

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

LISTED 12-8-97
97001520

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 District No. 1 School, Jefferson County

other names/site number Steele City Public School (NEHBS JF12-022)

2. Location

street & number northeast corner North Second & Curtis Streets not for publication

city or town Steele City vicinity

state Nebraska code NE county Jefferson code 095 zip code 68440

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Wendell Summer
Signature of certifying official

10/31/92
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

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		Total

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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instruction)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

No style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation _concrete
walls _brick

roof _asphalt
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.)

Education _____

Architecture _____

Period of Significance

1914-1947

Significant Dates

1914

1947

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Gernandt, William F.

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:

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property 2 acres

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	14	668975	4433890	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.)

11. Form Prepared Byname/title Patricia S. Peterson, Volunteerorganization Nebraska State Historical Societydate September 1997street & number 1500 R Streettelephone 402 471-4787city or town Lincolnstate NE zip code 68501**Additional Documentation**

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.)

Property Owner

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

name/title Jefferson County Historical Societystreet & number Box 154telephone 402 442-2218city or town Fairburystate NE zip code 68352-0154

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, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Continuation Sheet**Steele City School**

Name of Property

Jefferson County, Nebraska

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Description

Steele City School, School District No.1, is located in Steele City in southeastern Jefferson County, Nebraska, not far from where the Oregon Trail and Pony Express routes passed through southeastern Nebraska. Steele City is just over two miles north of the Kansas state line, approximately ten miles southeast of Fairbury, the county seat, and approximately eighty miles southwest of Lincoln, the Nebraska state capital. The building is sited on the edge of Steele City on a high point that overlooks the village. The two-story brick structure was completed in 1914. Steele City School is rare example of combined elementary/senior high school with integrity. It represents an early 20th century architect-designed school with intact historic and architectural elements, and these elements convey a significant story in the history of education.

Steele City's population peaked at 380 in 1890; its 1995 population was 101. In 1972 much of Steele City was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the Steele City Historic District. Steele City School is located in the town's second addition, well north and east of the historic district. (*Jefferson County Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey 1997:71*)

The school is on a high point of land at the edge of Steele City, giving it a prominent place in the town. Steele City School was built on land homesteaded by Abner Baker and donated by him for use as a school site. The location of the building presents a commanding view of the town, surrounding hills, valleys, and farmland. This nomination includes the two-acre building site. The School site is one full city block, and is bordered by rural residential streets and roads on the north, west, and south, and on the east by woods and fields. The building is centrally located at the western edge of the school property, facing Second Street, but above and screened from the road by two terraces on a hill that slopes toward the building. The perimeter of the site is bordered by deciduous and coniferous trees. Entrance to the property is along a gravel drive which leads in a long arc from Second Street to just east of the building, then curves north to come close and circle around the building. A yard at the front of the building has a sidewalk to the front door.

The Steele City School was designed by Nebraska architect W[illiam] F. Gernandt. (PW07-104) Its construction began September 1913 and was completed January 1914. The rectangular, L-shaped building is constructed of red pressed brick, and measures 85 feet x 50 feet. The School is two stories upon a raised basement. (*Steele City Press*, 10/17/13:np) The school building is noteworthy for the simplicity of its lines and subtle refinements. A parapet with two decorative peaks formalizes the west front of the flat roofed building. The front surface is distinguished by placement of bricks in modest yet distinctive diamond patterns. Subtle variations in the colors of the bricks add richness to the building facade. Two concrete bands frame a double row of windows which are uniformly placed along the front of the building, except at the center where very tall windows demarcate the front entrance and interior open stairwell. A continuous concrete band extends from the primary (west) facade around the windowless north and south facades and frames a simple brick rectangle at each end. Windows uniformly arranged across the rear (east) facade of the building echo the symmetry of the front facade. All sides of the building contribute to a cohesive design of simple elegance.

