

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic COALINGA POLK STREET SCHOOL  
and/or common OLD POLK STREET SCHOOL

**2. Location**

street & number South 5th and East Polk Streets  not for publication  
city, town Coalinga vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district 4th  
state CA code 06 county Fresno code 019

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>n/a</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Vacant

**4. Owner of Property**

name Alvin Walker and Michael Knoell  
street & number Box 1205  
city, town Lompoc vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state CA 93438

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Fresno County Recorder  
street & number Box 766  
city, town Fresno state CA 93712

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Coalinga Polk Street School has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no  
date September 26, 1981  federal  state  county  local  
depository for survey records Coalinga History Library; Baker Museum  
city, town Coalinga state CA

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## 7. Description

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**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

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**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**SITE

The Coalinga Polk Street School is located near the intersection of Polk and Fifth Streets in the western Fresno County city of Coalinga. In 1907, one year after the incorporation of Coalinga, city founders recognized the need to dedicate a school site within city limits. The original site chosen by them was a parcel of about 2.2 acres, fronting some 375 feet along Polk Street, extending some 250 feet to the rear. A subsequent lot split reduced the size of that lot to about 3/4-acre, with 218 feet fronting along Polk Street and extending 150 feet to the rear. The original and present lots are depicted on the attached Exhibit 1. The present parcel, while diminished from the original, includes the entirety of the school structure and does not exclude any significant aspects of the school property.

STRUCTURE

The Coalinga Polk Street School has an irregularly shaped plan, measuring 143' x 84' at its extremes. The floor plan is attached as Exhibit 2. The schoolhouse encompasses 9,600 square feet of floor space with a 4,050 square foot basement area. The structure is symmetrical, with fenestration, projecting wings, columns, and other architectural elements carefully balanced horizontally. The roof is hipped with a partial hipped roof at the rear extension and gabled roofs on projecting side wings. The front porch is surmounted by a gabled roof with a pedimented gable end. The bell tower is topped by a pyramidal hipped roof.

The facade (north) elevation is the most symmetrical, as well as the most clearly Classical Revival in design. The entrance portico, sheltering a recessed entryway, is supported by four 12' unfluted wooden columns with Corinthian capitals, paired at either side of the entrance. Entrance is gained through paired wooden doors, surrounded by a fanlight transom and sidelights. One-over-one double-hung sash are placed to either side of the doorway.

The area to either side of the portico is lighted by five one-over-one double-hung sash with movable overhead transoms. Projecting side wings, each measuring 16' by 18', can be seen from the facade at either side of the principal segment of the structure. Doric pilasters, rising to the same height as the portico columns, are placed at each of the four corners visible from the facade, as with all corners around the structure. These, like the portico columns, appear to be supporting a simple entablature, a pattern carried around the full exterior of the structure.

The east and west elevations are mirror images, one to the other. Each includes a double-door entrance at the juncture of the principal segment of the structure and the projecting wing. Each is lighted by eight one-over-one double-hung sash with movable overhead transoms, grouped in sets of four on the principal segment and the projecting wing. Small rectangular windows are placed at the basement level and above the entryway at each elevation.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1908 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

**Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)**

The Coalinga Polk Street School is significant historically as the first multiple-room schoolhouse in the vast western Fresno County, and architecturally as a handsome Classical Revival public structure, perhaps the most interesting historical structure in the town of Coalinga. From 1908 to 1980, this structure served the community of Coalinga as a school and as a community recreation center. The structure's design speaks of the time and place in which it was constructed. Classical Revival design features utilized here indicate the structure's construction at the turn of the century, a period of resurgent interest in the use of Greek and Roman design for public buildings. The scale of the structure and the use of traditional rural school features, such as the central bell tower, indicate the designer's intent to retain a link with the system of small schools which the Polk Street school replaced. This National Register application is linked to a rehabilitation effort designed to assure a continued role for this key structure within the social life of this community.

