

The Hungarian Settlement School is a rambling wood frame building built at an unknown date in the early twentieth century in Springfield and moved in 1928 to nearby Hungarian Settlement. (A date of c.1910 will be used for the original construction in this nomination.) The building for the most part is quite plain; hence the term “no style” is being used for purposes of this nomination. It occupies a two acre parcel on the corner of two-lane Louisiana Highway 43 and Presbyterian Church Road. The locale is largely rural, although modern brick ranch houses are within sight. With the exception of the loss of all but one of the entrance porches, the school looks much as it did from 1928 to 1943, the period of significance for this nomination.

#### The Move:

The large ethnic enclave of Hungarian Settlement received its first school in about 1920. This building burned in the 1927-28 school year. On April 3, 1928, a delegation from Hungarian Settlement appeared before the Livingston Parish School Board requesting that their situation be addressed. On November 6, 1928, the school board decided to award a contract to a Mr. Thompson to move a no longer used school building in Springfield (3-4 miles to the south) to Hungarian Settlement. Any moving expenses that exceeded the \$150 allotted by the school board would be paid by the people of Hungarian Settlement. According to old-timers who witnessed the move as children, the school was moved on logs pulled by oxen. Apparently it was moved in sections.

#### The Building:

The school has roughly a U-shaped footprint. The northern “leg” of the U may have been added when the school was moved to its present location in 1928. The building does not have a main façade with a main entrance. Instead there are two principal elevations which join at a right angle. A fan-shaped auditorium is located at the corner with small classrooms to each side. Each classroom as well as the auditorium had its own entrance marked by a small porch with a pyramidal roof and simple Eastlake posts (per an early photo showing the school in its Springfield location). Today only one porch survives. The northern two room “leg” of the U is not articulated in this manner and features a slightly different interior treatment – all of which makes one suspect that it was added as part of the move. Windows are two over two and typically are grouped in pairs. In its original location the corner of the school was marked by a simple belfry. This element was not moved to Hungarian Settlement.

The interiors are simply finished, with the walls and ceiling sheathed in beaded boards. Most rooms have a beaded board wainscot. The ceiling boards of the fan-shaped auditorium come together in a V-shape as do the floorboards. Historically each classroom had its own heating, as can be seen in remnants of the exhaust systems. (Former students recall gathering firewood for the stoves.)

The candidate ceased being a school in 1943 and in later years became a nursing home. Alterations made during this era include the loss or cutting-down of some of the exterior doors, some window replacement, the removal of the double windows and door at one end of the east-facing façade, and the creation of very wide openings between the auditorium and adjacent classrooms. (Formerly there were walls with a standard door.)

Until very recently, the long abandoned building was not secured, and one of the principal elevations was obscured by an unsightly enclosed porch addition made by the nursing home. At the advice of the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, local school enthusiasts formed the Hungarian Settlement Historical Society in 2000, obtained a long-term lease from the Livingston Parish School Board, and secured the building. In February 2001, again upon advice from the SHPO, the group removed the addition preparatory to this National Register nomination. Now they are working to secure funds for a complete restoration of the building (including the porches) and its re-use as a Hungarian heritage museum. The National Register nomination is being pursued at this time for two reasons: its psychological value and the importance of a Register designation for fundraising.

#### Assessment of Integrity:

When the Louisiana SHPO first evaluated the Hungarian Settlement School, there were two integrity issues – the enclosed porch addition spanning one façade and the loss of all but one of the original entrance porches. The removal of the addition helped immensely in re-establishing the school’s historic appearance. And while the small porches admittedly are character-defining features, one survives and it will be duplicated. And even with the missing porches, the old school retains the remainder of its original character (including the interior) and hence would be recognizable to someone from the historic period.

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1928-1943  
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Unknown  
CRITERION: A

The Hungarian Settlement School is locally significant in the area of ethnic history as a rare survivor to represent the distinctive heritage of Hungarian Settlement. The school is of local educational significance because of its role in educating both children and adults. It was the principal school for Hungarian Settlement children from 1928, when it opened, to 1943, when it closed. Grades one through seven were taught there, and it is where many an Hungarian child learned English. In addition, adult education classes were held there at night.

