

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 06000426

Date Listed: 5/12/2006


Thexton Ranch
Property Name

Madison
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

5/12/2006
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Resource Count:

The resource count is revised to read: *5 contributing buildings, 2 contributing structures, 2 contributing sites, and 2 non-contributing buildings.* [The corresponds with the written narrative description.]

Significant Dates:

The significant date 1872 is deleted. [The significant dates cannot precede the period of significance. Since the 1872 date does not appear to reflect extant building resources (purchase date of the property), it is deleted.]

Verbal Boundary Justification:

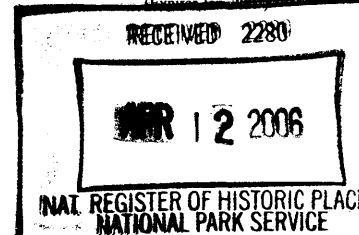
The justification statement is amended to add: *"The selected lands reflect the portions of the historic ranch now under separate ownership that retain the main complex of ranch buildings and sufficient agricultural lands to convey the historic associations of the ranch property."*

These clarifications were confirmed with the MT SHPO office.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Thexton Ranch or "Thextondale"

other name/site number: Alton Hereford Ranch

2. Location

street & number: 335 Varney Road

not for publication: n/a

city/town: Ennis

vicinity: X

state: MT code: MT county: Madison code: 057 zip code: 59729-9135

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.)

John Wilmoth
Signature of certifying official/Title

02/28/2006
Date

MT SHPO
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
[Signature]

Date of Action
5/12/2006

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not incl. previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Non-Contributing | |
|--------------|------------------|------------|
| 4 | 2 | buildings |
| 2 | | sites |
| 1 | | structures |
| | | objects |
| 7 | 2 | Total |

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions:**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwelling
 Agriculture/storage, agricultural field, animal facility

Current Function:

(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/Not In Use (buildings)
 Agriculture/agricultural field

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian/Queen Anne revival (Ranch House)
 Other -- Vernacular (outbuildings)

MATERIALS:

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Concrete
walls: Concrete, stone
roof: Wood/log
other:

Narrative Description:

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Setting and Access

The ranch headquarters complex for the historic Thexton Ranch is located roughly seven miles south of the town of Ennis, in Madison County, Montana. It is accessed from Varney Road, a local access road that runs parallel to the west bank of the Madison River. The ranch buildings, constructed at the edge of a level terrace overlooking Blaine Spring Creek, are visible from Varney Road, in a loose cluster at the end of a graveled two-trace access road. Bands of riparian vegetation (mostly cottonwood trees) are visible behind the buildings adjacent to the creek, and in groves in the low-lying area between the creek and the Madison River – the latter located another quarter of a mile distant to the east. The building cluster is completely surrounded on its north, west and south sides by irrigated cultivated fields – the source of hay that is still used to feed ranch cattle during the winter months. Ornamental landscaping is limited to the area immediately surrounding the ranch house. Grass lawn has been planted around the front and sides of the house, and beds of perennial shrubs – bordered with railroad ties, are located at the edge of the lawn. A few foundation plantings are located along the front and southeast side of the building. All of the landscaping dates to the modern era.

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture (Criterion C)

Exploration/Settlement and Agriculture (Criterion A)

Period of Significance

1883 – 1929

1929 – 1945

Significant Dates

1872 (George Thexton purchase)

1883 (George Thexton Cash Entry)

1910-1912 (Ranch house built)

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Charles Johnson (historic-era outbuildings)

Jake Bauer, Builder (ranch house)

Thexton brothers (modern noncontributing buildings)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET**9. Major Bibliographic References****Bibliography**

(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

Name of Repository:

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Madison County, Montana

Section 7. Description

The ranch house is the focal point of the complex. Built to face Varney Road, it is clearly visible from that roadway from at least a mile away. Other, more utilitarian ranch buildings, including a barn, root cellar, calving shed, shop/garage, bunkhouse and granary, are located to the rear or side of the house—most near the edge of the terrace overlooking Blaine Spring Creek. Two of these, the calving shed and the shop/garage, are modern compared with the remaining buildings, all of which are believed to predate 1912. Other resources that date to the historical period include a metal tower for a windmill and a two-track road that leads from the building complex to a ford in Blaine Spring Creek and to low-lying pastures beyond. The original log house and several outbuildings, including a chicken house, a garage, and several small sheds, have been removed from the property.

Ranch House (contributing building)

Constructed between 1910 and 1912, the ranch house is a two-story cast-in-place concrete building with a pyramidal roof covered with composition shingles. Cast in 12-inch forms, the walls are roughly 10.5 inches deep, and contain large stones of a variety of colors collected from local sources. The building has a square plan with a bay wing, which extends the full two stories on the front (southwest) side of the house. Two enclosed porches, one on the front and one on the rear (northeast), shelter the entrances. The half-hip roof of the bay wing intersects with the pyramidal roof of the main volume. Originally, the building had three internal brick chimneys, the tops of which extended above the roof. All three have been removed above the roofline, and a new external concrete block chimney has been added to the northwest side of the building. The new chimney is faced with flagstone, some of which has fallen off to expose the underlying blocks. The building has a partial basement, which was excavated after completion of the house, specifically to contain the batteries attached to a Jacobs 32-volt wind-powered generator.

