

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received 6/26/87
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Big Red Ranch

and/or common Big Red

2. Location

street & number off U.S. 14/16 not for publication

city, town Ucross vicinity of

state Wyoming code 56 county Sheridan code 033

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Ucross Land Company

street & number Ucross Route P. O. Box 28

city, town Clearmont vicinity of state WY 82835

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Sheridan County Clerk

street & number Sheridan County Courthouse P. O. Box 686

city, town Sheridan state WY 82801

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wyoming Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1980-81 federal state county local

depository for survey records Wyoming Recreation Commission, 1920 Thomas Avenue

city, town Cheyenne state WY 82002

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The "Big Red" ranch house, outhouse, and barn are located on their original foundations in the historic setting in which they have stood for over one hundred years. The ranch house, originally the headquarters of one of the largest cattle operations in Wyoming, is located in undeveloped rural countryside in a valley formed by Clear Creek, Piney Creek, and the lesser Coal Creek; it is surrounded by rolling hills reaching an elevation of 4,600 feet. The nominated area involves approximately nine acres of land and three original structures, the ranch house, its outhouse and the barn. The ranch house and ornate outhouse are considered contributing structures while modern additions have altered the barn so it is considered a non-contributing structure. The other buildings originally associated with the ranch disappeared over the years. The red ranch house, constructed in 1882, is a rectangular, two-story, 5,000 square foot plain Victorian frame house; the siding is clapboard and the roof is predominantly hipped with wood shingles. The ranch was virtually uninhabited and unmaintained for over fifty years and fell into disrepair. The dilapidation of the house was so extreme that extensive restoration work, including the replacement of the siding and windows, was necessary. The rehabilitation of the house was based on historical photographs, on-site inspections, and written documentation. During the rehabilitation, every effort was made to exactly duplicate the original historic fabric. The outhouse in the southeast yard is a frame, three-hole structure with decorative shingles on the roof and portions of the side walls. The Big Red barn, located within the boundaries of the northern portion of the nominated area was widened to accommodate artist studios. A clerestory window was also added to the barn. In terms of association and setting, Big Red has retained its integrity and deserves to be enrolled in the National Register as an historic place.

The original house was first altered around 1886 when a room off the kitchen was added to serve as a post office. This fact was deduced from the history of Big Red which revealed that Big Red was utilized as a fourth-class post office in 1886 and by internal evidence discovered while renovating the house, which indicated that the room off the kitchen had been added at a later date. In the early 1900's several minor room changes were made: a portion of the porch on the northeast side was closed in to serve as a bathroom, walls were added on the southwest portion of the first floor and on the second floor to accommodate the different needs of the managers' families who ran Big Red. Evidence for these room changes was found while restoring the interior of the house which revealed the original placement of walls on the first and second floor. In 1888, the house and outbuildings had been painted gray for a short period but were returned to their original red color in 1901 as revealed through company records and photographic documentation.

As the "before" pictures illustrate, both the exterior and interior features of the house were found in a terrible condition as a result of the uninhabited status of the house. The chimneys had been reduced to piles of bricks scattered around the yard, all three porches were totally dilapidated. The exterior siding, which had been left unmaintained and unpainted for over fifty years in the harsh climate of northern Wyoming, had suffered damage from the elements and insects. Vandals had spray-painted the exterior and broken almost every window and door in the house.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input 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 checked="" 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 1882 Builder/Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Big Red, ca. 1882, was an important ranch/farm headquarters in northern Wyoming. It was a leader in agricultural development in the area beginning with the large, open range cattle period, moving to sheep ranching and the development of irrigation projects and concluding with the sugar beet industry. Men of state and local significance were associated with the ranch including James H. Pratt, Levi and Joseph Leiter, William "Billy" Irvine, Frank Horton, and Willis Spear. Big Red is significant as one of the few large corporation ranches able to survive the open range period through adaptive change and growth. The restoration and adaptive use of the Big Red complex has not disturbed the historical association or setting and has helped to maintain and preserve this locally important property. This property was approved for tax act certification early in 1984 and restoration has already been completed with the site open to the public for conferences, workshops and meetings.

