

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 96000118

Date Listed: 2/23/96

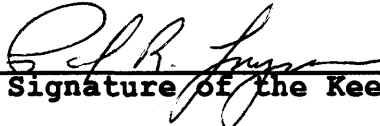
Cross Ranch Headquarters
Property Name

Powder River
County

MT
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

2/23/96
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Acreage:

The correct acreage for the listed property is: one acre.

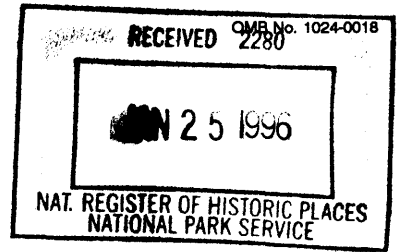
Address:

The location address is amended to read: East of MT 59, roughly 26 miles South of Broadus.

This information was confirmed with Cher Jiusto of the MT SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)



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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Cross Ranch Headquarters

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number:

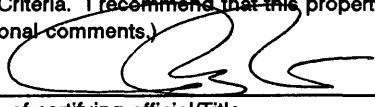
not for publication: n/a
vicinity: x

city/town: Broadus

state: Montana code: 075 county: Powder River code: zip code: 59314

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally X statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 _____ Date 12-18-95

Signature of certifying official/Title _____
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 _____

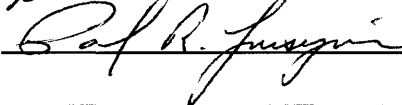
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

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

2/23/96

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing Noncontributing

Category of Property: Buildings

 3 building(s)
 sites
 structures
 objects

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

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

 3 TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

Current Functions:

Domestic: single and multiple dwelling

Domestic: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Materials:

Other: Rustic
French Colonial

foundation: concrete
walls: log
roof: wood shingle
other: n/a

Narrative Description

The Cross Ranch Headquarters consists of three log buildings situated on approximately one acre in Powder River County near the confluence of Ranch Creek and the Little Powder River. The buildings are huddled in the broad fertile valley of Ranch Creek. To the east, at the head of Ranch Creek, are the hills where the pine logs were harvested to build the ranch buildings. The surrounding country is rough grazing country, a part of the short grass prairie cattlemen found so enticing in the 1880s. The going was rough in those days, as many creeks drain into the Powder River and its tributaries, making travel difficult. When the ground was wet, traffic really slowed down as the "gumbo rolled" (this is Maude Beach's term for what happens when this particular type of soil and moisture meet). Nevertheless, this was prime country for the open range stockman and the Cross Ranch Headquarters, overlooking the Little Powder River was in an especially pretty setting some described as "parklike."

The largest structure is Biddle Lodge, constructed by Spencer Fullerton Baird Biddle in 1893 (date is on the building), soon after purchasing the Cross Ranch from E.H. Johnson and W.W. Graham (bill of sale 12/9/1892). The lodge is a two story log home eighteen feet wide and forty-six feet long. An eight foot wide porch wraps around the entire structure. The gable roof extends to shelter the porch, giving the roof line a gable-on-hip appearance. The overall look is similar to homes in the Tidewater South Tradition and rural French Colonial houses with wide porches that probably originated in the West Indies. These styles are more suited to mild climates than Montana's extreme temperatures, but Mr. and Mrs. Biddle did not usually spend winters in Montana, so that may explain the unusual design of the lodge. The fact that Spencer gave his new wife a choice of Paris or Montana may also have something to do with it. Perhaps he wanted to give the Montana location a fighting chance.

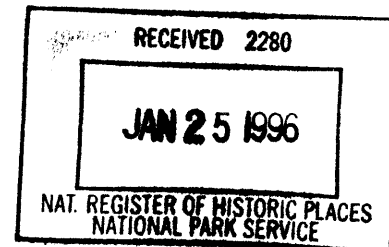
The lodge is constructed of 12" pine logs harvested at the head of Ranch Creek on the Cross Ranch property. The logs are flat on three sides with the round side on the exterior. They were notched, stacked horizontally and nailed to vertical supports at approximately eight foot intervals to create eighteen foot high walls (piece-sur-piece construction). There is one three foot

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eight inch wide entry door midway on the east side of the lodge. All the windows are the same size and style- five feet wide, three feet high sliding windows with four equal panes in each slider. The east side has two windows, each eight feet from the central door, three and one half feet up the wall. Each end of the first floor has a window centered at the same height. The west side has three windows at the same height, evenly spaced along the wall. Upstairs, each gable end has one centered window. The eight foot wrap-around porch is supported by posts at six foot intervals. The original posts were rotting and were replaced in the last ten years. The large roof has been re-roofed with asphalt shingles. The foundation was originally native rock and has been replaced with concrete.

