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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-9000a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

   Historic name: Hand-Dug City Water Well
   Other name/site number: Seneca Water Works; 131-5030-0015

2. Location

   Street & number: 301 North 11th Street
   City or town: Seneca
   State/Kansas Code/KS: County/Nemaha Code/131 Zip code/66538
   ☐ not for publication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 nationally ☐ statewide ☑ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]
[Date]
[Caption]

Kansas State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☑ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

[Signature]
[Date]

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is entered in the National Register. ☐ ☑ See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register ☑ ☐ See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register ☐ ☐
removed from the National Register ☐ ☑
other, (explain:)

[Signature]
[Date]

[Caption]
[Caption]
5. Classification

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7. Description

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<td>Roof: WOOD: shingle</td>
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Hand-Dug City Water Well

Nemaha County, Kansas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register)

☐ 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 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

ARCHITECTURE

ENGINEERING

Period of Significance

1895-1956

Significant Dates

1895, 1899, 1937

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

F. I. Barre, Architect

James T. Broughal, Builder

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

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 #

Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository:

City of Seneca; Seneca Chamber of Commerce
Hand-Dug City Water Well

Name of Property

Nemaha County, Kansas

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property  Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title  Dean and DarlAnn Rial

Organization  Date  3 December 2005

Street & number  906 North 8th Street  Telephone  (785) 336-0053

City or town  Seneca  State  KS  Zip code  66538

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

(Any additional items)

Property Owner

Name  City of Seneca, Glenn Rodden, City Administrator

Street & number  531 Main, PO Box 40  Telephone  (785) 336-2747

City or town  Seneca  State  KS  Zip code  66538

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. 470 et seq.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20043-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0019), Washington, DC 20503
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7    Page 1
Hand-Dug City Water Well
Seneca, Nemaha County, KS

Narrative Description

The Hand-Dug City Water Well (c. 1895) stands on Block 34 in the Seneca City Park, facing south towards Pioneer Street bounded by Elk Street on the north, 10th Street on the East and 11th Street on the west. It is the last visible sign of Seneca, Kansas's original water system, finished in 1896. The 65 foot deep by 34 feet wide, rock/brick-lined well is the second largest hand-dug well in Kansas.¹ The three-foot wide rock walls are laid in four-foot high sections, constructed from ground level downward. Water depth is approximately 25 feet and has remained at that level since at least 1979, long after the well stopped being used for human consumption. A cone-shaped structure with a wood shingled roof covers the well and is topped with a cupola. The structure is encircled by six-foot chain link fence. Installation of submersible pumps took place during city restoration work in 1989. A service platform was installed by the local golf club association and enclosed for visitor safety. Until recently, the well served to water the golf course fairways. The well is open to the public by appointment.

The first level of the wall is constructed of stone set in mortar while the lower portion is made of brick and mortar. During construction, planks with one tapered one end were driven at the base of the unfinished hole about 3 feet out into undisturbed soil. A ring section of wall was then laid upon the exposed inner ends of the planks. After the mortar had set in the first ring, the well was dug another four feet and new planks were driven and the process was repeated. Soil was removed from under the driven planks, to allow the next section of wall to be laid directly under the ring above. The process was repeated several times until the well was approximately 50 feet deep. At that point the diameter was decreased about three feet forming an offset ledge in the rock wall. Digging probably became more difficult once the water table was reached. Water had to be pumped out to allow for continued digging and wall construction. Soil instability, within water bearing strata, may have been the reason well diameter was decreased. If the soil was too unstable, driven planks could not have supported a wall section while the succeeding ring was dug out and laid.

The walls required upwards of 130,000 bricks, 100 cords of stone, 570 barrels of cement and over 20,000 feet of lumber. The large well house contained two large boilers, heater feed pump and pumping machinery as well as a large coal room. The two boilers were 40 horse-powered and could bring steam in 40 minutes with freezing water and 10 minutes with 70 degree water. The standpipe was 12 feet by 100 feet was used in fire protection.