ADDENDUM

Big Red owes its creation to the Pratt & Ferris Cattle Company (P & F) which arrived in Wyoming in 1880. The origin of the company began with James H. Pratt, a captain in the Civil War. After the war, he and his brother-in-law, Cornelius Ferris, began a freighting company in western Nebraska, Kansas, and Colorado supplying beef to the army and Indian agencies of northwest Nebraska. With this background, Pratt could see the opportunities in the range cattle business in northern Wyoming after the Indian campaigns of the mid-1870's; in 1878, Fort McKinney, west of present-day Buffalo had been constructed. In 1879 the big cattle outfits began to move their cattle into northern Wyoming. On December 29, 1879, Pratt and Ferris, along with Levi Z. Leiter and Marshall Field of Chicago obtained a Wyoming charter for the corporation of Pratt & Ferris Cattle Company.

In 1880, the Pratt & Ferris Cattle Company set up its camp on the Clear Fork of Powder River. The original land survey plat for 1880 in the General Land Office records in Cheyenne shows the ranch in its present location, but with no buildings noted. At its inception, as was typical of the large, open range ranches, the Pratt & Ferris camp probably consisted of several tents or perhaps a rough log bunk house.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Unpublished manuscript.

Murray, Robert A. "The Pratt & Ferris Cattle Company's Ucross Ranch on Clear Fork." A century of development in northern Wyoming (1981, Western Interpretative Services, P. O. Box 6467, Sheridan, Wyoming 82801).

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property approximately 9 acres

Quadrangle name Ucross

Quadrangle scale 7.5 minute

UTM References

A

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

B

1	3	3	7	8	8	5	8	4	9	3	5	4	4	8
Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

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

D

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

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE ADDENDUM

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rebecca W. Thomson, Attorney for Ucross Land Company

organization Burgess & Davis

date

street & number P. O. Box 728

telephone (307) 672-7491

city or town Sheridan

state WY 82801

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Alvin J. Baston

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date June 11, 1984

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

[Signature]

date

10/11/84

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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During the period the house was unoccupied, domestic and wild animals had been allowed to enter the house and had virtually destroyed the entire fabric of the house. The weight of the cattle and the grain that was stored in the house as well as the manure and urine deposited by the animals had caused the floor joists to break and the floor to suffer severe rot. This lack of floor support cracked the plaster walls throughout the house. In addition, many bugs had drilled holes through the exterior and interior walls and had built nests in all areas of the house. Approximately 30 cubic yards of cattle manure and 3 cubic yards of bat manure were removed, as well as 150 square feet of honeycombs, 220 live bats and assorted skunks. Because of the many broken windows and doors the interior as well as the exterior had been exposed to the elements for many years. The interior features of the house had been stripped, every fireplace was gone, almost all of the interior hardware had been stolen and the interior walls had been damaged by vandals over the years.

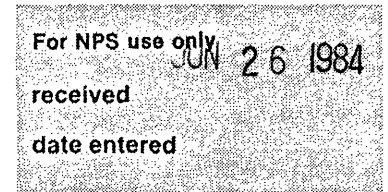
Restoration

The restoration work undertaken by the Ucross Land Company in 1982 was the next significant alteration of Big Red. On the whole, this work restored the appearance of Big Red to its 1880's look. This statement is based both on the historic photographic evidence the architects had available to them and the internal evidence discovered by the contractors as they rehabilitated the house. No architectural drawings were available, nor is the original architect of the house known. Documentary and photographic evidence revealed that the original color of the house in the 1880's was red and the house was restored to that color.

The internal evidence discovered by the workers indicated where original walls had been constructed, what rooms were additions, etc., as described above. The walls that had originally divided the rooms on the first and second floor were replaced to their original locations. Since Big Red was a corporate ranch, over the years it had different managers with varied family needs. On the second floor that meant adding back the walls that were once there to divide this space back into smaller units. On the first floor, a wall in one of the rooms in the southwest corner was added back to where it had been originally. In the northeast corner of the building, the portion of the porch that had been enclosed to serve as a washroom in the 1900's was left to continue to serve in that function. A portion of the wall that had originally divided the kitchen from the post office, added to the house later, was removed.

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Due to the overly restrictive and unyielding attitude of the local Fire Marshall, it was necessary to remove the central narrow staircase and replace it with two new staircases at either end of the building. Because the second floor hallway was longer than forty feet, it was required under Wyoming's fire code to have stairs at either end. The original stairs, which were narrow and steep with treads too small for public use, were removed and into this area a formal entryway and coat closet were added on the first floor, and on the second floor a 3/4 bathroom. Staircases were added at the north and south ends of the building and were put into rooms that were, relatively speaking, unimportant architecturally and historically. The south staircase was built on the first floor in a room that had been added sometime after the original house was built. This was revealed through the internal evidence as the house was being rehabilitated. On the second floor on the south end of the house, a staircase was located in a room that had been originally constructed as two small rooms but altered in the 1900s into a large room. The construction of the stairwell restored the original location of the bedroom wall. At the north end of the house a double stairway was put in at its present location because the space on the second floor had been an unfinished attic room originally. On the first floor the north end staircase replaced an area that had been used for storage.

