

NPS Form 10-900  
(Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

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historic name: Big Horn Academy Historic District

other name/site number: Cowley High School and Cowley Gymnasium/Community Hall  
Smithsonian Number 48BH260

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2. Location

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street & number: 25 East First South--Big Horn Academy  
35 East First South--Cowley Gymnasium

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Cowley vicinity: N/A

state: WY county: Big Horn code: 003 zip code: 82420

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: Public-local

Category of Property: District

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.  See continuation sheet.



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Signature of certifying official

2-19-92

Date

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State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

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Signature of commenting or other official

Date

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State or Federal agency and bureau

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**5. National Park Service Certification**

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I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register Autowitht/Bliss 3/26/92  
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): \_\_\_\_\_

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*for* Signature of Keeper Date  
of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic: EDUCATION Sub: School  
SOCIAL Meeting Hall

Current EDUCATION Sub: School  
VACANT/NOT IN USE

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification:

Romanesque Revival

Other: Log

Other Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: foundation STONE/Sandstone roof OTHER: Tar  
CONCRETE WOOD/Shingle  
walls STONE/Sandstone other \_\_\_\_\_  
WOOD/Log

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Locally.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A \_\_\_\_\_

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : N/A

Areas of Significance:

EDUCATION  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period(s) of Significance: 1916-World War II

Significant Dates : 1916 1936 \_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.  
X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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X See continuation sheet.

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:

- X State historic preservation office  
- Other state agency  
- Federal agency  
- Local government  
- University  
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: 1 1/2 acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing      Zone Easting Northing

A <u>12</u> <u>700020</u> <u>4972820</u>	B <u>12</u> <u>700020</u> <u>4972750</u>
C <u>12</u> <u>699950</u> <u>4972750</u>	D <u>12</u> <u>699950</u> <u>4972810</u>

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: X See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification: X See continuation sheet.

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title: Franklin T. Hinckley  
Rheba Massey, SHPO Survey Historian  
Organization: Cowley Alumni Association Date: November 27, 1991

Street & Number: N/A Telephone: 307-548-6734

City or Town: Cowley State: WY ZIP: 82420

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National Park Service

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Section number 7 (Big Horn Academy Historic District) Page # 1

The Big Horn Academy Historic District is located on one and one-half lots of Block 45 in the center of Cowley, Wyoming. The streets forming the boundary for this block are First Street South, First Street East, Division Street, and U.S. Highway 310. There are two buildings which belong to School District No. 1, Big Horn County and both of these buildings are contributing, the Big Horn Academy and the Cowley Gymnasium/Community Hall.

The two-story Big Horn Academy was constructed in 1916 of rusticated sandstone that is a mottled red and cream color. Rectangular in shape the building is approximately 80 feet by 65 feet in dimension. The front/south elevation has three bays with the center bay slightly recessed; the east and west elevations also have three bays but the center bay slightly projects from the building. The three entrances on the south, east, and west sides are framed by a beige rusticated stone, and the capstone over the front entrance bears the carved legend: BIG HORN ACADEMY 1916. The recessed front entry way has a six over six lite transom and two honey-colored wood entrance doors, each with 12 lites. The two entrance doors on the west elevation are wood paneled with two over two lites in the upper portion of the door. The entrance door on the east elevation is the same as the west elevation; however, one of the doors has been removed and the space filled with 5 window lites. The glass has been replaced with wood panels. These doors lead into a central hallway that gives access to classrooms, offices, cloakrooms and to two wide stairways. The stairways, in turn, lead to a second story similar in plan to the first story. The walls are plastered and the floors are of hard wood, both original. The hanging ceilings are of acoustical material installed in recent years to improve the heating efficiency and the sound abatement conditions in the building.

The roof is flat, heavily tarred, and set a few feet below the squared height of the masonry walls. It slopes gently to drain openings on the four corners of the roof. There are three wide beige stone belt courses above the second story windows which continue around the entire building. The middle belt course is recessed. The first and second story of the front elevation consist of nine over nine lite double-hung wood windows with plain white surrounds. Five windows are placed symmetrically on the second story of the center bay with two windows flanking each side of the first story front entrance. The other two bays have three windows on each story with narrow sidelights of six lites flanking each window set. The east and west elevations have the same windows; however, over each entrance is a one and one-half story stationary window of 12 over 12 lites with flanking sidelights of 8 lites and a transom of 3 over 3 lites with flanking sidelights of 2 lites. The many large windows are installed in openings framed by beige stone posts, lintels and sills. The beautifully dressed stone masonry is of coursed masonry construction except for a section of the east wall that is built of intricately fitted, uncoursed stone used to fill spaces designed for windows. The foundation is of the same rusticated stone which frames the doors and windows. There is an attached structure on the rear elevation built of the same type of stone, almost square

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in plan, that is connected to the main building by a covered walkway. This smaller structure houses the heating plant and the toilet facilities for the main building. The building has retained its original appearance and integrity.

The second contributing building, the Cowley Community Hall, was built in 1936 as a Works Progress Administration's project. It is located to the east of the Big Horn Academy. The overall building plan is a cruciform shape. The log building is approximately 100 feet long by 60 feet wide and one and one-half stories tall. The foundation is a low 6" in height and made of stone. There is no basement present. The walls are made of six to eight inch lodgepole pine with saddle notched corners in a stepped log design (the projection of the logs is wider at the bottom and decreases as the logs ascend to the roof). The windows are horizontally symmetrical and rectangular in form. They are double hung sash with a plain surround of milled lumber and a flat arch. All of the windows are boarded over with plywood. All doors on the community center are painted brown and are without lites. A single steel entry door is located on the south facade. Single slab entry doors appear on the northeast corner and the north elevation. Double slab entry doors are found on the west elevation. The roof of the Cowley Community Center is covered with red wood shingles and shows exposed rafter ends, ridge pole and purlins of log construction. The roof takes the form of intersecting gables.

