

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received MAR 14 1984
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Jay Em

and/or common Jay Em Historic District

2. Location

street & number Main Street not for publication

city, town Jay Em vicinity of

state Wyoming code county Goshen code

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Mabel Bass 532-4803

street & number N/A

city, town Jay Em vicinity of state Wyoming

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Goshen County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Torrington state Wyoming

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

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

Located in eastern Wyoming 30 miles north of Fort Laramie on Rawhide Creek, Jay Em is an early 20th century agricultural community typical of those which sprang up in the pre-depression era as farmers flocked to homestead previously unsettled regions of the arid west. Developed in response to the need for contact with the outside world, Jay Em was strictly a vernacular service community composed of simple structures providing necessities and very little else. The streets were never paved or graveled, there were never sidewalks, curbs or gutters, there is no municipal organization nor even a community center. But there is a bank, a repair shop and gas station, a water tower, a general store, lumber yard and post office, a few trees and residences; physical and psychological necessities for farmers and ranchers involved in a daily struggle with a near hostile environment and oppressive isolation. Jay Em's buildings were simple, constructed with the materials at hand, for there was no railroad to bring fancy eastern facades and no industry with which to attract or finance it. Jay Em's buildings are wood frame, with ship-lap siding and some concrete walls and foundations. They have simple functional doors and windows, gabled roofs and they are small, 1 and 2 stories, constructed to serve the needs at hand without speculation about the future. They are vernacular and demonstrate a rare consistency of architectural design due to the fact that Lake Harris had a hand in every construction. The district is a tightly knit commercial district with all buildings within a block of each other. Despite vacant lots separating some of the properties, there are no intrusions. A few modern structures are scattered about the fringes housing the 19 residents who remain. The district itself remains in the hands of Lake Harris' heirs, unaltered and in good condition. Empty but not abandoned, Jay Em still looks much as it did in the teens and twenties; huddled on the plains; dwarfed by an environment of open space; a neglected monument to unfulfilled dreams.

SEE ADDENDUM

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 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–1933	<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 1915–1933 **Builder/Architect** Lake Harris

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The village of Jay Em, Wyoming, is largely the result of one man's efforts to enhance the benefits of settlement in the area. Lake Harris, who came to southeastern Wyoming in 1905, planned and developed Jay Em and aided in the construction of the town's buildings. In many ways, Lake Harris was typical of those who dared to settle all over the West; determined to pursue the dream of working their own land and whose persistence most often allowed them to subsist if not necessarily to prosper. After filing a homestead claim in 1912, Harris realized the need for a village like Jay Em to combat the isolation of the area's farmers and ranchers, who depended on it for both economic and social support. From 1915, when the Jay Em Post Office was established, the town served the needs of residents in northern Goshen County well into the 1960's. The proposed Jay Em Historic District is largely deserted today, fighting nature's efforts to reclaim the land. It is associated with Lake Harris, a turn of the century pioneer who pursued his dream of establishing a community in an often inhospitable land, and is representative of the west's long history of hope; a rather significant contributor to the broad patterns of the American frontier experience. Unlike many of the more colorful cities and towns associated with the frontier, Jay Em was not a cattle town, a mining town or a railhead, nor was its existence founded upon speculation or anticipation of a boom. Jay Em was established out of need and functioned as a service community closely tied to the broad economic, social, and philosophical forces which affected the settlement patterns of the high plains in the pre-depression era. Jay Em is a poignant reminder of the reality encountered by Americans pursuing their dreams on the frontier and is deserving of Enrollment in the National Register of Historic Places.

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LUMBER YARD CONTRIBUTING

This is an unusual commercial structure with a 2½ story false front at the east end, an arched connecting wall and gabled warehouse which create a courtyard between. The first floor of the false front is concrete and upper floors are wood frame. The building drops to one story at the back and features a windowed cupola. The central front door is flanked by fixed store front windows all with plain surrounds. There are some double hung windows on the west also with plain surrounds. The arched courtyard facade is also concrete with central lattice sliding doors. The wall extends into the gabled warehouse which is primarily wood frame with an open west side facing the courtyard which has two shed type outbuildings.

