

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Plum Grove School

other names/site number N/A

### 2. Location

street & number County road 350, 3/8 mi. n. jct. 350 and 346 [N/A] not for publication

city or town Laclede [x] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Linn code 115 zip code 64651

### 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 [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [X] locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ]. )

Claire F. Blackwell 1 Sept. 94  
Signature of certifying official/Title Claire F. Blackwell/Deputy SHPO Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
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 the property is:

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

[ ] 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:)  
See continuation sheet [ ].

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**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property		
		Contributing	Noncontributing	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	2	0	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	0	0	sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	0	0	structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	0	0	objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	2	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

EDUCATION/school

OTHER/school coal house and wood shed

**Current Functions**

VACANT/ not in use

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

Other: one-room school house

**Materials**

foundation Concrete

walls Weatherboard

roof Asphalt

other

**Narrative Description**

See continuation sheet [x].

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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**

Property is:

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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

See continuation sheet [x].

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography**

See continuation sheet [x].

**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

**Areas of Significance**

EDUCATION

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

ca. 1905-1947

**Significant Dates**

N/A

**Significant Person(s)**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State Agency

Federal Agency

Local Government

University

Other:

Name of repository:

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	482790	4406850			
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing

[ ] 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 By

name/title Debbie Sheals  
 organization (Private Consultant) date June 22, 1994  
 street & number 406 West Broadway telephone 314-875-1923  
 city or town Columbia state Missouri zip code 65203

**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 FOP for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FOP.)  
 name Glenn W. Holloway  
 street & number Rt. 1, Box 140 telephone 816-963-2295  
 city or town Laclede state Missouri zip code 64651

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Plum Grove School  
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**Summary:** Plum Grove School is a frame one-room country schoolhouse, located approximately four miles northwest of Laclede, in Linn County, Missouri. The entrance is in the gable end, which faces the road, and four windows line each side wall. The school, built ca. 1905, sits on the one-acre parcel of land which it has always occupied, facing a narrow gravel county road. It has suffered no additions or major alterations, and most of the historic fabric of the building remains. The original blackboard is in place, and still bears a lesson schedule written there in chalk over 50 years ago. It has never been used for anything except a school or community gathering place. The only changes to the building since the period of significance are related to deterioration, and most of those are repairable. The schoolhouse retains a high level of integrity of location, design, materials, craftsmanship, and setting.

**ELABORATION:** Plum Grove School occupies its original schoolyard on one acre of level ground, and faces a gravel road which sees only light to moderate traffic. The site the building occupies today has hosted a school in one form or another since the very early days of area settlement. The present building replaced a frame school which had been built in 1869, and a log schoolhouse served the area before that. The log school was known as the Means School, and the first frame building was named Plum Grove after the plum thickets common to the area. When the new building was erected in 1905, the name Plum Grove was retained.

The fenced lot is edged with mature trees and surrounded by hay fields. The schoolyard itself is primarily open, with a few medium sized trees scattered about. Approximately ten feet north of the front corner of the school building is a well which was installed in 1913, the hand pump of which is still operable. To the south of the school building, along the fence, is a coal house which was built at approximately the same time as the school. A frame lean-to woodshed was added to the coal house in 1921. The coal house with woodshed measures 10'-10" x 13'-5", and is counted as a contributing building. The outhouses which were used when the school was occupied no longer survive.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The construction date for the present building is based on articles in the Laclede Blade of the early 1900's, including one from 1905 which mentions "the new school house at Plum Grove". The newspaper clippings were collected by Mary Elizabeth Caruthers, of Laclede. Background of the early schools is from "Plum Grove School--H. E. Howe, Teacher", The Brookfield Argus: Souvenir School Edition, Brookfield, MO, May 1903.

<sup>2</sup> "Records of Plum Grove School 1909-1943". School record book in the possession of Howard Gable, including a list of expenditures for improvements to the school grounds.

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The building measures roughly 24' x 36', and is oriented with its gable end to the road, facing west. The facade originally contained a pair of five panel doors, one for boys and one for girls. One original door remains, the other was changed to a window in the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> A polygonal sign over the doors still shows the faint outline of "Plum Grove School". The foundation is of rockfaced concrete blocks and the building is clad in clapboards which average four inches to the weather. The siding is in fair to good condition, and shows traces of white paint. The corners of the building are edged with vertical boards, six inches wide, and a simple flat cornice runs along the eaves at both gable ends.

The long sides of the building each contain four double hung, four over four windows, measuring 7'-0" in height. The original trim around the doors and windows is intact, and in remarkably good condition. Decorative crown molding, mitered at the corners, adorns the top of each window and door, providing one of the few decorative treatments used on the building. (See photos 6 and 7.) The simple form of the school belies the precise craftsmanship evident in its construction. Each 2'-9" wide window is exactly 5'-1/2" from the corner of the building or the next window. The front facade shows equal precision. The 3'-0" door openings alternate with exactly 6'-1" wide wall surfaces. (See floorplan, Figure Two.)

The interior of the school is simply and efficiently laid out. The front door opens directly into the class room. This is a one-room school in the strictest sense; not even coatrooms break up the space. A large jacketed coal-burning stove once sat in the northwest corner of the room. It vented up through a chimney which is centered in the front gable of the roof. There are two sets of coat hooks near the door, one high and one low, to serve students of varying ages. The walls from the floor to the sills of the windows are covered with varnished tongue and grooved wainscoting of the same dark wood as the interior window trim. School records show that the interior walls were plastered in 1917. That plaster, painted off-white, survives on the upper portions of the walls. The ceiling is 12' high, and covered with embossed metal panels.

The interior of the building also contains a gem of preserved school history. A 3' tall chalkboard which runs the entire width of the east wall contains a lesson plan written there more than half a century ago. The blackboard which is there today consists of black paint or "liquid slating" on plaster. Sometime after the school was built, a slate chalkboard was installed over the painted one. When the slate was removed several years after the school closed, the original board was revealed, and found to have

<sup>3</sup> Telephone interview with Howard Gable, former student of Plum Grove. June, 1994. Mr. Gable attended the school from 1922-1930 and much of the information about its early days has been supplied by him.

