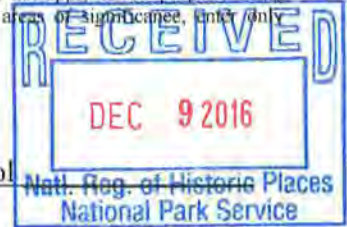


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

56-564

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.



1. Name of Property

Historic name: District No. 50 School

Other names/site number: Milford Town Hall; District No. 213 School

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 20837 U.S. Hwy. 14

City or town: Milford Township State: MN County: Brown

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

 12.1.16

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Amy Spong, Deputy SHPO MNHS** Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: _____ Date _____

Title : _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

[Handwritten Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

1/24/17
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: school

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT: town hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER/ American Foursquare

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Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

foundation: CONCRETE, BRICK

walls: WOOD

roof: ASPHALT SHINGLE

other: _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Constructed in 1912, District No. 50 School is located immediately south of U.S. Highway 14 in Brown County in south-central Minnesota. The site is a two-acre parcel in Milford Township, roughly six miles west of New Ulm and one-half mile east of the unincorporated community of Essig. The property is surrounded mostly by level agricultural fields and a small number of deciduous trees. (See photo #0001) The grounds include a gravel driveway loop off Hwy. 14, a cistern, a concrete flag pole base (without the pole), and a large boulder. The building is the single contributing resource. (See photo #0005)

Narrative Description

District No. 50 School is a single-story, wood-framed building. It has square massing, measuring 36' on all sides, on a concrete perimeter wall foundation, with a brick front entry porch on the east primary facade. The building is dressed mostly in wood clapboards that have been painted white. The water table is faced with brick. The basement is illuminated by wood-framed, awning-hinge basement windows with three panes each, with three windows on the west side and one each on the north and south elevations. The building is characterized by a hipped low-pitched roof, with wide eaves, and clad with asphalt shingles. The roof features prominent gabled dormers on the east and west elevations. The dormers show a recessed gable end, finished with fishscale wood shingles, and paired awning-style windows with an x-pattern glazing. On the east elevation, a wood flag pole rises from the middle of the dormer. There is a square brick chimney rising through the roof on its southern slope. It has a raised brick crown and appears to have a concrete cap and metal vent. Based on an early photograph, at some point, the original chimney was extended higher around two feet, with the original cement crown still in evidence.

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The east elevation is the primary facade, with a red brick porch with a hipped roof supported by square supporting columns and common-bond brick exterior. (See photo #0002) The porch rests on a concrete footing with full-arched openings at the base. Based on original state-authorized plans and physical evidence, these had louvered wooden vents, now gone.

The central entryway is a paneled wood door with sidelights on either side. The facade has two rectangular windows with 4/1 lights on the outer side and two with 6/1 lights flanking the door. The windows throughout the building have slightly raised hoods and surrounds and are double-hung.

The north side of the schoolhouse has no windows except for a box bay supported by decorative brackets, with two windows, 4/1 lights, on the northeast corner. (See photo #0003) On the south wall, there is a single entry wood panel door with a gabled portico supported by brackets. To its right is a small 1/1 window. The west facade has a band of seven wood-framed rectangular windows with 1/1 lights that span the full width of the elevation. (See photo #0004)

Inside, the main classroom represents the bulk of the interior schoolhouse, measuring 35' x 24'. (See photo #0006) It is in this room where children at several grade levels were given their public school education. The walls and ceiling are plaster, but the upper half of the walls and all the ceiling sheathed in a white-painted pressed tin. The flooring throughout is wood. Chalkboards are mounted on sections of the north wall. The woodwork for the chalkboard remains intact on the south wall, but the blackboard has been covered with a synthetic corkboard. Below both chalkboards, there is wood wainscoting, laid vertically and stained. All of these chalkboards date to the original construction of the schoolhouse. Narrow, wood benches line the west wall under the windows. These are not original. A drop curtain hangs from the ceiling on the south side of the room, with painted advertisements on canvas. This was installed around 1948-49. It is stored in place, rolled, and occasionally opened for special events. (See photo #0009)

The east third of the interior is divided into five rooms, each with a wood-framed doorway into the main classroom. (See Figure 7) Each doorway has a five-panel wood door and single-pane glass transom. (See photo #0007) The center room acts as a hallway between the front entrance and the main classroom. Its interior is modest, with plaster walls and wood baseboard. To its south is a coatroom. The lower parts of the walls are sheathed in original wood wainscoting incised with vertical lines, with a row of coat hooks at the top. The upper wall sections are plaster. Just off the coatroom is a small restroom with a metal toilet seat. (The building does not have a water connection.) The southernmost room has a wood staircase to the basement, plus a water pump, and an exterior door. North of the hall is the coatroom leading into another restroom with a metal toilet. The northernmost room is the library, which retains its wood and glass bookcase and storage cabinets. It was often used for reading by small groups. (See photo #0008)

The basement is a single unfinished room with open rafters and cement walls. There are metal holding tanks, located under the first floor toilets, with an exposed drainage pipe exiting the basement in the southeast corner. (See photo #0010)

The schoolhouse retains integrity of design, setting, materials, feeling, and association. Integrity of setting and feeling are clearly evident with District No. 50 School, located in the midst of fields just east of Essig. Of particular importance for the integrity of setting and feeling is the large boulder, just south of the school, cited by many former students for its importance in games and creative play. Moreover, the school retains integrity of design and materials. It continues as a rectangular, wood-

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framed, schoolhouse dressed in wood clapboards and featuring a hipped roof. It retains characteristic features of period schools, including original construction method and exterior building materials, and the original roof form. The east-west orientation of the site plan, and the retention of its early windows, notably on the western elevation, illustrate a progressive era emphasis on the benefits of sunlight and proper circulation. Finally, the schoolhouse retains integrity of association, for the building is virtually the same building that housed the district's schoolchildren through 1971.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION

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Period of Significance

1912-1966

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architects:

Herman Amme

Contractors:

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

District No. 50 School in Milford Township, Brown County, Minnesota, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A (a contribution to the broad patterns of our history) for its local significance in the area of Education. The schoolhouse relates to the Minnesota statewide context "Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940." The school is also locally significant under Criterion C as a well-preserved example of a standard school design promoted by the state board of public instruction. The period of significance begins with the construction of the school in 1912, and ends in 1966.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The history of Milford Township is closely intertwined with the founding of Brown County. The first claims were made in 1853, and among the earliest farms was that of Wilhelm Pfaender, a principal founder of New Ulm. A primary road from New Ulm to the Lower Agency and Fort Ridgely intersected the township, and travelers often stayed at Anton Henle's Travelers Inn. Just north of Henle's, the Palmer Ferry carried passengers across the Minnesota River. Typical of the families, Franz Massopust, a German-speaking Bohemian immigrant, owned 160 acres valued at \$700. It was a mixed-use farm with \$30 worth of machinery, probably planting and harvesting equipment, as well as two cows, two oxen, and five pigs.

