



STATE OF ALABAMA  
 ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
 725 MONROE STREET  
 MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36130  
 PHONE: 261-3184

ALABAMA REGISTER OF LANDMARKS AND HERITAGE  
 Nomination Form

COUNTY Wilcox

NAME: Present Old Boykin High School Historic Gee's Bend Farms Community School

LOCATION: Street and Number Approx. 100 yards N. of Boykin town center (off Wilcox Co. #79)  
 Town (Give directions if rural) Boykin, AL 36732

\*A MAP WITH THE LANDMARK MARKED MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH THIS FORM\*

CATEGORY: Building (X) Structure ( ) Object ( ) Site ( ) District ( )

USE: Present vacant Historic school

OWNERSHIP: Public (X) Private ( )

Owner's Name Leased to Boykin Historical Assoc. by Wilcox Co. Board of Education

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Camden, AL

INTEGRITY: Original Site (X) Moved ( ) When? \_\_\_\_\_

From where? \_\_\_\_\_ (Give details in significance.)

CONDITIONS: Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair (X) Ruins ( )

THREATS: No ( ) Yes (X) By What? vacancy, neglect

RESTORATION WORK: Being considered (X) Underway ( ) Completed ( ) Not planned ( )

SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT: Open land ( ) Woodland ( ) Scattered buildings ( )  
 High building density ( ) Commercial ( ) Industrial ( )  
 Residential ( ) Rural (X)

Acreage approx. 11

For all categories other than a district and object give a site plan with a North arrow. Show related buildings.

For a district give a verbal boundary description and attach a sketch map of the district.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Why is this landmark significant? (X) associated with events, persons, or movements  
Local (X) State ( ) National ( )  
(X) a good example of a type or style of structure  
( ) other

Explain: (Briefly state why the above is true)

Gee's Bend School is historically significant for its association with the Rural Resettlement Administration in the 1930s. The school was developed as an innovative social program to educate black tenant farmer's children and make them independent farm owners. The building is architecturally significant for its government construction.

Date of Construction or Period of major importance. 1937

Architect or Builder (Give name and biographies, if known)

Give a complete but concise history of the Landmark. Include information on important people and events associated with the landmark. (USE ADDITIONAL SHEETS IF NECESSARY)

See attached.

State sources of information, giving full bibliographical data:

See attached.

DESCRIPTION: PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE LANDMARK MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH THIS FORM.

Complete as directed below for each category.

BUILDING:

Number of stories One Foundation concrete block piers Basement none

Wall Material: (Note changes from one floor or wing to another)  
(clapboard, brick, stone, wood shingle, board and batten, stucco over wood or brick, metal, logs)  
Clapboard

Structural System: (If known)  
Wood frame (X) Load-bearing masonry ( ) Iron or Steel ( )

DESCRIPTION (Continued)

Roof Type: (Gable, Gambrel, Mansard, Flat, Hipped, Combination)

Roof Covering: (Wood shingle, Asphalt, Tile, Metal, Slate) Asphalt shingle Gable

Roof Trim: (Cornices, bargeboard, brackets, etc.) SIMPLE RAKING CORNICE

Porches: Front (type and description) Porch on facade between the wings extending on each side of the building.

Rear (type and description) none

Side (type and description) none

Doors: Main entrance (location, description) One on center of front and one on either end of the porch. They are single doors with a nine pane window in each.

Other entrances (location, description)

There is a single door entrance to each wing, and wing section.

Windows: Types and number of each floor of facade The west wing has 17 windows and the east wing has 15 windows, all with 18 panes each. The facade does not have windows. The

Types and number per floor for sides and rear cloak rooms, attached on the courtyard side of each wing, have a set of paired windows. The rear of the school has 12 windows with 18 small panes each.

Interior: Describe mantels, stairways, wainscoting, plasterwork and any unusual features. The walls and ceilings are of pine panelling and the floors are of wide pine boards.

The school building has a small cupola in its center.

Other: Use this space to describe any additions, alterations, outbuildings or other features of the structure and its surroundings.

A windmill and pumphouse are located directly behind the school.

On an additional sheet make a sketch of the floor plan of the building, showing dimensions if possible.

THIS IS NOT REQUIRED!

DESCRIPTION (Continued)

- STRUCTURE: On a separate sheet of paper give a complete as possible verbal description of the structure. (See examples)
- OBJECT: On a separate sheet of paper give a complete as possible verbal description of the object. (See examples)
- SITE: On a separate sheet of paper give the present description of the site and how the site is believed to have looked during its period of importance.
- DISTRICT: On a separate sheet of paper give a general description of the district. Also needed is a numbered list of the structures in the district corresponding to the sketch map. This listing should include a name for the structure, a date of construction, a brief description, a statement of why the structure is significant, if it is.