The chimneys that had been destroyed over the years were rebuilt on the exterior of the house using the bricks from the chimneys that were found scattered on the ground. Support for the location and placement of the chimneys came both from photographs and from the external evidence available on site.

As can be seen from the "before" photographs submitted with this nomination almost all the windows were broken. Out of 32 windows there were less than a dozen full panes of glass left anywhere and only six window units were in any way repairable. All of the other window units were broken and rotted beyond repair. The windows were replaced with custom-built Marvin windows, which match the original material of wood, the size and shape of the windows duplicate the originals with the same muntin and mullion proportions and configurations. These windows not only duplicate the originals, but also provide excellent energy efficiency and weather protection. The changes due to the fire code required that one window on the north end of the house be removed and replaced with a window in a new location on the north side, and that a doorway and window on the northeast porch be changed.

Unfortunately, only a few close-up photographs of the clapboard siding were taken in its "before" state. From those photographs it is difficult to fully illustrate the deterioration in the

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siding, but some indication of the damage can be seen in the enclosed photographs. The contractor described the siding as looking at first rough, but usable. It was obvious that some of the siding was missing, much of it was cracked, and that it was very weather beaten; sun and moisture had curled the siding so that when it was renailed it would crack.

The contractors began by removing the siding that was absolutely not usable due to major cracks or curls. It was at this point that it was discovered that the siding was so brittle that the grain was breaking apart. The paint was in terrible condition; in areas where the paint had come off, dirt had penetrated and the siding was rotted. There were also chunks of hardened paint that were virtually impossible to remove by scraping or sanding without damaging the siding further. The paper between the sheathing and siding was deteriorating or gone. The worst problem was due to the bugs and nests behind the siding. All these problems had deteriorated the siding to such an extent that to use the siding was impossible. It was obvious that the final result, even after much time and money, could not be justified from either a cost, function or aesthetic viewpoint. It was determined that the siding was pine and so pine was made to the exact size and shape as the original siding, as were the corner boards, casing, drillcaps and other exterior trim. The existing rakes, soffits, fascias, crowns and moldings were used. The original sheathing was left in place, new paper was put on and after the new frame siding was nailed to the house it was painted red.

Three of the four exterior doors were totally damaged or missing and were replaced by similar styled doors. The door that was reusable was stripped, patched and repainted. The roof shape retains its historic appearance. The old roof was stripped, the roof boards were renailed and repaired and, where necessary, new, similar shingles with the same reveal as the historic shingles were put on the roof.

None of the three porches were in any way repairable. The west porch was gone, the northeast and south porches were almost totally rotted underneath with posts missing or broken which had caused the roof to sag and bend the rafters out of shape. There were many broken rafters and holes in the porch roof boards. There was a tremendous amount of rot in these old porches so each porch had to be rebuilt starting with proper footings and joists. Lumber was milled to match the existing posts, rafters, roofboards and floorboards as well and the miscellaneous trim.

As described above, the interior condition of the house was very bad. Most of the interior features had been taken, including all mantels, doors and much of the interior trim. What was left had been damaged by elements, animals and vandals. Salvaging the interior was

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considered; all of the obviously defective materials were removed and upon closer inspection of the existing interior materials it became apparent that the extreme damage they had suffered over the years would not allow them to be used.

As a comparison of the present day appearance of Big Red with the historic appearance of Big Red from the three historic photographs submitted reveals, the house in its restored condition retains an integrity of style, setting and association. Where new materials were required, the material itself and their design were duplicates of the original historic materials used in the construction of Big Red.

SPECIFIC FEATURES

There are three wood porches attached to the house. The front porch is on the west side of the house, and it is approximately 22½' x 7' with an independent roof supported by four white wood columns. The south porch is 22' x 7' and has an independent roof supported by four wood columns and two pilasters and is reached by three brick steps. The east porch on the north end of the house is 17' x 7' with a shed roof extension supported by two wood columns and one pilaster and reached by two brick steps.

