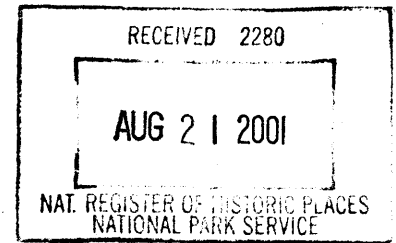


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

1080



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name MARY OLSON FARM  
other names/site number OLSON-JOHNSON FARM

**2. Location**

street & number 28728 GREEN RIVER ROAD SO. not for publication   
city or town Kent vicinity   
state WASHINGTON code WA county KING code 033  
zip code 98031

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]  
Signature of certifying official

8/16/01  
Date

WASHINGTON STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register  
 removed from the National Register  
 other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Keeper: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action: \_\_\_\_\_

**Entered in the  
National Register**

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>5</u>		sites
<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	structures
		objects
<u>11</u>	<u>4</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC

Sub: single dwelling

Cat: AGRICULTURE

Sub: fields, outbuildings

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: WORK IN PROGRESS

Sub: education facility

Cat: LANDSCAPE

Sub: park

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: VERNACULAR (GABLED-ELL)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE, WOOD

roof WOOD, SHINGLE

walls WOOD, SHIPLAP

VERTICAL BOARD

other \_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheet

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

**A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

**B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

**C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

**D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

**A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

**B** removed from its original location.

**C** a birthplace or a grave.

**D** a cemetery.

**E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

**F** a commemorative property.

**G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE  
ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1879-1940  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1879  
1897  
1902

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

SWEDISH- AMERICAN

**Architect/Builder**

OLSON FAMILY MEMBERS  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**9. Major Bibliographical References****Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data:**

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
 Name of repository:  
 White River Valley Museum, Auburn, WA

**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property 60.61**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	10	559940	5244230	3	10	560190	5243790
Zone	Easting		Northing	Zone	Easting		Northing
2	10	560190	5244230	4	10	560320	5243790
Zone	Easting		Northing	Zone	Easting		Northing

 See continuation sheet.**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

See Continuation Sheet

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

See Continuation Sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**name/title FLORENCE K. LENTZorganization KING COUNTY LANDMARKS AND HERITAGE PROGRAM date SEPT, 2000street & number 506 SECOND STREET telephone (206) 296-7580city or town SEATTLE state WA zip code 98104

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_ CITY OF AUBURN (ATTN: DICK DEAL, PARKS & REC DEPARTMENT) \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ 25 WEST MAIN STREET \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ AUBURN \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ WA \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_ 98001 \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**MARY OLSON FARM  
KING, WASHINGTON**

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**Narrative Description:**

The Mary Olson Farm is located at the mouth of a forested ravine at the far eastern edge of the Green River Valley in Auburn, Washington. The remaining sixty-acre farmstead, first established in 1879, includes wooded uplands, a small stream called Olson Creek, one formerly cultivated hayfield, and an open meadow with fruit orchard. Within this cultural landscape envelope, at the heart of the farmstead, is an unusually intact cluster of vernacular farm buildings dating to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most remarkable visual aspect of the property is its lack of change in the face of intensive industrial development in the surrounding valley.

**Valley Setting**

Between the cities of Kent and Auburn, the meandering Green River flows hard against the hillsides that form the eastern wall of the Green River Valley. From the 1850s through the 1950s, the rich alluvial soils of the valley were given over almost exclusively to agriculture. The great majority of farms in this central portion of the valley occupied bottomlands west of the river, but a few narrowly configured farms huddled along bench lands on the east bank, at the base of timbered slopes. For nearly one-hundred years, the valley setting remained pastoral, while successive patterns of agriculture evolved on the landscape - from subsistence farming, to hops ranching, to dairying, and finally to truck-farming.

Beginning in the early 1960s, when cumulative flood control projects on the valley's several river systems ended destructive seasonal overflows, the landscape was transformed by industrial, commercial, and residential development. Only isolated parcels of land on the valley floor remain in agricultural use today. Development has pushed two miles north from the original town site of Auburn to a point opposite the Olson Farm. East of the farm, on the upland plateau, intensive single-family residential development with neighborhood commercial nodes and schools has taken place.

Along Green River Road South at the base of the hills just east of the river, vestiges of rural character still survive. This winding road offers the only access to the Olson Farm, as it did during the historic period. To the north, sandwiched between the riverbank and the road, is undeveloped park land, currently under King County ownership. Additional County park property on the east side of the road occupies the fertile twelve-acre bench of land that was once the larger of the Olson family's hay fields. Immediately south of the farm proper lies the Auburn Regional Golf Course. The Green River Road corridor is soon to become part of a regional hiking and bicycle system.

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MARY OLSON FARM  
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**Narrative Description: (CONT'D)**

**Landscape Character**

Topography and Soils

The Mary Olson Farm is a long, narrow parcel of land bordered topographically to the east by forested hills and to the west by the Green River. At the center of the property is Olson Canyon, the mouth of which forms a flat-bottomed ravine that opens out in a southwesterly direction to the larger valley. Canyon walls form headlands that extend toward the river. The encircling hills historically limited farming at the site and formed a natural barrier to any adjacent development.

In the upper ravine, where the Olson family erected farmstead buildings, soils consist of gravel and sand deposits. At the lower end of the canyon and along the bench land bordering the Green River, alluvial deposits have produced a fine sandy loam. Here the Olson family cultivated hops, hay, and other crops in fields along the river south and north of the canyon.

Natural Features and Sensitive Areas

The Mary Olson Farm lies within the floodplain of the Green River, one of Western Washington's larger streams. Seasonal overflows historically inundated surrounding agricultural fields. Maps from 1897 through 1958 indicate that, over time, a shifting of the river channel altered the configuration of Olson land along the shoreline. Today, a setback extends 100 feet inland from the riverbank, within which clearing, grading, and other kinds of construction activities are limited.

Olson Creek runs through the center of the canyon in a southwesterly direction. The stream served as a major organizing factor in the layout of the farmstead. It once hosted an abundant run of salmon, a resource enjoyed both by the Olson family and, probably, by native inhabitants of the valley before them. Recent stream remediation measures have altered the appearance of the creek, introducing bank stabilization materials of landscape fabric and shade plantings. In the former agricultural field south of the farmstead complex, at the toe of the wooded slope, is a wetland of undetermined origin.