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retained the schedule of lessons which an early teacher had written on the board for her class. Incredibly, that schedule, which dates from before the 1940s, is still legible. (See photos 8 and 9. A piece of the slate is visible in #8, leaning against the wall below the board.)

The building is beginning to show signs of deterioration, as is natural for a structure which has not been regularly occupied in more than forty years. The roof leaks, and some damage to the tin ceiling has resulted from exposure to the elements. The window openings are intact, but little glass remains and some sashes have been almost completely lost. The original woodwork inside the school remains in fair to good condition, although the floor has been broken down due to the storage of lumber inside the building. This is not to say the schoolhouse is beyond help, by any means. Rather, it is in need of immediate attention. Most of the original fabric of the building is still in place, and even badly deteriorated elements retain enough material to replicate them as needed. Plans are being made to put a new roof on the building in the fall of 1994, at which time the windows will be temporarily boarded over to protect the interior from the elements. It is hoped that the official recognition associated with National Register status will help spur fund-raising efforts to preserve this fine example of an early one-room school.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

**SUMMARY:** Plum Grove School is significant under Criterion A, in the area of EDUCATION, and under Criterion C in the area of ARCHITECTURE, with local significance. The simplest description of this building is also the statement of its significance; it is a one-room country schoolhouse. The activities associated with Plum Grove school during the period of significance provide a nearly textbook example of a traditional American one-room country school. The way the school was run and the role it played in community life is typical of rural schools throughout the country. The school building itself is also representative of "mass-vernacular" schoolhouse construction. Mass-vernacular school buildings take the form traditionally associated with one-room schoolhouses, and are built with mass-produced construction materials such as dimension lumber and pre-milled woodwork. Children in grades one through eight were taught at the Plum Grove schoolhouse from the time it was built ca. 1905 until 1947, when county school districts were combined and area children were bussed elsewhere. The period of significance thus runs from ca. 1905 to 1947, and includes all of the time the building served as a school. Although this period of significance does run slightly past the recommended 50 year cut-off date, the overlap is so brief that the entire time in which the building functioned as a school should logically be included. The years the school was in operation represent a continuous period of time during which the historic function of the building was unchanged. The process which is considered significant--that of education--has been established

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for the entire period. In addition, that period represents a discrete, well defined span of time, and there is no sound reason to eliminate the last few years the building served the purpose for which it was built.

### EDUCATION

The advocacy of free public education in America dates back to the administration of president Thomas Jefferson, but it was the mid-19th century before it became a reality in most parts of the nation. And, as America was largely rural at the time, many Americans in the 19th and early 20th centuries began their educations in one-room country schoolhouses. In 1913 for example, there were 212,000 one-room schools in the United States, and the students who attended them accounted for half of the total schoolchildren in the country.<sup>4</sup>

The state of Missouri has a strong background in the promotion of public education. The original 1820 constitution for the state of Missouri called for free schools, and a 1904 history boasted that "Missouri has the largest permanent productive school fund of any state in the Union."<sup>5</sup> Rural school districts in Missouri were set up wherever there was a need. State law required only that there be twenty students living in the district and that the school board meet annually to set the rate of the school tax levy and length of the school term for the following year.<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of the school districts in Missouri at the turn of the century were rural: 9,119 out of 9,742. At the same time, there were only 10,393 teachers in rural schools, indicating that most of Missouri's country schools were of the traditional one-room configuration.

Rural schoolhouses were kept small for a number of reasons. Because most children had to walk to school, the districts were limited geographically. Because of this restriction, no more than twenty or thirty students were included in most districts. Also, rural districts often operated on a limited budget, and a simple school was all they could afford to build. Because the small number of students required only one teacher, the size

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Gulliford, America's Country Schools, (Washington D. C.: The Preservation Press, 1984), p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> From The State of Missouri: An Autobiography, edited by Walter Williams, (Columbia, Missouri: E. W. Stephens Press, 1904.) p. 197.

<sup>6</sup> History and Biography of Linn County, Missouri, (Chicago: Henry Taylor and Co., 1912.) p. 142-143.

<sup>7</sup> Williams, p. 200.



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and design of the school were also restricted by the range of the human voice. As one study of country schools explained, "The teacher's voice could not carry beyond the single classroom, and discipline proved difficult enough; there was no practical reason to add extra rooms or dividing walls."<sup>8</sup>

The life of the teacher in a one-room school was often very challenging, especially when one considers that many rural teachers were young and inexperienced. Claire Humphres was just 17 and newly graduated from high school when she was hired to teach the 1929-30 school term at Plum Grove. She described her experience at Plum Grove as "an open door to furthering my college education and teaching career" and felt that "Perhaps the happiest and luckiest day of my life came...when I was notified by the school board...that I had been hired for the job."<sup>9</sup> She is a typical example; Irene Bowling, who taught in a one room school in the Missouri Ozarks, also started right after high school, and R. Glenn Jones, who taught in numerous country schools in southeast Missouri, landed his first teaching job with a year of high school yet to go.<sup>10</sup>

The numbers of students enrolled in the typical one-room school varied from year to year and school to school, but generally averaged around twenty or thirty. Julia Weber Gordon, who published the diary she kept as a teacher in a one-room school in the Eastern United States, recorded classes of 30 to 33 students, while Irene Bowling and R. Glenn Jones reported first classes of 25 and 14.<sup>11</sup> The size of classes at Plum Grove were within the same range, and most years contained 20 to 25 students.<sup>12</sup> The logistics of keeping up with 25 students in six or seven grades must have been nearly overwhelming at times. As Julia Gordon wrote-- "There are so many details to teaching in a one-teacher school that I am afraid I shall never learn to do any of the work well unless I concentrate on a few of them at a

<sup>8</sup> America's Country Schools, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> Claire (Humphres) Loudon, Letter to U. S. Senator Christopher Bond, Jan. 18, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Debbie Hefner, "One-room schools saluted", Daily Guide, Waynesville, MO, Apr. 30, 1990, and Peggy Scott, "One-room Schoolhouses Once Dominated Public Education", Southeast Missourian, Cape Girardeau, MO, Mar. 4, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. and Julia Weber Gordon, My Country School Diary, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1946, reprint 1970.) pp. 251-253.