While the exterior of the building distinguishes it as an architect-designed building, the interior of the Steele City School most clearly reveals its representative status as an early 20th Century modern school facility. Further, the arrangement and design of the classrooms reflects the school's function as a combined elementary and high school. The entrance to the school at the front center of the building connects with the main staircase to both lower and upper levels and to a wide central corridor which runs through the center of the first and second floors. On the first floor, four classrooms, each with cloakrooms, are situated off the central corridor. That the first floor classrooms were designed for the elementary grades is revealed by the wall-mounted blackboards at levels suited to smaller, younger students. On the second floor, classrooms were designed for high school, with one classroom specially equipped for home economics and science classes. Other space was designated for an office, a library, and an assembly room. The assembly room was expanded at an undetermined date by converting a typing room to a stage area complete with retractable footlights in the stage floor. (Cline interview, 5/21/97) The school has an indoor gymnasium which "was one of the first in the area". (*Beatrice Sun*, nd) The gymnasium was unique in being located in the basement. It incorporates a small balcony for spectators to stand overlooking the gym floor. The basement of the school also housed the coal-fired furnace (converted to gas in the 1950s), the coal bin, and the rest rooms. The school had its own well for water. (Cline nomination, 1997)

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Identifying features of the modern school facility included lighting, heating and ventilation. For example, lighting from large windows in each classroom conforms to the State Superintendent's recommendations for creating the model rural school utilizing a "system of lighting ...known as unilateral or one-side lighting, by which light is brought from a number of windows located to the left of the pupil, and set as close to the ceiling as practicable". (*Twenty-second Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction*, 1913:22) Central steam heating from the furnace was carried to rooms equipped with radiators. A ventilating system consisted of vents with grates at the back of the classrooms; in the cloakrooms, a chimney-like structure with doors could be opened to draw hot air to the roof where two ventilators, approximately four feet in diameter, are located. (Cline interview, 5/21/97.)

The open field surrounding the school to the north, east, and south includes the remnants of a backstop for a ball field and the framework of a swing set indicating this area served as playground. While noncontributing features, they suggest attention was given to playground development in keeping with Progressive ideas concerning physical education typical of the 1910s and 1920s. (Theobald 1995:89)

The Steele City School building exhibits outstanding integrity having but one major change, during its period of significance in 1940, made to the entrance to the building. The original double door entrance was set flush with the front wall of the building; its prominence was heightened by brick laid in column-like forms, capped with concrete capitals, flanking either side of the doors. A projecting entryway was added to the building in 1941 when World War II coal shortages necessitated a protected entryway to conserve fuel. (Cassell interview: 6/4/97) The addition was designed and built to resemble the original fabric. While less refined in its construction, the addition utilizes bricks of similar colors, incorporates a diamond pattern in the brickwork, and features a parapet echoing the peaks in the original. The entryway addition is unusual in presenting a blank facade to the front; the single doors are placed at the sides of the entryway. The original entry remains intact inside the projecting addition. Inside the building, most of the classrooms retain the slate blackboards. Doors and all but a few windows are original. (Cline 1997; Cline interview, 5/21/97) Oak floors are found on the second floor and in one classroom on the first floor. Mechanical systems including steam heat radiators and ventilation are intact. A gas furnace was installed in 1950. (Cline 1997) The well pipe in the basement is still in place. The retractable stage footlights are intact. Outside, a flag pole and school bell remain. Modifications in recent years to provide access for persons with disabilities: the conversion of a cloakroom to a restroom and a ramp at a side entrance, do not significantly detract from the integrity of the building.

The building was used as a combined elementary and high school until the high school closed following the 1958 graduation. The elementary school through grade 8 continued until 1992. (Beatrice *Sun*, nd:np) The Steele City School gifted the school to the Jefferson County Historical Society, Inc. July 30, 1994. (Jefferson County Quitclaim Deed July 30, 1992) The Jefferson County Historical Society is developing the building as a school museum. Restoration and maintenance reflects sensitivity to the original, contributing to the excellent integrity found in the Steele City School.

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Statement of Significance

Steele City School is locally significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the broad pattern of education history. The School is representative of a combined elementary school and high school, considered a relatively rare building type of which few examples remain. (Valentine Public School National Register nomination, hereinafter referred to as CE14-002. All nominations used as reference in this nomination are referred to by NeHBS number.) The school is also significant for its association with education trends in early 20th Century Nebraska; as a combined elementary and high school it offers an illuminating but unusual example in the development of high school education.

Steele City School is also significant under Criterion C, as a representative example of a type of early 20th Century architect-designed school construction. Steele City School was designed by Nebraska architect W.F. Gernandt. While Gernandt is a recognized architect, Steele City School is not nominated based on his significance. Rather, his association with the school lends credence to its noteworthy qualities because he has been recognized for his design of public buildings. Steele City School's period of significance is 1914 to 1947, from the year construction was completed through the National Register fifty-year cut-off.

