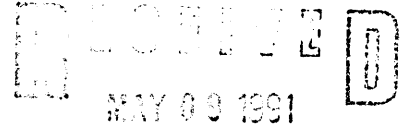


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

1. Name of Property

historic name: Bitter Root Cooperative Creamery

other name/site number: Turner Engineering

2. Location

street & number: 3730 Eastside Highway

not for publication: n/a  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

city/town: Stevensville

state: Montana    code: MT    county: Ravalli    code: 081    zip code: 59870

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

| Contributing | Noncontributing   |
|--------------|-------------------|
| <u>  2  </u> | _____ building(s) |
| _____        | _____ sites       |
| _____        | _____ structures  |
| _____        | _____ objects     |
| <u>  2  </u> | _____ Total       |

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

Name of related multiple property listing: Historic Resources of Stevensville, Montana: 1866-1941.

**4. 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.

Maude Sharp MT SHPO 4-19-91  
Signature of certifying official Date

MONTANA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE  
State or Federal agency and 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

\_\_\_ See Continuation Sheet

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

~~State~~  
**National Register**

entered in the National Register Alonzo Egan 6/19/91  
\_\_\_\_\_  
See Continuation Sheet

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ See Continuation Sheet

\_\_\_ removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ See Continuation Sheet

\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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## 6. Function or Use

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Historic: Agriculture/Processing

Current: Commerce/Professional

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## 7. Description

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Architectural Classification: Other: Vernacular Industrial Block

Materials:        foundation: concrete  
                  walls: concrete  
                  roof: metal

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Bitter Root Cooperative Creamery is composed of two separate buildings that were linked by a shared addition built after the historic period. The original building, which is located at the northern end of the property along the East Side Highway, was built in 1911; the southern building was added around 1920; and the central connecting unit was completed after 1944.

The original creamery building is a single-story, gable-roofed, rectangular (32'x 108'), cast concrete block building. The decorative cast concrete blocks are of a rock-faced design and have been painted gray. The roof is covered with corrugated metal, although it was sheathed in wooden shingles when first built. Two large metal ventilators are located at the apex of the roof mid-way between the ends and the center. The ventilators are made of decorative pressed metal construction and are a major character-defining element of the building. A round metal chimney is set at the far west end on the south side of the peak.

The principal facade is oriented toward the East Side Highway to the north, and has a large, gabled wall dormer set just to the east of center marking what was the primary entrance. The dormer windows and some of the first floor windows have been covered with plywood. There are six, irregularly spaced, 1-over-1 double hung-windows located along the eastern three-quarters of the main floor. The windows have concrete lintels and sills. An entrance door is located between the first two windows on the east. Two additional doorways, one between the third and fourth and one between the fourth and fifth windows have been infilled. A sign between the third and fourth windows reads "Turner Engineering".

The east elevation of the original building features a glazed entry door with a 2-light transom. In the upper portion of the gable end is a centered 1-over-1 double-hung window and a smaller 6-over-1 double-hung window is located south of center. A casement window has been added at the north side of this end wall. On the west elevation, the gable end has been covered with vertical wood. Historic photographs indicate that there were windows in this gable end. An entrance door is located to the south of center. The pair of fixed, single-light windows located between the door and the south wall replace earlier 1-over-1 double-hung units. A metal awning extends across the south half of the this wall.

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Immediately to the south of the original building is the connecting addition that joins the original 1911 cast concrete block building with the ca. 1920 brick building. The upper story of this addition is covered with asbestos shingles while the lower section is of multi-colored brick. The wall surface is broken by a pair of large vents. The ground floor is accessed by a brick loading dock with a single freight door.

The ca. 1920 building is a two-story, brick bearing-wall structure that was originally flat-roofed, but now has a low gabled roof. The walls are laid up in common bond and the cornice is enlivened with decorative corbelling. Regularly spaced 1-over-1, double-hung windows with brick relieving arches light the second floor, and there is an identical window on the east side of the ground floor. A corrugated metal loading shed has been added across the east side of this building and the east side of the connecting addition. Several shed-roofed, corrugated metal additions without doors and windows have been added to the south elevation during recent years. Exterior wooden stairs lead from the corner of the building along the south wall to provide access to the second story. The south elevation is divided into three bays by four pilasters.

