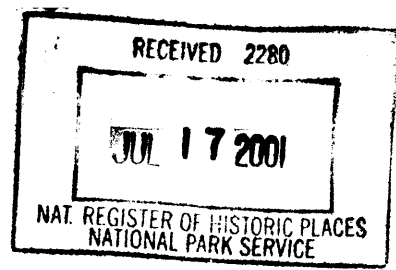


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

920

1. Name of Property

historic name: Joe and Carrie Hilger Ranch

other name/site number: Joe Hilger Homestead, Sleeping Giant Ranch

2. Location

street & number: Sleeping Giant Ranch, 20 miles north of Helena

not for publication: n/a
vicinity: n/a

city/town: Helena

state: Montana code: MT county: Lewis and Clark code: 049 zip code: 59601

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.)

Mark F. Baumer
Signature of certifying official/Title

7/5/2001
Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

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
 see continuation sheet
- removed from the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

ENTERED AUG 31 2001

| | |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing Noncontributing

Category of Property: District

8 6 buildings

Number of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register: 0

2 ___ sites

2 ___ structures

1 ___ object

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

13 6 TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

Current Functions:

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: Animal facility
agricultural outbuilding
agricultural field
storage
irrigation facility

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: Animal facility
agricultural outbuilding
agricultural field
storage
irrigation facility

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Materials:

OTHER: Vernacular

foundation: STONE; CONCRETE

walls: WOOD/log, clapboard, plank

roof: WOOD/plank, shingle; METAL/tin

other: METAL/aluminum, tin; CONCRETE; BRICK

Narrative Description

The Joe and Carrie Hilger Ranch is located approximately 20 miles north of Helena, Montana, at the southern edge of the Sleeping Giant Mountain, and approximately 2 miles west of the Gates of the Mountains of the Missouri River. The original 80 acres of the homestead still include the historic building cluster, irrigation system, fencing, corrals, and agricultural fields that were present during the period of significance, from the early homesteading of the area through the post-World War II boom in agriculture.

The building cluster is nestled at the foot of the Sleeping Giant to the north and east, and agricultural fields slope gently to the south and west. Water for the ranch was historically drawn from a spring northeast of the building cluster and Beartooth Creek, which runs generally north to south along the eastern edge of the property. A dam at the northeast corner of the property diverts water from the creek into a hand-dug ditch that carries water to the fields. The property includes buildings, ditches, objects, and agricultural fields. Its integrity of location, setting, feeling, association, workmanship, design, and material have been retained since the period of significance.

Access to the ranch is gained via a gravel county road that begins near the "Gates of the Mountains" exit from Highway 15. The road diverges from the Gates of the Mountains access road and heads north. The road follows the eastern edge the property, and ends just to the north. The ranch is visible from highway, but at three miles distance, the interstate has little impact on the integrity of the property.

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Building Descriptions

Desert Claim House

Although there is no record of a desert claim being filed on the property, the oldest building on the site is often referred to as the "Desert Claim House." Most likely, the building was constructed in the late 1800s, either by a squatter or Nick Hilger, the first to purchase the property. Located at the northeast corner of the property, the one-story, two-room, frame building features a gable roof. The roof is covered with rough-sawn planks and has been patched with rolled tarpaper. The exterior walls are also covered with rough-sawn boards, set vertically except in the gable ends, where they display a horizontal orientation. The rectangular building has no foundation, though in places does rest on stacks of rock.

Centered in the west elevation (front) is a single, wood-framed, vertical-plank door. The east elevation also contains a centered, wood-frame door. The original plank door has been replaced with a multi-paneled wood door taken from the log house later built on the property. On the south elevation, the bays that define the two rooms of the building are easily discernable, indicating that one may have been built subsequent to the other. A slight difference in the roof levels also points to this possibility. Fenestration on the south elevation is limited to a wood-frame window opening centered in the west bay. Only the bottom sash of the original double-hung window is present, and contains two lights. A similar window, also with one sash missing, is centered in the east bay. This window is positioned horizontally. The north elevation reflects the same fenestration as the south, only the horizontal window is on the west bay, and the vertical window is located to the east.

The interior of the building consists of two rooms. The interior walls are unfinished, though ragged pieces of cloth can be found in the spaces between the siding boards. Bits of wallpaper are also visible on the walls. The floorboards have been removed. Though in deteriorating condition, the building retains good integrity, and is a contributing feature within the district.

Log House

West of the cabin is the one and one-half story, rectangular, log house constructed in 1905 by Joe and Carrie Hilger. The foundation of the building is not visible. The square-hewn logs of the original building were reinforced by drilling holes vertically as they were laid and driving pipes through the holes. A wood-frame front porch was added in 1907, but has since been removed. A one and one-half story, log-frame addition containing the kitchen, dining room, and one bedroom was built on the rear (north) elevation in 1918. The addition was constructed on a rubble foundation. A small shed-roofed pantry was also added to the west elevation during the historic period. The front-gabled roof of the building was originally sheathed with sawn lumber and covered with wood shingles. These features are still visible beneath a modern corrugated metal roof. A concrete chimney pierces the ridgeline on the south side of the roof, and a brick chimney is located at the ridge at the north side of the building.

The façade (south elevation) is sheathed in horizontal board siding with milled cornerboards. The siding wraps around the east and west sides of the building, resulting in a "dressed up" look for the front portion of the house. At the first story level, a four-panel wood door is located on the east side. The opening is wood framed and features plain lumber millwork and a two-light, wooden, screen door. A two-over-two light, double-hung, wood-framed window is located to the west. An identical window is centered in the gable end.

The east elevation features three types of siding. At the south end, the plain narrow boards that cover the façade continue across the south third of the elevation. The original, square-hewn logs are visible in the middle third, and narrow clapboard sheaths the wood-frame addition on the north side of the building. A double-hung window, identical to those found on the façade, is located both in the south and middle thirds of the elevation. The north bay contains a wood-framed, four-panel door and a fixed, wood-frame window opening.

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The rear elevation features narrow clapboard siding and cornerboards. There are two, wood-framed, six-light, fixed windows at the ground level. The window opening to the east has been boarded over. In the gable end, there is a single, wood-framed, one-over-one light double-hung window to the east, and a plain, vertical board door to the west. A cantilevered wood plank platform is located beneath the door.