STONE COMPANY CONTRIBUTING

A two story gabled brick structure has two large shed roof wings flanking the central structure. The central structure has ladder tansom type windows at the eaves on both sides. The central door is flanked by large 15 light fixed windows with concrete surrounds decorated with marbled inset lintel ornaments. The concrete wings are 1½ story with double hung windows and may have functioned as living quarters on the east and storage on the west.

BANK CONTRIBUTING

The bank is a one story wood frame, ship-lap commercial building with a concrete foundation and flat roof. There is a simple coved cornice parapet extending only a few inches above the roof line. There are two oversized fixed windows flanking the central front door with concrete sills and plain surrounds. There are similar windows in back. The door is narrow with a divided transom, and the original door and screen are intact. There is a small one story frame garage with gabled tin roof and original double doors in back.

HOUSE CONTRIBUTING

This is a very simple one story house with concrete block foundation and gabled roof. Windows are symmetrically placed with two on each side. Windows are narrow, double hung 1/1 with plain surrounds, and wooden louvered shutters that are probably non-functional. There is a shed roof addition on the north side and a small gabled entry porch enclosed with lattice work on the front. There is one end brick chimney on the back.

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RESTAURANT/FEED STORE & POST OFFICE/GENERAL STORE CONTRIBUTING

This interesting 2½ story side-by-side Gambrel complex has a flat roof one story building connecting the larger Gambrel wings. The west Gambrel has a standard store front with narrow vertical lights as does the connecting structure. The eastern Gambrel has fixed oversized windows in front with plain surrounds. Doors and screens are original. There are paired double hung windows on the back second stories, a window ladder frieze with 21 lights on the east side, and a small rectangular window in the ½ story Gambrel end. There is a quaint and functional gable roofed, rock water fountain in front of the building.

GARAGE CONTRIBUTING

This is a one story garage with ship-lap siding. It has a stepped false front and parapet hiding the gabled roof of corrugated tin. It has central double sliding doors with a built-in walk-through door flanked by boarded windows. There are sliding windows on the south side in a 3/3 pattern and all have plain surrounds. There are large ½ globe ornaments decorating the corners of the parapet step and the original central engine pulley is intact.

GAS STATION CONTRIBUTING

This is a small one story gabled, wood frame and ship-lap structure which served as a gas station. The gable end is extended to create a drive through carport with a shingled gable end. The port roof is supported by battered piers and has arched ceiling beams. The wood panel door is left of center with paired six light fixed windows to the right and an oversized fixed window on the street side.

WATER TOWER CONTRIBUTING

The water tower is approximately 60 feet tall with the tank missing. It is supported by four 8 inch square beams with 2x8 cross beam support framing. There is a central ship-lap column which joins the platform at the top. The tower is in a very deteriorated state.

LAKE HARRIS HOME CONTRIBUTING

A 1 and 2-story woodframe house with an irregular plan, intersecting gables and shed roofs. The house has rock, brick, and concrete block foundation and wide clapboard with some shiplap siding.

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Windows are an irregularly spaced combination of square fixed and rectangular double hung with plain surrounds. There are three interior brick chimneys and two porches. The front porch has a gabled extension roof with turned posts while the back porch is enclosed with very narrow shiplap siding and a triple bay of double hung windows. Doors are wooden with single $\frac{1}{2}$ lights and original screens.

The original homestead dugout foundation and owl wall can still be seen on the south side of the house (see photo).

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The area of Goshen County, Wyoming, was originally inhabited by Crow, Shoshone, and Ute Indians, later by the Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes. These tribes were pushed out of the area by the aggressive and more powerful Sioux nation. The first Europeans to enter what is now Goshen County were Spanish and French fur trappers, but little is known of their activities. Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, American trappers ascended the rivers into the area. Until the 1840's trappers constituted the major American presence in the North Platte River Valley.

