



Wilcox School  
Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas  
County and State

**5. Classification**

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

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

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

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>	
<u>1</u>		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
<u>1</u>		<b>Total</b>

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: school  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL: Club house  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: VERNACULAR  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: STONE  
walls: STONE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof: WOOD  
other: BRICK CHIMNEY  
\_\_\_\_\_

Wilcox School  
Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas  
County and State

---

### **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.)

---

### **Elaboration**

Wilcox School-District No. 29 was built in 1886 by early settlers of the area.<sup>1</sup> The school was constructed of Niobrara limestone quarried on the south side of the Smoky Hill River, approximately one-half mile south of the school site. The schoolhouse is a simple rectangular form with a gable roof. There are two entry bays on the front of the building, a chimney on the rear, and three windows on each of the two sides. The form and style of the schoolhouse are typical of early one-room country schoolhouses. Constructed of native limestone and bearing no specific stylistic references, the school is classified as a vernacular structure.

The interior of the school also reflects the style and layout of traditional one-room country schools. The walls are plaster with wood wainscoting and the ceiling is pressed metal. A stove is located toward one end (the back) of the school and the entry foyer on the north end was used as a cloak room with coat hooks still in place. With the exception of the entry bays, the school is one-room, designed to serve all children of families in the area.

#### Site

Wilcox School District 29 is located 14.8 miles south of WaKeeney and the intersections of Interstate 70 and Highway 283. The school sits on the east side of Highway 283 between mile markers 131 and 130. Situated on a one-acre site, the school stands on a small hillside overlooking the Smoky Hill River valley. The site is mostly buffalo grass bordered by a farm that is enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program and planted in grass.

A gravel road on the south side of the site provides access to the school; a dirt parking area is located south of the school. There is no playground equipment or other structures on the site. There is no evidence of a well on the site but there is electrical service. A foundation of an outhouse is extant northeast of the school but the structure is reported to have been blown away by a tornado. A stone foundation measuring 12.2 feet a 7.6 feet is extant on the east end of the school, presumed to be remnants of a coal storage shed.

#### Exterior

The one-story stone schoolhouse is a simple rectangular form measuring approximately 20 x 30 feet. The wood frame gable roof has one-by sheathing and some wood shingles. The peak of the gable is 23'6" high and the eaves are 14' 6" high.

The school faces west, fronting Highway 283. There are two entry bays on the front of the school, each constructed of stone and each with a gable roof. The entry bays are progressively smaller than the main body of the school. The original entry bay measures approximately 7' x 12'. A stone inscribed "Dist. 29, AD 1886" is in place over the original entrance (now located inside the entry vestibule). A second entry vestibule was added to the schoolhouse at an unknown date (it is not in place on 1920s photos). This entry bay measures approximately 4' x 7' and has a concrete foundation. A slab of limestone serves as a step to the entrance. The existing door is a solid wood door constructed of one-by boards. A sign above the door reads "Hi-Plains Gravel Grinders."

The north and south facades are identical, each with three windows. The windows are 3' x 7', triple-hung wood windows with two-panes per sash. The windows on the north side have been boarded over and glass is loose or broken in several of the sashes on the south windows. Hail screen has been installed on the south windows. The windows have limestone lintels and sills. The existing windows are replacements, date unknown; the original windows were 6/1 double-hung wood windows.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Wilcox School was under District 29 for 60 years. When the districts were consolidated, Wilcox School became part of District 14 for the remaining two years. This information was provided to the Kansas Historical Society in 2018 in an effort to update the nomination based on additional newspaper articles and school records.

Wilcox School

Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas

County and State

A red brick chimney is located in the center of the east facade. The chimney rises above the roofline and the top of the chimney has crumbled. The chimney has a concrete foundation and there appears to have been a clean-out at the bottom of the chimney that has been bricked in. Mortar on the surface of stones clearly outlines the former coal shed on the east side of the building. There are no window or door openings on the east facade.

Exterior alterations include removal of the coal shed on the east facade, replacement windows and the addition of the second entry vestibule on the front (west) facade. Early photos of the building clearly show the original entry which is extant inside the entry vestibule, the original 6/1 double-hung wood windows, and the rear coal shed. The dates of the exterior alterations are undocumented. The school retains significant integrity but it is in deteriorating condition. The roof is in need of replacement; it retains only remnants of the wood shingle roof and is clearly leaking. There are several major cracks in the exterior stone walls, stones have failed at the northwest corner of the structure and the north wall is sagging. The mortar joints are in poor condition with widespread loose and missing mortar.