<sup>12</sup> "Records of Plum Grove School".

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time."<sup>13</sup>

One method used by the teachers to "concentrate on a few of them at a time" was to devise, and follow, incredibly detailed lesson plans. The schedule which remains on the board at Plum Grove today is broken down into increments of ten to fifteen minutes, beginning at 9:00 a.m. and going non-stop until 3:40 that afternoon. (See photo 9.) Amanda Glenn, who taught at Plum Grove in 1914-15, recorded her class schedule in the school record book; it is equally precise. The Plum Grove teachers were not the only ones to follow these busy schedules. Fred E. H. Schroeder, who taught in a Wisconsin one-room school in 1952, mentions the "30 minuscule class periods that constituted each day's curriculum in a one-room school", and there are several schedules published with Julia Gordon's diary which are similarly complicated.<sup>14</sup>

The complexity of scheduling was necessitated by the need to cover a wide variety of subjects, in multiple grade levels. The teachers often mixed the grade levels together for instruction in similar topics. Julia Gordon, for example, would have her older students write stories for their English assignment, and then have the younger students learn to spell the words the older group had written. Plum Grove teachers covered a wider variety of subjects than one would expect in a one-room school. In addition to the basics such as reading, grammar, and arithmetic, the surviving Plum Grove schedules include time slots for "Nature Study", Agriculture, and Physiology.

School districts generally paid for only a once yearly cleaning, so the duties of the typical rural schoolteacher included making sure the school was kept clean and properly maintained. From Plum Grove teacher Claire Humphres: "The teacher was the janitor, and the entire crew carried, or "lugged in" the coal!"<sup>15</sup> Students were often enlisted to help; Julia Gordon frequently mentioned the maintenance done by her students. Former Plum Grove student Howard Gable remembered that his older brother was paid a nickel a week to walk down and start a fire in the school's huge coal stove on Sundays, so the building would be warm on Monday mornings.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes the teachers even had to buy the needed cleaning supplies. A 1915 entry in Plum Grove's accounts notes that Eula K. Davis was paid

<sup>13</sup> Country School Diary, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> See Fred E. H. Schroeder, "Educational Legacy: Rural One-room Schoolhouses", Historic Preservation, Vol. 29, July-September 1977, p. 4

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Claire Humphres.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Howard Gable.

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\$52.90 for "Teaching and Broom".<sup>17</sup>

The records of the Plum Grove school board show that they paid their teachers a fair wage. The average male teacher in Linn County made \$51.05 per month for the 1910-11 school year. Female teachers did not earn as much, their monthly pay averaged only \$40.67.<sup>18</sup> The school board for Plum Grove seems to have been a little more even handed; there was less difference in the salary range for male and females teachers there. J. E. Marsh was teaching at Plum Grove in 1912, for \$50 per month. The salary did drop to \$45 per month for Edythe Goodman, who succeeded him, but went back up to \$50 for Amanda Glenn, who taught the 1914-15 term.

Teacher's salaries at Plum Grove presumably included room and board, and the teachers customarily lived with the families of their students. Howard Gable remembered that his teachers boarded with area families, usually staying with a different family every year, but occasionally remaining in one home for two or three school sessions. This was common practice all over the country. In the book America's Country Schools, which was based on a two year study of small rural schools, the living conditions of school teachers are described as follows. "Usually a teacher's pay included room and board; the teacher would shuttle from home to home, sharing a bed with one or more children. He or she would stay the longest with families with the greatest number of children and, frequently, the least privacy and provisions."<sup>19</sup>

In addition to serving the usual educational purposes, country schoolhouses often became community centers as well. The open space of the classroom provided an ideal location for meetings, social affairs, and neighborhood dances, and the schoolhouse was often the only building for miles around with sufficient room for such activities. Julia Gordon's diary noted that her schoolhouse was used for many meetings, and America's Country Schools documents several such uses. Plum Grove school was no exception, in addition to its regular function, the schoolhouse was often used for Sunday school classes, meetings, and community square dances. The building was especially popular for square dances, and continued to host such events after it had ceased to be used as a schoolhouse.<sup>20</sup>

It is pointed out in America's Country Schools that "People from miles

<sup>17</sup> "Records of Plum Grove School".

<sup>18</sup> History and Biography of Linn County. pp. 148.

<sup>19</sup> America's Country Schools, p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Howard Gable.

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around came to country schools to attend school programs...Of all the special events held at the schoolhouse, none had more importance than the Christmas program, the gala occasion of the year."<sup>21</sup> This was true in Julia Gordon's school also, she described her classroom as "bursting with people" on the night of her students' 1936 Christmas program.<sup>22</sup> One of the first such events to be held in the new Plum Grove schoolhouse merited notice in the Laclede newspaper--"Fine Christmas exercises and a tree were held at the Plum Grove school house last Monday evening. The literary program was rendered by the pupils of the public school of that district ...and were creditable to all who took part....The attendance comfortably filled the house, and the entertainment was an enjoyable one throughout."<sup>23</sup>

Community involvement in school business went beyond attending the social events held in the schoolhouses. Members of the community regularly lent support to school activities, often by serving on the local school board. Most school boards were composed of parents who had several students enrolled in the school, and in many cases this led the members to develop a proprietary attitude towards school affairs. Plum Grove's records show a high level of concern for the school on the part of the board members, and the same people often served for many terms, in a variety of positions. There is even a mention in the minutes for a Depression-era meeting that school clerk L.W. Potter voluntarily lowered his rate of pay in 1933 to keep expenses down.

Because families were large and school districts were small, it was not unusual for a country school to have numerous members of one family in attendance at the same time. (It has even been noted that some country schools were named after the families who had the most children enrolled.<sup>24</sup>) Because of this, it was common to see a high degree of family involvement in school affairs, as was the case at Plum Grove. This is well illustrated in the case of the James E. Gable family, members of which have been involved with Plum Grove School for most of this century.

James E. Gable was a well-known local carpenter who did much work in the area around the turn of the century. Gable family tradition holds that it he is at least partly responsible for the construction of the present Plum Grove schoolhouse. It was common for schoolhouses to be erected as a group

<sup>21</sup> America's Country Schools, pp. 79-80.