In 1843, the first sizable group of westward-bound emigrants passed through the valley along the Oregon-California-Mormon Trail. For the next twenty years, the area served as a corridor for about 200,000 travellers on the Trail. In addition, the presence of Fort Laramie (now a National Historic Site) caused the routing of several other historic trails through what would become Goshen County. The Telegraph and Emigration Overland Trail, the Overland Stage Route, the Pony Express, and the Texas Trail, all passed through the area.

It was the Texas Trail which brought Jim Moore to the North Platte River Valley in the 1860's. The Trail followed a north-south path through the area, passing along Rawhide Creek to Lusk, Wyoming. The last watering hole before reaching Lusk was located just north of present-day Jay Em. Moore realized the importance of water in this semi-arid land, and bought about 80 acres on Rawhide Creek. "In those days, if you owned the water, then you owned the land around it. So that gave Moore a jump on the other fellows." (Lake Harris, quoted in Torrington Telegram, October 18, 1978) It would be by Jim Moore's initials that his ranch, a creek, and a new town would be known.

By 1869, Moore, a former freighter and Pony Express rider, owned the second largest cattle ranch in Wyoming Territory; his cattle roamed from Lodgepole Creek (near present-day Sidney, Nebraska) to Running Water Creek and Rawhide Creek in Wyoming. Moore's brand was the "J Rolling M." Moore died in 1875, when he was thrown from a hay wagon by a runaway team. After his death, his brand changed hands several times, and the ranch was broken up into smaller farming and ranching operations. The brand remained in use, however, and a small waterway in the area acquired the name "Jay Em Creek."

A post office was established on Jay Em Creek in 1899. The postmaster was William "Uncle Jack" Hargraves, and the post office itself was named Hargraves. "Uncle Jack" had a taste for whiskey and a quick temper, and soon became

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involved in a heated dispute with a visiting postal inspector. Hargraves ended the argument by telling the inspector to pack up his post office and leave, which is exactly what the inspector did. Since all the postal materials and supplies were contained in a large wooden box, packing up and leaving was easy. For the next ten years, then, the nearest post office was at Rawhide Buttes Station, ten miles north, or Fort Laramie, twenty miles south.

In 1905, Silas Harris of Waupon, Wisconsin, moved to the North Platte River Valley, with his three sons, to assume control of the Jay Em Cattle Company. One of his sons, Lake Harris, saw the need for a post office in the area. The U.S. Postal Department informed him that if he would bring the mail on horseback from Rawhide Buttes Station to Jay Em Ranch, free of charge, every other day for ninety days, the post office would be re-opened. Lake Harris fulfilled the obligation, and a post office was opened in the bunkhouse of the Jay Em Ranch.

In addition to the post office, the Harris family maintained a small general store on the Jay Em Ranch. The "Silas Harris Company Store" sold general merchandise to area farmers and ranchers, provided rudimentary banking services, bought farm produce, and became a gathering place for homesteaders and cowboys alike.

Lake Harris filed his own homestead claim in 1912, on Rawhide Creek. Here he planned and developed the town of Jay Em. After building his own home, he built a small feed store; the post office was moved there in 1915. In 1918, the company general store was moved to Jay Em, and Harris built a lumber and building supplies store soon after. The Farmers State Bank was built in 1920. From 1917-1921, the village even had its own newspaper, the Jay Em Sentinel and Fort Laramie News, edited by Lake Harris, which was a weekly paper with a circulation of three hundred.

Through the 1920's and '30's, the village of Jay Em served as a trading center for homesteaders and ranchers in northern Goshen County, and Lake Harris maintained a controlling interest in virtually all of the town's businesses. This was a period of population growth throughout the west, characterized by a new wave of emigrants rushing to stake their claims in areas that had previously been ignored. Boosterism at the local level and the anticipated chance to start over brought 20th century pioneers determined to answer the irresistible call of free land. Men like Harris were the modern entrepreneurs who benefited from their arrival. In 1935, with several other men, Harris built the Jay Em Stone Company. The firm made tombstones, fireplaces, table tops, and other products, using stone quarried in the Rawhide Buttes area.