¹ Other historic hand-dug wells in Kansas include: Selkirk, Wichita County, Kansas (1887) is 24 feet wide and 102 feet deep; Westmoreland, Kansas (1914) is 30 feet wide and 38 feet deep; Greensburg, Kiowa County, Kansas (1884) is 32 feet wide and 109 feet deep. The Greensburg Well is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Selkirk Hand-Dug Well is listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places.
The structure enclosing the well dates to the late nineteenth century. The round cone-shaped structure with an open top and cupola is visible in a photograph dated 1896. The base of the structure is made of mortared stone units and rises several inches above grade. The wood frame walls that are covered with wood shingles on the exterior are wide at the bottom and taper inward to form a sort of truncated cone. A square cupola with louvered sides sits atop the walls. A gabled single-door opening on the south elevation provides access to the well. The door opens to a wood plank walkway that crosses over the open well. Next to the door, an iron ladder extends below the walkway down into the well. In the center of this catwalk is an electric pump mechanism. The walkway is enclosed by wood frame railings and screens on either side. The structure’s wood framing is exposed on the interior.

The well was deepened in 1899. The minutes of the July 19, 1899 City Council include specifications (specifications attached, see Exhibit 2) for deepening the pump pit:

Cement mortar is to be used for all the stone work and concrete. This made with three barrels of Louisville cement to one yard of sand. ...nine cubic feet of sand being used to each barrel of cement...filled with broken stone for concrete. Concrete is to be mixed rather soft and placed on fast...

The specifications also required a new tunnel from the pump pit to the well. This and the lowering of the engines were considered separately. The tunnel is not evident today, but probably entered the southwest side of the well where the pipe is still in place.

Use of the well was discontinued about 1937 when well #1 and well #2 were developed east of Seneca and the million-gallon reservoir was built on First Street. The original 85,000-gallon standpipe, located southeast of the well, continued in use until it was replaced in 1976 by the one-half million-gallon water tower.

The fence was installed in 1975. The landscaping was an Eagle Scout project. The City granted permission to the local golf club association to test pump the well in 1989. It was determined the well could supply adequate water for the golf course. Static storage capacity was 90,000 gallons and the calculated recovery was about 90 gallons per minute. With this information a fairway watering system was designed and installed. The golf club association installed pumps and pipelines. Submersible pumps replaced the boilers. A service platform was installed under the bridge. Originally the bridge was little more than planks on top of two fifteen foot I beams.

In April of 1989, the Seneca Fire Department, planning for the centennial celebration, encouraged the City Council to restore the old well as a tourist attraction. Local contractors agreed to undertake the renovation project. The cupola was dismantled in sections, repaired, and reinstalled. The rafters of the main roof house were also repaired. The top plate of the main roof was rebuilt. The stonework was
repaired where I beams were set into the stone walls. Wooden support pieces were installed between 4 x 4 uprights on inside stringers (specifications attached, see Exhibit 3). New decking was built, supported on I beams and angle irons bolted to inside stringers. Heavy Plexiglas was installed from the bridge deck to the railing, which allows children to view the well and prevents any objects falling through. The area above the railing is enclosed with a pipe welded wire cage. This is constructed in such a way as to allow visitors to lean over the rail and look directly into the well. Approximately 420 visitors viewed the well on the weekend of July 14 and 15, 1990. Over 100 names on the sign-in book were addresses of non-Seneca visitors. At least forty-nine were visiting from outside Nemaha County.

The Tourism Commission of Nemaha County is highlighting the well as the widest hand-dug well in Kansas in their “See Seneca First” campaign. Seneca’s Hand-Dug City Water Well (1896) is 34 feet wide and 65 feet deep. Other hand-dug wells in Kansas are listed thus: Selkirk, Kansas (1887) is 24 feet wide and 102 feet deep; Westmoreland, Kansas (1914) is 30 feet wide and 38 feet deep; Greensburg, Kansas (1884) is 32 feet wide and 109 feet deep.
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  

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Continuation Sheet  

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Hand-Dug City Water Well  
Seneca, Nemaha County, KS  

Narrative Statement of Significance  

Seneca’s Hand-Dug City Water Well (c. 1896) is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT and Criterion C for ARCHITECTURE and ENGINEERING. The well is historically significant for its long association with the development of life in Seneca in the past century and may be the widest hand-dug well in Kansas. The well provided drinking water for the community of Seneca, Kansas, until 1937 when the City developed other water accommodations. In 1989, the City granted permission to a local golf club association to use the well for irrigation and this remained its function until recently. The well is significant because of its long, continued use. Many similar wells in Kansas have been filled in and capped. Written records provide accounts of the engineering methods used in developing the well. The protective wood-frame structure is a unique example of late nineteenth century vernacular construction.

