

**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 William Bisson House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Northwest Corner, Washington and Emery Streets not for publication

city, town South Prairie vicinity of 3rd, Dist. congressional district Sixth Dicks

state Washington code _____ county Pierce code _____

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 type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Gerald and Donna Freeman

street & number P.O. Box 165

city, town South Prairie vicinity of _____ state WA 98385

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pierce County Auditor

County-City Building

street & number 930 Tacoma Avenue South

city, town Tacoma state WA 98402

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Tacoma/Pierce County Cultural Resource Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date December, 1979 federal state county local

depository for survey records City of Tacoma Community Development Department

city, town 749 St. Helens - 10th Floor Tacoma state WA 98402

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<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 _____

(Total restoration work in progress)

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

South Prairie is located in northeastern Pierce County in the foothills of Mount Rainier. It is a small valley formed by South Prairie Creek, a tributary of the Puyallup River. The town was platted approximately in the center of the prairie at the earlier site of a military fort (Fort McAllister) and the Connell's Prairie military road, on the southern shoreline of South Prairie Creek. The major road into South Prairie entered it from the north on Emery Street. This street continued south and during the early period of South Prairie's growth and development this road was the main wagon route to the coal fields at Wilkeson and Carbonado. It was on Emery Street that William Bisson built his home.

The significance of the William Bisson House is related to the continuity of design and materials which gives the house a sense of history. There are two additions to the original residence, both probably made shortly after initial construction. The name William Bisson is written in black wax pencil on the fir boards. The original house was constructed with square nails, the additions with wire nails.

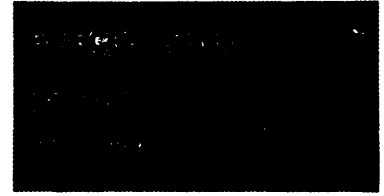
The original large fir two and one half story rural residence sits on two lots and faces east toward Emery Street with a view of Mount Rainier. It has shiplap siding defined by vertical cornerboards. The gabled area is clad with imbricated shingles. The front door is off-set to the right as one approaches the front walk. The full front porch is supported by brick piers and is raised three steps above the ground. The foundation is covered with latticework. The porch is supported by turned posts connected by a decorative balustrade. There is a partial porch above the living room windows on the second floor which repeats the same architectural elements. This porch is reached by a door from the master bedroom and also has a view of Mount Rainier.

All of the windows are double hung. The three windows in the front gable are smaller than the others and when raised the sash disappears into the gable wall. The smaller triumverate is capped by decorative scroll work which ties the windows together architecturally within the gabled area. This undulating line is repeated in the scroll work of the spanning members between the posts of the porches.

The first addition to the original house included an extension of approximately ten feet to the western (rear) portion of the first floor. At the same time the first floor porch and porch roof were extended to form side porches. The same materials and proportions were used with the undulating line of the porch spandrels carried from the north to the east to the south sides of the house. Bay windows were placed on the south and east (front) sides of the house using the original double hung windows. These repeat the proportion of the original bay on the second story of the house above the front door and north of the porch off the master bedroom. The second addition to the original house was a small addition to the first on the western (rear) side of the house.

The original heavy shingled roof is under the current asbestos roof. An outhouse is located at the rear, or west side, of the house and is reached by a covered extension of the porch. A summer kitchen and wood shed are also under cover on the north side of the house.

The current owners are engaged in a total restoration of both the exterior and the interior of the house, doing the work slowly and carefully. The entire house was built from a straight grain fir and all three interior floors are finished in wood. The molding around the doors and the windows is fluted and accented at the corners by simple rosettes, The house has been stripped of some of its original components; therefore, the owners are replacing some doors from other houses. The

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service****National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 1

fascia from the fireplace was oak. The owners have located a similar mantle for the replacement. The hearth material is the original tile and the decorative tile around the opening is intact. The latter is edged with repousse cast iron. The two rooms in the house which will be made more contemporary will be the kitchen and bathroom. The owners plan also to restore the outhouse and summer kitchen.

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 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 checked="" 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 c.1896 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The William Bisson House is significant to the history of Pierce County as the only remaining property in South Prairie, Washington associated with the family who platted the town and who made a major contribution to its early economic development. The participation of this family in the history of South Prairie is related to the role which the town played in the early coal mining activities of the Northern Pacific Railroad after completion of its transcontinental line across the Washington Cascade Mountains in 1887-1888. As a result of the railroad's activities in this area of Pierce County, South Prairie was, from the late 1880's until the mid-1930's a major commercial supply center for towns and settlements in eastern Pierce County. The William Bisson House is also significant as an intact and well-detailed example of a turn-of-the-century residence dating from the community's important period of growth.

On April 16, 1855, when Paul Emery filed his Donation Land Claim he named his property South Prairie because it was situated approximately five miles south of Connell's Prairie in eastern Pierce County. Michael Connell had settled on the latter claim one year before. Emery, like Connell, was one of the first American settlers in the county. The early history of the South Prairie and Connell's Prairie area is tied to the Indian Wars of 1855-1856 which resulted from treaties negotiated by Territorial Governor and Indian Agent Isaac I. Stevens in 1854. After hostilities erupted on Connell's Prairie in 1855, a blockhouse, named Fort McAllister, was constructed. The site of this fort is within the present town limits of South Prairie. In 1856, the same year that the Indian hostilities ceased, a military road, located roughly in the vicinity of Werron Road East, was constructed to facilitate communications between South Prairie and Connell's Prairie.