The first floor interior was originally divided in half for living/office and sleeping areas. There was no kitchen. The cookhouse served that purpose. There is a large fireplace in the southeast corner of the lodge. It appears to be cherry wood and has had some smoke damage in the last few years. Nevertheless, it adds an elegant touch to the rustic lodge. The floors are fir boards laid on log stringers. The fir probably came from the Ashland area to the west. Originally, the spacious upstairs was only accessible by a trap door and was used for storage. Today, the first floor is divided into kitchen, living and bathroom areas. The upstairs is reached by a stairway installed in the southwest corner in about 1920 when the Lodge was used as a store. There are now eight double beds in the upstairs area. The Lodge is used by the Rumph family to house hunters in season. The fir floor in the kitchen area in the north half of the lodge was in poor condition and has been replaced with pine. Other than these changes, the Lodge remains unaltered and is in good repair.

The Cookhouse is of similar piece-sur-piece construction, and the same vintage as the Lodge. It faces the lodge and runs parallel to it. It is an eighteen by fifty foot one-story structure with ten foot high walls. There are three forty-four inch four-panel doors on the west side. One is eight feet from the north end, one eight feet from the south end and the "middle" one is eight feet north of the south door. There is one sliding window (the same as the lodge windows) on this side. It is four feet up the wall five feet north of the "middle" door. There is an identical window centered on each end. The east side has one forty-four inch four-panel door fourteen feet from the south end and three of the sliding windows, spaced about thirteen feet apart. The interior is divided roughly in thirds, with the center used as cooking/living area. The north end has a bathroom and sleeping area and the south end is also a bedroom. This building was originally used as a cookhouse and is now used seasonally for hunters and other visitors. The fir floors have been replaced with pine, the gable roof has corrugated metal roofing, and the foundation has been repaired with concrete. The cookhouse is otherwise unaltered, and is well-maintained.

The bunkhouse is located south of the cookhouse and is in worse repair than the other two buildings. It was constructed at about the same time as the other two. It is forty feet long and eighteen feet wide. The walls are about seven feet high and the foundation has not been repaired as the others have. There are two three-foot door openings on the west side, one five foot by thirty inch window opening on the south end and two rough window openings on the east side about four and one half feet from the north end. It has corrugated metal on the gable roof. The wood floor has nearly deteriorated and the floor is primarily dirt. There are plans to repair this building, although it may involve taking it apart, pouring a new foundation and reassembling it.

The cookhouse and bunkhouse were built after the lodge and some other outbuildings (no longer in existence) were constructed. In the collection of historic photos (all undated), a summer photo shows the lodge and outbuildings. The cookhouse and bunkhouse appear in a winter photo of about the same time period, so they were evidently constructed in the fall of 1893, after the lodge was finished. The barns were torn down in the 1970s, so the lodge, bunkhouse and cookhouse are the only 1893 buildings remaining.

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Integrity

The integrity of the three buildings is intact and they are set apart because of their age and the fact that they are relatively unaltered and are not used year round. There are other ranch buildings in the vicinity that are not included in this nomination because they were built at various times and have been altered over the years so that they would not even be considered contributing buildings. However, the historic property boundaries encompass only the three historic Biddle buildings.

The three log structures, although near the other buildings, are set apart by style, usage and integrity, and represent the Cross Ranch Headquarters as it was in 1893. The three are grouped together, northeast of the other buildings. The setting, in a wide fertile valley, remains much the same, with the addition of some large cottonwoods that were not present when the headquarters was built. The Little Powder River has also changed course since 1893. It once flowed about 100 yards to the west of the Lodge, and is now about a half mile away.