Vegetation Relating to Land Use

Vegetation at the Mary Olson Farm reflects past agricultural land uses, as well as existing slope and soil conditions. An 1897 USGS Land Classification map labels the farm's steep slopes as "Burnt areas restocking" and the uplands as "Merchantable forests." A 1937 aerial reveals fresh logging on all of the lowest hillside slopes. This is verified by springboard notches that are located on a tall stump just east of the barn near the creek. Today, the slopes support a mixed forest of second and third growth Western Red Cedar, Douglas Fir, Red Alder, and Big Leaf Maple.

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MARY OLSON FARM  
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**Narrative Description:** (CONT'D)

Former cultivated fields north and south of the farm complex are still visually identifiable as open space, although the northern field is now under separate ownership. Emerging scrub vegetation, including such native pioneer species as Red Alder and non-native blackberry, have currently taken over the pasture grasses. Vegetation around the wetlands in the south field includes Cattail, Rushes, and Buttercup plants. Within the canyon itself, regular mowing of meadow grasses around the farm buildings and fruit orchard has maintained open spaces that historically existed where the family grazed dairy cattle.

The 1937 aerial photograph of the farm clearly depicts a mature fruit orchard at the mouth of the canyon, fronting the farmstead complex. Surviving remnants of the orchard may date back to the 1890s. Approximately fifteen historic trees remain in somewhat random arrangement (See attached map). The varieties include Waxen, Rhode Island Greening, King, Yellow Bellflower, and Northern Spy apple trees; Royal Ann, Bing, and Lambert cherry trees; Anjou, and Bose, Green Gauge, and Italian plum trees. In the mid-1990s, ten new seedlings were introduced in some of the same varieties.

Olson family photographs from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century document the presence of ornamental shrubbery and shade trees around the house and farm outbuildings. No flower beds are in evidence. In general, the landscaping appears rough but well-tended. Foundation plantings surrounded the house and a gravel walk led to the front door. By 1939, a fenced enclosure with informal vegetation defined a separate yard at the front of the house. Today, most ornamental landscaping around the farm buildings has disappeared. Several lone Big Leaf Maples and Douglas Fir trees remain standing in the clearing at the upper end of the farmstead complex.

Patterns of Circulation

The Mary Olson Farm was segregated from primary routes of travel on the valley floor by the Green (historically named the White) River. The river was too shallow this far upstream to accommodate steamboats. By 1897, however, a winding wagon road ran along the east bank of the stream, leading to bridge crossings several miles to the north and south of the Olson Farm at the villages of Kent and Auburn. A 1907 Anderson map shows an additional crossing established at Brannan's Farm about one mile upstream from the Olson property.

Aerial photos from 1937 show major sections of the wagon road still in use. The road followed the contour of the hillsides, turning inward along the base of the slopes above the floodplain. Sometime in the 1940s, presumably after World War II, the river road was straightened and diked. The present alignment of the Green River Road first appears on a 1949 USGS topographic map.

Vestiges of the old wagon road are clearly in evidence at the Mary Olson Farm both north and south of Olson Creek. North of the stream, a pre-1937 stretch of the road cuts up over the projecting headland, and works its way back down to the valley floor at the Olson's north hayfield. South of Olson Creek, a segment of the early



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MARY OLSON FARM  
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**Narrative Description:** (CONT'D)

road used into the 1940s cuts along the hillside east of the south hayfield, rejoining the river road at the farm's boundary with the Auburn Regional Golf Course. Both road segments have been recently cleared of vegetation, and made more visible and accessible to farm visitors.

Two primary graveled farmstead lanes appear on the 1937 aerial. One led off the river road to the farmhouse and garage complex. This one remains in use in its original configuration. The other lane ran from the river road along the north side of the orchard to the barn. It is now obscured by pasture grass and delineated only by a fence line overgrown with blackberries. Yet another farm lane, still extant, led up the slope from behind the barn, and continued southwest to an early segment of the river road.

**Built-Environment**

Farmstead Layout

The organizational layout of the Mary Olson farmstead reflects the northeast-to-southwest configuration of the canyon, its protective hillsides, the alignment of the river road, and the course of Olson Creek. The primary cluster of domestic buildings – the house, weaving shed, garage, and tool shed - are situated close to the north bank of the stream, with easy access to water. The farmhouse itself is set forward from all other structures, squarely facing the mouth of the canyon and the river road. Placed further back in the hollow, yet still in close proximity to the creek, are working farm structures such as the smokehouse, chicken house, and rabbit hutch.

Furthest removed from the residential cluster is a large dairy barn, standing at the far northeast corner of the canyon and oriented toward its mouth. The barn's location is downwind of the dwelling house. It was visible and easily accessed from either side of the canyon. From the barn's primary wagon doors, the Olson's enjoyed a full view of the entire farmstead complex - its buildings, orchard, and pasture. From the hillside lane above the barn, they could see out the mouth of the canyon to the river, the road, and the larger valley beyond.

Buildings and Structures

The Mary Olson Farm retains an intact collection of wood-frame farm buildings. It includes a number of surviving outbuildings, which served a variety of purposes, all contributing to the Olson family's self-sufficient lifestyle. As a group, the buildings date from 1897 through the 1920s. Most were built on post-on-pier foundations, with roofs clad with cedar shakes or shingles. Exterior siding of several types remain including - shiplap, clapboard, and vertical board (some with battens).

During the Olson's ownership, no major remodeling of the structures took place. No plumbing or electrical improvements were ever installed. New buildings were added over time, using salvaged local materials, in the

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**Narrative Description:** (CONT'D)

same utilitarian character as the existing structures. The original log dwelling house, and a few dependencies that appear in 1920s family photos and 1937 aerials, have been removed.