South Prairie was platted as a town in April, 1888 by Francis Bisson, brother to William Bisson in response to the development of the Northern Pacific Railroad transcontinental line which crossed the Washington Cascade Mountains at Stampede Pass. The terminus of this line was situated in Tacoma, Washington located approximately thirty miles to the northwest. South Prairie, and Cascade Junction, located about one half mile east of the town limits, were developed, after the completion of the line in 1887-1888, as the divisional point for the coal mining towns of Black Diamond, in southern King County, and Wilkeson, Carbonado and Burnett located southeast of South Prairie. Officials of the railroad planned to develop these coal fields in the vicinity of South Prairie as part of the natural resources contained within the original Northern Pacific Railroad land grant legislated by the U.S. Congress in 1869.

At the peak of South Prairie's town development the Northern Pacific Railroad maintained a major yard and round house on the periphery of the town. From there coal was transported to the coal bunkers and ships anchored along the southern shore of Commencement Bay in Tacoma. Thus South Prairie played a direct role in the mining export activities as these were related to the development of the Tacoma terminus, and developed as an early commercial supply center for settlements east of the Puyallup Valley. Six lumber and shingle mills in the vicinity of South Prairie also bolstered the local economy.

The Bisson Family was one of the first to settle in South Prairie after the Northern Pacific Railroad had chosen this site for development. Francis Bisson (1849-1937) first came to

9. Major Bibliographical References

Pierce County Deeds of Record for the Bisson Property.
 William Pierce Bonney. History of Pierce County. Chicago, Pioneer Historical Publishing Co., 1927.
Tacoma News Tribune. November 25, 1925 and April 4, 1937. (Bisson obituaries)
 Interview with Geannie Kuranko, South Prairie Historical Society, April 8, 1980 (P.O. Box 153, South Prairie, WA 98385)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Under one acre
 Quadrangle name Buckley, Washington Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	<u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>5</u> <u>6</u> <u>8</u> <u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>0</u>	<u>5</u> <u>2</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u> <u>8</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u>	B	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	D	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
E	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	F	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
G	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	H	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>

Verbal boundary description and justification

The William Bisson House is located on the northwest corner of Washington and Emery Streets on lots eight and nine of the Francis Bisson Third Addition to South Prairie, Pierce County, Washington.

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

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Patricia A. Sias and Caroline Gallacci
 organization Office of Historic Preservation date September 5, 1980
 street & number 740 St. Helens - 10th Floor telephone 206-593-4960
 city or town Tacoma state WA 98402

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.

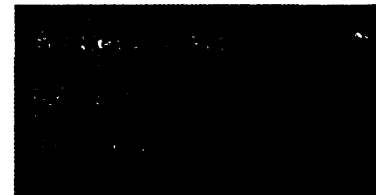
State Historic Preservation Officer signature _____

title Patricia A. Sias date 1/4/82

For HCRS use only	I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	Entered in the	date
<u>Patricia A. Sias</u>	<u>Delores Byers</u>	National Register	<u>2/19/82</u>
Keeper of the National Register	Attest:	Chief of Registration	date

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

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



Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 1

Washington state in 1876 to work on the construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad lines to Wilkeson and Carbonado. In 1884 he opened the first grocery and general merchandise store in the town. Four years later, in 1888, he platted the South Prairie townsite. He served on the city council and the local school board. In 1889 he was elected to serve in the first Washington State Legislature. In the late 1920's, because Francis Bisson did not want to see further growth in the town, he refused to sell land to the Northern Pacific Railroad for the purposes of enlarging its facilities. His refusal meant the departure of the Northern Pacific Railroad in the 1930's. The house which he constructed for his family in 1888 was demolished in 1955.

William Bisson (1856-1925) and his family came to South Prairie in late 1889. After working in Francis' store he opened his own hardware store (1895) which he operated until his death in 1925. In 1894, William Bisson organized the first Episcopal Sunday School in town. When South Prairie was incorporated in 1909 William was the first town treasurer, a position which he held until 1915. At that time he became postmaster. His wife, Maria, was a seamstress who made wedding dresses for local families.

William Bisson built his home after acquiring the lots from his brother. While the deed was recorded in 1895, there is some speculation as to when the house was built. It is possible that construction could have occurred prior to the legal transfer of ownership. The earliest recorded event relative to the history of the house was the birth of William Bisson, Jr. in 1896. Besides housing the Bisson family, two rooms were reserved for boarders, one of which was the South Prairie school teacher.

The William Bisson House is an exceptionally well-detailed example of a style used for major residences in the rural towns of Pierce County, and is in contrast to the vernacular architecture visible in other homes built during the period of South Prairie's growth and development. Emery Street was originally a main road into South Prairie and the town plan was designed so that the Bisson houses were the first to be seen upon entering the town. That the Bisson homes were the only ones of this style and detailing built during South Prairie's period of significance is representative of the tendency in early town planning for the founding families to relate their perceptions of their relationship to the community through the size, style and physical placement of their homes.

In time two more houses were constructed for Bisson children east and west of the William Bisson House. These two, like the Francis Bisson house, have been altered or demolished, leaving the William Bisson House as the only property remaining which is associated with the early activities of the founding family of South Prairie.

South Prairie remained a major commercial supply center until the 1930's when the Northern Pacific Railroad constructed the Palmer cutoff which diverted the passenger and major freight traffic to Auburn and Renton in southern King County. The central economic position of the town was further weakened as timber resources were logged out and the coal mines were closed. This departure of railroad, mining and coal interests from the area meant the loss of an economic base for the town and the end of South Prairie as a major commercial supply center for eastern Pierce County.