UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Cheyenne

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED MAY 1 0 1976

DATE ENTERED

JUN 10 1976

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS NAME HISTORIC J. C. Penney Home AND/OR COMMON Langtha J. C. Penney House LOCATION STREET & NUMBER Center of Railroad Park NOT FOR PUBLICATION CITY, TOWN CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT Kemmerer First **VICINITY OF** COUNTY CODE STATE CODE Wvomina 56 023 Lincoln 3 CLASSIFICATION **CATEGORY OWNERSHIP STATUS PRESENT USE** __DISTRICT X_PUBLIC OCCUPIED _AGRICULTURE __MUSEUM XBUILDING(S) ___PRIVATE X_UNOCCUPIED _COMMERCIAL **X**PARK __STRUCTURE __вотн X_WORK IN PROGRESS X_EDUCATIONAL __PRIVATE RESIDENCE __SITE **PUBLIC ACQUISITION ACCESSIBLE** __ENTERTAINMENT __RELIGIOUS __OBJECT __IN PROCESS X_YES: RESTRICTED __GOVERNMENT _SCIENTIFICBEING CONSIDERED __YES: UNRESTRICTED __INDUSTRIAL _TRANSPORTATION __NO __MILITARY __OTHER: **4 OWNER OF PROPERTY** NAME Town of Kemmerer STREET & NUMBER City Hall CITY, TOWN Wyoming 83101 Kemmerer 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Lincoln County Court House STREET & NUMBER CITY, TOWN STATE Wvomina 83101 Kemmerer **6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS** Wyoming Recreation Commission Survey of Historic Sites, Markers and Monuments Inventory DATE __FEDERAL XSTATE __COUNTY __LOCAL 1967 (1973 revised) **DEPOSITORY FOR** Wyoming Recreation Commission SURVEY RECORDS CITY, TOWN STATE Wyoming 82002



CONDITION

CHECK ONE
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CHECK ONE

__EXCELLENT

__DETERIORATED

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__ORIGINAL SITE

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DATE 1975

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The basic structure of the J. C. Penney Home in Kemmerer, Wyoming is that of a rectangular, barely two story, gable roof, clapboard building. Built into and extending the full length of that framework's backside is a slope-roof, shed-type extension which might be a part of the original construction or might have been added at a later time. Exterior dimensions are: length - 30 feet (along the line of the shed-type extension); width - 25 feet (which is lengthway of the basic structure); height - 20 feet (at the roof peak). Whether the extension is original or not, it seems reasonable to believe that it was already existent when in 1903 or 1904 the Penney family first occupied it, Mr. Penny having given, as his reason for moving, the fact that his growing family required more room.

Inside, on the first floor, is a living room-dining room complex which is separated by a partial wall. Further back is the kitchen, a side room which could be a bedroom and a bathroom; farthest back is an inclosed porch. Upstairs there is one large bedroom and behind it, under the extending roof slope, a smaller room which might serve as the bedroom of a small child. Across the front of the house is a full-width porch with fancy balustrade and four columns supporting not only the roof but a hanging fringe of woodwork duplicating the design of the balustrade.

This small home stood well toward the back in a long and narrow Lot number 12, Block number 7 of the original townsite of Kemmerer. That lot was, and is so still, a downtown lot in a business area block; in fact it fronts on Pine Avenue just one half block north of the Triangle that is the core of Kemmerer's commercial district. Across Pine Avenue from it, missing by two or three establishments a coveted Triangle location, was J. C. Penney's first store—then named Golden Rule. Later, following first indications of fame and fortune, this store was moved that necessary two or three doors to prime and prestigous location at the base of the Triangle, the corner of Pine Avenue and North Main Street, where it presently stands under title of J. C. Penney Store Number One.

But this house, the great man's home, was evidently not similarly fondly remembered. It continued to stand for many years at the rear of its long and narrow lot. There, on either side, it was walled in and dwarfed by commercial buildings reaching to the sidewalk on Pine Avenue. As late as 1975, it stood there, a rather pathetic appearing, run down little house standing behind a weed-grown lawn whereon one or two stunted trees and several shaggy bushes struggled under an arid climate for an unwatered existance.

Then in 1975 new hope was born for this small, aging home. It all came about because some years previously the Oregon Short Line of the Union Pacific Railroad had ceased to operate passenger service. The Railroad Company no longer had reason to maintain a truly extensive sweep of lawn extending from along its tracks and the unused passenger station to a point which touched against the similar apex of the Town-owned Triangle. Since the interior of the Triangle had always been a park the Company offered the Town their similarly triangle-shaped property of well-sodded lawns. The Town accepted, resulting in two parks touching (not quite because of a street intersection) at an angle of each--producing a somewhat hourglass shaped pattern.

PERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW __PREHISTORIC __ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC __COMMUNITY PLANNING __LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE __RELIGION __1400-1499 __ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC __CONSERVATION __LAW __SCIENCE __ECONOMICS __LITERATURE __1500-1599 ___AGRICULTURE __SCULPTURE __ARCHITECTURE __1600-1699 ___EDUCATIONMILITARY __SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN _1700-1799 __ART __ENGINEERING __MUSIC __THEATER X.COMMERCE __1800-1899 ___EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT __PHILOSOPHY __TRANSPORTATION -X1900-__COMMUNICATIONS __INDUSTRY __POLITICS/GOVERNMENT __OTHER (SPECIFY) __INVENTION SPECIFIC DATES BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As the stage for the launching of a nation-wide enterprise the new town, rising above environs themselves barely emerged from a wilderness, was an unlikely place. But then, at its launching, the enterprise was an equally unlikely candidate for national recognition. Purely commercial in nature its speedy attainment of such lofty ranking was surely unforeseen by its founder and, though never formally admitted, must have caused him considerable surprise.

In the year 1902 the town, then numbering perhaps a thousand inhabitants, reared its new but only sparse structures along the banks of a river where they stood in stark and scattered relief against a landscape otherwise offering nothing taller than a uniform carpet of drought stunted sagebrush. Where the town was growing the river's flow reaches a midpoint marked by a definite change in topography. Descending from snow-clad heights through headwater canyons and mountain cramped valleys, here the river turns away from uplands henceforth to pursue a southeasterly course--cutting no more than a shallow if broad trough across arid plains.

Taking advantage of that trough--staying close beside the river, making good use of its easy grade--pioneers had built a railroad. Where the river and this attendant railroad cut through the foothill folds of the westerly standing mountains there they also had cut the thick seams of an extensive coal field. It was, of course, this presence of easily minable and--owing to the railroad--valuable coal which resulted in the founding of the town.

The setting of this scene was in southwestern Wyoming and the river was the Hams Fork of the Green, one of the headwater sources of the Colorado. The railroad was the recently completed Oregon Short Line, that branch of the Union Pacific's mainline transcontinental connecting system that serves states of the Pacific Northwest. The town was Kemmerer, founded in 1897 by P. J. Quealy (developer of mines, ranches and mercantile concerns) and named for his friend and partner Mahlon S. Kemmerer, a well known industrialist and financier in his native state of Pennsylvania.

Kemmerer, then, was founded primarily as a coal mining center and in that sense it was at least to some extent a company town. Characteristic of such developments—wherein the town itself was usually established by a carefully organized subsidiary firm in which it was politic to remember the interests of the serving railroad company—Kemmerer, Wyoming was an entirely separate venture from the parent company's chief objective which was the exploitation of a natural resource. Here on the Hams Fork, by 1902, the actual mining of coal had already resulted in traditional type developments, including those of other concerns besides the Kemmerer Coal Company. An example,

| Beasley, Norman., Main Street Merchant. Whittlesey House, New York, McGraw Hill 1948 Penney, J. C. View from the Ninth Decade. Thomas Nelson and Sons, New York 1960 Fifty Years with the Golden Rule. Harper & Brothers, New York 1950 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one acre UMM REFERENCES NO UTM map available. Latitude 410 47' 43" Longitude 110 32' 8" ZONE EASTING NORTHING C JONE EASTING NORTHING C JONE EASTING NORTHING C JONE EASTING NORTHING C JONE EASTING NORTHING C JONE EASTING NORTHING C JONE EASTING NORTHING C JONE EASTING NORTHING C JONE EASTING NORTHING C JONE EASTING NORTHING L JONE EASTING NORTHING L JONE EASTING NORTHING L JONE EASTING NORTHIN | Batten, William M. | GRAPHICAL REFE , The Penney Idea. The ton, Princeton, Portla | Newcomen Society | in North American, New versity Press, 1967. |
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Form No. 10-300a (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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Into the central area of this former railroad park, at the foot of a medium-steep incline which sweeps upwards toward the point of junction with the Triangle, the Town has recently moved the J. C. Penney Home. Here, within the next several months, it will be refurbished and then put to a worthy use conforming with interests and pleasures of Kemmerer's own citizens and of their visitors.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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not far outside the town and easily recognized by its requisite surface structures, was the latter's operation known by the name Frontier. Typically, Frontier's surface markings included a railroad spur, a tipple, a mine office, a company store and the "camp" which was not literally a camp but rather a cluster of houses owned by the company and rented to individual employees--the miners.

