

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

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

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Taos County, Red River  
Red River Multiple Resource Area

1. Name: Melson-Oldham Cabin (Red River <sup>MRF</sup> Multiple Resource Area)
2. Location: At the Tall Pine Resort, southeast of the town <sup>SL</sup> of Red River off Highway 150.
4. Owner: Winnifred Oldham Hamilton, Florence Oldham, and Nathan Oldham  
P.O. Box 246  
Red River, New Mexico 87558
7. Description: The Melson-Oldham Cabin is a one-story, square single log pen with gabled roof, constructed of square-hewn beams joined at the corners by half-dovetail notches. A plank-covered-with-log-slab shed room at the rear is an early addition. A vertical log-slab extension was made to the south gable end in 1952 for storing old farm equipment and other large antiques. At the same time, a porch overhang was added to a portion of the north end of the building.

The single pen measures approximately 17 feet by 19 feet and originally consisted of one room. It is now partitioned into two rooms which serve as museum exhibit rooms. The vertical-board-and-batten entrance door is centered in the east facade. In the wall to the south of the door is a small, square fixed window having four lights. In the north gable end is a double-hung window with single panes in each sash. The plank roof is covered with tar paper. The logs are chinked with cement.

The vertical "log slabs" used as siding on the shed room and the addition to the south gabled end were a popular building material after the establishment of saw mills in New Mexico's mountains. They were the refuse of the rounded sides of the logs that remained after boards had been sawn from the center of the logs. They were used as siding with the bark still on the slabs.

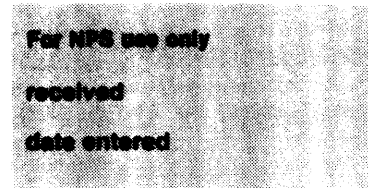
The building is maintained in good condition.

8. Significance: The Melson-Oldham Cabin is significant both architecturally and historically. It is significant architecturally as a good example of the use of the square single pen log cabin form in New Mexico, and as a good representation of a pioneer building type of the settlement years of the mining town of Red River. It is significant historically by association with its early owners, the Melsons and the Oldhams, who were pioneer settlers of Red River.

According to local tradition, the cabin was originally constructed on the "Red River City" townsite, platted in 1895 about a mile and a half away in the center of the valley. It is said that the cabin was moved to this site in the eastern end of the valley in the early 1900s by Tommy Melson who owned the property at that time. Thomas Melson was listed in the census of 1900 as a 42-year-old gold miner from Iowa. He and his wife, Mary, made the cabin their home. In the census of 1910, Melson is listed as a farmer. In the business directories of 1913-14-15, he is listed as a freighter and his wife as a laundress. One sees in the change in Melson's professions the shift made by many of Red River's settlers from mining to other occupations as the mining boom subsided.

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The old Red River Pass road was constructed by the Forest Service in 1914-16 on the mountain side overlooking Melson's farm. At that time, his farm was used as a storage depot for construction equipment. The supervising engineer of road construction, Kenneth C. Balcomb, described Melson and his farm in The Red River Hill:

One of the most lovable characters in the town was Tommy Melson. Tommy wore a brown derby hat on all occasions--at dances, at the table while eating, indoors and out of doors. It was rumored that he even slept in it--a rumor never substantiated by Mrs. Melson. He had a little farm place with a log house, a log barn, and a small corn patch at the foot of the vast slope on which the road was being built. [The barn no longer stands.]

During work on the upper legs of the road, an occasional large rock would catapult down the entire hill to come to rest in the valley; but as construction got nearer to the bottom of the hill, more and more material slid all the way down, some of it into Tommy Melson's corn patch, effectively burying the corn till in some places only a long green tassel showed. Mr. Melson grumbled about it a great deal, but like all others in the valley, he was so glad to get a decent road he took no action to stop what seemed an inevitable result of its construction.

In 1920, the Melson property was purchased by Nathan K. and Richard A. Oldham, twin brothers who operated a cattle ranch east of Raton, New Mexico. They had come to New Mexico from Missouri in 1874, with their father and brothers in a covered wagon. Their brothers, Lowny, Morgan Read and George L. Oldham had come to Red River during the 1890s gold rush. They had acquired claims in the surrounding mountains with names like the Golden Treasure, Golden Calf, Bunker Hill and Raton. The cabin bought in 1920 by Nathan and Richard was used also by their miner brothers as housing in winter. In 1922, the brothers dug a fish pond near the cabin and in summer the family used the property for recreation.

During the 1920s, the Oldhams built a few sheds for rental to fishermen who came to use their pond. From this beginning, they developed the Tall Pine Resort which today consists of dozens of tourist cabins scattered in the woods. The original log house is maintained as a museum and contains a large array of items pertaining to the history of Red River.

Architecturally, the Melson-Oldham Cabin is significant as an example of the nearly square single log pen with shed room addition. Single pen log cabins are common throughout the eastern and southern United States. They represent the oldest form of log house in America, and the poorest form socioeconomically. The square pen is said to be descended from the one-bay house of Medieval England. In British terminology, a "bay" or "rod" is 16 feet square. The unit originated in the dimensions of a space wide enough to house four oxen side-by-side. Log pens measuring roughly 16 feet by 16 feet are common in the United States. They are said to derive from the simple one-room house of this size introduced into America, as a frame structure, by the

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English colonists of the Virginia and Maryland Tidewater. Constructed in log in the Virginia backcountry, it traveled westward with the colonists. The dimensions of the Melson-Oldham Cabin are approximately those of this traditional house form.

The shed room of the Melson-Oldham cabin is another traditional form that originated in England and was first introduced to the Chesapeake Tidewater. The name "shed room" is derived from the single-slope shed roofs covering these additions which were usually attached to the rear of the cabins. Because of the difficulty of attaching a new log wall to an existing one, shed rooms were usually built of another material such as plank, as in the case of the Melson-Oldham Cabin. This shed room was constructed to house a kitchen, either by the Melsons or by the Oldhams. In the 1930s, the vertical log-slab siding was added to the exterior walls of the kitchen shed room. These log-slabs covered with bark were refuse from saw-mills and were a popular building material in New Mexico's mountains. They were used on homesteads and barns, and were a favored construction material for tourist retreats because of their rustic appearance. In 1952, when the cabin was made into a museum, a log-slab extension was made to the south gable end of the cabin to house old farm equipment.

Other significant aspects of log construction in this cabin are the half-dovetailed notching and the squared logs which are hewn on all four sides. Only rarely were such squared beams produced because of the extra labor involved. Usually, only two sides were hewn, the inner and outer wall surfaces.

10. Geographical Data:

The nominated property consists of the building, which measures 39' by 29'4" at its greatest length and width, plus an additional 10' in each direction.

Quadrangle name: Red River  
Quadrangle scale: 7.5 minute

UTM References:  
Zone 13 Easting 465440 Northing 4060180