In the late 1970s, when Mary's son Alfred Olson finally left the farm, extended family members began the process of updating the house. Over several years several incompatible changes were made to the house including the enclosure of the porch and the removal some of the original historic windows. In their place, vinyl eight-over-eight double hung windows were installed. Other changes include the installation of a small bay window on the main façade. Since acquiring the property in 1994, the City of Auburn has undertaken building stabilization, developed a preservation master plan and begun rehabilitation restoration of the farm complex. The Mary Olson Farm was designated a City of Auburn Landmark in 2001 and all future preservation work must be locally reviewed and approved in accordance with *The Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*.

Small Scale Features

Small-scale features, although difficult to date, collectively add to the rural character of the Olson Farm. The most prevalent is fencing. Several kinds of rudimentary fencing exist around the property, much of it now overgrown and deteriorated. The most common type is of rough-hewn wood posts, some quarter round, with stretched 4" x 4" welded wire mesh. Other types of fencing that can be found include post with barbed wire and split rail.

In the 1937 aerials, the farm appears much more extensively fenced. A fence line appears along the rear wall of the canyon, extending southeast from the barn. A small area south of Olson Creek is fenced, and the entire north hayfield is delineated with fencing along its eastern edge at the base of the hill.

**Inventory of Features**

Contributing Resources

**Buildings:**

- Barn (1897, based on King County Assessor records)  
Gable-roofed barn, post-and-beam construction, with lean-to sheds on southeast and northeast. Overall dimensions 45x70'. New concrete footings recently installed under log posts. Exterior siding of 2x12" rough-sawn vertical boards. Wide-gauge cedar shake roof, partially replaced in kind. 1937 aerial shows an attached wing or abutting outbuilding (perhaps a milk house) at the southernmost corner, now removed.

Interior with wood stanchions, some original plank flooring, equipment racks of peeled and/or hewn construction, and 1970s horse stalls. Some evidence of whitewash in milking wings, but few concrete flooring updates apparent.

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MARY OLSON FARM  
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**Narrative Description:** (CONT'D)

- House (1902, based on King County Assessor records)

Design as a typical gabled-ell style dwelling, the circa 1902 home has undergone several alterations throughout the years. Per historic photos, they include the enclosure of a porch and the addition a shed roof dormer on the main facade in the mid-to-late teens. As such, the one-and-one-half story dwelling, originally with an L-shaped plan, took on a rectilinear footprint of 26' x 36'. The home is clad with shiplap siding and has a concrete perimeter foundation, added since c.1980. Original sash windows and doors are stored within the building and are scheduled for reinstallation. The home is capped with a cedar shingle roof that was recently replaced in kind. Some new multi-paned vinyl sashes have been installed to replace original one-over-one sashes, and a bay window has been cut into the main facade. Other remaining windows are currently boarded up.

- Garage (c. 1920)

Designed in the Craftsman style, the single car garage has a front-facing gable roof covered in cedar shakes. The 14' x 30' building sits on concrete slab foundation. Decorative details include knee braces, exposed rafter tails, wide lapped siding. Double, hinged front entry doors are bumped out from southwest face of building. Windows are paired four-light fixed sashes. A small room at the rear of the garage served as an ice house or cooler for potato, apple storage and boasts walls insulated with sawdust.

- Weaving Shed (c. 1922)

Simple vernacular structure with a side-facing gable roof. The 16' x 12' one-room building is supported by rocks at the four corners of the structure. The shed boasts a cedar shake roof, v-grooved shiplap siding, and six-over six double-hung windows.

**Structures**

- Smokehouse (date unknown)

Simple 3' x 3' structure clad with 2' x 12' vertical boards (same as barn), and some battens. Roof clad with cedar shingles. The smokehouse sits on a concrete slab on grade. The original door (two boards in width,) and interior shelving remains. The firebox is located on bank of Olson Creek, five feet east of structure, and is covered with metal plate.

- Chicken Coop (pre-1922)

Small side gable structure with horizontal board siding and a single six-light fixed wood sash window. The 8' x 10' building has a cedar shake roof and a post and wire fenced pen attached to northeast corner of the structure. The building appears in 1920 photos of the farm.

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MARY OLSON FARM  
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**Narrative Description:** (CONT'D)

*Site Features*

- Fencing (dates unknown)

Rough-hewn posts with wire mesh fence now overgrown with blackberries defines western edge of orchard along former access lane to barn (appearing in 1937 aerial). Other fences encircle chicken coop and rabbit hutch, and border south pasture along highway. A heavy post and board fence is located at entrance on Green River Road (see attached site plan).

- Wagon Road Remnants

Arterial river road discernable (on ground and through vegetation) around eastern edge of south pasture, crossing Olson Creek at entrance to farm, and continuing up over headland north and west of canyon. Alignment first appears on 1897 USGS map.

- Entrance Lane

Graveled entrance lane leads into canyon to east of house, west of garage, and fades out toward barn. Same well-worn alignment appears on 1937 aerial.

- Open Spaces

General clearing at mouth of Olson Canyon encompasses farmstead cluster and orchard. Agricultural field south of Olson Creek now partially re-vegetated. Northern field now in separate ownership. All clearings indicated on 1897 USGS Land Classification map; south and north fields under cultivation on 1937 aerial.

- Orchard

Approximately fifteen turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century trees survive, in various states of decay and vigor. Arrangement appears haphazard, as in 1937 aerial. Ten seedlings planted in 1994-'95 based on historic varieties.

Non-Contributing Resources

*Building:*

- Caretakers' Mobile Home (brought in 1994)

Temporary placement at north end of orchard, to be relocated during park development.

*Structures:*

- Toolshed (c. 1880s, collapsed)

Timber frame barn adjacent to garage, recently collapsed. Interior mortise and tenon joinery visible on framing elements. Vertical board siding. Peeled pole rafters, cedar shake roofing. Dimensions 21x37'. To be documented, disassembled, and reconstructed.

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**Narrative Description:** (CONT'D)

- Rabbit hutch (date unknown, may be non-historic)

Post and board fenced structure under a Big Leaf maple northeast of tool shed and garage.

- Outhouse (date unknown, relocated)

Gable-roofed, horizontal board, two-seater outhouse stored inside barn since mid-1990s. Last located in orchard. To be restored and returned to appropriate site.