Of these identifying markers the store is here the most important factor because mining companies ordinarily maintained such stores not only for the convenience of employees, but also as a source of supplementary revenue. To help insure that such revenue would be forthcoming in pleasingly profitable amounts the miners were customarily paid partly in script, a tender only redeemable through purchases made at the company store. It was this script and its potential to insure payment of any credit granted which made the company store such a formidable competitor. Indeed, it had to have been some version of this script and credit mixture which gave rise to the folk song--out of Appalachia but applicable wherever coal was mined--with its haunting refrain:

"You load sixteen tons and what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt. Saint Peter don't you call me 'cause I can't go, I owe my soul to the company store."

In the Kemmerer coal fields that song was only symptomatic of poor management by the worker; over the years many miners earned a comfortable living, built good homes and helped to develop a prosperous small city. But what of that small city, that town founded in the year 1897? Mr. Quealy's surveyors platted and constructed the streets of the town to include a somewhat unusual feature, at least somewhat unusual among frontier towns of the Northwest. That idea, often used in other regions, was to center the business district around a square rather than irrigularly dotting the length of a straggly "Main" street. But, being original thinkers a square wouldn't do for these planners of a town; they built a triangle. Their triangle was not—is not—a very long sided affair and its lots were soon all sold if not all built upon. There was not room enough for every business that could have used a triangle location advantageously.

Kemmerer was a hub town, it filled a need and in the beginning it grew swiftly. Besides Frontier, other mining "camps" that came to dot its environs during those early days included Diamondville (adjacent to and older than Kemmerer and might have itself become the principal town), Glencoe, Blazon, Cumberland and Elkol. But Kemmerer was only partly a coal mining town because, once it had been founded in this otherwise raw country, it also became a trading center for sheep and cattle ranches and for such other scattered operations as an occasional timber concern, an exploratory oil well and recreational and scientific expeditions. This was a fortunate condition, very important to the making of a real town because the coal business had its

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ups and downs and when the beat was down a town that had no other interests to take up the slack could never amount to much and might die altogether.

Into this little town of Kemmerer, one day in 1902, came a young but already experienced merchant looking to establish a general dry goods business. This man was J. C. Penney. Mr. Penney, born in 1875 the son of a farmer-minister of Hamilton, Missouri, had learned merchandise as a youth in the store of one of Hamilton's most competent and highly principled tradesmen. Later, seeking a dry climate for reasons of health, he had gone to Denver where he eventually came into the employment of two men who were partners in two stores--one in Longmont, Colorado and the other in Evanston, Wyoming. After having worked for a time in each of these stores the partners agreed to help Mr. Penney start a third store, in some other locality, in which the three would be equal partners. It was given to Penney to select that location and, despite his partners doubts, his choice was Kemmerer.

It cost the three partners six thousand dollars, two thousand each of which Penney had to borrow fifteen hundred of his share, to open their store in Kemmerer. Two thousand dollars was a considerable sum in 1902 and, considering their own reservations about this town being a promising location, expressed, better than any words, the faith each of his new partners placed in the ability and integrity of their former employee.

Penney had worked in the Evanston store, only fifty miles from Kemmerer, for sometime and his interest had led him to become familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of the latter place insofar as operation of a private mercantile enterprise was concerned. He was aware of the company stores in all of the various mine "camps" and of their strong competitive positions; he knew the value of a good location and that he would have to take one just off the favored triangle. But he also knew that the mines provided a payroll clientele, meaning some cash was always in circulation; and he knew that ranchers and other country people of that day only came to town when they needed something and intended to buy it. He opened the store under the name Golden Rule--not exactly an original name but one he fully intended to honor.

The Golden Rule was a cash and carry store: in its first day of business the receipts amounted to \$466.59; in the first year they amounted to \$29,000. This business was accomplished with very little help, for the most part Mr. Penney and Mrs. Penney were the sales force, other management expenses were the cost of the goods and the usual overheads—rent and utilities, none of them very great. In other words J. C. Penney had a profit maker from the start, he was off and running.

Apparently Penney's partners were well content with their own two businesses and—though no doubt pleased with his success and the resultant accrual to their own coffers—were not really interested in carrying on an expansionist program. They stayed with him a few years, allowing him time to gain financial strength, then sold their interests

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to him. But Penney was impressed by the help those two old friends and former employers had provided for a promising young employee to get into business for himself. From this experience he worked out a formula to build a vast mercantile organization.

That formula was to find a promising young man, carefully train him in Penney's own principles and methods of business, offer him a partnership in the start of a new store in some new locality, encourage him to train another clerk to become a partner in yet a third venture—and so on ad infinitum. By 1913, when his organization had grown to 48 stores doing two and a half million dollars of annual sales in as many separate small western towns, the name Golden Rule was changed to J. C. Penney Stores Company and his principles of business were set into print, under the title "Penney Idea", as follows:

- "1. To serve the public, as nearly as we can, to its complete satisfaction.
- 2. To expect for the service we render a fair remuneration and not all the profit the traffic will bear.
- 3. To do all in our power to pack the customer's dollar full of value, quality and satisfaction.
- 4. To continue to train ourselves and our associates so that the service we give will be more and more intelligently performed.
- 5. To improve constantly the human factor in our business.
- 6. To reward the men and women in our organization through participation in what the business produces.
- 7. To test our every policy, method and act in this wise: Does it square with what is right and just?"

