

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Stark School  
other name/site number: Ninemile Community Center

2. Location

street & number: Ninemile Road, Ninemile Valley not for publication:  n/a  
city/town: Huson vicinity:  X  
state: Montana code: MT county: Missoula code: 063 zip code: 59846

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
*[Signature]* SHPO Date: *SEP 5 '95*  
Signature of certifying official/Title  
Montana State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register *[Signature: Edson H. Beall]* Date of Action *10-12-95*  
 see continuation sheet  
 determined eligible for the National Register  
 see continuation sheet  
 determined not eligible for the National Register  
 see continuation sheet  
 removed from the National Register  
 see continuation sheet  
 other (explain):

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## 5. Classification

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Ownership of Property: Public - local

**Number of Resources within Property**

Category of Property: Building

Contributing                      Noncontributing

Number of contributing resources previously  
listed in the National Register: n/a

  3                             building(s)  
                                   sites  
                                   structures  
                                   objects

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

  3                             TOTAL

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## 6. Function or Use

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**Historic Functions:**

**Current Functions:**

Education: School

Social: Meeting Hall

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## 7. Description

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**Architectural Classification:**

**Materials:**

Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements:  
Craftsman

foundation: stone/concrete  
walls: wood  
roof: asphalt shingle  
other: n/a

### Narrative Description

Stark School is a one and a half story building with a basement. The building has an northeast, southwest orientation with the main facade facing southwest. The foundation is constructed of a mix of quarried and native field stone. It is two feet thick and forms the first four feet of the building walls. The building is frame, covered in clapboard in the craftsman style which was popular in the northwest in the early 1900's. The design and floor plan are typical of rural school houses constructed throughout Montana during that period, however the dome design of the enclosed bell tower appears unique. The original bell still hangs in the tower and is sounded now and then to mark an occasion.

The main facade, southwest elevation, has a central entrance. Originally the entrance consisted of a double door with large windows in each side. The entryway was altered in 1985 by putting in a support upright and hanging two doors, each have smaller windows than the original. There is a secondary entrance at the center of the northeast elevation which leads into the basement. It consists of a wooden door and a concrete stoop sheltered by a lower/secondary roof line.

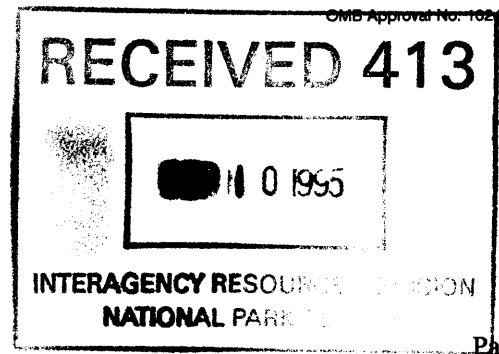
The ground level floor was designed as a vestibule with a high ceiling and stairways leading up to the classrooms and down to the basement. The interior was altered in 1986. A lowered ceiling was installed to conserve heat. The stairway to the classrooms was reduced from seven feet wide to four feet to provide space for a storage room. Handrails were installed. The plaster walls were covered with paneling and carpet was installed on the floors.

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The main floor was divided into north and south side classrooms. A two foot wide space between the classrooms runs the length of each room. It covers the brick chimney projecting up through the building about five feet in from the east wall. It also contains storage space and the ladder to the bell tower. An archway with sliding doors joins the two classrooms. The walls were plaster and the floors hardwood. The ceiling in the southside classroom has been covered with ceiling tiles and the walls covered with paneling. The northside classroom ceiling has been re-plastered and the plaster walls repaired but not changed. Although there was a furnace room in the basement, each classroom had a wood, later oil, stove. Gas lanterns hung from the ceiling. In the 1960s electrical space and water heating systems were installed and the original coat/supply rooms at the west end of the classrooms were converted into bathrooms.

In the basement there was a gym-dining area running the full length of the building north to south. About ten feet in from the east wall, a partition wall separated the gym-dining area from the small kitchen and the furnace room which included a wood/coal storage area. The kitchen was relocated upstairs to the east wall of the northside classroom, then later moved to the west wall of the northside classroom. The partition wall was removed and all equipment of the furnace room was removed except a wood burning stove that was probably brought down from one of the classrooms when electrical heat was installed. The west wall of the basement was paneled.

