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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Gustave Heilsberg Farm

other names/site number John Heilsberg Farm

2. Location

street & number Route 2, Box 58

not for publication

city, town Colfax

vicinity

state Washington

code WA

county Whitman

code 075

zip code 99111

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private public-local public-State public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s) district site structure object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing: Grain Production in Eastern Washington

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official (Handwritten signature)

Date 7/22/88

Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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 (Handwritten signature)

Date of Action 9/22/88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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Wood floors cover most of the structure's interior. The original floor plan has been retained, as have the original wooden stalls on which hang the names of the draft horses that last occupied them in the late 1930s: Daisy, Nig, Andy, Flossie, Floria, Pearl, Bill, Fanny, and Charlie. With the horses gone, most of the floor space is now used for parking vehicles and antique farm machinery. Hay is still stored in the enormous loft on the second level.

The residence near the west edge of the nominated property is perhaps second only to the horse barn in significance. Constructed in 1914 by J.R. Good, a Colfax contractor, the house is in many ways a typical bungalow of its day. Sided with shiplap on the lower half and wood shingles under the eaves and on the gables, the house measures 40 X 50 feet. The gently sloping, side-facing single gable roof has wide boxed eaves and decorative brackets. The decorative eaves are mirrored in two matching front-facing gable dormers and a gable portico over the front stairs. Concrete steps lead to the wooden deck of the porch, whose awning is supported by boxed columns. The porch wraps around the house from the northwest corner across the front and east sides and extends around the southeast corner to the back door off the kitchen. The porch along the east side of the house has been enclosed with screens and a screen door opens onto the front porch. All fenestration consisting of sash windows is original, as are the doors.

The foundation of the bungalow is unusually stout, reportedly measuring about 3 feet thick and 3 feet deep. Gravel from nearby Union Flat Creek was used in the concrete for the foundation. In the full basement are a pantry, furnace room, a meat smoker constructed of concrete, and a photographic dark room installed by John Heilsberg. The floor plan of the main and upper floors is unchanged, with hardwood floors throughout. Only the kitchen in the southeast corner of the house has a newer linoleum floor. The room is spacious, with original cupboards and a dumbwaiter rising from the basement. Shelves separate the kitchen and dining room, with wood doors opening into the kitchen and decorative glass doors facing the dining room in the northeast corner of the main floor. Gustave and Johanna's piano (she played) stands in the living room, which occupies the northwest quarter of the main floor. The chandeliers have been removed from that room, but original tiles still decorate the fireplace. Boxed columns resembling those on the porch rise from atop dividers between the living room and the dining room. A bathroom and master bedroom located in the southwest quarter of the main floor have been slightly remodeled.

Each of Gustave and Johanna Heilsberg's sons had his own bedroom on the upper floor. All the rooms have walk-in closets, original woodwork, and their walls are plastered and painted, never having been papered. Side doors exit the bedrooms onto two sleeping porches on the east and west sides of the house under the gables. A toilet and linen closet are centrally located at the top of the stairs. On the landing midway up the staircase is a window seat affording a view out the rear of the house.

Directly opposite the back door is the icehouse and butcher shop. Measuring 20 X 25 feet, the building is of concrete construction with soil and rocks piled against its side and rear walls and on its roof to provide insulation. A single insulated door enters the icehouse on the building's east half where ice cut from nearby Union Flat Creek was stored. Two sliding wooden doors with glass panes enter the butcher shop on the west half. Perhaps more than any other single feature on the property, the butcher shop reflects Gustave Heilsberg's life as a butcher before he became a grain farmer. It is equipped with

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meat hooks and a folding cutting board mounted in a wall. On the far west end of the building, Heilsberg installed a built-in doghouse, complete with arched entryway at ground level.

Behind the icehouse/butcher shop are various ancillary buildings reflecting the self-sufficient nature of the farm and its inhabitants. There is a chicken house (reportedly moved in from the earlier Heilsberg farmstead), a stoutly-built hog shed, a stone root cellar with a frame upper level containing a cider press, and another shed of undetermined utility.

Southeast of the house is perhaps the most dilapidated, but one of the most interesting, structures on the farmstead. The garage is of flush-board construction and has a gable roof. Providing entry are sliding and hinged wooden doors to which have been nailed every license plate from every automobile ever owned by the Heilsbergs. Just as he retained the names of his draft horses, John Heilsberg kept a memento from all of his and his father's vehicles. Inside the garage are automobiles dating from the first half of the century, including the roadster in which John first dated his wife Elizabeth.

Adjacent to the garage is the machine shop. It more than any other building bears John Heilsberg's signature. The two-story concrete structure consists of a metal shop on the ground floor and a carpentry shop on the upper level. Tools, lathes, and machinery of every description lay about the place, more or less as John left them, testaments to the man's mechanical skill, ingenuity and resourcefulness.