By 1862 Milford was a close-knit farming community, and the most prosperous township of the county. Its citizens, though few in number, took the education of its children seriously. The earliest school classes in the township were held in the home of Anton Henle in the spring of 1857. Two years later a log school was erected.

The farmers who settled in Milford Township were the closest neighbors to the lower Dakota reservation and there are many stories relating encounters. Christoph Spelbrink, a Milford farmer, wrote, "The Indians, our near neighbors, naturally were visiting their new neighbors very frequently." In addition, at least some Dakota blamed the German American settlers for driving out game, and referred to them as "Eyasica" or "bad talkers," likely because of their foreign language. While the postwar stories often suggest that there was little tension between these neighbors, newspaper reports of the day show that was not always the case. In September 1859 the *New Ulm Pionier* stated, "Red neighbors the Sioux Indians have recently committed many excesses against the property of the citizens of Milford Township."¹

The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 wrought devastation on the community. On August 18, 1862, following an assault on the Lower Agency, the Dakota moved down the south bank of the Minnesota River and attacked settlers in Milford Township. Over the next few hours, at least fifty people were killed in the township. The immediate impact was a depopulating of the township, as residents moved to towns and cities to the east. An influx of federal dollars, paid as claims against losses during the conflict, helped to draw settlers back, and by 1865, the state census listed 312 people in Milford Township. In 1912, when the school was built, the township's citizens were often the children and grandchildren of those early settlers. After the expulsion of the Dakota, reservation land was sold to new immigrants to the upper Midwest, who were actively recruited by a committee, appointed by the governor. The committee included August Westphal of Milford Township.²

Further population growth came with the arrival of the railroad. The hamlet of Essig was settled on the western part of the township in Section 18, one-half mile from the school's present location. In

¹ Christoph Spelbrink, "Narrative of the Sioux Uprising," manuscript, Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm, Minn., 1912; Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862* (St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984), 242; *New Ulm Pionier*, September 17, 1859.

² *New Ulm Post*, September 29, 1865.

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1885 the Winona & St. Peter Railroad built a side track between New Ulm and Sleepy Eye. Soon after, the Empire Mill Co. of New Ulm erected an elevator. The adjoining site of Siding Number 1, owned by the rail line, was platted for a townsite on August 21, 1885, and by September 30, John Essig of Milford Township had bought a lot and built a store. A year later, it gained a post office. In 1912, when the school was built, there were around 100 residents in town, with businesses including several stores, a grain elevator, a creamery, and a lumberyard.³

The cultural heritage of the township remained closely tied to its German roots. Dayle Besemer, who attended the school in the late 1940s, said that his parents still spoke German at home sometimes, although his father spoke High German and his mother, Low German. Besemer said, "We always had hired men and they talked German with my Dad." Carol Lambrecht Schapekahn, who attended the school from 1949 to 1955, recalled her father did not speak English until he went to school.⁴

In 1912 County Superintendent of Schools Robert Kennedy filed his annual report in September, providing a snapshot of local education at the time of this school's construction. The county had three independent districts — New Ulm, Sleepy Eye, and Springfield — plus one graded school in Comfrey. The rest were split among eighty rural school districts — Milford Township had five districts. Total county enrollment was 3,987 pupils, with 824 of those in New Ulm. In addition, around 800 students attended parochial schools. Among them was a branch of St. Paul's Lutheran School (Wisconsin Synod) that recently opened in Essig. There was a major difference between city and country schools. In New Ulm, Springfield, and Sleepy Eye, the buildings were made of brick, while in the rural districts, all but two were of wood construction. Outside, the 1912 report stated "seventy-eight schoolhouses in our county have no trees on them."⁵

Comparing the county's rural schools, using the numbers from 1915, enrollments ranged from a low of thirteen to a high of fifty-six, with District No. 50 having thirty-two pupils. One statistic set the district apart. In the length of its school year, New Ulm schools topped the chart with an average length of 161 days, followed by Springfield at 145 days. Among the rural districts, No. 50 led the way with 141 — a longer year than even Sleepy Eye schools. While District No. 50 adopted a nine-month school year in 1911, most other rural districts ran an eight-month school year, with many limited to seven months. This suggests that the district's citizens had a strong commitment to good education. The district also appears to have had a better tax base than most of the other rural districts in the county, since it included Essig with its elevators, lumber yards, and a bank.⁶

In March 1912 the citizens of District No. 50 voted to build a new school. The tally split evenly with twenty-seven voters for and against a \$2,350 bond issue. Despite the tie vote, within a week, a

³ C. J. Carmicheal Braun, *Marking Time: An Illustrated Guide to Brown County's Sites of Historical Interest* (New Ulm: Brown County Historical Society, 2012), 40.

⁴ Dayle Besemer, interview by Daniel J. Hoisington, video recording, October 18, 2013, Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm, Minn.; Carol Schapekahn, interview by Daniel J. Hoisington, video recording, October 17, 2013, Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm, Minn..

⁵ *New Ulm Review*, September 18, 1912; *New Ulm Review*, January 18, 1911.

⁶ Louis Fritsche, editor, *History of Brown County, Minnesota: Its People, Industries and Institutions* (Indianapolis, Ind.: B.F. Bowen & Co., 1916), 376; *New Ulm Review*, September 18, 1912.

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public notice called for construction bids. The school board required that all work be completed by October 1st — the traditional opening day in the rural districts.⁷

It appears that the primary reason for the split vote centered on the proposed location of the new building.⁸ There was a strong sense of ownership among the district's citizens, and when an initial proposal moved the planned site closer to Essig, a rebellion broke out. Among its leaders, only H. D. Beussmann, who lived on the eastern district boundary, was named in local newspapers. In early April, the *New Ulm Review* reported:

There is a movement on foot to organize a new School District in the Town of Milford. People in the eastern part of School District No. 50 are agitating this matter because of the contemplated removal of the schoolhouse to a point fully a mile west of its present location. The new district to be formed consists of part of School Districts No. 8, 90, 14 and 50. A petition is being circulated and it is the intention to present it at the next meeting of the Board of Commissioners.⁹

The debate ended in late May when the Brown County commissioners rejected the petition by a unanimous vote, following a recommendation from Superintendent Kennedy. What is curious is that, in June 1912, Katherina Hengel sold two acres of land to the school board, and the new building was built near the site of the original school, suggesting a possible compromise.¹⁰

Unfortunately, there is little historical evidence available to inform why a new building was erected in 1912. There are no school board minutes, and contemporary newspapers in New Ulm and Sleepy Eye gave only cursory coverage to rural school matters. Since the school listed the number of pupils as thirty-four in 1912, it is possible that the classroom space in the old building was inadequate.

The motivation for the construction of this building may be found in broad trends in education, which was in the midst of a transformative period. Progressive-era reformers placed much of their hopes for social change upon the school in the early twentieth century. Nowhere was that more readily apparent than in rural America. Popular writers expressed concern that America's rural youth were leaving the countryside in unprecedented numbers to make new lives in the city, with one sociologist fearing that rural areas of the Midwest were becoming "fished out ponds." Good schools, though, nurtured "on our farms, a civilization in full harmony with the best American ideals."¹¹

In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt appointed the Country Life Commission, headed by reformer Liberty Hyde Bailey as its chair, asking its members to study what could be done to stem rural population loss. After hosting hearings nationwide and compiling answers from thousands of questionnaires, the commission issued its report in 1909. According to the report, the principal reason farmers were leaving for the city was the country school. The solution, according to the commission,

⁷ *Brown County Journal*, May 25, 1912.