There are two contributing outhouses constructed of wood frame and clapboard, with projecting eaves and hipped roofs which echo the lines of the school building. Originally, there was also a teacherage and horse stables on the property but they have since burned and no remains are evident. The original water supply was spring fed. In the 1960s a well was drilled on adjacent property to supply water to the building.

Stark School sits between Butler and Kennedy Creeks facing the Ninemile Creek and Ninemile Road. The Ninemile Valley is primarily ranching country with some small residential plots. Some logging continues and an occasional placer-gold-seeking hopeful stalks the creeks.

### Integrity

Stark School has been well maintained and is in good shape. It sits on a knoll, the landscape of which has been virtually unchanged except for the early logging and new growth of the pine and fir which surround the building site. The exterior of the building remains as originally constructed. The alteration of the entry door is the only change. The two outhouses are as originally constructed and also are in good shape. The building is a dominant landmark in the Ninemile Valley. Approaching the site from either direction on Ninemile Road brings on an overwhelming feeling of stepping back in time.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: Education, Architecture

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1916-1930

Significant Person(s): n/a

Significant Dates: 1916

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: Hatfield (builder), architect unknown

### **Narrative Statement of Significance**

One of just two original buildings remaining from the historic community of Stark, Montana, the Stark School is a memorial to the era of miners, loggers and hearty settlers that inhabited western Montana and the Ninemile Valley in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The Stark School was an outgrowth of growing interest and 20th century advances in public education, reflecting the importance of education to emergent communities, as well as the early settlement of this valley. For these associations the school is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places according to Criterion A. The Stark School gains significance for listing in the National Register under Criterion C. Built during the early 1900s, when many country school districts replaced their old log schools with more substantial designs, Stark School is a well-preserved example of early 20th century school design and eclectic Craftsman style.

### **Community History**

Gold was discovered in the Nine Mile gulch in 1874. The discovery was described as "diggings of considerable promise" in the October 11, 1876 Centennial Address on the Origin, Growth and Resources of Montana by W.A. Clark, Esq. Shortly after the discovery of gold, the upper Ninemile Valley became a bustling mining region with hundreds of miners and three busy settlements. The first settlement began in 1874, and was called Montreal but was later known as Old Town when a new Montreal was laid off and christened in 1875 about 2 1/2 miles further down the creek. Montreal became Martina when the government, concerned about confusion with Montreal, Canada, refused to name the post office Montreal, Montana. Louisville, a 600 ft town plat adjacent to Montreal sprang up and was largely inhabited by Chinese. These mining towns boasted of hotels, boarding houses, various stores, butcher shops, a bakery, blacksmith shops, stamp mills, and several saloons and Chinese wash-houses. The August 1875 election returns for Montreal Precinct reported a total population of 102 men, no women, and 99 voted. According to the California Mining Journal \$3,000,000 worth of gold went out of Eustache and St Louis creeks.

In 1890, a settlement known as Nine Mile was established at the mouth of the Valley as the gateway to the Ninemile mines and by men providing lumber for the Northern Pacific Railroad. About halfway between Montreal/Martina in the upper valley and the "Ninemile" settlement at the mouth of the valley, the town of Stark emerged both as a mining and as a lumbering town with houses, shops and a combined hotel/saloon. The Stark, Montana Post Office was established June 25, 1890. By 1915 mining in the Ninemile Valley had declined, Old Town was a ghost town, and Martina was rapidly disappearing, the Montreal/Martina Post Office was closed in 1918.

