

# Hickory Hills Farm Complex

East High School Outdoor Environmental Research Laboratory

**Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
Historic Preservation Program**

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The East High School Outdoor Environmental Research Laboratory is located in Jackson County, Missouri north of 47th Street near Raytown Road in Kansas City. This site has been known as the Dietrich Farm, Hickory Hills Farm, the Kimsey Farm, and the Gossett Farm. The 90 acre tract, located generally east of the Sports Complex and Blue Ridge Cut-off, is currently surrounded by single family residential to the east and north and vacant land zoned single family residential to the south and west.

This tract has a stream (Round Grove Creek) which runs from the northeast corner of the property to just north of the southwest corner. The land to the south of the stream is primarily wooded with native deciduous trees and has a sloping terrain. Limestone outcroppings can be found along side of the stream. To the north of the stream, the terrain becomes less rocky and more level. This area is covered by dense vegetation including tall grasses, thorny shrubs and young native trees. The structures on the site are found on the south side of the stream and were probably placed there to not waste prime farm land to the north. There are many structures on the site. The most significant of these are the Farm House (photo 8-16), Log House (photo 21-30), Spring House (photo 31-42), Shed (photo 48-54), Stone Shelter (photo 55-56), Large Barn (photo 57-64), and Small Barn (photo 65-66).

The property was an area of early settlement in the county. County histories suggest that the farm was the possible site of the county's first grist mill, distillery, and school house, as well as its first orchard. While the site exploration didn't turn up any evidence to either confirm or dispute these claims, its not very surprising because its subsequent owner, Alfred N. Gossett, built many new structures and altered existing structures on the farm. Evidence of this occurs throughout the site. The creek bed running across the site is completely lined with limestone walls approximately 8' in height (photo 1-5). Limestone retaining walls and stone lined paths are found surrounding the main farm buildings. Stone fence posts were also used at gate entrances on the farm (photo 6-7). Other evidence includes what appear to be additions to the Log House, Large Barn, and Farm House. Since the owners spent so much time constructing and reconstructing, it is not inconceivable that other original buildings may have been destroyed, used for materials or significantly altered.

The primary residence of the farm is the one and one-half story frame farm house. This served as the residence for the farm's caretaker while the Gossett and Dietrich families owned the farm (1902-1991). The house was constructed on a squared and coursed rubble limestone foundation with balloon framed walls sheathed in beveled siding (photo 8-16). The original one and one-half story portion of the house has a gable roof and no basement underneath (drawing 1). The subsequent one story bathroom and kitchen addition added to the northwest side has a squared and coursed rubble limestone basement, exterior beveled siding, and a shed roof which leans on the original structure. The porch addition added a gable to the east facade and a cistern

under the porch floor (photo 17). This porch is encircled by a stone retaining wall with steps leading to the porch. This house has sustained fire damage to the west wall of the kitchen which is adjacent to a red brick stove chimney. The deteriorated state of the house makes it difficult to tell exactly how the rooms functioned, but it appears there were three rooms on the first floor and two on the second floor of the original house with the kitchen and bath attached to the north on the first floor. Interior finishes are lath and plaster with non-descript pine woodwork and hardwood floors.

A stone lined path leads down the hill to the north of the farm house and passes a root cellar (photo 18-19). Stairs lead down into the ground to a door. Light streams in through a small clay tile opening in the ceiling which provides adequate ventilation. Just West of the root cellar is a stone pit used to scald hogs for butchering purposes. The pit consists of two parallel, approximately one foot high, stone walls spaced about two feet apart with iron bars suspended between them forming an iron rack. For butchering purposes, a dead hog was stretched out on the iron rack. A fire, built on the east side of the pit, was used to heat a large kettle of water. Once the water was boiling, the kettle was tipped over, coating the dead hog with scalding water and facilitating the removal of its hair. To the west of the stone pit are the ruins of a stone enclosure and the foundations of a small shed, which were used to house unlucky victims while they were still alive (photo 20<sup>71</sup>).

Down the path from the root cellar north of the Farm House is the Log House (photo 21-30). The Log House may actually be the combination of two one-room log houses that already existed on the property and were moved to this location (drawing 2). This has been suggested by historical accounts as well as the fact that the two log sections are constructed differently and sit on different grades ( the east section is lower). Both sections were constructed of rough hewn logs with limestone foundations; however the section to the west has rough hewn rafters while the east section has milled lumber. Also, the corner joints used on the west section differ from those used on the east section. An open breezeway paved with brick, laid in a herringbone pattern, connects the two sections, forming the common dogtrot log house type. Construction techniques and materials used in the log portion of the house suggest a post-Civil War construction date. Shed-roof frame additions to the rear and east of the log portion of the house date from the twentieth century.