Hungarian immigrants from the North were first attracted to Livingston Parish around 1896. The stimulus was the Charles Brakenridge Lumber Company, which advertised in Hungarian newspapers for workers, promising employment as well as the opportunity to buy land. The three original settlers were Julius Bruskey, Tivador Zboray and Adam Mocsary. They in turn wrote to friends and relatives in both America and Hungary, and Bruskey and Zboray visited Hungarian communities in the North to spread the word. Also, the Illinois Central Railroad paid to advertise the area in an Hungarian newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio. By 1900, seventeen Hungarian families had moved to the sawmill community. They called their settlement Arpadhon, or "place of Arpad," in honor of a legendary Hungarian hero. The earliest building (besides the sawmill complex) was the Immigration House, a large two story building built by Brakenridge Lumber to serve various needs. It provided temporary lodging for settlers and helped meet the immediate religious, educational and social needs of the fledgling colony. By 1910, the population of Arpadhon had grown to sixty-five families (291 people). Presbyterians built their permanent place of worship in 1908 and the larger Catholic population built St. Margaret's in 1910. Named for a patron saint of Hungary, the church was consecrated in 1912.

Despite the mill's closing in 1916, Arpadhon continued to grow in the 1920s as more and more Hungarians made it their home. Now the economic foundation was agriculture, with strawberries as the dominant crop. From the very beginning, one of the chief inducements to immigrate to the area had been the opportunity to buy cutover land (in twenty acre parcels) from the lumber company. In the early years, settlers combined farming with a long day's work in the mill. After the mill closed, they turned completely to farming, capitalizing on the strawberry boom occurring in the area. By 1935, Arpadhon had reached its peak population of about 200 families (1500 individuals). Up until the post World War II era, it was a strong self-contained ethnic enclave where Hungarian was most commonly spoken and Hungarian married Hungarian. (Former students of the Hungarian Settlement School interviewed for this nomination indicate they learned to speak English at school and that Hungarian remained the language at home.) In later years the name Arpadhon faded from use, as more and more people simply referred to the community as Hungarian Settlement, the name it is known by today.

Today very little survives to show someone that there was once a thriving Hungarian colony in the area. Historically, Arpadhon was a rural hamlet of scattered farms. Early farmhouses, as shown in photographs, were board and batten buildings with simple porches across the front and rear. Population figures demonstrate that at its peak, there must have been about 200 farmsteads in the settlement. Today, the farmsteads may still be there, but the old family home has been replaced with a brick ranch house. Only about a half dozen fifty-plus year old houses survive, in varying stages of integrity. None of these are the type of board and batten farmhouses that represent the earliest housing stock. The most significant building in Arpadhon, the Immigration House, is long gone. Fortunately, a photo survives. The community also had its own Hungarian newspaper, but the building where it was published is also gone, as are the farmer's association meeting hall and the buildings housing St. Margaret's Parochial School and the first school. There are only three surviving historic buildings (other than the half dozen older houses mentioned above): the Presbyterian church, St. Margaret's Catholic Church (NR), and the Hungarian Settlement School.

Fortunately, there are several individuals still residing in the area who remember their school days in the candidate. They were interviewed for this nomination. All recalled that grades one through seven were taught in the building's five classrooms. Two grades were combined in some rooms, with one student remembering that the only difference in instruction was the books. One man recalled that the auditorium doubled as a classroom, in addition to being the venue for plays and graduation. The school year was based on the strawberry crop needing to be harvested in the spring; so "summer" break began in late March and the new school year started after July 4<sup>th</sup>. Those that could make an estimate generally recalled the size of their graduating class (7<sup>th</sup> grade), with the numbers running between 9 and about 20. Many remembered school as the place where they learned English.

During the historic period (1928-43), the candidate was the principal educational facility for the disbursed farmsteads of Hungarian Settlement. The nearest other schools were in Albany and Springfield, between 3 and 5 miles from the candidate. Some children went to the "regular" school (i.e., the non-Hungarian school) in these communities,

depending on where their farm was located, but it is clear that the vast majority were educated at the candidate. Upon graduation from Hungarian Settlement School, students had to go to Albany or Springfield for high school.

The candidate additionally played an important role in adult education. Various classes were held in the evening, with the bulk relating to naturalization. Agricultural courses were also offered. As part of the instruction for electrical work classes, students wired the school (at a time when most farmsteads in the area did not yet have electricity).

Because of its role in educating both children and adults, the candidate is an immensely important building in the history of what was once a large, thriving Hungarian community. It and the two churches are rare survivors and were used by the community at large (in contrast to a private home). They tell an important story – one, it is hoped, which will find its first museum interpretation in a restored Hungarian Settlement School.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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Interviews with Alex Petho, Ruby V. Petho, Nick Erdey, Raymond Blahut, Helen C. Galladora, Ethel Kolles Prokop, Helen Kolles Kropog, and Alex Bartus. Conducted by Donna Fricker, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, February 2000.

Photo showing school in its Springfield location. Copy in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.