For some years Stark just held on, but in 1916 the Anaconda Copper Mining Company moved in its logging operations and established its headquarters, with some 26 buildings and hundreds of lumbermen just above Stark. The town began its heyday. An ice cream and candy parlor was opened, as well as a restaurant and laundry, and warehouses and shops. During the ten years of A.C.M. logging operations about seventeen logging camps were established throughout Ninemile and logging railroad tracks criss-crossed the Valley. In 1926 the A.C.M. Company pulled out of Ninemile and Stark began to dwindle to a ghost town. The saloon/hotel burned in 1920 and the old buildings were torn down and the land converted to ranches. The town of Stark, Montana disappeared when the post office was officially closed in 1959. Little remains of that era of miners, loggers and hearty settlers of the Ninemile Valley. Two badly deteriorated log buildings in what was Stark remain. A fallen log cabin, and a gravestone of the last postmaster are all that is left of Montreal/Martina. The old Ninemile School in the lower valley remains and is in good condition and is occupied as a Bed and Breakfast. These few structures and the Stark Schoolhouse stand as a markers to that bygone era.

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The origin of the name of the town of Stark has not been officially established, but the best explanation came from Irma Mulcihy in an interview by Audra Browman and reported in the Seeley Swan Pathfinder. Irma is the daughter of Jessie Dickson Proebstel, whose family homesteaded in Ninemile. She gives this account: The first postmaster was Mary F. Menges, who was a descendant of John and Molly Stark. General John Stark fought in the Revolutionary War. Before the Battle of Bennington (Vermont) he gave his men a very inspiring speech, and said of the British, "They are ours tonight boys, or Molly Stark's a widow." That saying became a patriotic slogan. Mary's suggestion to name the town after the famous Revolutionary War general was accepted.

### Educational History

The first public school districts in Montana Territory were established in 1866. The early school houses were rough buildings, usually log, poorly lighted and heated and there was no running water. Compulsory attendance legislation was passed in 1887 although it was impractical and often impossible to enforce in rural areas. Fourteen years later, the records of 1901 indicate, there were 182 rural schools maintained in Montana with less than 15 children enrolled for the entire year and an average daily attendance of less than 8 children. Beginning in 1902 Superintendents of Public Instruction were on record as requesting legislative assistance for transportation of rural students and for consolidation of the single room schools into larger units with more inclusive programs. By 1906, courses of study for Montana elementary and secondary schools had been revised and were well established. The old log school houses were being replaced with frame, brick or stone buildings. By 1914 there had been a nationwide increase in interest in education. The 1915 Report of the Commissioner of Education stated there was a real increase, in striking contrast to the upheaval (War) in Europe, during the year in a democracy, indicated by greater interest in the health and care of young children, particularly in rural communities where school terms were short and salaries of teachers small.

The Stark School District 25 was created in 1896 and there are records which indicate there was a schoolhouse in the Stark District, but we have been unable to confirm its location. In 1905 Frederick and Jessie Proebstel donated .9 acre of land to the Stark School District. A school and horse stables may have been built there then or sometime before. They existed when the 1915 Stark Schoolhouse was built and became the teacherage and stables for the school. (Both have since burned). In 1915, the Ninemile Valley benefitted by the Nation's growing interest in public schooling for rural children. That and the expected increase in student population as a result of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company's intentions to locate their logging operations in the Valley in 1916 prompted the local residents, the public school system and the A.C.M. Company to build the modern two-classroom school in Stark, Montana. Jessie Proebstel donated another one and one-quarter acre to the school district, and the present Stark School was built. The school opened in 1916, just after the first of the year. It housed grades one through eight. It had one teacher and about twelve students. As A.C.M. logging increased the number of students increased and another teacher was added in 1920. The A.C.M. Company closed out its logging operations in 1926. The school was closed in 1929-30 and the students were bussed to the lower Ninemile School. In 1932 the lower Ninemile School was closed and the students went to Alberton.

From its beginning the Stark School became the center of community activities; ranching and 4-H meetings were conducted in the building. The Anaconda Copper Mining Company held dances every two weeks in 1916 and 1917. It was used as a gathering place for news and socializing in the World War I and II years. Church was held in one of the classrooms every Sunday until 1952. In 1935 the Home Demonstration held meetings in the school and in 1949 the building was turned over to the Ninemile community for their club house, and was renamed Ninemile Community Center. It has since been used for elections, community meetings, pot luck dinners, holiday programs, dances and various other community activities.

