



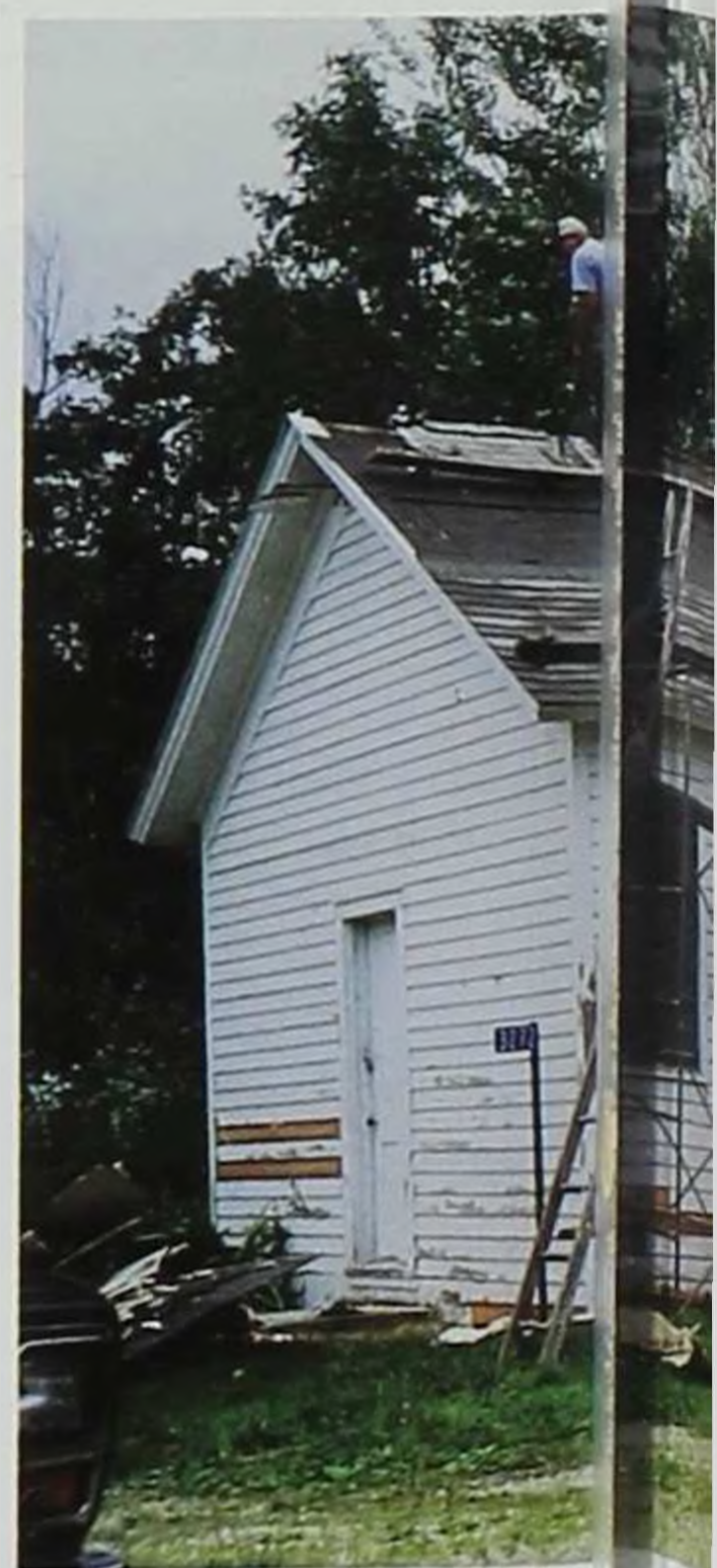
ABOVE PHOTO BY GRINNELL HERALD-REGISTER; ALL PHOTOS, SHSI (DES MOINES); ISEA COLLECTION

Left: Visiting students play circle games and spin on the merry-go-round at Malcom #6, now a school museum at the Poweshiek County fairgrounds. Malcom #6 functioned as a rural school from 1879 to 1965.

Right (top): Teacher Curt Nielsen gives a sense of country school teaching in the Little Red School in Cedar Falls. Week-long sessions are held there each summer, and it is open to visitors May through October and for other events.

Right (middle): Cedar #7 in Mitchell County was renovated in 1997 by alumni, their children, and township residents, and is used for special events.

Right (bottom): Garfield #4, in Ida County, is now a meeting place for the local 4-H club.



Re-using Rural Schools

Over the last century and a half, Iowa's one-room rural schools often functioned as more than a daytime center of learning for children. In the 19th century, singing societies and evening penmanship classes used the buildings. In the 20th century, schools continued to double as township and community centers, where rural residents gathered to cast ballots, discuss issues, eat potluck dinners, applaud school programs, and in other ways exercise a sense of community.

Although thousands of one-room schools have disappeared from the landscape (or now masquerade as farm storage buildings, housing, and the occasional commercial enterprise), significant numbers have been lovingly brought back to useful lives. In recent years Iowan William L. Sherman, with the help of hundreds of others in every county, compiled an extensive record of remaining one-room schools in Iowa. The product, *Iowa's Country Schools: Landmarks of*

Learning, sets rural schools in historical context, considers their educational virtues and various architectural styles, shows the remarkable adaptability of these modest structures, and recognizes the energy and labor that Iowans have poured into them. Sherman believes that Iowa may hold the record for the most one-room schools still standing—by his count, more than 2,900.

Meanwhile, the State Historical Society of Iowa is funding a major study of town and city schools, 1846–1966, with inventories, intensive surveys, National Register of Historic Places nominations, and three field guides. The guides will help the public understand, appreciate, and nominate town, city, and country schools to the National Register.

These four photos are just a sampling of the ideas and energy Iowans have applied to that beloved and beleaguered structure—the country school.

—Ginalie Swaim