History

The history of Steele City School is embedded in the history of Steele City. The town's origins are as a descendant of the 1867 settlements of Jenkins Mill and Freeport. The first school district in Jefferson County, District 1, was organized at Jenkins Mill in March 1867 where the first school was built. (The *Fairbury Journal News*, 6/29/73: np) Following a flood in 1869, the first school building was relocated from Jenkins Mill to a location near the future Steele City. (Fairbury *Journal-News* 6/29/73: np) Steele City was established in 1873 with the development of a railroad and depot; it was located on the east side of the Little Blue River and north from both Jenkins Mill and Freeport, which had been subjected to frequent floods. Freeport was also constrained from expansion by the river and railroad tracks. (Jefferson County Nebraska *Historic Buildings Survey*: 1997:69)

When the first school became too small, it was replaced by a second building in 1881. (Pages of History 1994:430) The land on which the second school was built was donated by Abner Baker from his homesteaded land. (Early Life 1973:np) Baker is prominent in the history of Steele City. He is identified as being among the first settlers around Jenkins Mill. (Dawson 1967:322) He was instrumental in the founding of Steele City: Baker is believed to have given the St. Joseph & Denver City railroad part of his land for the railroad depot. (Fairbury *Journal-News* 6/29/73:np) Baker and Robert Crinklow platted Steele City in 1873. (Pictorial History [1992]:93)

The 1881 school building was destroyed by fire June 10, 1913. (The *Fairbury Journal*, 6/13/13:1 and *Steele City Press*, 6/13/13:1) On July 7, 1913 town voters passed, 122 to 20, a \$10,000 bond to build a new school. (Steele City *Press*, 7/11/13:1) An additional \$3,900 was received from insurance. (Steele City *Press*, 8/15/13:1) On July 8, 1913, the school board awarded the contract for drawing up plans and specifications to W. F. Gernandt, an Omaha architect. (Steele City *Press*, 7/11/13:1)

Following Gernandt's work on plans and specifications, bids for school construction contracts were opened August 6, 1913. Contract prices were \$12,327.65 for the building and \$1,442 for the plumbing and heating. (Steele City *Press*, 8/15/13:1) Contracts were awarded to H.V. Bandler of Oxford for carpenter work; to Peter Johnson Co. for brick and stone work; to Frank Gage of Fairbury for plumbing work. R.G. Borchert served as head mason. (Steele City *Press*, 10/17/13:np and *Steele City Press*, 10/31/13:1) Construction was anticipated to begin within ten days of the August bid opening and to be completed by January 1914. (Steele City *Press*, 8/8/13:np) Excavation of the basement and work on the building was begun in September. (The *Fairbury Journal*, 9/12/13:np) The laying of the cornerstone occurred October 1, 1913 with a large crowd attending on a lovely, balmy day. Among the speakers were State Superintendent James E. Delzell, County Superintendent R.Harris, and architect W.F. Gernandt. (Steele City *Press*, 10/3/13:1 and Cline 1997.) The school opened for classes January 5, 1914. (Steele City *Press*, 1/2/14:np)

Criterion A - Education

Steele City School is significant to Nebraska's education history, in accordance with Criterion A, because it is representative of a combined elementary school and high school, a relatively rare building type. The combined elementary and high school

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existed because it "presumably filled a need for communities of a size where all classes could fit into one building" or where the "high school program was not yet developed enough to need a separate building." (CE14-002)

In Steele City, precedent for combining elementary and high schools in one building occurred in the 1881 building. At that time, Nebraska had gone through several revisions of its education laws. For example, the 1855 law which provided for the establishment of public schools required only voluntary support for high schools, and gave school districts the authority to decide whether higher grades would be established. (Hasch 1926:10-11,67) Changes in 1858 made provision for support by establishing that "...the cost of establishing high schools and erection of buildings be met by a tax on all the property of the township..." as long as approval was given by legal voters. (Hasch 1926:12) The laws of 1873 "...put the high school on the basis of equality with elementary schools." (Hasch 1926: 67)

"During the decade from 1870 to 1880 the high schools increased in number to twenty-one with a total enrolment [sic] of 1098." (Hasch 1926:69) Examination of different figures, based on the number of graded schools with classes from kindergarten through 12th grade, show that "as late as 1890 there were only [250 or] 260 graded schools in the state." (Jensen 1968:209; Olson 1966:345) Graded schools were defined as "...multiteacher schools in which pupils were separated by age and achievement according to grades." (Luebke 1995:166) The 1881 Steele City School building housed eight grades until 1894, when grades nine and ten were added. (*Pages of History* 1994:430) It is unknown if Steele City School, with grades through 10th, was counted among schools with classes through 12th grade. However, to put Steele City School in perspective, by 1900 only 448 districts out of 6,708 in Nebraska had classes through 12th grade. (Jensen 1968:209)

