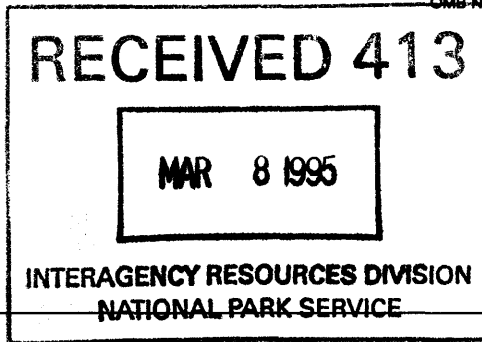


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



1. Name of Property

historic name: Stearns Hall

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: Two miles north of junction of State Hwy 200 and Hwy 434

not for publication: N/A
vicinity: x

city/town: Wolf Creek

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Lewis and Clark code: 049

zip code: 59648

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 statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Marilyn DeJoy MT SHPO 2-17-95
Signature of certifying official/Title 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):

for
Elson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action
4-7-95

Entered in the
National Register

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public-local	Number of Resources within Property	
Category of Property: Building	Contributing	Noncontributing
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A	<u> 2 </u>	<u> 0 </u> building(s)
	<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> sites
	<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> structures
	<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> objects
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A	<u> 2 </u>	<u> 0 </u> TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

Social: meeting hall
Recreation: music facility, sports facility, auditorium

Current Functions:

Vacant/not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Other: Gambrel Roof Barn

Materials:

foundation: stone/concrete
walls: WOOD
roof: WOOD
other: n/a

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Completed in 1911, Stearns Hall is a one and a half story balloon-framed barn form building. The building has an east-west orientation with the main facade facing east. The hall has a rectangular massing and gambrel roof. The eaves have a box cornice and the roof is finished with cut wooden shingles. The entire exterior of the building is covered with narrow lap siding. The building rests on a foundation of native stone and concrete pad and has a raised wooden water table.

The main facade, east elevation, has a central entrance with a wooden panel door and two window openings placed symmetrically above it which are currently boarded over. Originally, a wooden porch spanned the width of the facade but due to deterioration the porch was replaced with a cement pad.(alteration estimated late 1960s).

The south elevation originally had three window placements with high fixed 3-pane units but today only two are visible. The original narrow lap siding evident around the rest of the building is covered on the south elevation with asphalt shingles.

The rear, west elevation, has a secondary entrance at the southwest corner with a wooden panel door and a cement stoop. There is one window opening offset on the upper level and evidence of another window placement on the lower level that is boarded over.

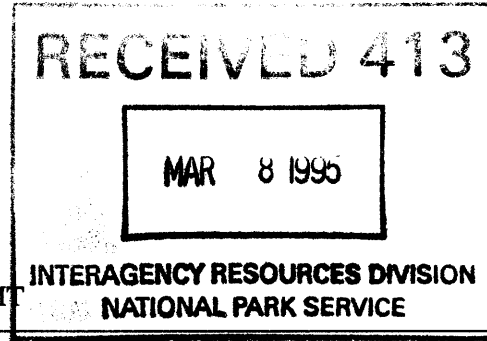
The north elevation was altered within a year of construction. Along the north side, a one-story shed roof addition was added that runs the length of the building. There is an entrance on the northwest corner and three tall window placements evenly spaced and now boarded over.

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Two original chimneys still project above the roofline, one along the rear of the roof and one along the north wall of the addition. Evidence of a third chimney is marked by a stove pipe near the ridge of the roof.

On the interior, the building was originally divided into two floors but was altered soon after construction to basically create a single large open space to facilitate community activities. When the north side addition was added, the second floor was removed allowing the ceiling to extend to the gambrel roof. The flooring is fir and the walls finished with 3" milled slats. Three metal cables have been installed across the main room to provide structural support.

Opening from the main room to the north side addition was a stage area which is now boarded up. The walls in the addition are wide wooden planks covered with either tar paper or beaverboard. The floor is covered with 6" unfinished wooden planks. There is a partial chimney and possible water pipe against the north wall and in the northwest corner there are remnants of an old wood stove.

West of the main building stand an outhouse and the remains of another unidentified structure. The outhouse has a gable roof, clapboard siding, corner boards, and two small vent windows. It has two stalls with wood flooring and one wooden panel door still remains.