At the turn of the century, western Fresno County had little to attract pioneers or settlers to the general area. Other than a small amount of natural rainfall, there was very little water existing in semi-arid areas of the San Joaquin Valley that drifted gradually into the foothills of the Coast Range. There was no indication at the time that some 80 years later Coalinga would become the hub of western Fresno County. The few settlers who did arrive in the area in the late 1800s were a hardy lot attempting to establish themselves primarily with farming and ranching operations. The amenities of life were few, the work exhausting, and rewards very limited. Families like Roberts, Crump, Akers, Parra, Duckworth, and Palmer became familiar names in the history of early western Fresno County. The very first rural school established in the area was in Warthan Canyon in 1872 to service the need of rancher John Crump's children, along with those of his neighbors. It was called the Pleasant Valley School District and, because it slightly overlapped into eastern Monterey and San Benito Counties, a three-man school board (one member from each county) administrated this first school district. As the population slowly grew in terms of small farm and ranch congregations, a few other small, one-room, rural schools were established. Between the first in 1872 and the last in 1914, some 20 districts were founded in this manner in the general western Fresno County area. These were typically one-room structures approximately 20 x 30 feet in size which spanned the educational needs from first through eighth grade.

Development of western Fresno County was aided by the extension of the now nonexistent Valley Railroad. It crept slowly northward and westward with the extension of the line from Goshun to Huron occurring in 1877. In 1882, M. L. Curtiss homesteaded a large tract of land which included what is now the present site of the entire city of Coalinga. In 1888, the railroad was extended from Huron to a spot on the track referred to as Coaling Station A. Initially, this spot was only a transportation site to which coal was delivered from the mine to be loaded on the coal-burning steam engines of the Valley Railroad. A description of this spot was shortened by railroad men to Coaling A and later abbreviated to Coalinga.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

See continuation sheet No. 1

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 3/4 acre

Quadrangle name Coalinga

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 

1	7	3	8	6	7	0	4	0	0	1	8	9	0
Zone	Easting			Northing									

B 

Zone	Easting			Northing									

C 

Zone	Easting			Northing									

D 

Zone	Easting			Northing									

E 

Zone	Easting			Northing									

F 

Zone	Easting			Northing									

G 

Zone	Easting			Northing									

H 

Zone	Easting			Northing									

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Property bounded by E. Polk and E. Valley Streets in Coalinga, CA. Described as Lot 2 in Block 56, City of Coalinga recorded in Book 10, pages 3 through 8 in record of surveys, County Recorder's Office, Fresno County, CA.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state none code  county none code

state  code  county  code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Alvin Walker - Owner

organization Individual date 10-1-81

street & number Box 1205 telephone 805-736-7534

city or town Lompoc state CA 93438

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature K. M. [Signature]

title  date APR 1 1982

For HCERS use only

I hereby certify that this property is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

[Signature]  
for Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places

Attest:

C [Signature]

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The rear (south) elevation includes a projecting wing, measuring 6' by 56', flanked by nearly identical segments of 44' each. Here, as with the facade, fenestration is predominantly one-over-one double-hung sash with movable overhead transoms.

A bell tower, 10 feet in height, rises above the facade entrance. The original bell, measuring three feet in diameter at its widest, is still operable in its original location.

The integrity of this structure is remarkably intact. The original wood shingle roof has been replaced with composition shingle. Minor alterations were made to interior partitions while the schoolhouse was used by the Coalinga Recreation and Parks Department between 1942 and 1980.

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The real development of Coalinga, however, occurred with a dramatic event in 1896. As early as 1890, a few shallow oil wells were developed in the general Coalinga area which pumped minimal quantities of low grade oil. Most of these wells were approximately 100 to 150 feet deep with about a ten barrel a day capacity. In 1896, the Home Oil Company unexpectedly brought in a well, later to be called the Blue Goose Well, with output of 15,000 barrels a day. This event was soon followed by another even more dramatic; the Silvertip Gusher which produced 16,000 barrels of oil per day. These amazing wells created an immediate growth in the Coalinga vicinity and, in 1906, enough population had been attracted to the area to lead to the incorporation of the City of Coalinga.

The earlier gradual settlement of the Coalinga area due to agriculture and extension of the Valley Railroad had led to the need of a small rural school as early as 1887. At that time, a district was formed originally named the Alcalde School District. The first classes of the Alcalde School were held on the banks of the small creek at the edge of what was to be Coalinga's city limit. A small, one-room schoolhouse was built the following year and served the needs of the residents of the Coalinga area for approximately 15 years. The oil boom which stimulated Coalinga's growth and subsequent incorporation in 1906 also brought the need for a more formalized school system. Leaders of the day recognized this fact and planned for a larger, more permanent school system to service the needs of Coalinga's children. The first structure planned in 1907 was to be called the Polk Street School and be located in the east side of the Coalinga city limits. The school was constructed in 1908 by a general contractor named Robertson and was actually occupied as a school at the beginning of 1909. The Polk Street School was the first permanent, substantial school to be located in the entire western Fresno County area. Prior to this point, all the schools had been the small, one-room country school variety. The Polk Street School was well planned, of substantial size, and built to last for an indefinite period of time. Also during 1909, the opening year of the Polk Street School, the Alcalde Street School District legally changed its name to the Coalinga School District. Within a few years, many of the small, outlying rural school houses had joined the Coalinga School District. This process continued throughout the century and, by 1960, all of the schools in the western Fresno County area had either ceased to exist or had joined with what later became known as the Coalinga-Huron School District.

