United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form  

1. Name of Property  
   historic name McVey School  
   other names/site number Little Red Schoolhouse  

2. Location  
   street & number junction of Highway 50 and Route M  
   city or town Sedalia  
   state Missouri  
   county Pettis  
   code MO  
   code 159  
   zip code 65301  

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 [ ].)  
   Signature of certifying official/Title Claire P. Blackwell/Deputy SHPO  
   State or Federal agency and bureau Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
   Date Sept 95  

4. National Park Service 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  
   (See continuation sheet [ ].)  
   Signature of the Keeper Date
5. Classification

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6. Function or Use

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<td>Work in Progress</td>
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7. Description

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<td></td>
<td>walls brick</td>
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<td></td>
<td>other</td>
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Narrative Description

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

Applicable National Register Criteria

[X] 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.

[X] 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.

[X] G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Education

Architecture

Periods of Significance

1886 to 1956

Significant Dates

n/a

Significant Person(s)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

unknown/Cousley, William

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

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

Primary location of additional data:

[X] State Historic Preservation Office

[ ] Other State Agency

[ ] Federal Agency

[ ] Local Government

[ ] University

[ ] Other:

Name of repository: ____________________________

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

#__________________________
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one acre.

UTM References

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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.)

[ ] See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Rhonda Chalfant
organization: Chalfant Consulting
date: June 20, 1999
street & number: 619 West 32nd Street
telephone: 660/826-5592
city or town: Sedalia
state: MO
zip code: 65301

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps
A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs
Representative black and white photographs of the property.

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

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

name: Pettis County Commission
street & number: Pettis County Courthouse
telephone: 660/826-4892
city or town: Sedalia
state: MO
zip code: 65301
Summary: McVey School, located at the junction of Highway 50 and Route M on the east city limits of Sedalia, in Pettis County, is a brick, one-room school built in 1886. The property consists of a one contributing building, the schoolhouse; a contributing structure, the privy; and a noncontributing object, a school bell from the Broadway School mounted on a brick and wood platform; a smaller bell mounted on a wooden pole and a metal pump (see site plan) are not counted. McVey School, named for prominent landowner Absalom McVey, was used as a schoolhouse until 1956, when the county school districts were consolidated and McVey School students became part of the Sedalia school district. In 1966, the building was restored and opened as a museum maintained by the Pettis County Historical Society. It contains desks, blackboard, piano, pictures, textbooks, and maps used by the school and dating throughout the period when the school was in use. The exterior of the building retains significant integrity. Despite the 1966 restoration, repairs to the floor sills, roof, and plaster ceiling are now needed, and a more accurate restoration of the interior artifacts to the early twentieth century is planned by the Pettis County Historical Society.

Narrative: McVey School is a one-room brick school building built in 1886. The original district, known as Champion District, No. 31, extended as far west as New York Avenue. The first building for the district was a frame building built prior to 1872 on land owned by Absalom McVey, an important property owner in east Sedalia and Pettis County. This original building was at the corner of Seventh Street and Marshall Avenue. When McVey sold the land to the Missouri Pacific Railroad for use as a stockyard in 1882, the school district purchased one acre of land at the corner of Highway 50 and Route M from John and Lizzie Decker for $125 and moved the building to the new site. This building was destroyed by fire, believed to have been accidentally set by vagrants who had taken shelter in the building. A frame building was built to replace the burned building. In 1886, the frame building was replaced by the existing brick building. William Cousley, a Sedalia builder and contractor, was paid $650 for constructing the building.

The 150 foot by 150 foot lot, now enclosed by a chain-link fence, is shaded by several trees. The building is oriented toward the north, facing what is now Highway 50 and what in 1886 was Twelfth Street. The hand pump for the well is located 6 feet to the southeast of the building. A two-seater privy is in the far southeast corner of the lot and is shaded by trees. A school bell, donated by former pupil Mrs. Don Nottingham during the 1966 restoration, is mounted on a bracket just east of the front door of the building.