Stearns Hall faces unimproved Route 434 between Wolf Creek and Augusta, Montana. The building sits alongside Gillette Ditch which empties into the Middle Fork of the Dearborn River. The building is located in a river flood plain, in a high plains ranching environment.

Integrity

Overall, Stearns Hall is in poor shape. The siding is falling, shingles crumbling, windows are broken, the roof leaks, and there are holes in the walls, but structurally the building remains sound. Despite its poor condition, Stearns Hall retains a large measure of its original integrity, with design, materials, and workmanship all intact and reflective of the 1911-1912 period when the building was constructed and put into use. Little has been added to deter from the Hall's high level of integrity. The only alterations of consequence are the addition of asphalt shingles on the south elevation (which are dropping off now of their own accord), and the removal of the front porch deck.

The integrity is enhanced by the pristine quality of the setting -- Stearns Hall remains at the original site and the setting remains virtually unchanged. The historic feeling of the property is strong, (outbuildings remain in association although deteriorated) and associations with the surrounding rural community are strongly conveyed. Today, the Hall is the only building left standing in Stearns to reflect the development and disintegration of the surrounding community.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C Areas of Significance: Entertainment/Recreation; Exploration/Settlement
Architecture

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A Period(s) of Significance: 1911-1921

Significant Person(s): N/A Significant Dates: 1911

Cultural Affiliation: N/A Architect/Builder: unknown

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Stearns Hall is historically significant for the important role it played in the community's social life and also as the sole remaining building of the town which is representative of the nation's last homestead boom. Thus Stearns Hall qualifies for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A for its significant contributions in the areas of Entertainment/Recreation and Exploration/Settlement.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The town of Stearns, Montana emerged about 1890 as growing numbers of settlers staked claims to land between Wolf Creek and Augusta under the Original Homestead Act. While the population around Stearns remained small, and spread out on surrounding ranches and farms, like many rural towns Stearns acted as a focal point for community activity. By 1900 the community could boast a school and a post office, neither of which are standing today.

Between 1900-1910 Montana's population steadily increased from 243,000 to 376,000. During this same period the Federal Government was committing itself to a long term program of building large scale irrigation projects, such as the Sun River Project, carried out between 1904-1906. While irrigation projects did help many homesteaders the size of the land allotment remained an important issue. In Montana's semi-arid environment small scale dry-land farming was not practical. In 1909, after realizing 160 acres of land was insufficient for farming in the West Congress enacted the Enlarged Homestead Act(EHA), which provided up to 320 acres of land. The Federal Government in committing itself to large scale irrigation projects and enacting the EHA helped foster conditions favorable to the homestead boom that followed.

Between 1909-1917 Montana experienced its greatest homestead boom. In 1910 the United States Census reported 376,000 residents in Montana in 1920 it reported 548,000 residents but the boom had collapsed. By 1918 most of the state was feeling the effects of a drought and the state's growth rate was in decline.

There were many important factors contributing to the homestead boom after 1909. Among these contributing factors were federal policies, including the EHA, improved dry-land farming techniques, and a massive promotional campaign carried out by the Milwaukee Road, Great Northern, and Northern Pacific Railroads. Other factors included ample rainfall and high grain prices. These factors along with many others created conditions favorable to the homestead boom, but changing environmental conditions and America's entrance into World War I brought the boom to an end.

The area around Stearns was not missed by the influx of homesteaders. Most of the new arrivals came to establish a home and try their hand at farming. They came with families and were used to an active social life. By 1910 Stearns had grown sufficiently for area residents to build a community hall.

For the ten years that Stearns Hall operated while the town of Stearns was in existence(1911-1921) it played a central role in the community's social life. Between 1909-1923 settlers filed nearly 115,000 homestead claims in Montana, and as one historian notes "where settlement was sufficiently compact, neighbors maintained an active social life centering on the community hall."(Malone, p.246)

Local members of the Modern Woodmen of America (MWA) were primarily responsible for construction of Stearns Hall. The MWA was originally organized by Joseph Cullen Root in 1883 in Lyons, Iowa. Reflecting a rise of fraternal benefit organizations in the United States following the Civil War years, the MWA provided life insurance to its members who

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also practiced fraternal activities, including secret rites and community service. These fraternal benefits orders played an important role in the growth of the insurance industry, particularly by providing coverage to working class beneficiaries. The Modern Woodmen of America and affiliated organizations could be found in Montana by 1890 and by 1900 Woodmen groups could be found in all of Montana's larger cities. While research has not identified a charter for a MWA camp in Stearns, a local diary and local history establish their presence in the area.