The construction of the 1914 Steele City School building is significant because it enabled District 1 to add grades 11 and 12. (*Pages of History* 1994:430) Following the loss of the 1881 building to fire, and encouraging support of the school bond issue, the local newspaper said, "...whatever the loss may be the people of Steele City will work together in voting bonds for a new building and a better school --for a twelfth grade school." (*Steele City Press* 6/13/13:1) Compulsory education laws of 1891 and 1901 did not go unnoticed either. On July 4, prior to the July 7 bond issue vote, the newspaper stated, "As it is compulsory on us to have school, let's stand united and have a good one." (*Steele City Press* 7/4/13:1) Initially the new school opened with only grades 9 and 10 above the elementary 8 grades; a year later in 1915, the 11th grade was added, resulting in a 12th grade graduation class in 1916. (*Early Life* 1997:np) (*Pages of History* 1994:430) The number of high schools in Nebraska continued to grow, though still in small proportion to the number of school districts. By 1920, there were 749 districts with grades through 12th grade out of 7,264 districts, a reflection on Steele City School's achievement. (Jensen 1968:209) Steele City School remained a combined elementary and high school until 1958 when the high school closed.

Extant examples of combined elementary and high schools with historic integrity are rare. The Valentine Public School in Valentine is the only other listed on the National Register. The 1913-1914 construction of Steele City School followed a period of change and revision as the state faced education challenges of the new century. William K. Fowler, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, whose administration began in 1900, devoted efforts to reviewing past and considering future accomplishments. Among his concerns were the need to create modern schools, and to improve the quality of rural schools. (Jensen 1968:20) The Steele City School is significant as an example of a school building designed to meet the needs of evolving educational requirements.

Criterion C - Architecture

In the history of building schools, Steele City School is exemplary in reflecting ideas of what comprised an early 20th Century modern school building. The modern school facility designation is based on the 1902 report of Superintendent William K. Fowler, *School Buildings and Grounds in Nebraska*. Published by the State Department of Public Instruction, Fowler's report disseminated to school officials a variety of recommendations, ideas, and even plans, for creating a modern school facility pertaining to building design, ventilation, and interior and exterior spatial arrangements. Interior features such as ventilation ducts for air circulation, adequate and modern lighting, and modern heating were important elements in this vision of the modern school facility. (AD00-140) By 1910, Nebraska was experiencing "...a period of renewed activity in the construction of new rural schoolhouses, most of which were considered to be 'modern' in style. (Jensen 1968:23)

Steele City School followed this trend. The local newspaper, reporting on construction progress stated "The construction of the building from basement to roof is according to the most modern plans for a school house with regard to light, ventilation,

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etc. It will be heated by a furnace. All necessary equipment for teaching the different branches [elementary through high school grades] will be installed." (Steele City Press, 10/17/13:np) The school design incorporates these modern features of the period, including several innovative design elements - an indoor gymnasium and an innovative internal, non-mechanical ventilating system. Large windows, coal furnace with space for indoor fuel storage, and steam heat radiators - all contributed to creating an environment which modern school proponents considered conducive to good health and enhanced learning. In keeping with a 1900 law to establish a library in every school, Steele City School had a library on the second floor.

An important element of the model modern school was the playground and perhaps, more peripherally, the landscaping. "Until very near the turn of the century, the schoolyard received little attention," according to Theobald. "Swings and other outdoor amusements were the products of a Progressive era concern with physical education. They appeared in rural schoolyards during the 1910s and 1920s." (Theobald 1995:89-90) While the present playground has no contributing elements remaining, the remnants of a swing set and backstop suggest attention was given to this aspect of the modern school. That the Steele City School followed the trend in playgrounds is revealed in a newspaper article describing the choice of the school on the site. The present building was "...erected about fifty or sixty feet south and about 200 feet west of where the old building stood. At first some were opposed to putting it here as they thought the old location was better because it is almost in the center of the school ground and is the highest point around here. But the present site was recommended by the architect and approved by all the members of the school board. The object of building at this place instead of on the old location is that it gives the children a larger play ground back of the building and leaves the front part of the ground about the right size to beautify with flower beds and otherwise." (Steele City Press 10/17/13:np)