The building measures 19 feet by 29 feet, with walls 12 inches thick. A concrete wall vestibule, 12 feet by 5 feet 6 inches, was added to the north of the building prior to 1942, according to photos taken of Jewel Miller and her class sometime between 1938 and 1942. The vestibule door opens to the east, providing a 4 foot 6 inch by 4 foot 8 inch weatherlock for the door into the classroom. The vestibule also provides a place for coal storage in a 5 feet 10 inch by 4 foot 8 inch closet on its west side. The building has three segmental arch windows on the east facade and three segmental arch windows on the west facade. Their
exterior sills are pre-fabricated steel. These windows provided ventilation during the warm months, and light for the building, as the building did not get electricity until the early twentieth century. At some point in the past, the segmental arches were closed in with wood and straight topped windows were installed. No records documenting the use of electricity in the building have been found. The lights were installed when electricity was put in, according to local tradition. The light fixtures are typical of the 1920s, leading to the conclusion that the electricity was brought to the building in the 1920s. Heat was originally provided by a coal stove, vented through a chimney at the south end of the building. At some point, the south chimney was removed, a chimney was built on the north end of the building, and a propane stove was installed.

The interior of the building features plaster walls above 3 foot high tongue-in-groove wainscoting, with a blackboard above the wainscoting on the south wall. The blackboard is original, and was made by painting a black finish on the plaster wall. The three windows on the east and west sides of the building have horizontal lights arranged in a two over two pattern and measure 7 feet by 34 inches, and surrounded by 7 inch wide molding with bulls-eye corner blocks. The door to the vestibule is in the middle of the south wall of the vestibule. On either side of the door are storage cabinets. The cabinet on the west side of the door is 4 feet 6 inches wide and 8 feet 3 inches tall, and was believed to have served as a library. On the east side of this cabinet is the flue for the propane stove. The cabinet on the east side of the door is 4 feet wide and 5 feet high, and served as a coat closet and storage area. A small table is placed between the door and the east cabinet; the table holds a water basin. A wooden box holding paper towels is mounted on the side of the cabinet.

The interior retains the original desks and chairs, some purchased by mail order from Sears and Roebuck, others made by the New Peabody and the Globe companies. The desks are in a variety of sizes to fit children of various ages. Other interior fixtures include a teacher's desk, a piano, pictures of Washington and Lincoln, bookshelves, a forty-eight star American flag, two sets of pull-down maps, and a collection of old textbooks. While a piano would have been an important addition to a nineteenth century school and a teacher who was musical would have been considered an asset, no records have been identified to indicate when the piano was added to the school's furnishings. The piano was used in the school during the 1940s when Pettis County had an itinerant music teacher who traveled from school to school to teach music; she also provided private music lessons in the summer months. The pictures, the flag, and some of the textbooks were in use when the school closed in 1956. The teacher's desk was donated by Dr. C. F. Scotten during the renovation of the building in 1966.

A non-contributing object, a brick platform housing a large school bell salvaged from the Broadway School, the first public school building built in Sedalia, was placed on the site in 1966. Although the bell is of some historical interest, it is considered a non-contributing object since it was placed at the site in 1966 and was not part of the school's original equipment.
Figure 1 -- Sedalia, 1896
Figure 2  Pettis County Schools - McVey School District
Figure 3

1. Site of original building - 7th & Marshall
2. Site of existing building - Highway 50 (Broadway) & Rt M
McVey School
Pettis County, MO

1. coat closet
2. library closet
3. blackboard
4. coal storage
Summary: McVey School, located at the junction of Highway 50 and Route M, Sedalia vicinity, Pettis County, is significant under criterion A in the area of EDUCATION, and under criterion C in the area of ARCHITECTURE. It is a one-room school in use from 1886 to 1956, and represents the concept of free, public education in rural Missouri. Its architecture is representative of the "mass vernacular" schoolhouse construction using mass produced materials in a form traditionally associated with the one-room schoolhouse. Children in grades one through eight attended McVey School from the time the building was built until it closed in 1956 during a consolidation movement. McVey School served several functions demanded of public schools in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including providing basic education, Americanizing immigrants, serving as a community gathering place, and providing club activities for children. Although the period of significance--1886 through 1956--extends past the fifty year cut off point, its significance was well established before that date, and the end date represents a continuation of its use as a public school. The use of the one-room school so late in the twentieth century reveals the reluctance of Pettis Countians to improve education. Few changes were made in the building during its use as a school. A vestibule was added sometime prior to 1942. Electricity was added in the early twentieth century, and a fuel oil/propane stove replaced the original coal stove. The building currently needs some repair, including a new roof, replacement of sills and floor joists, and interior and exterior painting. It does, however, retain significant integrity. The Pettis County Historical Society restored the building for use as a museum in 1966. As the building needs repairs, the Pettis County Historical Society plans to repair the building and do a more accurate restoration of the interior for continued use as a museum.

