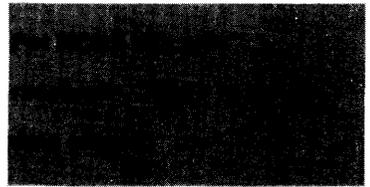


**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**



**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Prescott Commons

and/or common The Dining Hall

**2. Location**

street & number Rimrock Road<sup>Rd.</sup> N/A not for publication

city, town Billings N/A vicinity of congressional district 02

state Montana code 030 county Yellowstone code 111

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Rocky Mountain College

street & number N/A

city, town Billings N/A vicinity of state Montana

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Yellowstone County Courthouse, Office of Clerk and Recorder

street & number

city, town Billings state Montana

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title N/A has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town state

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Composed entirely of randomly coursed sandstone blocks, Prescott Commons is 1½ stories in height with a full daylight basement. The cross axial plan of the building consists of an 85'x35' main hall crossed at the center by a 28'x28' block to the north and a 28'x15' entrance portico flanked by twin towers to the south. A small, covered rear entrance with a shed roof fills in the northeast corner of the otherwise axial plan and provides access to both the main floor and the basement.

One foot thick bearing walls rise from a concrete foundation which is set approximately 10' below grade. The twin towers flanking the gable entry are solid in mass, measure 6'x6' square, and rise to a height of 27½' above grade. The west tower once accommodated a bell which has since been removed and is stored on campus. The concrete steps leading up to the main entrance extend 21' from the building, measure 15' in width, and rise a total of 7'. Sandstone walls, one foot thick, flank the stairway, forming a 2' wall above the steps. The main doorway is composed of two centrally placed, single pane, glassed doors with a transom window of 12 lights above. To the sides of the entrance portico, twin walks lead to a basement entrance beneath the main steps.

Twin exterior chimneys protrude 6" from the wall plane at both ends of the main hall. A third chimney is set in the rear block. The building is capped by an intersecting gable roof, covered with asphalt shingling and pierced by ten symmetrically placed gable dormers. The roof eaves extend slightly over the main block and the rafter ends are left exposed. The chimney stacks rise 4' above the ridgeline.

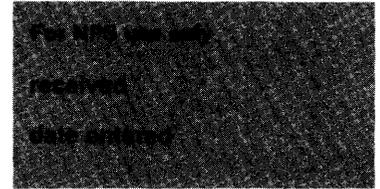
Two belt courses protrude slightly from the wall plane at approximately 5' and 20' above grade respectively. In addition to demarking the basement and main floor, these belt courses also serve as the lintels for the symmetrically organized window openings. The predominant sash arrangement is 6/2 and the windows are placed as follows: at the basement level, four windows are placed on each side of the main entrance, two on each the east and west elevations flanking the chimneys, and four on the right side of the rear block; at the main level, two narrow 6/1 windows frame the entrance, one tall and two smaller 6/1 windows are cut into the gable end directly above the entry, and otherwise, a like number of windows are centered above the basement windows on the main level except for an 8' horizontal band of 2' square windows which is cut into the north elevation of the rear block. A sealed doorway opening, meant to be used in conjunction with a never-built addition, is also located in the north wall of the rear block. The twin entry towers feature blind windows at both the basement and main floor levels.

On the interior, the walls consist mainly of plaster covered lath anchored to the stone bearing walls. The main hall has an open wooden scissor truss rafter system with tongue-in-groove oak roofing above. The trusses are lighted by the dormer windows. All of the windows on the main floor and basement measure 12" by 44". The walls of the main hall feature wainscotting to a height of 8'. Both ends of the main hall are anchored with the massive, finely finished stone fireplaces. Each fireplace exhibits an emblem with the date 1916 inscribed. The opening of each fire pit is formed by a key stone arch. The flooring is tongue-in-groove oak.

Within the main hall steam heaters are spaced around its perimeter, some of which have compartments for the heating of buns. The rear section, which housed the cooking facilities, is smoothly finished in plaster which remains in fair condition.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number

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The basement is of the same format as the main floor with the exception of having unfinished stone walls. Water seepage and some deterioration of the stone walls is evident in the basement.

The only visible structural damage is on the entrance portico where vertical cracks appear in the bearing walls flanking the entrance. This damage was due to settlement which occurred 20 years ago when the water table was raised by a nearby irrigation ditch. Since the ditch was removed no further damage or settling has occurred.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1915-1916      **Builder/Architect** Wallace H. Comstock

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Prescott Commons is significant due to its association with the early development of the Rocky Mountain College campus in the city of Billings, Montana and as an interesting example of Tudor Gothic stone architecture, designed and constructed by local craftsmen.

The college was established in 1908 by two brothers, Ernest and Lewis Eaton, who recognized the need for an institution of higher learning in the eastern Montana, northern Wyoming and western Dakota region and initiated a campaign to solicit donations from local businessmen to finance the construction of a suitable campus. Prescott Commons, built from 1915-1916, was named for a New York financier, Amos L. Prescott, a major contributor in the fund raising drive who donated \$5,000 toward the erection of the building which was added to the approximately 16,000 small donations which totalled \$23,000.

Designed by the Manual Arts instructor, Wallace H. Comstock and constructed by local craftsmen in sandstone quarried by the college students themselves from a large boulder which had detached itself from the rimrocks north of Billings, Prescott Commons was the first building on campus to employ loadbearing stone wall construction and remains a very fine example of indigenous stone architecture. Stylistically, the Commons attempts to approximate the Tudor Gothic quality then popular on the campuses of some eastern colleges. This stylistic influence is most concentrated around the main entry of the building where a gable is flanked by two underscaled stone castellated towers. An additional influence of the arts and crafts style is seen in the gabled dormers and more particularly on the interior of the building where the walls of the dining room are finished with tall, vertical banded wainscoting and the wooden trusses of the roof are left exposed.

Prescott Commons served as the campus dining hall for 45 years. A cannery and granary were located in the basement and here, the agricultural goods from the college's farms were processed. The Commons for many years was also the setting of numerous social gatherings involving both the school and the community. After 1961 the building housed a coffee shop and a small student theatre for a brief period. Presently, Prescott Commons stands as the only unused building on the Rocky Mountain College campus.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Billings Polytechnic Year Books, 1910 to 1924

Assorted pamphlets published from 1907 on, at Rocky Mountain College

## 10. Geographical Data UTM ✓ ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Billings West, Montana

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 

1	2	6	9	0	2	3	0	5	0	7	4	2	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Located on the north side of the Rocky Mountain College campus, the nominated property is a 200' x 200' square, centered upon Prescott Commons. T1N, R26E, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , Section 36

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gary R. Bergman, Student under direction of Mr. Kingston Heath & John DeHaas, Jr.

organization Montana State University

date July 15, 1980

street & number 1246 Crawford

telephone (406)259-4385

city or town Billings

state Montana

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Marcella Shafiq*

title

Deputy SHPO

date

3-10-82