St. Deroin School - Dist. #56

Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier
HISTORIC SITE FORM

State: Nebraska  County: Richardson, Nemaha

Location (in miles & direction from nearest town): 14 miles southeast of Bonneville

Is this the original location? No, moved in 1903 when river changed course

Name of building & origin of name: St. Deroi School — named after village, which was named for half-breed Joseph Deroi who laid out village in 1853.

Name & number of the district: #36 (from 1907 to 1944 as Nemaha County School)

Date built: 1872  Years in use: until 1944

Who built it? A contractor or the community? Michael Brannon (lived in St. Deroi)

Does it look like it came from a plan book or was it designed by the community? Designed by community — later, when moved, it was rebuilt from salvaged materials

Names of former teachers:
Emmet Allen

Names of former students (family names only):

Name & address of person in charge of building:
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission

Who is the owner?
Eugene T. Mehaney, Director
Lincoln, NE
COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY HISTORIC SITE FORM

Architectural Features:

Size of building ________________ 33' x 27

Number of Windows (four pane, six pane, etc.) ________________ 7-8-pane

Number of doors (entrances) ________________ 2 front doors

Number of classrooms ________________ 1

Bell tower or cupola ________________ Flat roof

Materials used (wood, brick, stone, etc.) ________________ brick

Type of roof ________________ Flat

Outhouses ________________ None currently standing

Playground Equipment ________________

Color of building & trim ________________ white trim

Coal shed or stable ________________

Teacherage ________________ Yes

Flagpole ________________

Other architectural features: ________________ Wooden enclosed well nearby

Anything left inside? ________________ Teacher's desk, student's desks, wood bin (enclosed), kerosene wall lamps, blackboard, bookcase, flag, maps

Narrative Information: Did any special events happen at the school? What stories do people remember?

See attached brochure

Current condition & use: ________________ Restored by County of Parks Commission, Used as seasonal museum

District records available: yes ___ no ___ where stored _______

Black & white photo taken: yes ___ no ___ See photo copying shot of students in front of school

Old photos available: yes ___ no ___

Does the building have any state or national historic designation? Yes ___ state

Name & address of surveyor ________________ James L. Dertien, date 2/81
St. Deroin School was salvaged and moved to high ground when the Missouri River changed its course. Note the youngsters in the foreground, sitting on the edge of the bank. General store (now restored) is at right with residence behind, so photo was apparently taken about 1910.

If history is your "thing", you'll find plenty to stir the imagination at the Nebraska Game and Park's Commission's Indian Cave State Park. In addition to the petroglyphs left by those mysterious inhabitants of long ago, you'll find the remnants of a mid-19th Century river settlement known as St. Deroin. The first townsit in Nemaha County, the village was laid out in 1853 by a half-breed named Joseph Deroin.

One of the chain of small communities that served as trading and supply posts for the river traffic, St. Deroin was a bustling town of 300 people by the turn of the century. However, it was doomed by the ever-shifting channel of the river, the subsequent flooding, and a supposed outbreak of cholera.

Education first came to St. Deroin in 1858, when a subscription school was inaugurated. That schooling served early-day residents until 1866, when A. J. Ritter, a prominent local citizen, took a hand in the establishment of a public school.

The original wooden structure was replaced in 1872 by this one-room brick structure, which was restored by the Game and Parks Commission in 1978. Most pupils just went to the fourth grade, and school terms lasted only about three months in those early days. Parents bought all their children's books and supplies, and the books were handed down from child to child. The teachers, in turn, taught from whatever books the student happened to have.

During those boisterous frontier days, teaching certificates were still in the future. Teachers were generally young men of the community who happened to have some formal education.

After a visit to the school on June 20, 1871, the Nemaha County superintendent wrote in his report, "The pupils are studying Alphabet 40, Reading 40, Geography 8, Grammar 6, and Mental Arithmetic 10."

After another visit on November 10, 1871, he wrote still another, more detailed report. "The school house is rather inferior to any. I will not attempt to describe it, as Judge Ritter informs us here a new one will be erected soon. However, we will speak of the stove. Judge says it is the best in the state. We do not know how that is, but we can say of a truth here, it is the best in the County. This is to their credit, it ought to be in a better house and hope it will be as another year rolls around.

"Books are complicated. Mr. Emmet Allen is the teacher. He is a young man of some experience, and I believe he will give general satisfaction."

When the brick schoolhouse was built, the future of this river town looked bright indeed. Consequently, a large school was built. There were 61 students during its first year in 1872, and members of the Holiness Church also held regular meetings there.

The outlook changed by the turn of the
Teacher Nettie Conner (later Mrs. Russell Hoover of Auburn) had 20 pupils in 1924 when this photo was taken. A porch was later added to the school, which also served as community hall, church, and voting place. The cover of this pamphlet was designed from a post card photograph of students at St. Deroin School taken in October 1912. The teacher at that time was Maude Clive.

In the early part of the 19th century. In 1908, the Missouri River changed channels and slowly cut away the banks, destroying most of the town. Acres at a time were swept away, as the relentless river pursued its new course. Farmland and buildings simply disappeared overnight.

As the Missouri edged ever closer to the school, residents decided to move it to higher ground, salvaging what brick and lumber they could. It was relocated on the south end of the bluff, still within the old townsite, on the site of what had once been an old hotel. The reconstructed school was smaller (approximately 12 feet shorter) than the original building, and it had a flat roof. Since the townspeople were able to save seven window casings, the new building had three windows on each side and one between the doors.

The salvaged school served 30 students for six months, but the town of St. Deroin was doomed. When the store and a residence were moved to the high bluff ground near the school, it marked the end of the town's use as a Missouri River portage.

Education continued, however. From 1909 to 1944, Nemaha County operated the school as District 56, and the structure also served local families as a church, community house, and polling place. It still stands as a symbol of the importance of education to early-day Nebraskans.

Restoration of the school is as authentic as possible. Considerable effort went into the research of old photographs and to studying the ruins of the structure before reconstruction was undertaken. Former teachers and students contributed greatly in efforts to locate furnishings and other items for display.