The historic Bitter Root Creamery buildings retain a moderate to high degree of architectural integrity. The two buildings constructed in 1911 and ca. 1920 remain intact. At some time after 1944, however, they were joined together by an incompatible, noncontributing addition to form one large building. A gabled roof has also been added to the two-story brick section. Doors on the principal facade of the 1911 building have been infilled; the windows in the gable end of the west elevation and the dormer have been covered. The south elevation has been altered by the construction of a metal shed-roofed addition and the walkway for second-story access. No significant historic fabric remains exposed on the interior of these buildings. Despite these changes, the two historic buildings retain basic integrity of design and materials and are able to portray their role as the processing plant for Bitterroot Valley dairy products.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Locally

|   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Applicable National Register Criteria: A  | Areas of Significance: Commerce      |
| Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a | Period(s) of Significance: 1911-1941 |
| Significant Person(s): n/a                | Significant Dates: 1911, ca. 1920    |
| Cultural Affiliation: n/a                 | Architect/Builder: unknown           |

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State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Bitter Root Cooperative Creamery is of primary importance in the history of Stevensville, Montana. Significant for its association with the general optimism and prosperity of the community after the turn of the century, the Creamery represents the rapid growth in population in the Bitter Root Valley between 1900 and 1920 due to increased agricultural development. The Creamery directly contributed to the economy of the town and the surrounding farms as a source of regular cash payments. The Creamery was an institution that bound the rural area with the town; it belonged to the people of the area. The rapid rebuilding of the Creamery after the 1911 fire with support from the town leaders, drew the community together on a common mission. The rebuilding was critical for the farmers who needed a market for their dairy products. The importance of that common mission was recognized by persons in the community at the time, and they institutionalized the celebration staged by Creamery manager John Howe to commemorate the completion of the new building as the annual "Creamery Picnic," which continues today.

The dairy business has waned in the Bitterroot Valley. The Creamery is a reminder of the bygone era when agricultural production was the main economic support in the Valley.

### Background History

The first Montana dairy cattle belonged to the missionaries at St. Mary's Mission. John Owen also had a dairy herd and the early farmers of the Bitterroot Valley usually had milch cows. Butter making was a routine part of domestic farm life, and many farm wives earned a small cash income by selling excess butter to neighbors without cattle or in the settlements.<sup>1</sup>

The first creamery building in the Stevensville area was built in 1894 by Peter Russell on the G. Scott Anderson place three miles south of town.<sup>2</sup> Russell established a reputation as a cheesemaker, although he apparently hit on hard times after 1900. In the spring of 1902 he sold out to Francis W. Howard and S. Van Vliet.<sup>3</sup> That fall, there was a movement

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<sup>1</sup>Burlingame, Merrill G., The Montana Frontier (Helena: State Publishing Company, 1942), pp. 333-337.

<sup>2</sup>Northwest Tribune, June 22, July 20, 1894 Stevensville Historical Society, Montana Genesis (Missoula: Mountain Press, 1971), p. 180.

<sup>3</sup>Montana Genesis, p. 180.  
Northwest Tribune, May 23, 1902.

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to establish a second creamery and cheese factory under Russell's management.<sup>4</sup> In January 1903, a farmers' meeting was called to determine interest in a second creamery. Should there be adequate support, D.L. Cannon would become the manager and Peter Russell would be in charge of the creamery. In March the meeting was held, but there were few in attendance and the project was dropped.<sup>5</sup>

The Howard Creamery, known as the H.H. Creamery, was running at full capacity by 1904, and F.W. Howard began considering expansion of his facilities. Amos Buck indicated that he was willing to purchase the lot adjacent to the Horticulture Hall on South Main Street and donate if Howard would purchase the Horticulture Hall for a creamery. There was adequate space to include a feed mill. Howard had recently installed a 200 gallon cream vat and shipped 1800 pounds of butter and 175 pounds of cheese.<sup>6</sup>

The H.H. Creamery was a small affair producing primarily for the local market. According to the scientists at the Bozeman Experiment Station it took from four to six hundred cows within a radius of six miles to produce enough milk to support a cooperative creamery.<sup>7</sup> The quantity of butter and cheese produced by such a creamery could not be marketed locally in a community the size of Stevensville. Therefore, the creamery needed to have a marketing system to promote and distribute its products. A successful creamery required a large commitment from the community in terms of investment in dairy cattle, production facilities, and marketing.

During the winter of 1905, the national feeling of optimism and prosperity, especially among the agricultural interests, and the increasing immigration to Montana suggested to local promoters that the time was ripe to look again at establishing a cooperative creamery. Local farmers were called to a meeting on December 2, 1905 to consider the construction of a creamery east of town on the J.M. Higgins property. C.P. Kite, of the Hastings Industrial Company of Chicago, a firm that specialized in the construction of creameries, was in attendance.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout 1906 the creamery promoters worked to interest farmers and investors in establishing a cooperative creamery. By June, enough stock had been subscribed to allow the managers to summon a builder from the Hastings Industrial Company. The estimated cost

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<sup>4</sup>Stevensville Register, September 24, 1902.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., January 28, March 11, 1903.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., June 22, 1904.

