**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    Jens Nielson House

and/or common

## 2. Location

street & number    OM UT 47    ____ not for publication

city, town    Bluff    ____ vicinity of    congressional district    01

state    Utah    code    049    county    San Juan    code    037

## 3. Classification

| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ____ district | ____ public | _X_ occupied | ____ agriculture | ____ museum |
| _X_ building(s) | _X_ private | ____ unoccupied | ____ commercial | ____ park |
| ____ structure | ____ both | ____ work in progress | ____ educational | _X_ private residence |
| ____ site | **Public Acquisition** | **Accessible** | ____ entertainment | ____ religious |
| ____ object | ____ in process | _X_ yes: restricted | ____ government | ____ scientific |
| | ____ being considered | ____ yes: unrestricted | ____ industrial | ____ transportation |
| | | ____ no | ____ military | ____ other: |

## 4. Owner of Property

name    Eugene and Mary Foushee

street & number

city, town    Bluff    ____ vicinity of    state    Utah

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.    San Juan County Courthouse

street & number

city, town    Monticello    state    Utah

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title    Survey of Bluff, San Juan County, UT    has this property been determined elegible?    ____ yes  _X_ no

date    1975-76    ____ federal  _X_ state  ____ county  ____ local

depository for survey records    Utah State Historical Society

city, town    Salt Lake City    state    Utah

# 7. Description

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

## Description

This is a T-plan gable-roofed vernacular house constructed of large stone blocks laid in coursed ashlar bond.  The west (cross) wing of the T is a one and a half story structure whose roof flares out over the eaves.  There is a brick center chimney and a symmetrical window-door-window west facade that may originally have been the front of the house.  On the ends are paired first and second floor windows, and wood shingle siding on returns in the gables.  The east (bottom) wing of the T is one story tall with a plain gable roof.  Its south facade, with its asymmetrical window and door arrangement, now serves as the main entrance and is sheltered by a simple porch, whose original posts are no longer extant.  The home may be viewed as a representative example of a traditional type, incorporating characteristics of folk building types (the broad side orientation, symmetrical piercing, chimney placement and overall proportions) with Victorian period elements (orientation moved to T wing with shed roof porch enclosing the T, and paired double hung windows on the gable ends).

# 8. Significance

**Period**

____ prehistoric
____ 1400–1499
____ 1500–1599
____ 1600–1699
____ 1700–1799
_X_ 1800–1899
____ 1900–

**Areas of Significance—Check and justify below**

____ archeology-prehistoric
____ archeology-historic
_X_ agriculture
_ _ architecture
____ art
____ commerce
____ communications

____ community planning
____ conservation
____ economics
____ education
____ engineering
____ exploration/settlement
____ industry
____ invention

____ landscape architecture
____ law
____ literature
____ military
____ music
____ philosophy
____ politics/government

_X_ religion
____ science
____ sculpture
____ social/ humanitarian
____ theater
____ transportation
____ other (specify)

**Specific dates**   c. 1890        **Builder/Architect**   Unknown

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Jens Nielson House, constructed in about 1890, is locally significant because it is one of only half a dozen remaining houses in Bluff that documents an important phase in the history of the town: the evolution from farm village to cooperative livestock production. That development began in the late 1880s and assurred Bluff's survival. Until then, its existence was in doubt. It is also significant because of its association with Jens Nielson. As bishop of the Bluff LDS Ward from the time of the town's founding in 1880 until his death in 1906, he played a key role in building the town during its first generation. The Nineteenth Century Mormon ward was more than a geographical ecclesiastical entity, and the bishop was more than a religious leader. The ward was also the most important political unit, and, except for the family, the most important social unit. The duties of the bishop were, therefore, extensive, particularly during the initial phase of colonization, when it was he who directed the process of community building.

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The Mormon settlers who founded Bluff in 1880 tried to establish it on an agricultural economic base. Despite immense effort and considerable hardship, they failed. By the mid-1880s, it had become clear that the people of Bluff would either have to find another means of livelihood or abandon the town and settle elsewhere. Some did leave. Those that stayed turned to stockraising, and by 1890, San Juan County, along with Box Elder County and Rich County, were the centers of the cattle industry in Utah. In 1880, for example, there were 267 head of cattle other than milch cows and working oxen in San Juan County. That was 1.3 head for every person in the area. In 1890, there were 17,100 head of cattle in the county, 47 for every man, woman, and child. According to one historian, "Never again in Utah history would so few people live with so many cattle."[1]

With the growth of the cattle industry, Bluff's built environment began to change. In 1890, all of Bluff's approximately 25 families lived in log houses, and all of the public buildings, including the post office, the hotel, the church, and the school house, were built of logs. Gradually, the log buildings began to be replaced with stone ones. Built of stone quarried in nearby mountains, they reflect Bluff's new found prosperity and stability.

This house was built ca. 1890 for Jens Nielson. He was born in Denmark in 1820 and married Elsie Rasmussen in 1850. They emigrated to Utah in 1856 as converts to the Mormon Church. In 1879 they were among the nearly 250 people whom the Mormon Church "called" to settle what is now San Juan County.[2] It was a rugged and isolated area, 300 miles from the nearest centers of Mormon population.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Lyman, Albert R. <u>Bishop Jens Nielson History and Genealogy</u> (N.P., N.P.).
Miller, David E., <u>Hole-in-the-Rock</u>, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1959.
Peterson, Charles, <u>Look to the Mountains</u>, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young Univ. Press, 1975.
Walter, Don D., "The Cattle Industry of Utah, 1850-1900, An Historical Profile," <u>Utah Historical Quarterly</u>, XXXII (Summer 1964).

# 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of nominated property** ___Less than one___
**Quadrangle name** __Bluff, Utah__                     **Quadrangle scale** __1:62500__
**UMT References**

A | 1,2 | 6,2,8,4,5,0 | 4,1,2,7,2,5,0 |
Zone / Easting / Northing

B | | | |
Zone / Easting / Northing

C, D, E, F, G, H (blank)

**Verbal boundary description and justification**

The nominated property includes all of Lot 2, Block 12, Plat A.

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

| state | code | county | code |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |

# 11. Form Prepared By

**name/title**    John McCormick, Historian/Debbie Temme, Architectural Historian

**organization** Utah State Historical Society          **date**    Summer 1980

**street & number**    300 Rio Grande          **telephone**    801-533-6017

**city or town**    Salt Lake City          **state**    Utah

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national          ____ state          _X_ 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**    _Melvin T. Smith_

**title** Melvin T. Smith, State Historic Preservation Officer          **date**    January 5, 1982
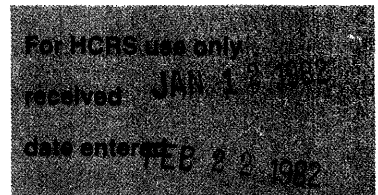
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The founding was part of the effort that Mormons began soon after they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847 to systematically explore and colonize the surrounding area. In order to build a commonwealth that would guarantee them permanent security, they intended to settle everywhere they could as fast as they could. By the end of the Nineteenth Century, Mormons had founded nearly 500 cities and towns throughout present Utah and the surrounding states.

The group that Mormon officials called to settle the San Juan River Valley set out in the fall of 1879. Their journey with wagons and stock during mid-winter was almost a catastrophe. The settlers thought their route was a shortcut. Later geographers deemed it the most difficult that any wagon train had encountered in the history of the west. So rugged was the territory over which they travelled that it took them 6 months to go 260 miles. Two of those months they spent cutting and dynamiting a path through high cliffs above the Colorado River. The precipitious trail over which they finally moved has been known ever since as Hole-in-the-Rock. Bluff was not originally their intended destination, but they settled there, according to one settler because, "We were too tired to go on, and it was too far to go back."[3]

Soon after he arrived in Bluff, Nielson was named bishop. He served in that office until his death 26 years later. As bishop of a ward in an isolated and remote area of the state, he faced greater problems and duties than did many of his counterparts. Having only irregular contact with church headquarters in Salt Lake City, he served, in effect, as "theologian, stateman, pastor, constable, judge, arbitrator, and foreman." His charge was to take the lead "in every domestic improvement" establish and supervise schools; assist the farmers; supervise the cultivation of public property and the repair of ward fences; assign to new arrivals their farm and town lots; see personally to the distribution of irrigation water and the maintenance and construction of ditches; keep cattle out of the fields, impose sanctions on uncooperative owners; assign men to work on community road crews; and direct construction of schools, meetinghouses, and other public buildings. Because the scope of the bishop's duties were so broad, his character and personality to a large extent shaped his ward. Historian Charles Peterson saw Nielson as the glue that held Bluff together in its early years.[4] It was largely because of his leadership and personality that the original settlers of Bluff stayed on, rather than abandoning the town after a few years in the face of very difficult times.

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[1]Don D. Walter, "The Cattle Industry of Utah, 1850-1900, An Historical Profile," _Utah Historical Quarterly_, XXXII (Summer 1964), 190.

[2]Lyman, Albert R. _Bishop Jens Nielson History and Genealogy_ (N.P., N.P.).

[3]The Standard Account of the Hole-in-the-Rock Expedition is David E. Miller, _Hole-in-the-Rock_, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1959).

[4]_Look to the Mountains, Southeastern Utah and the La Sal National Forest_ (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 51.