Criterion A: Community Planning and Development  
The community began seriously discussing the construction of a waterworks facility in the late 1880s. After several rounds of discussion about financing, logistics, and construction, the Seneca City Council agreed to put the matter to a public vote. On November 15, 1894 the electorate approved the $30,000 bond 306 to 42. Businessmen were among those who pushed the City Council to move on this issue. Having a modern waterworks system would make the community a more attractive place to live and do business. Not only did the waterworks system play a valuable role in fire protection, but also it promoted the use of indoor plumbing. Although it no longer served as the primary source of water for the community after 1937, it has been maintained by the City and, until recently, was used by a local golf club association to irrigate fairways.

Criterion C: Architecture and Engineering  
The Hand-Dug City Water Well was excavated in 1895 and completed in 1896. It currently measures 34 feet in diameter and stretches 65 feet deep. Records indicate that some 130,000 bricks, 100 cords of stone, 570 barrels of cement and over 20,000 feet of lumber were used in the construction of the well and above-grade building. The well is an example of a utilitarian structure essential to the collection and transport of water for human use and consumption. The wood-frame conical structure atop the well, which also dates to 1896, is a unique and intact example of vernacular industrial architecture. The well and protective structure are intact and retain a high degree of their original materials and architectural integrity.

Historical Background and Significance  
Located at the intersection of Highway 36 and Highway 63 in northeast Kansas, Seneca lies in a valley carved out by the Nemaha River, which flows north. Seneca is the county seat of Nemaha County and with over 2,000 residents.
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National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

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Hand-Dug City Water Well
Seneca, Nemaha County, KS

J. B. Ingersoll, an early settler, chose this area to stake his claim in the winter of 1857-58. In one of the logs on his house, the words “Rock Castle” were inscribed. Thus, Seneca was first known as “Rock Castle.” It was changed to Seneca when the town company took over the claim from Ingersoll. The growth of Seneca was influenced by its being on the routes of several major trails. Seneca was also fortunate enough to have a railroad line beginning in 1870 and was on the Pony Express route through northern Kansas.

Many of the buildings lining Main Street – which is paved with the historic brick – and elsewhere in Seneca, are rich with historical lore. Their facades reveal dates of establishments from the 1800s and many others attest to their use at the turn of the century. A ride through the streets of Seneca provides a glimpse back in history and a look at the present. One might notice the huge well house in the city park, which covers the second largest hand-dug well in Kansas. The “Old Well” is the last visible sign of Seneca’s original water system, completed in 1896.

Five years prior to its construction there was talk about a city water system, which would promote indoor plumbing. The matter came to a head several times only to be dropped again and again. In 1893, a banker by the name of Mr. Berns from St. Joseph, Missouri, made a proposition to the city and offered plans for a water system at the cost of $50,000. Discussion continued and converts were added to the list of those who thought it was time for a water system. Local resident W. C. Humes went around soliciting funds to obtain an estimate for constructing the water system.

Mr. F. L. Barrel, a consulting engineer from Freemont, Nebraska, came to Seneca and studied the site and gave an estimate of $33,000. On October 20, 1894, the City Council received a proposition signed by 40 businesses and citizens of Seneca. The City Council set November 15 as the date for holding a bond election for $30,000 and the vote passed 306 to 42.

On November 19, 1894, the City Council appointed a committee of four to make an inspection tour of water systems in different cities and report back to the Council. On December 31, 1894, the City employed Mr. Burrell to draw up plans and specifications and to superintend the construction of the plant. Bids were solicited on the $30,000 bonds to finance the project. Bids came in as follows: the First National Bank of Niles, Ohio, at $30,100; State Bank of Seneca at $30,125; and Spites and Company, Toledo, Ohio, at $30,385. Test wells were put down in the southeast and northwest part of town for the purpose of finding the location of a water supply. The City Council was on the eve of accepting bids when they received a letter from the First National Bank of Niles, Ohio, stating that an influential citizen of Seneca had informed them that the bond of proposed water works was not legal and that the taxpayers did not vote for the measure at all. The bank threatened to bring an injunction suit and requested 30 days to look into the matter. Correspondence continued until February of 1895, at which
time the matter was settled. Some weeks later, new bids were accepted and the State Bank of Seneca was awarded the contract for the original bid of $30,125.