<sup>7</sup>Jones, R. C., Farm Butter-Making Creamery Industry in Montana (Bozeman: Montana Agricultural Experiment Station Circular 32, November, 1913), p. 124.

<sup>8</sup>Northwest Tribune, November 17, December 1, 1905.

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of the plant was \$5400. There were 39 subscribers, but the subscription list would not be closed until all the area farmers had been solicited.<sup>9</sup> As soon as the decision was made to move ahead on the project, the executive committee examined the proposed building sites. They selected an acre of ground donated by J.H. Barton. A. Muller, a builder for the Hastings Industrial Company, arrived shortly thereafter. He had just completed construction of a creamery at Laurel, Montana.<sup>10</sup> The H.H. Creamery burned in 1907. It is not clear, however, whether this precipitated the rapid organization of the new creamery or whether it was merely coincidental.

Within two weeks lumber was arriving for the new building and an additional \$700 was subscribed. The Creamery was to be a cooperative with capital stock at \$15,000 or \$20,000. No person or company could hold more than one share.<sup>11</sup> The shell of the building was completed by the end of July, and the machinery was scheduled to arrive in August. Construction went smoothly, and by the first of September the Creamery was completed.<sup>12</sup>

The Bitter Root Cooperative Creamery churned its first butter on September 3, 1907. It made 375 pounds the first day, 300 pounds the second. That was considered "a very satisfactory start," and the manager expected to increase the daily output soon. The butter was labeled "Gold Bar." The buttermilk was sold to J.M. Higgins, probably for his hogs. The manager also planned to build an ice house at the creamery.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of community enthusiasm for the new business, the operation did not go smoothly the first year, and the Creamery Cooperative began looking for a new manager. Their choice, John G. Howe, a Minnesota buttermaker, proved to be a godsend not only for the creamery, but for the entire community. Under Howe's management the Bitter Root Creamery would become known as one of the outstanding creameries in the State and a symbol of community spirit.

John and Ruby Howe with their son Warren moved to Stevensville in 1908. Within a year the Creamery was thriving, and its impact was being felt throughout the community. Not only did it produce profits for the stockholders, it brought much needed cash regularly into

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<sup>9</sup>Stevensville Register, June 13, 1907. A list of stockholders was included.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., June 20, 1907.  
Montana Genesis, p. 183.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., July 4, 18, 1907.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., August 1, 22, 1907.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., August 8, September 5, 26, 1907.

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the farmers' homes and into the community. The Missoula Herald noted that Howe had done an "excellent" job of getting the Creamery into a profitable condition.<sup>14</sup> The following year Howe began to receive widespread recognition for his buttermaking and creamery management ability. He received first prize at a contest with 2290 entrymen at St. Paul, Minnesota, in which he had to state methods for pasteurizing, starting and ripening cream. Then he had to explain why the particular methods were used.<sup>15</sup> He also won a silver cup at the State Fair that year.<sup>16</sup>

In February, 1911, Howe was elected President of the state creamery men, and the Bitter Root Creamery was held up as an example of good cooperative creamery management.<sup>17</sup> The motto of the creamery was "Quality", and Howe made every effort to turn that motto into a reality. Then, on June 22, 1911, the Bitter Root Creamery, "one of the best cooperative creameries in the country," was reduced to ashes. The loss had a widespread impact on the area, because it provided a cash market each month for cream, thus circulating money in the community; it had a greater economic impact on the community than any other single business.<sup>18</sup>

In this crisis John Howe's leadership and commitment rallied the community to turn the disaster into an opportunity for enlarging the creamery business and giving Stevensville a cause for celebration. Before the ashes were cold, Howe was making plans to rebuild the building within six weeks. Within a week the executive board had met, decided that the new creamery would be twice as large as the old one, appointed George May, John Howe, and James Carruthers to look after the construction. A contract was awarded to C.P. Miller to pour the concrete floor. D.L. Cannon, John Foust, Evan Lockridge, and Lon Young had begun making concrete blocks.<sup>19</sup> They were aiming for an August 1 completion date.

By mid-July the concrete blocks were finished and the masons were erecting the walls. A new churn and boiler had arrived and would be put in place as soon as possible. Howe noted that people from all over the Valley had shown an interest in the project and had offered aid of all sorts.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., July 1, 1909.  
Missoula Herald, January 1, 1909.