Biddle originally purchased about 400 acres, which included the headquarters site and the bottoms along Ranch Creek where he had irrigated hayfields. He added to this over the years and there were approximately 3000 deeded acres when he sold to Bob Eccles in 1915.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, B, C

Areas of Significance: Agriculture, Architecture

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1893-1915

Significant Person(s): Spencer F.B. Biddle

Significant Dates: 1893

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Cross Ranch Headquarters is significant for listing in the National Register of Historic Places according to Criterion A, for its associations with late 19th Century expansion of the livestock frontier in Powder River country. The Cross Ranch is located near the "Texas Trail", the way north for the great 1880s cattle drives from Texas and other regions to the south. The ranch gains National Register significance according to Criterion B for its associations with Spencer Fullerton Baird Biddle. Biddle is typical of the wealthy investors who came into Montana Territory in the 1880s for the "free grass" and for the adventure of the open range. He is unique in that he bought the Cross Ranch after the bad winter of 1886-87, when many other investors in the cattle business left the Montana Territory. Biddle began ranching in Montana in 1881 and managed a successful operation between 1893 and 1915 from the Cross Ranch Headquarters near the confluence of Ranch Creek and the Little Powder River.

The unusual size and design of the 1893 Cross Ranch buildings add to the significance of this property. Built at a time when most ranch architecture on the Eastern Montana plains consisted of small, low log structures, the Cross Ranch residence is noteworthy in a statewide context, as a rare example of French Colonial style, furthering its National Register eligibility according to Criterion C.

Historical Significance

Although he came from a wealthy Philadelphia family, Spencer Fullerton Baird Biddle found "big medicine" in the Powder River country of southeastern Montana. During the thirty-four years he ranched in Montana he traveled the world and visited with his family in Philadelphia, but he always retained his involvement in the ranching business. The headquarters he built for the Cross Ranch might not have been as elaborate if he had not been trying to convince his wife to share what he had found in Montana.

Spencer Fullerton Baird Biddle was born in Philadelphia in 1859. He was named for his uncle, Spencer Fullerton Baird, the second curator of the Smithsonian. His father was a West Point graduate and was Adjutant General of the Pennsylvania Reserves. Spencer graduated from the Naval Academy in 1878 at the age of nineteen and served two years aboard the U.S.S. Guinabang in the Mediterranean. In 1881, Biddle and Mr. William Ferdon bought a ranch at the mouth of Horse Creek on the Powder River in Montana Territory. Their activities were reported in the Miles City newspaper, The Yellowstone Journal. "Messrs. Ferdon & Biddle have heretofore run to Short Horn blood, but this year have branched off to the Hereford, believing them to be the best strains, all things considered." ¹

In 1885, Mr. Biddle became one of the first members of the powerful Montana Stockgrowers Association. He was also a representative from Custer County, which at that time encompassed all of southeastern Montana, to the 1885 "Cowboy Legislature." This was the year that the open range stockmen ruled in Helena. The legislature passed a law outlawing branding at any time except during the roundup season, and created a territorial veterinary surgeon who could quarantine cattle. They also established the Board of Stock Commissioners, which could conduct brand inspection at marketing points and supervise the range industry in general. Biddle was a part of all these heady early days of the ranching fraternity in southeastern Montana.

¹Yellowstone Journal, 6/30/1885.

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Biddle and Ferdon dissolved their partnership in 1892 when Ferdon married, and Biddle purchased the Cross Ranch from E.H. Johnson (Miles City's first mayor) and W.W. Graham. The Cross brand came with the ranch and that name has clung to the property over the years. Biddle did not use the Cross brand because, at the time, he suspected rustlers were finding it easy to convert to the windowpane brand they were using. Biddle used the Seven O L brand. Biddle is listed in the brand book as the Manager of the Biddle Cattle Company and, although he had silent partners in the east (probably family members), he effectively ran the ranch. He brought in Scottish Highlander cattle, which he had seen on his travels, completed an irrigation system and had several hundred acres of meadowland, a portion of which was alfalfa.²