Members of the Stearns MWA took the initiative in building Stearns Hall but relied heavily on community involvement and support to complete the project. The hall was built between 1910-1911 on property left in trust to the community by F.M. Stowe, a prominent area rancher. The lumber for the building was milled locally from logs obtained from the south fork of the Dearborn River. The foundation was laid by Frank Reinig, the father of Roy a member of the Stearns MWA. An interesting note about another MWA member, Ed Borhos, his mother served as post master of Stearns and was an active member in the Grand Circle, Women of Woodcraft an auxiliary of the MWA.

The hall was officially opened with the St. Patrick's Day dance in March 1911. In 1912 the hall was modified when the second floor was removed to allow basketball to be played inside. Over the next eighty odd years the hall has served many purposes including dance hall, meeting hall, gymnasium, and dormitory and dining room for the construction crew working on Highway 200 over Rogers Pass in the early 1940s. Over the past twenty years the hall has been in decline and only used occasionally, but with some work the hall could again function as an active community center.

Between 1911-1921 Stearns Hall functioned as the center of community social activity. But in 1917 the rains that help create the homestead boom diminished and the boom collapsed. In 1920, three years into the drought, the United States Census contains a notation explaining the decline population as a result of the lack of rain. Although the report states that the people would return with the rain the drought persisted and many people never returned.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Stearns Hall is a good example of a vernacular gambrel-roofed barn form. The gambrel-roofed barn was, and still is, a popular form built across the country. In rural settings, this form was employed widely for construction of large buildings, the roof configuration a response to the need to span the large building mass. In this case, the basic form was applied to a community hall. Built by locals who likely had some experience with barn raising, the design aptly reflects the agricultural base to the community. It is typically simple, a rectangular mass capped with a gambrel roof. The building retains excellent integrity, despite its poor condition. All historic fabric and design elements are intact, affording an excellent understanding of the building method and historic usage.

A product of America's last homestead boom, Stearns Hall functioned for many years as the center of social life for area residents. But, as the town declined in the 1920s, so too did the hall. While the drought drove many people away the automobile was making it much easier to travel to Wolf Creek and Augusta, thus lessening the importance of Stearns. Stearns Hall marks that community history, representing the countless little towns and settlements that rose and fell with America's last homestead boom.

Stearns Hall
Name of Property

Lewis and Clark, Montana
County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

Alt, Mrs. Diary in possession of Barb McDonough, Stearns Hall Trustee, Wolf Creek, Montana.
Barrett, Arthur, Jr. "Woodmen of the World Assured Life Association: A Brief and Condensed History Covering the Years 1890-1990."
"Fraternalism and the Woodmen of the World: A Brief History." Published by Woodmen of the World/Omaha Woodmen Life Insurance Society.
Lang, William and Michael Malone, Richard Roeder, Montana: A History of Two Centuries, Revised Ed., University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1991.
Lewis and Clark County Records, Helena County Courthouse.
Lutz, Dennis, Montana Post Offices and Post Masters, Montana Chapter No.1 National Association of Postmasters of the United States, 1986.
Progressive Men of the State of Montana,
United States Census Reports, (1910,1920).

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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: approximately 8 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	12	403320	5229000
B	12	403320	5228680
C	12	403510	5228680

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): SW 1/4, SW 1/4, SW 1/4 of Section 20, T17N, R5W.

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary for the property is defined on the accompanying USGS map.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with Stearns Hall.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: John Phillips, History Intern
organization: SHPO date: Oct. 27, 1994
street & number: 1410 8th Ave. telephone: 406-444-7715
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59620

Property Owner

name/title: Barb McDonough and Herb Ingersoll, Stearns Hall Trustees
street & number: Dearborn Route telephone: 406-235-4205
city or town: Wolf Creek state: MT zip code: 59648