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MARY OLSON FARM  
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**Narrative Statement of Significance:**

The Mary Olson Farm is significant under Criterion A for its strong association with the evolving agricultural history of King County and the White River Valley. Owned and occupied for nearly 100 years by the Swedish immigrant family of Mary Olson, the property is a rare surviving specimen of subsistence, hops, and dairy farming in the valley. Extant features of the property suggest a period of significance from 1897 to 1940, a time frame that encompassed the major physical development of the farm, and beyond which very little change occurred.

Green River Valley Context

The Mary Olson Farm lies in territory traditionally inhabited by peoples now affiliated with the Muckleshoot Tribe. In historic times, the Skopamish, St'kamish, and Sulkamish people lived along the banks of the White and Green rivers in small village groups. Permanent winter communities were identified by name in the records of early anthropologists. The two major river villages included Ilalko at the juncture of the White and Green rivers at present-day city of Auburn, and Kho-al-ky at the confluence of the White and Black rivers at the north end of the valley. In between were smaller villages, such as Stokk ("logjam") west of O'Brien, Tcutapaltu ("flea's house") a mile upstream, and Sbeq ("a ball"), all stood across the river from what was to become the Olson Farm.

Indigenous peoples of the valley enjoyed an abundant amount of flora and fauna. Indian-burnt prairies of grasses and berries, thick stands of cedar and vine maple on the valley floor, and tangled understory of nettles and vines – all were present in varied profusion. Forests and streams teemed with life, and salmon was especially plentiful in the rivers and creeks, which are tributaries to the salt waters of the Puget Sound. The specific use of Olson Creek by native residents has not been documented, but the historic period presence of a village site nearby on the opposite bank of the river suggests this possibility.

Shortly before the creation of Washington Territory in 1851, several families established claims on the Duwamish River. Settlement in the upper reaches of what was then known as the White River Valley (later to be named the Green) quickly followed. A rude military road from Fort Steilacoom to Fort Walla Walla passed through the future town site of Auburn. By 1853, wagon trains arriving over Naches Pass along this trail stimulated further development. Twenty-one Donation Land Act claims had been filed in the White River Valley by the close of 1854. A steady stream of Euro-Americans poured into the valley following the 1855 Indian treaties orchestrated by Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens. As a result, by the mid 1860s all of the prime river bottomlands had been homesteaded.

Early agricultural activity in the White River Valley was little more than subsistence farming. Pioneer settlers devoted themselves to clearing the land, raising stock, putting in fruit orchards, and cultivating potatoes, wheat, onions, oats, cabbage, carrots, peas, hay and barley. These products were transported to markets in the village of Seattle, and to logging camps around the Puget Sound, on wooden river scows and flat-bottom steamboats. It was not until the 1870s that valley settlers discovered a cash crop in the form of hops. Hops prevailed due to the

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**Narrative Statement of Significance: (CONT'D)**

quality of soil and climatic conditions, and quickly become the economic backbone of the region. Soon the White River Valley became dotted with kilns where the hops were cured. Most of the local hops were shipped to breweries in England.

The vigorous hops market collapsed due to an insect infestation in 1890, followed by the nationwide financial panic of 1893. As a result, large hops ranches were subdivided and sold as dairy farms. By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, dairy farming and the related cultivation of hay had transformed the valley. In the 1920s and '30s, berry growing and intensive truck farming gained a foothold, also owing to the proximity of expanding urban markets in Seattle and Tacoma. Truck farming continued together with dairying through the early 1960s, until flood control opened the valley up to industrial development.

Logging activity transformed the valley from an early date as well. Logging camps on the forested hillsides took advantage of the river as a means of transport. Numerous small shingle mills and sawmills operated along the banks of the White and Green rivers between the towns of Kent and Auburn in the 1880s and 1890s. An 1897 U.S.G.S. Land Classification map shows much of the valley as logged, either permanently for agricultural use, or with a second growth already underway. Large portions of the valley floor were designated in fact as "cut areas restocking." Slopes along the east side of valley, in the vicinity of the Olson Farm, were shown as "burnt areas restocking." Large stands of first growth "merchantable timber" covered the uplands flanking the valley.

For farms bordering the banks of the White River, the river served as the primary highway of travel. Flat-bottomed steamboats from Puget Sound plied the stream as high as Alvord's Landing several miles downstream from the Mary Olson Farm. Most farm families had small canoes for their own use, and some expanded their cargo capacity with scows. Prior to the advent of the automobile, valley roads were rough and muddy, sometimes laid with puncheon in marshy areas. The main valley highway was known as the "military road." Families on the east side of the river, however, relied upon a route now called the Green River Road, which skirted the hillsides and ran past the Mary Olson Farm toward bridge crossings at the villages of Kent and Auburn. A branch of the Northern Pacific Railroad came through the valley in 1883. With the railroad came the growth of towns along its line. Some towns, like O'Brien, Thomas, and Christopher, remained small agricultural service centers. The city of Auburn, however, boomed as a railroad division point and, by 1913, western freight terminus for the Northern Pacific. The city of Kent flourished in the 1880s as a port for the shipment of hops via the river and, later, as a canning and processing town.

Throughout the historic period, White and Green river area farmers suffered annual and biennial flooding. South of the town of Auburn, the White River naturally diverged in two directions, one branch continuing north to Elliott Bay at Seattle, the other south and west to Commencement Bay at Tacoma. Flooding, logjams, and landslides alternately affected the flow of water along either branch. After much wrangling among local residents, a diversion

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**Narrative Statement of Significance: (CONT'D)**

dam was constructed in 1913 to permanently reroute the waters of the White River to the south. The once-tributary Green River continued to flow north through the old channel of the White, resulting in the official but confusing change of place name from the historic "White River Valley" to the current "Green River Valley." In 1962, the Green River itself was brought under control by the construction of Howard Hanson Dam at Eagle Gorge. These engineering works finally halted the relentless flooding that had so plagued valley farmers for more than a century. Although it benefited farmers in the short run, flood control measures opened the doors wide to a new sort of land use.