### Interior

The newer entry vestibule has a concrete floor and the walls are exposed limestone. There is a step up to the original vestibule. The original doors are missing but the five-foot opening is intact and the four-light transom is in place although the glass is missing. The original doors were a pair of five-panel wood doors. The original entry vestibule has an oak floor that is painted blue and plaster walls and ceiling that are painted a cream color. The walls have wood wainscoting and a chair rail. There is evidence of coat hooks on a wood molding extant on both sides of the vestibule. A wood box measuring approximately 5' x 2' is in place on the north side of the original vestibule. The pair of wood doors into the schoolhouse (from the original entry vestibule) is extant but a panel of hinged particle board has been installed over the transom.

The interior of the main building measures approximately 27' x 17'. It has an oak floor that has been painted gray. The walls are plaster with a sand finish, painted blue. Bead board wainscoting with a chair rail cap is in place around the room. The windows have deep sills and a simple wood frame, painted blue. There is a slate chalk board mounted on the wall between two windows on the north wall. An ornate pressed metal ceiling is in place. The ceiling includes a cove molding, a border pattern and the central pattern. The ceiling has collapsed on the south half of the room as a result of the leaking roof. The ceiling panels are rusted through and likely beyond repair. Likewise, the oak floor on the south half has deteriorated due to the leaking roof.

A stove is in place near the east wall and a stove pipe connects to the chimney through the east wall. A single light bulb with exposed conduit is in place on the metal ceiling. There is no plumbing in the building. No school desks are extant but two wood benches are in place along perimeter walls. The interior of the schoolhouse is largely intact but historic materials have been damaged by the leaking roof.

Wilcox School  
Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas  
County and State

**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.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

EDUCATION

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1886-1947

**Significant Dates**

1886

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

**Period of Significance (justification)**

**Criteria Considerations (justification)**

N/A

Wilcox School  
Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas  
County and State

---

### Narrative Statement of Significance

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

---

### Elaboration

Wilcox School – District 29 is nominated to the National Register under the multiple property documentation form, *Historic Public Schools of Kansas*. The school is significant on a state and local level under Criterion A as one of only a few remaining rural school houses in Trego County. The school served Wilcox Township, a rural settlement south of WaKeeney, for sixty-two years, the last term being the 1948-49 school year.<sup>2</sup> Wilcox School was constructed in 1886 to educate the children of local families. The early settlers of Wilcox built the school of native limestone, quarried along the Smoky Hill River, one-half mile south of the site. Its simple rectangular form with a gable roof and entry vestibule is representative of traditional one-room county schools.

Wilcox was a small rural settlement located between WaKeeney and Ness City on Highway 283 in central Trego County named for William Willcox, the first settler and postmaster.<sup>3</sup> Located fifteen miles south of WaKeeney near the Smoky Hill River, Wilcox was founded in 1879. The Wilcox post office was established in April of 1879; William K. Willcox, the landowner, became the first postmaster.<sup>4</sup> The second ‘L’ was later dropped from the original spelling of Willcox.

Trego County is in the western half of Kansas, located in the fourth tier of counties from the Colorado line and the third tier of counties from the Nebraska line. The Saline River runs along the northern boundary of the county, the Smoky Hill River runs six miles north of the southern border of the county. The county has an abundance of limestone, used for the construction of most early buildings. The county was organized in June of 1879 and WaKeeney was named the county seat. Cutler’s History of Kansas (1883) identifies Collyer on the western border and Ogallah, east of WaKeeney, as the only other established towns in the early 1880s. According to Cutler, the years of 1878-79 witnessed a great influx of people to Trego County due primarily to the success of wheat crops in the preceding year. By 1880, the county boasted a population estimated at 3,500, one-third of which lived in WaKeeney. However the 1879 and 1880 crops were a total failure and the population decreased as fast as it had previously grown. The first school was taught in the County in 1879 in WaKeeney. By 1882, there were twenty-two school districts. However, the school population was reduced by half, dropping from 404 in 1880 to 188 in 1882.<sup>5</sup> Wilcox School (1886) was the 29<sup>th</sup> district formed in Trego County.

