

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The schoolhouse was constructed in 1938 by the Works Progress Administration program. The building is seventy by seventy feet and was constructed of heavy gray stone, which came from the old Theater and Equity buildings in Wiley, which the school purchased for this purpose. The exterior of the building is a native sandstone veneer. It is a one-story, flat-roofed structure that is located on the east side of the Wiley School property and faces Main Street. The entire east boundary of the block has a sandstone curb approximately 1.5' high. There are a series of three wide sandstone steps that lead from the street up to the sidewalk. One leads to the main entrance. These steps were designed to be loading piers for the school buses. The west side of the block contains the present Wiley Consolidated School District RE-13-JT school building that houses the elementary through high school classrooms, offices, gymnasium, and cafetorium. The elementary playground surrounds the rock schoolhouse.

The schoolhouse interior consists of four large classrooms with a central hallway, two bathrooms and a storage garage. Each classroom boasts large, multi-paned windows on all exterior walls. All the classrooms and hallway still have the original wood flooring, trim and doors in good repair. The original slate chalkboards hang in each classroom. The building was originally designed to house a blacksmith shop for manual training and agriculture programs, a sound-proof music room for the band, as well as additional classrooms.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) on May 6, 1935, as a reaction to the Great Depression. Its purpose was to provide relief work for unemployed persons through public works projects. In our area, many of those "unemployed persons" were farmers hit hard by the effect of both the depression and the Dust Bowl days of the dirty-thirties. Between 1935 and 1943 the WPA provided almost 8 million jobs at a cost of 11 billion dollars, and created a legacy of public welfare that has become monumentalized through their still used buildings, roads, dams, schools, indexes, oral histories, and art. The local Sandstone Schoolhouse is one of those living legacies.

The schoolhouse has remarkably retained its original appearance both interior and exterior. Only one exterior wall has been altered from the original sandstone veneer. After the end of World War II, barracks from a relocation camp located in a neighboring town were moved in and used for additional school classrooms. One of these barracks was attached to the west side of the rock schoolhouse for additional elementary classrooms. When the new Wiley school was erected, these barracks were all moved from the school property. The west exterior wall of the schoolhouse was simply sealed with a stucco finish rather than replacing the sandstone. As this is the rear wall of the schoolhouse, it has not been detrimental to the overall appearance.

Located in southeastern Colorado on U. S. Highway 287, the town of Wiley, incorporated in 1907, has managed not only to survive; it has remained a tiny but stable and vibrant farming community. Built from sandstone quarried locally, the Sandstone Schoolhouse was also built by local Wiley farmers. A number of these original "builders" descendants still live in the community and speak emotionally of how the work on this schoolhouse literally saved their families from the despair of the times. Due to its constant use as a school, there are families who have attended classes in the building spanning five generations.

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Contributing to this feeling of "era" continuity is the Wiley Rock Schoolhouse. Built in 1938 by the Works Progress Administration, it remained in constant use for students, by the town's school district, until only a few years ago. Although retaining architectural integrity and basic soundness of structure, the building's need for rehabilitation and the district's need for new construction space put the building at risk. Only aggressive community intervention saved it from a vote to demolish in March of 2000.

Built from sandstone quarried locally, the Rock Schoolhouse was also built by local Wiley farmers. A number of these original "builders" descendants still live in the community and came to speak on its behalf at the School Board's meeting. They spoke emotionally of how the work on this schoolhouse literally saved their families from the despair of the times. Due to its constant use as a school, there are families here who have attended classes in the small four-room building spanning five generations.

In a letter dated June 20, 2000, addressed to the Wiley School Board of Education, Monita Lee Dakin, Executive Director of Colorado Preservation, Inc., stated, "A recent survey in Colorado indicates that as many as 250 of our public schools may be architecturally or historically significant. We believe that Wiley Rock School is one of these significant schools." The Prowers County Historical Society and the Prowers County Commissioners have echoed this sentiment. The school, which has a living oral history still available, has survived nearly intact. Stonework, slate blackboards, unpainted woodwork, doors and floors have survived nearly seven decades of local children. Former students visit the rock school, many sporting grand children, and speak fondly of their school days, school plays and old ways.