⁸ *Brown County Journal*, March 23, 1912.

⁹ *New Ulm Review*, April 3, 1912.

¹⁰ *New Ulm Review*, May 29, 1912.

¹¹ Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country Life Movement in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 16; Edward Allsworth Ross, *The Social Trend* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 47; Mabel Carney, *Country Life and the Country School* (Chicago: Row, Peterson, and Co., 1912), 3.

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was to create a curriculum for rural schools that related to country life. Its advocates saw the role of “the country school as a center for redirected education and community building.”¹²

There was, however, a mixed message being sent by the reformers, as its leaders praised the moral quality of rural life while criticizing the judgment of farmers in matters of education.¹³ Many reformers saw consolidation of rural schools as the best answer, improving control over curriculum, eliminating inefficiencies of scale, and professionalizing teachers. That set in motion a long battle to close the one-room schools, one that would not end in Brown County for six more decades. As historian Wayne Fuller wrote,

To close a country school was to destroy an institution that held the little rural community together. It was to wipe out the one building the people of the district had in common and, in fact, to destroy the community, which in those years, so many were trying to save and strengthen. Even more important, as far as the farmers were concerned, the destruction of their school meant that their power to set the length of the school terms, to employ their teachers, and to determine how much they would spend for education would be taken from them and given to some board far removed from their community and their control.¹⁴

Since consolidation was not easily achievable, reformers turned their attention to the school building itself. For example, George W. Knorr wrote in a 1910 U.S. Department of Agriculture bulletin, “When new buildings are erected they usually represent the best efforts of the community, and are the objects of local pride.” In addition, Knorr recommended that school boards hire architectural firms familiar with the “peculiar requirements of these schools.”¹⁵

Swept up in the movement, Minnesota reformers picked up the call to improve the rural school building, while recognizing local resistance to district consolidation. Samuel Challman, who became the first director of Minnesota’s School Building Division in 1913, lamented, “With our democratic form of school government, we cannot hope to eliminate the small rural school.” Given the long term prospects for continued use of the rural school, he continued, “timely and well-directed efforts to

¹² *Report of the Country Life Commission: Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909); Robert A. Harvie, “How ‘Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm? Washington’s Country Life Commission and Redirected Rural Education,” *Columbia* 19 (Summer 2005). Also see Scott J. Peters and Paul A. Morgan, “The Country Life Commission: Reconsidering a Milestone in American Agricultural History,” *Agricultural History* 78 (2004), 289-316.

¹³ Many rural newspapers picked up on this theme. The editor of the *Butte Intermountain* (July 18, 1910) wrote, “The rural American needs no patronizing solicitude from the Roosevelt commission or any other self-appointed coterie of busybodies.” When asked what farmers needed, another paper responded, “More rain and less fool questions by fool commissions about fool things.”

¹⁴ Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 227.

¹⁵ George W. Knorr, *Consolidated Rural Schools and the Organization of a County System* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Experimental Stations, Bulletin No. 232, 1910), 8; Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 64.

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improve the rural school are sure to bring their rewards not only in increased opportunities to the children who attend, but also in an enlarged vision of the value of the public school to the community as a whole.”¹⁶

Challman observed one barrier to this enlarged vision, writing, “Many school officers resent even the suggestion that plans drawn by an architect should be secured, as any builder in their estimation can put up a schoolhouse, if given the outside dimensions of the proposed building. The questions of height of ceiling, size of schoolroom, size and location of windows, size and location of chimney, means of heating and ventilation, and other matters relating to the health, progress, and welfare of children, are considered merely incidental to the structural problems.”¹⁷

To remedy this aversion to architects, the Holmberg Act of 1911 authorized the Minnesota state superintendent of public instruction to set standards for school buildings. Although aimed at eliminating one-room schools, the new standards found their way into rural areas through widespread distribution of plan books, based on designs published in annual reports of the Superintendent of Public Instruction or other readily available publications. Some were produced by the state, while others by companies providing plans as advertisement for their heating systems or school furnishings and supplies. In 1910 C. G. Schultz, Minnesota’s superintendent of public instruction, commissioned Minneapolis architect Frank E. Halden to create standard plans for one-and two-room school buildings. Two years later, Halden published an extensive collection in *Rural and Consolidated School Buildings of Minnesota*.¹⁸

The District No. 50 school board chose one of Halden’s plans, and then, as recommended by the state, hired a local architect to adapt the plan to the specific site. The son of a German mason, Herman Amme was born in New Ulm in 1866, and spent his young adult years studying architecture in Germany. A local newspaper said that Amme was “one of the best educated architects in this part of the state.” Most of his early work was for private homes, often undertaking the work as a contractor in addition to architectural duties. In the wake of the success of Sleepy Eye’s C. Berg Hotel (NRHP) in 1899, Amme received commissions for the First National Bank in Winthrop, a new high school building in New Ulm in 1900 (no longer standing) and substantial commercial blocks in downtown New Ulm (Louis Buenger Block, 227 N. Minnesota, and Engelbert Hardware, 16 S. Minnesota) contributing buildings to the New Ulm Commercial Historic District). Familiar with school projects, Amme had previously built a school for the adjacent District No. 14 School in 1902 and later served as superintendent of construction for the New Ulm Public High School (NRHP).¹⁹

The plan, which remains remarkably intact, is an adaptation of the Minnesota Standard School Plan, Design No. 2. Samuel Challman noted this design “has proved to be most popular in the state and is one of the two original plans prepared by the Department of Education.” He described the plan as follows:

¹⁶ S. A. Challman, *The Rural School Plant for Rural Teachers and School Boards, Normal Schools, Teachers’ Training Classes, Rural Extension Bureaus* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1917), 5.

¹⁷ Challman, *The Rural School Plant*, 12.

¹⁸ F. E. Halden, *Rural and Consolidated School Buildings of Minnesota* (St. Paul: Department of Education, 1912).

¹⁹ *Brown County Journal*, January 28, 1899; January 20, 1917; *New Ulm Review*, February 8, 1899; *New Ulm Review*, August 19, 1903; *New Ulm Review*, July 16, 1913. Amme died in 1917 at the age of fifty.

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A one-room frame school building with a seating capacity for forty pupils. This building has, in addition to the schoolroom, two coat rooms, a library, a fuel room, and a vestibule. It is to be heated and ventilated by means of a jacketed heater. It is designed to front west, but may also be used when an east front is desired. It cannot be used when a north or south front is wanted.