The west elevation features four types of historic siding: plain, narrow horizontal boards to the south; the original logs in the center; clapboard to the north; and horizontal wood planks on a small pantry addition. The one-story addition is located off-center to the north, and features a shed roof covered with corrugated metal. Fenestration on the addition includes a centered vertical plank door on the north side and a one-by-one, wood-framed, sliding window centered on the west and south sides. Additional fenestration on the west elevation of the building is limited to a small wood-framed, fixed, one-light window to the north, and a two-over-two light double-hung window immediately south of the addition. A pair of wood-plank double doors beneath the south window lead to a dugout root cellar.

The interior of the house was remodeled during the 1960s when the owner's sister moved in. Despite the installation of a toilet and other, more modern appliances on the ground floor, the floorplan of the building remains largely unchanged. The house features a front room, living room, kitchen, and pantry on the lower level, and two bedrooms upstairs.

Although the log house has been altered with the construction of two wood-frame additions, both were built during the early part of the period of significance, and do not diminish the integrity of the building. The log house is considered a contributing resource within the historic district.

Outhouse

A small, one-hole outhouse is located east of the log house. The building is sheathed with vertical planks, and has a corrugated tin shed roof. Fenestration is limited to a vertical plank door on the southwest elevation. Though the exact construction date of the outhouse is unknown, it was built during the period of significance and is associated with the Hilger family's tenure in the log house. It is therefore considered a contributing building in the historic district.

Log Barn

At the west end of the building cluster is the log barn, constructed by Joe Hilger in 1908. The large two-story barn features a gambrel roof covered with vertical planks. In 1942, the ridgepole was reinforced and a log-frame, shed-roofed addition was built across the west elevation. Six years later, a one-story, log-framed shed addition was constructed on a rubble wall foundation across the north elevation. A post and pole fence defines the corrals on the south and west sides of the building. A metal pipe gate provides access to the corrals. The log walls of the original first story level are square hewn and notched, and the log ends extend beyond the plane of the walls. Vertical wood planks of variable widths cover the other exterior walls.

A large sliding door, off-center to the south, provides access from the east elevation. A small window opening, filled with the screen of an old television set, is located immediately north of the door. Two small, wood-frame window openings are located high in the east gambrel end. These openings are boarded from the interior. The south elevation contains a vertical plank sliding door with vintage hardware off-center to the east in the log bay. At the west end of the south elevation, the shed addition contains two window openings cut from the siding. The windshield of a Model-T fills the eastern opening. Fenestration on the west elevation of the barn is limited to a boarded-over window opening on the north side of the addition and a small window opening low in the gambrel end. The north elevation has no fenestration except a boarded opening at the second story level where hay was delivered.

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The interior of the barn is unfinished. The north shed addition is divided into four low stalls. A small tack room is located at the southeast corner of the building, and a large stall at the southwest corner of the original log structure has been converted to tool storage. Large log poles define the stalls. Two large stalls are located in the west shed addition. Pocket gates provide access to the addition area and to the individual stalls. The loft area is open and has plank flooring. A series of guy wires attached to the ridgepole exterior walls, and floorbeams add support to the roof structure.

Though in need of repair, especially the roof, the barn retains a high degree of integrity and is considered a contributing building within the historic district.

Machine Shop

East of the log barn stands the large, rectangular machine shop. The building was begun by Joe Hilger in 1933, and originally had a flat roof. By 1948, Matthew Hilger had completed construction, including expanding the original footprint to the south, and constructing a saltbox roof. The roof is covered with corrugated tin, and features a metal stovepipe on the north slope. Vertical wood planks sheath the exterior walls. The entrance to the building is gained via a vertical plank pedestrian door on the south side of the east elevation. Large vertical-plank double doors are located north of the pedestrian door. A wood-frame louvered vent is centered above the doors in the gable end. Five modern, wood-frame, evenly spaced, fixed, one-light windows span the south elevation. There is no fenestration on the north and west elevations.

The interior of the building consists of one large room. The massive log beams and poles support the roof structure. Blown insulation covers the interior walls and ceiling, and the poured concrete floor is modern.

Though some modifications to the interior finishes have occurred, the exterior of the building is reflective of the historic period, and the building is considered a contributing element of the historic district.

Chicken Coop

The small original chicken coop is located east and slightly north of the machine shop. The frame building is sheathed with vertical wood planks, and consists of two masses, each with steeply pitched shed roofs. The north side of the building is higher than the south. Large window openings across the south elevation, both at ground level and between the ridge of the north mass and the roof of the south bay, have been covered with horizontal planks. A small vertical-plank pedestrian door provides access from the east elevation. A small, boarded, wood-framed window opening is centered on the west elevation. The north elevation has no fenestration. The interior walls are unfinished. The floor is wood plank, and there are built-in shelves and storage areas. The chicken coop, built by Joe Hilger in the early 1900s, contributes to the historic district.

Granary

North of the original chicken coop stands the granary. The small rectangular building displays typical studs-out granary design, adding strength to the structure and providing a smooth interior surface in which to store grain. Constructed in 1953, during Matthew and Nick Hilger's tenure at the ranch, the shed roof building rests on a log and rock foundation. The roof slopes down gently to the north, and is covered with corrugated metal. Horizontal planks, braced by the exposed studs, cover the exterior walls. A single, narrow, centered vertical plank door provides access from the south elevation. Both the east and west elevations contain small openings, through which grain could be poured. The north elevation contains no features. The interior of the building has smooth wood plank floors and walls. Two large grain bins are built into the west and east sides of the building. Built towards the end of the period of significance, the building is representative of the ongoing operations of the ranch during the second generation of Hilger tenure there, as well as the success of that generation during the post-war era. For these reasons, the granary is considered a contributing element of the historic district.