The front (southwest elevation) of the building is dominated by the bay wing, which occupies the north half of the wall. The first and second stories each contain three large window openings—one in each wall of the bay. Each opening contains a large single-hung sash with a fixed transom above. Originally, the transom lights in the second-story windows contained art glass; however, only the southern panel remains in place. The center and north transoms have been replaced with plain glass. On the first floor the transom in the center window contains a stained glass panel; the transom to the south contains patterned glass, while the one to the north contains plain glass. Another distinguishing feature of the bay is the decorative wooden brackets above the second-story windows at the eave line, which tie into the board frieze at the roof-wall junction.

An enclosed porch with a half-hip roof covers the remainder of the first floor south of the bay wing. Built as a simple open porch, its roof supported by two, square wooden posts, it was enclosed some time after initial construction. Currently, the southwest wall of the porch is entirely enclosed with a series of five, two-light fixed windows above a partial, shingle-covered wall. An entrance in the southeast end of the porch contains a wooden door with four lights above two rectangular panels. Narrow sidelights are located adjacent to the door, above the porch wall. Inside the porch, the southwest wall of the main building contains an entrance and a large window opening with a single-hung window with a patterned glass transom above. A second entrance, in the southeast wall, leads to the room in the bay wing.

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On the southeast side of the building there are three window openings in the ground floor and two in the second story; all five contain one-over-one-light double-hung wooden sashes. On the ground floor, two adjacent openings are located in the middle of the west half of the wall. The upper sash in both of these windows is glazed with square colored glass lights around a central clear light. The third opening is located in the center of the east half of the wall; both the upper and lower sashes contain plain glass. In the second story, the two window openings are centered in the middle of the two halves of the building. The upper sashes of both windows contain diamond-patterned lights.

Fenestration on the northwest side of the building is similar to that on the southeast, with three windows in the ground floor and two in the second story. The only difference is in the placement of openings within the wall and in the character of the glazing. In this elevation, the set of paired windows in the ground floor has patterned glazing in the upper sash. The remaining ground floor window opening appears to have been filled in at the bottom and a new, smaller window inserted in the opening. This window and the two in the second story, are all glazed with plain glass.

The rear (northeast) wall of the building has an enclosed frame porch centered within the wall. The exterior walls are covered with wood shingles and its shed roof is covered with asphalt shingles. In the 1970s, the porch was used as the foundation for a wooden deck. This is the second porch to have been built on the rear wall, constructed to enclose the entrance to the partial basement dug to contain the batteries attached to the Jacobs, wind-powered generator.

Garage/Shop (noncontributing building)

The modern garage/shop is located behind and slightly north of the ranch house, facing a gravel drive. It is a one-story, rectangular post and beam building with a saltbox roof. The exterior walls and roof are covered with at least two types of steel siding. Roughly the south half of the building is open on the southeast elevation, and was used for vehicle storage. The northern part of the building is enclosed on all sides; in this part of the building two overhead metal garage doors fill the southeast wall, and a pedestrian entrance is located in the east end of the northeast wall. A slight difference in the roof height of the two volumes, as well as differences in the steel siding, may indicate that the two volumes were constructed at different times. This building dates to the late 1950s.

Bunkhouse (contributing building)

The bunkhouse is located behind the ranch house at the edge of the terrace overlooking Blaine Spring Creek. It is a one-story rectangular log building with a side-gable roof, built on a stone pier foundation. The frame roof structure is covered with sawn wooden shingles, while the gable ends are covered with vertical boards and battens. The top of an internal cinder block chimney is visible above the ridgeline at the south end of the building. The wall logs are joined at the corners with half-dovetail notches, and daubed on the exterior surfaces with a mixture of sand, lime and cement.

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The front of the building faces southwest towards the ranch house, and contains an entry in the north half of the wall and a window opening in the south half of the wall. The entrance contains a board-and-batten door with a six-light window in the upper half. The window opening contains a one-by-one-light sliding sash, and is framed on the outside with plain board trim. The rear wall contains one window opening at the south end of the wall. Both windows have exterior screens nailed in place. Sometime after World War II, the interior of this building was divided into two rooms by a frame partition. The south room was outfitted to serve as sleeping quarters for a hired hand, while the north room continued to be used for storage.

Barn (contributing building)

The barn is a two-story, rectangular log building, with a gable roof, constructed on a foundation of stone piers. Located roughly 170 feet south of the bunkhouse, it appears to have been built in two parts, the larger volume at the rear (east end) of the building, with a smaller space at what is now the front (west end) of the building. The round logs are joined at the corners with steeple notches; the exterior surface of the walls are daubed with a cement mixture and chinked with split poles (nailed in place). The roof is covered with composition shingles, and the gable ends with wide, vertically placed, rough-cut boards. The log floor joists for the second story are visible in the sides of the rear volume and in the front of the smaller volume.

The front and rear of the building each have a large central entrance. The front entrance contains a double board-and-batten door, the north half of which is divided into two leafs. The rear door is made of vertical boards and slides horizontally along a rail at the top. The northwest side contains two openings for loading hay into the second story. The interior of the larger volume at the rear of the building contains stalls along the outside walls, separated by an alley with a dirt floor. The stalls have plank floors; a shallow trough carried urine from the stalls beneath the rear door and outside the building. Feed mangers are located along the outside walls of the stalls, below openings in the second-story floor used to transfer hay from the loft to the manger. A hand-dug well was formerly located inside the southwest corner of the larger volume; a metal windmill mounted atop the barn was used to pump the water. The well has collapsed and the windmill has been removed from the top of the building.