\*A MAP WITH THE LANDMARK MARKED AND PHOTOGRAPHS MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH THIS FORM\*

Map: A U.S. Geological Survey Map is preferred, but if you are unable to obtain one a county highway map may be used.

USE ONLY PENCIL TO MARK ON MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS.

Photographs: Black and white, glossy finish, 5 x 7, or 8 x 10, is preferred.

FORM PREPARED BY

Name M.G. Trend - ETV - Telecommunications Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address Corner of Samford and Donahue Telephone 826-4110

Town Auburn, AL 36849

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

For Alabama Historical Commission use only

STAFF COMMENTS:

MAP REFERENCE: MAP \_\_\_\_\_

U. T. M. Reference      Zone      Eastings      Northings

Thematic Category \_\_\_\_\_

Added to ALABAMA REGISTER \_\_\_\_\_

NATIONAL REGISTER Potential

## SIGNIFICANCE

THE GEE'S BEND FARMS COMMUNITY SCHOOL building was constructed in 1937 by the U.S. Government as part of an innovative social program that was designed to make a group of destitute Black tenant families into independent farm owners. To do this, the Rural Resettlement Administration purchased what had once been the 10,000-acre Pettway plantation from its three absentee landlords.

With the help of the local residents, government workers set up a planned community that consisted of individual farmsteads, as well as a series of community buildings and cooperative enterprises that included a cooperative store, cotton gin, grist mill, plowing and haying operation, stock breeding program, medical clinic, and school. Although Wilcox County was approximately 80% Black during the Great Depression era, the participating families constituted a virtual majority of Black land owners until after World War II.

Supervision of the new community was provided by a Community Manager, an employee of the Farm Security Administration. The Gee's Bend Community School was staffed by Black teachers, who were college educated and drawn from outside the area. It can safely be said that the residents of Gee's Bend were among the best educated in the Black Belt.

Government supervision lessened in 1946, when the Farm Security Administration was replaced by the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA). At that time, the cooperative enterprises began to recede. The school came under the control of Wilcox County, which constructed other buildings by the 1950s. With this, the frame school building ceased to serve all the grades. It became a high school until the 1970s when it was closed, and high school students were bussed out of their home community. Since that time, the school building has been vacant.

Across entire United States, there were approximately two dozen "Rural Resettlement Programs" like the one at Gee's Bend. By several accounts (e.g., University of Virginia, 1949), the Gee's Bend project was among the most successful, and intrinsically significant in that it was an early example of an attempt to extend a measure of equal opportunity to minorities in the South.

Gee's Bend (or Boykin, as it is known today) no longer is a planned community with cooperative enterprises. Rather, it is a Black settlement of farmers and former farmers. The Gee's Bend Farms school building is the only one of the "public" buildings or facilities (i.e., structures which are not individual homes) that survives in essentially unmodified and unrelocated form.

Because they were farm owners, rather than renters, the members of the Gee's Bend community have tended to be

independent, self-confident, and politically active. They were especially active during the Civil Rights Movement.

The government project at Gee's Bend was photographed by Farm Security Administration photographers Arthur Rothstein and Marion Post Wolcott. The entire cooperative effort, including the community school, became well known through documentary and social science research in the community. Much has been written about the Gee's Bend community, past present, and the importance of the social experiment which sought to enfranchise a group of Black farmers made destitute by the Great Depression.

#### 9. BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

New York Times Magazine, Change at Gee's Bend, August 1937.

Rubin, Morton, "Plantation County," University of North Carolina Press, 1951.

Salamon, Lester, Land and Minority Enterprise: The Crisis and the Opportunity, Washington, DC, US Department of Commerce, Office of Minority Business Enterprise, 1976.

The Time Dimension in Policy Evaluation: The Case of the New Deal Land Reform Experiments. Public Policy 27(2)129-184, 1979.

Trend, M.G. Government Capital and Minority Enterprise: A Benefit/Cost Analysis of a Federal Project in Western Alabama, Auburn University, AL, M.S. Thesis, 1982.

Government Capital and Minority Enterprise: An Evaluation of a Depression-Era Social Program, American Anthropologist, 88:1, 1986 (with W.L. Lett).

University of Virginia, Up From The Bottom: A Rehabilitation Program Pays Off At Gee's Bend, Charlottesville, U of Virginia Press, 1949.

