

# Lee School Description & Significance from National Registry of Historic Places Listing

## Description

The Lee School is located on a flat, grassy, 0.4-acre parcel on the east side of New York State Route 14 about one mile south of the village of Montour Falls. Historically, this section of Route 14 consisted primarily of farmsteads and open, undeveloped land; recently, however, the area along this heavily travelled thoroughfare--including the immediate vicinity of the schoolhouse--has been developed with modern commercial and residential properties. Furthermore, Route 14 itself has been widened and realigned during the twentieth century, further compromising the historic setting and orientation of the schoolhouse. Despite this partial loss of integrity of setting, the schoolhouse retains a high degree of integrity of design, materials, craftsmanship and feeling.

Built in 1884, the building is a one-room, one-story, rectangular, gable-roofed frame building resting on a low, dry-laid stone foundation. The exterior is sheathed with novelty siding and is articulated by narrow corner boards. The three-bay-wide front (west) elevation features a centrally placed, simple plank door surmounted by a transom light and a pent-roofed hood; blind bays flank the entrance. North and south (side) elevations feature four, regularly spaced, six-over-six, double-hung sash windows, most with their original glass panes.

The building was used as a district schoolhouse until 1937; mothballed until 1960, it was then turned over to the local historical society with its interior features virtually intact. Notable original appointments include blackboards (wooden boards painted black), narrow, beaded panelling, wide board flooring, a cast-iron wood stove, and original students' and teacher's desks. The floorplan of the building consists of one room plus a small cloakroom.

There are no outbuildings located on the nominated property.

## Statement of Significance

The Lee School, built in 1884, is architecturally significant as a substantially intact, representative example of a late nineteenth century, one-room schoolhouse in Schuyler County. Very plain in design and decoration, the vernacular frame building is typical of the type of building erected for educational purposes in small, rural agrarian communities across upstate New York in general and the southern Finger Lakes region in particular during the mid- to late 1800s. The former schoolhouse illustrates the tradition of housing children of all grades together in a single room before the advent of centralized school systems, which provided for, among other progressive advantages, age-segregated classrooms. Currently serving as a museum run by the Schuyler County Historical Society, the remarkably intact building--particularly in terms of its interior appointments and furniture--is a rare surviving reminder of the history of education in the southern Finger Lakes of New York.

According to currently available information, the current building is the second schoolhouse erected on the site. The first, believed to have been built before 1829, was a one-room schoolhouse of log construction. The log schoolhouse was replaced in 1884 by the present building, which served the town as Montour District #1 School until 1937. Built on land donated by a descendant of David Lee--an early settler in the area--the building was, and still is, commonly known as Lee School. The only intact school of its type in Schuyler County, the building is a rare surviving example of the period and a prominent local landmark in the community.