As the third school building in the history of Jefferson County's School District 1, Steele City School is significant as a representative of an architect-designed school and for exemplifying the pattern of evolution in country school architecture. A typology of school architecture developed by Fred E.H. Schroeder and propounded by Andrew Gulliford offers refinement of a schoolhouse style. Schroeder's general categories of school architecture are comprised of two broad categories - vernacular and architect designed - and each with two sub-categories. Vernacular may be folk vernacular or mass vernacular. Architect designed may be architect designed schools based on plan books or schools built from plans commissioned from architects. Gulliford considers the architect commissioned building designs to be the rarer, thus Steele City School can be seen as an example of this rarer type. (Gulliford 1984:164) These categories are open to interpretation, but serve nonetheless as guides. (Schroeder 1981:15) In the case of Nebraska's Antioch School, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this typology was modified to describe a "vernacular hall type" and a second type, the "modern school facility." (AD00-140) Steele City School can be categorized more clearly as an architect designed building by a commissioned architect as well as a modern school facility.

The three schools of District 1 may be seen to represent a different stage in the evolution in country school styles. Gulliford states, "...country schools evolved through a number of stages. They started generally as shelters using readily available local materials and showing strong regional or ethnic characteristics (folk vernacular), then were replaced with traditional designs using machine-made, commercially sold materials (mass vernacular) and, finally, were designed by standardized plans and built with stock materials." (Gulliford 1984:164) The little that is known about the first and second schools of District 1 merely hint at representative styles. District 1's first school, described as being a "frame building with three windows on either side", suggests folk vernacular, or perhaps the vernacular hall type. (Fairbury Journal News, 6/29/73: np) The 1881 building suggests mass vernacular based on a photograph and by being described as "...an ornate two-story brick school with a lofty bell tower....", and made of local brick. (Pages of History 1994:430) It bears a resemblance to Schroeders' description that "the brick rectangle with a bell tower is one general design [of mass vernacular]." (Schroeder 1981:15)

While the extant Steele City School is included in Gulliford's list of rural schools, it is a larger building than the typical one-room school. Schroeder points out, "Graded schools in America were born simultaneously with educational and architectural reforms and response to increased population density. Because of their size, cost, and departmentalization, they, almost without exception were products of professional architects, although the design may come from a plan book. In their architectural style, the buildings expressed the mode of the day, and in that respect resemble small schools, but they are founded upon principles of specialization in function and design." (Schroeder 1981:16) Steele City School's specialization in function and design was not the usual because it was based on the combination of elementary and high

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school grades. But there was specialization in spaces designated for a library, for physical education activities in an indoor gymnasium, and in a high school classroom designed for home economics and science.

The extant Steele City School stands on its own merits as an example of one of the rarer architect designed buildings by a commissioned architect, though not a master architect as defined in Schroeder's typology. This building was designed by Nebraska architect W.F. Gernandt, who worked in Steele City's neighboring town of Fairbury from at least 1909 to 1913. By the time he built Steele City School his office was in Omaha. (Murphy 1967: 10) Gernandt is best regarded as an architect of Nebraska county court houses. At the time of the building of the Phelps County Court House in 1910-11, "...his stationery stated they were 'specialists in the designing of public schools and court houses', though the Phelps County Courthouse [was] his first known design." (PP04-13) Gernandt went on to design other county court houses and of the 63 Nebraska county court houses listed on the National Register of Historic Places, 10 are of his design. Court houses came out of "...an unusually productive period [in Gernandt's practice], between 1910 and 1923." (Nominations of court houses for the National Register.) His design and building of the Steele City School in 1913-14 coincides with this period of special architectural productivity. Court houses designed by Gernandt in the period of the Steele City School included Phelps (1910-11); Pawnee (1911-12); Merrick (1911-13); Dawson (1913-14); and Webster (1914). The exterior form of Steele City School is reminiscent of Gernandt's court houses, on a smaller scale and minus the elaborate decorative elements which characterized his court houses.

Summary

Steele City School is significant due to its association with education history, and because it is an excellent example of a type of school construction. The building is a rare representative of a combined elementary school and high school, and it is an reflection of the evolution of education trends in early 20th Century Nebraska. The Steele City School is representative of early 20th Century modern school facility construction, and is illustrative of the architect designed school. Part of the strength of the building's significance is in its excellent historic integrity.