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### Architectural Significance

Mandates from the Montana Office of Public Instruction and development of more organized rural school programs during the first decade of the 1900s induced rural districts across the state to upgrade facilities and replace the modest school houses of the frontier era. The 1900 census for the first time recorded more wood frame than log buildings; in Missoula County that year the number of school districts reached 45.

Design of the Stark School in 1915 reflects that shift in school construction, and exhibits many elements characteristic of school design of the period. These include the single story format with projecting entry vestibule capped by a bell tower, symmetrical design and bands of windows to illuminate interior classrooms. In addition, the Craftsman style was common to many early 20th century schools. Those influences are evident in the gentle pitch of the hipped roof, the projecting eaves, and the combined use of naturalistic materials, including the exposed stone foundation which lends the building a good deal of interest and texture. Other eclectic influences are seen in the latent Queen Anne flavor of the cap on bell tower, along with Neo-Classical styling of the front entrance.

Stark School  
Name of Property

Missoula County, Montana  
County and State

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## 9. Major Bibliographic References

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See continuation sheet

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary Location of Additional Data:

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other – Specify Repository: Ninemile Community Center

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: 2.08 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	11	90320	5221200

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): Located in the SW 1/4, SW 1/4, NE 1/4 of Section 27, T16N, R 23W.

### Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet.

### Boundary Justification

These historic boundaries correspond to those deeded to the school district in 1905 and 1916 by Frederick and Jessie Proebstel, and associated with the school building ever since.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title: Carol Guthrie  
organization:                      date: April 1995  
street & number: 3385 Old Coyote Rd.      telephone: (406) 626-4438  
city or town: Huson                      state: MT      zip code: 59846

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### Property Owner

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name/title: Ninemile Community Center Trustees c/o Susan J. Stanley  
street & number: 25705 Ninemile Rd.      telephone:  
city or town: Huson                      state: MT      zip code: 59846

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### Published Sources

Browman, Audra. Beginnings of Settlement of Skiotay or Nine Mile Valley and District 45, Ninemile-Lothrop-Brown and Creation of Stark School. Various dates. Compiled from court and school archives and historical issues of the Missoulian and Polk Newspapers.

Demmons, Jack, Logging History, Reported in Seeley Swan Pathfinder, June 17, 1993, Page 6; July 29, 1993, Page 10; October 7, 1993 & November 11, 1993, Page 10; January 20, 1994, Page 6.

Frenchtown Historical Society, Frenchtown Footprints, Mountain Press Printing Company, Missoula, Montana, 1976

Hartley, Bill. Stark and the Ninemile Valley, Document Collection and oral histories. Various dates.

Historical Society of Montana, Gold Discovery in Ninemile, Contributions, Vol II. State Publishing Co. 1896

Inter-Mountain Educator. Movement for Better Rural Schools, June 1916

Mineral County Courthouse records, Superior, Montana

Missoula County Courthouse records, Missoula, Montana

#### Oral Histories

Interview with Harvey Hackman, Former Ninemile Resident by Bill Hartley, Missoula, Montana

Logging Days of the Past, 1900 to 1955, The Ninemile Valley and Greenough (or Sunset), and Woodworth, Montana by Bill Hartley, Missoula, Montana, March 23, 1992

Ninemile Logging by Don McKenzie, A.C.M. Logging Superintendent by Bill Harley, Missoula, Montana, February 26, 1974

Ninemile old-timers, Oral reports and written records of Bruce and Ralph Thisted, Dale Regan, Fred Haggar, Jean and Theodore Soldowski, Jack and Connie Dove, Leslie Robinson (granddaughter of Rita Demin) and Sue Stanley.

Railroad Logging at the ACM Co. Camps at Woodworth, Montana, by Bill Hartley, Missoula, Montana, March 23, 1992.