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Chicken House

Like the granary, the chicken house was built during the early 1950s (it is visible in a 1952 photograph of the ranch) by Joe Hilger's sons, Nick and Matt Hilger. The rectangular, one-story building is constructed on a concrete wall foundation, and covered with horizontal plank siding. Corrugated metal covers the saltbox roof, and a gabled vent straddles the ridgeline on the north side. The south elevation contains a vertical plank, wood-frame door to the west, and a one-over-one light, wood-framed, fixed window to the east. Two identical windows are located on the west elevation. The east and north elevations contain no window or door openings. The county extension office designed the building, including its heating and ventilation system. Sawdust between the double walls provides insulation. The lumber used in the building was obtained from timber on the ranch, and sawed at the sawmill owned by the Hilgers and three neighboring families. The interior of the building is finished with smooth wood planks on the floors and walls, and is divided into two rooms. Built towards the end of the period of significance, the building is representative of the ongoing operations of the ranch during the second generation of Hilger tenure there, as well as the success of that generation during the post-war era. For these reasons, the chicken house is considered a contributing element within the historic district.

Residence

A modest, one-story, frame residence with a cross-hipped roof was built in 1960. Constructed on a concrete-wall foundation, the building is located south of the log house and ditch. Wide clapboard siding covers the exterior walls. The south façade is divided into two bays. The west bay projects and is covered by the cross hip of the roof. A concrete stoop leads to the modern, three-light wood door, protected by a wood-framed screen door, located on the east side of the west bay. Three large, wood-frame windows, set in a ribbon pattern, dominate the west side of the west bay. Each window unit contains a large fixed light above a smaller hopper. Two evenly spaced one-by-one sliding windows are located in the east bay of the façade. The slope of the land surrounding the house allows for a daylight basement to be revealed on the east elevation. A modern wood door with a metal screen provides access to the basement level at the south side. A small, one light, fixed window is located on the north side at the basement level. At the main level of the house, there are two, one-light, evenly spaced, awning windows on the east elevation. The west elevation features a modern wood door, with a wooden storm, and concrete stoop off center to the north. South of the door is a single window opening with a large fixed light above a smaller hopper. A one-by-one sliding window is located north of the door. The north (rear) elevation contains three windows at the main level: a large one-by-one sliding window off-center to the west; and two evenly spaced, one-light awnings to the east. Corrugated metal protects the window wells of the fixed, one-light windows at the basement level. Asphalt shingles cover the roof, which features a metal, capped stovepipe at the ridge off-center to the east. The interior of the building features modern finishes and appliances. The building was built just after the period of significance, and is not in keeping the rustic architectural style of the other buildings. It is a non-contributing element within the historic district.

Metal Shed

A large, modern metal shed is located between the log house and the chicken coop. Built during the early 1990s, the plain gable-roofed building is constructed on a concrete-slab foundation. Corrugated metal covers the roof and exterior walls. The south elevation contains large sliding doors to each of the four bays. A one-by-one sliding window is located off-center to the south on the east elevation. The modern shed does not contribute to the historic district.

Garden

Immediately south and west of the desert claim house is a large, fenced garden area. The garden was created and tended by Carrie Hilger, and dates from early in the historic period. Irrigated by a ditch that runs from the spring northeast of the cabin, the garden was, and continues to be, used to grow vegetables, berries, and flowers. The site is a contributing feature within the historic district.

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Ditches

In addition to the ditch that feeds the garden, a dam at the northeast corner of the property diverts water into a large, hand-dug ditch. This ditch runs to the southwest, between the log house and modern residence, and continues along the north side of the agricultural fields, past the west fence line, then continues to the south-southwest. Historically, the ditch provided both domestic and irrigation water to the ranch. A developed spring, consisting of a pipe and corrugated metal diversion, also feeds water into the ditch system. The spring is located just east of Beartooth Creek, at the northeastern corner of the property. The ditch system contributes to the historic district.

Calving Barn

During the modern era, a one-story, rectangular calving barn was constructed at the northwest corner of the property. The building features a gabled, corrugated metal roof, and vertical plank siding. A large sliding door is centered on the south elevation. Single window openings flank the door. The east opening is boarded over. A single window opening is located on the south side of the east elevation. Both the north and west elevations contain no fenestration. The interior is unfinished, and divided into several calving stalls. There is no foundation. The modern building does not contribute to the historic district.

Pole Barn

A pole barn constructed to replace one that burned in the 1980s is located south of the building cluster on the east side of the property. The simple, rectangular, gable-roofed building features vertical plank siding and a corrugated metal roof. Sliding doors provide access from the north and east elevations. Though located on the site of the historic pole barn, the building is modern and does not contribute to the historic district.

Pole Shed

Immediately west of the pole barn is a modern, one-story, post-and pole shed. The building is open on the south side, and horizontal, corrugated metal siding covers the north, west, and east elevations, as well as the roof. The modern building does not contribute to the historic district.

Small Modern Shed

A small modern shed is located immediately north of the pole shed. The gable-roofed building is sheathed with metal siding on the south, west, and east elevations. Wooden, drop-lap siding covers the north elevation. A vertical wood-plank door is centered in the north elevation. The building has no foundation, and can be moved throughout the property. The modern shed does not contribute to the historic district.

Corrals

Historic corral areas are adjacent to the old log barn and the modern pole barn. The fences that define the corrals are mainly post-and-pole, though some post and wire has been installed to repair deteriorating historic material. East of the pole barn, straddling Beartooth Creek and paralleling the county road, are the hay corral, chutes, round corral, and two corrals used to separate the mares from the stallion. Despite some modern repairs, the corrals retain integrity of location, setting, feeling, association, design, materials, and workmanship. Collectively, they are considered a contributing structure within the historic district.

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Fences

The post and barbwire fences on the property define specific use areas within the ranch complex, including corral areas, the garden, and agricultural fields. The fences follow the historic land use patterns in the district, and though have been repaired over the years, still are reflective of the historic period. The fences are a contributing structure within the historic district.

Agricultural fields

Sloping south of the building complex are the irrigated hay fields. Since Joe and Carrie Hilger arrived at the ranch in 1904, these nearly 80 acres have been cultivated with hay crops such as alfalfa. The fields contribute to the historic district.

Sawmill Equipment

Historically, there have been two sawmills located on the ranch property. The first, built by Joe Hilger, was located southwest of the log barn, and is no longer extant. The second was built by the second generation of Hilgers on the ranch, and provided lumber for the construction of the chicken house and granary. Though the building that housed the machinery no longer exists, heavy metal machinery associated with the mill still lies south of the pole barn and corrals. The machinery is a contributing object within the historic district.

