NPS Form 10-900
Oct. 1990

OMB No. 10024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A) Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-9000a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name MENNO COMMUNITY HALL

Other name/site number 075-0000-0015

2. Location

Street & number NE4, NE4, NE4, NE4, S. 15, T. 26S, R. 49W ☐ not for publication

City or town KENDALL ☒ vicinity

State Kansas Code KS County HAMILTON Code 075 Zip code 67857

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Richard D Laubert DAHPO NOVEMBER 25, 2002

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of commenting official /Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I herby certify that the property is Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other, (explain:)

Name of Property MENNO COMMUNITY HALL County and State HAMILTON COUNTY, KS

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

XX private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

XX building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		total

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Previously listed in the National Register
NEW DEAL ERA RESOURCES OF KANSAS

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
122

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter Categories from instructions)

SOCIAL: MEETING HALL, CLUBHOUSE
RELIGION: RELIGIOUS FACILITY

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: WPA RUSTIC

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

FOUNDATION: STONE: LIMESTONE
WALLS: STONE: LIMESTONE
ROOF: WOOD: SHINGLE

Modern Movement

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

MENNO COMMUNITY HALL | HAMILTON COUNTY, KS

Name of Property | County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for Natonal Register

☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ D Property has yielded, or likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ B removed from it original location.

☐ C a birthplace or grave.

☐ D a cemetery.

☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ F a commemorative property.

☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

SOCIAL HISTORY

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1937- 1952

Significant Dates

1937

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

BLANCHARD, HOWARD T.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual lising (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ Previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository:

Name of Property MENNO COMMUNITY HALL County and State HAMILTON COUNTY, KS

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property LESS THAN ONE ACRE

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	14	274240	4185900
2			
3			
4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Organization _____ Date _____

Street & number _____ Telephone _____

City or town _____ State _____ Zip code _____

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name MENNO COMMUNITY CLUB, C/O ANN PALMER

street & number RFD telephone 620-384-5561

city or town KENDALL state KANSAS zip code 67857

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16) U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

The Menno Community Hall, finished in 1937, is located in the NE ¼ of Section 15, township 26, Range 39, in the vicinity of the town of Kendall in Hamilton County. The one story building, erected by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), is built of native stone and sits over a cement basement. The first floor is framed in wood, as is the roof, which is covered in cedar shingles. The building stands essentially alone, with few trees and some playground equipment. The floor plan is rectangular and the approximate size of the structure is 36 feet in width by 76 feet in length. A small, cross-gabled wing projects to the south near the rear of the building.

Coursed, ashlar cut blocks compose the stone walls. A projecting water table encircles the building at an approximate height of four feet. The limestone blocks were quarried in the southwest part of Hamilton County, fifteen miles west of the site. The stone has been described as "light brown with shades of rose streaked throughout."

The front façade of the building faces east. A stepped gabled vestibule frames the entrance. Sheltered by the projecting gable are two doors. The wooden doors contain large rectangular paned lights, each with several broken panes. Rectangular transoms surmount each door. Two light fixtures flank the entrance. Above the entrance a high oculus pierces the façade. It is perhaps the most decorative element of the façade. A double arched stone frame bisected by keystones at each quarter surrounds the oculus.

The building's north and south elevations are similar. All first floor windows are crowned with horizontal, finely dressed stone lintels of five blocks, with keystones. The steel windows are covered with wide, wire mesh screens. At least 25 individual panes are broken. On the south side four tall, 15-light windows are spaced evenly. Beneath these are four small, six light windows into the basement. Two small windows on the first floor and one on basement level light the wing on its south face. A wooden door with an inset fanlight sits at ground level on the east face of the wing and leads to the basement. On the building's north side four 15-light windows correspond with those on the other side. A fifth, westernmost window is shorter, has only 9-lights, and is not on course. Five,six-light basement windows lie below the water table. Rising from the center of the west wall is a chimney.

A dressed cornerstone inset with cast metal tablets is situated above the water table on the northeast corner of the building. It reads "MENNO COMMUNITY HALL, CLUB INC. 1923, BUILDING ERECTED 1937, THESE TABLETS PRESENTED BY R.B. FEGAN" on its east face. The north face reads "M:W: GRAND LODGE OF A.F. & A.M. of KANSAS, A.D. 1937 A.L. 5937". A third plaque

located inside the entryway reads "ERECTED BY WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION AND HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 57 A-D-1937".

Inside the building, the original multi-purpose floor plan, detailing, and some furnishings remain. A foyer encompasses a landing and a short flight of steps. Two doors on either side of the entrance to the main room lead to small front rooms. Above the entrance hangs a basketball goal, and much of the plaster surrounding it has been damaged.

A stage about 3 feet high faces the entrance from across the large auditorium, with curtains still extant. Short flights of stairs access two doors flanking the stage, leading to dressing rooms. The placement of the windows is consistent with the exterior. The auditorium was reported to seat 230 and retains a few original benches. In the well-lit basement, the largest space is a dining room capable of seating 100 people. Most furnishings appear extant and original. A spacious kitchen, sewing room, storage room, and furnace room are also in the basement. On both floors are rooms intended to be bathrooms. Due to lack of funds a well was never drilled, and these rooms were never completed. A privy stands south of the building.

The Menno Community Hall (c. 1937) is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the United States Works Projects Administration (WPA) program and for its association with Menno, Kansas; and under Criterion C for its architectural significance as a modern adaptation of an early American, rustic style of building. The overall style and detailing of the Menno Community Hall is representative of the work of the WPA. It is a rustic style building and was designed by Howard T. Blanchard of Garden City, Kansas. The building's significance stems from its importance to the local community. The very fact that the building is no longer in use could be seen as contributing to its significance. The population of rural Kansas is steadily declining, and buildings like this that stand alone and forgotten serve as melancholy testaments to the communities that once thrived there.

When a small colony of Mennonites from central Kansas decided to migrate to the western edge of the state in 1906, the families found land thought to be most suited for cattle ranges, but unpopulated and unused by anyone. With optimism, the small colony of Mennonites settled in western Kansas and attempted to coerce the land to grow crops such as wheat and sorghum. Within a couple years, the perseverance of the colony paid off and they reaped the benefits of their crops. With the money earned from harvest, the Mennonite families were able to build farms with barns and houses, and most importantly, a central community with a church and a post office. And they named this community Menno.

The community of Menno, or rather, the church building and post office that once sat there, was located equidistant and central from four county seats in the southwest corner of Kansas: Ulysses in Grant County, Johnson (now Johnson City) in Stanton County, Lakin in Kearny County, and Syracuse in Hamilton County. The first few years were quite prosperous and Menno began to grow. Unfortunately, the farming families began to discover that their cattle range land was less suitable for farming than they had hoped. A few dry seasons with too much wind and hot sun left the families of Menno without crops and without an income.

By 1911, all was lost. The church building was sold to a German Lutheran colony in an adjoining county and most of the original settlers of Menno moved on, either returning to central Kansas or pushing on to Colorado. Two original Mennonite settlers remained, brothers named Pete and Henry Dyck, and aside from their bloodlines, the church building, and the name of the community, there were to be no other signs of influence from the Mennonite colony that once existed.

After purchasing the church, some families of the German Lutheran sect migrated to Menno. However, the church building was never really utilized as the center for the religious worship of the colony that it was intended to be. In 1923, the Menno Community Club purchased the building and the true history

of the nominated building began. Acquisition by the Menno Community Club gave the old building a multi-purpose function for the isolated rural families living in a four-county area. The Club itself was organized early on after the arrival of the German Lutheran sect. When the roads were poor, and the Model T car was the last word in up-to-date transportation, the residents of Menno were compelled to choose between humdrum existences on their individual farms, or to organize for mutual entertainment. They chose the latter, of course!

At its height, the Club organized baseball teams, which "played on even terms with the best in this section of the state." Homegrown talent plays were presented in the community, and when taken to the neighboring county seats, the performances "equaled the best that the towns could offer." The Menno Sunday school and church was a lively organization with an enrollment of practically every child within a radius of ten miles. Menno socials and pie-suppers took place at the community building, along with the plays and other entertainment. All the activities greatly over-taxed the capacity of the building, clearly a new building was needed.

The agricultural situation of the area had somewhat improved with the arrival of the German Lutherans. They brought with them new hope and new ways of understanding the land that had rejected the seeds of the Mennonite farmers. Agriculture in moderation was best; therefore cattle were raised and row crops such as sorghum were planted. From 1911 until the late 1930s, there never failed to be a crop harvested; yet wheat was not attempted after 1911 until 1928 and even then, it was only of secondary importance. In 1928, wheat was grown with full force and it performed beautifully- the land had had time to recover. The yields were excellent and harvest was profitable, but once again, the success only lasted a few years until 1931. The last wheat crop harvested before the construction of the new building was in 1934.

With a bleak agricultural outlook in the Great Depression, there is no doubt that Menno, Kansas, and its area residents lived the typical nightmare that we have seen in photos and images in history books and on film. Fields sat barren, the result of dust and wheat planting damage. Anyone traveling through the area would have seen sage-covered sandhills along road ditches drifted level with dust. Yet, the Menno community club rallied to give the community the hope and faith needed in the hard times to survive. The Menno Community Club, with a membership of over 700 people, mustered their spirit of community friendliness and cooperation to petition and raise sponsorship money for the construction of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) community building. Once the project was approved, the old Mennonite church building was demolished to make way for the new WPA building. During the early stages of planning and construction, the WPA officials stated that the building was "an outstanding example of local co-operation with the government administration."

It was truly a community works project and the construction provided much needed work for the men in the surrounding areas. Contributions, not taxes, provided the sponsor's share in the building. The May 21, 1937 issue of The Syracuse Journal detailed the Menno Community Building's history upon its dedication:

> "Because of a WPA ruling, the district school board technically is the sponsor, as a taxing unit, but no taxes have been levied for the project, and the Community Club has been the only group to take any part in raising the money. In an area once among the most productive in southwestern Kansas, but for the past four years plagued with dust, they have raised in money or contributed in work about $4,000 for the building of their community center."

Designed by Howard T. Blanchard of Garden City, Kansas, at an estimated cost of $18,555, the concrete for the foundation was poured on 1 July, 1936. The residents of the community declared a holiday, with nearly every able-bodied man and boy in the neighborhood spending all day on the job. The ladies of the community joined in the work by providing a large chicken dinner at noon, and another large meal in the evening. The men poured 370 sacks of cement in the foundation, twenty inches, and 350 feet in circumference. As construction continued, community meetings were held in which volunteers were always requested and always found.

The building was constructed of local limestone. Local stone was quarried in the southwest part of Hamilton County, about fifteen miles west of the new building site. It was taken from the quarry by WPA labor, dressed, and set in the building by men who had never done such labor before. The local newspaper gave an assessment of the stone: "It is a brown limestone, occasionally streaked with a rose line, and blends well into a building to give a pleasing whole."

The design of the building is a good example of a modern adaptation of early American architecture and an excellent description of the building's design was given in the Friday, 21 May, 1937, edition of The Syracuse Journal:

> "The approximate size of the structure is 36 feet in width by 76 feet in length. It is constructed of native stone walls laid in coursed ashlar style, wood framed first floor and wood framed roof covered with cedar shingles. The first floor will accommodate the main auditorium with stage and dressing rooms at either side, toilet rooms and rest room facilities will serve the auditorium. The seating capacity of this room is approximately 230 people. The basement floor will have a spacious dining room, seating approximately 100 people. Other rooms serving this floor will be men's and women's toilets, kitchen, sewing room, storage room and furnace room."

After almost one year of construction and furnishing, the new Menno Community Building was completed. The dedication was scheduled for Monday, 24 May, 1937, but due to tremendous dust blowing, it was postponed to Thursday, 17 June, 1937. Originally expecting a crowd of 3,000 to celebrate the dedication, the postponement as well as continued dust blowing allowed only 1,000 attendees. A morning softball game kept onlookers entertained until the beginning of the dedication ceremony. At 10:45 A.M., the Masonic cornerstone ceremony began, conducted by Masonic Fraternity Grand Master of Kansas Charley B. Erskine, and at Noon, Governor of Kansas Walter A. Huxman and his entourage arrived. The program was altered slightly, due to the dust storm. Lunch was served downstairs in the basement of the new building and the governor's address took place in the new auditorium, where attendees crowded in the 230-seating capacity room. According to the local newspaper report, "Governor Huxman praised the courage of the Menno people for building for the future in spite of the present conditions, and expressed the hope that they would enjoy their fine new building to the utmost." The newspaper also commented that, because of adverse weather conditions, the governor's remarks were very appropriate and he received "first hand knowledge of what the residents of Menno have endured during the construction of the building." The remainder of the dedication consisted of musical numbers and other programs.

The new Menno Community Hall served a multi-purpose function for the families of the surrounding areas. Along with worship services and Sunday school, pie and box suppers, 4-H meetings, card parties, dances, and weekly sewing circle meetings took place at the new facility. Once a year, a bazaar was held to auction off the items made during these weekly meetings. The money received from the auctions was used to help with maintenance expenditures for the building. The local rural school children as well as other youngsters from the surrounding areas performed musical and talent programs in the auditorium. The Christmas programs were especially delightful and were the result of weeks of preparation to learn the various parts. All of these functions provided much entertainment for the rural families of the area for many years.

In the 1950s, the building was well utilized by the community surrounding it. The annual Menno Sewing Circle Bazaar was still being held and a new 6-piece living room suite set was donated for use on the community building stage for performances.

The building continued to serve the people of the communities in the four-county area into the 1980s. When the rural schools closed one-by-one and the children were bussed into town for their education, most of the activities that were held within the Menno Community Hall were also moved into town. Thus, when the final rural school closed in the 1980s, the Menno Community Hall also closed. Since that time, the building has remained vacant. Clearly visible on a hilltop, the deteriorating building stands as a tribute to the community.

In 1994, vandals broke into the building and did a wealth of damage to both the exterior and interior of this historic building. This event along with a book entitled The Dust Bowl Diary of Mary Knackstedt Dyck, the wife of original Mennonite settler Henry Dyck, which chronicles the community of Menno and the construction of the Menno Community Building, has prompted a rejuvenated interest to save the building from more vandalism and possible destruction.

It was through the spirit and hardy resilience of local people that the Menno Community Hall was made possible and hopefully it is through that same spirit and hardy resilience that the Menno Community Hall will be saved. Precisely because of the continued decline of population in rural areas, remaining buildings such as this should be protected as testaments and monuments to the vanished communities of the rural Midwest.

Section 9

Sources

The Syracuse Journal:
"Mennonite Settlers Gave Menno Its Name in 1906," 21 May 1937.
"New Building is The Result Of Menno Community Spirit," 21 May 1937.
"Governor Walter A. Huxman," 21 May 1937.
"Native Stone Used in New Community House," 21 May 1937.
"Menno Expects a Crowd of 3000 at Dedication Services," 24 May 1937.
"Will be dedicated Thursday, June 17th," 11 June 1937.
"Menno Dedication set for Thursday, June 17," 11 June 1937.
"Thousand Visitors at the Menno Community Building Ceremony," 18 June 1937.
"Menno Community Building Given New Stage Equipment," mid 1950's.
"Dust Bowl Revisited," 24 July, 1999.

Riney-Kehberg, Pamela. *Waiting on the Bounty: The Dust Bowl Diary of Mary Knackstedt Dyck*, University of Iowa Press, 1999.

Vandergrift, F. L. *The Earth*. "New Mennonite Settlement in Kansas." (Chicago). October 1910. V. 7, NO. 10.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 10

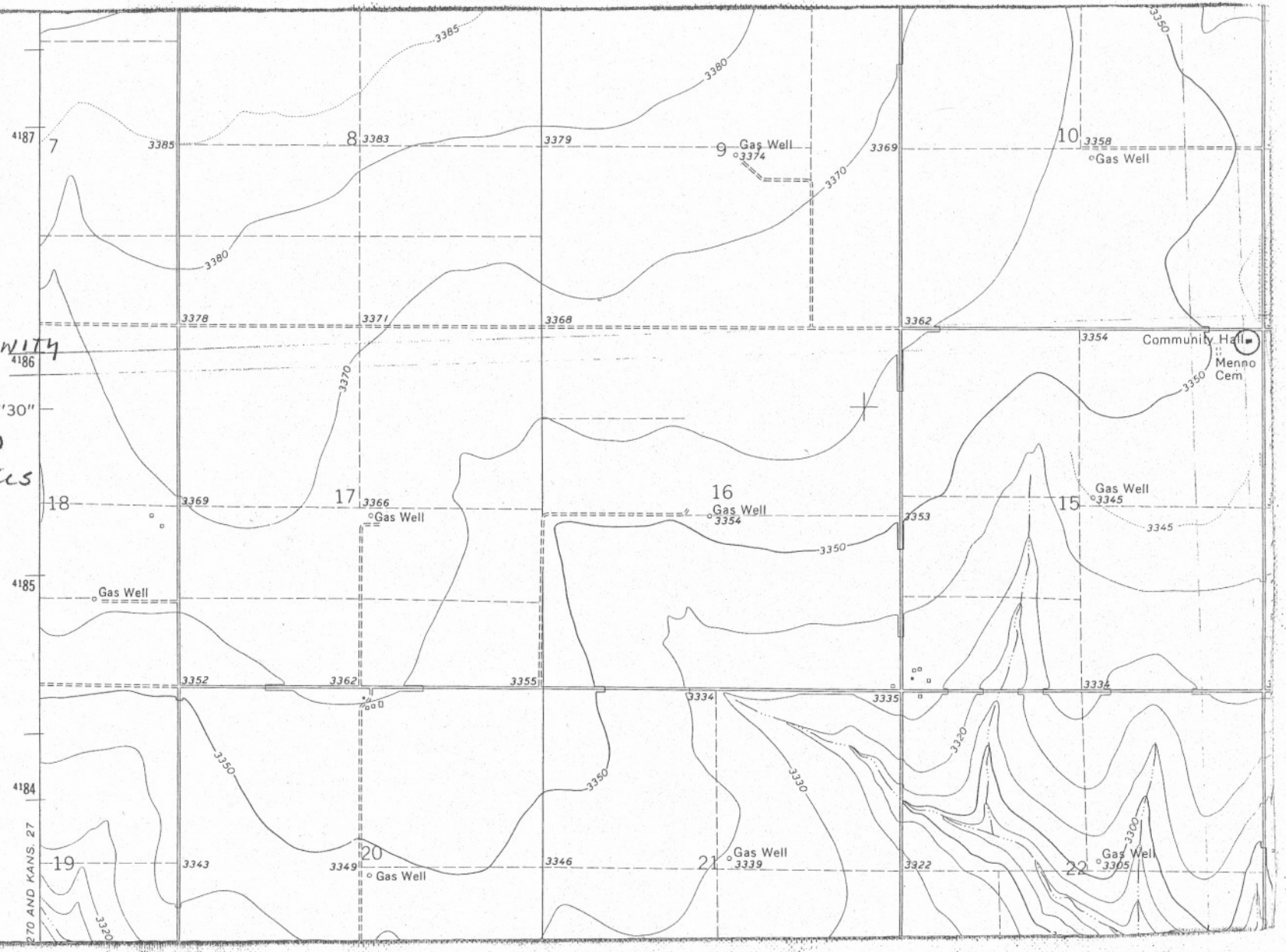
Verbal Boundary Description

The Menno Community Hall is located on the NE4, NE4, NE4, NE4, Section 15, Township 26 S, Range 49 W, in Lamont Township, Hamilton County, KS.

Boundary Justification

The building stands on a two acre parcel which is contained in a ten acre parcel.

Form Prepared By:

Heather O'Hara, National Register Intern and Emilie Hagen, National Register Intern
Kansas State Historical Society
6425 SW 6th
Topeka, KS 66615
78-272-8681

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