This combined log house with its additions was the summer home of the Gossett family. Photographs and site evidence show that at the time the Gossett's were using the house, the breezeway was enclosed, the house was covered with clapboard siding, and a porch with shed roof ran the length of the house's facade. There is also a squared and coursed rubble limestone fireplace on the west side of the house with an unusual terra cotta flue cap. Another brick stove

chimney is also present near the center of the east side of the house. This house is also in a state of ruin which makes it difficult to determine room uses.

Mr. Gossett (according to his grandson) liked to build something new each summer. One such project was likely the Spring House which lies just west of the Log House along Round Grove Creek (photo 31-42). The Spring House is a two story limestone structure embedded into the south stream bank (drawing 3). The south and east sides are random ashlar limestone. The reason for this may be that materials from an existing grist mill may have been reused. The simple gable roof was constructed with asphalt shingles and a terra cotta ridge cap. A floor level pool was used to cool the Spring House with the spring water exiting through a pipe in the north wall.

Once the water left the Spring House it traveled down the hill to the holding pond. The pond is stone lined and was used by the family for swimming, bathing and fishing (photo 43-45). The pond was kept well stocked with fish. A small drop in the wall allows any excess water to drain off onto the creek. It also appears that a dam may have been used to help maintain the water level in the pond. Two stone posts across the creek from each other have slots which may have been used to inset boards to dam the stream (photo 46-47). This has not been substantiated.

Between the Farm House and the Spring House just west of the root cellar is the Shed (photo 48-54). The Shed was constructed similar to other buildings on the site, with a squared and coursed limestone foundation embedded in the hillside, framed walls with beveled siding and a gable roof (drawing 4). The north side of the Shed is open and the structure also has a loft with an interior ladder and stair.

The Stone Shelter is the most remote building from the cluster of buildings surrounding the house (photo 55-56). This building is in the greatest state of ruin, so it is the most difficult to determine its form and function. From the column spacing, wall openings and remaining metal brackets and hinges a probable scenario can be shown (drawing 5). The building appears to have had a gable roof running east to west with stone columns supporting the structure at the center. The building also appears to have had a "drive through" covered area to protect carriages and farm equipment while they weren't in use. The center columns have hinges attached, which points to the possibility that animals were kept in the south half of the building. Corrugated metal remnants on the ground around the building leads to the conclusion that the roof surface was of this material. Gables and roof trusses were constructed of wood.

The Large Barn lies closer to the house just east of the Log House (photo 57-<sup>63</sup>~~64~~). This barn was used for hay storage and winter livestock protection. A frame addition to the southeast is a Grade A milk barn. This barn has stone walls with wood center support posts and a wood end gable and trusses (drawing 6). The main floor and loft spaces were used for hay storage. A

drive through runs the length of the barn from the northwest to the south east. Access is through sliding double doors at each end. Due to a rapid drop in grade the barn has a partial lower story which runs the full length of the northeast elevation. Another lower room, approximately 16' x 20' is under the southeast corner. The lower level can be accessed by large Roman-arched openings in the northwest and southeast elevations. There is no evidence of windows on the northeast elevation. The southwest elevation has square windows evenly spaced. Square windows flank each side of the double doors on the facade (northwest) elevation; there is no evidence of windows on the southeast elevation. An earthen ramp with a concrete walkway beneath, leads up to the double doors on the southeast elevation. The configuration of the milk barn addition and the livestock pens on the southwest elevation are unclear due to their state of deterioration. This barn was deemed a hazard by the school district and the roof was pulled down.

The final building is the Small Barn located just south of the Large Barn and east of the Farm House (photo 65-66). The building was recently rebuilt by the school district to house storage for the lab (drawing 7). Unfortunately, the building was not restored according to HABS standards. Structural steel, masonite and plywood siding were used in the reconstruction, and glass windows with shutters were installed. A concrete floor slab was also added, though it appears the original studs and rafters still remain. It is also difficult to tell how this barn was used, but its adjacency to the front gate may indicate that it was used as a garage.

This site is of interest on two levels. First the significance of the Log House as one of the few remaining in the area is unmistakable. The added importance of the former owners to the community and the possible remnants of the county's first grist mill create and added interest. Second, this farm has been left virtually untouched since the 1950's. This farm is a microcosm of life between 1900 and 1950. It still combines the "old ways" with small attempts at "civilization". It is a great way to learn from and about the past.