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Jay Em began its decline in the late 1930's, with the improvement of transportation in southeast Wyoming. The spread of the automobile, and improvement of roads, enabled area residents to travel to larger commercial centers like Lusk, Lingle, and Torrington. One by one, the businesses of Jay Em closed their doors. There were occasional attempts to revive business in the village - the general store was open in the late 1970's - but these attempts were unsuccessful.

In 1983, the founder, builder, and guiding spirit of Jay Em, Lake Harris, died at the age of 96. Nineteen people remain as residents of Jay Em, living in newer homes surrounding the old village. Some are older persons who have lived in Jay Em for years; others are young families, employed in Lusk, or on the surrounding ranches. The dusty main street of Jay Em, where the general store, restaurant, bank, and lumber yard stand, lies deserted, fighting a losing battle with tumbleweeds and neglect. Some village residents express a hope of finding a caretaker for the old buildings, someone to care for Lake Harris' dream. These residents refuse to let Jay Em join the long list of Wyoming ghost towns and forgotten places. From homestead to community Jay Em represents the efforts of one man to carve out a small trading center in Wyoming's cattle and farm country. It shows the efforts of Lake Harris, and all the other homesteaders and ranchers, to settle this area; Jay Em is a living reminder of those who have gone before people who represent the heart of the American West.

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Attachment

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Larson, T.A., History of Wyoming, University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln and London 1978.

NEWSPAPER

Jay Em Sentinel and Fort Laramie News, 1917-1921.

Lusk (Wy) Herald. 30 January, 1964, 2 July, 1964.

Torrington (Wy) Telegram. 18 October, 1978, 20 April, 1983.

PERIODICAL

Bass, Mabel, "What's In a Name?," Annals of Wyoming, Volume 32, No. 2, (October, 1960) pp. 164-166.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

This nomination includes those buildings located on lots 1 and 2 and 6 through 15 Block 3 and lots 1 through 10 Block 4 and tract D original town of Jay Em described within the text of the nomination. Because there are no sidewalks, curbs, or pavement the boundaries can best be defined as extending 10 feet from the lot or tract lines on all exterior boundary lines.

The boundary begins at the north east corner of lot 1 block 3 (point A) and proceeds directly south to the south east corner of lot 1 block 4 (point B). The boundary then proceeds west to the south west corner of lot 10 block 4 (point C) and then north to the north west corner of lot 10 block 4 (point D), then directly west to the south west corner of tract D (point E). It then continues on north to the north west corner of tract D (point F) and then east to the south west corner of lot 6 block 3 (point G) and then north to the north west corner of lot 6 block 3 (point H). It then proceeds east along the south side of the alley to the north west corner of lot 12 block 3 (point I), and then north to the north west corner of lot 2 block 3 (point J) and then east to the point of beginning.

This boundary defines the original structures from Jay Em's 'boom' period as described within the text while excluding modern intrusions located on portions of blocks 1 and 2. The empty lots included within the boundary are not intrusive and provide a cohesive district boundary.

LAKE HARRIS
HOME

THIRD AVE.

LUMBER YARD
STORE

BANK

HOUSE

RESTAURANT

FEED STORE
POST OFFICE

GENERAL STORE

G
A
R
A
G
E

WT.

GAS
STA.

MAIN ST.

AUTUMN ST.

WAREHOUSE

STONE
COMPANY

SECOND AVE.

TOWN
OF
JAY EM



U.S. 85

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

DATE

4/12/84

TELEPHONE REPORT

TIME OF CALL

12:50

AM.
PM

1. CALL TO; FROM (Name)

Chris Hall

2. ADDRESS (Tel. No. if needed)

Wyoming SHPO

3. SUBJECT, PROJECT NO., ETC.

Acreage figure for Jay Em Historic District

4. DETAILS OF DISCUSSION

Spoke with Chris Hall at Wyoming SHPO about Jay Em H.D. acreage cited in the nomination as less than 5 acres. The actual statement should have been approximately 5 acres. Asked them to be sure to be as specific as possible in the future.

Bill Bushong

NAME OF PERSON PLACING/RECEIVING CALL

TITLE

OFFICE