The Polk Street School was significant in many ways, the first of which was to ingrain a sense of stability and permanence to the entire school system in the area. Coalinga was evolving as the key area in western Fresno County, and this type of structure was a source of pride and offered a sense of belonging to many of the area residents. The building was extremely well-constructed, primarily with redwood imported from the Northern California lumber mills, and was "overbuilt" by today's standards in terms of the massiveness of the beams, timbers, and framework of the building. A recent engineering inspection of the structure revealed no significant weaknesses of any kind in the framework of the building. Initially, grades one through six were taught at the Polk Street School and continued until 1925. At that time, a grammar school, covering

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grades one through four, was opened as part of the Coalinga School District, leaving only grades five and six being taught at the Polk Street School. This continued until 1942. At that time, Coalinga schools had constructed more "modern" structures, and the Polk Street School was no longer needed by the school district. At this point, it was turned over to the Coalinga Recreation District which continually administered the use of the old Polk Street School through early 1981. From 1909 through 1942, while the building served as a school, it also was utilized for other purposes. During World War I, it served as an emergency hospital. During the period of 1917 and 1918, it was used to assist in combating a flu epidemic which raged in the Central Valley of California.

From 1942 to 1981, while the building was under the control of the Coalinga Recreation District, it served such uses as youth groups, the American Association of Retired People, the Coalinga Art Association, the Coalinga Lapidary Club, and as a creative arts center. The Old Polk Street School has faithfully served the people of Coalinga from 1909 to 1981.

The Coalinga Recreation District decided in 1980 that the facility was obsolete for its usage and placed more modern facilities in use for its recreational programs. The buildings and grounds were declared to be excess property, and a move by some members of the Recreation District to demolish the old school was made. The purpose was then to sell the remaining grounds as additional financing for the Recreation District requirements. Almost immediately, this plan met with opposition from many members of the Coalinga community. These people, organized as "Friends of the School", saw the old Polk Street School as a place where their fathers and mothers had attended school, as a place where many members of the community had served in civic capacities, and saw the value of the condition and architectural significance of the structure. Sale of the building and grounds was then delayed until a decision could be reached on the disposition or destruction of the building.

During this time frame, Michael Knoell and Alvin Walker presented an offer to purchase the Polk Street School and grounds. The offer included provisions for preservation and restoration of the school structure. The men have successfully restored a number of old structures and, after verifying the credentials of Knoell and Walker, the Recreation District entered into an agreement to sell the property to them. The sale was completed in May of 1981 and included deed restriction against the removal or demolition of the building. Knoell and Walker also agreed to complete an exterior renovation of the structure which is planned for 1982.

The successful resolution of the conflict met with the approval of the Coalinga Recreation District, the "Friends of the School", and the local community. In addition, it assured the retention and ultimate improvement of one of the most interesting, unique, and historic structures in Fresno County.

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Major Bibliographical References

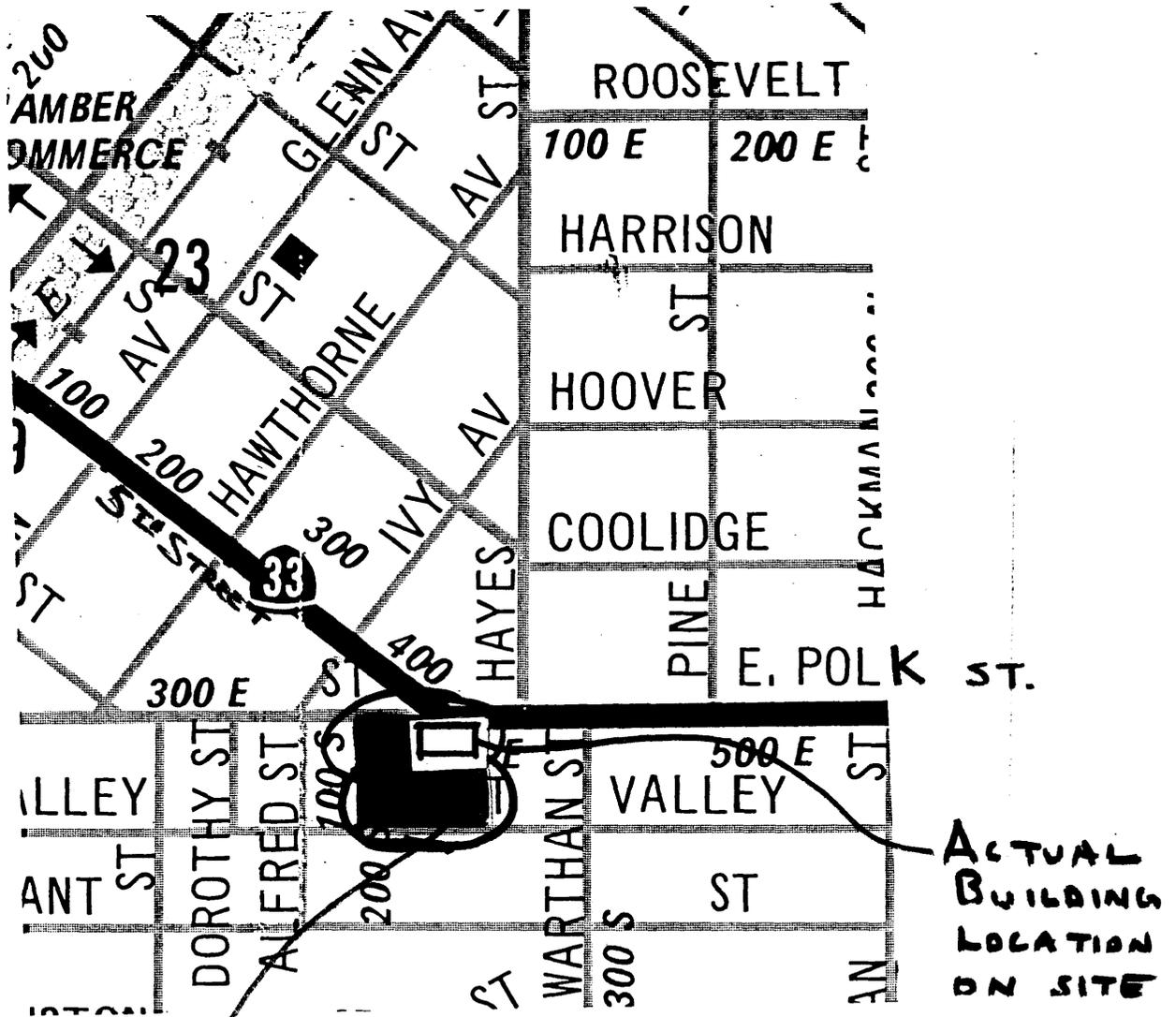
NOTE: Primary historical data and documentation for this nomination is maintained by the Coalinga District Library (c/o Mrs. Helen Tharpe) and by the Coalinga Baker Museum (c/o Mrs. Audrey Acebedo).

References:

1. Coalinga Baker Museum, Mrs. Audrey Acebedo, Curator, Elm Street, Coalinga, California.
2. Coalinga District Library, Dr. Adele Watson, Director, North 4th Street, Coalinga, California.
3. Mrs. Helen Tharpe, Coalinga Historian, Princeton Street, Coalinga, California.
4. Mrs. Betty Griffin, long-time area rancher and student of Coalinga history.
5. Coalinga-Huron Parks and Recreation District, Mr. William Page, Director, Elm Street, Coalinga, California.
6. Mr. Ron Eastman, Chairman, Coalinga-Huron Parks and Recreation District, Princeton Street, Coalinga, California.
7. Mr. Vincent Motte, Chairman, "Friends of the School Committee", North Coalinga Street, Coalinga, California.
8. Mr. Henry Lockman, Legal Counsel, Coalinga-Huron Parks and Recreation District and Coalinga City Attorney, Elm Street, Coalinga, California.
9. Coalinga Oil Records (original tabloid publication commencing in Coalinga area in 1909).
10. Coalinga Record Newspaper (Jerry Drew, Editor).
11. Suzie Kirpatrick Blair, Second Generation Coalingan, attendee of Polk Street School in 1909-1910.
12. Gladys Woodbury, Second Generation Coalingan, attendee of Polk Street School in 1909-1910.