The buildings and structures at the Joe Hilger Ranch retain a high degree of historic integrity, reflecting three distinctive periods of the ranch's history. The eight contributing buildings, ditch system, fences, corrals, and agricultural fields accurately reflect their historic designs and associations. Typical of a working ranch, there have been changes to the building complex since the period of significance, most notably the construction of four buildings. Only the residence and metal shed, however, detract from the historic character of the complex. Modern alterations to the historic buildings have been minimal, and are limited to remodeling of the interiors or replacement, in kind, of deteriorating material.

The high degree of preservation of historic buildings, structures, objects, and sites on the ranch, and the cohesive clustering of these features, set against the backdrop of the century-old working ranch, continue to strongly convey the historic agricultural associations of this property, despite the addition of four modern buildings.

Integrity Statement

Though the desert claim house is in deteriorating condition, as is the roof of the log barn, the buildings, sites, structures and objects found at the Joe and Carrie Hilger ranch retain good integrity of setting, location, association, feeling, workmanship, design and materials. Indicative of their continued importance to the functioning of the ranch, each of these features has been maintained with care. A few modern, non-contributing buildings are located within the building cluster. These include the calving shed, pole barn, and pole shed, which are constructed of compatible materials and do not detract from the overall feeling and association of the other features at the ranch. The large metal shed and modern residence are not constructed of compatible materials, but they do stand as testament to the continued operation and success of the ranch through the modern era.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT;
AGRICULTURE; ARCHITECTURE

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): G

Period(s) of Significance: 1890-1959

Significant Person(s): N/A

Significant Dates: 1890, 1904, 1905, 1908, 1935, 1942, 1950, 1952

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Joseph Hilger, Arthur Sperry, Matthew Hilger,
Nick Hilger, Lewis and Clark County Extension Service

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Joe and Carrie Hilger Ranch, located approximately 20 miles north of the city of Helena, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, for its local associations with the patterns of settlement and agricultural history. In addition, the property is eligible for listing under Criterion C, as an excellent example of rustic, vernacular architecture.

Purchased as a cash entry by Nick Hilger in 1890, the property originally consisted of 80 acres, where the building complex and agricultural fields remain today. Given to Nick's son, Joe Hilger and his wife Carrie as a wedding gift in 1904, the ranch was expanded eventually to include over 4700 acres of pasture and timberland. The success of the ranch followed the historical patterns of agricultural activity in Central Montana during the early and middle parts of the twentieth century, and continues to the present day. The rustic architectural design of the building complex and structures are evocative of period of significance, which spans from the early homesteading and settlement era, through the Great Depression and the post-World War II agricultural boom.

Early Settlement of the Helena Area

The first non-Indian settlers to come to the Helena area of Montana were miners attracted by the discovery of gold at Last Chance Gulch in 1864. At the time of this discovery, placer gold finds had dwindled at the two previous mining centers of Bannack and Virginia City. Prospectors stormed Last Chance at the first mention of the strike. The town grew quickly, and settlers arrived soon after the miners to take advantage of the booming economy. Ranches and other businesses were established and supplied foodstuffs and other essentials to the community. After mining played out during the 1870s and 1880s, the town matured into a commercial, political, and social center. The tracks of the Northern Pacific Railroad arrived in 1883, linking the remote Montana Territory and Helena, designated territorial capital in 1875, with the "States." This great milestone ushered in a period of expansion and optimism.

Judge Nicholas Hilger

One of the first to arrive in Helena was Nicholas D. Hilger. Hilger was born October 28, 1831 in Luxemburg, Germany. In 1847 he and his parents came to the U. S. and settled on a farm in Collins, New York. Nicholas attended school in nearby Buffalo, New York. In 1853, when Nicholas was 22 years old, he began traveling around the western and southern states and territories. In 1854 he decided to settle in Minnesota, and married Susanna Moersh three years later. Anxious to see the gold fields of Montana, he enlisted as a civilian newspaper correspondent for the St. Paul Pioneer Press. Hilger arrived at the present site of Helena on the 21st day of September 1864. Within a year, he secured a position as Deputy Clerk and Recorder of Edgerton County (now Lewis and Clark) at Silver City, then the seat of government of the new county.

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In the spring of 1867, Nicholas brought Susanna and their six children, via wagon train, from Minnesota to Montana. They reached Fort Benton on the last day of September of 1867. Their first year in Montana Territory was spent at the "Priests' Ranch," located near Silver City in the Prickly Pear Canyon. In the fall of 1868 Nicholas and his family moved to Helena. A year later, Nicholas was elected Lewis and Clark County Justice of the Peace and served until 1871 when he was elected Probate Judge. Nicholas served in dual roles as Probate Judge and County Judge from 1873 to 1876. During this time Susanna gave birth to their third son, Joseph, born December 8, 1870.

In 1873 the Judge bought acreage, later known as the Hilger Ranch, at the Gates of the Mountains on the Missouri River. There, Hilger built his family summer home. Though the Hilgers continued to live in Helena, they began raising cattle and putting up tons of hay on the ranch. The Judge conceived the idea of running a boat through the Gates of the Mountains for others to see the wonders and grandeur of the canyon, and began the Gates of the Mountains boat tours. Visitors would spend the night at the Hilger's summer home. In 1886 Nicholas traveled to Dubuque and had a steamboat built to his specifications. It was shipped to Townsend by rail and launched there.

A steam engineer was hired to navigate "The Rose of Helena" on her maiden voyage through the Gates of the Mountains canyon on Wednesday, June 2, 1886. After the "Rose of Helena's" first season the Judge's son, Joe Hilger, who had his steam engineer's license, was in complete charge of the boat. The excursions increased and "The Rose" made tri-weekly trips for a number of years during Judge Hilger's lifetime. The rustic home on the Missouri River served as a secluded retreat for countless tourists who enjoyed the excursions through the "Gates" and the hospitality of the resort for many years.

The Judge expanded his property in 1890 when purchased 80 acres just 2 miles to the west of his holdings on the Missouri River. The acreage was located in Section 20, Range 3 West in Township 13 North.

In 1904 the Judge dispersed his property to his three surviving sons. David was given the family home in Helena, Joe was given some cattle and the 80 acres in Section 20, and the youngest, N.D, was given the boat business and the ranch home on the Missouri River. In 1910 Nicholas lost his beloved wife Susanna. They had been married for 53 years. Judge Nicholas Hilger died in 1913 at the age of 82.