Soon after buying the Cross Ranch, Biddle married a divorcee, Molly Scott, in Philadelphia. The family story is that he told her they could live on a ranch in Montana or in Paris, France. The Lodge was built so that Biddle would have a suitable home in Montana for his new wife. He even brought "a colored man and his wife to cook and make her comfortable and though they spent their entire time in trying to do it, she was not greatly enthused with cattle ranching..."³ Biddle spent less and less time at the ranch, but his impact was lasting. He was an inventor and designed the "Biddle Tent," a shelter one man could use out on the range. He also built a "horse restraint" (photo attached) for horse shoeing and other activities. He was a blacksmith and, according to some accounts, built much of the Lodge himself. Some of his employees worked for him the entire thirty-four years he ranched in Montana. He referred to the Powder River Country as his "Elixir of Life."

Biddle served as a First Lieutenant on the USS Fish Hawk during the Spanish American War and wanted to re-enlist when the First World War broke out. He was turned down because of blindness in one eye and a heart condition, but he served Navy Intelligence in Paris with distinction. After leaving the ranch, he lived in Paris and collected wonderful objects d'art. Spencer F.B. Biddle died in Paris April 1, 1929.

Biddle sold the ranch in 1915 to Bob Eccles, who ran sheep and cattle. In 1941, Mrs. Eccles sold the ranch to W. D. Fortner who raised nine children and Hereford and Angus cattle. In 1972, Fortner sold the ranch to Roland Rumph. Most of the repairs mentioned have been done since then. The Rumphs use the three headquarters buildings for hunters and guests and storage, but not as permanent residences.

Architectural Significance

The Cross Ranch Headquarters is highly significant for its architectural values. Design of the Lodge is quite unusual on the Montana frontiers, both for its French Colonial style design, and as a surviving representative of the piece-sur-piece method of log construction. Common to the French colonies in eastern North America, the French Colonial style was seen both in urban and rural areas. While the inspiration for Biddle's use of French Colonial design is unknown, however, the Biddle Lodge is a strong example. Such elements as the dual-pitched hipped roof and the integral porch with slender wooden columns, which fully wraps the building clearly reflect the style. In addition, the piece-sur-piece construction was an important method of log construction, seen in particular, in very early frontier situations and in ethnic settings. This well preserved example is extremely important on the eastern Montana cattle frontiers.

Locals referred to the Lodge as "The White House," because of its imposing size compared to the typical prairie log structures which were small and low to the ground. The porch added a graceful and extravagant touch seen in few buildings in the Powder River Country in the late 1800s (or even today). The size of the cookhouse and bunkhouse was also unusual for those days.

²Beach, Maude, Faded Hoofprints – Bygone Dreams, p. 94.

³Beach, p. 95.

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Biddle kept seven or eight men on year round while most ranches didn't keep that many hands during the winter. That these buildings are in good condition and relatively unaltered is both unusual and fortunate. The three 1893 structures give a definite sense that this was a special and important place. The Rumph family seems committed to their preservation and is interested in preserving their integrity as historic buildings, a reminder of those early years on Montana's livestock frontier.

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:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
X Other - Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property:

Table with 4 columns: UTM References, Zone, Easting, Northing. Rows A, B, C, D.

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): SE 1/4, SW 1/4, NW 1/4 Section 35, T8S, R52E

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries for the Cross Ranch Headquarters historic property are delineated on the accompanying USGS topographic map.

Boundary Justification

The historic property boundary is drawn to encompass the three original log Cross Ranch Headquarters buildings, which comprised the heart of this historic Biddle Ranch as it existed in 1893.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kathy Doeden
organization:
street & number: Box 1297
city or town: Miles City
date: August 1994
telephone: (406) 232-6733
state: MT zip code:

Property Owner

name/title: Roland and Erma Rumph, Tom Riggs
street & number: Cross Ranch
city or town: Biddle
telephone:
state: MT zip code: 59314

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beach, Maude L., compiler, Robert L. Thaden Jr., Ed., *Faded Hoofprints - Bygone Dreams*, Benchmark Printing and Copying, Billings, MT., 1989.

Dick, Helene, Interview, August 7, 1994, notes in Kathy Doeden's files, Miles City, MT.