The early farming challenges and the emergence of the railroad (replacing the Smoky Hill and Butterfield Overland Dispatch Trails) may have contributed to the short-lived settlement of Wilcox. Founded in 1879, the post-office closed in 1896. During this time however, a schoolhouse was constructed that continued to serve rural residents for sixty years. Early settlers in Wilcox Township needed a school for their children to attend; the local families organized District 29 and built the stone schoolhouse in 1886.<sup>6</sup> Records show that one acre of land was given to the district by Caroline M. Manly and her husband on October 4, 1886 for construction of a school. Given the scarcity of trees, the settlers turned to the material that was readily available, namely Niobrara limestone located on the south side of the Smoky Hill River. The quarried stone had to be hauled to the building site one-half mile north of the river over low-water bridges and natural fords using horse-drawn wagons. The school house was completed in 1886. The school and township were named for W.K. Willcox, one of the homesteaders who lived one-half mile west of the schoolhouse. Bernice Yetter of Ogallah was the first teacher at the school, teaching a three-month term in 1886. Some of the family names of the first pupils were: Wilcox, Nichols, Whisler, Fredrickson, Gullet and Rains. The County Superintendent at this time was A.G. Baker.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> This information was updated in 2018 to include the two years (1947-1949) that Wilcox School was part of District 14. This information was provided via a newspaper clipping and grade school records.

<sup>3</sup> *Western Kansas World*, March 11, 1893.

<sup>4</sup> *Western Kansas World*, November 14, 1974 (article references an interview with Mrs. Whisler, the author collecting information on early settlements for “Ghost Towns in Trego County”). Mrs. Whisler’s husband’s grandparents were among the early settlers of Wilcox.

<sup>5</sup> William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas* (first published by A.T. Andreas, Chicago, Ill., 1883). Accessed on-line.

<sup>6</sup> *Western Kansas World*, November 14, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> South Downer Homemakers, “History of Wilcox School Dates Back to 1886,” *WaKeeney Western Kansas World*, November 6, 1969. (This history has been reprinted in several publications and credited to Mrs. Charles Surprise.)

Wilcox School

Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas

County and State

The annual reports of Wilcox School – District 29 are available at the Trego County Register of Deeds office listing the pupils and teachers for each year of operation. The number of pupils varied over the years ranging from as few as three students in 1898 and 1899 and a high of 24 students in 1918. Enrollment stabilized with an average of 15-20 students through the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The last teacher was Wilma Bell who taught nineteen students during the 1946-47 term (under District 29). The last teacher was Gloria Lowe who taught seventeen students during the 1948-49 term.<sup>8</sup>

Wilcox was a typical one-room school in a rural farming community in western Kansas. The area children walked to school and grades 1-8 shared the same classroom. Pupils desiring additional schooling attended high school in Ransom or WaKeeney. Rosie Mai Kvern, a student of Wilcox during the 1946-47 school term recalls: “Wilcox school was a good school for learning and playing... There were spelling matches and arithmetic matches at the blackboard. Individual grade classes were called up to sit on a bench near the teacher’s desk for reading or arithmetic, while other students studied at their desks.” There was no well at the school and pupils carried a gallon syrup pail of water to school. Later, water was reportedly brought to the school from the Jackson place (north of the school).<sup>9</sup>

In addition to its primary role of education, Wilcox School served as the hub of the community. Sunday School was organized and held at the school for many years; Ministers from Ransom and WaKeeney came and held regular services. Lyceum or Literary Programs and quilting bees were organized by local residents. During World War I, draft registrations were held at the school.<sup>10</sup> Township meetings were also held at the schoolhouse and the school served as the Township voting hall.

John Olsen, whose parents came from Norway, arrived in Trego County in 1905 and purchased the Wilcox homestead for raising cattle. John served on the Draft Board for registration in World War I and sold liberty bonds. He served on the Wilcox School Board continually from 1910 until his death in 1946. His wife Rebecca was active in Sunday School and Church services held at the Wilcox School. She also helped with literary programs where young people took part with their talents of debate and music. John and Rebecca’s five children all attended school at Wilcox. Their daughter, Mary Marie Olsen, at the age of 16, returned to teach for the 1927-28 school term.<sup>11</sup>

District 29 was consolidated with other rural districts in 1947 and the Wilcox School closed in 1949.<sup>12</sup> The schoolhouse was purchased by the Hi Plains Gravel Grinders Motorcycle Club at that time for use as a clubhouse. The club was started in the 1940s, named for a nearby gravel pit, and is one of the oldest motorcycle clubs in the state of Kansas. The Gravel Grinders maintain ownership of the school today. During the 2018 update, it is noted that the ownership of the property changed to the City of WaKeeney.