Narrative: The McVey School building, the third building to serve what was originally called the Champion District, No. 31, was built in 1886. The first building in the district was outside the city limits. The district bordered the Sedalia School District, even after the city limits were extended to include the McVey School property. The first building for the district was built prior to 1872 at the corner of Seventh Street and Marshall Avenue. Although Pettis County had been established in 1834, few public schools existed until after the Civil War. The city of Sedalia was platted in 1857, and replatted in 1860. At that time, the Missouri Pacific Railroad had reached Sedalia, and established a depot in East Sedalia, approximately one mile from the site of the school. A community grew up around the depot and railroad shops, consisting mostly of workers at the shops.

According to the 1880-1881 School Commissioner's Report to the State Superintendent, Pettis County had 7,972 white children of school age and 892 black children. Of these 5,812 white children and 535 black children were attending the 100 white schools and 20 black schools and being taught by 163 teachers. The figures are, however, somewhat misleading. A "lack of interest on the part of parents" was given as an explanation for the number of children not attending school; however, the ages of children--between six and twenty--included a number of young people who would already have completed the
elementary school program and a number who would have been working, either on farms or in local businesses.

The rural school districts were small; in Pettis County they averaged nine square miles, with the school near the center of the district, so that no child would have to walk more than 3.5 miles to school. At the turn of the century, Pettis County had 99 rural schools. Consolidation between 1915 and 1920 reduced the number of districts to 80, but did not affect the McVey district. The typical one-room school of the turn of the century had twenty to thirty students. A photograph of teacher Ophelia Wherley, taken in 1890-91, shows twenty-five students. The population of the district seemed to become smaller in the mid-twentieth century. Photographs of McVey School during the tenure of Jewel Miller in 1941-42 show 15 students; photographs taken in 1943-44 show 7 students, but this is probably not the full student population.

Being especially close to Sedalia may have made McVey School somewhat different from other rural schools. While teachers often boarded with students' families, this was not a common practice at McVey School. This may have been because the McVey district was so close to Sedalia, where most of the teachers lived, and within walking distance of the end of the streetcar line. Sophia Mothersbaugh, teacher from 1928 -1930, recalls riding the street car as far east as it ran, then walking or ice skating to school when the roads were iced over in winter.

Education was thought by nineteenth century social critics to "sweeten and hedge in the family circle and drive frivolity from a community, protecting the members from the inroads of vice and immorality." Missouri law mandated that the presence of twenty students in a district required the building of a school; the district school board met once a year to set the tax levy and length of the school term. Despite a national movement advocating education for all children and stipulations in the Missouri Constitution requiring free public education, local residents were frequently reluctant to provide public monies to pay for education. For example, the first Sedalia School district levy election in 1866 was bitterly contested by those who felt the tax burden to be "outrageous." Although the levy passed and a school for black children and a school for white children were built in Sedalia, problems with funding continued, and periodically the terms would be cut short because of lack of money for teachers' salaries.

The 1882 History of Pettis County, which detailed the difficulties of establishing schools and praises the progress of the Sedalia Public Schools, acknowledged the progress made in education since the settling of the area in the 1820s. The burst of prosperity for school districts between 1865 and 1875, accompanied by state law mandating the office of county superintendent of schools, was a time of growth in public education in both city and county. The superintendent was to provide guidance to the teachers in proper methods of instruction and to serve as a model educator. The writer of the History called for the "superintendent to be a scholar, a Christian of the highest type, who loves the free schools and the children's interests as he loves himself."
The replacement by state law of the county superintendent with a county commissioner of schools, an attempt to correct corruption in some districts, was blamed for the decline in quality of schools, especially rural schools, after 1875. The commissioner was responsible for administering the pedagogy examination, hiring teachers, and making an annual report to the state, but did not provide supervision or leadership for the teachers, leaving "schoolboards and teachers embarrassed and lukewarm." 8