<sup>22</sup> Country School Diary, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> Laclede Blade, December 29, 1906.

<sup>24</sup> America's Country Schools, p. 35.

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effort, utilizing the skills of any who cared to participate. One study noted that "The best workmen in the community were drawn to the construction of a new school even more than to a barn-raising or cabin framing."<sup>25</sup> As one of the leading carpenters in the area, James Gable would surely have participated in an event as important as building the new schoolhouse.

Claude Gable, James E.'s son, was active in Plum Grove affairs for several decades. He served on the district school board for many terms. He first appears in school board records as the clerk in 1913, and is listed regularly until 1946, when he was serving as Chairman. Over the years he acted as clerk, secretary, and chairman, and even attended a few school board conventions. He also did some construction and repair work on the school property in 1921, when he added the woodshed onto the coal house and erected a pair of new outhouses. Part of Claude Gable's long involvement with Plum Grove stems from the fact that he had children in the school over a time span of more than thirty years. His older children began attending in the early teens, and his younger daughter by a second marriage was enrolled in Plum Grove in 1947, the last year it was open.<sup>26</sup>

Claude Gable's son Howard started going to Plum Grove when he was only four years old. His mother had died recently, and the teacher allowed his brothers and sisters to bring him along to school with them. He received all of his early schooling at Plum Grove, and graduated from the eighth grade there, one of a class of two. Most of his brothers and sisters, and numerous cousins, also graduated from eighth grade there. His continued attachment to the schoolhouse has prompted him to sponsor recent stabilization efforts, as well as this nomination of the building to the National Register of Historic Places. Mr. Gable is also working towards establishing a not-for-profit corporation which will collect funds to entirely restore the building.

#### ARCHITECTURE

The architecture of small country schools has received much attention in recent decades, and several works have analyzed the buildings in terms of their physical forms. One of the first modern authors to discuss one-room school architecture was Fred E. H. Schroeder, a scholar of country school

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>26</sup> "Records of Plum Grove School", and Interview with Howard Gable.

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history and former teacher in a one-room school.<sup>27</sup> His writings categorized country school architecture into two types of school building: those based on formal designs, and vernacular buildings built by local builders who followed no formal plans. Each of those categories is further divided into two subgroups. Designed school buildings are either custom designed by an architect or, as is vastly more common, based on published architectural plan books. Vernacular schoolhouses also fit into two subgroups. Purely vernacular, or "folk-vernacular" schools are built of native materials, using hand construction methods. The earliest frontier schools of log and adobe belong in this group.

The most common type of vernacular schoolhouse is what Professor Schroeder terms "mass-vernacular". Those buildings utilize traditional plans and mass-produced building materials. As he first explained it in 1977:

"The majority of vernacular schools are not folk-architecture. Rather, they are built of dimension lumber, milled clapboard, commercial brick and dressed stone. The interiors are likely to have such manufactured elements as tongue and groove floors, wainscoting, embossed metal ceilings, cast-iron desks, cabinets and shelving and slate blackboards. But the design of these vernacular schoolhouses is traditional, not architect designed: They look like schoolhouses and could only be confused with some country churches and town halls. Unlike the folk-vernacular, these schoolhouses are in the national mainstream, reflecting trends and reforms in American education".<sup>28</sup>

Plum Grove school is an archetypical mass-vernacular schoolhouse.

The simplest way to differentiate between an architect designed schoolhouse and a mass-vernacular one is to keep in mind the phrase "they look like schoolhouses". State and government agencies often published collections of schoolhouse designs, and the plans found in such books rarely took the traditional schoolhouse form. Architect's schoolhouse designs from the latter 19th and early 20th centuries often show charming little structures calculated to look more like residential cottages than schools.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See Fred E. H Schroeder, "Schoolhouse Reading: What You Can Learn from Your Rural School", History News, April, 1981, and Educational Legacy: Rural One-room Schoolhouses". The author of America's Country Schools credits the latter with spurring his interest in the subject.

<sup>28</sup> "Educational Legacy", p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> A sampling of the numerous published school plans includes the United States Bureau of Education's, "Rural School Architecture: Circular of Information of the Bureau of Education. No. 4-1880", (Washington, D. C., 1880) School Buildings: Extracts From State Superintendent's Report, (Missouri,

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Designed schools often had floorplans and room layouts which were similar to traditional schoolhouses, but the exteriors tended to be much more elaborate. Covered porches and applied decorative features from the style of the times were common. Hipped roofs in particular were favored for designed schools but rarely found on their vernacular counterparts.

The extremely common mass-vernacular schools on the other hand, show an homogeneity of appearance which is a typical, and usually defining, aspect of vernacular building types. The general description of mass-vernacular schoolhouses given by Schroeder applies nicely to Plum Grove School: "rectangular, with one or two entrances at one end under a simple gable roof, and with three or four widely separated windows on each side." This is the form which has come to symbolize the one-room school in America, and buildings fitting this description have been documented across the country. One Missouri school district even put a similar description on the ballot when they asked voters to approve funds for a new school. When Mt. Zion School in Camden County, Missouri was built in 1906, the voters approved specifications which called for a "20 x 24, 9 foot high building...with three windows in each side, a double door in front, and a shingle roof".<sup>30</sup> Several other very similar Missouri schools have been documented, including the Lone Hill School (ca 1919) in Christian County, and the Bellview School (pre-1930) of Greene County.<sup>31</sup>

Even though the general form of Plum Grove is based on centuries-old tradition, the school building also reflects reforms in school design which took place in the early 19th century. In the early eighteenth hundreds, interiors of schoolhouses were normally arranged with high desks built around the exterior wall, accompanied by backless benches. The windows were placed low, and the center of the room was either left open, or contained only a stove. An extreme change in the way classrooms were arranged has been directly traced to an award winning essay on school design which was written for William A. Alcott in 1832. Alcott designed individual desks, which had backs to the seats and storage space for materials. He also called for the desks to be arranged in rows, and faced in one direction to make it easier for the students to see the teacher and for the teacher to move around among them. Windows were to be large to

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1901), and the Pennsylvania Board of Education's Bulletin of Two, Three, and Four Room School Buildings, (Harrisburg, PA, 1915).