It used many of the latest trends: a concrete foundation, a library room, a hall (or vestibule), and a coatroom. "The coatroom and the vestibule should never be combined," warned Challman, "as children's clothing should be kept in a warm room where there is a constant circulation of air." Another incorporated reform was the use of a wall of windows, with its location based on prevailing winds and afternoon sun. This improved the health of the students by providing sunlight and good ventilation.²⁰

Amme made a few alterations. The standard plan did not include a full basement, so here, Amme turned the fuel room on the first floor into a stairwell. In addition, Amme included two indoor restrooms (and not outdoor privies) and an inside pump connected to a cistern. On the exterior, one of the principal options was the use of brick for the porch and to face the concrete foundation. As the son of a mason, it is not surprising that Amme chose that path.²¹

Soon after the commissioners' decision, construction began, and it appears that work was completed by the next fall. The following spring, the *New Ulm Review* announced: "A farewell dance was given in the old schoolhouse of District No. 50 in the Town of Milford last Sunday. A new building was erected last year and the old one was sold. The present owner expects to move it to Essig and convert it into a dwelling house."²²

Over the next fifty-nine years, the grade school instruction of the district's children took place in this building. At first, many of the teachers were provided through a state-funded teacher-training program. Under new state laws adopted in 1909, funds were provided in the amount of \$750 to establish normal schools throughout the state. This allowed young men and women to gain training to go and teach in surrounding rural schools, without going on to a four-year institution. At its peak, in 1924, there were ninety-six departments established in sixty-five counties across Minnesota. New Ulm's program was among the earliest in the state, and it was soon providing teachers for the rural schools throughout Brown County, including District No. 50. Among its first graduates was artist Wanda Gag. By the 1930s, the program had fallen by the wayside and teachers were graduates of four-year colleges. After that, based on students' memories, the teachers were typically married, and always women. Looking at Brown County salaries through the years, rural teachers were paid less than their city counterparts.²³

²⁰ S. A. Challman, *New School Buildings in Minnesota for the Year Ending July 31, 1914, Bulletin No. 54*, (St. Paul, Minn.: Department of Education, 1914), 16; also see Challman, *The Rural School Plant*, 106. Describing the proper location for windows, he wrote: "The chief reason for having the light enter the room to the left of the pupils is that it will prevent the shadow of the hand from falling on the work when the pupil is writing."

²¹ Challman, *The Rural School Plant*, 18.

²² *New Ulm Review*, April 30, 1913. I found no record to where the old school was moved.

²³ H. E. Flynn, Inspector of Teacher Training Departments, in *State of Minnesota, Department of Education, Report, Teacher Training Departments in High Schools, 1920* (Saint Paul, Minn.: Department of

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The county school system provided support and special subject teachers for the rural schools, with several former students pointing to the efforts of superintendent Helen Schroeder in the post-World War II era. "We had up-to-date textbooks, workbooks, reference books, a good piano, and record player," recalled one student.²⁴ After World War II a bookmobile frequently visited. A few recall the visits of a music teacher in the later years. A nurse rotated through districts, conducting basic checkups and maintaining records of immunizations.²⁵

The great challenge for the teacher was to manage the education of different grade levels, all in one room. Classes included reading, spelling, penmanship, geography, music, arithmetic, and, for a time, industrial arts. With enrollment shifting between eighteen and thirty students, it meant each grade level often had only three or four pupils. The teacher carefully maintained classroom routine. Dayle Besemer said, "There were eight grades (later changed to seven), and when it was your classes' turn, you would go sit at the table with the teacher. You each had about 10-15 minutes of class, then she would start with the first grade and then go up through the eighth." "I'm surprised I learned as much as I did," Melvin Alfred declared. "After all, there were seven grades and all those subjects to cover. That's an hour a day for each grade."²⁶

What worked, said LaVonne (Alfred) Christensen, was that the "younger ones would be listening to the older ones, and pick up the lessons. They would remember it the next year when they moved up a grade. So, by the time you left, a student might have heard the same lesson six or seven times." The teacher enlisted the older children to instruct the lower grades. Curt Lambrecht recalled that the classroom "functioned more like a new form of block teaching, in that there were always multiple levels of activities of kids doing things simultaneously. There would be a first-grader sitting in the front, with a book, and a fifth-grader supervising their reading, and maybe a sixth-grader was working with a second-grader on a spelling test. Meanwhile the teacher was working with the fourth grade on a history lesson." Those interviewed all expressed satisfaction with their education, saying that they often entered the high school system ahead of the "townies."²⁷

At lunch or recess, if the weather was pleasant, the children flocked outdoors to climb on playground equipment (now gone), play sports like softball (often called kitten ball by former students), and "Pom, Pom, Pole Away," or create imaginary games. Curt Lambrecht remembered that, because of the small number of students, they had to cooperate. He said, "If we wanted to play softball, everybody played softball. If we decided to play fort, everyone — all grades — played it together." Based on the memory of former students, the one boulder on the lot could be turned into

Education, 1920), 3. Also, State of Minnesota. Department of Education, *Statistical Tables relating to Teacher Training Departments in High Schools* (Saint Paul, Minn.: Department of Education, 1920), 3.

²⁴ Verne Radloff, interview by Daniel J. Hoisington, video recording, April 20, 2016, Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm, Minn.;

²⁵ "Milford's Schools," typescript, Brown County Historical Society, no date.

²⁶ Dayle Besemer, interview, October 18, 2013; Melvin Alfred, interview by Daniel J. Hoisington, video recording, October 17, 2013, Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm, Minn.

²⁷ LaVonne (Alfred) Christensen, interview by Daniel J. Hoisington, video recording, October 17, 2013, Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm, Minn.; Curt Lambrecht, interviewed by Daniel J. Hoisington, video recording, October 17, 2013, Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm, Minn.

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anything from home base for tag to a fort to be defended against mythical attackers. It also served as a place to clean erasers — a task assigned to students.

During the winter months, the basement provided space for recess. A coal furnace originally heated the building, later replaced by a large gas heater. Here the children would place their lunch. Helen (Alfred) Vogel said, “We used to bring potatoes in foil and put them on the furnace when we arrived in the morning and they would be ready by lunchtime.” There was a reservoir for water on top, where students placed jars of soup.²⁸

The holidays anchored the school year, and none was bigger than Christmas. Each year, students mounted a pageant that drew its audience from parents, friends, and neighbors. Curt Lambrecht said, “Every kid had multiple things to do. We were involved in painting scenes and building props, learning how to speak in front of public audiences, and practicing music. It was a pretty good fine arts activity.” Dayle Besemer recalled, “Christmas was the highlight of the year, because the school board would attend, and all the parents and neighbors. It looked like there were five hundred people out there.” A painted drop curtain, emblazoned with small advertisements, still hangs from the classroom’s ceiling.²⁹

Every school year ended with a big picnic on the grounds. “It was actually for the whole district, and it was potluck,” said Carol Schapekahm. “It was the school boards’ job, and they took the weiners to the Essig creamery and they would steam them in a milk can and bring them here.”