To the north is a complex of three frame buildings more or less joined into one. On the west is the oil building where fuels and all-purpose oils used on the farm are stored. To the immediate east is the so-called seed treating building in which grains to be used as seed stock were chemically treated before planting. North of that structure is the bunkhouse, which, like the other two adjacent buildings, is a neatly painted red frame building with white trim on its wood sash windows. The bunkhouse serves as a reminder of the days when harvest crews were temporarily boarded on the farm. The building is rather small (measuring .15 X 23 feet) and could not have housed a very large crew.

Northeast of the bunkhouse and the horse barn is a frame structure standing on a stone and timber pier foundation. Measuring 36 X 45 feet, the dilapidated flush-board building has a gable, sheet-metal roof that extends over its east side providing covered parking for various antiquated farm machinery, some personally designed by John Heilsburg.

Immediately to the east is the granary built by John Heilsberg and granary annex constructed by John and Harold Heilsberg in the 1950s and 1960s, respectively. The earlier of the two buildings is the main granary, or elevator as it is called, reflecting the device known as an elevator installed on its interior to carry grain from trucks into storage bins, which are presumably of cribbed construction. The building has wood shingles on its walls above the high concrete foundation. On the building's east side is a sliding wood door covering a pit into which trucks dump grain to be stored in the structure. A sliding vehicle door on the north end provides entry for truck loading. The adjacent annex stands only about one foot west of the main granary. It is of flush-board construction, reinforced with ca. 10-inch diameter wood poles anchored vertically in the ground next to the concrete foundation. The poles are lashed to the building's sides for added support.

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Together the structures provide "home" or temporary storage for about 20,000 bushels of grain.

South of the granary are two barns joined together to form one structure measuring 20 X 100 feet. The barns are of weathered flush-board construction atop post foundations. Their interiors are essentially empty, open from end to end, and lacking any facilities such as stalls or hay lofts. The structures are referred to by the Heilsbergs as the "cattle barns," and have apparently been used for sheltering cattle and storing farm equipment. The nominated property includes those grounds which are circumscribed by the complex of standing structures. The original wheat fields beyond the complex have been merged with much larger land holdings and cannot be distinguished from nonhistoric fields.

Contributing Buildings: horse barn, icehouse-butcher shop, garage, machine shop, oil building, bunkhouse, seed building, cattle barn #1, cattle barn #2.

Contributing Structures: chicken house, hog shed, root cellar, shed, storage shed.

Noncontributing Structure: granary and annex.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture
Architecture

Period of Significance

1904-1938

Significant Dates

1904

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Good, J.R.
Heilsberg, Gustave

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Gustave Heilsberg Farm is a historically and architecturally significant example of the wheat growing farmsteads of Eastern Washington. Built between 1904 and 1930, the farmstead is probably the most complete and best preserved example in Whitman County, having retained all the major and most of the ancillary structures associated with the property during the early 20th century. As such, the farm meets the registration requirements for the farmstead property type as established in the Grain Production in Eastern Washington Multiple Property Documentation Form. The complex includes a full range of the structures necessary to sustain a large wheat farm from the period, including a well preserved farmhouse, horse barn, machine shop, ice house and butcher shop, bunkhouse, garage, seed house, hog shed, chicken house, root cellar, and other ancillary structures. In addition to the structural diversity of the complex, the farm is distinguished by the number of original buildings that survive, a rare occurrence for farms that have operated continuously for nearly 90 years. Even more surprising is the architectural integrity of the individual elements. As a result, the property is a historically important example of the farms associated with wheat production, and an architecturally important illustration of the types and methods of construction that characterized those farms.

Historic Background:

Gustave Heilsberg was born to German parents in southwestern Russia in 1867. It is not known when he left the country of his birth, but in doing so he joined over 100,000 other German-Russians who came to the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. So many eventually settled in the Pacific Northwest that their migration constitutes one of the most massive moves to the region by a single ethnic group.