After the sixty-day delay, the Council advertised for bids for the construction of the system to be opened on April 9, 1895. Block 34 was purchased by the city in two transactions during April and May of 1895 for $872 (Ordinance No. 191). Lots 13 and 14 were purchased on May 6, 1895, for $133.33 (Ordinance No. 195). The Seneca City Council minutes of April 10, 1895 records, “Decision was made to locate a city well on the west side of the city.” The bid from James T. Broughal, of Kansas City, Missouri, to build a water works was accepted. The project was to start within ten days of April 15, 1895, and to be completed within four months. The project also included laying water lines throughout the city. Broughal was granted several time extensions and then disappeared. On October 22, 1895, the City Council voted to acquire “pumps and machinery to complete the well.” On January 22, 1896, Charles Bradshaw was paid $200 for the use of his tools, clamshell, engine and boiler to be used while completing the water works.

From _Seneca-Democrat_, February 28, 1896, comes the following headlines: “Water Works!”, “Will Be Completed This Week”, “One of the Best Systems in the West”, “The Machinery of the Very Best and Latest Improved”, “The Water Supply Abundant”, “The Exact Cost of the System Will Be About $32,000.00”, “Much credit is due Engineer Burrell and the City Council.” The paper states:

They excavated a large amount of sand and caused the construction of a wall under the curb and leaving the well of diameter originally intended and of the average depth of 60 feet 6 inches. There were places in the curb where the wall was badly damaged which has to be taken out and repaired in a good and workman-manner. Many will remember the so-called test made in September ’95 and compare it with the insurance rate of a few weeks ago, the promptness of the response to the alarm by giving direct pressure within 10 minutes and a good steam given, were a source of congratulation to Mr. Burrell who made the response possible, though made with the work incomplete at that time and it is a tribute well earned in the face of innuendos and sneers from a few (a very few we are glad to state) he has accomplished the construction of one of the finest systems in the state.

A brief description of the system may be interest to our readers. The house is of brick of neat and tasty design, being commodious and roomy, containing two large boilers, heater feed pump and pumping machinery as well as a large coal room. The well is thirty feet inside diameter and is sixty feet six inches deep. The first or top being rock and the lower part of brick; these walls are three feet in thickness.
The article goes on to describe the mechanics of the operation and the boilers (steam engines), stating: “There are two boilers which are 40 horse power and can be brought to steam in 40 minutes with freezing water and 10 minutes with 70 degree water. The Stand Pipe is 12 feet by 100 feet.” The article also states the benefit to the city in fire protection and fire insurance and is considered to be “the best in the west”.

On July 19, 1899, “specifications for deepening the pump pit at the Seneca Water Works” were approved. Those specifications also state, “This will also require a new tunnel from the pump pit to the well. This and the lowering of the engines will be considered separately”. The tunnel is not evident today, but probably entered the southwest side of the well where the pipe is still in place.

The April 13, 1911, Courier Democrat places the time of piping water from Maxwell Springs to the well. It reads as follows:

Ralph Hybskmann of Axtell and W. A. Wiley of Seneca were given the contract for the construction of an extension pipe line to Maxwell Springs at the Saturday night city council meeting, at a figure of $2,659.06. Their estimate is $190 below that of their nearest competitor. The American Cast Iron Company of Kansas City was given the contract for the piping and accessories at the price of $4,913.60. The length of the pipeline from the springs to the well is 10,700 feet, and the trench at its greatest depth to the well will be twelve feet deep. It will be necessary to conduct the piping under the Nemaha River. The Courier-Democrat is glad to see the contract for the work go to a local enterprise. Wiley and Hybskmann will probably begin work in the course of ten days and as soon as working material arrives.