In the 1960s a small (approximately 15'x27') cinderblock addition was constructed on the northwest corner of the building. It features a single grey entry door in the west elevation. The addition is covered by a shed roof extension that is covered by the same red wood shingles that cover the main roof.

Although the exterior is quite conventional, the interior of the Cowley Community Center has almost a cathedral effect with its soaring, open trusswork built of 14 inch logs. These logs are lacquered and honey-colored. This very large room has been traditionally used as a gymnasium and basketball court. There are some small storage areas found along the outside walls. The floor is laid with tongue-and-groove boards that are uneven in spots.

This building is in basically good condition and would not require any major repair other than some minor rechinking. Even though it is now being used for storage, the Cowley Community Center still retains a good deal of integrity because there have been few if any changes made in either its interior or exterior. Although there is an addition, its placement at the rear of the building only slightly detracts from the overall integrity. It is very small in relation to overall building size and is not visible from the front. To create harmony with the original building, identical roofing material was used.

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The Big Horn Academy Historic District is significant under Criterion A for its primary role in the development of education in Cowley and the Big Horn Basin. The Big Horn Academy was the first High School in the Big Horn Basin and in Cowley; the Gymnasium was the first constructed in Cowley. The period of significance for this district is 1916-1942. The first building, the Big Horn Academy was constructed in 1916 and the second building, the Cowley Gymnasium, was constructed in 1936 as a Works Progress Administration Project. The Academy is now being used for a pre-school and the Gymnasium is vacant. Plans are now being made to restore the Gymnasium for community use.

The Mormon people came to the Big Horn Basin in 1900 in response to a call from their church president to colonize the west. An added incentive came from William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) who had acquired state permits to appropriate water along the Shoshone River. He communicated a desire to see thrifty settlers of their type establish homes and farms on a large block of land along the river. Almost the first thing the Mormons did on arrival, after starting construction of irrigation works, was to build churches and schools. Primitive log cabins were the first such structures.

In 1907, the Mormons started construction in Cowley of a stone school house, a part of which was allocated to the use of a more advanced academic enterprise which they would call the Big Horn Academy. Its program was essentially that of a high school, although in the context of that time it was thought of almost as a college. Students came to the Academy from a wide area to live and board, somewhat as students leave home to attend college today. The Mormon church planned to rotate the Big Horn Academy every few years between the towns of Lovell, Byron, and Cowley where the program would be housed in available facilities. However, the school never made it to Byron and in 1913 the LDS authorities started planning the construction of a permanent building to house the Big Horn Academy. The old stone school house was torn down and the new school building was completed in 1916 at a cost of \$40,000. The work was done entirely by horse and manpower. Stone for it was quarried from the hills to the north by expenditure of brutal hard work, much ingenuity and a limited amount of black powder. The beautifully dressed, coursed stonework, even the large capstone including its chiseled inscription, was all shaped, placed and mortared by hand.

The Academy was operated as a church school until 1924 when its physical facilities and responsibilities were transferred to School District No. 28 and the entity thereafter to be known as the Cowley High School. The building could accommodate 400 students. This building has been intimately associated with nearly every aspect of Mormon history in the Big Horn Basin of Wyoming. Its uses and influence have extended far beyond the merely educational phase of their lives (important as that has been) to touch importantly every other aspect of their history to date. Important public figures, distinguished musicians, All American basketball players, beloved pioneers and solid citizens

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by the hundred have trod these hallways down through the years.

A half century ago, in the depths of the Great Depression, Congress established the Works Progress Administration to bring work and income to people all over America whose overalls were beginning to hang on them a bit loosely by then. You could hardly think of anything that a creative imagination could dream up in the way of public construction that the old WPA didn't help finance at that time. The city dads of Cowley, Wyoming, naturally, like everybody else, asked to get on the gravy train too with a project to build a "community hall"! Uncle Sam came through with a few dollars (approximately \$10,000); and for a total investment of public funds that would hardly pay the interest for six months on a typical bond issue for construction of a high school gymnasium today, these embattled farmers put up their community hall/gymnasium. Within a very few years it became officially the Cowley High School Gymnasium, for which purpose the building has served the school and the community most admirably for fifty years.

Like the first building, however, that is but one among a myriad of uses it has been put to. It is no exaggeration to say that every usage or employment that a meeting house in a small town might conceivably have has been valiantly served by this glorified old cabin. The ghostly presence of public meetings, church conferences, annual celebrations, family ingatherings, class reunions, dances, political rallies, musical extravaganzas, dramatic presentations, even prize fights, all long past, seems almost palpable here. If these old buildings aren't historic places then we have no history.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lindsay, Charles. The Big Horn Basin. Lincoln, Nebraska: The University of Nebraska, 1932.

Partridge, Mark N. With Plow and Book. Lovell, Wyoming: Mountain States Printing Company, 1967.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

Big Horn Academy is on Lot 3, Block 45 of the original township of Cowley. Cowley Gymnasium straddles the boundary line of Lots 3 and 4 of Block 45. Therefore the verbal boundary description includes all of Lot 3 and the west half of Lot 4, Block 45 of the original township of Cowley.

Boundary Justification:

This is the legal description set forth in the original township of Cowley in the Tax Assessor's Office.

DIVISION STREET

N →

BLOCK 45

Hwy 310

FIRST SOUTH STREET

DISTRICT  
BOUNDARY

BIG HORN  
ACADEMY

LOG  
COMMUNITY  
HALL

RASMUSSEN  
REPAIR SHOP

ALLEY

FIRST STREET EAST