The Wilcox School maintains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and association. The school retains the general characteristics of the property type including: its original site and setting, the original building form, the original roof form, the native limestone and pattern of window and door openings, and the basic interior configuration. The school retains a significant degree of integrity on both the interior and exterior. The only alterations being the removal of the rear coal storage shed, the addition of a second entry vestibule and the replacement windows. Modifications to the school are within the parameters defined in the multiple property submission and do not sufficiently impact the integrity of the building as to make it ineligible for listing. The most significant threat to the integrity is the condition of the building. National Register listing is being sought as a means to aid in the preservation and maintenance of the structure.

Wilcox School – District No. 29 is a traditional example of the Country School property type as the one-room schoolhouse constructed to educate the children of local families in rural Wilcox Township; it served that function for sixty-two years (1886 – 1949).<sup>13</sup> Like many rural schoolhouses, Wilcox School was the center of community activities. The school serves as a present reminder of the dedication of the early settlers to educate their children and to work together as a community for the betterment of all. The school is one of only a few remaining rural school houses in Trego County and serves as a

<sup>8</sup> This information was updated in 2018 based on a newspaper article and school records that were submitted to the Kansas Historical Society.

<sup>9</sup> South Downer Homemakers, “History of Wilcox School Dates Back to 1886,” WaKeeney Western Kansas World, November 6, 1969. (This history has been reprinted in several publications and credited to Mrs. Charles Surprise.)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> “Biography of Olsen Family – John O. Olsen and Rebecca E. Crawford,” First United Presbyterian Church Centennial Book, 1878-1978. n.p., 1978.

<sup>12</sup> This information was updated in 2018 based on a newspaper article and school records that were submitted to the Kansas Historical Society.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Wilcox School

Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas

County and State

representative of a significant component of our educational system – the one-room schoolhouse. Constructed of native limestone quarried on the south side of the Smoky Hill River, one-half mile from the site, the school is an excellent example of western Kansas vernacular architecture. The school is a monument to the demanding manual labor and ingenuity of the early settlers of Wilcox Township who dreamed of making a better life for their families and neighbors. Wilcox School – District No. 29 is nominated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under the multiple property documentation form, *Historic Public Schools of Kansas* as representatives of the Country School property type.

Wilcox School  
Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas  
County and State

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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

Adams, Paula. *Kansas Historic Resources Reconnaissance Inventory of Wilcox School District 29*, March 1, 2002.

*"Biography of Olsen Family – John O. Olsen and Rebecca E. Crawford," First United Presbyterian Church Centennial Book 1878 – 1978. n.p., 1978.*

"Homesteading in Trego County - Wilcox." Fort Hays State University web site.

Michellich, Bob. *Wilcox School Souvenirs and photographs.*

Olivia, Bonita. *Kansas State Historical Society Historic Building Inventory Form for Wilcox School*, August 7, 1976.

*Records of Wilcox School District No. 29*, Trego County Register of Deeds.

Shearer, Ruth. "Ghost Towns of Trego County," chapter in local history as presented to the Trego County Historical Society, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, n.p., 1974.

South Downer Homemakers. "History of Wilcox School Dates Back to 1886," WaKeeney Western World, November 6, 1969.

Spencer, Brenda R. *Historic Public Schools of Kansas*, National Register Multiple Property Nomination, 2004.

Surprise, Mrs. Charles, "History of Wilcox School," chapter in local history as presented to the Trego County Historical Society. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition n.p., 1974.

Surprise, Mrs. Charles. "History of Wilcox School." Trego County Historical Society Museum, WaKeeney, Kansas, 1969.

Western Kansas World. March 11, 1893, May 23 and November 14, 1974

Personal Interviews/Written Correspondence with residents and former teachers and students of Wilcox School:

- Bob Michellich (son of Mary Marie Olsen), January 10, 2004.
- Fern Rhoden (local resident), March 17, 2004.
- Milton Dietz (former student), March 29, 2004.
- Raymond and Peggy Sue Mai (former student), March 29, 2004.
- Evea Rumpel, Trego County Register of Deeds, March 17, 2004.
- Rosie Mai Kvern (former student), April 18, 2004
- Wilma Bell Rohr (former teacher), June 11, 2004.