A frame lean-to addition occupies the entire length of the southeast side of the building.¹ The addition is built on a concrete foundation wall, and enclosed with vertical boards covered in places with asphalt siding. The roof covering consists of corrugated galvanized steel panels, some of which are missing, exposing the underlying board sheathing. The front wall of the addition contains a double, board-and-batten door with a wide, unglazed opening above. Several other window openings are scattered throughout the building—most of which are not glazed. A small rectangular enclosure extends from the approximate middle of the southeast wall of the addition. This building was constructed prior to 1912.

¹ Tom, Albert and Don Thexton built this addition in the 1950s, for use as a calving shed.

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Root Cellar (contributing building)

The root cellar is located below the edge of the terrace behind and slightly north of the barn. The building was constructed by excavating a cavity into the edge of the terrace, then erecting stone and concrete retaining walls. The roof is made with logs covered with earth. Part of the front (east) wall has collapsed inward. The root cellar was constructed prior to 1912.

Calving shed (noncontributing building)

The calving shed is located just south of the barn, also at the edge of the terrace. It is a long rectangular building with a shallow, front-gable roof, built on a concrete foundation wall. The cribbed walls are made with lengths of 2-by-4 lumber, overlapped at the ends. The exterior walls and roof are covered with sheets of corrugated galvanized steel, as is a ventilator in the center of the roof. The building has large openings in the northeast and northwest walls. There is no interior floor, except in a small, enclosed room just inside the northeast entrance, which was used as a sleeping area for the "night man," whose job it was to watch the cows during calving season. This building was constructed circa 1950.

Granary (contributing building)

Located southwest of the ranch house and at the edge of a cultivated field, the granary is a one-story, 30-by-30-foot-square log building constructed on a concrete foundation wall, with a gambrel roof. The round wall logs in this building are joined at the corners with half-dovetail notches and are daubed on the exterior with concrete and chinked with split poles. The wood frame roof (built with 2-by 6-inch lumber) is covered with composition shingles; its gambrel ends are enclosed with vertically placed, rough-cut boards of varying widths. A gable roof dormer is located in the approximate center of the northeast side of the roof; its sidewalls are covered with sawn shingles, and a vertical board door provides access to the interior grain bins. The southeast wall has a pedestrian entrance near the south end of the building that contains a vertical board-and-batten door. An opening in the center of the gambrel end provided access to the second story. The northwest wall also has an opening in the gambrel end.

The interior of the granary is divided into four separate interior spaces by timber partitions, all of which have board floors. Three of these rooms were used to store various crops grown on the ranch, barley, wheat, etc. The fourth room was used for grinding grains into feed for ranch livestock. The room still contains a grinder, which was powered by a belt attached to the ranch tractor.

Hay Road (contributing structure)

The hay road is a two-track access road that leads from the north end of the barnyard area, past the east side of the granary to a ford at Blaine Spring Creek. The road runs along the bottom of a natural drainage coulee eroded in the edge of the terrace that contains the buildings. This road was used to haul hay from the low-lying fields between the creek and the Madison River. After the Thextons quit cutting hay from these fields, they continued to use it for pasture, moving both horses and cattle along the "hay road."

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Windmill tower (contributing structure)

The 30-foot steel tower that once supported a windmill is located north of the building complex, at the edge of the terrace overlooking Blaine Spring Creek. According to Don Thexton, his father erected the windmill to pump water from the creek to the surface of the terrace. Because the windmill was not designed to do this, the windmill was removed but the tower was left standing.

Native hayfield/winter Pasture (contributing site)

Historically, the Thextons cut hay from the area, and transported it across the creek to be stored on higher ground in the vicinity of the building complex. The area is currently used as winter/spring pasture.

Irrigated Hayfield (contributing site)

A portion of the ranche's irrigated hayfields is located within the district boundary, west and north of the building complex.

Section 8 Statement of Significance*Summary Statement*

George Thexton, with the help of his son Thomas, built the ranch known as "Thextondale" into a successful enterprise, which supported Thomas's sons until the sale of the property in the mid-1970s. The ranch began as an open range operation, dependent upon unrestricted access to public grass. Through the decades, however, the Thextons accommodated their operation to changes mandated by both markets and by land management agencies. The family increased its land base by patenting additional lands, obtaining grazing leases on adjacent forest service lands, appropriating water, and developing an irrigation system to support the production of forage crops to use as winter feed for their livestock. In this regard, Thextondale was similar to, and representative of, other successful ranching operations.

The primarily vernacular infrastructure in the ranch core reflects at least two periods of development, including the initial period during which occupants used native building materials (log and stone) to create shelter for themselves and their livestock and to store their agricultural produce. Most of these buildings are of simple design, with rectangular plans and simple gable roofs; the log work, specifically the corner joinery, represents the skills of at least two different builders. The change to a more formal style of architecture is expressed in the ranch house, which incorporates some elements of high style architecture with the use of locally available building materials and construction techniques.