In the past fifty years, the valley has undergone a radical transformation. Farming has entirely given way to heavy industry, service, and retailing. The Green River Valley has become Seattle's primary industrial district, rather than its truck garden. The Boeing Airplane Company is the anchor industry in the valley with plants in the cities of Auburn and Kent. To accommodate rapid growth, these two communities have annexed thousands of acres of former agricultural fields on the valley floor and adjacent wooded uplands. Development pressures in the area continue even today bringing new industry, housing tracts, shopping centers, and recreational facilities.

Olson Family History

On October 25, 1879, valley newcomer Alford Olson, an immigrant from Asmule Or, Sweden, paid \$1200 in gold coin for a 73-acre parcel of land on the east side of the White River. The property had previously been operated as a sawmill and farm by Halvor and Juliana Nelson. Olson's purchase included not only the acreage, but also two steers, two cows, 15 hogs, 18 chickens, one boat, two log chains, one set of blacksmith tools, carpenter tools, one wagon, one box stove, one bedstead, three chairs, one cupboard with plates and cups, all the lumber in the sawmill yard, and all the hay in the barn.

Alford soon afterward married Swedish immigrant Mary K. Anderson in 1883. Mary had also left Asmule Or, Sweden, emigrating first to Minneapolis before coming to the West. Along with their daughter Anna Suffee Olson (b.1885), and their son Carl Alfred Olson (b.1887), Alford and Mary lived in a small log cabin near the present site of the farmhouse. In 1887, Alford Olson died unexpectedly at the age of 37. This was shortly after the birth of his son, Alfred. Mary's brother, John J. Anderson, then moved to the farm to help the family. He remained with his widowed sister on her farm until she remarried Eric Magnus Johnson in 1895. Johnson had himself emigrated from Sweden in 1890. The family continued to live in the cabin and work the farm, eventually developing a substantial complex which included a large dairy barn (1897), dwelling house (1902), and other outbuildings. Mary Olson Johnson retained full ownership of her property throughout her remarriage, and at her death in 1938 passed the farm directly to her children.



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**Narrative Statement of Significance: (CONT'D)**

The Olson/Johnson family made news in 1902, when they were one of several area farming families held hostage by Harry Tracy, an escaped convict from the Oregon Penitentiary in Salem who was for a time "public enemy number one." Numerous newspaper accounts chronicled Tracy's jail break during which he killed three prison guards and subsequently evaded dogs, a posse and the militia for two months, all while robbing several Northwest farmers of food, money, clothing and horses. Mary Olson Johnson and her children were held captive by Tracy for twelve hours on July 9, while Magnus Johnson traveled to Tacoma on orders from Tracy to purchase two guns. The report of this incident in the Seattle Times (July 11, 1902) gives a snapshot description of the farm, prior to construction of the new house:

*"The Johnson home is three miles southeast of the town of Kent. It is a log house of one and a half stories, containing three rooms downstairs and one large room in the loft. It stands in the center of a large apple and cherry orchard, surrounded a well-kept lawn. The trees are thick and almost shut out the house from view of the country road that passes by some 100 yards from the front of the unassuming home of the quiet, inoffensive Scandinavian rancher..."*

Mary Olson's children, Anna and Alfred, attended school in nearby Kent. The two young people are said to have loved dancing, and whenever they were able, joined their friends at dances in Kent and Auburn. Anna reportedly longed to go to New York to study to become an artist, but her stepfather forbade it. She never married and lived most of her life on the farm, except for a one-year period in 1907 when she moved to Seattle and worked as a domestic. Anna was a talented seamstress and weaver, a skill she learned from her mother Mary. With her mother, she began to create rag rugs on a loom, first for friends and then (after 1922) for sale at the local J.C. Penney store. When the weaving created too much lint in the house, her mother insisted the loom be moved to a shed built for the purpose by Anna's brother Alfred. The shed remains on the property today.

Anna's brother, Alfred, never married either and continued to work the farm until he was in his mid-eighties. Alfred was well known in Kent, where he took his infrequent business trips by driving his Packard automobile to town. He was known for his resourceful ways and quiet sense of humor. Over time, he managed to salvage and recycle most of the building materials on the farm. He was a skilled hunter, trapper, fisherman, and gardener. Together with his sister, he eked out a modest living selling pelts, raising calves, and bartering his produce.

Anna Olson died in 1971. At the time of Alfred's death in 1980, he had left the farm and was living with a cousin, Norma Jean Jameson, in Des Moines, Washington. A second cousin to the Olson's managed the farm as a rental property during part of the 1970s. He began, but did not complete, renovations on the farmhouse. The entire farm was leased to horse owner John Anderson during that decade. It was Anderson who installed horse stalls in the barn at that time. The City of Auburn purchased the remaining 60.61 acres of the property in 1994, with the goal of preserving and interpreting the farmstead as a remnant of the Green River Valley's agricultural heritage.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance: (CONT'D)**

Mary Olson Farm Development

In 1879, when Alford Olson purchased the 73-acre sawmill site on the east-side of the Green River, the White River Valley was at the height of hop production. It is likely that Olson intended from the outset to grow hops; indeed, when he died prematurely in 1887 at the age of 37, his estate included a crop of hops valued at \$100. His widow Mary is listed in the 1891 Auburn City Directory as a hops rancher. Split cedar hops poles later reused for corral fencing still remain stacked in the barn today. Alford Olson's 1887 probate records also provide some indication of the diversification of the farm by listing apples, potatoes, and butter which were produced for sale.

It is not known exactly when Mary Olson switched from hops to dairying, although this likely had occurred by the mid-1890s. Mary had remarried by 1897 when the large dairy and hay barn was erected. But over time, the farm appears to have undergone few of the sanitary improvements mandated by law – including the 1919 requirement for a separate, free-standing milk house, or the 1949 requirement for concrete floors and gutters in all milking areas. King County Assessor records for 1939 note only 13 stanchions in the barn. It seems probable that Olson family dairy products were not widely sold on the open market, and that the family continued to dairy at little more than a subsistence level. Reportedly, cows were grazed in the open canyon clearing, and in and around the orchard and outbuildings of the farmstead. In the 1950s and '60s, Alfred Olson raised veal calves for cash, and maintained only a few dairy cows.

