

INVENTORY SHEET FOR GROUP NOMINATIONS: IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, BOISE, IDAHO

NOMINATION: (Lava Rock Structures in South Central Idaho TR)

SITE NAME: Van Hook, Jay, Potato Cellar

SITE NUMBER: 79

LOCATION: ~~1 1/2 miles south~~ ^S of Jerome, ^{Vic.} Idaho

OWNER'S NAME AND ADDRESS: Ace Realty, Inc.
1528 Addison Avenue E
Twin Falls, ID 83301

QUADRANGLE AND SCALE: Jerome, 7.5 minutes

ACREAGE: 2 1/2 acres

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nomination includes the Jay Van Hook Potato Cellar and the property on which it stands in the SE 1/2, SE 1/4, NE 1/4, SE 1/4, SE 1/4 of Section 25, T8S, R16E, Boise Meridian. Legal description on file at Jerome County Courthouse, Jerome, Idaho.

UTM(S): 11/703300/4729980

DATE OR PERIOD: c. 1922

ARCHITECT OR BUILDER: Jay Van Hook

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture, agriculture

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: local

CONDITION: deteriorated, unaltered, original site

DESCRIPTION:

This long, low, earth-covered potato cellar with stone end walls is approximately 122 feet long. The interior of the cellar is supported by a frame of poles covered with wire, straw, and dirt. The dirt floor of the cellar slopes downward. At its center it is approximately six feet lower than the ground level outside. The facade and rear stone walls of approximately 58 feet are the same width of the cellar. They slope upwards from ground level on each side to about twelve feet high at the center. Centered on each end wall is a double wooden door about eight feet high that can be opened so that wagons or trucks can enter one end and exit at the other. A rough, flush, concrete lintel and jams are above and at the sides of the door openings. The lintels are faced with wooden planks. A small rectangular door has been cut into the left panel of the front door so that a person can enter the cellar to inspect the contents without opening the large double door. A small, square, four-paned ventilation window is placed near the ground at the extreme left and right of both end walls. The tops of the random rubble walls have several slightly projecting rows of small rounded stones topped with a thin layer of mortar. These have fallen in several areas, especially just above the door. A section of the wall is collapsing above the left window. The stones in the walls appear submerged in mortar because the mason created wide joints by bringing the mortar out to the face of the stones.

SIGNIFICANCE:

This structure is a significant example of a type of vernacular agricultural structure commonly found in south Idaho. Beginning in the 1910's, earth-covered potato cellars were built in Idaho to protect stored potatoes from freezing during cold winters. This cellar is the only surviving example with stone end walls that has been found in the two-county area of this nomination. It demonstrates the variety of rural structures that were made of stone. Most potato cellars built prior to the 1940's have pole or frame end walls. Cinder blocks were used for end walls in the 1940's into the 1950's. Many earth-covered cellars like this one are not being maintained and will be eventually demolished. Modular, air-conditioned, humidity controlled, above ground, insulated metal and plastic structures are now being used to store potatoes. This example is visible both from Interstate 84 and Jerome County Road 79. It was built in about 1932 by farmer Jay Van Hook and a hired man. The pride of the untrained farmer-masons in their handiwork on this modest utilitarian structure can be seen in the decorative wall coping. Although deteriorating, the cellar remains as an attractive reminder of earlier agricultural methods in Jerome and Lincoln counties.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES:

Van Hook, Mrs. Jay, interview with Marian Posey-Ploss, Twin Falls, Idaho, Summer 1979.