<sup>30</sup> "Mt. Zion School typical of log school replacements". Reveille. Camdenton, MO, Mar. 8, 1990.

<sup>31</sup> Several newspaper articles about one-room schools have been collected by the State Historical Society of Missouri, and can be found in their "vertical file" on one-room schoolhouses.

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allow ample light and ventilation, and placed higher in the walls to avoid distractions. Behind the teacher's desk were to be shelves for scientific apparatus, books, and a globe.<sup>32</sup> The essay also called for Greek Revival exteriors to reflect the role of schools as "temples of learning". His exterior designs did not catch on, but the interior arrangements he advocated were to become standard fare by the latter part of the 19th century, both in designed and mass-vernacular schools.

The materials used in the construction of the Plum Grove schoolhouse are typically mass-produced, and many of the furnishings reflect Alcott's influence. The building sits on standard concrete blocks, the framing is all of dimension lumber, and the windows are pre-milled units. The interior of the building has tongue and groove wainscoting, finished flooring and an embossed metal ceiling. The furnishings of the school when it was in operation included elaborate manufactured desks which were arranged in rows, a globe, dictionary, and maps, and glass doored shelves for the 123 volume "library".<sup>33</sup> Alcott's rules were also followed in regard to the windows of Plum Grove. The building is well-lighted and ventilated, with four windows on each side wall. (Three are much more common.) Also, the sills of the windows are nearly three feet above the floor, as Alcott recommended.

Professor Schroeder's description notes that mass-vernacular schools "could only be confused with some country churches and town halls." The similarity of simple vernacular schoolhouses to modest one-room churches is often quite striking. The adoption of the same vernacular form for both types of buildings stems from the early practice of using one structure for both religious and educational purposes. In frontier settings, the first public buildings to be erected were quite often schools and churches--the flagships of "civilization". Because there was also much other work involved in creating a permanent settlement, there was not always time or energy available for the construction of two public meeting places and one building often did double duty. Simple rectangular church buildings with plans similar to that of Plum Grove School have been constructed in America since the eighteenth century, and continued to be built all over the country well into the 20th century.<sup>34</sup> Missouri is no exception; buildings

<sup>32</sup> "Educational Legacy", p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> "Plum Grove School Report", Laclede Blade, May 1913, and Interview with Howard Gable.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of rectangular churches in colonial America, see Dell Upton's "Anglican Parish Churches in Eighteenth Century Virginia", Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, II, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1986) pp. 90-101.



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with forms not unlike that of Plum Grove School can be found across the state, and it is often difficult to tell upon first glance if one is viewing a church or an old schoolhouse. A quick review of recent county histories for the LaCledde area turned up several simple frame churches which closely resemble the Plum Grove schoolhouse. These include the Swedish Evangelical Church, near Bucklin in Linn County, and the Lilly Grove Church in Livingston County.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of the many small country schools still in existence in Missouri, surprisingly few have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Missouri Historic Sites Catalogue includes one-room schools from eight counties in its inventory of Missouri's most historic buildings, and county histories from across the state are filled with pictures of early one-room schools. However, those listed in the National Register of Historic Places number but five.<sup>36</sup> The Plum Grove schoolhouse appears to be extremely typical of one-room schools throughout the state, and possibly the country. However, as there has been no comprehensive survey of Missouri's one-room schools, the recommended level of significance is set at the local level.

Plum Grove school held its last session in 1947, when it fell victim to the nationwide consolidation movement. The consolidation movement essentially promoted the belief that children in rural areas would be better off if the tiny districts served by one-room schools were consolidated into much larger districts. (See Figure Three for a comparison of district sizes.) The larger areas could then be served by central schools which divided students into separate classes for each grade level. This was facilitated by advances in transportation, which eliminated the necessity of keeping schools within walking distance of their students. During the 1940s the number of students in Missouri who were being bussed to school increased dramatically. In the 1930-31 school year, only 8,200 students rode busses to school; by 1945-46 that number had grown to 93,400.<sup>37</sup> Statistics also show that Plum Grove School was among the earlier casualties of this movement. A report put out in 1947 gave the total number of one-room

<sup>35</sup> These churches are pictured in Linn County History, (Linn County Historical Society, 1990) p. 38, and One Hundred Years of Livingston County (Livingston County Bicentennial Agriculture Committee, 1976) p. 111.

<sup>36</sup> From figures compiled by Steven E. Mitchell, National Register Coordinator, Office of Historic Preservation, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Jefferson City, Missouri.

<sup>37</sup> Missouri Looks at Her Rural Schools, p. 7.

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schools in Missouri as 7,868; of those, 5,929 were still in use.<sup>38</sup> Eventually, the state did eliminate all of its one-room schools, but not until 1973, when the last 25 were closed.<sup>39</sup>

In the early decades of the twentieth century, consolidation proponents wrote volumes bashing the traditional one-room school system, and most seemed to agree with the author of The American Rural School, who wrote in 1910--"It thus appears that this system has outlived its usefulness, and its passing will be cause for few regrets."<sup>40</sup> The merits of consolidation continue to be debated, and some modern scholars question the wisdom of totally eliminating the one-room country school. Critics argue that the smaller schools often served as anchors for rural communities, and that the bussing of rural children into town separated them from their parents' community and encouraged migration out of rural areas. One study describes it as "a shattering of the community spirit of the original settlers."<sup>41</sup> Whatever the final judgement on the wisdom of the movement, there are increasingly few remaining examples of the numerous small schools which once dotted the American countryside. The Plum Grove schoolhouse stands as a rare unchanged example of this once common building type and its significance as a typical one-room country school is readily apparent.

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<sup>38</sup> Administrative Committee of the Cooperative Study of Rural Education and Rural Life, Missouri Looks at Her Rural Schools, (December, 1946), p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Leslie C. Swanson, Rural One-room Schools of Mid-America. (Moline, IL: Leslie Swanson, 1970, 1984) pp. 30-31.

<sup>40</sup> From The American Rural School by Harold Foght, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910) p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> America's Country Schools, p. 43.