## WRITTEN DESCRIPTION

THE GEE'S BEND COMMUNITY SCHOOL ("OLD BOYKIN HIGH SCHOOL") is a frame, single storey building. The front of the building faces south. It is sited toward the rear of an 11+ acre parcel known as the "School Campus." The building sits approximately 18 inches above the ground on piers of concrete blocks.

The interior framing is wood. The external wall material is wood boards painted white.

Viewed from above, the building is H shaped. That is, there are two parallel connected wings. The wings run approximately along a North-South axis.

The roofing material is asphalt shingles. Four brick chimneys are in evidence at the junctures of the wings with the connector.

There is a covered portico (18 ft. x 18 ft.), supported by columns, then leads to a covered front porch (74 ft. x 8 ft.), also supported by pillars. The roof is capped by a cupola/bell-tower.

There are three entrances to the central ("crossbar") part of the H shaped building. They are single doors with nine small panes in each. One door, the main entrance, is located toward the midpoint, and the other two at either end, of the front porch.

In addition, there is a single door entrance to each wing, and wing section.

The leftmost (west) wing consists of two rooms. The first is a classroom (29 ft. x 22 ft.), plus a small cloak room toward the front or southernmost side of the building. Access is through a door on the northeast corner.

The second room is a library. It measures approximately 22 ft. by 48 ft. Overall the wing measures 84 ft. x 22 ft.

The other (east or right) wing consists of three rooms. The southern most (front) room measures 29 ft. x 22 ft., plus a small cloakroom. The second room measures 30 ft x 22 ft. The back room measures 18 ft x 22 ft.

The wings appear to consist of two bays each. The west wing has seventeen windows, each consisting of eighteen panes. The east wing has fifteen windows, each consisting of eighteen panes. There are no windows on the back (north) side of the wings.

Each wing has a single wooden door. The door on the east side of the west wing, and the west side of the east wing.

The only alterations known to the structure are on the front

of the wings, which have added shed-like bathrooms, added some time during the 1950s. The bathrooms are on the east side of the west wing, and the west side of the east wing.

That portion of the building that connects the two wings contains two rooms. The west most of these measures 14 ft. x 22 ft., plus a small cloak room on the westernmost portion, which measures roughly 4 ft. x 22 ft. The second room, which has two entrances, measures 45 ft. x 22 ft.

Windows in this section are in the back (north side) There are a total of 12, each with 18 small panes.

All windows double-hung wood.

Additional structures of significance include a windmill and pumphouse directly in back of the school building.

Interior surfaces (e.g., ceilings and walls) consists of pine panelling, except the floors, which consist of pine boards.

The building was constructed in 1937 by the Rural Resettlement/Farm Security Administrations.





United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

JUL 14 1987

## 1. Name

historic Gee's Bend Farms Community School

and/or common "Old Boykin High School"

## 2. Location

street & number Approx. 100 yards N. of Boykin town center (off Wilcox Cty. Rd. 29) NA not for publication

city, town Boykin, AL 36723 \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district

state Alabama code 01 county Wilcox code

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Leased from the Wilcox County Board of Education to Boykin Historical Association

street & number

city, town Camden  vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state Alabama

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Wilcox County Courthouse -- Probate's Office

street & number

city, town Camden \_\_\_\_\_ state Alabama

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Alabama Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1970-present  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery \_\_\_\_\_ state Alabama

# 7. Description

**Condition**

- excellent
- good
- fair

- deteriorated
- ruins
- unexposed

**Check one**

- unaltered
- altered

**Check one**

- original site
- moved date \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

See attached sheets & maps.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian?
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
				minority <input type="checkbox"/>

Specific dates 1937

Builder/Architect Rural Resettlement Administration

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

THE GEE'S BEND FARMS SCHOOL BUILDING is the essentially the only remaining public facility of a major social experiment that, under the aegis of the federal government, extended a measure of equal opportunity to Blacks in the Deep South during the late 1930s. One of twenty-five "Rural Resettlement Projects" or planned communities that were set-up and run primarily by the Farm Security Administration (FSA), the Gee's Bend project sought to uplift destitute Black tenant farmers and their families through a program of hard work, formal education, on-the-job training, cooperative enterprise, and land ownership via supervised credit. Through this program, the project participants attained a measure of independence that allowed them to become active participants in the Civil Rights Movement. The Gee's Bend Farms School is a significant symbol of minority education, achievement, and ultimate independence in the rural South.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

New York Times Magazine, August 22, 1937  
Lester Salamon, Land and Minority Enterprise, US Dept. of Commerce, 1976  
M.G. Trend, "Government Capital and Minority Enterprise," American Anthropologist  
University of Virginia, "Up From the Bottom," 1949. 1986

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 11 +/-  
Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_ Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

### UMT References

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
E	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	F	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
G	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	H	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