The Thexton Ranch is significantly associated with early the non-native agricultural settlement of Madison County, and is recommended eligible under National Register criteria A and C at the local level of significance. Under criterion A, the areas of significance include "exploration/settlement" and "agriculture." Under criterion C, the area of significance is "architecture." Although some of the original outbuildings have been removed

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from the site, the remaining building cluster, coupled with the adjacent fields and pastures, possesses integrity of materials, workmanship and design, setting, feeling and association.

Settlement of the Madison River Valley

Permanent non-native settlement of the Madison River Valley began in earnest in the early 1860s, when gold discoveries along the Salmon River in present-day Idaho brought prospectors to the region. The 1862 strike at Bannack was followed by the discovery of placer gold along Alder Gulch in 1863. Of the settlements established along the 14-mile stretch of Alder Gulch, Virginia City emerged as the commercial center of the mining district. Unlike some other communities, which were abandoned soon after the end of the first rush to gold, Virginia City continued to prosper—largely because of its role in local and territorial government; after the creation of Montana Territory in 1864, it was designated the county seat for Madison County (one of the original eight counties created in the territory). The following year it became the territorial capital, an honor that it retained until 1875, when Helena won the vote for capital city.

As was typical of most Western mining regions, in Madison County digging for gold was not the only way to make money. The influx of people into the territory created a need for goods and services, including food for both people and livestock. Taking advantage of legislation such as the Act of 1820 (which allowed the purchase of up to 160 acres of lands from the public domain), and the Homestead Act of 1862, individuals established farms and ranches to provide support to the local mining communities. In the towns, grocery and dry goods stores and blacksmith shops thrived. Individuals with specialized skills, or those with an entrepreneurial spirit, often were more successful than the miners.

An 1872 publication on the resources of Madison County,² although heavily weighted towards mining, also noted farming and stock raising as substantial economic forces in the county. The value of cultivated land in the county was estimated to be \$197,260. The value of horses was estimated to be \$116,968, and the value of cattle \$427,959. The author further described the character of stock raising as follows:

The county has become world-famous for stock raising. Horses and cattle run out in the valley at all times of the year, feed, fatten and thrive at all times—usually having no feed except what they gather by grazing.³

Although the economic prospects of the county seemed good in 1872, like most other areas in the West, production was hampered by poor transportation infrastructure. The 1883 completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad through Montana Territory, however, provided a shorter link between Western Montana agricultural producers and Midwestern and Eastern markets. Ranchers in the Madison River Valley could trail their livestock north to rail stops such as Manhattan, where they were loaded for shipment to Chicago.⁴

² Note that in 1872, Madison County incorporated about twice as much area as compared with the current county boundary.

³ James Handly, *Resources of Madison County* (1872) p. 6, copy available in microfilm collection "Western Americana: Frontier History of the Trans-Mississippi West 1530-1900," Reel 234, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

⁴ After completion of the spur line to Norris, many area ranchers loaded their stock at that stop, shortening the distance that they had to trail their cattle.

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By the 1880s unrestricted use of the public domain for grazing and timber harvesting had resulted in noticeable, sometimes dramatic, degrading of rangelands and forests. In order to protect public lands from further abuse, in 1891 Congress passed the Forest Reserve Act. Soon thereafter, President Benjamin Harrison signed proclamations establishing the nation's first 15 forest reserves, most in Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. In the vicinity of the Madison River Valley, the 1902 Presidential Proclamation 36 (32 Stat. 2024) established the Madison Forest Reserve, incorporating much of the Gravelly Range west of the river. The creation of the reserve set the stage for regulation of the livestock grazing within its boundaries, a change that affected many area ranchers. No longer able to rely on the open range of the public domain, successful ranchers increased the size of their holdings, usually through a combination of patenting and purchasing of land to increase their deeded acreage, and by applying for grazing leases on lands controlled by federal agencies. Legislation such as the Desert Land Act, which allowed individuals to patent arid or semi-arid land suitable for agricultural purposes (if irrigated), contributed to ranchers' ability to acquire lands from the public domain. Throughout the first half of the 1900s, the tendency was for ranch operations to grow in size; small operators, whose land base would not facilitate expansion, typically sold out to larger ranches.

The Thexton family in Madison County and establishment of "Thextondale"

George Thexton, a native of Westmoreland County, England, immigrated to the United States in 1855. Thirty-one years of age at the time, and a blacksmith by training, he brought his bride, Nancy (Redhead) Thexton, to the community of Twelve Mile House, Grant County, Wisconsin, where he spent the better part of the next nine years, working as a blacksmith. In 1864, however, hearing of the gold strikes in Alder Gulch, he decided to move west.⁵

Leaving his family, which by this time had grown to include five children in Wisconsin, he traveled overland to the newly established town of Virginia City via Jim Bridger's route, arriving in Alder Gulch on July 4, 1864. The following quote is attributed to him: "I found living high, and the place overstocked with laborers, but I had bought a set of blacksmith tools at Council Bluffs, which gave me a chance to start business."⁶ In the fall of 1866 Thexton returned to Wisconsin to move his family to Montana. George and Nancy and their four living children, Margaret, George Jr., John, and Thomas, traveled by steamboat up the Missouri River to Fort Benton. From there they traveled overland by ox cart, stopping in the vicinity of White Hall where Nancy gave birth to their sixth child. They arrived in Virginia City in the summer of 1867, George having been absent for nearly a year.