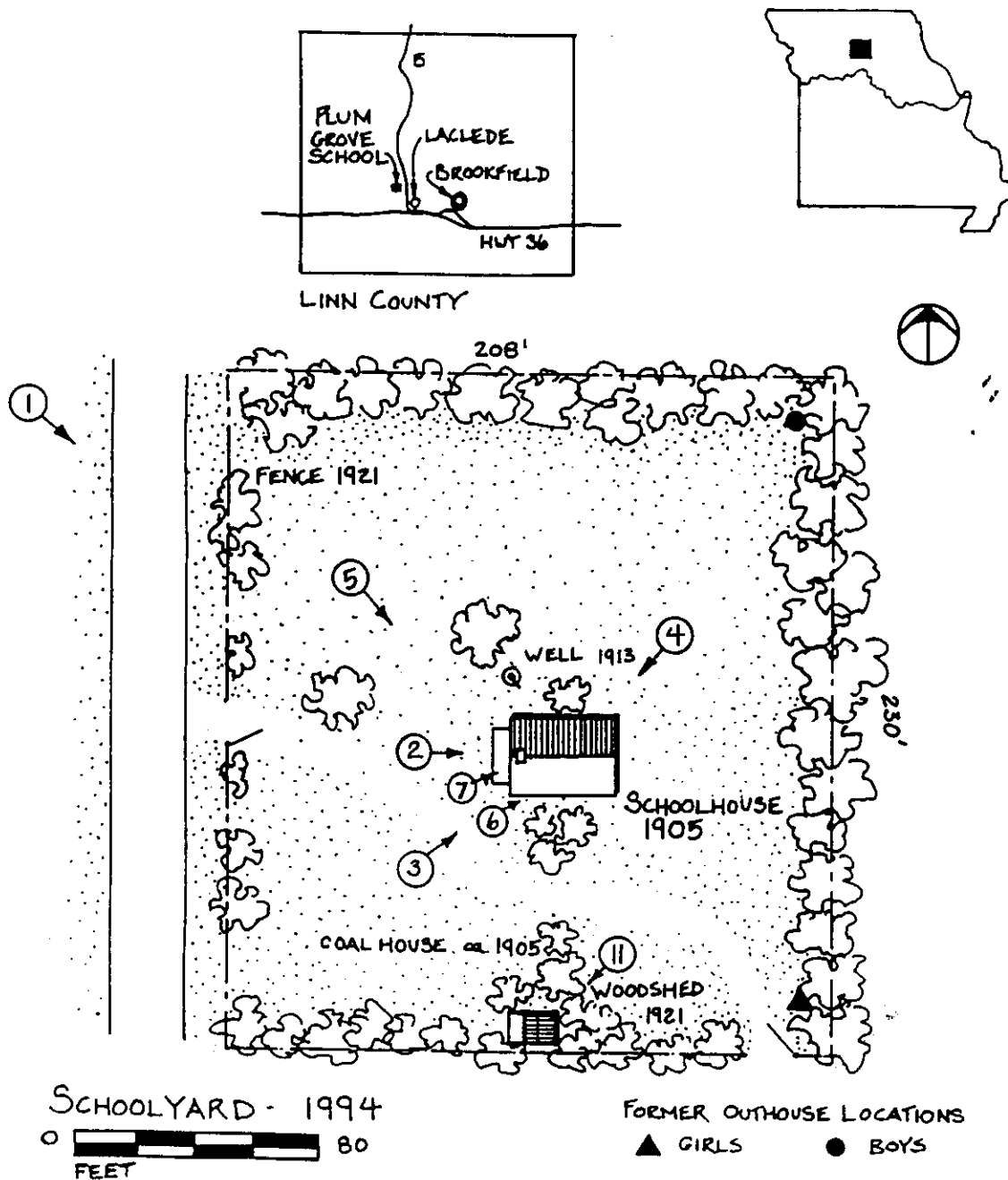
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Linn County, Missouri

Figure One. Site Plan and Location Map. With indication of camera angles. Drawn by Debbie Sheals.



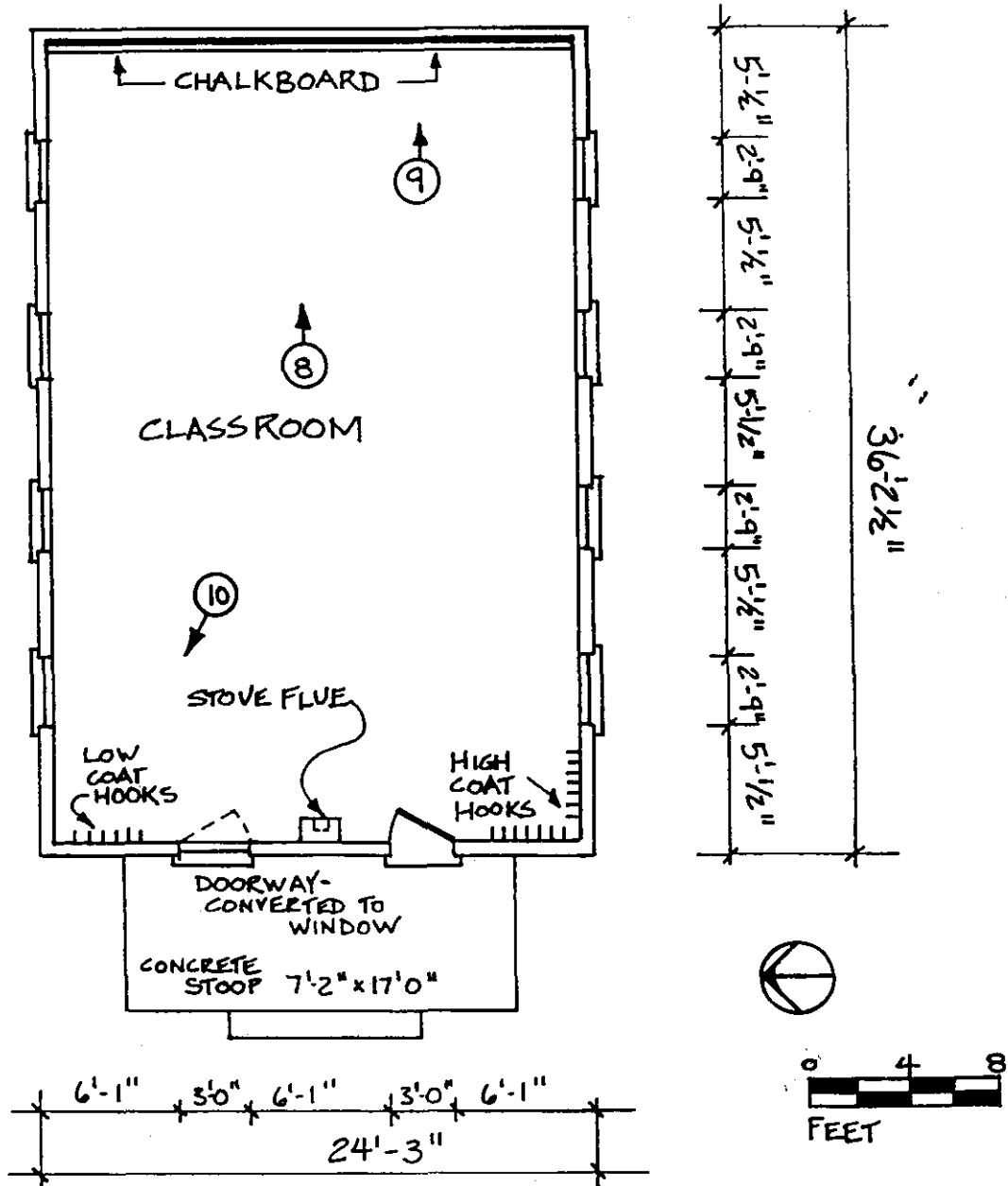
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Figure Two. Floorplan. With indication of camera angles.  
Drawn by Debbie Sheals.