The farm is assumed to have been partially logged when purchased by Alford Olson in 1879. The deed of sale specifically lists the sawmill on the site, everything belonging to the sawmill, and all the lumber in the sawmill yard. Alford Olson apparently continued to log the hillside property himself until his death. In a 1935 interview, Mary Olson Johnson recalled that Alford had built a sawmill on the farm in 1880, on the south side of the creek. Creek water diverted through a wooden flume turned a 24-foot water wheel. Fallen logs were rolled downhill or dragged to the mill by oxen.

The Olson-Johnson family established a fruit orchard on their land well before the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Little is known of its early planning or configuration. By 1937 though, it had reached maturity and included 25 or more trees. It does not appear to have been fenced at that time, but later photos of the property show a fenced enclosure around the orchard area. Alfred Olson was an avid orchardist. He raised a wide variety of fruit, and welcomed neighbors at harvest time. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the family also cultivated hay and other crops. The 1937 aerial photos show harvested hay stacks in the north field, and rows of crops in the south field.

Alfred was also a highly successful gardener. The location of his renowned vegetable garden has not been firmly established, and likely was moved over time. One neighbor remembers it being near the creek by the workshop, another by the gated entrance to the orchard, and yet another on the south side of Olson Creek. Alfred grew corn squash, bush beans, carrots, beets, potatoes, kohlrabi, and grapes for wine.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance: (CONT'D)**

Olson Creek and the Green River itself provided one of the family's most important subsistence resources. Alfred and his neighbors fished for trout, Chinook, Silver, Coho, and Chum salmon which were heading upstream to spawn in the fall of each year. Alfred regularly smoked fish and meat in the family smokehouse.

The Mary Olson Farm's buildings are a direct reflection of one family's long-lived presence on the land within the context of the region's evolving agriculture. The barn appears to mark the change from hops to dairy farming, a transition echoed around the valley at that time. The new family dwelling, built in 1902, reflects some measure of economic prosperity and, perhaps, the coming of age of the Olson children, Anna and Alfred. The weaving shed is an unusual reminder of Anna Olson's artistic talents and enterprise. The smokehouse reflects Alfred's love of the outdoors and skills at self-sufficiency, and the garage commemorates his one nod to modern times. The buildings are remarkable for their value as artifacts of the Green River Valley's rural past. Together with the remnant components of the family's gentle imprints on the landscape, the farm is a powerfully tangible reminder of another time and place.

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  - Tina Brewster-Wray, Curator, White River Valley Museum
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  - Kroll ca. 1930
  - Metsker 1940
  - U.S.G.S. Topographic 1949
  - Kroll Township 1958
  - U.S.G.S. Topographic, updated 1968, 1973
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UTM References (continuation)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
5	10	560320	5243150	7	10	560150	5243380
6	10	560080	5243150	8	10	560090	5243580
9	10	559940	5244050				

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

The nominated property consists of three parcels:

Parcel A: Northwest quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 32, Township 22 North, Range 5 East, W.M., in King County, Washington; EXCEPT that portion lying westerly of the following described line:

Beginning at the northwest corner of said southwest quarter; thence south along the west line of the southwest quarter to the northeasterly line of Green River Road; thence southeasterly along said road to a point 440 feet south of the north line of the southwest quarter; thence southeasterly to a point on the south line of the northwest quarter of the southwest quarter which is 240 feet east of the southwest corner of the northwest quarter of the southwest quarter; EXCEPT County Road; AND EXCEPT for the following described portion thereof;

The east 441 feet of the northwest quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 32; Township 22 North, Range 5 East, W.M., in King County, Washington; EXCEPT the south 888.2 feet thereof.

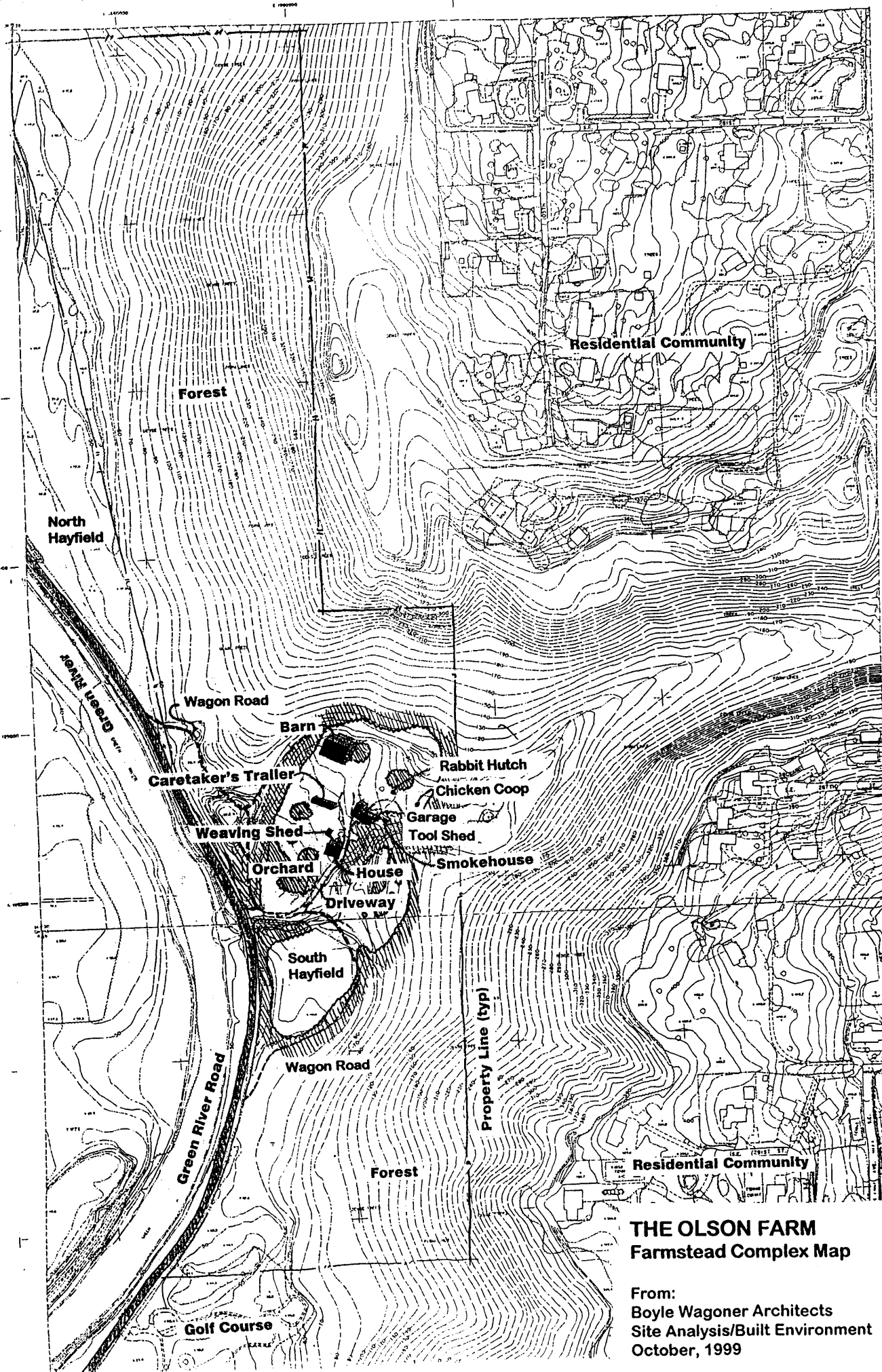
Parcel B: Government Lot 2, Section 32, Township 22 North, Range 5 East, W.M., in King County, Washington; EXCEPT that portion lying southwesterly of a line described as follows:

Beginning at the northwest corner of said Government Lot 2; thence easterly along the north line thereof 240 feet; thence south 09 degrees, 30 minutes east to the northeasterly margin of Green River Road; thence southeasterly along said road margin to the south line of said Government Lot 2 and the terminus of said line; EXCEPT County Road.

Parcel C: Government Lot 4, Section 5, Township 21 North, Range 5 East, W.M., in King County, Washington; EXCEPT that portion lying west of Green River Road; EXCEPT County Road.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

The nominated property reflects the present-day boundaries and surviving acreage of the original Olson Farm.

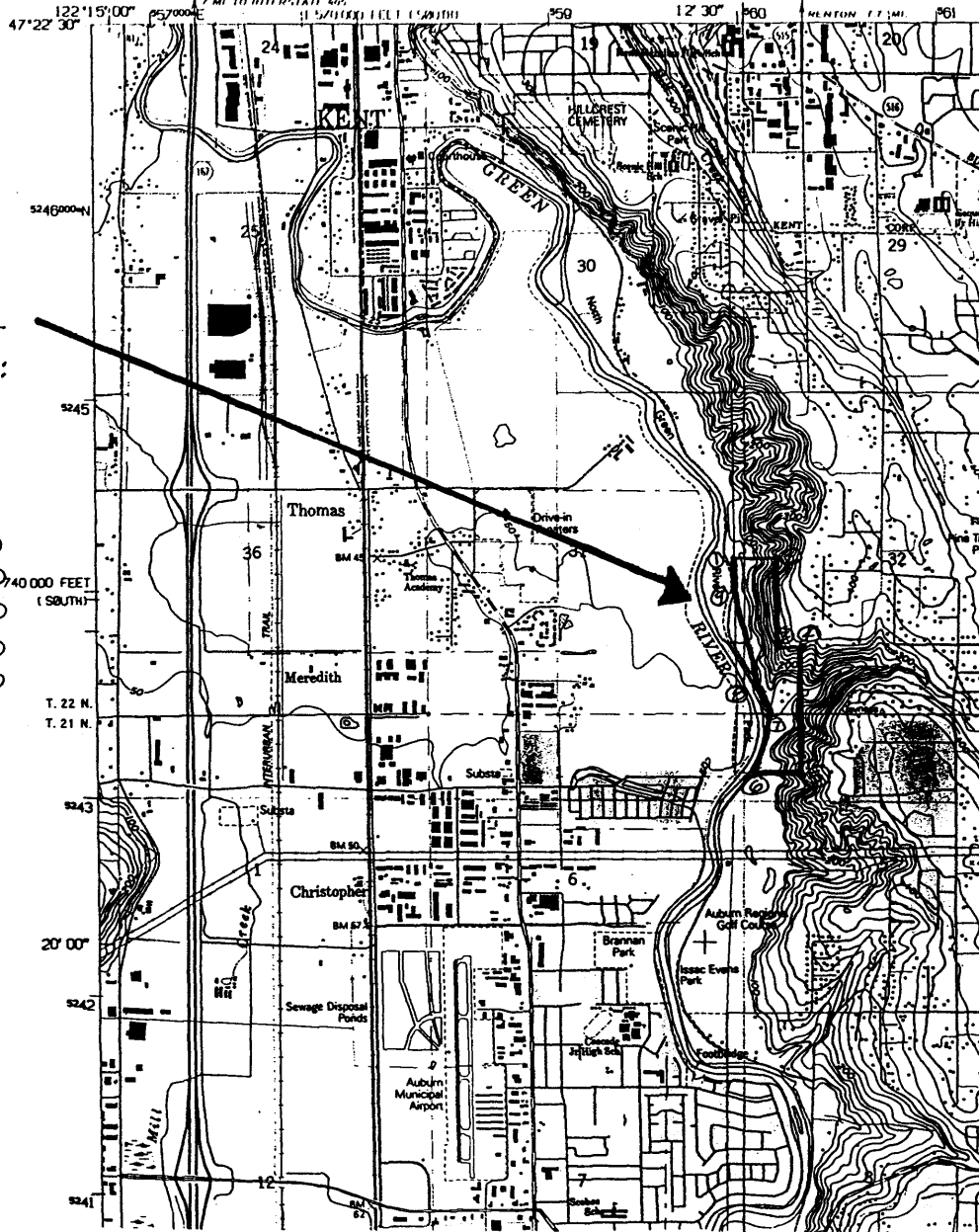


**THE OLSON FARM**  
**Farmstead Complex Map**

From:  
Boyle Wagoner Architects  
Site Analysis/Built Environment  
October, 1999

AUBURN QUADRANGLE  
WASHINGTON  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

