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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL
REGISTER

1. Name of Property

historic name: DeSmet Schoolhouse

other name/site number: Old DeSmet School, 24MO138

2. Location

street & number: 6105 Old Highway 10 West

not for publication: n/a
vicinity: n/a

city/town: Missoula

state: Montana code: MT county: Missoula code: 063 zip code: 59801

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 1 </u>	building(s)
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 1 </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

4. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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. See continuation sheet.

Maude Shep 1-16-91
Signature of certifying official Date

Montana SHPO
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

~~Entered in the~~
~~National Register~~

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register Melanie Byer 2/28/91
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain): _____

[Signature] _____
Signature of Keeper Date

6. Function or Use

Historic: Education/school

Current: Domestic/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification: Other: Folk Vernacular

Materials: foundation: stone
 roof: wood shingle
 walls: brick

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The DeSmet Schoolhouse is located 4.8 miles northwest of Missoula, Montana on the edge of DeSmet, a small, historic settlement, now a part of the greater Missoula area.

The school is a traditional, one-room, red brick school house built in Folk Vernacular style. The single-story building is a rectangular mass, with a steeply-pitched gable roof. The roof is covered with wooden shingles and has shallow, overhanging eaves. The brick work is common bonded, laid with red bricks of local manufacture. Originally, a brick chimney projected from the ridgeline of the roof. The building rests on a random fieldstone foundation.

The design of the school house is symmetrical, with the entrance on the northeast elevation. The entrance is centrally located with a single door under a rectangular transom. The doorway is spanned by a segmental relieving arch across the head. Originally, an uncovered wooden porch deck and stairs accessed the entrance.

Southeast and northwest elevations are similarly designed. Each includes a group of three wide-set window openings with brick sills, and three rows of brick above each, forming segmental arches. The windows are double-hung, wooden sash units -- the original units were arranged 4-over-4.

The original design on the southwest elevation (rear) had an offset central exit, with an open, wooden porch deck and stairs similar to those on the front.

The interior contains a large classroom, with the original 4' fir wainscoting all around and restored plaster walls to a height of 12'. Modern improvements were made over the years: hardwood flooring was installed, electricity was added in 1938, indoor plumbing and restrooms were added, probably in 1933.

In 1933, a single story, wood frame addition was added to the rear which housed a cloakroom and a bathroom. The addition has a shed roof with exposed rafters under the eaves, and is covered with corrugated metal roofing, over the original wooden shingles. The siding is wooden clapboard, with simple cornerboards. Windows on the addition are double-hung, 1-over-1 sash units on the east and west sides, on the south side an offset doorway is located. This was covered with a projecting, bracketed shed roof, which has been removed.

In 1940, new windows and a new porch were added to the school. The windows, which remain in place today, were double hung, with 3 horizontal panes-over-3 horizontal panes. The porch improvements included a bracketed, gable overhang to cover the front entrance. In 1990, a pair of chamfered, wooden posts were added to this porch roof to support its weight on the front of the building. The original wooden decking and stairs were replaced, probably during the 1960s or 1970s, with concrete.

The foundation was reinforced in 1990 with poured concrete, although it was possible to leave the original fieldstone exposed along the east side. The east and north corners had been poorly repaired with concrete, probably during the 1960s or 1970s. These, too, were stabilized in 1990, by removing the concrete and rebuilding the corners with new, matching red brick and mortar.

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The school grounds are covered with native grasses, and are demarked by a non-original wire mesh fence which encircles the property. Two gates open to the highway on the north side. Playground equipment was installed in 1928, and later removed. An area northeast of the school, adjacent to the building, was covered with asphalt for a playground and basketball court. There was a wood shed and garage on the property which burned in 1937, and originally, outhouses were located at the west and south corners of the property. When the county sold the schoolhouse in 1966, these were destroyed.

Presently, a two bay garage and storage building is under construction at the rear, west corner of the property on site of the original woodshed/garage which burned. This is a gable-roofed, wooden framed structure. It will be finished with clapboard siding to match the rear addition, and swinging carriage doors to ensure compatibility with the historic schoolhouse.

The school faces north onto Highway 93, a road which has historically been the main travel corridor northwest out of Missoula. The school setting is in the bottomland near the mouth of Butler Creek, and open land surrounds the historic property. Burlington Northern Railroad tracks parallel the highway opposite the school.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: Education, Architecture

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1896-1940

Significant Person(s): n/a

Significant Dates: 1896, 1933, 1940

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: Riddle, J. A., builder

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The DeSmet Schoolhouse is a one-room schoolhouse which is significant under criterion A for its associations with development of early educational facilities in the Missoula area, and as a center of community for the residents of early DeSmet. The building further gains significance under criterion C as a well-preserved example of a late-19th century Folk Vernacular, brick, one-room schoolhouse in Montana.

The history of education in DeSmet began in 1890. From the beginning, active community support and involvement made possible the operation of the local school. The first DeSmet school was constructed on an acre of land donated by Mr. George DeRosier. This small building (22' x 32' x 12' tall), built with materials provided by the school trustees, burned in 1893. Classes were then held in a nearby granary, owned by Thomas Shaughnessy for the period until a new school was built.

On June 4, 1894, the trustees approved a tax levy to raise \$350.00 for building a new school. In April of 1896, the trustees held a meeting to accept bids for the new schoolhouse, and of 8 bids, the trustees accepted the sole bid proposing to build a brick schoolhouse. The bid was awarded to contractor J.A. Riddle for \$635. Land for the new schoolhouse was donated by Henry Thibedeau and bricks were donated by Mr. Hollenbeck from a local brickyard located 1.8 miles east of DeSmet. The school was apparently built that spring and summer.

For the school year which began in September of 1896, there were at least 27 students, from 7 families. Two sessions were offered -- fall sessions ran from September or October through December, and spring sessions usually began in March and ended in July. The schedule suggests that in the summer, children were needed to help on family farms and ranches, and that in the winter, the weather prohibited travel to and from school.

Like most one-room rural schools in Montana, the school employed one teacher annually, and there was a very frequent turnover in staff, often every year. Teachers were generally single women, and they taught a broad curriculum to meet the needs of students from kindergarten through eighth grade.

Attendance at the school fluctuated as families moved in and out of the DeSmet area during the 70 years that the school operated, with as many as 46 in 1903, and as few as 2 in 1941. Periodically, the issue of closing the school and transporting students into Missoula was raised, however, the trustees continued to keep the school open and make improvements to the facility. Such things as schoolyard fencing, a flagpole, a dictionary, and a piano were considered by the board and added over the years.

Improvements made in 1940 -- new windows, porch, benches, oil heating system and a lowered ceiling -- attest to the community's commitment to maintain the school, despite a very low enrollment during that period.

By 1965, growth in school population as the outlying Missoula residential development prompted the DeSmet School district to construct a larger elementary school across the highway. The name was transferred and that new facility became known as the DeSmet School. Safety was also at issue, for the new school was set further away from the highway, and out from under the airspace used by the U.S. Forest Service's Smoke Jumper facility. The DeSmet Schoolhouse was sold to the U.S. Forest Service and used for storage until 1985, when it passed into private ownership.

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In a statewide context, the history of the DeSmet Schoolhouse is reflective of educational development during the first decades of Montana statehood. Building upon the solid educational base which had been established during the territorial era, the number of schools in Montana continued to rise rapidly. In 1882, 189 schools were counted, and by 1889 that number had almost doubled. By 1890, 335 public schools operated in Montana, and by 1900 the number reached 700. During this era, an evolution in schoolhouse architecture is marked by a shift away from the log buildings which characterized early Montana schools. Funding for schools via the State Board of Land Commissioners began to reach school districts enabling them to erect more substantial facilities. On the 1900 census, the state's educational system for the first time recorded more wood frame than log school buildings. The DeSmet Schoolhouse was one of 83 brick buildings represented in that tally. And as evidence of the expansion of the educational system in the Missoula area, by the turn of the century, DeSmet School District #20 was one of 45 school districts in Missoula county.

In its heyday, DeSmet was not much more than a strip of sectionhouses built for railroad workers. The school served families from that settlement, as well as those in the rural Butler Creek area. Local investment and support for the school reflects the importance of the Old DeSmet School as a focal point of community. The building lent the community substance, by virtue of its sturdy architecture, by providing a place of permanence to educate members of growing families, and as a location for community-building activities such as weekly dances.

The DeSmet Schoolhouse is an excellent example of folk vernacular schoolhouse design and embodies many of the characteristics distinctive to the popularly characterized "little red schoolhouse" type. The building is a simple gable-end rectangular mass, the design is symmetrical with the doorway set squarely in the center on the gable end. Fenestration is composed of three wide-set windows along each side wall, and the building is aligned with the doorway and gates on the schoolyard opening toward the road. On the interior, the single classroom with wainscoting and plaster walls is typical of this common form. In addition, as noted by Andrew Gulliford in America's Country Schools, the practice of using brick made on site or nearby is a pattern common throughout the United States in the construction of vernacular school buildings.

The building retains a high level of integrity, reflecting its original design, as well as changes made through 1940 as the school continued to meet the educational needs of area children. Present efforts to preserve the building and restore the interior have been sensitive to the building's historic character, and have ensured that it will stand in good condition for many years to come. Where possible, original materials have been retained, modern alterations have been reversed, and elements which were lost over the years were restored following the historic design.

Today, the schoolhouse remains as the last significant building marking the old community of DeSmet. For years now, it has been a local Missoula landmark -- a reminder of the now-fading era when thousands of children in Montana received their education in one-room schools, a memorial to the dedicated teachers who made that system work, and a reflection of the importance that early Montanans placed upon education as a foundation to community.

9. References

- Ainsworth, David B. The Public Elementary Schools of Montana, 1860-1920. Dissertation, Doctor of Education, University of Montana, Missoula, 1971.
- Beck, Barbara Springer "Cultural Site Record, Site 24M0138 - DeSmet School." USDA Forest Service Region 1, 1981.
- Day, Shirley (Current principal of DeSmet School) Personal Communication with Chere Jiusto, October 16, 1990.
- Dodd, Walter and Byron (Longtime residents of Butler Creek area) Personal Communication with Barbara Springer Beck in Missoula, Montana, Feb. 1981.

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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than one acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	11	721030	5201220

Verbal Boundary Description:

The DeSmet Schoolhouse is located in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec 35, T14N, R20W, on a tract of land described as follows:

X See Continuation Sheet

Boundary Justification:

These boundaries take in the property which has historically been associated with the schoolhouse.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Chere Jiusto
Organization: State Historic Preservation Office
Street & Number: 225 N. Roberts
City or Town: Helena State: Montana Zip: 59620

Date: October 1990
Telephone: 406/444-7715

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References (continued):

- Guilliford, Andrew America's Country Schools. The Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C. 1984.
- Hamel, Alzire (Teacher at DeSmet School 1929-1934) Personal Communication with LynAnne Otto in Missoula, October 1990.
- Schroeder, Fred E.H. "Schoolhouse Reading," History News, American Association for State and Local History, Vol. 36, No. 4, April 1981, p. 15-16.
- Reports of County School Superintendents for Montana, Record Series 109, Boxes 12-13, Missoula County Statistics, housed in the Montana Historical Society Archives.

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Verbal Boundary Description (continued):

Beginning at the northwest corner of said Section 35; thence S. 0°34' E., along the west boundary of said Section 35, a distance of 1484.0 feet to a point on the southwesterly right-of-way line of U.S. Highways No. 10 and 93, and a point on a nontangent curve; thence southeasterly along said nontangent curve and along said southwesterly right-of-way line of U.S. Highways No. 10 and 93, said curve being concave to the southwest and having a radius of 6,650 feet, a distance of 1524.3 feet to the TRUE POINT OF BEGINNING; thence S. 31°01'W., 173.5 feet; thence S. 50°48' E., a distance of 202.4 feet; thence N. 32°40' E., 174.6 feet to the southwesterly right-of-way line of the US Highways No. 10 and 93; thence N. 38°06' E., along said highway right-of-way line, a distance of 15 feet; thence N. 50°43'W., along said highway right-of-way line, a distance of 15.9 feet to the TRUE POINT OF BEGINNING.

Benchmark 3213 is located in the side of the building.