The school remained open until 1971 because of the community’s persistent opposition to consolidation. At the state level, legislators and educators pushed to bring an end to small, rural schools. They argued that these districts, which gained financial support from local taxes, were too small to effectively run a school, forcing them to fall behind on technology and other teaching tools, such as books. Despite the carrots of increased state financial assistance, rural areas held tight to the old system. As historian William Folwell wrote, “The attachment of the people of Minnesota, especially rural residents, to their inherited system of small neighborhood school districts, with the schoolhouse within easy walking distance of the home, had persisted from the beginning of the organized existence of the state.” As late as 1947, Minnesota had more than 7,600 districts, but the decline was dramatic over the following two decades. By 1965, there were fewer than 1,800 school districts in Minnesota.³⁰

Despite fifty years of entreaties by state educators, one-room schoolhouse still dotted the landscape of Brown County throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The death knell came on May 24, 1967, when the state legislature passed the Duty to Maintain Grades K-12 Statue. This piece of legislation

²⁸ Helen (Alfred) Vogel, interview by Daniel J. Hoisington, video recording, October 17, 2013, Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm, Minn.

²⁹ Dayle Besemer, interview, October 18, 2013; Curt Lambrecht, interview, October 17, 2013. The curtain was painted around 1948-49. In a phone conversation with the author, the Midwest Art Conservation Center described it as one of the best preserved in the state.

³⁰ William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, Vol. 4 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1930): 168. On September 30, 1957, District #50 was designated as District #213, following a county school reorganization.

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called for the elimination of all districts that did not maintain their own secondary schools. Districts were given until 1971 to merge with a district that provided K-12 education.

In late May 1971 Brown County's rural schools closed for the last time, recorded in an elegiac article in the *New Ulm Daily Journal*: "Under state law all country public schools must close their doors for good after the present term, ending an era that touched the lives of nearly every rural resident in the county today. The thinking behind the law is that the old-fashioned facilities do not offer the necessary opportunities to today's youth. Any of you old-timers care to challenge that?" A similar article, published a week later, observed that the closings were "generally regarded by rural residents with a certain degree of sadness."³¹

Four of the five Milford Township schools were sold to private owners, and at least two were converted into residences. These two are still standing, although their interiors have been altered. District No. 14's school was a 1902 wood building, designed by architect Hermann Amme. District No. 9's school was constructed in the late 1920s using rainbow concrete block manufactured by Saffert Construction Company of New Ulm. One year after the District No. 50 School closed, it was purchased by the township, which continues to use it as their town hall.³²

District No. 50 School illustrates the importance of education in rural Brown County in the twentieth century. It provided its young people with the tools needed to participate as adults in the social, political, and commercial life of the community. As a rural school district, it also offered its citizens local control over education — a prerogative that was fiercely protected until the state mandated the closing of most one-room schools in 1971. In addition, the school building is a well-preserved example — both inside and out — of a state-issued architectural plan that reflects the ideals of Progressive Era education.

³¹ "Closing of Old Country Schools Brings Back Many Fond Memories," *New Ulm Daily Journal*, May 18, 1971; "Picnic Marks School Closing Sunday," *New Ulm Daily Journal*, May 28, 1971.

³² The two other Milford schools that remain standing are potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, however, neither represent the Progressive Era ideology or state-approved plans of the District No. 50. See Michael Koop, "Colorful, Functional and Practical: The Artstone Buildings of the Saffert Construction Company, New Ulm, Minnesota," paper presented at the conference, Historic Architecture and Landscapes of Minnesota and Wisconsin, September 1994; also see Daniel J. Hoisington, *A German Town: A History of New Ulm, Minnesota* (New Ulm, Minn.: Edinborough Press, 2004), 149-152.

District No. 50 School
Name of Property
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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Newspapers

Brown County Journal
New Ulm Daily Journal
New Ulm Review
Sleepy Eye Herald

District No. 50 School
Name of Property
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Unpublished

- Anderson, David C. "District No. 48 School." 1996. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Available at State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.
- _____. "School District No. 74." 1991. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Available at State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.
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- Granger, Susan, et al. "Morris High School." 2003. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Available at State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.
- Hackett, John J. "School District No. 48." 1978. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Available at State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

Oral History Interviews

- All interviews were conducted by Daniel J. Hoisington.
- Alfred, Melvin, October 17, 2013
- Ahlness, Joan, October 17, 2013
- Besemer, Dayle, October 18, 2013
- Besemer, Lisa, October 18, 2013
- Christiansen, LaVonne, October 17, 2013
- Finstad, Kevin, October 18, 2013
- Lambrech, Curt, October 17, 2013
- Radloff, Verne, April 20, 2016
- Schapekahn, Caroline, October 17, 2013
- Vogel, Helen, October 17, 2013

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Brown County Historical Society

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Brown County, Minnesota

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): BW-MIL-009

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1. Zone: 15 Easting: 373222 Northing: 4909303

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Legal Description: Section 20, Township 110, Range 31, Lot A of NW4

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the schoolhouse and two-acre parcel that has historically been part of District No. 50 School.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Deborah Dove, Milford Town Hall Building Committee
& Daniel J. Hoisington, Hoisington Preservation Consultants
organization: Milford Township
street & number: 24279 County Road 11
city or town: New Ulm state: MN zip code: 56073
e-mail: mdjldove@newulmtel.net
telephone: 507-359-5775
date: May 10, 2016

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

District No. 50 School
Name of Property
County and State

Brown County, Minnesota

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: District No. 50 School
City or Vicinity: Milford Township
County: Brown State: MN
Photographer: Daniel J. Hoisington
Date Photographed: April 2013, April 2016
Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- Photo #1 (MN_Brown County_District No. 50 School_0001), camera facing east.
- Photo #2 (MN_Brown County_District No. 50 School_0002), primary entrance, camera facing west.
- Photo #3 (MN_Brown County_District No. 50 School_0003), north elevation (left), west elevation (right), camera facing southeast.
- Photo #4 (MN_Brown County_District No. 50 School_0004), west elevation (left), south elevation (right), camera facing north-northeast.
- Photo #5 (MN_Brown County_District No. 50 School_0005), south elevation, camera facing north. Flag pole base, foreground.
- Photo #6 (MN_Brown County_District No. 50 School_0006), interior, classroom, camera facing north-northwest.
- Photo #7 (MN_Brown County_District No. 50 School_0007), interior, classroom, camera facing southeast.
- Photo #8 (MN_Brown County_District No. 50 School_0008), interior, library, camera facing east.
- Photo #9 (MN_Brown County_District No. 50 School_0009), interior, curtain, camera facing south.
- Photo #10 (MN_Brown County_District No. 50 School_0010), interior, basement, camera facing southeast.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

District No. 50 School

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Figure 1: Location of school property

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Figure 2: School property

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National Park Service

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Section number Additional Documentation Page 3