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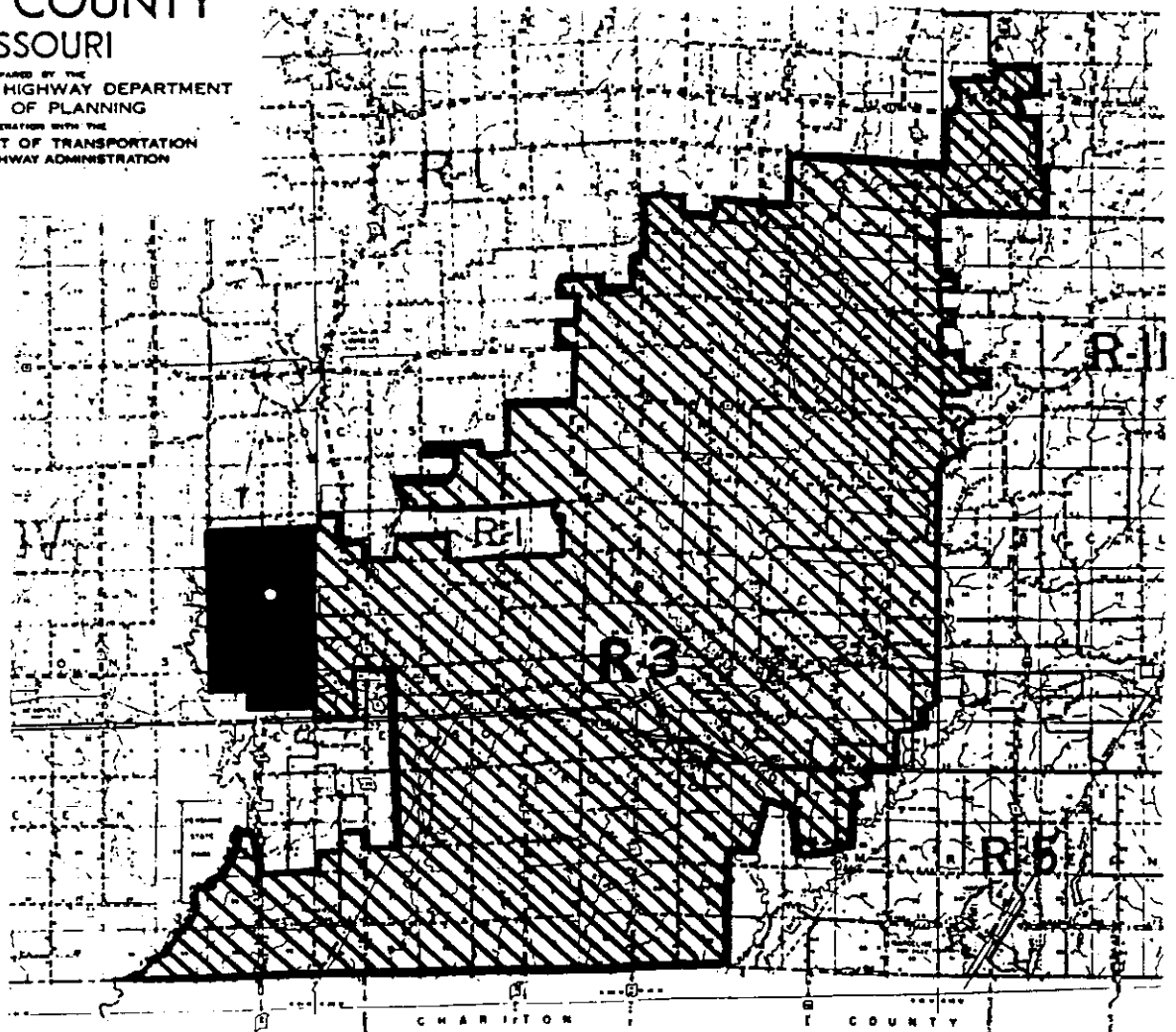
**Figure Three.**  
Comparison of School Districts.  
Base map from 1981 Land Atlas and Plat Book: Linn County, Missouri.

-  Plum Grove's original District #70.  
(Schoolhouse indicated in white.)
-  District R-3, which serves the area today.