Joe and Carrie Hilger and the Establishment of the Joe Hilger Ranch

Joseph George Hilger was born in Helena, Montana on December 8, 1870. Joe was the third son of Nicholas and Susanna Hilger. He attended school in Helena and graduated from Helena Business College. He was also trained in river navigation and obtained his steam-engineers license. Joe, in charge of the ranch and cattle at the Hilger Ranch on the Missouri River, worked for his father until 1904. During the summer months he was responsible for the steamboat operation along with his ranch duties. Summers were busy. There was always ranch maintenance and a hay crop to harvest, not to mention the cord of wood used by the steamboat "Rose" for each trip through the canyon.

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Caroline (Carrie) Amelia Sperry was born April 7, 1880, on the Head Ranch close to Fort Harrison on Seven-Mile Creek. Carrie was the first born child of Datus and Rachel Sperry. Sperry and his wife were in a ranching partnership with his two brothers and their wives. The venture was successful but after about five years, Datus and his brothers dissolved the partnership and the three ranching couples went their separate ways. Rachel and Datus' share of the division was the cattle and livestock. The Sperry's bought rights to some land located in the area of the Bear Tooth Mountain (now known as the Sleeping Giant). They hired a friend and neighbor, Andreas Synness, to build their house and barn. They established a dairy farm and raised a few cattle. Ever since Carrie could remember she had worked on her family's dairy farm with Datus, her father. Carrie worked mostly outside in the garden and fields and helped her father delivering their dairy items in Helena, Marysville and Unionville. By the time she was five, she was able to handle a single horse and wagon by herself. By the time she was ten, she was milking ten cows.

Carrie attended school at Mitchell completing eight grades in just four years. Carrie left school when she was about thirteen to help on the ranch. Datus had developed asthma and Carrie was called on to do all the ranch work until her younger brother, Walter was old enough to take over. As she grew into young womanhood Carrie had the reputation of being as skilled a teamster as her father. She was also an excellent horsewoman. Carrie and her two sisters, Fannie and Bertha, would ride the wild horses they brought in from the hills around their ranch. After breaking the wild horses, the Sperry sisters would sell them for \$10 and \$15 each. Some of the fancy horses would bring as much as \$25.

Joe Hilger met his future bride when he happened to need a team and went to his neighbor, Datus Sperry, to borrow one. The Sperry Ranch was the closest neighbor, about two and a half miles west of the Gates of the Mountains Hilger place. After Joe and Carrie married in 1902, he continued working for his father. The hours were long and the pay was short. Joe and Carrie lived in a small cabin across the river. There, their first two children were born. In 1904, Joe received his legacy, the 80 acres in section 20 and 20 head of cattle. The acreage was very close to Carrie's family. Although the "desert claim house" was already on the property, the couple moved to the Sperry ranch while they built their log home and improved their acreage. Their first son, Nicholas, was born on the Sperry Ranch.

Like many other ranchers in Central Montana, the Hilgers recognized the need to acquire more land in order to support a successful farming and ranching operation. They added to their acreage in 1909, when Joe purchased 80 acres in the N2NW4 of section 20. He soon applied for a 160-acre homestead entry on surrounding land, including the N2NE4, SE4NE4, and the NE4SE4 of section 20. That homestead patent was issued in 1913. Carrie Hilger purchased an additional 80 acres in 1916, bringing their total to 400 acres, in addition to leased rangeland.¹

Joe Hilger and Arthur Sperry began construction on the new log home in the Spring of 1905. A front porch was added in 1907. The ditch system was dug to bring water from Beartooth Creek and the springs northeast of the property to the new house and hay fields. The Hilger family lived in the desert claim cabin from 1910 to 1918, while the new log house was being used as a school. With the addition of six more Hilger children, Joe was forced to build additional rooms to the back of the log home. This gave them a kitchen, dining room and another bedroom in the two-story addition, which was completed in 1918. By that year, the Beartooth School was built to accommodate all the children of the Synness, Wolstein and two Hilger families. Finally, Joe and Carrie along with their nine children were able to move back into their log home.

Joe and Carrie Hilger's log barn was built in 1908. Originally there was a rock wall in the back about 14 feet from the barn. The hay was skidded on planks through a door to the hayloft on the west side. There were no bailers at that time so the loose hay was loaded with pitchforks onto a wagon. A team of horses placed at the other end of the barn pulled the load into the loft using ropes. During this early era at the ranch, other essential buildings and structures were constructed, including the original chicken coop. A sawmill was located southwest of the barn, but was later removed.

¹ General Land Office, Patent Files, Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Files, <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/visitor/cdrom.asp>.

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From 1904 – 1919, Joe and Carrie had been extremely busy making a living for their sizeable family and expanding their ranch. Carrie devoted herself to raising the children, her garden and tending to the everyday ranch chores that kept food on the table. To keep the family afloat during the boom and bust economics of the era, Joe worked at numerous outside jobs along with his ranching. He worked for the Hauser family building the first summer home below Ox-Bow Bend on the Missouri River. Joe was also employed at the Holter sawmill. His engineering skills afforded him the opportunity to work as the steam operator at the Anson Slate Quarries and Mill. Joe excelled as a mechanic, engineer and carpenter and he took every chance offered him to put these skills to work. Joe and Carrie Hilger enjoyed the good crops, ample rainfall and prime markets for eight years prior to World War I. The War brought the Lever Act, which froze wheat prices at \$2.00 a bushel, resulting in huge amounts of crops being raised throughout the country.²

Joe Hilger Ranch 1919-1930

Joe Hilger had made an excellent choice in marrying Carrie Sperry. He not only got an amazing wife and partner, but as competent a ranch hand as you could find anywhere. By 1923 the family numbered 11 children, five sons and six daughters, (one daughter had died when she was 22 months old). Soon the older Hilger kids were as hard working as their parents. They helped with the hay, worked in the garden, fixed corrals and fences, rounded up cattle and chopped a lot of firewood. Joe and his grown sons started a sawmill business to bring in additional money and saw the boards for their intended machine shop and other outbuildings. The Joe Hilger family survived the adversities of drought, crop failures and economic depression to preserve and expand the ranch. The strong commitment of the Hilger's daughters and sons is one of the factors that set their operation apart from the many Montana ranches that went under during the 1920s.