After returning to Montana Territory, Thexton opened a blacksmith/machine shop on lower Wallace Street, where he produced all manner of items, including plows (made from carriage springs) as well as the augurs used to bore the original wooden pipes for the Virginia City water system.⁷ In 1871 he purchased an adjacent building (originally constructed to house the Kiskadden grocery), and converted it for use as a livery stable,

⁵ Adah Thexton, "George Thexton," in *Pioneer Trails and Trials: Madison County 1863-1920* (Great Falls: Blue Print & Letter Company, 1976), 186-188.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

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which he named the Star Livery.⁸ An 1872 advertisement for the stables read: "Horses left at this stable receive plenty of feed and best of care and attention."⁹

The income from his Virginia City businesses was sufficient to allow Thexton to expand his economic ventures into both mining and ranching. In 1872 he purchased Charles Johnson's 160-acre cash entry patent, located adjacent to the Madison River, about 15 miles southeast of Virginia City. Johnson's entry straddled Blaine Spring Creek and the low-lying area between the creek and the Madison River—a well-watered meadow full of native grasses. Described by the family as a "hay and stock ranch," Johnson's property formed the nucleus of the family ranch, which he named *Thextondale*.

Initially, it appears that the family spent little time at the ranch. Sons George Jr., John, and Thomas, would occasionally reside there to care for the livestock. As this was the open range era, however, most often the cattle and horses were simply turned out to graze on the range. In 1883, George Thexton increased the size of his deeded acreage by filing for a Cash Entry patent to 160 acres of land adjacent to the west side of Johnson's claim.

Meanwhile, Thexton continued in business in Virginia City, sometimes assisted by his sons. In 1884, he completed a large stone house on upper Idaho Street, where he lived until about 1888. A series of personal tragedies, including the death of his first wife and that of his two oldest sons (George Jr., and John) occurred during this time, and may have influenced his decision to move from town to the ranch. Whatever the reasons, in about 1888, George Thexton, his only living son, Thomas, his unmarried daughter, Annie, and his niece, Agnes Whalley, moved to *Thextondale* permanently—apparently occupying the buildings constructed by Charles Johnson at the edge of a broad terrace overlooking Blaine Spring Creek and the Madison River beyond. George Thexton lived at the ranch for the remainder of his life, dying there in 1904.

Thomas Thexton was in his mid-twenties when the family moved to the ranch. As a young man he had assisted his father in the blacksmith shop and livery stable. For a time he also operated his own freighting business, hauling various commodities between Virginia City and the communities of Dillon, Butte, Sheridan and Bozeman. He hauled hay for his father's livery stable and ore from his father's mine (the Alameda), as well as the stone used to build the Idaho Street house.¹⁰ The completion of the Oregon Short Line Railroad, between Utah and Butte, Montana, in 1881, cut into the freighting business, however, and after moving to *Thextondale*, it appears that Thomas concentrated on ranching with his father, building up a sizable herd of Shorthorn cattle, draft and saddle horses, and growing hay and grain. The cattle and horses were driven north to the station at Manhattan where they were shipped east, the cattle to Chicago, and the horses to New York, New Jersey, Kansas City and Natchez, Mississippi.¹¹

⁸ Ellen Baumler, "More than the Glory: Preserving the Gold Rush and Its Outcome at Virginia City" (<http://www.his.state.mt.us/education/cirguides/goldbaumler>, October 10, 2005).

⁹ James Handy, *Resources of Madison County* (1872), copy available in microfilm collection "Western Americana: Frontier History of the Trans-Mississippi West 1530-1900," Reel 234, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

¹⁰ Adah Thexton, "Thomas Thexton," in *Pioneer Trails and Trials: Madison County 1863-1920* (Great Falls: Blue Print & Letter Company, 1976), 188-189.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

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In 1899, at the age of 37, Thomas Thexton married Mary Ann Foreman (daughter of the Madison County assessor) and brought his bride to the ranch.¹² By 1910, Thomas and Mary Ann's family, which at that time included five children, had outgrown the old log ranch house, and Thomas contracted for the construction of a new one. He hired a local man, Jake Bauer, to build the house, an effort that took two years to complete. The family moved into the new house in 1912, leaving the log house vacant for other uses.

Between 1912 and his death in 1929, Thomas and Mary continued to operate and expand the ranch holdings with the help of their three oldest sons, Tom, William and Albert. (The Thextons' fourth son, Donald, was only seven years old at the time of his father's death.) In 1917, Thomas patented roughly 300 acres of land adjacent to the north and west of the ranch buildings under the Desert Land Act. A year earlier, Mary Thexton filed a cash entry to 80 acres about two miles southwest of the ranch headquarters. Like his father, Thomas also purchased lands from other settlers.