The west side of the house has six 7' x 3' four over four pane windows on the first floor and four 5' x 3' two over two pane windows on the second floor. The south side has six 7' x 3' four over four pane windows, two on the second floor and four on the first floor, and three 5' x 3' two over two pane windows on the second floor. On the east side of the house are four 5' x 3' two over two pane windows on the second story and four 7' x 3' four over four pane windows.

The northeast porch area was structurally altered so that the interior of the house could comply with the fire code regulations for public buildings. A door that was formerly located on the south end of the northeast porch was relocated and replaced with a 7' x 3' window; above this window on the second floor is a two over two pane 4' x 3' window. The door was moved to the west side of the porch and a new window, 7' x 3' two over two pane, was located to the north side of the door. On the east side of the post office addition there is a 7' x 3' two over two pane window.

On the north side of the house is a new 2' x 4' four over four pane window on the first floor and an original 4' x 3' two over two pane window on the second floor. A 2' x 3' single pane window is located on the second floor in the attic area.

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There are four doors into the house, three out of the four were totally destroyed or missing and were replaced by similar styled wood doors. The south porch door is an original and was repaired and refinished with an antique stained glass window installed in the transom above the door. All doors are six panel solid wood doors.

There are four internal brick chimneys, and their locations can be seen on the enclosed photographs. All chimneys were rebuilt in their original locations. When the house was altered in the 1900's, a chimney was added in the northeast parlor room, but was not rebuilt in the restoration project.

INTERIOR FEATURES

The present use of the house has been changed from residential to public offices for an arts and humanities foundation. Because of that change in use the interior was completely renovated. As described above, the most significant 1982 alteration is the removal of the old staircase in the new entryway and the addition of two staircases at either end of the house to satisfy fire code requirements.

As described above, the condition of the interior left no features to salvage. All fireplaces and mantels were gone, but the original fireboxes were left in the fireplaces and were utilized. New doors matching the originals were installed, as were moldings and trim cut to match. Because of the numerous bug nests and the condition of the plaster and lath, it was decided to sheetrock the interior, particularly since wallpaper was going to be used.

As described above, public rest rooms were installed. Part of a wall that separated the old post office and the kitchen was removed to provide more area. The house is heated by recessed electric heat from solid panels located unobtrusively on the ceiling. Plumbing tanks are located in the basement and a janitorial area was hidden under the stairs.

OUTBUILDINGS AND MAN-MADE ELEMENTS

The barn located in the northeast corner of the ranch has been changed to allow for its use as a series of artists' studios. The barn was originally 70' long x 42' wide, but is now 70' x 66' with the addition of two 12' wings. When the barn was originally constructed, it had two 11' wings; one was removed later. A clerestory row of windows was installed on the west wing of the barn for light into the studios and a gable was added to the roof over the east main

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entrance. The pitch of the barn's roof has also been altered for its use as studios. The original posts throughout the barn remain. Windows and doors were changed throughout the barn. The barn was of such poor construction that it would have been unsafe for extensive human use. It is not part of the nominated property.

The outhouse received a new coat of paint and remains virtually unchanged. A bunk house located to the north of the house was removed due to its poor condition.

The landscaping of the house is virtually unchanged; grass seed was put down and the 35 large old cottonwood trees that line the creek and surround the house were trimmed.

SITE

The site is basically unchanged from the date it achieved significance. From historical records it is known that several buildings that existed at one time at Big Red are no longer present. These include the cattle shed, coal shed, bunk house and a blacksmith's shop.

The elevation of the Big Red site is a little over 4,000' with the high peaks of the Big Horn Mountains visible from the house and barn. As described above, it is in a valley at the confluence of three creeks; Clear Creek is directly adjacent to the house. Rounded hills at an average elevation of 4,600' surround the ranch. An alfalfa field is located north of the house in the good soil typical of eastern Sheridan County. The area surrounding Big Red remains that of undeveloped rural countryside. The climate in this area is the typical arid Wyoming climate.

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This acquisition and development of land and water for farming proved critical to the long term survival of P & F and enabled the company to insulate itself from many of the harsh conditions of nature. That conditions were harsh is illustrated by company records for the 1890's which show the hire of "Rattlesnake Jack" Moran as a wolf trapper, who killed as many as 200 to 300 grey wolves a year! All told, from 1879 to 1899, P & F was one of the most successful of the large range cattle outfits. Despite the heavy winter losses in the 1886-1887, the company made substantial overall profits. From 1887 to 1898 the return on the \$400,000 initial capital investment averaged 11% per year, an unusual accomplishment in this industry.