**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): \_\_\_\_\_



Wilcox School  
Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas  
County and State

---

**Additional Documentation**

---

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Maps

USGS map attached

Historic Views

Figure 1 – Early photo of Wilcox School

Figure 2 – 1927-28 School Souvenir

Photographs

Wilcox School District 29

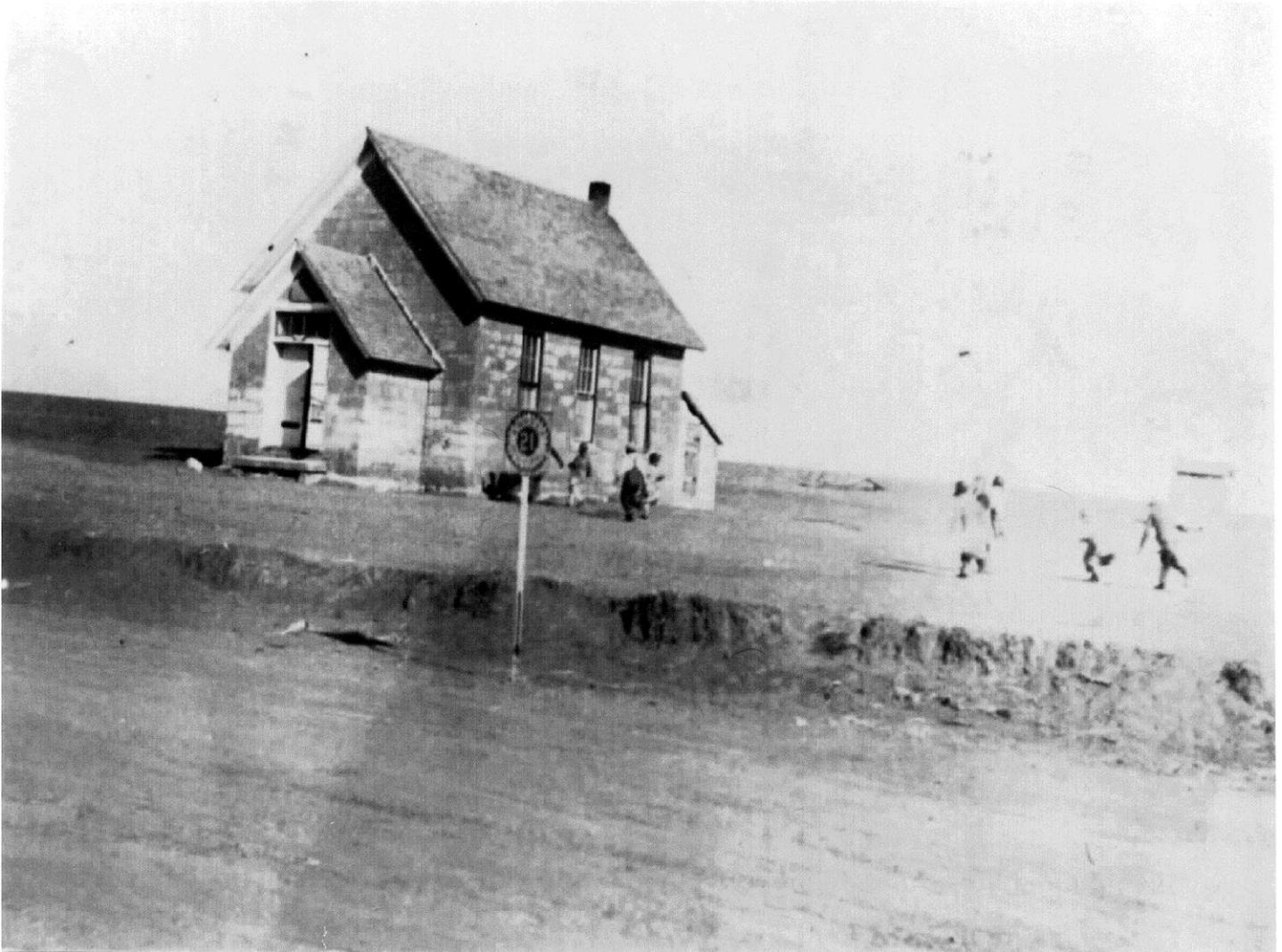
Trego County, Kansas

Digital Photos taken by Brenda R. Spencer, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005.