## SCHOOL DISTRICT MAP LINN COUNTY MISSOURI

PREPARED BY THE  
MISSOURI STATE HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT  
DIVISION OF PLANNING  
IN COOPERATION WITH THE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION



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Linn County, Missouri

### Verbal Boundary Description

Directions to the property are as follows: State Road 5 north out of Laclede, to county road 346, which is the first westbound gravel road past the city limits. Follow 346 until it intersects 350, at a "T". Plum Grove school is 3/8ths mile north, on the east side of county road 350.

The boundary of the nominated property is a rectangular parcel measuring 208 by 230 feet. The boundary is described as follows: beginning at the northeast corner of the schoolhouse, and proceeding east 70 feet; then proceed south 115 feet; then proceed west 208 feet; then proceed north 230 feet, along the right-of-way of county road 350; then east 208 feet; then proceed south 115 feet, to the point of beginning. (See also Figure One, Site Plan, Section 8, p. 15.)

### Boundary Justification

The one acre plot represents all of the land historically associated with Plum Grove School.

### Photographs

The following information is the same for all photographs:

Plum Grove School

Laclede vicinity

Linn County, MO

Taken by Debbie Sheals

Negatives on file with Debbie Sheals

406 West Broadway

Columbia, MO 65203

### List of Photographs

Indication of camera angles for photos 1-7, and 11 are on Figure One; for 8-10 on Figure Two.

1. Schoolyard with gate and woodshed-March, 1994.

2. Front Elevation-March 1994.

3. Front and south side-March, 1994.

4. Back and North Side-March, 1994.

5. View from road-March, 1994.

6. Detail of south windows-June, 1994.

7. Detail of Door molding-June, 1994.

8. Interior, east wall-June, 1994.

9. Chalkboard detail-June, 1994.

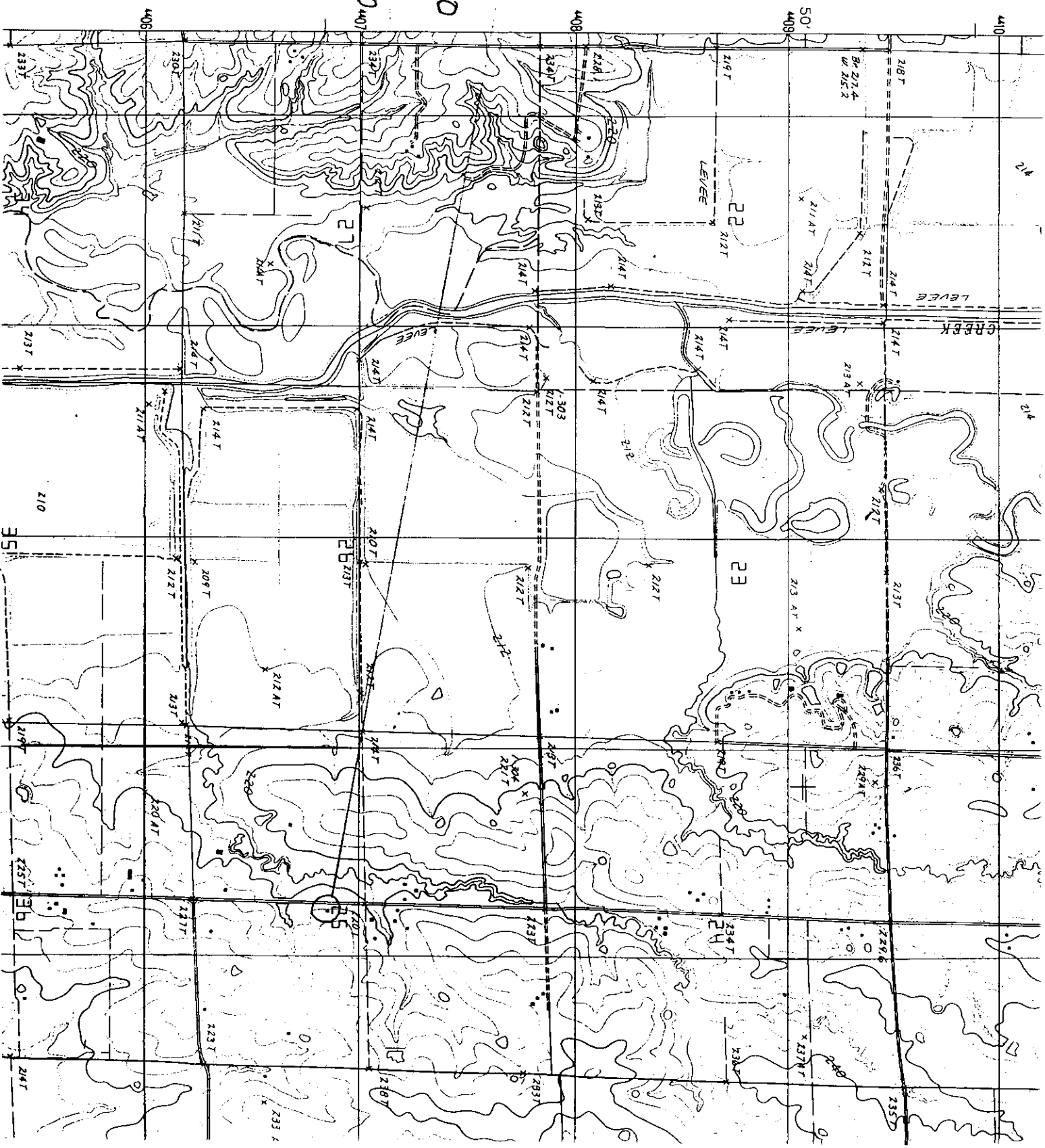
10. Interior, Northwest corner-June 1994.

11. Woodshed-June 1994.





PLUM GROVE  
SCHOOL  
LINN COUNTY MO  
UTM REFERENCE  
15/482790/4400850



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JAN 24 1995

JAN 23 1995

DPHP/DO

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 94001203

Date Listed: 10/22/94

Plum Grove School  
Property Name

Linn  
County

MO  
State

Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Beth Boland  
Signature of the Keeper

12/19/94  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

The resource count includes only the school and the coal house/woodshed. The well and pump also contribute to the significance; therefore, the count should be 2 contributing buildings, 1 contributing structure, and 0 noncontributing resources.

This revision was approved by Steve Mitchell of the MO SHPO staff.

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DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)