Indeed, the decade began with severe droughts and extreme winters that resulted in the failure of numerous nearby ranches and farms, including those of Joe's brothers. Joe's younger brother, N.D. Hilger, who was given the home ranch at the Gates of the Mountains, had only mild luck at making his ranch pay off. He ran into all kinds of troubles; two floods, one caused by the bursting of the Hauser Dam on April 14, 1908 and the other by the building of Holter Dam (began 1909 and completed 1918). Holter Dam raised the lake, which flooded N.D.'s hay ground forcing him to buy hay shipped from Minnesota at \$60 per ton. N.D. was able to get most of his cattle through the winter of 1918-1919 expecting to sell in the spring. But beef prices went down and when spring came there was no market. The summers of 1919 – 1920 experienced droughts that every farmer and rancher in Montana remembers.

Joe's older brother, David Hilger, had also gone broke during the drought of 1919 – 1920. In 1881 David moved to Dog Creek in the northern part of Fergus County, east of Helena. Within a dozen years he had become a leading Montana sheep producer. He also became a leading citizen of Lewistown, building up real estate holdings and establishing interest in both the hardware business and in banking. He was one of the town's leading civic leaders and served in the Montana Legislature from Fergus County. Despite his vast holdings, the drought of 1919 left his bank and other businesses bankrupt. In 1923 he moved back to Helena and was appointed Historical Society Librarian.

The droughts, combined with the collapse of the agricultural markets after World War I, spelled disaster for farmers and ranchers throughout Central Montana. Wheat prices dropped dramatically, going from \$2.40/bushel in August 1919 to just \$1.25 two months later. The effects of the drought were felt nationally, and though President Wilson's administration extended seed loans and Governor Stewart authorized public improvement projects to increase employment, these measures had little impact on the economy. During the 1920s, continued drought and economic depression continued.³ At the Joe Hilger Ranch, these years saw little improvement to the buildings, though they did manage to acquire 420 additional acres when their stockraising homestead, made possible by the Stockraising Homestead Act of 1916, was patented in 1924.⁴

² Vivian Palladin and Jean Baucus, *Helena: An Illustrated History*, Norfolk, VA: Donning Company Publishers, 1983, p. 139

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ General Land Office, Patent Files, Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Files, <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/visitor/cdrom.asp>.

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Through the Depression and World War II

Joe and Carrie persevered and their ranch, through good management and hard work, continued to expand. Their frugality, ingenuity, and management skills factored into their ability to purchase surrounding lands as other ranchers went under. Although the stock market crash of 1929 did not immediately affect Central Montana's agricultural economy, the familiar patterns of drought, combined with the fall of national markets, took their toll. Again, Joe Hilger and his family were forced to diversify their operation to stay afloat, including taking advantage of the stands of timber in the mountains above the building complex. In 1933, they started building a machine shop with lumber from their new sawmill, which was located on the eastern edge of the property, south of the pole barn and corrals. Also that year, Joe and his grown sons piped water from a spring into the log house. Nick and Matt buried the pipe 6 feet deep in order to keep it from freezing. Two of their daughters, Florence and Bea married and left the home place during the mid-1930s. The rest of the Hilger offspring remained at home until the beginning of World War II when Nicholas, Matthew, Charles and William were called into the military. Joe Hilger passed away on March 25, 1942.

World War II ushered in a period of great prosperity for Montana agriculture, which continued through the 1950s. Indicative of the post-war prosperity, Carrie and her sons made improvements and expanded the building complex. During the mid-1940s, the lean to was built on the west end of the barn. It made space for box stalls and an entryway to the main barn. About 1948 Matthew Hilger reinforced the ridgepole and extended the barn back over the rock wall. He added new stalls and mangers and made space for bailed hay and a tack room. The hayloft was no longer used, and the main entry door was moved from the east end to the south wall of the barn.

Matt built a new granary in 1950. The granary was lined with lumber on the inside of the studs for easier removal of the grain. Bins on either side of the door that could be filled from the outside through small openings. Also that year, the brothers completed the machine shop that Joe had started in 1933. The building was extended to the south and the present roof installed. The log house was wired and had electricity provided by a generator. Nick and Matt built the new chicken house in 1952. The county extension office designed the building and its heating and ventilation system. The walls are double and insulated with sawdust. Timber from the Hilger ranch was used for all of the new buildings. Nick and Matt along with their cousins, Don and Ed Sperry, and Bryan and Dan Hilger milled the lumber at their sawmill.

In 1952 three of the girls, Viola, Hallie and Betty, along with their brother, Bill, purchased acreage in the Helena valley. Eventually Vi and Hallie married and established homes of their own. One son, Charlie, had located in Nevada, while Bill worked the ranch in the Helena valley. Betty and Dorothy were living in town on Custer Avenue. George was working on various ranches before his marriage in 1954 to Nellie Barret, the granddaughter of another pioneer family, the McElhaneys. In 1960, Carrie's sons and daughters signed a contract to have a new house built for her just south of the log home, which she and Joe had built 60 years earlier. She now had electricity and indoor plumbing. Her sons, Nick and Matt, were conducting the ranching operation on the home place, which was then a corporation. Carrie and all of her children were equal partners in the corporation.

The United States Department of Agriculture recognizes the post-war agricultural boom as a national trend that began in 1946 and lasted through 1959.⁵ The Joe Hilger Ranch is representative of that trend. During that period, the second generation of Hilgers made improvements to several existing buildings, and constructed a granary and chicken house. When building the chicken house, the Hilger sons took advantage of the county extension office services, a program that expanded nationally during the 1940s and 50s, to utilize the most efficient technology available.⁶

⁵ USDA, *History of American Agriculture: 1776-1990*, "Economic Cycles," <http://www.usda.gov/history2/text1.htm>.

⁶ USDA, *History of American Agriculture: 1776-1990*, "Agricultural Education and Extension," <http://www.usda.gov/history2/text1.htm>.

