

HABS No. WA-183

Stehekin School
Lake Chelan National Recreation Area
East side, Stehekin Valley Road
Stehekin vicinity
Chelan County
Washington

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
STEHEKIN SCHOOL

HABS No. WA-183

Location: East side, Stehekin Valley Road, approximately 3 miles from Stehekin Landing (head of Lake Chelan), in Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, Chelan County, Washington

USGS Stehekin Quadrangle (7.5'), Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 10/670710/5356560

Present Owner: Stehekin School District, under special-use permit with the National Park Service, Department of Interior

Present Occupant: Stehekin School

Present Use: School

Significance: Beginning in the late 19th century, various cabins in the Stehekin Valley served as schools. With a stable number of families residing in the valley by the 1920s, the community wanted a more permanent learning environment for their children, and one in a central location. In 1921 the United States Forest Service granted the community a special-use permit to build a school, and valley residents volunteered their time and labor to accomplish their goal. Using timber from the site, they felled trees, cut shakes and notched logs, and erected a sizable, rustic, one room log cabin to serve as the new school. On May 28, 1974, the Stehekin School was officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It is significant for its association with the settlement and development of the isolated Stehekin Valley; it gives testimony to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the early residents of a wilderness community.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Context

The Stehekin School is located in the Stehekin River Valley, in Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, within the North Cascades National Park Service Complex. This remote region of north central Washington State is accessed by foot, boat (along Lake Chelan), or floatplane only. The glacially-sculpted and forested Stehekin Valley is accessed by the 22-mile-long Stehekin Valley road which parallels the Stehekin River and is only partially paved. The Stehekin School is located along the east side of the valley road, approximately 3 miles north of Stehekin Landing and the head of Lake Chelan. The historic site takes in less than one acre of open pine forest and includes the log school-house, a playground area, two outhouses and a new log structure which serves as a kindergarten. The school has a north/south orientation, set back from and facing the valley road. The schoolhouse and its associated cluster of outbuildings have a rustic appearance; the use of natural materials harmonizes with the surrounding environment.

B. History

In 1889 the first official settler arrived in the Stehekin Valley to establish a homestead. Although the development that occurred in the valley was slow, a community evolved based on tourism, mining and seasonal employment with the United States Forest Service (USFS). By the 20th century, families with children were calling Stehekin home, making a life for themselves in a wilderness environment.

After years of holding school lessons in various Stehekin Valley cabins, or teaching their children in their own homes, valley residents decided it was time to build a permanent schoolhouse. The community had grown in size and a centrally located school seemed appropriate. The citizens approached the USFS, the agency administering what was then national forest land, for a special-use permit to build a school. The permit was granted in 1921 for a .6 acre parcel of land near Rainbow Falls, a locally famous landmark. Construction work began that same year. Using native materials from the valley, timber from the site, and their own ingenuity, skills and labor, Stehekin residents gathered in August to cut, notch and fill the logs that comprised the main walls of the schoolhouse. Money was raised through community events such as "box socials" in order to purchase doors, windows and flooring for the building. While no formal construction plans or drawings were made, the builders had years of experience in erecting similar structures elsewhere in the valley. Some of the individuals known to have volunteered their labor included Van and Harry Buckner, Barney Zell, and Fred and Henry Bowan.

The school is used for grades kindergarten through the eighth grade. Children wishing to continue their education through high school usually leave the valley and attend school 55 miles downlake in Chelan. Over the years the structure has been romanticized as being the last remaining one-room log schoolhouse in Washington State. What is significant is its value to the community as a learning facility and how it remains a symbol of pride to those residents who received an education there. Changes to the log school have altered its appearance, although from the valley road these changes are not readily apparent. In the early 1970s a wood-frame addition was built onto the north side of the building, nearly doubling its size. This was completed by local resident Mike Barnhart, a descendant of one of the early valley settlers. This addition originally was built as an apartment for the teacher, but now serves as classroom space. The front porch of the school was stabilized and sections rebuilt by Jim Hammett in 1982. The log kindergarten cabin was originally built by Ray Courtney in 1979 for use as a restroom. It never served in that capacity, but is used today for kindergarten classes.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Exterior

The Stehekin School is a rectangular, one-story, 2 bays wide log cabin structure (18'x 26') with a 21' wood-frame addition on the north end. The steeply-pitched gable roof is covered with split wood shakes and extends out 6' on the south side to form a porch overhang supported by round logs. The upper gable ends have board and batten siding. Roof rafters are exposed round logs. The foundation is log joists and sills set on rocks. The log portion of the school is comprised of round logs with hand-hewn planked ends and saddle-notched corners; the wood-frame addition sits on a poured concrete foundation and is sided with clapboard. The porch (south side) sits on round logs and rocks and is decked with milled lumber. A concrete block chimney is centrally located along the ridgeline. There are openings on the south and east facades of the log portion of the school: the south has a rustic wood panel and glass door and a one-over-one double-hung sash; the east wall is broken up by a row of five, one-over-one, double-hung sash cut into the logs. The north addition has single-pane fixed sash on the east and west facades, and an open shed-roofed porch supported by squared posts set on a raised concrete foundation (off the north elevation).

B. Interior

The school was originally one room with a king post truss log rafter roof system above. The ceilings in both rooms have been dropped and covered in acoustical tiles. The old log cabin and new addition are separated by a wall with a doorway. The walls in the older section are covered with vertical knotty pine wood, and the electrical system has been upgraded. Except for a sink in the new addition, there is no plumbing in the schoolhouse. The floors are modern, "parquet-look" wood tiles. A wood-burning stove in the older (south) section of the school provides the sole source of heat for the building.

Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. Higgs, Gary W. List of Classified Structures form, Stehekin School. National Park Service, Pacific Northwest/Western Team, Denver Service Center, March 1, 1976.
2. Huffman, Laurin C. National Register Nomination for the Stehekin School, National Park Service, Pacific Northwest Region, Seattle, June 19, 1970.
3. Luxenberg, Gretchen A. Historic Structures Inventory, North Cascades National Park Service Complex. National Park Service, Seattle, 1984.
4. Luxenberg, Gretchen A. Historic Resource Study, North Cascades National Park Service Complex, National Park Service, Seattle, 1986.

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