Beginning in 1891 the railroad played an increasing role in the area. The Burlington-Northern began to come across northeastern Wyoming in 1891. Its presence changed things measurably for P & F. Direct service to rail sidings, downstream on Clear Fork, the founding of the town of Clearmont, and the changed mail and freight connections made a big difference to the company. In 1891, a stageline from Buffalo to Belle Fourche, South Dakota utilizing land and rail was organized. A new commercial telegraph line ran down the railroad from Buffalo to Gillette. From 1892 until 1911 there was a two day stage-coach service from Buffalo to Clearmont, the rails end. In the summer of 1911, car service for \$3.00 one way from Buffalo to Clearmont began. During these years over 3,000,000 to 4,000,000 pounds of freight moved down the Clear Fork from Buffalo to Clearmont. By 1915, Buffalo people had extended the rails to Ucross and by 1918 to Buffalo, thus ending the freight period down the Clear Fork.

But the 1890's brought another change to the rangeland of Wyoming - sheep and P & F was ready and able to make the switch. In 1903, Levi Z. Leiter, now along with Pratt, the principal owner of the company, hired William C. "Billy" Irvine, who is remembered most vividly in Wyoming history as one of the leaders of the Johnson County invasion in 1892. During Irvine's two-year term as manager of Big Red, most of the effort of the company was directed to changing over to a sheep ranching operation. During this time he and his family lived at Big Red and it appears to have been the most elegant period for the house.

In 1903 the Irvines added a bathroom with hot and cold running water from a copper tank kept in the attic. Irvine also had two Japanese servants, a cook and butler, Ume Moto and Kunimitsu. The Irvines left in late 1905 and went on to found a large ranch dynasty in the Buffalo-Casper area.

Although Levi Z. Leiter, the chief shareholder in the cattle company, had never visited the property, he supplied management expertise as well as capital. From his headquarters in Chicago he

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looked after investments which included western ranches, Chicago real estate, mines and oil shale land. He was intimately involved with the managers of Big Red on the details of real estate transactions, building maintenance, beef cattle management, and genetics. In 1904, Leiter died and in a friendly partition action, his widow and his children primarily Joseph Leiter, received the Clear Fork holdings. Pratt at this point was no longer associated with the company.

Levi's son, Joseph Leiter, was a colorful figure, he was a skilled manager, as well as a supreme risk taker. He lost millions trying to corner the wheat futures market in 1898. One night early in the century, he lost \$70,000 gambling in Sheridan, but won it all back along with \$4,500 of the house's money by morning. Leiter bet a vast amount of money, along with much of his time on the ultimate success of irrigated farming in the region. He was the prime mover behind the Lake DeSmet water project, the second Kearney Lake Company and other irrigation projects that still serve the crop lands of the valley.

1906 was the final year that Big Red operated as a conventional stock ranch and it was the year that Joseph Leiter was ready to begin a new phase of development centered around irrigated farmlands. Because the development of an irrigation system required a lot of money and time, the company entered into a phase where it closed out its livestock operation and used contracts with others and leases to provide interim cash flow until the farm ground and its water could be fully developed.

During the interim years when the irrigation systems were under development a number of men of area importance managed the Leiter holdings. In 1906, Frank O. Horton out of the University of Chicago arrived to take care of 3,000 head of sheep. By 1911 he had saved enough money to start a major dude operation in the Big Horns, the HF Bar, in Saddlestring, Wyoming, that is still in operation today. He was followed by Willis M. Spear. Spear was one of the best known of the cattle ranchers in the area. He was a skilled guide and outfitter, a jovial entertainer and a successful businessman. By 1909, Spear had negotiated two leases for the Spear Brothers Cattle Company that covered all lands owned or leased by the Leiter estate for a period ending in 1915. At the peak of the War World I cattle boom, the Spears ran approximately 56,000 head on over 3,000,000 acres of rangeland. In 1908 the Spears lived a year at Big Red and summered alternately at Big Red and other Leiter ranches in the area. During 1915 and 1917 Will Johnson, his wife, and her sister, both Spears, lived at Big Red.

The expiration of the Spear lease in 1915 was timed to coincide with the next phase in the development of the Big Red - sugar beet farming. The sugar beet industry had been encouraged by the

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State. In the early 1900's competition between Wyoming towns was fierce to get sugar factories. The businessmen in the towns of Sheridan and Buffalo in 1915 met together to secure a factory for their town. In 1916 Holly Sugar Company completed its large new sugar factory in Sheridan.