Their odyssey began in Germany in the eighteenth century where persistent warfare, dislocation, economic deprivation, and in some cases religious persecution drove thousands to seek new homes abroad. While some went to North America, others turned eastward, lured by promises of Catherine II, Empress of Russia, and herself a German by birth. In the early 1760s Russia was a backward country, lagging far behind the West in agricultural development, and locked into the medieval system of serfdom. Catherine hoped that by attracting foreign settlers to the great expanses of uninhabited arable land in southwestern Russia, she could accelerate her adopted nation's development. In the early 1760s she offered free land, exemption from taxation (for a limited time) and military service (in perpetuity), interest-free loans, and free passage to Russia to anyone willing to swear an oath of allegiance to the crown.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

- Heilsberg, Don and Christine. Interview with Craig Holstine and Glen Lindeman, Wilcox, December 1987.
- Heilsberg, Harold and Millie. Interview with Holstine and Lindeman, Colfax, December 1987.
- Heilsberg, Teri. Interview with Holstine and Lindeman, Wilcox, December 1987.
- Hitchman, Robert. Place Names of Washington. Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society Press, 1985.
- Meinig, D. W. The Great Columbia Plain: A Historical Geography, 1805-1910. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968.
- Plat Book of Whitman County. Seattle: Anderson Map Co., 1910.
- Scheuerman, Richard D. and Clifford E. Trafzer. The Volga Germans, Pioneers of the Northwest. Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1980.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property ca. 4 acres

UTM References Northwest corner

A	1,1	4,6,2	7,5,0	5,1,8,3	6,0,5
	Zone	Easting	Northing		
C	1,1	4,6,2	9,0,0	5,1,8,3	5,0,5
	Southeast corner				

Southwest corner

B	1,1	4,6,2	7,5,0	5,1,8,3	5,0,0
	Zone	Easting	Northing		
D	1,1	4,6,2	9,0,0	5,1,8,3	6,1,0
	Northeast corner				

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at a point on the south side of County Road 8090 approximately 0.3 mile south of the Wilcox townsite, the western nominated property boundary runs almost directly south 105 meters (346.5 feet) past the house and ancillary buildings into the locust trees. From that point, the boundary continues east 150 meters (495 feet) through trees and over the northern brow of a grassy hill, crossing the north/south-running farm road at the

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries include all structures and associated grounds on the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Craig Holstine, Historian

organization Archaeological & Historical Service, EWU date March 31, 1988

street & number Eastern Washington University telephone (509) 359-2239

city or town Cheney state Washington zip code 99004

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Peoples of many nationalities accepted Catherine's generosity, the vast majority being German peasant farmers. They congregated in colonies and maintained their linguistic and cultural identity. For a century the transplanted Germans were models of productivity and the envy of their Russian neighbors. Then, in the early 1870s, the Russian government repealed some privileges extended to the colonists, including exemption from military service. The action prompted a mass exodus from their adopted homeland, with most German Russians emigrating to the U.S. Perhaps not surprisingly, since they were nearly all farmers, most of them did not stay on the East Coast but went directly to the Mid West. Completion of the transcontinental railroads brought several thousand of these latter-day pilgrims to the Pacific Northwest in the 1880s.

Gustave Heilsburg was somewhat atypical of this human phenomenon. He was reportedly not a farmer but a butcher by trade. It is not known when he left Russia, but it must have been after the great German Russian exodus of the 1870s. He went first to Australia, but by 1892 was in Nebraska, where his son Ewald was born. Gustave and his wife Johanna had four sons in all, the other three being Joseph, John, and Nathan. Joseph was born in Russia before the couple emigrated; John and Nathan were born in America, John in 1896 and Nathan sometime thereafter.

The family appears to have arrived in Whitman County shortly after the turn of the century, most probably in 1902. They settled on Union Flat Creek, where some of the county's first pioneers had settled in 1869. The creek was reportedly named for the Union sympathizers who took up lands along its banks, in contrast to Rebel Flat Creek to the north where new arrivals with decidedly Southern leanings congregated. Stockmen found Union Flat Creek ideal with its high grass and sheltered home sites in the shallow valley. Early grain farmers eagerly took up lands in the valley bottom, avoiding the rolling hills for fear they lacked the soil and moisture needed to sustain wheat crops. Once that misconception was dispelled by the 1880s, the adjacent uplands were quickly taken up and put under cultivation. The small town of Wilcox, supposedly named for Robert Wilcox, the first postmaster, was established and had a post office by 1886.

By the time Gustave Heilsberg arrived, all the choicest farmland had already been homesteaded in Whitman County. For reasons now unknown, he decided to locate at Wilcox where he purchased the property on which the nominated farm buildings now stand. It is not known whether he bought all of his land at once from a single owner, but by 1910 Heilsberg had acquired 718 acres in Secs. 11 and 14, T15N, R42E. (He eventually amassed over 1600 acres). While maintaining several head of cattle, horses, and hogs, his primary preoccupation was with wheat growing. At least one-twentieth of his cultivated acreage was required to grow feed for the draft horses needed for harvesting, plowing, and other tasks requiring horsepower.

In 1904 Gustave built the huge horse barn that today still displays that date under its high gable. At that time the family did not live on the present site but on a farmstead reportedly "over the hill in the next draw" south of the nominated property. He is also reported to have built most of the other buildings on the site, with the exception of the house, chicken house, and two barns that have been joined to form a single structure on the east edge of the complex.