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Ranching Continues through the End of the Century

In 1964, Carrie was 84 years old and had lived on this ranch for 59 years. At this time Fannie Sperry Steele, Carrie's sister, sold her ranch at Arrasta Creek and moved into the lower level of the old log home. Carrie's sons had remodeled the interior of the old ranch house especially for their Aunt Fannie, including installing a bathroom on the first floor. The sisters were happy to once again be together if only for a few years. Their sister, Bertha, lived several miles to the east and a brother, Walter, still lived on the Sperry home ranch, a half-mile to the north. The Sperry kids had gone their separate ways for some sixty odd years. Now four of the five children on Rachel and Datus Sperry were again situated in the vicinity of the Sleeping Giant, where they had played and worked and chased wild horses, as children.

Carrie Sperry Hilger died at the age of 88 on April 6, 1968. Her five sons and six daughters, six grandsons and one granddaughter, two sisters and two brothers survived her. During her lifetime, Carrie witnessed many changes in the Helena valley. She watched a small mining camp on Last Chance Gulch grow into a thriving city. She saw the arrival of the first train into Helena. She observed the building of dams and the bursting of one dam, wagon roads replaced by highways and highways replaced by freeways. Carrie lent her initiative to the founding of a successful and enduring cattle ranch which is a working ranch to this day, 97 years after its inception. She buried an infant daughter and sent four of her sons off to war. An avid horsewoman, she was widely known for her ability to train and break horses. Visitors were always welcomed and treated to a meal or perhaps some fresh raspberries from her prolific gardens. Ranchers, while moving their cattle to winter pastures, would often stay the night at the Hilger ranch. Carrie would put them up for the night along with keeping their herd in her pasture. After serving them a good breakfast she would send them on their way. Carrie was always available to help a neighbor in need and cared for one nearby elderly homesteader for years. Carrie Sperry Hilger will always be remembered for her hospitality and her devoted friendship to her neighbors.

In 1984, the children of Joe and Carrie Hilger donated a "conservation easement" on the family ranch – placing it beyond the reach of developers forever. The land's agricultural value and pure scenic beauty will never be buried under condominiums and parking lots. Nicholas and Matthew continued ranching on a small scale through the mid-1980's and, with the help of the younger generation, were still putting up the hay and raising a few cattle. With the death of Matt in 1987, and Nick in 1988, the ranch was leased out. George and Nellie Hilger moved into the house to tend the garden and keep an eye on the property. In 1998, the ranch was sold to the Trent Synness family. Carrie's legacy to her eleven children was honesty and hard work in all dealings with all people at all times. Mostly she instilled in them a desire to be a credit to their pioneer forefathers. No doubt this, along with the devotion of all the family members, is the key to the success of the ranch.

The Joe and Carrie Hilger Ranch, established in 1904, stands as a testament to the dedication and hard work of the Hilger family. The ranch survived and continued to grow throughout the twentieth century despite drought, harsh winters, and the Depression. In addition to raising cattle, the Hilgers survived by expanding their operations to include a sawmill, and providing services to neighboring properties. As a result, they were able to purchase additional acreage when other ranchers were forced to sell. As the agricultural economy boomed during the post-war era, the second generation took over the ranch operations, made improvements to existing buildings, and constructed new buildings. These improvements to the ranch are reflective of the economic patterns of Central Montana's agriculture throughout the century.

Architectural Significance

The buildings themselves, with their rustic architectural design, log and rough-sawn lumber construction, and distinct, functional plans are excellent examples of twentieth century rustic architecture. The building cluster includes structures and buildings representative of several distinct eras of construction: the homestead-era desert claim house; the log house, barn, machine shop, fences, corrals, ditches, and agricultural fields and garden constructed during Joe Hilger's early twentieth century tenure; and the granary, chicken coop, sawmill equipment, and additions constructed by the second generation of Hilgers during the post-War agricultural boom.

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The desert claim house is a good representative of an initial dwelling on a Montana homestead. The relatively small building most likely began as a single room, and a second room was added shortly thereafter. Because the General Land Office required that the patentee show proof of residence and improvements, a small one or two-room building was often one of the first improvements to be built.

The log house and log barn are the most substantial buildings on the property, and utilize the ample wood supply from the surrounding mountains. Simple notching at the corners is reinforced on these buildings by a pipe driven through the logs to improve stability. This innovative design resulted in the buildings being structurally sound more than 90 years after their construction. The buildings also stand as testament to their importance to the functioning of the ranch. The log house needed to be large enough to house eleven children. Additions such as a front porch (later removed) and a two-story kitchen/bedroom area, constructed during the pre-World War I era, are architecturally simple, yet a combination of utility and pride. Indeed, the horizontal siding that covers the original logs on the front third of the house is clearly an effort to “dress-up” the building. This effort is representative of architectural trends such as placing false fronts on commercial buildings in order to appear more affluent. The barn, with its pocket-style stall gates, large hay loft, and massive log framing, display a architectural design with utility and endurance in mind.

The smaller outbuildings, including the outhouse, machine shop, and chicken coop, are typical of functional, rustic design. All are constructed of planks from the sawmill. The chicken coop, like others in Central Montana and throughout the colder climates of the country, faces south and displays a saltbox roofline and window openings to take advantage of warmth of the sun.

The buildings constructed during the post-War agricultural boom combine proven practical design with modern innovation and technology. The granary displays studs-out construction, which not only provides extra strength, but makes the extraction of grain from the building easier. The chicken house has doubled walls insulated with sawdust, and a ventilation system – innovations designed by the county extension office.

Criteria Consideration G:

Though the granary and chicken house were constructed during the early 1950s, and are not quite 50 years old, they are intrinsic to the significance of the ranch during the post-World War II era. They are representative of the success of the ranch during those years, and the need to modernize buildings and accommodate the increased productivity. The second generation of Hilgers to run the ranch, lead by Nick and Matt Hilger, kept the property functioning during the agricultural boom. The buildings remind visitors that the ranch continued to grow and prosper through the century, largely because Nick and Matt’s dedication. They were constructed using timber harvested from the ranch land, and milled on-site. The granary is an excellent example of the typical, rustic design, with its studs-out construction. The chicken house was designed by the county extension office, and with its insulation and ventilation systems, is representative the trend to modernize agricultural buildings after the war. For these reasons, the granary and chicken house are extremely important to the overall significance of the district, and are considered contributing buildings within the district.