In anticipation the Leiter estate had begun to lease out portions of the farm to beet growers before the growing season of 1916. More tenant farmhouses were built and in 1919 Big Red was also rented to resident tenants. Most of the tenant farmers were of Volga-German ancestry and by 1923 there were as many as thirty tenant farmers connected with the Leiter holdings. The demands of World War I for farm products coincided nicely with the development of the sugar beet industry. The estate was very active during this time with investments and improvements for the Lake DeSmet dam, a greenhouse, and an experimental farm, warehouses, livestock feeding programs, and hog and chicken farms. But, by 1921, the World War I farm boom had begun to slow and prices had dropped by 25%.

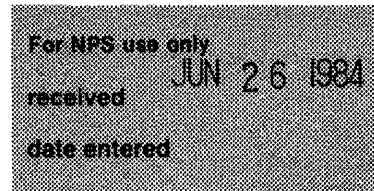
The loss of profits from the Leiter holdings caused problems between the Leiter heirs. Marguerite Leiter Hyde, the Countess of Suffolk and Berkshire (sister of Joe Leiter) was under severe financial pressure stemming in part from the demands of a post-World War I Britain. But Joe Leiter still had faith in the long range prospects for irrigated farming in the area and in 1925 and 1926 was looking into irrigating additional land in Piney, Dutch Creek, Wildcat Creek, and Prairie Dog Creek drainages. This ambitious plan finally precipitated a lawsuit between the brother and sister in 1926 over his management. He won that lawsuit but lost another which caused financial problems for Joe Leiter. By 1926 he had pulled out of the direct management of the Big Red properties.

In the winter of 1928, the estate negotiated the first of a long series of leases lasting through 1949 in which all of the irrigated farms were rented by Holly Sugar Company itself. The Great Depression ended any prospect for an intensive expansion of irrigated farming and by the 1930's the Sheridan sugar factory was obsolete and was replaced by a factory in Hardin, Montana.

From the mid-1920's the estate and Holly Sugar Company, respectively, performed only the most essential repair work on the buildings at Big Red, and in most cases, they let the tenants do it themselves. In 1949, the Leiter holdings were finally sold to John and Ruth Rice. They divided the large holding into smaller acreages and sold off the land to the tenant farmers. Alex Pitsch was the last tenant at Big Red and he bought Big Red and sold it to Apache Corporation in 1980.

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

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



Continuation sheet Boundary Description

Item number 10

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Due to the semi arid climate and unusual topography of northeast Wyoming, the primary use of the high plains during the late nineteenth century related to agriculture. The local economy was supported by large ranching operations that used Wyoming's plains for grazing and a limited amount of farming. Rolling hills, small streams and large meadows still visually describe southern Sheridan County and Big Red. Through the years the site retained its historic setting and association with the Big Red ranch. Today the land that surrounds Big Red is still used for agricultural purposes. At one time Big Red was one of the largest ranch complexes in northern Wyoming, currently only three of the original ranch buildings remain. These buildings (the house, outhouse and barn) are located in a small area that once served as headquarters for the ranch. While the land surrounding the buildings is used in its historic role, the Big Red structures are now used as part of a conference center.

The boundaries of Big Red are defined by both natural and super-imposed lines. The entire ranch complex was not included within the National Register's boundaries since only three original buildings remain as visible cultural artifacts. During the nineteenth century, the founder of Big Red logically placed the ranch buildings in close proximity to water at the intersection of Coal and Clear Creeks. These important natural resources served ranchers in the past and today adequately serve as boundaries for the National Register. Arbitrary lines drawn to connect UTM points, help to define the boundaries of the nomination and to eliminate nominating excess land. These boundaries also help to basically outline the acreage involved with the original ranch headquarters. UTM point A, an arbitrary point, is located 10' east of the gravel ranch road. The east boundary runs in a south-east direction and is a straight line drawn from UTM point A to UTM point B; this line is adjacent to the north corner of the ranch house. The southern boundary follows the north bank of Clear Creek from UTM point B to UTM point C. Coal Creek defines the western boundary that follows the east bank of the stream between UTM point C to UTM point D. The northern boundary runs in a northeast direction and is a straight line that is drawn perpendicular to the main ranch road and touches the northwest corner of the barn; the north boundary extends from UTM point D to UTM point A. The USGS map does not show where the outhouse is located. A structure is shown on the 1970 quad map which is located outside of the boundaries; this building no longer remains standing.