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In 1914 Gustave hired J.R. Good to build his house. Good was a noted contractor in Colfax, where several bungalows stand today with his name cast in the concrete of their front steps. Heilsberg reportedly worked closely with Good on numerous design details for the house. When completed, at a cost of \$4,000, the house was a masterpiece of solid construction that Union Flat Creek neighbors referred to as "the best built house in the county." Gustave's insistence that the foundation be much thicker and stronger than the standard variety installed under most bungalows of the day appears to have been the wandering immigrant's way of putting down permanent roots. The house design also reflects the family's size: a master bedroom on the main floor with four upstairs bedrooms, one for each son.

It is not known for certain but the nearby icehouse/butcher shop was probably built about the same time, possibly by J.R. Good. Like the bungalow, it is stoutly built with 6-inch thick concrete walls, and reflects the personal touch of Gustave Heilsberg, seen particularly in the butcher shop where he practiced the trade he first learned before taking up farming. The Heilsbergs spent enjoyable, albeit laborious, winter hours filling the adjacent ice house with ice from Union Flat Creek.

At the age of 59, Gustave died of dropsy while visiting a health resort at Hot Lake, Oregon, in 1926. (His wife Johanna died in the late 1950s). Prior to his death, Gustave bought his two surviving sons Joseph and Ewald (Nathan died as an adolescent) farms in the Wilcox area. John, the only unmarried son still living at home, inherited the place. Later he married, and farmed and lived there the rest of his life with his wife Elizabeth.

John was somewhat of a mechanical genius, fabricating in the rather elaborate shop many pieces of hardware that today give the place its special character. One unique item for which John was responsible is the heavy stone drilled through in the middle serving as a counterbalance for the cantilevered wood gate southwest of the cattle barns. He must have inherited from his father a propensity for preserving things constructed, used, or driven by the family. Parked in the storage building on the north edge of the place are numerous farm implements dating from the turn of the century, several of which bear John's customized modifications. In the somewhat dilapidated garage are both Gustave's and John's old automobiles, and nailed to the front doors and walls of the garage are license plates from every automobile ever owned by the Heilsbergs.

Perhaps the most unusual item on the farm, and the most reflective of John Heilsberg's sense of time and history, is a small metal plaque mounted on the large circular concrete water trough in front of the horse barn. The plaque reads: "Carp hatched in 1922 caught by Harold Heath 1924 in Snake River & put in water trough JH [John Heilsberg]." In the trough, the carp, amazingly, is still alive and apparently well at what must be age 66 in his transplanted home high above the Snake River.

The commemorative plaque on the trough, as well as the old cars and license plates, tell only part of the story. John Heilsberg did more than just save things, he maintained them in good working order. His abilities as a carpenter and all-around "handy man" resulted in the farm's receiving careful maintenance for over a half century after Gustave's death. John's energy and personal desire to keep the original buildings well-maintained has created a showcase of his family's hard work and accomplishment. As such the Gustave

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Heilsberg Farm is today perhaps Whitman County's most outstanding wheat farm in terms of its retention of original buildings dating from the early twentieth century.

John passed away in 1976. His nephew Harold Heilsberg farmed the place before retiring. (It is now leased). Like his uncle and his grandfather, Harold has maintained the farm buildings in excellent repair. No new structures have been added to the complex since John and Harold completed the granary in the 1960s. Today, the farm retains its significant assemblage of resources, reflecting the full range of activities and structures required on a wheat farm of the period. The house, horse barn, bunkhouse, ice house-butcher shop, and machine shed are all excellent examples of their types as described in the multiple property documentation form. The complex also illustrates the layout of a farmstead from the period. Domestic structures (house, bunkhouse, icehouse-butcher shop, root cellar and chicken house) are grouped on the west, while large farm structures (horse barn, cattle barn, granary, and implement shed) are clustered on the east. The integrity of the complex, and the constituent elements, is unsurpassed in Whitman county, according to a comprehensive survey in 1986.

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Verbal Boundary Description (continued)

cantilevered gate with the stone counterbalance ending at a point on the fence on the hillside. From there the boundary follows the fence north 105 meters along the east side of the cattle barns, continuing north to the county road. The northern property boundary then follows the road 150 meters west to the northwest corner of the nominated boundary.

COUNTY ROAD 8090

Implement storage

Annex Granary
(Noncontributing)

Nominated
property boundary

Bunkhouse

Concrete
fish pond

Horse
barn

Oil building

Seed-treating
building

House

Ice house/
butcher shop

Windmill *

Root
cellar

Garage

Machine
shop

Chicken
house

Hog shed

Root cellar/
cider press

Cattle
barns

Gate

GUSTAVE HEILSBURG FARM