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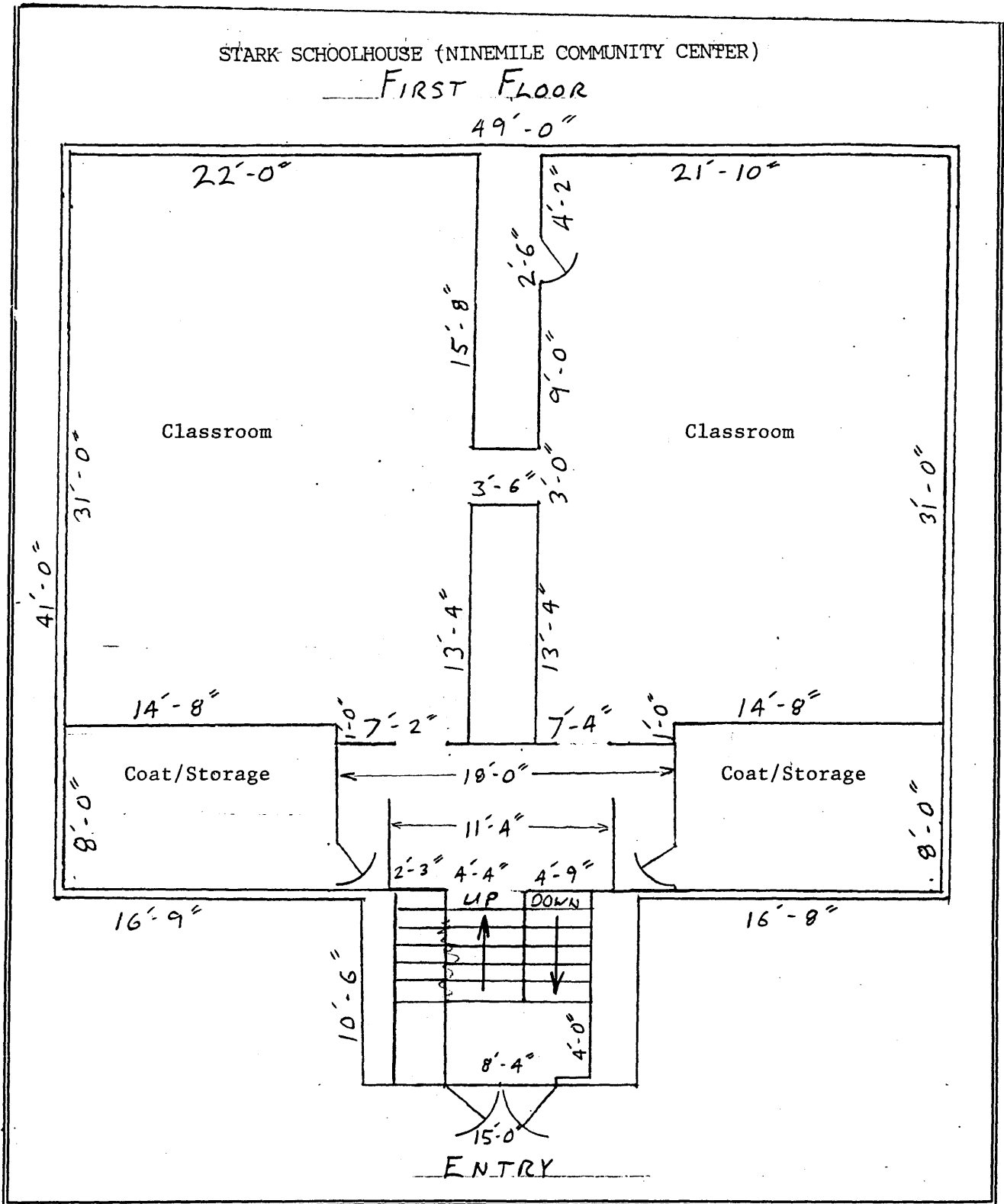
Historic boundaries for the Stark School follow the property boundaries and are located on a tract of land in the Southwest Quarter of the Southwest Quarter of the Northeast Quarter of Section Twenty-seven (27), Township Sixteen (16) North of Range Twenty-three (23) West, Montana Meridian described as follows:

From the corners common to Sections 26, 27, 34 and 35, Township 16 North, Range 23 West, running North 35 26° West 3580 feet to a point hereinafter known as the place of beginning, thence North 26 00° East 334 feet; thence North 64 00° West 271 feet; thence South 26 00° West 334 feet; thence South 64 00° East 271 feet to the place of beginning, containing 2.08 acres of land, the magnetic variation used being 22 6° East, as obtained from observation on Polaris.