McAlester, Virginia & Lee, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1990.

Powder River County Deed Records. Clerk and Recorder's Office.

----- Tax Records. County Assessor's Office.

Powder River County Families *Echoing Footsteps* with an introduction by Fred J. Toman, Biddle, MT, 1967.

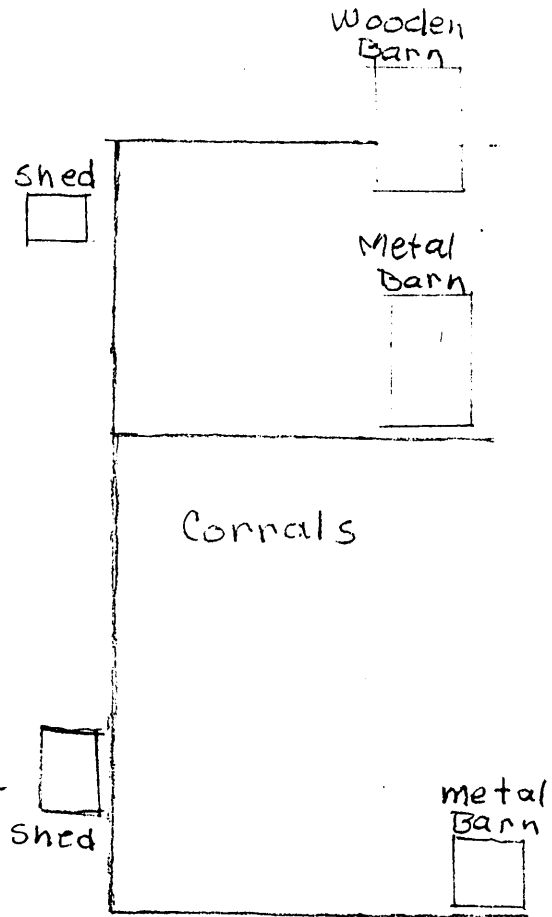
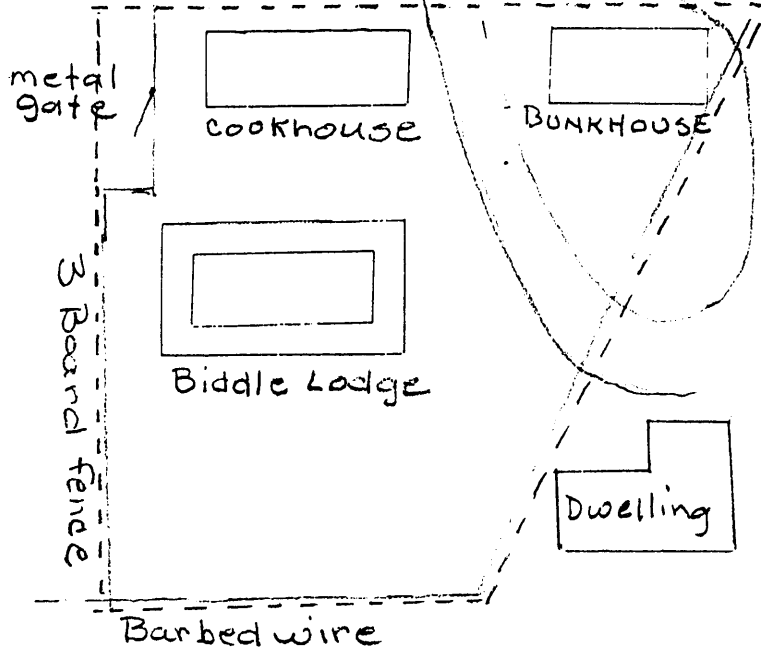
Rumph, Erma, Interview, July 21, 1994, notes in Kathy Doeden's files, Miles City MT.

Yellowstone Journal, Miles City, MT, 6/30/1885, 7/10/1885, 7/26/1885.

Historic photographs, unknown photographer, Biddle Ranch Collection, Powder River County Museum, Broadus, MT.

CROSS RANCH HEADQUARTERS POWDER RIVER CO.

DRIVEWAY



N ←

--- nominated area