The rhythm of ranch life followed the seasonal movement of cattle between summer and winter range: in May the Thextons trailed their cattle 35 miles south of the ranch headquarters to their Forest Service grazing lease on the West Fork of the Madison River, where the stock were turned out to graze until fall.¹³ During the summer months, the family was kept busy irrigating fields of wheat, barley and oats, which were stored in the log granary after a fall harvest.¹⁴ Initially, they also put up hay in the low-lying area between Blaine Spring Creek and the Madison River, transporting it across the creek via a ford and a short two-track ranch road referred to as the "hay road."¹⁵

The family also kept milk cows, chickens and hogs at the ranch headquarters. The chicken coop was located adjacent to the building currently referred to as the bunkhouse, and the hogs were kept near the barnyard. Hogs provided meat for the family and local markets; each fall the surplus pigs were hauled to Butte for slaughter and sale.¹⁶ Mary Ann Thexton planted a large vegetable garden (enclosed with a board fence) on the north side of the new ranch house. Most of the products of the garden were used in the household. The root cellar was used to store foods such as potatoes and meat.

In November, the Thextons rounded up their cattle on the West Fork grazing lease, and trailed them north to the vicinity of the ranch—a trip that took three days. Yearling steers were driven north to railroad shipping points (Manhattan and later Norris) for transportation east. Cattle kept on the ranch were turned out to graze in cut hay fields and pastures close to the ranch headquarters.

¹² His cousin Agnes had married in 1893 and his sister Annie in 1894, leaving Thomas and his father alone at the ranch. Adah Thexton, "George Thexton" and "Thomas Thexton."

¹³ Don Thexton indicated that horses outnumbered cattle in the Madison Valley during the early years. Don Thexton interview, September 30, 2005.

¹⁴ The 1965 edition of the water resource survey bulletin for Madison County indicates that the Thextons irrigated lands west and north of the building cluster from a series of private ditches. The point of diversion for the ditches is located in Section 26, T2S/R2W. Montana State Engineer's Office, Water Resources Survey, Madison County, Montana, 1965 reprint.

¹⁵ Don Thexton indicated that they quit cutting hay from this area when the cost of fuel for trucking it to higher ground exceeded the value of the crop. Afterwards, they used this well-watered area for pasture.

¹⁶ Don Thexton interview.

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Prior to World War II, nearly all of the ranch work was accomplished with the use of horses—which numbered roughly 800 during Thomas Thexton's tenure.¹⁷ Teams pulled the farm machinery and were also used to move cattle between the ranch and grazing leases and to shipping points. Prior to and during World War I, Thomas had raised horses for sale to the Army—a fact that may explain the large number of horses on the ranch at the time of his death.

After an extended illness, Thomas Thexton died in 1929, leaving his wife and sons to run the ranch.¹⁸ Eldest son, "Tom" Thexton, moved into the old log house after his marriage, while Mary Ann and her unmarried daughters and youngest son, Donald, continued to occupy the stone ranch house. Almost immediately after Thomas' death, the family sold 500 of the 800 horses. In the early 1930s, they sold the Shorthorn cattle and bought Herefords instead—a change that Donald Thexton attributed to market pressures.¹⁹ Other than these changes, however, the operation of the ranch proceeded as before—at least until World War II.

Unlike some industries, which were curtailed during the war years, agriculture was considered critical to the war effort. Young men, who, under other circumstances, would be drafted, were given leave to stay on farms and ranches in order to keep up production. Consequently, Don Thexton, just finished with high school, stayed on the ranch with his brother Tom. Middle brother Albert, enlisted in the Marine Corps, and spent the war years away from the ranch.

Although the seasonal pattern of ranch life remained much the same, the manner in which work was accomplished changed dramatically after World War II, largely due to the increased availability of trucks and tractors. After the war the Thexton brothers began trucking cattle between the ranch headquarters and grazing leases and shipping points, which saved time and also reduced the amount of weight loss in the cattle during the trail drives. Formerly, the three-day trip from the West Fork of the Madison back to ranch headquarters, resulted in the spring calves being foot-sore, and in significant weight loss in the yearlings shipped east in the fall. Because ranchers were paid for their cattle by the pound as weighed at the shipping point, thinner animals meant lower returns. Even though the cost of vehicle operation and maintenance had to be balanced against gains in shipping weight, overall, trucking the animals to shipping points proved more profitable for the Thextons, and presumably for most area ranchers. Using trucks to transport cattle also allowed the Thextons to begin shipping spring calves in the fall of the year, thus reducing the amount of feed needed to over-winter the animals.

Another program that effected change in the infrastructure of the Thexton Ranch after World War II was rural electrification, which reached the area in the mid-1940s. Since the 1920s a Jacobs 32-volt wind generator had provided electrical power at the ranch. The steel tower for the windmill stood behind the ranch house, and the batteries were stored in a partial cellar excavated beneath the house specifically for that purpose. After the rural

¹⁷ Don Thexton interview.

¹⁸ Mary Ann Thexton and the three eldest sons each inherited portions of the deeded ranch lands, although they continued to operate the ranch as a single unit. Although son William (Bill) also inherited land from his father, he left the ranch to pursue other work. Brothers, Tom, Albert and Don leased Bill's land for use in the operation of the Thexton Ranch Corporation. Don Thexton interview.

¹⁹ Don Thexton interview.