### Verbal boundary description and justification

see red line on attached platt map

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>Alabama</u>	code		county	<u>Box</u>	code	
state		code		county		code	

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title M.G. Trend, Ph. D., John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellow  
organization College of Business, Auburn University date May 19, 1987  
street & number Thach Hall telephone (205) 825-4566  
city or town Auburn University state AL 36849-3501

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

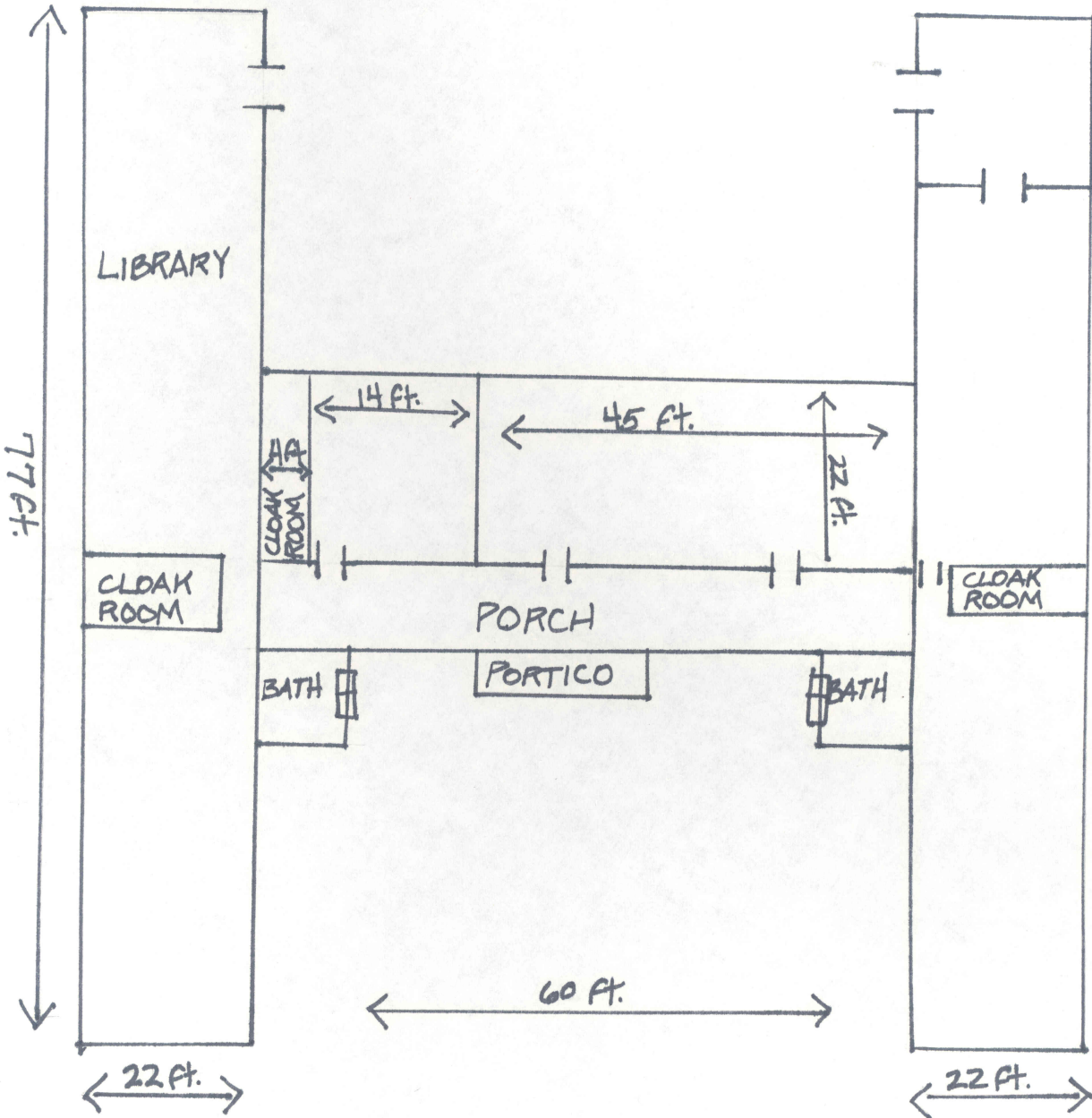
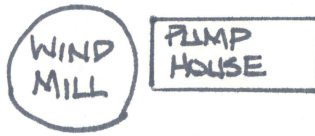
The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

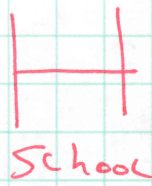
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