The partnership idea worked satisfactorily up through a provincial stage; thereafter, with each additional store, it became more and more unwieldy. Finally, in 1927, when growth had reached 750 stores operating in 45 states and doing, in monetary values of the time, a sales volume of 116 million dollars the individual partnerships were closed out with each listed partner receiving an equivalent value in company stock. This adjustment was accomplished without pause, the company continued to grow reaching, in 1965, 1700 stores located in 49 states doing two and one half billion dollars of business. By that time J. C. Penney, main street businessman, had twice moved head-quarters from the original Kemmerer location: first, in 1909, to Salt Lake City and subsequently into the forty plus storied Penney Building in New York. Surely, Mr. Penney had arrived as one of America's all time great merchant princes.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney Home ITEM NUMBER 8

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Prince or not, Mr. Penney never forgot the Kemmerer beginnings of his business, neither did he ever forget that he was a salesman of drygoods merchandise. He continually practiced to keep his hand in the pot, on past his ninetieth year he could on occasion be discovered surreptiously sliding into some company store where he might causually fit a customer to a pair of shoes and, having carefully ascertained the buyer's satisfaction, close the sale. The last of his books, of which he either wrote or was the subject of several, was entitled "View from the Ninth Decade" wherein he once again stressed the company's Kemmerer origins and the satisfaction and contentment he experienced while there laying out the foundations of a nation-wide commercial enterprise.

As for his original store just off Kemmerer's prestigious downtown triangle, that building had been vacated many long years since--its fate lost to the ken of men. Back in those early days, however, Penney didn't vacate a building without opening another, the successor stands on a choice corner location of that all-important triangle. This second Kemmerer store succeeded to designation as No. 1 in the system, a ranking it still holds on the date of this nomination.

From the standpoint of historic interest and loss of what might have been a valued heritage, it is too bad that the original J. C. Penney Store (really the "Golden Rule Store") in Kemmerer, Wyoming has ceased to exist. This becomes doubly unfortunate when one considers that that building was not only Penney's first house of business but that it also was the first abode of young Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Penney when they came into a raw new town to make their home and seek their fortune. It was a frame building supporting the type two story false front then so much in vogue across the erstwhile western frontier. However, this particular two story affectation was not entirely bogus; actually the building boasted a full length peaked roof beneath which was a cramped, garret-type second floor space. It was in this garret that Mr. and Mrs. Penney set up housekeeping although, since the two of them constituted the firm's total sales force and since that firm kept long business hours, neither of them spent a great portion of their wakeful time in residence.

This arrangement was bearable, perhaps even convenient for two young people engrossed in their work. But when first one and then a second baby arrived, putting further stress on already limited space, it became necessary to make a change.

J. C. Penney then bought the little white house described under the Physical Appearance heading. This was his home during the remaining years that he lived in Kemmerer,—from about 1904 to 1909—the years when the basic organization of his nation—wide store system was formulated. This house is the one existant feature remaining in Kemmerer that bears a day—to—day relationship to that important phase of J. C. Penney's life. The J. C. Penney Company, the Town of Kemmerer and the Union Pacific Railroad have all shown an interest and made a contribution that this little house shall be preserved. It seems right and proper that it should be enrolled in the National Register of Historic Places.

5. Additional Information, J. C. Penney Home Nomination.

As indicated in paragraphs three and four, <u>Present and Original Physical Appearance</u>, the J. C. Penney Home stood, in its original location, on a lot in the Town of Kemmerer's business district. During recent years, and presently, the town has and continues to boom owing to exploration for and development of surrounding energy resources and other deposits useful to industry--coal, oil, gas and trona. Business site locations are at a premium and valuations are very high.

While a number of residents, including the Town Fathers, recognized the historic worth of the Penney Home and desirability of saving it, no one so inclined could afford to purchase the lot on which it stood. Least of all did the Town administration—faced with the need to provide new schools, new water systems, new sewer lines, etc. for an influx of people and industrial developments that will not for some time create a proportionately renumerative tax base—feel that it could afford to purchase a cultural property when hard put to meet the expenses necessary to health and education. In other words, it was a foregone conclusion that when, sometime soon, the lot was sold to a commerical or other business enterprise the Penney Home would be razed.

Thus, when it came about that the Town acquired a suitable piece of property as a gift from the Union Pacific Railroad Company it was determined to move the J. C. Penney Home to that property. In the view of the owners, the Town of Kemmerer, that was the only way to save the home.