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power lines reached the ranch headquarters complex, the tower and the associated windmill were removed. Also about this time, the log granary, which had been used since the turn of the century, was abandoned in favor of two prefabricated round metal granaries, which could be loaded with an electric-powered conveyor.²⁰

Other postwar changes to the ranch headquarters were relatively minor. Tom, Albert, and Don built the calving shed with 2x4s purchased from a mill in Livingston, Montana, for \$20.00 per thousand feet. Tom and Don remodeled the south half of the bunkhouse into quarters for a hired hand, and Tom and Bill built the addition on the south side of the barn.²¹ Don Thexton built the garage/shop behind the ranch house.

Tom and Don Thexton continued to live at the original ranch headquarters, while Albert lived on his own property. Tom and his wife, Ada, lived in the original log house on the property, while Don and his family occupied the 1912 ranch house. Don planted the ponderosa pine trees in the vicinity of the ranch house, replacing the native cottonwoods that had originally grown in the vicinity of the ranch buildings.

In 1977 the Thexton brothers sold the ranch, including roughly 3,000 deeded, and 5,000 leased acres. After the sale, the new owners demolished the original log ranch house and several other outbuildings in the vicinity of the existing bunkhouse. Other modifications included the addition of the external chimney on the original ranch house and installation of landscaping around that building. The current owners continue to operate the property as a working cattle ranch.

²⁰ Don Thexton interview.

²¹ Don Thexton interview.

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9. Major Bibliographic References

Adah Thexton. "George Thexton." In *Pioneer Trails and Trials: Madison County 1863-1920*, Madison County History Association, compilers. Great Falls, Montana: Blue Print & Letter Company, 1976.

Adah Thexton. "Thomas Thexton." In *Pioneer Trails and Trials: Madison County 1863-1920*, Madison County History Association, compilers. Great Falls, Montana: Blue Print & Letter Company, 1976.

Handly, James, *Resources of Madison County* (1872), copy available in microfilm collection "Western Americana: Frontier History of the Trans-Mississippi West 1530-1900," Reel 234, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

Montana State Engineer's Office. Water Resources Survey, Madison County, Montana. 1965 reprint.

Thexton Ranch ("Thextondale")

Madison County, Montana

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 240 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM References on a continuation sheet.)

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------|---|---------|----|----------|-----|----|---|------|---|---------|----|----------|-----|----|
| 1 | 12 | 4 | 395 | 80 | 50 | 150 | 00 | 3 | 12 | 4 | 400 | 00 | 50 | 145 | 60 |
| | Zone | | Easting | | Northing | | | | Zone | | Easting | | Northing | | |
| 2 | 12 | 4 | 400 | 00 | 50 | 150 | 00 | 4 | 12 | 4 | 407 | 55 | 50 | 145 | 60 |
| | Zone | | Easting | | Northing | | | | Zone | | Easting | | Northing | | |

X See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The Thexton Ranch Historic District boundary encompasses 240 acres in Township 6 South, Range 1 West, Montana Prime Meridian. The property includes the W 1/2 SE 1/4, NE 1/4 SE 1/4, and the SW 1/4 NE 1/4 of Section 30, and the W 1/2 SW 1/4 of Section 29.

Boundary Justification

The boundary of this property incorporates 120 acres from each of Charles Johnson's and George Thexton's cash entry patents, for a total of 240 acres. The boundary excludes the 40 acres retained by Don Thexton (part of George Thexton's Cash Entry patent).

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Janene Caywood

organization: Historical Research Associates, Inc.

date: January 2006

street & number: P.O. Box 7086

telephone: 406 721-1958

city or town: Missoula

state: MT

zip code: 59807-7086

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title: Kirby and Jan Alton

street & number: 815 Country Valley Rd

city or town: Thousand Oaks

state: CA

zip code: 91362-5637

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Section 10. UTM's, continued

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----|------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 5 | 12 Zone | 4 407 55 Easting | 50 137 55 Northing | 8 | 12 Zone | 4 400 00 Easting | 50 140 00 Northing |
| 6 | 12 Zone | 4 403 40 Easting | 50 137 55 Northing | 9 | 12 Zone | 4 400 00 Easting | 50 137 55 Northing |
| 7 | 12 Zone | 4 403 40 Easting | 50 140 00 Northing | 10 | 12 Zone | 4 395 80 Easting | 50 137 55 Northing |

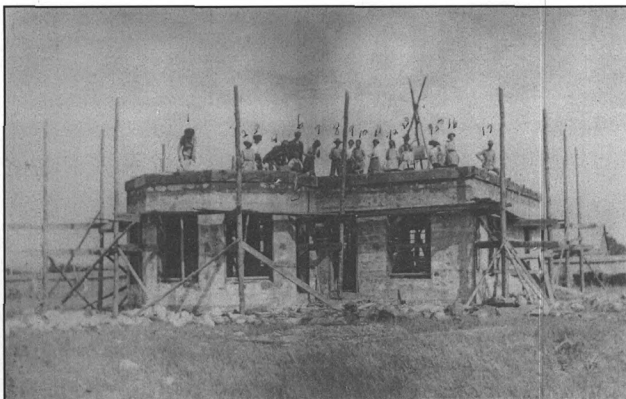
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Historical Photos – all courtesy of Don Thexton, Ennis, Montana



Ranch house under construction, between 1910 and 1912.



Ranch house after completion.

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Front of the original ranch house, looking northeast towards Blaine Spring Creek.



