

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. 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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Gas Creek School  
Other Names/Site Number: 5CF.314  
Name of related multiple property listing: Rural School Buildings in Colorado

## 2. Location

Street & Number: 20925 U.S. Highway 285  
City or town: Nathrop State: CO County: Chaffee  
Not for Publication:  Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

national  state  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date

History Colorado

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official: Date

Title: State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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**4. National Park Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:  
 entered in the National Register  
 determined eligible for the National Register  
 determined not eligible for the National Register  
 removed from the National Register  
 other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of the Keeper**

**Date of Action**

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public – Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public – State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public – Federal

**Category of Property** (Check only **one** box.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	District
<input type="checkbox"/>	Site
<input type="checkbox"/>	Structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	Object

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

Contributing	Non-contributing	
4	0	Buildings
0	0	Sites
1	0	Structures
2	0	Objects
7	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: None

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.):  
Education/school

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.):  
Domestic/single dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions.):  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movements

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE  
 walls: BRICK  
 roof: ASPHALT

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other: BRICK

### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### **Summary Paragraph**

The 1909 Gas Creek School is an excellent representative of historic one-room country school design. The current school replaced an 1890 building on the same site that included at least one privy to the west. Located on the west side of U.S. Highway 285, 1.6 miles south-southwest of the small community of Nathrop in a rural area of central Chaffee County, the one-story brick school stands amid open agricultural lands against the backdrop of 14,196' Mt. Princeton rising to the west (Photograph 1). The school grounds are notable for retention of a full ensemble of resources comprising a rural school complex, including two privies, a shed, and two pieces of playground equipment, as well as a pre-existing irrigation ditch. Gas Creek is one of relatively few rural one-room schools in Colorado constructed of brick. The property retains a very high level of historic integrity, with no additions and few alterations since its construction. The included Sketch Map shows the boundary of the nominated area and photograph locations.

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### **Narrative Description**

The Gas Creek School is located in the northwest quadrant of the level parcel, with two privies and a shed to the west in a north-south alignment and a swing set and seesaw to the south. The 1.5-acre grounds measure approximately 361' east-west x 176' north-south. The 1875 Frantz Ditch flows north to south through the property near its center, with all of the standing resources located to its west.<sup>1</sup> Vegetation on the Gas Creek parcel consists primarily of a variety of low to mid-grasses, mowed near the school and outbuildings and uncut throughout the remainder of the parcel. A few mature wheat plants were observed around the perimeter of some of the outbuildings. Other vegetation included thistle (*Cirsium sp.*), tumbleweed or Russian Thistle (*Salsola kali*) along the perimeter fences, and several mature narrowleaf cottonwood trees (*Populus angustifolia*) located along the ditch to the northeast of the school building. The largest tree has a roughly 3'-diameter trunk. No evidence of planted ornamentals was observed. A barbed wire fence encloses the parcel with a metal tubular ranch gate located northwest of the school. Borrow ditches extend along the county road to the north and the highway to the east. A wood utility pole (no longer in use) stands 35' east of the school. All of the resources within the property boundary are assessed as contributing.

### **Schoolhouse, Resource 1, 1909, building, photographs 2 through 9<sup>2</sup>**

Gas Creek School is a one-story 796-square-foot rectangular (roughly 30' X 26') orange brick building atop a raised concrete foundation that projects slightly outward. The masonry is predominantly laid in stretcher bond, with a few rows displaying alternating stretchers and headers. The building's hipped roof has a wide central deck, asphalt composition roofing shingles, and overhanging boxed eaves. On the front (east) the building features a slightly projecting, central, gabled-roof bay crowned by a bell tower. The building retains tall, segmental arch, four-over-four-light double-hung wood windows with

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<sup>1</sup> Only real property, not water rights (per 36 CFR 60.6), is the subject of this nomination.

<sup>2</sup> The assessor, remarkably, reported an 1853 year of construction for the school. Its composition is based on an 1889 design.

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rowlock brick sills. The sills are painted or stucco-clad. There is a plain wood cornice with frieze boards at the top of the walls.

The east façade contains entrance bays at the north and south ends flanking the central gabled bay.<sup>3</sup> The entrances are of identical design, with low, stepped concrete stoops with beveled edges, segmental arched single-light transoms above wood doors with screen doors, and shallow gabled hoods with overhanging eaves and exposed rafter tails supported by triangular knee braces. The south entrance contains a five-panel wood door and a wood screen door, while the north entrance has a one-panel wood door with an aluminum screen door.<sup>4</sup> The center bay features two central windows, remnants of the school signboard anchors, and eave returns. A wood raking cornice on the gable end has frieze boards. The bell tower rises from a square base clad with roofing shingles. The open belfry-stage displays a functioning metal bell and a rope bell pull on a wheel. The pyramidal roof of the tower has a projecting finial and is supported by wood posts with intersecting diagonal braces.

The north and south walls of the building are identical in design, with a large expanse of unfenestrated wall toward the front of the building and paired windows toward the rear (west). On the south wall near the east end is an area on which students carved their initials in the brick. The north wall has electrical and telephone service boxes.

The rear (west) wall displays three evenly spaced windows. Between the two southern windows a brick chimney rises on the upper wall. The chimney has a corbelled brick base and a tapered metal cap with a projecting chimney pipe. The brick of the west wall displays some dark red and brown brick between the windows. There is a small hole in the wall below the north window and a circular hole filled with concrete south of the south window.

*Interior.* Although extensively remodeled, the interior of the building retains original fir flooring and plaster walls above a beadboard wainscot. The original large open classroom remains. At the east end an enclosed area is flanked by the entrance vestibules. This area, now a bedroom, contains an original, slightly raised platform. Nonhistoric stairs lead to a ca. 1980s attic loft. Some of the interior walls display historic green chalkboard panels, and the ceiling has Celotex panels.<sup>5</sup> A kitchen area now occupies a portion of the building, as do domestic furnishings.

*Alterations.* The gabled hoods above the doors were installed between 1942 and 1957. The “Gas Creek, Dist. No. 20” wood sign from the front of the building is visible in 1990s photographs but since has been removed and is stored in sections in the shed. The north door is a wood non-historic replacement and screen doors are added at each entrance. The building received new roofing shingles after the 1990s. The interior has been converted to living space, as described above.

### ***Shed, Resource 2, pre-1938, building, photographs 10 and 11***

Located 26’ west-southwest of the school is a shed used for storage during the school era and today. The 16’ x 12’ front gable roofed shed faces south and has walls of wood drop siding with cornerboards. The front contains double plywood doors with strap hinges. The gable face above features a rectangular loft opening filled with horizontal boards. The east wall contains an off-center four-panel wood door (bottom stile missing). The rear (north wall) also has a boarded-up loft opening

<sup>3</sup> Although double entrances such as those found here were commonly used for separate entrances for boys and girls, the historic record indicates otherwise in this case.

<sup>4</sup> A ca. 1938-39 photograph shows a four panel wood door on the south and a five panel wood door on the north (Figure 4), while a 1942 photograph shows two five-panel wood doors. No screen doors are shown in either photograph.

<sup>5</sup> Janet Whitesell, Fort Worth, Texas, email to Thomas H. Simmons, 31 October 2017. Mrs. Whitesell recalled the green chalkboards from her time at the school from 1937 to 1941, commenting the students found the green chalkboards “a very funny thing about our school.”

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with a boarded-up window opening on the wall below. The west wall is unfenestrated. The roof has slightly overhanging eaves and was once clad with rolled asphalt roofing (now mostly gone).

*Alterations.* Some openings are now boarded-up. The plywood doors are replacements (date unknown); the original type of doors is not known.

***North Privy, Resource 3, ca. 1935-37, building, photographs 10, 12, and 13***

Rural schools typically offered separate privies for boys and girls. Writing in 1917, Samuel A. Challman directed "there should always be separate toilets for the sexes, and they should be far enough apart to avoid moral contagion."<sup>6</sup> The north privy was used by female students.<sup>7</sup> The one-story, 50" x 50" outhouse lies 24' west of the school and faces east. Walls are clad with board-and-batten wood siding. The front contains a vertical board door with strap hinges. The interior seat is oriented at a 45-degree in the southwest corner; a T-shaped wood vent connects to rectangular openings (originally screened) on the west and south walls. The shed roof displays wood shingles and has boxed eaves and widely overhangs on the sides and rear. An L-shaped privacy screen/windbreak is attached to the northeast corner of the privy. The screen is composed of square corner posts and horizontal tongue-and-groove boards attached with cut (square) nails.<sup>8</sup>

Both privies follow a Work Projects Administration (WPA) design built in the ca. 1935-37 period.<sup>9</sup> The New Deal agency constructed 32,000 of these sanitary privies in Colorado and 2.3 million nationally. The privies included a concrete vault and a T-shaped vent for improved ventilation. They were installed on farms, schools, tourist camps, individual homes, and other locations throughout the state.<sup>10</sup>

*Alterations.* A vertical board with a diagonal brace is attached to the southeast corner of the privy screen/windbreak; an electrical extension cord from its top extends to the privy. One vent screen is missing.

***South Privy, Resource 4, ca. 1935-37, building, photographs 10 and 14***

The south privy was used by the boys attending the school. It faces east, is located about 39' southwest of the school, and follows the same design as the north privy. It no longer has a privacy screen/windbreak.

*Alterations.* The screens are missing from the vent openings. The privacy screen/windbreak was removed after 1973.

***Swing Set, Resource 5, ca. 1940s, object, photograph 15***

No playground equipment is visible in a 1942 photograph of the school, while a ca. 1957 image shows two swing sets and a seesaw. This swing set appears homemade, most likely erected by parents of school children. It is located 26' south of the school. The swing frame is composed of 2 ¼" tubular steel connected with threaded joints, with the legs forming a wide angle. Two chains to the south hold tires; the swing seat to the north is broken.

*Alterations.* The swing seat to the north is broken. The tires were not present in a 1973 photograph.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel A. Challman, *The Rural School Plant* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Bruce Publishing Company, 1917), 231.

<sup>7</sup> Janet Whitesell, Fort Worth, Texas, Interview by Thomas H. Simmons, 15 September 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Cut (square) nails suggest that the screen may have been retained from an earlier privy on the school grounds.

<sup>9</sup> The date is based on when the WPA program started and historic photographs.

<sup>10</sup> History Colorado, WPA Privy (1935-1943), History Colorado, Denver, Colorado, [www.historycolorado.org](http://www.historycolorado.org), accessed 26 October 2017.

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### ***Seesaw, Resource 6, ca. 1940s, object, photograph 16***

South of the swing is a seesaw, lying 43' south of the school. The seesaw, also fabricated locally, is composed of from boards bolted with metal straps to a pipe frame. The two boards of the seesaws are 2"-thick, 11" wide, and 12' long. The support frame consists of a 5" diameter pipe connected to inverted V pipe supports at each end.

*Alterations.* There are no apparent alterations.

### ***Frantz Ditch, Resource 7, 1875, structure, photograph 17***

The Frantz Ditch flows from north to south through the center of the property. The 1875 irrigation ditch diverts water from Chalk Creek at a point about 1.6 miles to the north-northwest. In 1890 C.C. Evans and Thomas Morgan received Priority No. 59 for the ditch, which supplies water to agricultural lands.<sup>11</sup> The unlined earthen ditch is about 3' to 4' wide and about 1.5' deep.

*Alterations.* There are no apparent alterations.

### ***Archaeological Remains***

The historic nonaboriginal archaeological remains within the nominated area of the Gas Creek School consist of a wide scatter of artifacts located around the school and outbuildings. Many of the artifacts in the vicinity of the outbuildings are visible in rodent backdirt that appears to have been burned (Photograph 18). These sediments contain very small fragments of burned brick and vessel glass, one fragment of flat, black slate (probably from a slate board), and clinkers; all are likely the remains dumped from cleaning out a wood stove or possibly a trash barrel where the contents were burned. No artifacts were observed in the eastern portion of the parcel, east of the ditch. Overall, the archaeological evidence is minimal and although the artifacts appear to be related to historic activities at the school, they do not have the potential to add significant data to the historical record of the site.

The general paucity of artifacts observed at the site may be due to: 1) the small numbers of students that attended the school during the historic period and 2) the general lack of items available at/or brought to the school by the students. Janet Everson Whitesell, a student at the school from 1937-41, stated that there was very little trash produced when she was a student; burnable trash was put into the school potbellied stove and anything else that could not be burned was likely taken home by the teacher. She also noted that in "Depression days--anything was used, not discarded!"<sup>12</sup> Even in more recent times, it appears that trash was burned onsite as stated by Bill Harry, a local resident who stayed in the school for a few weeks in 1995. Bill noted the site occupants burned their trash in a barrel near the shed.<sup>13</sup> Based on this information and the visible archaeological remains, it does not appear likely that a formal trash dump was associated with the school. Although the extant surface-visible artifacts are sparse and fragmented, it is recommended that any future onsite ground-disturbing activities take into account the possibility of encountering buried cultural deposits, particularly in the vicinity of the privies.

### ***Integrity***

The Gas Creek School retains excellent historic integrity. The school's location is unchanged since the building's construction. The setting at the intersection of two roadways remains the same and includes the privies, shed, playground equipment, and a historic irrigation ditch, surrounded by grazing land and mountain views. The school's design displays a high level of integrity through

<sup>11</sup> Petition for Adjudication of the Priority of Rights to the use of Water for Irrigation in Water District 11, District Court of the 4<sup>th</sup> District, 19 June 1890, 168, Colorado Division of Water Resources, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>12</sup> Janet Everson Whitesell, Fort Worth, Texas, email to Thomas H. Simmons, 23 September 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Bill Harry, Buena Vista, Colorado, interview by Thomas H. Simmons and Marilyn A. Martorano, 19 October 2017.

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retention of the building's plan without additions and its four-over-four-light wood windows, orange brick walls, and bell tower. The present doors, gabled hoods, and concrete stoops date to the period of significance. The materials and workmanship also maintain a very high level of integrity, including brick masonry of the walls and framing of the bell tower. The building no longer is associated with education in Chaffee County, since the post-World War II school consolidation movement led to its closure in 1958. The school retains a very high level of integrity of feeling by preserving its other aspects of integrity, which convey an excellent example of an early twentieth-century country school.

**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.)

<b>X</b>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<b>X</b>	<b>C</b>	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.
	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history

**Criteria Considerations:**

<b>A</b>	Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
<b>B</b>	Removed from its original location
<b>C</b>	A birthplace or grave
<b>D</b>	A cemetery
<b>E</b>	A reconstructed building, object, or structure
<b>F</b>	A commemorative property
<b>G</b>	Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions.):

Education  
Social History  
Architecture

**Period of Significance:** 1909-58

**Significant Dates:** N/A

**Significant Person** (Complete only if Criterion B is marked above): N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion D is marked above): N/A

**Architect/Builder (last name, first name):** Cooper, George

**Period of Significance (justification):** The period of significance for Education and Social History extends from the completion of the school in 1909 until its closure in 1958. The period of significance for Architecture is 1909, the year of the school's construction.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary):** None

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The 1909 Gas Creek School is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Education, as it was the only school in Chaffee County School District No. 20 from 1909 to 1958. Drawing its students from the widely scattered farms and ranches of the area, the school is further locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Social History for the role it played as a place for community activities, such as dances, meetings, celebrations, and dinners for the surrounding rural area. The school is also locally significant under Criterion C for Architecture as an example of an early-twentieth century one-room rural school. The school meets the registration requirements of the *Rural School Buildings in Colorado* Multiple Property Documentation Form, as an example of the Schoolhouse property type.<sup>14</sup>

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Criterion A.** The school is locally significant in the area of Education, serving as Chaffee County School District No. 20's only school from 1909 to 1958. The one-teacher, one-room school provided instruction for students living on ranches and farms in the surrounding agricultural area of Chaffee County. The property tangibly illustrates the spread of public education and the value that Gas Creek area farmers and ranchers placed on schooling, as they organized a school district, served as its administrative officers, and fabricated playground equipment. In his book assessing country schools, historian Andrew Gulliford judged that "no single building type in American architecture more vividly represents the communal efforts of the settlers, who donated time, labor and materials to provide places of learning for their children."<sup>15</sup>

The Gas Creek School is further locally significant in the area of Social History, serving as a venue for community functions, including meetings, dances, celebrations, and dinners. The *Rural School Buildings in Colorado* MPDF described these resources as "social and cultural centers" for their surrounding agrarian communities.

**Criterion C.** The Gas Creek School is locally significant in the area of Architecture as an exceptionally well-preserved example of a one-room rural schoolhouse. The building displays many of the attributes of rural schools identified in the MPDF: one-room, one-story, rectangular plan, symmetrical façade, and hipped roof with belfry. The school is also a relatively rare example of a brick rural school building. The MPDF reported that only about 25 percent of such schools featured brick.<sup>16</sup> The significance of the property is enhanced by the presence of support buildings and objects necessary for the functioning of the school, including privies, a shed, and playground equipment. The MPDF noted that the survival rate for such outbuildings is "quite low."<sup>17</sup>

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## Developmental History/Additional Historic Context Information

### Gas Creek

The school was named for Gas Creek, a stream 1.1 miles to the south. Gas Creek, a tributary of the Arkansas River, flows west to east and takes its name from gurgling noises it makes in some areas,

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<sup>14</sup> Suzanne Doggett and Holly Wilson, *Rural School Buildings in Colorado*, Multiple Property Documentation Form, March 1999, on file with History Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Denver, Colorado. By February 2018, thirty-six schools were listed in the National and State Register under the "Rural School Buildings in Colorado" MPDF. Fourteen were listed only in the State Register.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1996), 160.

<sup>16</sup> Doggett and Wilson, *Rural School Buildings in Colorado*, MPDF, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Doggett and Wilson, *Rural School Buildings in Colorado*, MPDF, 31.

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which reminded local residents of gas.<sup>18</sup> The Gas Creek and Centerville vicinity, south of Nathrop and northwest of Salida, developed as an agricultural area in the 1860s, with Gas Creek and Brown's Creek providing water for irrigation. Several prominent early settlers played roles later in organizing the school district. John D. Coon came to Chaffee County in 1864 and farmed and ranched four hundred acres near Nathrop. Thomas Donley, born in New York in 1826, came to Chaffee County with his wife, Mary A., in the 1880s from Iowa. Six of their children relocated to Chaffee County in the 1870s and 1880s. Son Joseph J. Donley married Lizzie Lavina Coon.<sup>19</sup> Other early settlers included Galatia Sprague, Mat Johnson, Matthew Rule, and Henry Weber.<sup>20</sup>

### **Creation of Chaffee County School District 20**

A majority of legal voters in the Gas Creek area petitioned the county superintendent of schools for creation of a new school district in July 1888. The superintendent granted the request, and Chaffee County School District 20 came into being.<sup>21</sup> Territory for the new district came from existing school districts 13 (Nathrop, to the north) and 19 (Hortense Springs, to the west). The district initially covered fourteen square miles, extending south of Nathrop to Centerville and from the Arkansas River on the east to the foothills of the Collegiate Range on the west (see Figure 1). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, school districts were quite local in nature. By 1910 thirty school districts were created in Chaffee County, with most supporting a single school.<sup>22</sup>

The first officers of District Number 20 were elected in August 1888: John D. Coon, president; J.D. Cantonwine, secretary; and Thomas Morgan, treasurer.<sup>23</sup> The three men were local farmers. Local historians June Shaputis and Suzanne Kelly listed J.M. Weed and Mrs. O.O. Morrison as teachers in the district in 1889.<sup>24</sup> Before a schoolhouse was erected, classes may have taken place at area ranches. In September 1889 the district published a request for bids, noting that it "proposes to build a school house."<sup>25</sup> The requested schedule was aggressive, with bids to be opened on 1 October and the building ready for occupancy by 1 December. School board records show the building in use by March 1890, noting that a special meeting of the district was "to be held at the school house in said district on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of March AD 1890" (see Figure 2).<sup>26</sup> The 1890 building followed the same design as the 1909 school except for the porch deck.

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<sup>18</sup> Suzy Kelly, Buena Vista, Colorado, email to Tom Simmons, 2 March 2018. Local residents explained: "The creek makes a lot of gurgling noises like gas in some places" (Suzy Kelly), and "When the water would hit a hole it would make different noises" (Peg Scanga).

<sup>19</sup> June Shaputis and Suzanne Kelly, comps. and eds., *A History of Chaffee County* (Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1982), 181 and 186.

<sup>20</sup> Virginia McConnell Simmons, *The Upper Arkansas: A Mountain River Valley* (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1990), 73.

<sup>21</sup> Record for the Use of the County Superintendent of Schools, Chaffee County, Book B, 28 July 1888, 58 and Record for the Use of the County Superintendent of Schools, Chaffee County, Book A, 1 July 1885, Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado. An earlier Chaffee County School District No. 20 in the Cottonwood Creek area west of Buena Vista was annulled in 1885 for "having failed to maintain a school for nearly two years." The district number was reused when Gas Creek formed a district.

<sup>22</sup> Bessie M. Shewalter, "Chaffee County Schools," in *Under the Angel of Shavano*, George G. Everett and Wendell F. Hutchison (Denver: Golden Bell Press, 1963), 512.

<sup>23</sup> Record for the Use of the County Superintendent of Schools, Chaffee County, Book B, school district officers, 29 August 1888, 110, Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>24</sup> Shaputis and Kelly, *A History of Chaffee County*, 72.

<sup>25</sup> *Buena Vista Democrat*, 19 September 1889; Chaffee County Extension Homemakers, Western Fremont County Homemakers, and Chaffee County Extension Clubs, *A History of Chaffee County Schools, 1860-1986* (N.p.: n.p., ca. 1986). The 1986 history of Chaffee County schools also supports the 1890 construction date.

<sup>26</sup> Affidavit of James C. Irving, 26 March 1890, Record of School Districts for the Years 1892 to 1958, Chaffee County, 76, Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

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The school site was part of a 160-acre homestead patent received by John D. Coon in 1880.<sup>27</sup> In November 1889 Coon transferred approximately two acres to the school district as a school site. He included a provision in the deed stating that “in case School District No. 20 ceases to use said described ground for school purposes for the term of two consecutive years the title of said grounds shall revert to the party of the first part, his heirs or assigns.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Construction of the Current School**

Although slightly less than twenty years old, the Gas Creek School apparently developed serious problems of an unknown nature by 1909. The school closed for the academic year in May. The school board met on 22 May for the purpose of determining whether there should be a new school building erected or not.<sup>29</sup> In early June the *Salida Mail* carried a brief note identifying George Cooper as “one of the men employed to examine the Gas Creek school house.”<sup>30</sup> In mid-June a meeting was held by the residents of School District No. 20 and “all seemed in favor” of constructing a new building. Later in June the school district ran weekly legal notices in the *Salida Mail* requesting bids for “taking down and rebuilding the brick Gas Creek school house in District No. 20; all bids must be in by July 7, 1909.”<sup>31</sup>

The *Salida Mail* reported that “George Cooper of Buena Vista will begin work soon” on the school construction. Cooper (1850-1938) was an English-born mason and builder.<sup>32</sup> The project proceeded during the summer and took several months to complete. By late September the newspaper reported “brick layers at Gas Creek school house have completed their contract. Their work so far has proven satisfactory.”<sup>33</sup> By mid-October the carpenters finished their work on the building.<sup>34</sup> A comparison of photographs of the 1889-90 building and the 1909 school shows the same plan was followed for both (see Figures 2 and 3). It seems likely that windows, doors, and other materials were salvaged and reused.

Andrew Gulliford included a picture of the Gas Creek School in his *America's Country Schools* (1996), stating: “Built from a plan book, this school has double entrances with canopies and an ornate bell tower.”<sup>35</sup> Gulliford believes the building’s symmetrical design suggested a plan book design.<sup>36</sup> He notes that a belfry or bell tower “usually placed above the entrance to the schoolhouse, had become a status symbol for many school districts” by the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup>

Writing in 1963, Bessie M. Shewalter, a teacher and Chaffee County Superintendent of Schools, stated that “the buildings [sic] at Gas Creek are similar in design and were considered quite modern

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<sup>27</sup> John D. Coon, homestead patent, document number 6, 30 March 1880, General Land Office records, U.S. Bureau of Land Management website, [gloreCORDS.blm.gov](http://gloreCORDS.blm.gov), accessed 28 February 2018.

<sup>28</sup> John D. Coon to School District No. 20, Chaffee County, book 64, page 522, 27 November 1889, in the files of the Chaffee County Clerk and Recorder, Salida, Colorado.

<sup>29</sup> *Salida Mail*, 25 May 1909.

<sup>30</sup> *Salida Mail*, 4 June 1909.

<sup>31</sup> *Salida Mail*, 25 June 1909.

<sup>32</sup> *Salida Mail*, 22 June 1909; U.S. Census, Census of Population, Chaffee County, Colorado, manuscript returns, 1910. No explanation of the school’s problem was located in newspaper accounts.

<sup>33</sup> *Salida Mail*, 28 September 1909.

<sup>34</sup> *Salida Mail*, 12 October 1909.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1996), 214. The book incorrectly provides an 1883 date of construction. Several architectural plan books were consulted, but this school’s plan was not found.

<sup>36</sup> Gulliford could not identify what plan book the school might have come from.

<sup>37</sup> Gulliford, *America's Country Schools*, 174.

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when they were built.”<sup>38</sup> The Gas Creek building reflects common school-design principles of the era. Gulliford reported that brick vernacular schools are found throughout the United States:

The majority of brick one-room schools built after the Civil War used mass vernacular construction materials and had hardwood wainscoting halfway up the wall inside the classroom. ... School districts usually hired an expert mason to construct the walls. The buildings tended to follow two basic design tenets: (1) They were symmetrical from the front, with the door squarely in the middle (or, if they had two doors, the front view was always symmetrical); and (2) the door faced the adjacent local road, perhaps as a symbol of the building’s access to anyone in the rural community.<sup>39</sup>

### **School Activities**

In the early part of the twentieth century one-room rural schoolhouses still predominated in Colorado. A 1931 study found 1,910 one-room schools in the state, accounting for about 60 percent of total buildings.<sup>40</sup> Shewalter describes general conditions in early Chaffee County schools:

In few of these schools was any provision made for water for the pupils; drinking water was carried by the bucketful. Coal oil lamps provided light for entertainments and dances given in the building at night. For a number of years the large double seats and desks were used in the school rooms, but in the late twenties these were slowly replaced by more modern desks.

During those early days the school term was short in the small schools, often only three months. Sometimes two 3-month terms would be held during the year. As time passed the school term was extended to six months, then to seven and eight and then to nine months. School attendance was often irregular because of bad weather conditions, the distance pupils lived from the school, and because of work at home.<sup>41</sup>

Gas Creek School was a one-room, one-teacher school that included grades one through eight. Records are incomplete, but teacher turnover appears to have been frequent, with more than thirty women serving as instructors during the school’s operation. Prior to 1907, the school year consisted of seven months or less. Sixteen pupils were enrolled in 1898, when Bettie Sells taught five months of school and received \$45 a month. The school year lengthened to eight months in 1907 and nine months in 1930. Between 1907 and 1940 teacher pay varied between \$50 a month and \$110, with educators with more experience or education drawing higher wages. The number of students during the period ranged from five to sixteen yearly.<sup>42</sup>

Robert N. Donley (1903-81) began attending Gas Creek School at the age of four and graduated from the facility, thereby attending classes in both the old and new buildings. He recalled the teacher sometimes boarding at his home and leaving early to start a fire in the school’s pot-bellied stove to warm the classroom on cold mornings. The school bell pealed at 8:30 a.m., alerting students that class would start in half an hour. Pupils enjoyed fifteen minute recesses in the morning and afternoon, with fox and geese the favorite schoolyard game. Donley remembers dances at the school and Arbor Day celebrations. The narrow leaf cottonwood tree near the northeast corner of the school was

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<sup>38</sup> Shewalter, “Chaffee County Schools,” 514. It is not clear why the author used the plural, unless referring to the 1889-90 and 1909 buildings, both of which followed the same design.

<sup>39</sup> Gulliford, *America’s Country Schools*, 185-86.

<sup>40</sup> *Colorado State University Experiment Station Bulletin* (1931), 17.

<sup>41</sup> Shewalter, “Chaffee County Schools,” 514-515.

<sup>42</sup> County Superintendent’s Record, Chaffee County, Colorado, 1901-1931, Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado; Chaffee County Extension Homemakers, et al, *A History of Chaffee County Schools*.

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planted one Arbor Day, with the name of the teacher and students placed in a jar and buried nearby.<sup>43</sup>

Janet Everson Whitesell, who attended Gas Creek School in the 1937-41 period, recalled that enrollment varied between six and sixteen students yearly. The pupils used the north entrance to enter the school; the south vestibule held a bucket with a dipper. Water for the school was carried by bucket from the ranch across the highway to the east; she did not recall a well on the property. Students sat at desks with tops that lifted; younger students had single desks and older ones utilized twin desks. The slightly raised area between the vestibules was open and held a piano; Whitesell called the space a stage. The privies were located west of the school, with girls using the north one and boys the south one. The shed stored firewood and old books; parents took turns supplying firewood. Whitesell did not recall any playground equipment during her time at the school, and none appear in a 1942 photograph of the school. The pupils played baseball in the schoolyard. Some students rode horses to school; during class, the horses foraged on the school grounds and drank from the irrigation ditch. One of Whitesell's memories was viewing a solar eclipse at the school using smoked glass.<sup>44</sup>

Betty Farrington taught at Gas Creek in 1938-39 during the Depression. She taught fourteen students, with at least one in each of the eight grades at the school (see Figure 4). Her salary totaled \$75 a month, from which she paid a local family \$25 a month for room and board. Farrington recalls a hand-dug well on the property.<sup>45</sup> Heating was provided by a flat-top pot-bellied stove. A 2011 newspaper article reported that "the state and federal governments provided surplus commodities food for lunch for the students and if there was hot food they kept it warm on the stove top. Betty remembers that some of the kids had only cold biscuits for lunch without the free lunch provided."<sup>46</sup>

Cheryl Monaghan attended the school in the early 1950s and believes it had about a dozen students then (see Figure 5). Playground equipment was added to the area south of the school building in the 1940s, and Monaghan recalls "swinging and 'bailing out' of those swings."<sup>47</sup> She was the only student in her grade and remembered "a dirt school yard—playing kick-the-can and just running around and around the building. . . . You always entered through the door on the far right [north]. The other door was the area where your hung up your coat, parked your lunch box, and immediately took your seat."<sup>48</sup>

In addition to its instructional function, events related to education likely occurred in the school, such as Christmas programs, spelling bees, and graduation ceremonies. Gas Creek School also played an important role in the social life of the rural community. Local newspapers reported the school hosted social dances, meetings, dinners, and other events. The MPDF noted such country schools were typically "the only public building for miles" and provided a venue for events such as weddings, box socials, pot lucks, funerals, and casting votes in elections.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Fred Garcia, "Where They Played Fox and Geese," *Denver Post, Empire Magazine*, 18 October 1978, 61. The article referred to the tree as a weeping willow.

<sup>44</sup> Janet Whitesell, Fort Worth, Texas, interview by Thomas H. Simmons, 15 September 2017. The privies currently at the school were the ones she remembers from the time she was a student, supporting the ca. 1935-37 estimated construction date. Her family left the area, but she and her husband visited Chaffee County in summers from 1975 through the 1990s.

<sup>45</sup> Garcia, "Where They Played Fox and Geese," 60. A 1978 newspaper article showed a photograph of a hand pump (no longer extant). The well did not provide water to users outside the parcel and is no longer present.

<sup>46</sup> *Chaffee County Times*, 8 June 2011.

<sup>47</sup> *Wichita Eagle*, 29 September 1957, in the Janet Whitesell photograph and clipping collection, Fort Worth, Texas. The 1957 photograph shows playground apparatus south of the school.

<sup>48</sup> Cheryl Monaghan, Bellevue, Washington, "School Days," 19 May 2009, Nostalgia: Yesterday and Today Blog, <http://nostalgiaYesterdayandToday.blogspot.com>, accessed 14 October 2011.

<sup>49</sup> *Salida Mail*, 24 May 1910 and 27 April 1915; *Chaffee County Times* (Buena Vista), 8 June 2011; Doggett and Wilson,

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## Closure of Gas Creek School and Later Uses

During the twentieth century many of the county's school districts were disbanded or merged with adjoining districts. School District 20 saw small changes to its territory in 1937, 1947, and 1951.<sup>50</sup> A move to save money and improve educational quality led to a school consolidation movement in Colorado in the 1940s and 1950s. In Chaffee County the remaining fourteen districts were merged in 1958 to form two large districts: R-32, centering on Salida and composed of nine districts in the southern part of the county, and R-31, focusing on Buena Vista and consisting of five districts the northern part.<sup>51</sup> District 20 became part of the latter district, and Gas Creek School stopped operating the same year.

The reverter provision in the 1889 deed to the school district resulted in the return of the property to descendants of the Coon family in February 1962.<sup>52</sup> In 1962 and 1964 Robert N. Donley acquired the interests of other heirs and gained ownership of the school (see Figures 6 and 7).<sup>53</sup> In 1978, Donley, a former Gas Creek School student, said he had rejected offers to purchase the property "for fear that the handsome structure would be commercialized, misused or torn down."<sup>54</sup>

In 1980 Robert Donley transferred the property to Kenneth R. Donley, who sold it to Alan M. Cillessen of Golden, Colorado, two years later.<sup>55</sup> Cillessen made interior changes to the school, adding a loft area accessed by stairs and enclosing the area between the two entrance vestibules. He and his wife Pam and their family used the property occasionally in the summer. Following Mr. Cillessen's death in 1991, the school passed to his wife, now Pam Cillessen Lockwood, who lives in Arvada, Colorado.

## 9. Major Bibliographical Resources

### Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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*Rural School Buildings in Colorado*, MPDF, 12-13.

<sup>50</sup> Boundary changes, 5 January 1937, 1 December 1947, and 8 August 1951, Record of School Districts for the Years 1892 to 1958, Chaffee County, 76, Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>51</sup> Shewalter, "Chaffee County Schools," 512-513.

<sup>52</sup> Chaffee County School District R-31 to John D. Coon and heirs, quitclaim deed, 12 February 1962, book 323, page 381, in the files of the Chaffee County Clerk and Recorder, Salida, Colorado.

<sup>53</sup> John Joseph Ayres (heir of Winniebell Ayres, formerly Winniebell Coon) to Robert N. Donley, quitclaim deed, 16 February 1962, book 325, page 125 and Lizzie L. DeWitt (formerly Lizzie L. (Coon) Donley) to Robert N. Donley, quitclaim deed, 19 June 1964, book 355, page 730, in the files of the Chaffee County Clerk and Recorder, Salida, Colorado.

<sup>54</sup> Garcia, "Where They Played Fox and Geese," 61.

<sup>55</sup> Robert N. Donley to Kenneth R. Donley, quitclaim deed, 29 December 1980, book 446, page 872 and Kenneth R. Donley to A.M. Cillessen, quitclaim deed, 26 March 1982, book 456, page 405, in the files of the Chaffee County Clerk and Recorder, Salida, Colorado.

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** 5CF.314

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property:** 1.5

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 38.722757                      Longitude: -106.086911

**UTM Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Zone: 13                      Easting: 405515                      Northing: 4286573

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**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated area is coterminous with Chaffee County Assessor parcel number 342126200118 containing the property, which is located in the Northwest Quarter of the Northwest Quarter of Section 26, Township 15 South, Range 78 West, 6<sup>th</sup> Principal Meridian.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The selected boundary contains all of the resources historically associated with the Gas Creek School.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Thomas H. Simmons and R. Laurie Simmons, Architectural Historians  
organization: Front Range Research Associates, Inc.  
street & number: 3635 West 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
city or town: Denver state: CO zip code: 80211  
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with contributions by

name/title: Marilyn A. Martorano, Archaeologist, RPA  
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street & number: 2817 Humboldt Place  
city or town: Longmont state: CO zip code: 80503  
e-mail: martoranoconsultantsllc@gmail.com  
telephone: 303-845-0085

date: 1 May 2018 (revised)

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Gas Creek School  
City or Vicinity: Nathrop vicinity  
County: Chaffee  
State: Colorado  
Name of Photographer: Thomas H. Simmons (unless otherwise noted)  
Date of Photographs: October 2017

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- 1 of 18, Overview of the property with Mt. Princeton in the distance. View west-northwest.
- 2 of 18, Front of school (Resource 1). View west.
- 3 of 18, Front and south wall of school (Resource 1). View northwest.
- 4 of 18, South wall of school (Resource 1). View north-northeast.
- 5 of 18, South and rear (west) walls of school (Resource 1). View northeast.
- 6 of 18, Rear (west) wall of school (Resource 1). View east.
- 7 of 18, Rear and north wall of school (Resource 1). View southeast.
- 8 of 18, Detail of school bell tower (Resource 1). View northwest.
- 9 of 18, Interior of school classroom (Resource 1). View north-northwest.
- 10 of 18, Shed (Resource 2), flanked by privies. View northwest.
- 11 of 18, Shed (Resource 2), front and east wall. View northwest.
- 12 of 18, North privy (Resource 3) front and south wall. View northwest.
- 13 of 18, North privy (Resource 3) screen. View southwest.
- 14 of 18, South privy (Resource 4) front and south wall. View northwest.
- 15 of 18, Swing (Resource 5) front and south wall. View west.
- 16 of 18, Seesaw (Resource 6). View southwest.
- 17 of 18, Frantz Ditch (Resource 7), View north.
- 18 of 18, Close-up view, burned sediments with clinkers and small pieces of glass (marked by pin flags) in rodent backdirt southwest of the shed and west of the boy's privy. Scale is 12".  
Photographer: Marilyn A. Martorano.

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## List of Maps and Historic Figures

Location Map

Sketch Map

Artifact Sketch Map

Historic Figures

1 of 7, The original 1888 boundary of Chaffee County School District 20 is shown over a USGS topographic mosaic. The boundary is denoted by the solid line, while a star identifies the Gas Creek School. Mapped using verbal description of boundary, Chaffee County Superintendent of Schools records, 1888.

2 of 7, This ca. 1900-03 photograph of the Gas Creek School (view northwest) shows the original 1889-90 building and demonstrates that the same design was followed in the 1909 rebuilding. The image shows a full-width wood deck across the front and a privy at the left edge. Courtesy of Shaputis, *Where the Bodies Are in Central Chaffee County, Colorado* (1995), 37.

3 of 7, Artist/historian Muriel Sibell Wolle captured this southwest view of the Gas Creek School and its north WPA privy in a photograph dated 1942. No playground equipment is shown to the left of the school. Courtesy of Western History and Genealogy Department, photograph X-3339, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

4 of 7, The front of the current 1909 school is shown in this view of the 1938-39 pupils. Courtesy of Buena Vista Heritage, photograph collection, Buena Vista, Colorado.

5 of 7, This ca. 1957 view northwest, shows the school, with the south privy, shed, and playground equipment to the left. The photograph appeared in the *Wichita Eagle* (Wichita, Kansas) in 1957. Courtesy of *Wichita Eagle*, 29 September 1957, 13, Janet Whitesell, clipping and photograph collection, Fort Worth, Texas.

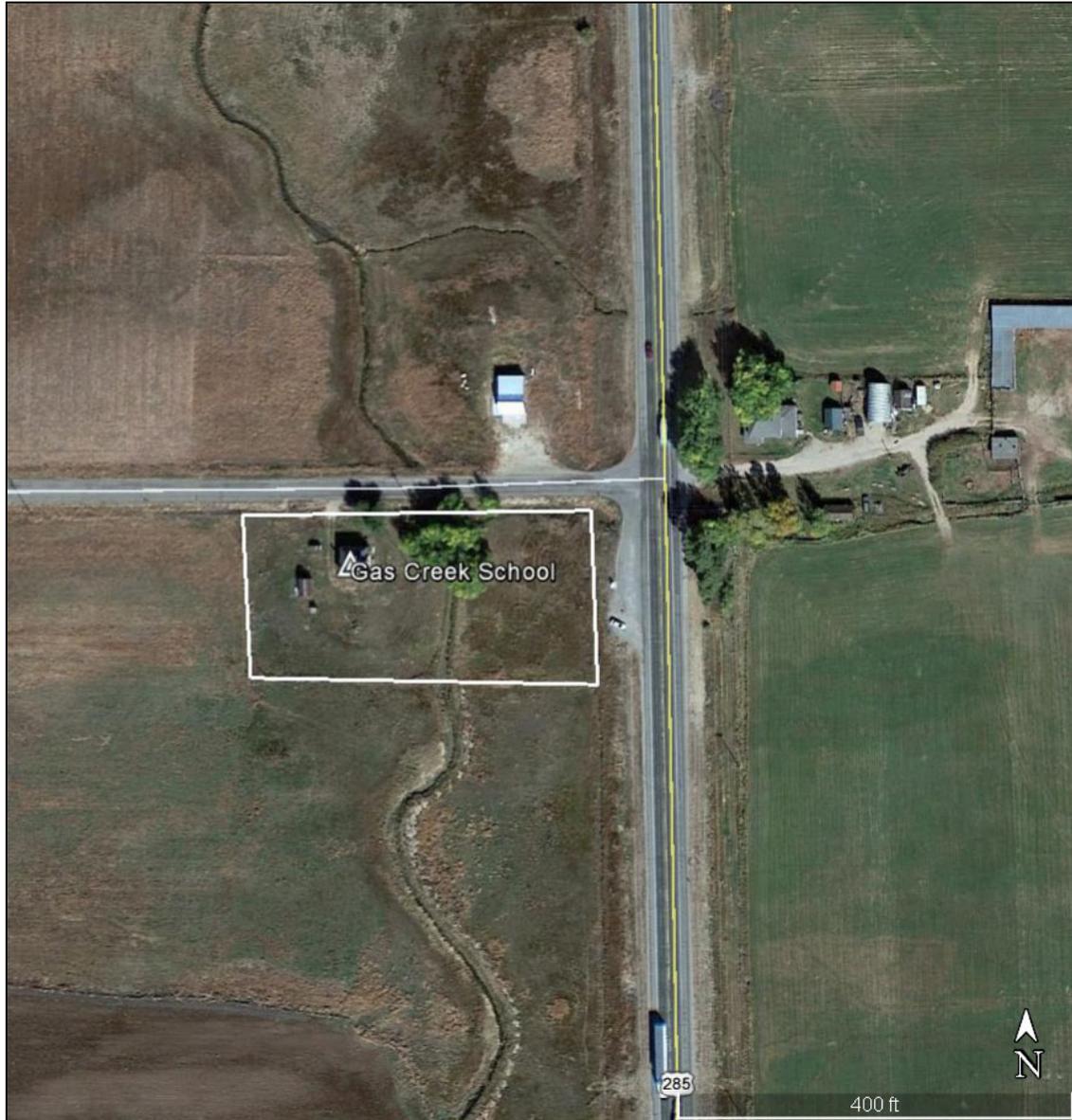
6 of 7, This view southwest in 1973 shows the school, privy (right), and playground equipment to the left. Courtesy of J. Todd, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, 30 December 1973, Jean Hanfelt Collection, Salida Regional Library, Salida, Colorado.

7 of 7, This view northwest in 1973 shows the school, with the south privy, shed, and playground equipment to the left. Courtesy of J. Todd, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, 30 December 1973, Jean Hanfelt Collection, Salida Regional Library, Salida, Colorado.

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### Location Map

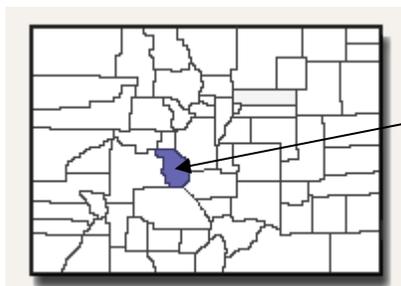


The labeled point indicates the location of the nominated resource, which has the following coordinates:

Latitude: 38.722757

Longitude: -106.086911

Image Date: 13 October 2015

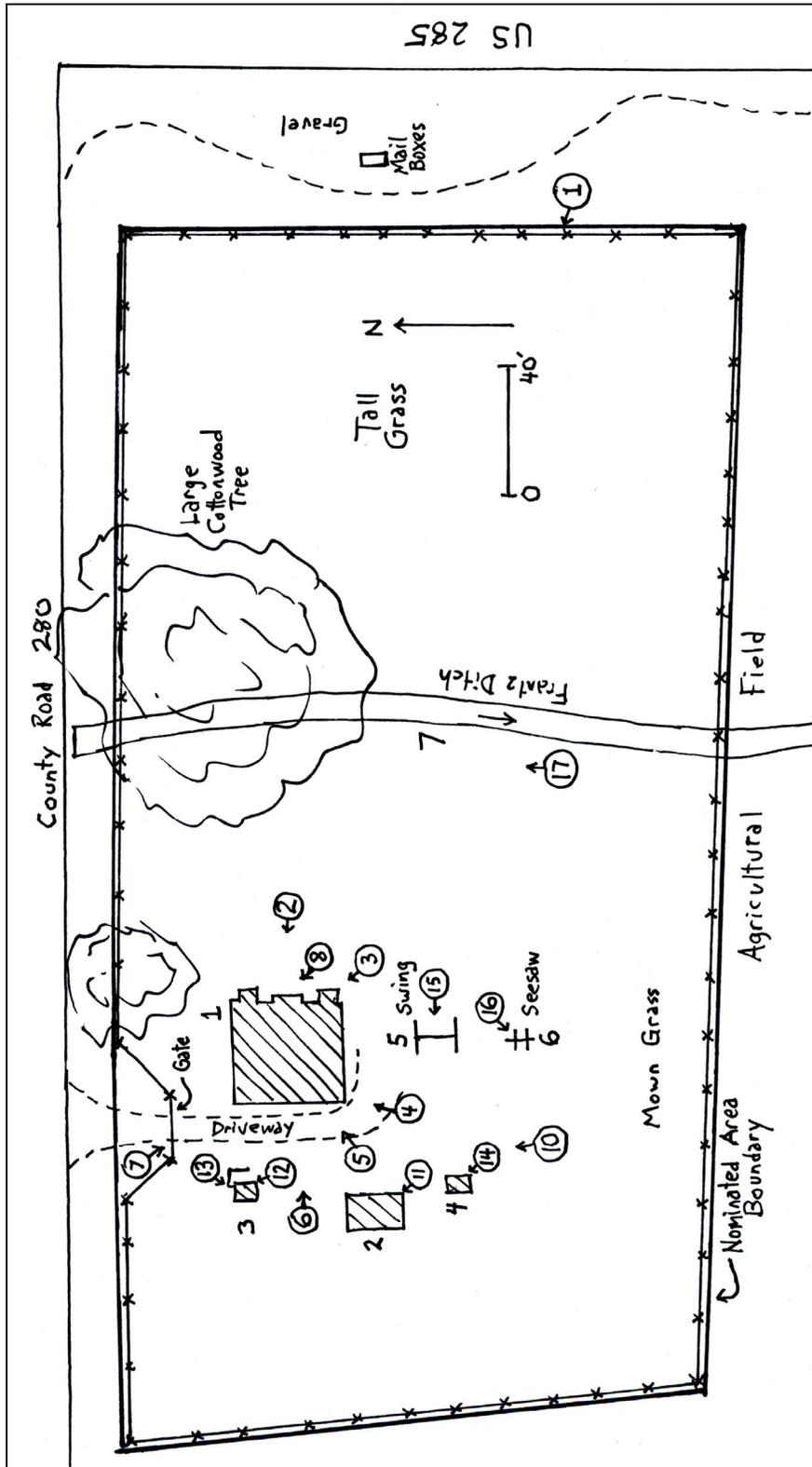


State Perspective:  
Gas Creek School

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### Sketch Map

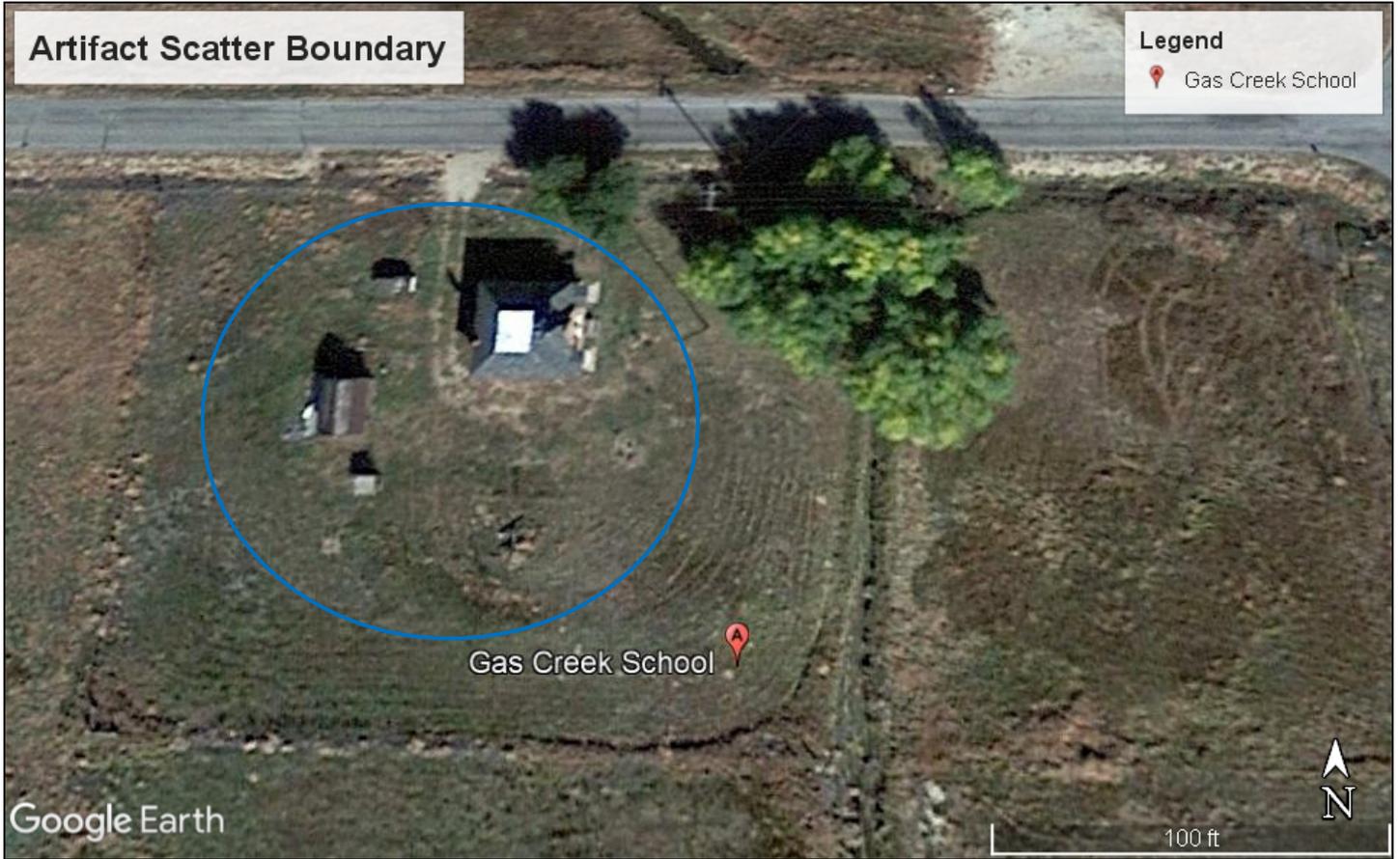


The solid line indicates the nominated area boundary. Numbers beside buildings are resource numbers. Numbers in circles show photograph locations and camera directions.

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### Artifact Sketch Map



Archaeological artifact scatter boundary = 

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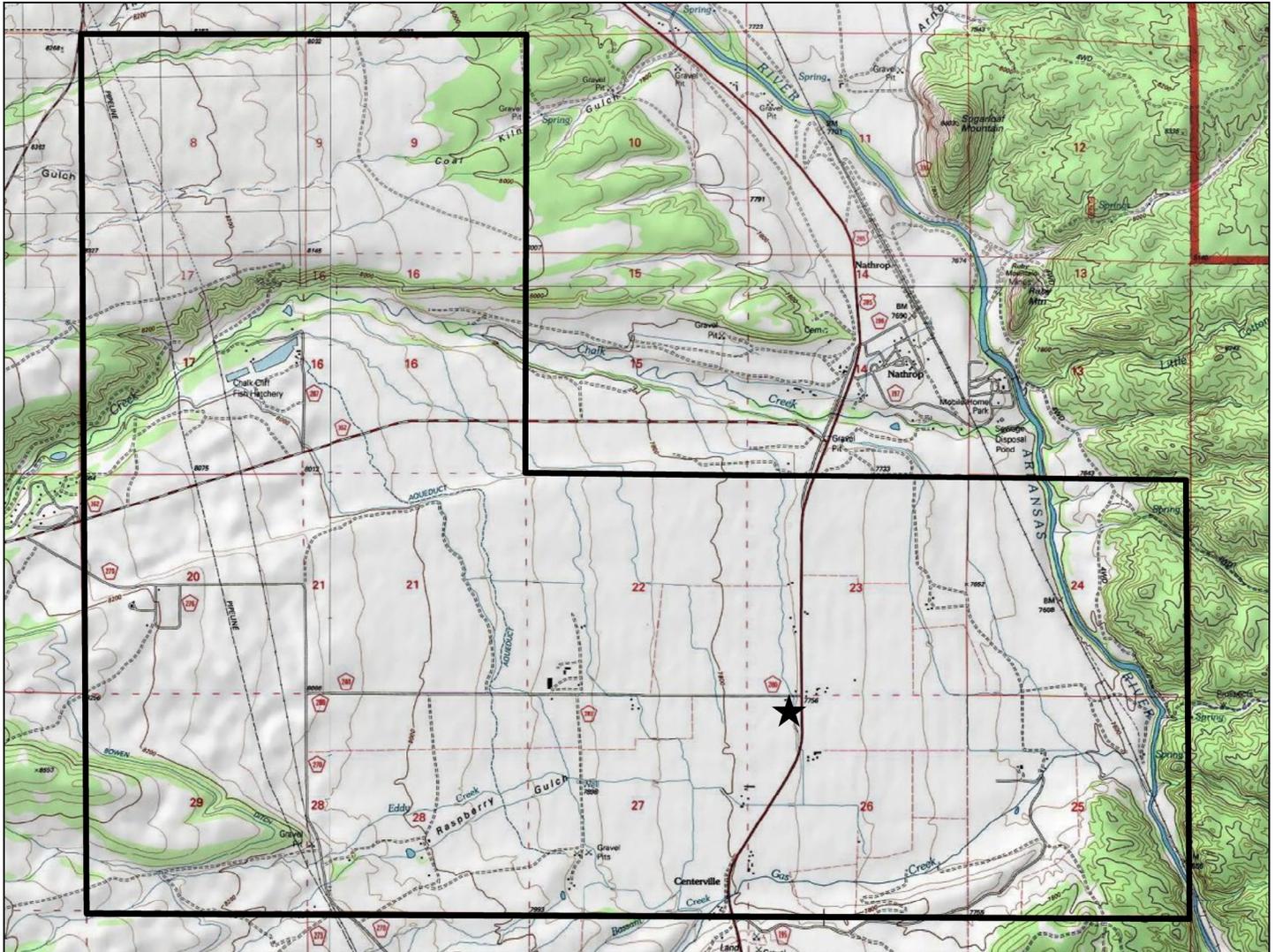


Figure 1. The original 1888 boundary of Chaffee County School District 20 is shown over a USGS topographic mosaic. The boundary is denoted by the solid line, while a star identifies the Gas Creek School. Mapped using verbal description of boundary, Chaffee County Superintendent of Schools records, 1888.

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Figure 2. This ca. 1900-03 photograph of the Gas Creek School (view northwest) shows the original 1889-90 building and demonstrates that the same design was followed in the 1909 rebuilding. The image shows a full-width wood deck across the front and a privy at the left edge. Courtesy of Shaputis, *Where the Bodies Are in Central Chaffee County, Colorado* (1995), 37.



Figure 3. Artist/historian Muriel Sibell Wolle captured this southwest view of the Gas Creek School and its north WPA privy in a photograph dated 1942. No playground equipment is shown to the left of the school. Courtesy of Western History and Genealogy Department, photograph X-3339, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

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Figure 4. The front of the current 1909 school is shown in this view of the 1938-39 pupils. Courtesy of Buena Vista Heritage, photograph collection, Buena Vista, Colorado.



Figure 5. This ca. 1957 view northwest, shows the school, with the south privy, shed, and playground equipment to the left. The photograph appeared in the *Wichita Eagle* (Wichita, Kansas) in 1957. Courtesy of *Wichita Eagle*, 29 September 1957, 13, Janet Whitesell, clipping and photograph collection, Fort Worth, Texas.

Gas Creek School (Rural School Buildings in Colorado MPDF)  
Name of Property

Chaffee, CO  
County and State



Figure 6. This view southwest in 1973 shows the school, privy (right), and playground equipment to the left. Courtesy of J. Todd, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, 30 December 1973, Jean Hanfelt Collection, Salida Regional Library, Salida, Colorado.

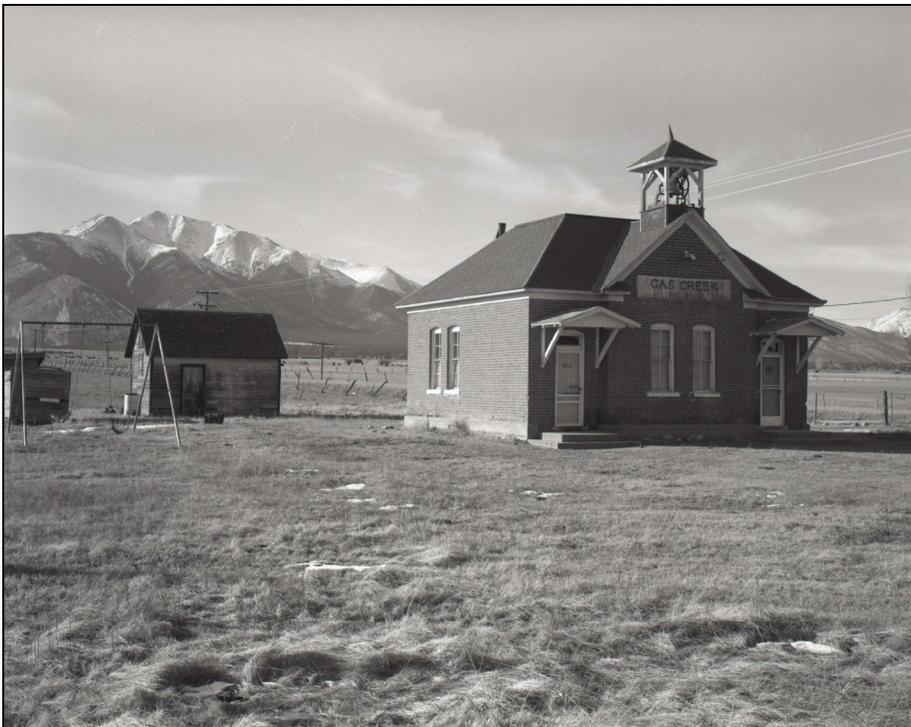


Figure 7. This view northwest in 1973 shows the school, with the south privy, shed, and playground equipment to the left. Courtesy of J. Todd, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, 30 December 1973, Jean Hanfelt Collection, Salida Regional Library, Salida, Colorado.