

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: **Tassajara One Room School**

Other names/site number: NA

Name of related multiple property listing:

NA

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



2. Location

Street & number: 1650 Finley Road

City or town: Danville State: California County: Contra Costa

Not For Publication:

Vicinity:

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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D

<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p>
---	---------------------------------

<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of commenting official:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Title :</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

3

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education: grammar school

Social: Meeting Hall

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education Related: Living history instructional site of the Museum of the San Ramon Valley
for 3rd graders their parents, and teachers.

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late Victorian – Eclectic

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Wood framed building

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Tassajara One Room School is a simple wooden building built during the summer of 1889 in the Tassajara Valley, east of Danville, in a very rural setting surrounded by ranch settlements. It is a single story rectangular building containing one classroom which sets exactly where it was first built. At the east end of the classroom are three small spaces for nursing ill children, a library, and a teacher's room. The design/builder constructed it out of 2" x 4" pine studs to which he attached 1" x 8" tongue and groove redwood siding. Over the gable roof vestibule sets a belfry attached to the hipped main roof. Both sections of the roof are covered with cedar shingles. Originally the school set on a redwood perimeter foundation of 4"x 6" beams with posts to the subfloor. A school bell hangs in the belfry with a rope reaching down into the vestibule. The interior of the classroom is surrounded by slate blackboards. The walls are wood paneled with overlapping 4" wide "V" groove wainscoting rising from the floor to the bottom of the black board eraser ledge. The floor is polished yellow Douglas fir wood. An old stove sets off to the side of the classroom to provide heat and a black and white picture of President George Washington always hangs in the classroom. The original teacher's desk is in place. Adjacent to the school building are a stable, water tank house, and a handicapped accessible restroom all built in 2006 and which are non-contributing. Surrounding the school building are 49 black walnut trees planted by the first students in 1890. A flagpole sets directly in front of the school entrance. The school sat abandoned for over 25 years and vandals broke out all the windows which were replaced in the 1970s with non-period wood windows in anodized aluminum frames. The three doors to the spaces at the rear of the classroom were also replaced with contemporary 6 panel hollow core doors. The Museum is investigating restoring both features to materials common to the original period. The post and beam foundation had badly rotted and the building

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

was tipping precariously so it was replaced with a perimeter concrete grade foundation with support posts running down the center rising up to the subfloor. Precise 1970's dates for these restorations are not known. The original school bell and the picture of President George Washington were both stolen. Also in the 1970's a replacement bell was donated and the thief who stole the president's picture anonymously returned it. In 1990 the leaky cedar shingle roof was replaced with cedar shingles. The remainder of the building is original material in excellent condition.

Narrative Description

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- 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 is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.) **NA**

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
A cemetery
- D. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- E. A commemorative property
- F. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Tassajara One Room School **Contra Costa County**
Name of Property

California
County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education – grammar school

Social - meeting hall

Period of Significance

1889 - 1946

Significant Dates

Construction and opening of school - 1889

School Abandoned – 1946

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Weilbye, Julius L. (builder)

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Tassajara One Room School is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for its role in education and social history in rural Contra Costa County, at the local level of significance. Period of significance is from 1889, the date of construction, until 1946 when the building ceased operation as a school.

As the chaos following the 1849 mad rush for gold gradually turned towards a search for normality and a more civilized life style, 49'ers who discovered their share of gold purchased land and settled into the familiar rhythms of rural agrarian America. California was transformed into a mirror of life back in the Midwest and Eastern states. Tassajara Valley ranchers too made their fortunes in the mines and stayed to set up housekeeping. With marriage and children they soon focused on a core American value: educate your children! To educate children they needed a school. Just like other Americans they formed a school district, voted to tax themselves, issued bonds through Contra Costa County, contracted with a design/builder who built a solid school in four months, hired a teacher, and sent their children to that school: the Tassajara One Room School. Over the next 57 years that school taught their children how to read, write, think, and live together successfully with other people. Their school was the anchor of their community. A United States Post Office served them from 1896 – 1922 and closed. Tassajara One Room School was the only enduring symbol of community in the Tassajara Valley and it faithfully educated their children from 1889 - 1946. They were part of the broad pattern of transformational California history reliant on a small building that dominated the lives of both children and their parents. Similar change was occurring across California.

But Tassajara One Room School played another important role as well. It was the center of social life for ranchers and their families. Parents came to the school to celebrate holidays and to applaud their children upon graduation. In fact the school was the focus of social life all year long. People voted at the school. The school board met there and the important decisions of the entire community were decided in that frame building. Over the years the community grew as emigrants from Portugal, Denmark, and Japan moved into the area. Their children went to school together. They ate each other's lunches and learned each other's customs. They celebrated American holidays. Over time immigrant children slowly became Americans without even recognizing the transformation in their lives. The Tassajara One Room School integrated immigrants with native born children and very few people even noticed. Tassajara One Room School was the cultural and social center of life in the Tassajara Valley.

That historic school house 124 years later still sets where it was originally built and it is still nearly surrounded with open ranch land. It looks just like it did 124 years ago. Most of it is original. It resembles hundreds of other one room schools across America all of which alike it, are treasure chests of memories and history.

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Contra Costa Gazette February 9, 1889, August 21, 1889, September 11, 1889, August 2, 1890

Contra Costa Times September 27, 1970, September 25, 1989

Livermore Echo March 23, 1889

Lane, Beverly: "Tassajara School House" 2006

Oral Interviews by Jerry Warren:

Gordon Rassmussen Tassajara student 1940 – 1946 on April 22, 2013

Betty Matos Casey member of last Tassajara class in 1946 on May 1, 2013

Vera Reinstein Tassajara Fire Protection District Commissioner 1971 – 1990 on May 1, 2013

Berry, Blair AIA Danville, CA

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

preliminary determination of individual listing (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 # _____

recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other: local media collection at Contra Costa County History Center, Martinez, CA

Name of repository: and the Museum of the San Ramon Valley, Danville, CA

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA _____

Tassajara One Room School
Name of Property

Contra Costa County

California
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property one acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Contra Costa County Assessor's Parcel APN 204-070-001

This one acre parcel fronts to the west on 1650 Finley Road and is bounded on the south by Old School Road at its NE corner. Ranch property bounds the school on the north and east sides of the school. It is located in eastern Contra Costa County approximately two miles east of the Town of Danville and one half mile north of Camino Tassajara Road.

Tassajara One Room School
Name of Property

Contra Costa County

California
County and State

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The school sets on the one acre parcel purchased by Tassajara School District for \$200 as recorded in the Contra Costa County Book of Deeds, April 20, 1889 Volume 55.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Dr. Robert Chandler, Retired Historian Wells Fargo History Museum, San Francisco and Jerry E. Warren, President, Board of Directors, Museum of the San Ramon Valley

organization: Museum of the San Ramon Valley

street & number: Box 39 (205 Railroad Ave.)

town: Danville

state: California

zip code: 94526

e-mail: svrmuseum@sbcglobal.net

telephone: 925 837 3750

date: July 22, 2013 Revised September 3, 2013

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location. **1996 7.5 minute Tassajara Quadrangle Map Attached See Tassajara One Room School in Section 34 of the map.**
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map **Sketch map attached**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)
Floor Plan attached.

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

Additional Historic Context:

Narrative Description:

For 57 years, the Tassajara One Room School in the larger San Ramon Valley area educated, enriched, and involved its community.

Tassajara Valley is isolated among the foothills of domineering Mt. Diablo, Contra Costa County's "initial point," that is the prime meridian for the survey of Northern California and Nevada. It has limited water supply, making it suitable only for cattle ranching or dry land farming usually producing barley and wheat.

Although remote, early settlers demanded education for their children. In September 1856, young poet Bret Harte became the teacher for the four sons of Tassajara rancher Abner Bryant in a "place as wild as the God of nature made it," Harte found. "Not caring to have them grow up like range-cattle," Harte wrote, the drover "decided to have a tutor." Thirty-five years later, Harte set here his novel, *A First Family of Tasajara* (1891) during the great flood of 1862.

"Whenever at least ten heads of families petition the County Superintendent for the organization of a new School District," the school law of March 22, 1864 stated, "that officer shall transmit the petition to the Supervisors." The Contra Costa board concurred, for during the next year as the Civil War closed, rancher Albert G. Wilkes built a small school on his ranch. Fifteen years later in May 1880, among the fourteen on the honor role for three grades, the families of Coats, Finley, McPherson, and Williams, contributed thirteen.

Time brings siblings. On January 12, 1889, ten voters unanimously agreed to sell \$1700 dollars of 7 percent bonds to purchase land and build a larger school. That spring, the school board bought an acre of land from Peter Anderson's ranch at 1650 Finley Road where it now joins Old School Road. The Old School came first and loaned its name to the road.

That September, architect and builder Julius L. Weilbye from nearby Sunol, finished the one room, high-ceiling, redwood frame building. The school opened in 1889, well furnished with double desks, a wood-burning stove, and two outhouses. The school and community had plans to plant trees, landscape the area, gravel the paths, and build a stable to house the one-horsepower student transportation. Over the years, nine sequential wells supplied water.

Beginning in August, 1889, teacher Richard D. Williams, a Tassajara graduate himself when the school was at the Wilkes Ranch, supervised from 32 to 41 pupils scattered in eight grades. He taught 14 students in the eighth grade and 8 students in the first grade. Ten families, Coats, Davina, Fergodo, Hanna, Koch, McPherson, Scott, Silver, Smith, and Webster, accounted for 70 percent of the attendees. Perhaps they were the ten voters approving the bond issue

To begin the 1890 school year, on July 25, their new teacher Albert J. Young spoke to the assembled multitude. He was a long time Valley teacher with service at San Ramon, Sycamore,

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

Tassajara, and Danville schools. Their new flag, “a fine large one, was caught by the breeze and waved out over all, while the children sang *Flag of the Brave and the Free*.”

During that school year, the students took charge of planting the forty-nine surrounding black walnut trees. Six year old Roger Podva, as the youngest, got the last one. Due to its location by the outhouse, it became the largest. In the 1880s, Portuguese followed the earlier Irish, and Danes came in the 1890s, allowing for a real mix of food-swapping during lunch time. The school often took two-month mid-winter breaks due to muddy roads and added back the time during the dry, hot summers.

Imitating the stature held by Old Glory, the school house itself became symbolic. Not only did it educate children to better their lives, as the only public building in a very rural area, it became the local meeting house and polling place. About 10 miles from Danville, the settlement had no public transportation west. Buggy or wagon made a two to four hour ride into town. The Tassajara Post Office, in operation between 1896 and 1922, received mail by stage from Pleasanton, Alameda County, 10 miles to the south.

In the half century between 1889 and 1946, hundreds of Tassajara students entered ignorant and exited educated. Young, unmarried school mar’ms, boarding locally, either hoped for husbands among the ranchers, but more likely yearned to be in a large, exciting town, such as Danville.

During that time, the school and its community gathered around witnessed the depressing Panic of 1893, the excitement of the Great War, the horror of the flu epidemic, and celebrated during the flush times afterwards. Then came the Great Depression, followed by home front rationing to aid the boys to win World War II.

Meantime, the automobile took hold and counties paved roads. On August 2, 1946, “a majority of the electors residing within the Tassajara School District as shown by the teachers’ registration” petitioned to be annexed to the Danville Union School District,” the supervisors recorded. The number was not large, as another school related matter drew only forty votes.

Two large families had moved away and small farms combined into larger ones. During the last school year in Tassajara, 1945-1946, Mrs. Gertrude Arendt taught an average of 11 students, only a quarter of those enrolled fifty-seven years previous. She brought them to school in her car, or, as horses were gone, they charged in on bicycles. During cold weather, Gertrude Arendt cooked soup for all on a hot plate in the tiny Teacher’s Room in the back.

One family, the Rasmussens, moved there in 1913, and contributed a quarter of the students in 1946. Ed Rasmussen, the father, attended in 1913, received chipped front teeth during a wild marble game, and graduated with eight in his class. One son Gordon, a pupil from 1940 to 1946, with only one other in his class, collected walnuts for 40 cents a bag, which Newton Arendt sold to bolster their meager income.

Every school morning, Mrs. Arendt lined up the children outdoors for the morning salute to the flag. During World War II passing farmers would stop and pledge their allegiance.

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

Those farmers and ranchers knew the Constitution. Their care for the Hikido family exemplified their devotion. As California prevented Japanese from owning land, the Hikidos rented from the Rasmussens to raise tomatoes during the winter, while their California-born sons Tatsuya, Katsumi, and Shogo attended the Tassajara School. After graduating from the one room school, Shogo Hikido moved on to Danville, where he starred on the high school Honor Roll in 1941.

Then came December 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and Tassajara teacher Miss Olwen Jones prepared to suspend Japanese-American student Tatsuya Hikido. However, school board member Theodore Nissen promptly intervened, chastising her narrow-minded attitude toward an American citizen.

An inland relocation camp swept up the family in 1942, but they remained undaunted. Katsumi Hikido enlisted in the famed Japanese 442 Regiment, suffering severe leg injuries fighting in Europe. His large family never forgot the Tassajara School. They gathered there for his 80th birthday celebration in April, 2008.

With its very small enrollment Tassajara School District merged into the nearby Danville Union School and in September, 1946 students, desks, and accouterments moved into Danville, leaving the 1889 building abandoned.

After vandals trashed the derelict building breaking out all the windows and stole the school bell the worried residents of the Tassajara Valley asked the Contra Costa County Eastern Fire Protection District to take charge of the building in 1957.

Its modern history is as exciting as the old. The (Walnut Creek) *Contra Costa Times* headlined for its centennial story in 1989, "Old Building forms Nucleus of Community." That sums up the role of the Tassajara One Room School for the past 60 years.

In the early 1960s, rancher and school graduate Gordon Rasmussen formed the Tassajara-Highland Improvement Association, which organized work parties to clean up the area. The first annual barbecue picnic on the school grounds in 1968 raised money for the fire fighters and the school. The Tassajara Valley settlement had boomed to 65 residences and it wished more county services. One was better fire protection.

The next decade began with the new Tassajara Fire Protection District, composed of community volunteers. Chief Warren Reinstein took charge on July 1, 1970 and continued Rasmussen's work of refurbishing the school.

As in days gone by, the school became a polling place and meeting room for the firemen, 4-H Clubs, and a place to discuss items of community import. The surnames of the firemen show the diversity of the restoration workers. Besides Chief Reinstein and Assistant Chief Rasmussen, they were Raymond Basso, Henry Bettencourt, Jorgen Clausen, Albert Hansen, Dan Jones, C.J. Perry, and Dean Watts.

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

Following Chief Reinstein's untimely death in 1979, county supervisors acknowledged the importance of this historic building to the Tassajara community. The board appointed his widow Vera Reinstein to be a Fire Commissioner on July 21, 1979. Her responsibility lay with the one room school house and she led the Tassajara School Improvement Association. The Board for the Fire District recognized it on September 13, 1984, and it went to work.

Meantime, a remorseful thief returned the picture of George Washington, which originally hung behind the teacher's desk and gazed back intently at viewers regardless of where they stood in the room. Teacher Arendt donated a replica Liberty Bell in 1970 to hang in the school bell tower and her replacement for the stolen bell rang with history. The Government awarded it to her husband's father, German-born Pleasanton merchant Joseph Arendt in 1918 for the highest sale of World War I Liberty Bonds in the area.

A century after the first flag pole went up; the firefighters gave a new one, besides replacing the cedar shingle roof and refinishing the original Douglas fir floors. The Tassajara volunteer fire department merged in 1990 into the larger San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District. Three years later, the Fire Department brought the building up to code, strengthening inner walls for earthquake safety and constructing a wheel chair ramp at the back of the school to broaden access to this historic building.

In 1996, the fire district allowed the Museum of the San Ramon Valley to establish a pilot living history program in their restored building. The Tassajara One Room School program became a local history component for San Ramon Valley Unified School District third graders. The next year the program became permanent, and since then, 33,000 students, teachers and parents have enjoyed a half day at the school.

Annually each spring, 2,500 or more students arrive to peruse McGuffey readers, do arithmetic with scratchy chalk on black boards, and perfect handwriting with quill pens. At recess, children play 1880s games, while lunch time at picnic tables brings forth delicacies common to that decade long ago. Use of the one room Tassajara School house returns full circle. Again it educates.

On September 11, 2012, making a black day brighter, the Board of Supervisors, with the enthusiastic backing of the fire department, transferred the deed to the Museum of the San Ramon Valley.

As part of the growing urban San Francisco Bay Area, Contra Costa County has few reminders of its rural past. Tassajara is its last remaining one room school. After 124 years, the old frame building still educates children and it continues to be a vibrant part of its greater valley and county community.

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Tassajara One Room School

City or Vicinity: Danville

County: Contra Costa

State: California

Photographer: Jerry Warren

Date Photographed: 3/17/12

Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

1 of 4.

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Looking east toward the school house (building 1) with water tank tower (building 4) at far left and stable (building 3) at left.



2 of 4.

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Looking south at handicapped ramp and restroom (building 2) at the back of the school (building 1).



Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

3 of 4.

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Interior of school (building 1) looking to the back of the room at the east side of the property with slate blackboards on the walls and the teacher's desk in front of the room.



4 of 4.

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Looking east toward the wood stairs at the entry vestibule into the school (building 1).



Tassajara One Room School

Contra Costa County

California

Name of Property

County and State

Figure 1. Tassajara One Room School Site Plan

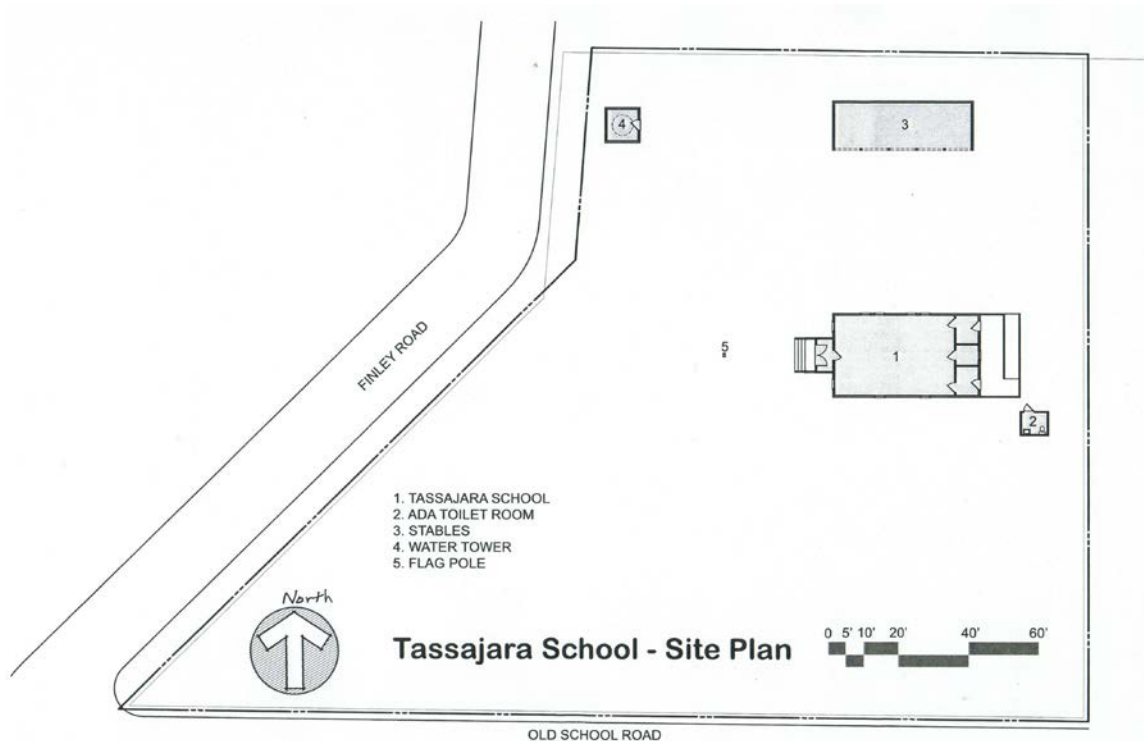


Figure 2. Building Schematic and Detail