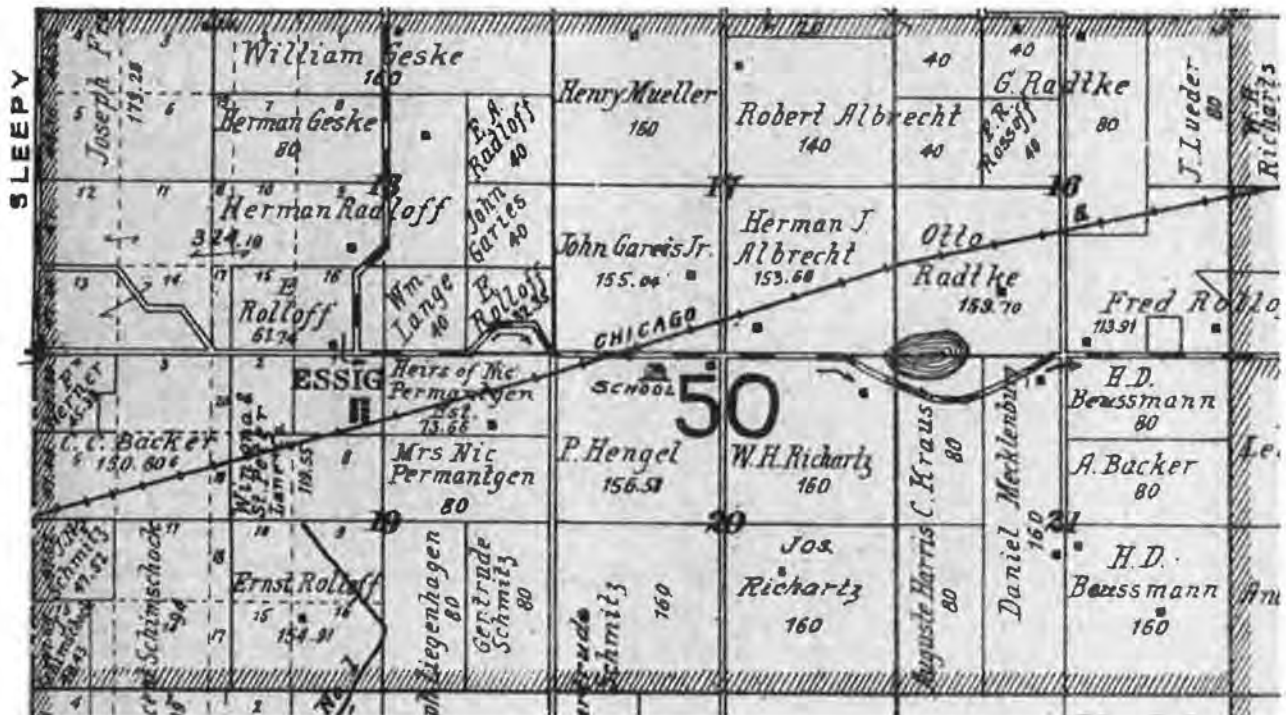


Figure 3: District No. 50, Brown County, Minnesota, from *Atlas of Brown County* (1914). Note the location of the school in the center of the map.

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National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

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Figure 4: District 50 School, no date
Brown County Historical Society

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National Park Service

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Figure 5: District 50 School students in 1949.
Brown County Historical Society

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National Park Service

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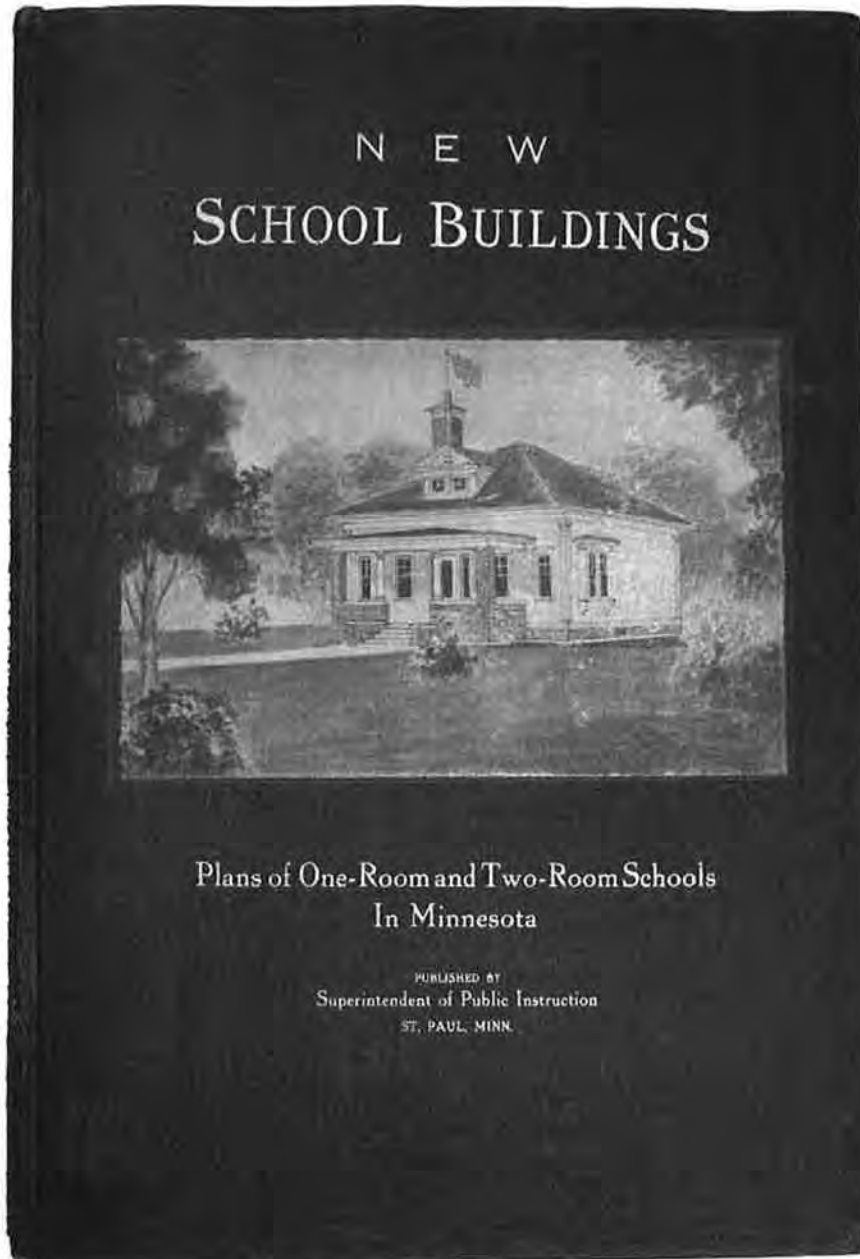