An article published on June 8, 1911, in the Courier-Democrat is pasted to the back of the City of Seneca’s Ordinance #326 and is entitled, “Not Much of a Seer”. The story muses:

A newspaper pats itself on the back with the assistance of John Stowell, for advocating the purchase of Maxwell springs sixteen years ago. Mr. Stowell says that the editor of the paper was even accused on the streets of being paid for his interest in the matter. Mr. Maxwell wanted $7,000 for the springs at that time. Our council got them in 1911 for $2,800. One man who knows, says that the people wanted the springs bad enough at the time. They just didn’t want to be held up for them; didn’t want to buy the farm for the sake of its spring.

Ralph Tennyx mentions the water works and Maxwell Springs in his 1916 book, History of Nemaha County, Kansas:
Seneca has a capably administered municipal light and waterworks system, which is being operated with such signal success that each year witnesses a surplus piling up in the city treasury over and above maintenance and operating expenses. The city water is obtained from a never failing source, natural springs eastward beyond the city limits, which are safeguarded for all time from pollution, and whose waters have been pronounced by the State chemistry department to be absolutely pure.

Water was pumped from the well by engine driven pumps. These pumps were in pits located inside a brick water works building, located southwest of the well. That building was razed in the late 1950s after being used many years for storage. The well was discontinued about 1937 when well #1 and well #2 were developed east of Seneca and the million gallon reservoir was built on First Street. The original 85,000-gallon standpipe, located southeast of the Hand-Dug City Water Well, continued in use until it was replaced in 1976 by the one-half million-gallon water tower.

The Hand-Dug City Water Well maintains a water depth of approximately 25 feet, and has remained at that level since at least 1979. Although it no longer served as the primary source of water for the community after 1937, it has been maintained by the City and, until recently, was used by a local golf club association to irrigate fairways. The well and protective structure are intact and retain a high degree of their original materials and architectural integrity.
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  

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Hand Dug City Water Well  
Seneca, Nemaha County, KS

Bibliography

Ackerman, Bob (researcher). Interview by Dean and DarlAnn Rial, 2005. Notes in possession of the interviewer.

City of Seneca Archive Records and Minutes: Minute Book B, 28 December 1894; page 143.

City of Seneca Archive Minutes: Minute Book B, 19 July 1899.

City of Seneca Archive Records and Minutes; Minute Book C: 2 September 1910; p. 220; Resolution to condemn and purchase “Maxwell Springs”. County Clerk has condemnation records in her files.

Courier Democrat [Seneca]; 28 February, 1894; 19 November, 1894; 20 October, 1894; 31, December, 1894; February, 1895; March, 1895; 13 April, 1911; 8 June, 1911; 11 September, 1913; 28 September 1922; 25 August 1925; 3 August 1942; 20 July, 1950.

Nemaha County, Register of Deeds, State of Kansas.

Nemaha County, County Clerk, State of Kansas

Seneca City Ordinances #319-323.

Seneca City Ordinance #326.


VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

This building is located on Lot 2 of Block 34, West side of City Park, City of Seneca, Nemaha County, Kansas. The park is bounded on the east by Tenth Street, on the south by Pioneer Street, on the west by Eleventh Street, and on the north by Elk Street.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nomination contains some of the property historically associated with the Old City Water Works Complex in block 34. The nominated area includes the Hand-Dug City Water Well and a 5-foot circumference around the structure.
Photographic Information

The following information is consistent for all photographs:

1. Hand-Dug City Water Well
2. Nemaha County, KS
3. Photographer: Sarah J. Martin
4. 15 August 2006
5. Digital photographs on file at the Kansas State Historical Society

Photo #1: South elevation, view from the south
Photo #2: East elevation, view from the east
Photo #3: Close-up of the roof, view from southeast
Photo #4: Close-up of the foundation, view from the southeast
Photo #5: Interior, looking through doorway, view from south
Photo #6: Interior, looking toward doorway, view from north
Photo #7: Walkway enclosure and water measuring device, view from west
Photo #8: View through trap door in the floor, view from north
Photo #9: View of stone well wall, view from northeast
Photo #10: View of stone well wall, view from northwest
Photo #11: Interior roof structure