Joe and Carrie Hilger Ranch

Name of Property

Lewis and Clark, MT

County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

See continuation sheet

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 -- Specify Repository: Montana Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 80

| UTM References: | Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
|-----------------|-------|----------|-----------|
| A | 12 | 423020 | 5191460 |
| B | 12 | 423420 | 5191460 |
| C | 12 | 423420 | 5190645 |
| D | 12 | 423020 | 5190645 |

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): SW1/4NE1/4 and the NW1/4SE1/4 of section 20, T13N, R3W

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property includes the original 80-acre cash entry for the property, consisting of the SW1/4NE1/4 and the NW1/4SE1/4 of Section 20, Township 13 North, Range 3 West.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn to include the building cluster, agricultural fields, and timberland that reflect the historic integrity of the ranch. These original 80 acres of the ranch contribute to the feeling, setting, and association of the historic property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Carol Synness

organization:

date: December 20, 2000

street & number: 1230 Poplar

telephone:

city or town: Helena

state: MT zip code: 59601

name/title: Kate Hampton, NR Coordinator

organization: MT SHPO

date: December 20, 2000

street & number: 1410 8th Ave.

telephone: (406) 444-3647

city or town: Helena

state: MT zip code: 59620

Property Owner

name/title: Trent and Nola Synness/Sleeping Giant Ranch L.C.

street & number: P.O. Box 6575

telephone:

city or town: Helena

state: MT zip code: 59604

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Information on the family of Joe and Carrie Hilger was obtained from three principal sources:

1. Author's interviews with the Hilger descendents, Hallie Hilger, Alexander, Betty Hilger, Bryan Hilger and Viola Hilger Nelson.
2. Numerous scrapbook articles obtained from Bryan Hilger and Viola Hilger Nelson. Most of these articles are unidentified newspaper clippings and magazine articles.
3. The vertical files of the Montana Historical Library, which contains Hilger obituaries and newspaper articles from 1923 through 1937. David Hilger, the Librarian of the Historical Society died in 1937.

Taped audio interviews with Fannie Sperry Steele were supplied by Hallie Hilger Alexander, Sheryl Monroe and Yuana Ukolov, all nieces of Fannie. The tapes are not dated, but were taped when Fannie lived in the Hilger log house from 1968 to 1978. The interviewer was a close neighbor of Fannie's.

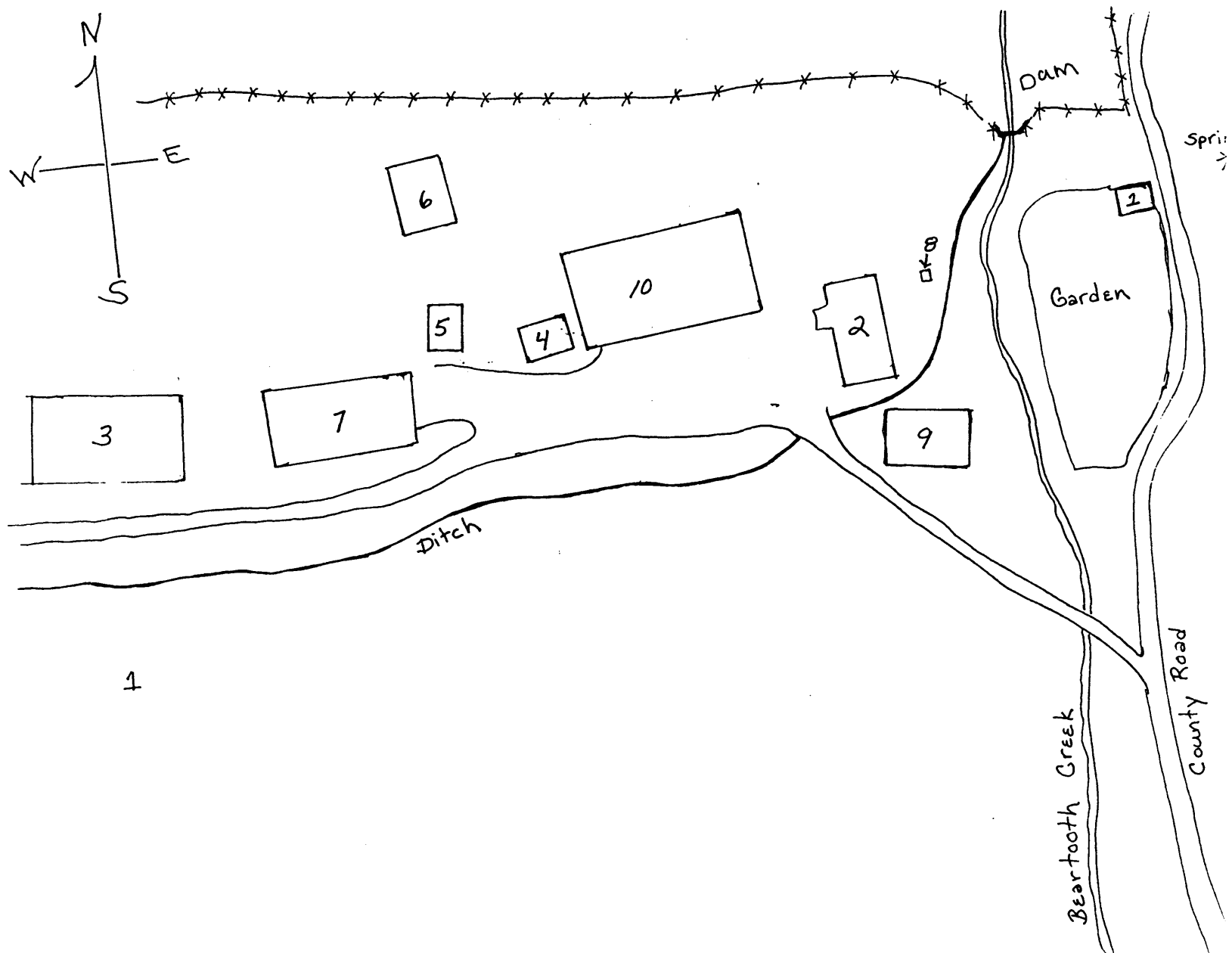
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|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Desert Claim House | 6. Chicken House |
| 2. Log Residence | 7. Machine Shop |
| 3. Barn | 8. Outhouse |
| 4. Original Chicken Coop | 9. Modern Residence |
| 5. Granary | |

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