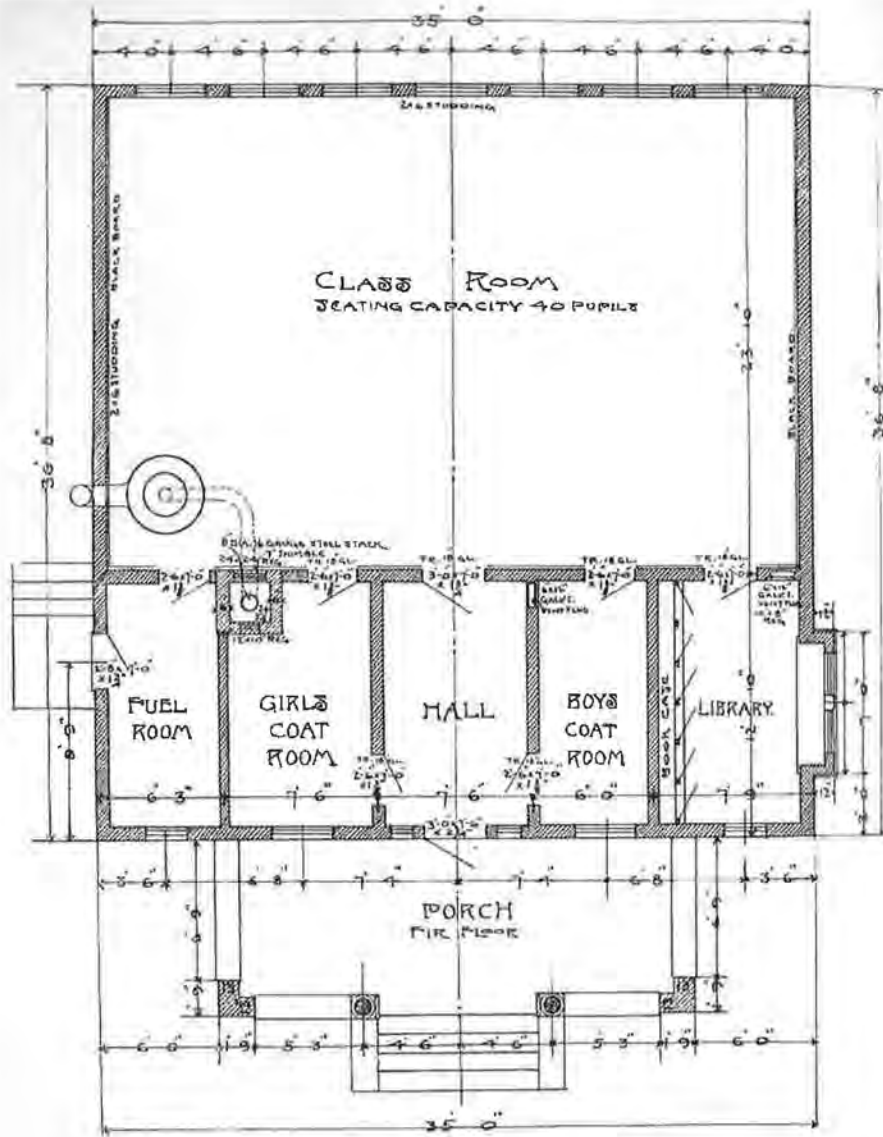
Figure 6: *New School Buildings*. Plan #2, used for District No. 50 school, is shown on the cover.
Minnesota Historical Society

United States Department of the Interior
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Continuation Sheet

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FIRST FLOOR PLAN.
One-Room School Building. Design 2

Figure 6: *New School Buildings*. This is the basic floor plan as designed by Frank Halden
Minnesota Historical Society

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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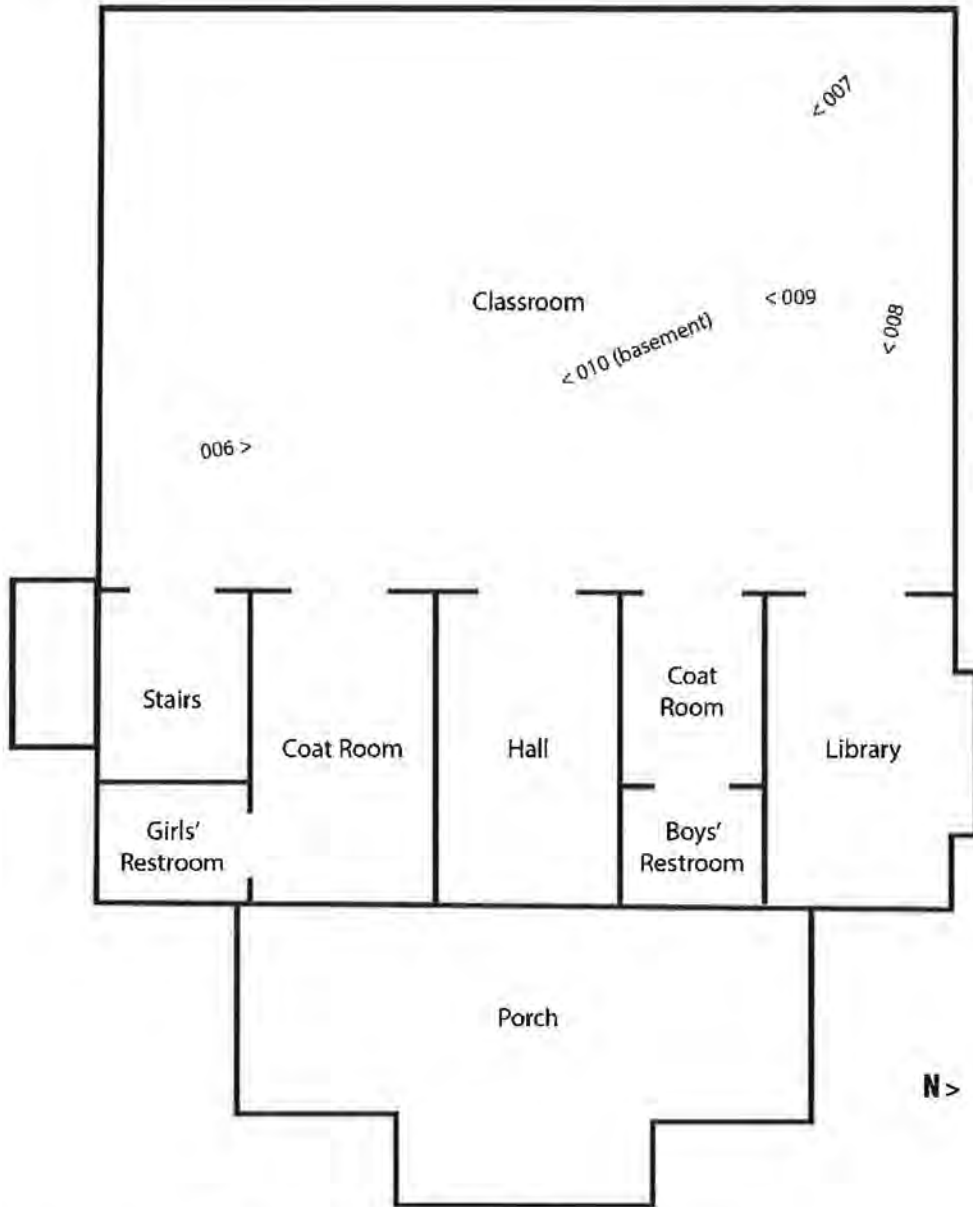