EXHIBIT 1

# COALINGA POLK STREET SCHOOL



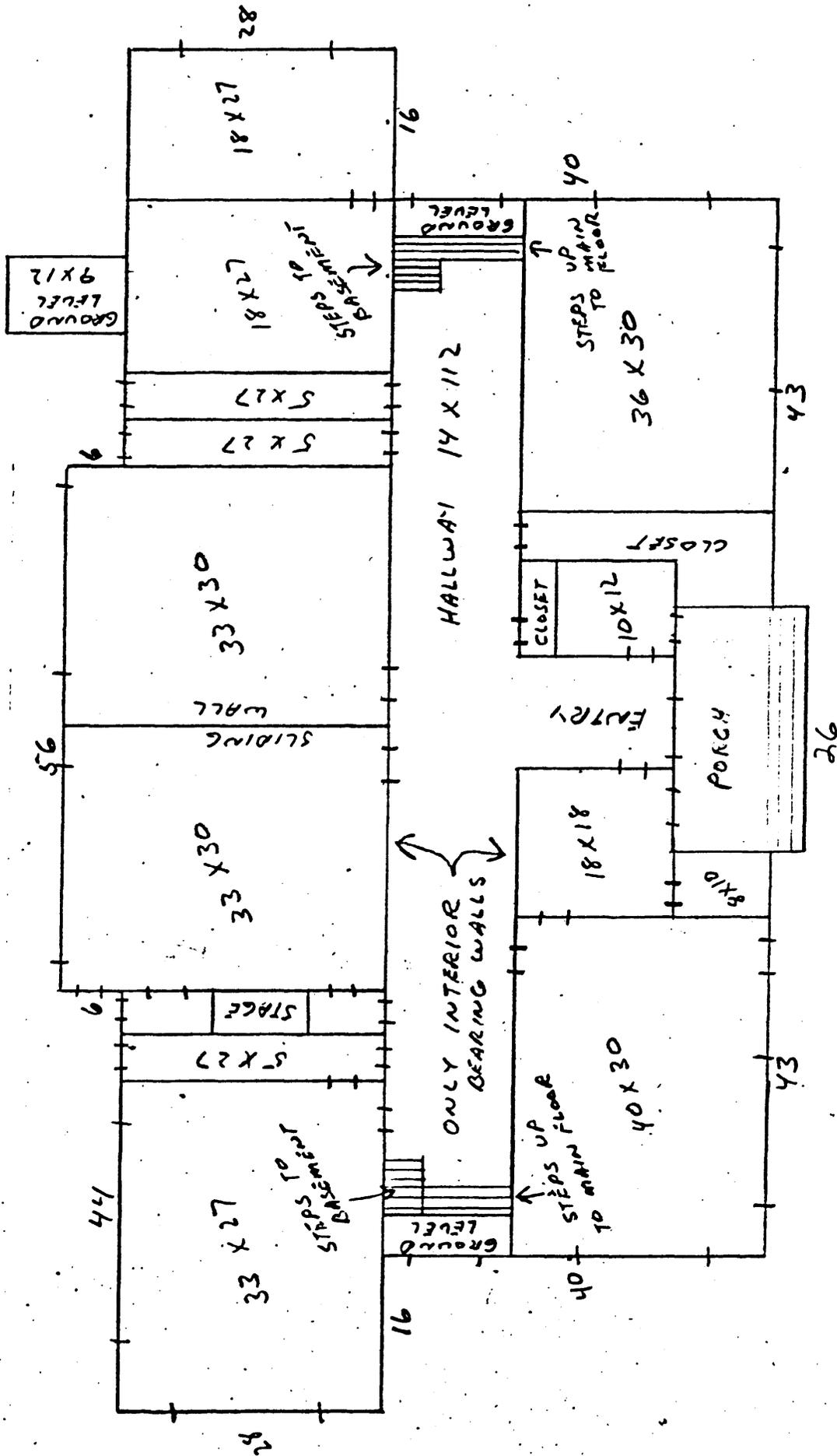
2.2 AC SITE OF  
POLK STREET SCHOOL



EXHIBIT 2

COALINGA POLK STREET SCHOOL

FLOOR PLAN



FRONT ENTRANCE

— POLK STREET —