The 1882 History further laments the quality of rural schools, noting "the county can boast of but few professional teachers. Many teach as a stepping to some other more lucrative avocation." 9 The office of teacher was open to anyone who passed the pedagogy examination, was of good moral character, and could pay the $1.50 fee. The second-class examination, which certified a teacher for one year, included "orthography, reading, penmanship, arithmetic, English grammar, modern geography, United States history, and civil government." The "first-class certificate, good for two years, added natural science and physiology to the subjects covered." 10 Most of the teachers at McVey School were young single women. Most taught at McVey School for only a year or two before either moving to other schools or before retiring to be married. 11

Perhaps teaching was not a valued vocation because of the level of salary; however, low salaries were often justified because most teachers were young women. Teachers' salaries were low and country school teachers' salaries were especially low; Sedalia teachers' salaries ranged from $35 to $50 in the 1880s, with white men being paid the most and black women the least. The average county salary for a teacher was $36.90 for male teachers and $36.70 for female teachers. 12 J. West Goodwin of the Sedalia Bazoo noted that the teaching field was crowded and wages low, leaving a woman the option of starving in honor or becoming a prostitute. 13 In an attempt to overcome the lack of trained teachers, Pettis County offered teachers' institutes, held in the fall of the year before the school term started. These institutes provided instruction in teaching, important at a time when a college degree was not necessary for teacher certification.

McVey School provided basic education to students in grades one through eight. It also served other functions expected of a school in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the 1913 and 1914 school terms, McVey School participated in the "Americanization" of immigrant children. When the Missouri Pacific Railroad hired a number of Mexican laborers, these men and their families lived near the MoPac shops within the McVey school district. Their children attended McVey School, then taught by Mecca Palmer, learning English and American culture in a manner typical of immigrants to the United States.

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8 History of Pettis County. 1886, 326.
9 History of Pettis County. 1882, 328.
10 History of Pettis County. 1882, 331.
11 Typescript listing teachers prepared by Dr. Claude Foster Scotten, former County Superintendent of Schools.
12 History of Pettis County. 1882, 329.
13 J. West Goodwin. Sedalia Bazoo. 10 April 1877, 16 October 1877.
States. The school likely served as a location for community events, though no documentation of this can be found. McVey School did provide music classes and school clubs, which exhibited at the State Fair. McVey School had a "Girls' Sunshine Club," provided Halloween parties for its students, and held eighth grade graduation ceremonies.

There are many possible reasons why the Pettis County area was reluctant to provide adequate schools staffed with professional teachers. According to historian Merle Curti, farmers were traditionally hostile or indifferent to the battle for better schools. The limited curriculum of the country schools had little to offer the farmer in carrying on his daily work. The curriculum was limited by the qualifications of the teachers, and by a concept of education that stressed rote memory of classical subjects with little practical application.

In addition, many populists believed the schools reinforced the caste system, and that country schools intended to keep farm children on the farm, and thus deny them opportunities for advancement. Curti suggests that the schools in part were motivated by the industrialists' desire for cheap labor force, only moderately educated but obedient and respectful of rank and power. The schools in the Pettis County area maintained this attitude, in part because of the importance of industry to the area's economy. Since students in high school had to provide their own transportation and buy their own books, many of the working class children were effectively kept out of high school. Not until the 1940s were students from McVey School bused to the Sedalia high school at district expense.

The architecture is a type described by Fred Schroeder as "mass vernacular," meaning that the building follows a standard vernacular pattern associated with schoolhouses, and that it uses mass produced materials in its construction. This description, as explained by Schroeder, notes the use of mass produced elements such as wainscoting, moldings, dimension lumber, cast-iron desks, and are traditional rather than architect designed. The typical design features a one-room, gable-end building with a blackboard at one gable end, windows on both sides, and the door on the wall opposite the blackboard wall building typical of one-room schools throughout the country.14

14Fred Schroeder, cited in Debbie Sheals, "Plum Grove School Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places."