Figure 7: Interior floor plan and interior photo key
For District No. 50 school, restrooms were added off the girls' and boys' coat rooms.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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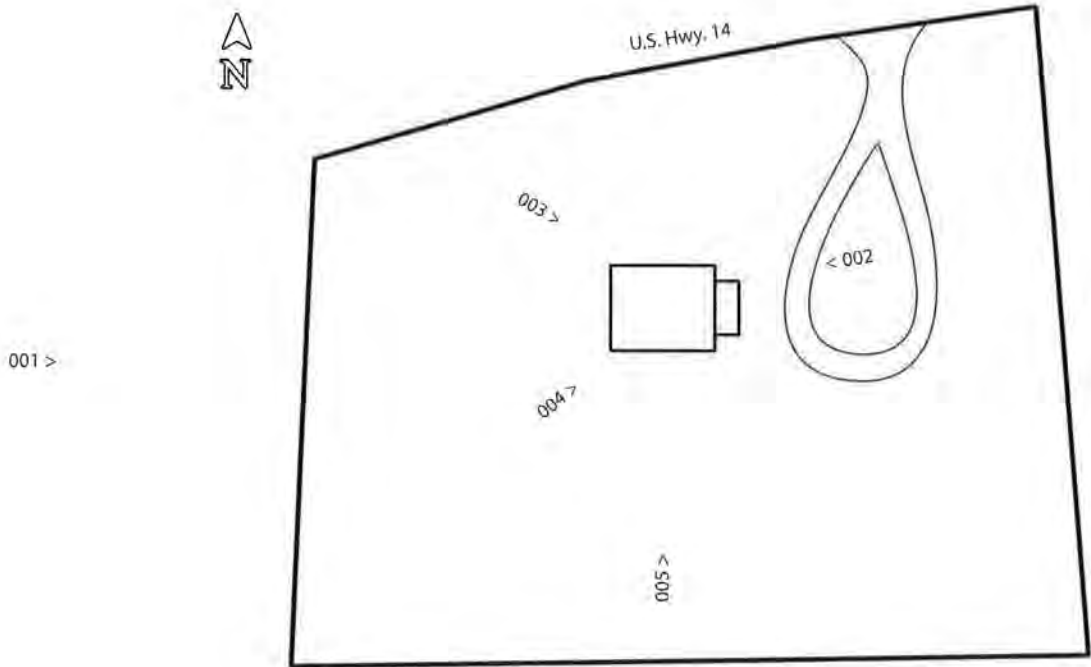


Figure 8: Photo key













34 - 25 YES
9 NO

THIS SCHOOL CLOSED, ALONG WITH ALL OTHER "COUNTRY" SCHOOLS, AFTER THE 1970-71 SCHOOL YEAR.

WELCOME TO DISTRICT #50
BROWN COUNTY
Historical Society

Full 12 COURSE BASEMENT	} \$15,251.00
4" CONCRETE FLOOR	
MOVING THE BUILDING	7,200.00
1 UNI-SEX HANDICAP RESTROOM	4,200.00
ASSOCIATED CARPENTRY (PLUMBING)	2,650.00
H ₂ O \$2,500 ⁰⁰ NEW BACK DOOR	675.00





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RICH
ICE CREAM
NEW ULM DAIRY

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EGGS & POULTRY

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SLEEPY EYE GREEN HOUSES

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Service
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SEARLES CO-OP
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& SHIPPING ASSN.
NEW ULM
WALLACE GEISTHARDT

COMMUNITY CO-OP
OIL ASSOCIATION
OF NEW ULM
PH. ESSIG 77
PH. NEW ULM 15711 SLEEPY EYE

Schleuders
JEWELERS - OPTOMETRISTS
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PRODUCE
BUYER OF EGGS
& POULTRY - ESSIG

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BURIAL ASSN.
E.H. WINTER - WALTER J. GARRIS
NEW ULM

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COMPLETE BANKING SERVICE
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CO.
CONCRETE SPECIALIST
NEW ULM, MINN.

HARTL MOTOR CO.
FORD
SALES SERVICE
NEW ULM

Herberger's
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Ford
TRACTOR
PETERSON
IMPL. CO.
SALES & SERVICE
DEARBORN FARM EQUIP.
NEW ULM



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GEIB-JANNI
LUMBER CO.
INC

Fisher Auto
SERVICE
OLDSMOBILE DEALER
WHEEL ALIGNMENT -
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Lincoln MERCURY
NEW ULM
MOTOR SALES
ROY C. JOHNSON, PROP. PH. 835

FULLER MOTOR CO.
DeSOTO - PLYMOUTH
NEW ULM

Pats Cleaners
RUGS & INC.
FUR CLEANING
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NEW ULM

CITIZENS
STATE BANK
OF NEW ULM
MEMBER F.D.I.C.

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PACKING CO.
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HATCHERY & FEEDS
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DRAIN TILE - CULVERTS - SEWER PIPE
BLOCKS BRICK AND OTHER
BUILDING MATERIAL

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these Merchants



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 12/9/2016 Date of Pending List: 1/11/2017 Date of 16th Day: 1/26/2017 Date of 45th Day: 1/24/2017 Date of Weekly List: 2/1/2017

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept Return Reject 1/24/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria

Reviewer Roger Reed Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2278 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

Milford Township
27332 187th Avenue
New Ulm, MN 56073

Supervisors

Frederick Juni
Michael Dove
Greg Haubrich

Town Clerk

Thomas Giefer

Town Treasurer

Verne Radloff

November 14, 2016

Via E-Mail

ginny.way@mnhs.org

Ms. Ginny Way
National Register Architectural Historian
Minnesota Historical Society
345 Kellogg Blvd W
St. Paul, MN 55102

Re: Milford School House

Dear Ms. Way:

Milford Township, Brown County, State of Minnesota, through its Board of Supervisors, hereby supports the nomination of Milford's District No. 50 School House to the National Register of Historic Places. As one of the few remaining "country schools" in existence, the integrity and preservation of this unique and historic school house warrants preservation.

Thank you for your attention.

Milford Town Board
Milford Township,
Brown County, Minnesota

cc: Mr. Thomas Giefer (via e-mail)
Ms. Deb Dove (via e-mail)
Mr. Daniel Hoisington (via e-mail)

2057694.1

Minnesota Historical Society
State Historic Preservation Office
345 Kellogg Blvd West, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102
651-259-3451



TO: Stephanie Toothman, Keeper
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Ginny Way

DATE: December 1, 2016

NAME OF PROPERTY: District No. 50 School

COUNTY AND STATE: Brown County, Minnesota

SUBJECT: National Register:
 Nomination
 Multiple Property Documentation Form
 Request for determination of eligibility
 Request for removal (Reference No.)
 Nomination resubmission
 Boundary increase/decrease (Reference No.)
 Additional documentation (Reference No.)

DOCUMENTATION:

- Original National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
- Multiple Property Documentation Form
- Continuation Sheets
- Removal Documentation
- Photographs
- CD w/ image files
- Original USGS Map
- Sketch map(s)
- Correspondence
 - Owner Objection
 - The enclosed owner objections
 - Do Do not constitute a majority of property owners

STAFF COMMENTS: