

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# 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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Sandford Dugout

other names/site number Sandford Dugout

## 2. Location

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication [X]

city or town Mitchell vicinity [X]

state Nebraska code NE county Sioux code 165 zip code 69357

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 [ ] nationally [x] statewide [ ] locally. ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Lawrence Samuels  
Signature of certifying official

1/25/00  
Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_
- 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 of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

**Sandford Dugout**

Name of Property

**Sioux County, Nebraska**

County and State

**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

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

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

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Single Dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instruction)

Vacant  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Prairie Folk Style  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Earth  
walls Sandstone  
roof Rolled Asphalt Shingle  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Architecture
- Settlement
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1897-1949

**Significant Dates**

N/A

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Sandford, Joesph L.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 for Additional Data:**

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

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Sandford Dugout  
Name of Property

Sioux County, Nebraska  
County and State

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### 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1.			3.		
2.			4.		

See continuation sheet.

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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### 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Todd H. Knispel Research Assistant  
organization Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office date December 10, 1999  
street & number 1500 R St. telephone (402) 471-4787  
city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68501

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### Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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### Property Owner

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

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**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. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127.

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Sandford Dugout

Name of Property

Sioux County, Nebraska

County and State

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The J. L. Sandford Dugout located in Sioux County, Nebraska was built in 1897, and represents one of the American Prairie Folk Styles. The dugout is a 14 X 16 foot one-room dwelling located about twenty-five miles north of Mitchell, Nebraska and two miles west of Nebraska Highway 29, and approximately 12 miles east of the Wyoming border. The Dugout is located on the Plains which are flat laying lands above the river valley. Plains are an extensive flat or rolling treeless land.

The J.L. Sandford Dugout is constructed into a hillside has walls made of local sandstone and a wood floor. The roof is made of pine wood boards, covered with rolled asphalt roofing. The roof is the only change that has occurred in the last half-century. The roof is still supported by the original lodgepole. The lodgepole was hewn from a pine near the Niobrara River 11 or 12 miles north of the Sandford Dugout. The original walls were built out of wood but were replaced with the Sandstone within the first couple of years after construction. The wood floor was added, to replace the dirt floor, early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Sandford Dugout was built into a hillside facing the western horizon. The front facade is made of sandstone. There is a simple window on the south half of the wall and simple wood door on the north half. Projecting from the north wall is a retaining wall that provides some protection from northwest winds. The roof supported by the original lodgepole blends into the top of the hill. The interior of the Dugout is just as simple as the exterior. The floor is made of wood, and the three interior earthen walls are supported by sandstone. The interior space is large enough for two beds, a stove, hutch, and a table.

The property retains a high degree of historic integrity, and maybe the best example of its type in Nebraska. The Dugout has changed very little in the century since it was built. The view from the front door of the Dugout has probably not changed since it was first built in 1897. A true testament to those pioneers that came before us.

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The Joseph L. Sandford Dugout is eligible for listing on the National Register as the best example of the folk tradition housing constructed during the settlement period of the plains of Nebraska. The historically significant dugout is eligible under criterion A and C. The period of significance extends from 1897 to 1950 the existing fifty year cutoff date. Historical significance under criterion A lies in its importance to Nebraska's settlement period. The dugout was built during a time when houses on the plains were still being made in the American Prairie Folk Style. Architecturally the dugout may be the best example of American Prairie Folk Style of dugouts in the state of Nebraska. The dugout is an important link to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century when homesteaders were conquering the vast areas of the plains. Sandford dugout is also significant under criterion C for its architecture in American Prairie Folk Style. Though the original wood walls were replaced by local sandstone near the turn of the century, the lodgepole is still original to the structure. The dugout and sod house played a significant and important role in the settlement of the Great Plains prior to modern transportation when the availability mass produced building materials allowed more permanent structures to be built.

## History

Sioux County is in the extreme northwestern corner of the state of Nebraska. When Nebraska became a state in 1867, Sioux County took up a large portion of northern and western Nebraska. In 1883, the east half of the county would be divided into what would become the counties of Cherry, Brown, Rock, and Keya Paha. Sioux County's present day boundaries would be set in February 1885. The first homestead in what would become Sioux County took place in 1880, by L.E. Belden, on land that is now part of the Lake Ranch near Ft. Robinson. By 1886, The Fremont Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad reached Harrison in northern Sioux County approximately 20 miles north of the Sandford Dugout.

J.L. Sandford came to Sioux County in the late winter, early spring of 1897. Joseph LaCount Sandford was born June 30, 1865 in Sullivan County, Missouri. J.L. Sandford married Izilda "Dilla" Kinner in 1885. They left Missouri with two daughters for Fall River County, South Dakota in 1887. Joseph Sandford then moved his family to Sioux County in 1897 where they would homestead. After hand digging a well and living in a tent for two months, Sandford's would build their 14X16 foot dugout. By 1904, when he filed his Homestead claim there was a barn, a well, the dugout, two corrals, and a new frame house. The first house and the other structures no longer stand, and the well has since caved in. The dugout was used as a bunkhouse up to the 1960's. Four generations of the family have spent a night or two in the dugout with plans for a fifth. Today there is a newer house, built 1957, on the homestead site but is placed in a manner that its impact on the original site and view is minimal. The view from the dugout, it can be presumed, is the same in 1999 as it was in 1897.

## Criteria Evaluation

The J.L. Sandford Dugout is eligible under criterion A for its association with the broad pattern of settlement of the Great Plains during the homestead era. The Homestead act of 1862 allowed settlers 160 acres of land after

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five years of residency and improvements. The Homestead Act in Nebraska would be amended in 1904 with the Kinkaid Act. The Kinkaid Act would allow 640 acres to settlers. After forgoing a Homestead attempt in South Dakota J.L. Sanford moved to Nebraska in 1897. After finding an adequate supply of water he built his one room dugout for his family, and would file his homestead claim. The original claim is still under family ownership, and to their credit have preserved a piece of an American era that has all but disappeared.

The Sanford Dugout is also eligible for its architectural merit as well. This rare property type may be the only surviving example of its type in Nebraska. The dugout or sodhouse were the folk style of building common to areas of the high treeless plains of the American West without adequate transportation system to bring lumber for frame structures. Though this type of dwelling was quite common less than one hundred years ago, the dugout has all but disappeared from the Nebraska landscape.

The J.L. Sanford dugout is a prime example of Folk Building Tradition style common to the treeless plains of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century as European immigrants and those looking for new start reached the open and mostly treeless plains of the United States many encountered the same problems. The most common problem of the Great Plains was that there was neither sufficient wood or stone for building material. Once a suitable location and a good source of water was found the pioneer would then begin making his new home. These pioneers would produce a very efficient solution in sod or dugout buildings that were used as homes, schools, churches, post offices, stores and barns. A typical Nebraska homesteader would almost inevitably make his home out of sod or dig a hole into the side of a hill or ravine. A dugout might be wholly or partially inside of a hill, with a partial dugout being the most common form. Because of this the terrain was very important and rolling hills had to present. A room sized cavity was dug into the face of a hill until the floor was level with the back end of the dugout with the roof joining the upward slope of the hill. The roof was then generally constructed the same way as a sod house roof was built. The roof required a good lodgepole or it would more than likely collapse. Once a good lodgepole was obtained and in place the roof boards would be placed perpendicular. Once that was accomplished the roofing material was placed on the roof. This material could consist of either hay, thatch, or sod with sod being the most commonly used material. After about five years the roof would have to be replaced because the roof boards would begin to rot. By that time most settlers would have built a new home, and the sod or dugout homes were abandoned to their fate of inevitable deterioration. The front of the dugout was usually made of sod, stone, wood or whatever was easily available for the builder. To obtain the sod for building, a sod-cutting plow was used.

The exact origins of this building tradition are obscure. Some writers claim this design was an European adaptation of Native American earthlodges. Dugouts are excellent in providing protection from the weather. They maintained a good constant temperature, proved to be fire resistant and could endure fierce storms. However, the roof was the Achilles heel of the structure. If the dugout's roof was poorly made or maintained the risk of a cave in was a real possibility. The average life span for a roof was five years before it would have to be replaced. By the time a roof would have to be replaced for a second time the rancher/farmer would have a new

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frame house built so the dugout or sod house would be abandoned or converted for another use. Also livestock had to be fenced away from the dugout to prevent the animals from walking across and possibly falling through. Many dugouts were abandoned and left to slowly disappear under the ravages of time.

Dugouts, as well as sod houses, enjoyed a long useful period in American life, and were perfected by the immigrants who were prompted to take land under the Homestead Act in the Great Plains. The sod house and dugout was put to extensive use as a home for settlers making it possible for them to conquer the vast prairie of the American West.

Sandford Dugout is also eligible under criterion D for its potential to yield information. Unknown at this point is the actual location of the well, privies, and any other homestead era structures that may have been present at the site. The Dugout itself and nearby well could provide more detailed information on the settlement period of the Great Plains during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Because it is the best known surviving example of its type of early pioneer dwellings in the state of Nebraska, its potential to yield further information is strong. The Dugout is a prime example of how determined Homesteaders settled and how Euro-Americans existed on the vast treeless plains of the American West.

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Sandford Dugout

Name of Property

Sioux County, Nebraska

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**Bibliography**

Barns, Cass G. *Sod Houses*. University Nebraska Press; Lincoln, Nebraska 1970.