This design was patterned after one proposed in 1832 by William Alcott as an improvement over the log school building with desks mounted in the wall and backless benches for student seating. Alcott, writing in 1832, recommended that all students face the teacher, that they be provided with desks with storage space and seats with backs. He advocated large windows for light and ventilation, adequate storage space for educational materials, such as a globe, books, and scientific apparatus.15

15William Alcott, cited in Debbie Sheals, "Plum Grove School Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places."

This design, which had become popular by the late-nineteenth century, was not approved of by all education authorities. In Michigan, for example, the one-room school was "badly located, exposed to the noise, dust, and danger of the highway, unattractive, . . . too small, . . . badly lighted, . . . not properly
ventilated, . . . imperfectly warmed, . . ." and poorly furnished and equipped. The charges leveled against the Michigan schools may well have applied to McVey School as well. In a year when the school had 25 students, each student had 17 square feet of space. Windows augmented by kerosene lamps did not provide adequate light appropriate for reading; a coal stove provided uneven heat, making some parts of the building too warm and others too cold.

Despite such criticisms, the "mass-vernacular" schoolhouse continued to be built and to be used throughout the Midwest until well into the twentieth century. Most fell victim to the consolidation movement of the 1950s. Few of the buildings remain today. Only a few stand in Pettis County, where they are used as community centers or have been remodeled for use as dwellings. The McVey School should be preserved as an example of the desire for education and the limits of rural education.

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Appendix

Teachers at McVey School

1872  Joseph Kingsley
1878  B. F. Winfrey
1883  Lucy Bapple
1884  Lucy Reynolds
1889 (spring)  Eva Thomas
1889 (fall)  Julia Cooper
1890 - 1891  Ophelia Wherley
1903  Myrtle Donohue Johnson
1906  Nora Hotenspiller
1913 - 1915  Mecca Palmer
1918 - 1919  Daisy Dillow
1920 - 1921  Minerva Merceraux
1921 - 1922  (Miss) Snowden Mitchell
1922 - 1923  Isabelle Knapp
1923 - 1924  Mary Johnson
1924 - 1925  Margaret Lujin
1925 - 1926  Dollie Williams
1926 - 1927  (Miss) Cecil Thistlewaite
1927 - 1928  Mrs. L. T. Thompson
1928 - 1930  Sophia Mothersbaugh
1930 - 1933  Gladys Griffin
1933 - 1935  Ruth Barrick
1935 - 1937  Marguerite Keller
1937-1938  Genevieve Bond
1938 - 1942  Jewell Miller
1942 - 1944  Mrs. C. F. Scotten
1944 - 1946  Mrs. John Witcher
1946 - 1947  Mary E. Hausam
1927 - 1954  Mrs. John Witcher
1954 - 1956  Mrs. George West


McVey, W. A. *The Sweet and the Sour of West Central Missouri*. Sedalia, MO: n. pub, n.d.

---. *Yesteryears*. Sedalia, MO: n. pub, n.d.


Scotten, Claude Foster. *A History of the Schools of Pettis County*.

Scrapbook and photographs in collection of the Pettis County Historical Society.


10. Geographical Data

**Boundary Description:** Beginning at the intersection of the south right-of-way of Highway 50 and the east right-of-way of Route M, proceed east along the south right-of-way of Highway 50 150 feet; then proceed south 150 feet; then proceed west 150 feet; then proceed north along the east right-of-way of Route M to the point of beginning.

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary includes the McVey School and surrounding property which retains integrity. East and south of the McVey School are modern school buildings.

**Photographs:**

The following information is the same for all photographs:

- McVey School
- Pettis County, MO
- Rhonda Chalfant
- July 1999
- Rhonda Chalfant
- 619 West 32nd Street, Sedalia, MO 65301

- Photo #1 -- camera facing southwest
- Photo #2 -- camera facing west/southwest
- Photo #3 -- camera facing northwest
- Photo #4 -- interior, camera facing south
- Photo #5 -- school clock
- Photo #6 -- interior, camera facing north
- Photo #7 -- interior, camera facing northwest