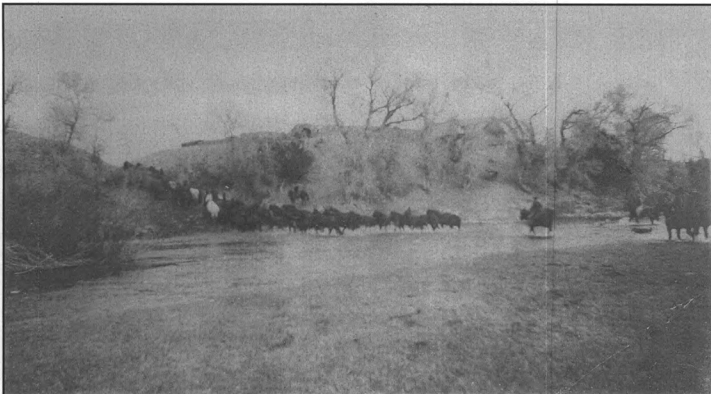
Rear of old ranch house.

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Crossing horses via the ford on Blaine Spring Creek and the "Hay Road" beyond.



Mary Ann Thexton with her youngest son, Don, inside the fenced garden north of the ranch house, about 1924.

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Madison County, Montana



Overview of the building complex. Photo taken from the top of the windmill tower north of the buildings.



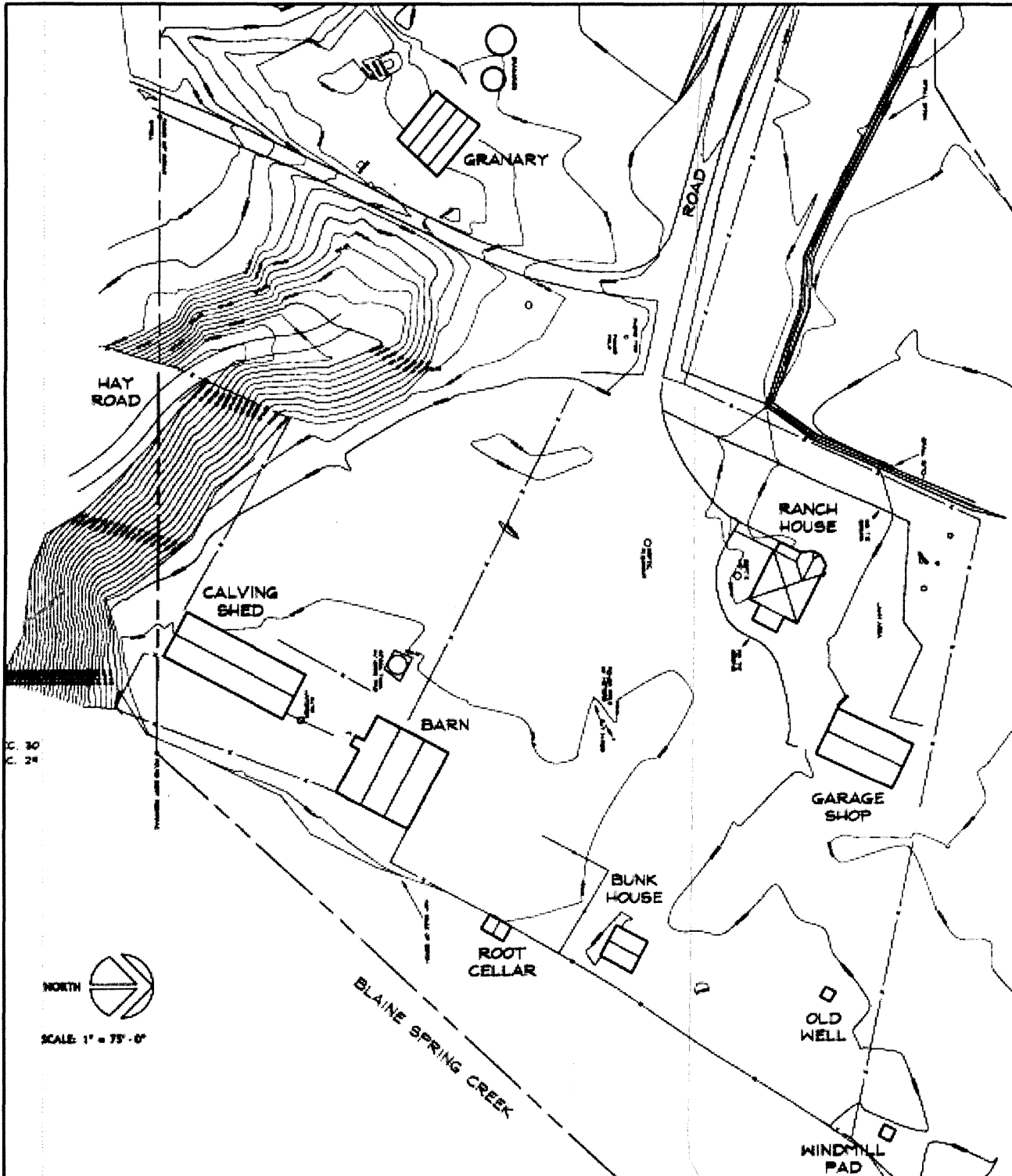
View of the rear of the ranch house showing the tower for the Jacobs wind-powered electrical generating system.

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Site Plan, 2006.