Dick, Everett. *Conquering the Great American Desert*. Nebraska State Historical Society; 1975.

Department of the Interior. "Homestead Affidavit No. 6143 Vol. 297 p. 156". July 10, 1903.

Harrison Community Club. *Sioux County History*. Curtis Media Corp.; 1986.

Keer, V. A. *Sod house and Dugout in North America*. Prairie Printers; Colby KS, 1971.

McAlister Virginia & Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. Knopf Inc.; NY, 1984.

**Verbal Boundary Description**

**Verbal Boundary Justification**

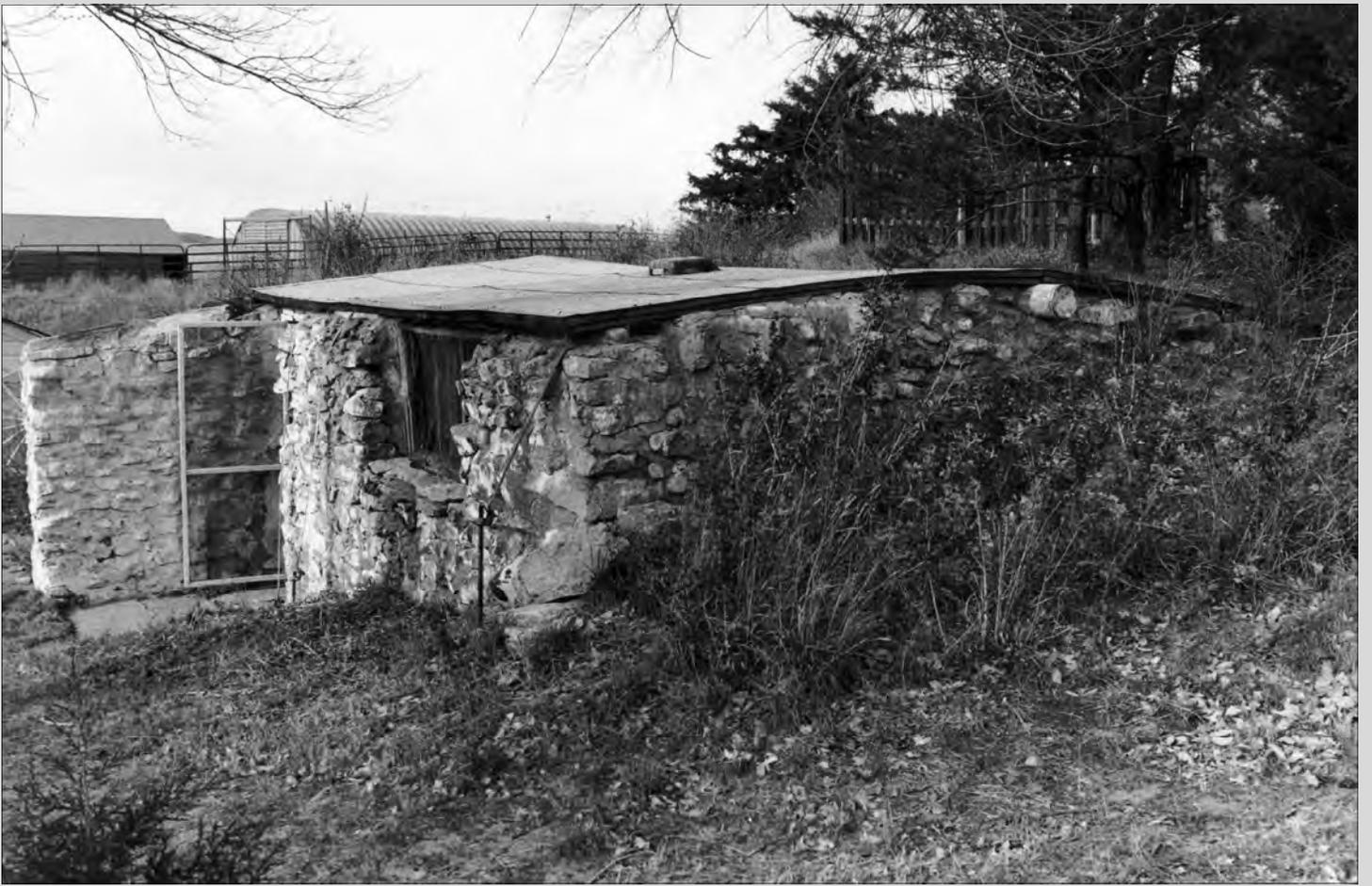
The nominated property is the piece of land the Dugout is on and only that portion of land.



Front of dugout, looking east.



View looking east



View looking northwest



View looking southeast



North wall



View of northwest corner



View of south wall



View of southeast corner & original lodge pole



View of west wall