<sup>15</sup>Northwest Tribune, February 11, 1910.

<sup>16</sup>Stevensville Star, Creamery Picnic Special Edition, 1988, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Stevensville Register, February 23, 1911.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., June 22, 1911.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., June 29, 1911.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., July 13, 1911.



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As the deadline for completion of the new building drew closer, Howe and the Chamber of Commerce planned a "monster" celebration "on or about the 15th of August, between haying and the harvest rush season for the farmers." The picnic and "general joy gathering" would be held at the Creamery.<sup>21</sup> The building was completed on schedule, and the farmers were overjoyed. The grand picnic was held, and townspeople and farmers from the surrounding area joined together to admire the new facility and share together their good fortune. Mayor Faulds lauded the work of the Creamery and proposed "three cheers and a tiger" for Mr. Howe.<sup>22</sup>

When the Bitter Root Cooperative Creamery had its annual meeting in February, 1912, they discussed the idea of having an annual picnic in August. There was general support for the idea, and the Creamery Picnic became an annual affair. At the meeting it was reported that the Creamery had paid out over \$80,000 to area farmers for cream. The output of butter was about 600 pounds a day. When Howe took over as manager in April, 1908, the Creamery was \$2500 in debt and 22 patrons were milking 132 cows. In February, 1912, the debt had been paid and there were about 200 patrons milking 2000 cows. The Creamery's Gold Bar butter had a statewide reputation and was in high demand. Prof. R.W. Clark of Montana State College called the creamery the best in the State.<sup>23</sup>

In January, 1920, the Bitter Root Creamery expanded its facilities. The Cooperative purchased additional land south of the 1911 building in 1921 and 1923, and built a new two-story brick building. The new building housed the refrigeration plant and dryer on the first floor and storage on the second. The plant was also manufacturing ice. An additional churn and testing laboratory was added in 1922.

In January, 1926, John Howe decided to leave the Bitter Root Creamery. At a meeting held on January 2, the stockholders decided to hire a new manager and continue operation as a cooperative. A month later they hired P.S. Carnes of Three Forks as the new manager.<sup>24</sup> Howe moved to Hamilton and started his own creamery, which he operated until 1968.

In 1946, the Cooperative sold the plant to the Carnation Co. In 1955, it was sold to Gold Medal Dairies and a year later to Foremost Dairies. The larger companies attempted to make a profit through specialization, but dairying was on the wane in the Bitterroot Valley. The small plant could no longer produce enough to compete with large dairy producers who could cut costs through quantity production. Since about 1975, the buildings house a small manufacturing enterprise called Turner Engineering, Inc.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., July 27, 1911.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., August 17, 1911.

<sup>23</sup>Northwest Tribune, February 9, 1912.

<sup>24</sup>Northwest Tribune, January 1, 8, 1926; February 26, 1926.

<sup>25</sup>Chain of Title.

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## 9. References

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Baumgartel, Walter H., A Social Study of Ravalli County, Montana (Bozeman: Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin No. 160, September 1923).

Cotton, J. Randall, "Ornamental Concrete Block House," Old House Journal, 22 (October 1984).

Jones, R. C., Farm Butter-Making Creamery Industry in Montana (Bozeman: Montana Agricultural College Experiment Station Circular 32, November 1913).

Missoula Herald, Missoula, Montana, Special Edition, January 1, 1909.

Missoulian, Missoula, Montana, December 15, 1912; June 12, 1949; August 14, 1949.

Stevensville Historical Society, Montana Genesis (Missoula: Mountain Press, 1971).

Stevensville Register, Stevensville, Montana, Special Edition, December 23, 1909.

Stevensville Star, Creamery Picnic Special Edition, 1988.

Western News, Hamilton, Montana, December 19, 1911.

Negative File: NW, Elevation, Sleeve 6, Negative 4.

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:

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: Less than one acre

| UTM References: | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|-----------------|------|---------|----------|
|                 | 11   | 723880  | 5154900  |

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Verbal Boundary Description:

Stevensville Heights Addition, Block 1, Lot 1. The boundary for the nominated property begins at the intersection of the East Side Highway and the western right-of-way of Perry Lane. From that point, the boundary runs 250 feet south; then, 230 feet east; then, 250 feet north; then, 230 feet west along the right-of-way of the East Side Highway to the point of beginning.

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Boundary Justification:

The nominated property includes the lots upon which the historic buildings are situated.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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|                                       |                            |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Name/Title: Frank Grant               | Date: revised October 1990 |
| Street & Number: 544 Hastings         | Telephone: 406/549-2468    |
| City or Town: Missoula State: Montana | Zip: 59801                 |