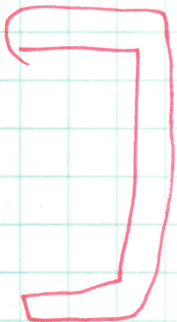
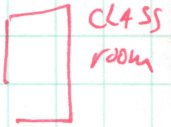
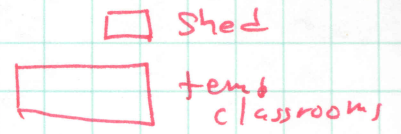
title	date
For HCERS use only I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
Keeper of the National Register	date
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	



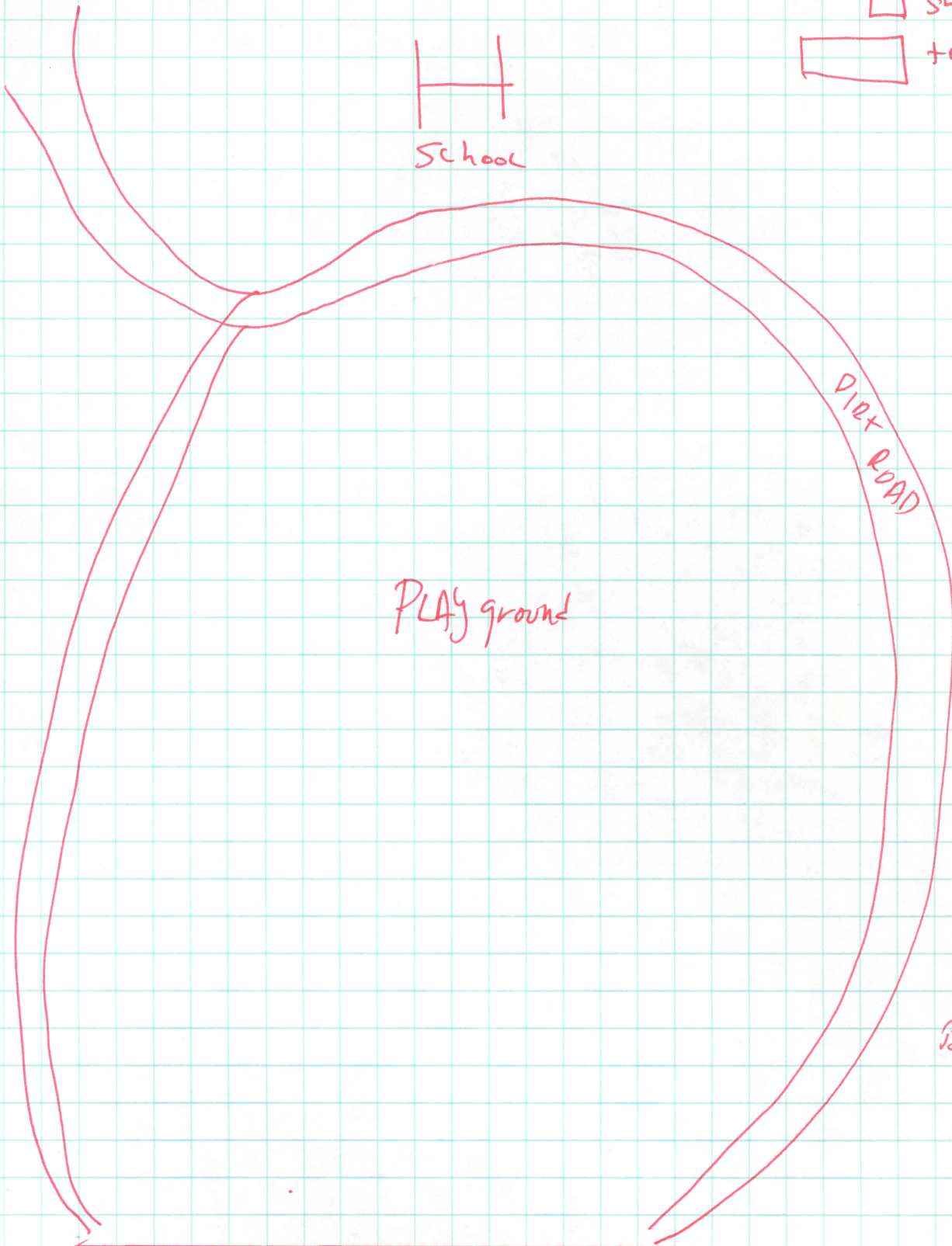
GEE'S BEND FARM COMMUNITY SCHOOL  
WILCOX COUNTY  
BOYKIN



School



Boys K/W  
Elementary



BLACKTOP

CAMPUS grounds