<u>#</u>	<u>Description of View [direction of camera]</u>
1	Front (west) and south facades from southwest corner [northeast]
2	Front (west) facade [east]
3	South facade [north]
4	East (rear) and north facades from northeast corner [southwest]
5	Front (west) and north facades from northwest corner [southeast]
6	Window detail, south facade [north]
7	Original entrance/ entry vestibule on west facade [east]
8	Second entry vestibule (stone) added at unknown date, looking out original door [west]
9	Interior of school from front entrance [east]
10	Detail of north side of school room [east]
11	Window detail from interior, south side [south]
12	Detail of wainscoting and oak floor at entrance [northwest]
13	Detail of pressed metal ceiling, northeast corner [northeast]

Wilcox School  
Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas  
County and State



*Figure 1 – Historic View of Wilcox School  
Provided by Bob Michellich, no date or source.*

Wilcox School  
Name of Property

Trego County, Kansas  
County and State

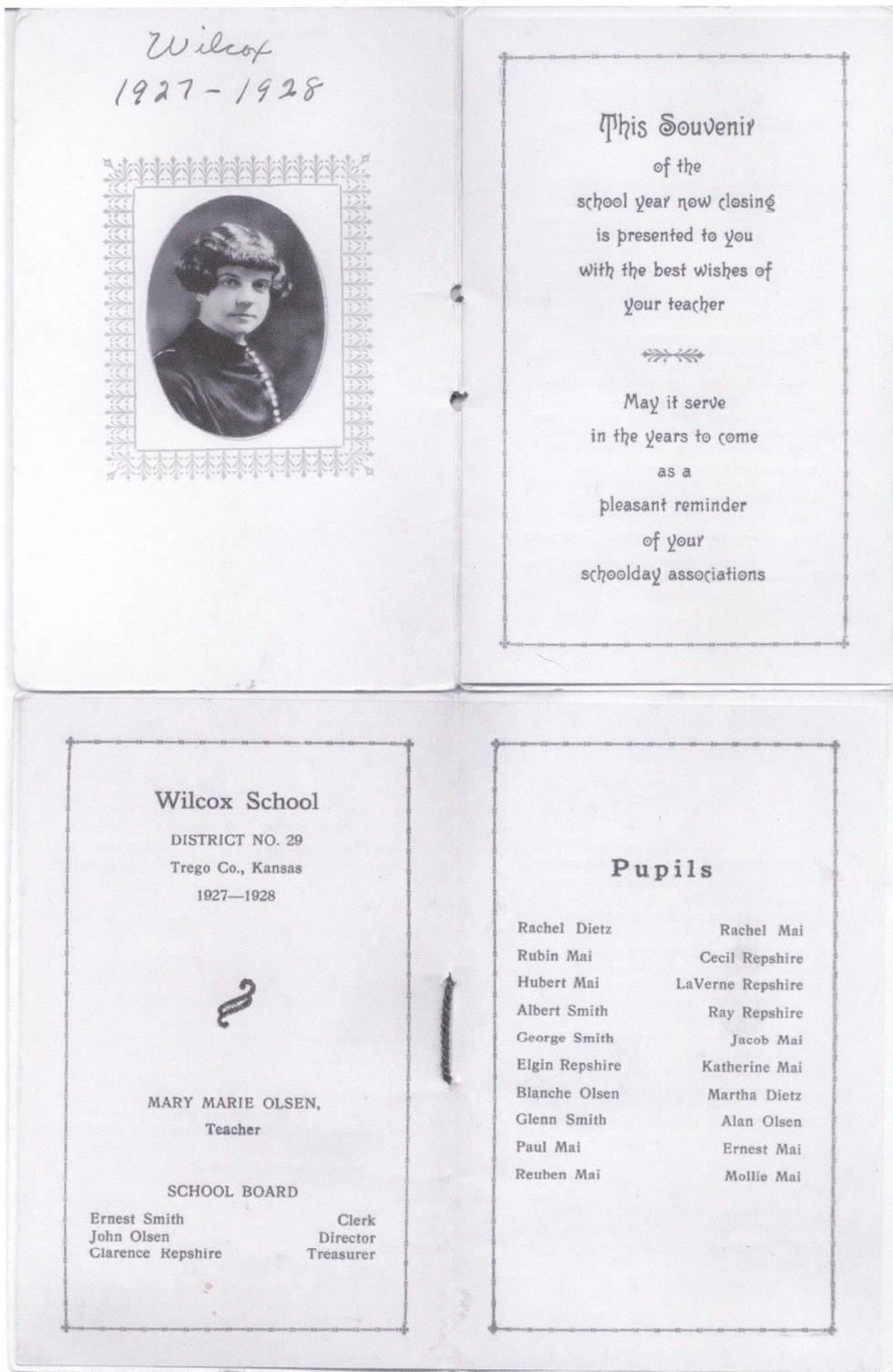


Figure 2 – Souvenir of Wilcox School, 1927-27Historic View of Wilcox School  
Provided by Bob Michellich (son of Mary Marie Olsen).