STARK SCHOOLHOUSE (NINEMILE COMMUNITY CENTER)

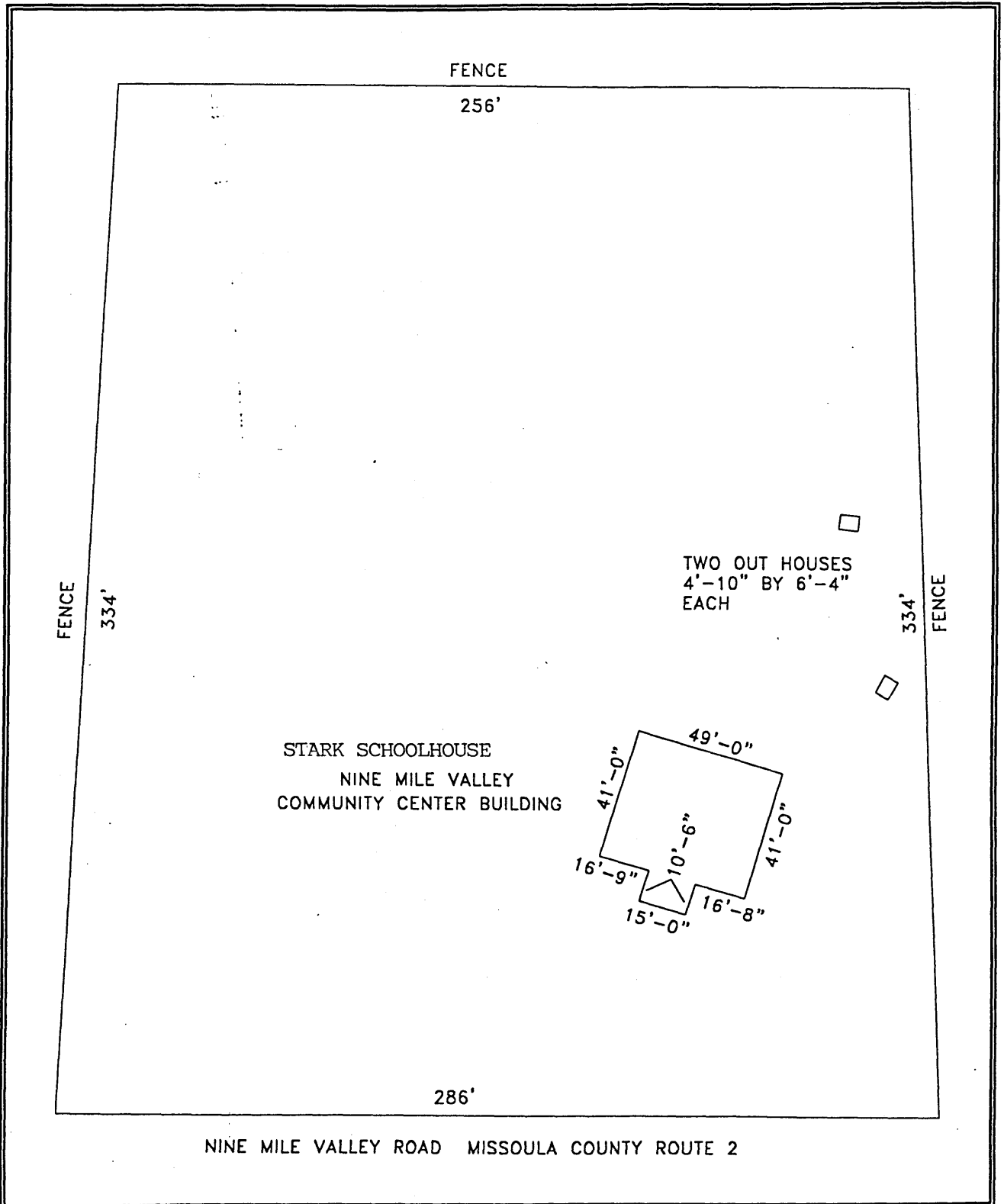
FIRST FLOOR

49'-0"