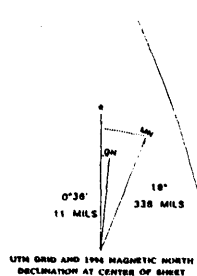


MAK-OLSON FARM

UTM REFERENCES:

1. 559940, 5244230
2. 560190, 5244230
3. 560190, 5243790
4. 560320, 5243790
5. 560320, 5243150
6. 560080, 5243150
7. 560150, 5243380
8. 560090, 5243580
9. 559940, 5244050

Produced by the United States Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and NOG/NOAA  
Compiled from aerial photographs taken 1943. Revised from  
aerial photographs taken 1990 and other sources. Field checked  
1992. Map edited 1994. Contours and land elevations have  
not been revised and may conflict with other content  
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and  
the 1000-meter ticks: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 10  
10 800-foot ticks: Washington Coordinate System, south and  
north zones  
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed  
corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and  
NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from  
National Geodetic Survey NADCON Software  
Gray tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are  
shown  
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the  
National or State reservations shown on this map



INTERIOR GEOLOGICAL SURVEY RESTON, VIRGINIA 20192

WASHINGTON

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway	Light-duty road, hard or
hard surface	improved surface
Secondary highway	Unimproved road
hard surface	

Interstate Route (U.S. Route) State Route

QUADRANGLE LOCATION

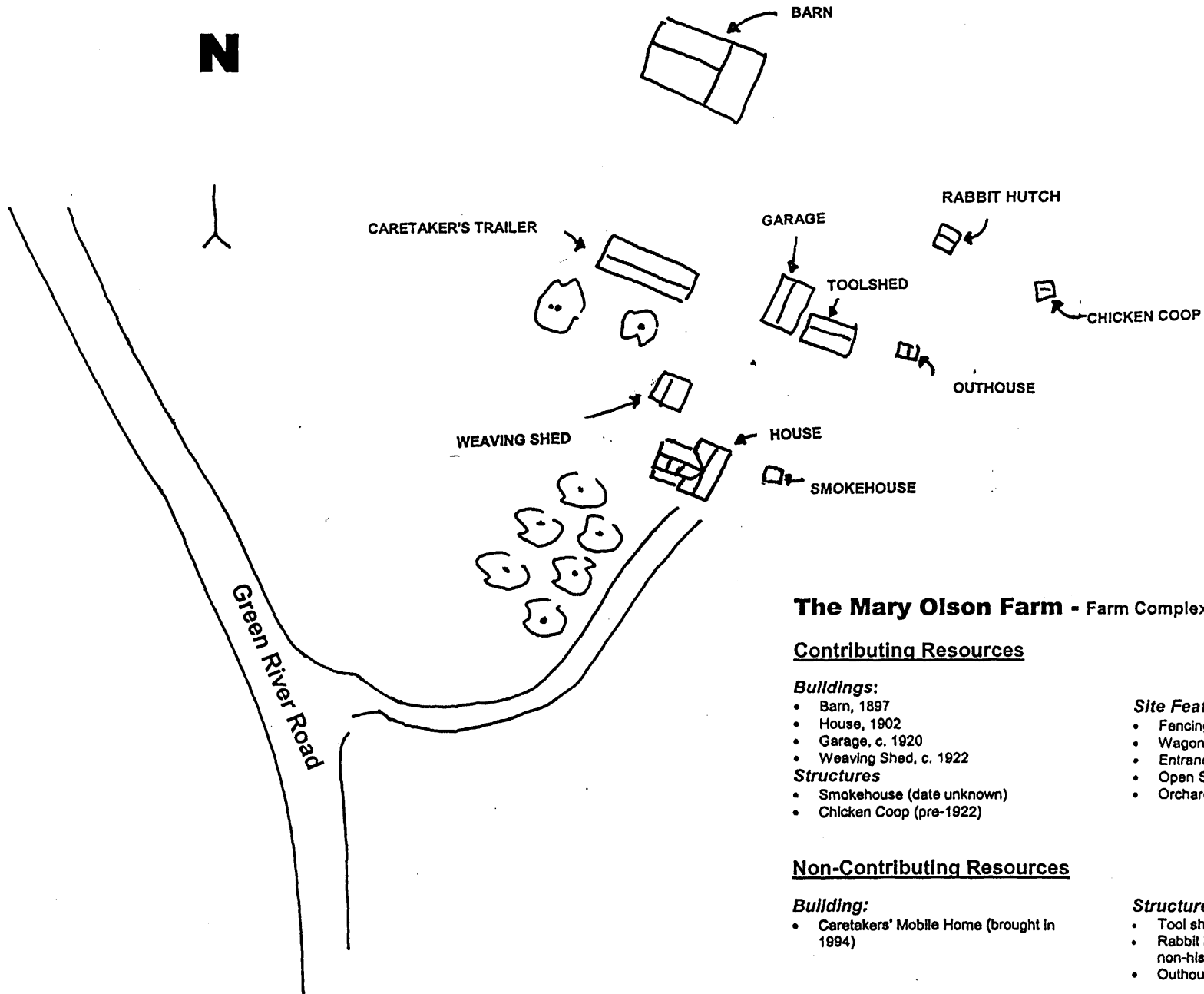
1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	

1	Dee Helms
2	Stinson
3	North Valley
4	Powerty Bay
5	Black Diamond
6	Populup
7	Summer
8	Beckley

ADJACENT 7.5' QUADRANGLE NAMES

AUBURN, WA  
47122-C2-TF-024  
1949  
REVISED 1994  
DMA 1578 I SW-SERIES V891





## The Mary Olson Farm - Farm Complex Map

### Contributing Resources

#### *Buildings:*

- Barn, 1897
- House, 1902
- Garage, c. 1920
- Weaving Shed, c. 1922

#### *Structures*

- Smokehouse (date unknown)
- Chicken Coop (pre-1922)

#### *Site Features*

- Fencing (dates unknown)
- Wagon Road Remnants
- Entrance Lane
- Open Spaces
- Orchard

### Non-Contributing Resources

#### *Building:*

- Caretakers' Mobile Home (brought in 1994)

#### *Structures:*

- Tool shed, c. 1880s, collapsed
- Rabbit hutch (date unknown, may be non-historic)
- Outhouse (date unknown, relocated)