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Bibliography

Books

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Gulliford, Andrew. *America's Country Schools*. Washington D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Steele City School

Name of Property

Jefferson County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 9 Page 2

Interviews

Cassell, Belva. 6/4/97

Cline, Henry Vaughn. 5/21/97

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"Coming of the Railroad, Flooding were Reasons for the Location of Century-Old Steele City." Vol. 79, No. 26, June 29, 1973. np.

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Nebraska Nominations to the National Register

NeHBS #

Cline, Rosella. Nomination draft for Steele City School, 1997

Antioch School, District No. 20

AD00-140

Valentine Public School (Centennial Hall)

CE14-002

Dawson County Courthouse

DS07-030

Merrick County Courthouse

MK02-003

Pawnee County Courthouse

PW06-054

Phelps County Courthouse

PP04-013

Webster County Courthouse

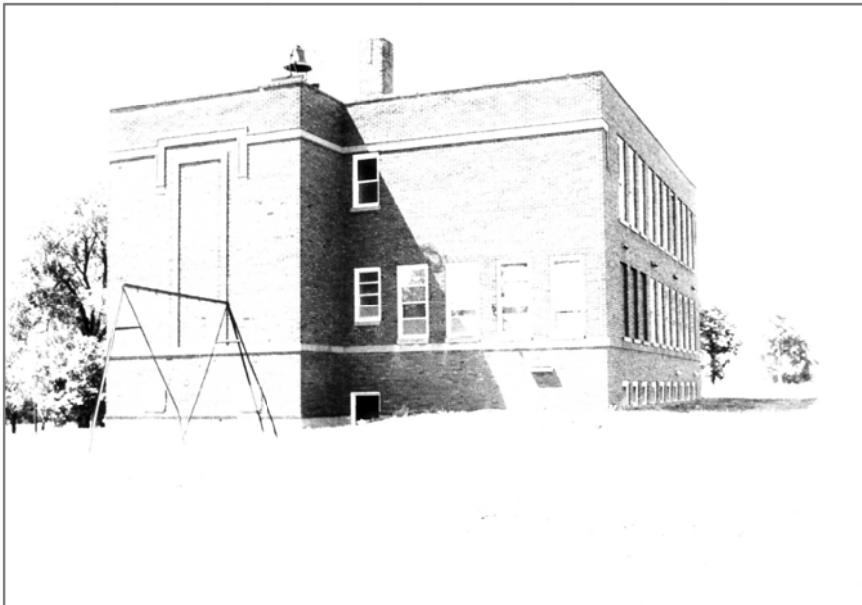
WT07-104

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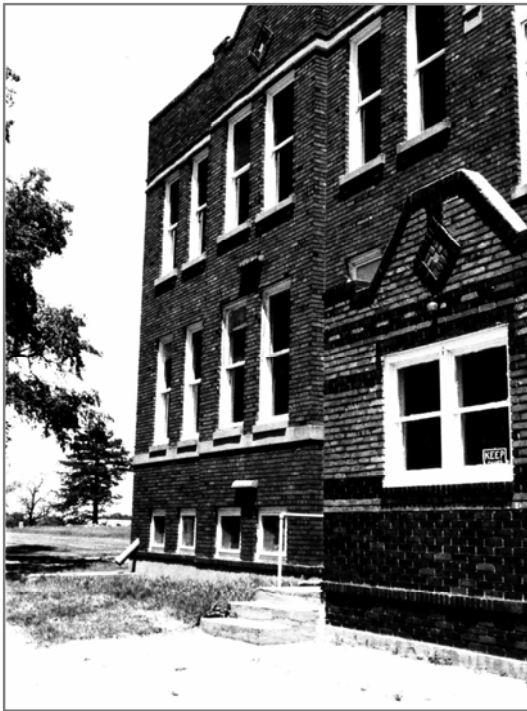
View looking N showing main façade
Photo by Carol Ahlgren, June 1997, NSHS
(9706/2:2)



View looking NW
Photo by Carol Ahlgren, June 1997, NSHS
(9706/2:17)



View looking NW
Photo by Carol Ahlgren, June 1997, NSHS
(9706/1:22)



View looking NE
Photo by Carol Ahlgren, June 1997, NSHS
(9706/1:25)



View looking NE showing 1st floor classroom
Photo by Carol Ahlgren, June 1997, NSHS
(9706/1:2)



View looking W showing staircase
Photo by Carol Ahlgren, June 1997, NSHS
(9706/1:1)