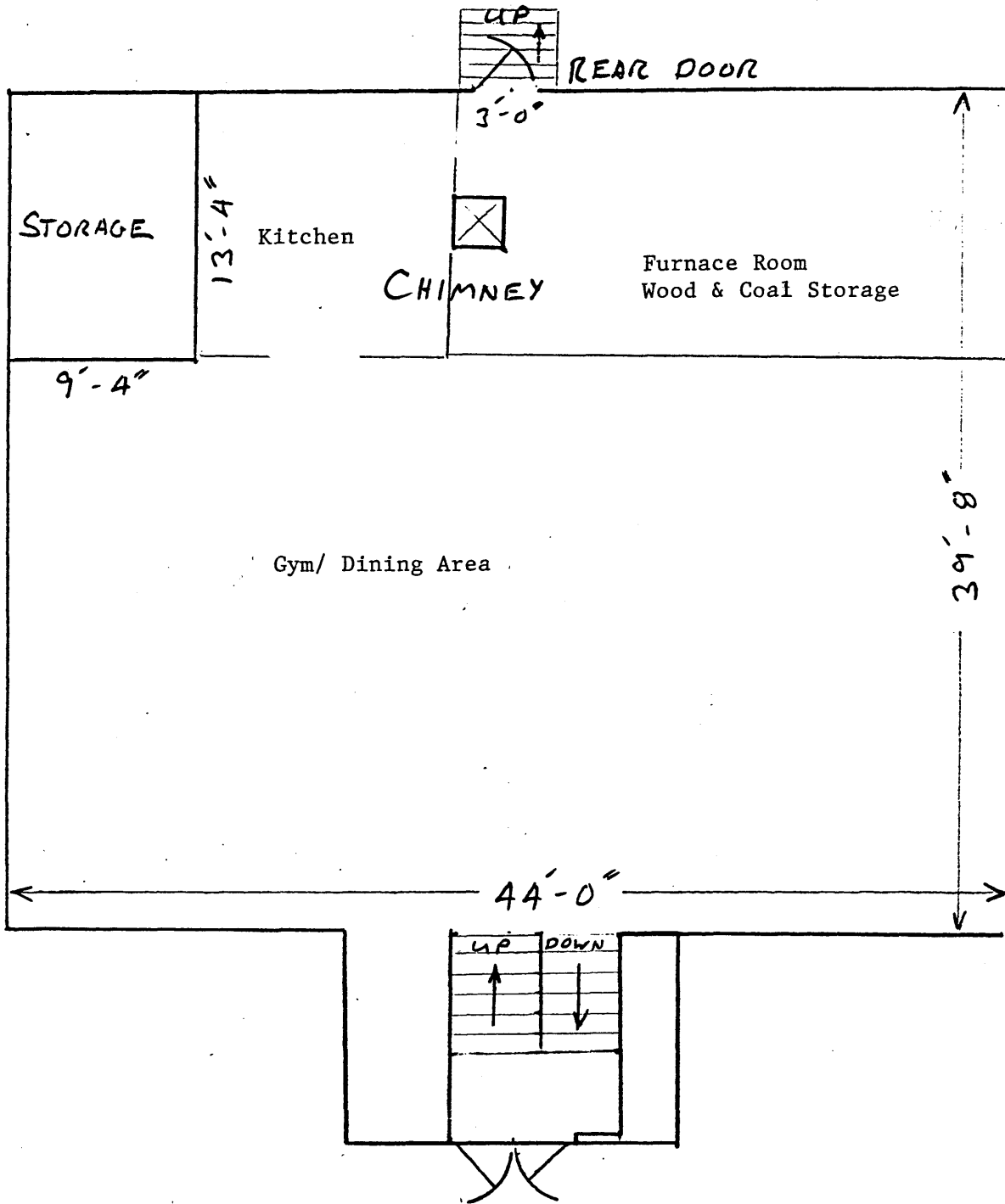


Stark School  
Ninemile Valley Road  
Missoula County  
Montana

SKETCH MAP OF SITE



BASEMENT



Stark School  
Ninemile Valley Road  
Missoula County  
Montana