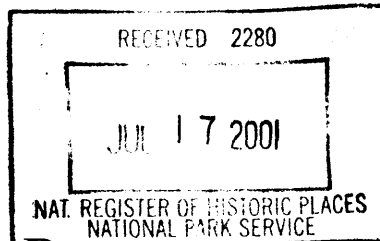


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

921

1. Name of Property

historic name: Torgrimson Place

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: West Rosebud Road

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Fishtail

vicinity: X

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Stillwater

code: 095

zip code: 59019

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.

Mark F. Sander
Signature of certifying official/Title

7/5/2001
Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

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

Entered in the National Register

Date of Action

8/31/01

5. Classification

Ownership of Property:	Private	Number of Resources within Property	
Category of Property:	Buildings /structures	Contributing	Noncontributing
		<u>5</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:	N/A	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> structures
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
Name of related multiple property listing:	N/A	<u>7</u>	<u>0</u> Total

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:
 DOMESTIC/single dwelling
 AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/agricultural outbuilding

Current Functions:
 DOMESTIC/guest house
 AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/agricultural outbuilding

7. Description

Architectural Classification:
 OTHER/vernacular

Materials:
 foundation: stone
 walls: log, stone, frame
 roof: asphalt, steel, earth
 other:

Narrative Description

Southcentral Montana is defined by the magnificent backdrop of the Beartooth Mountain Front, from which numerous clear and rushing streams issue from the mountains. The Torgrimson Place lies along one of these streams, the West Rosebud, not far from the mountain bulwark itself. The West Rosebud flows in a northeasterly direction from the Beartooth Mountains, joining the East Rosebud a short distance south of the town of Absarokee and emptying into the Stillwater just downstream. Located about 14 miles upstream from Absarokee, the Torgrimson Place sits along the edge of the first terrace of the West Rosebud, overlooking the floodplain and mountain stream. The Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness is only a few miles away providing a wonderful mountain setting for the historic log home that is the focus of this historic site.¹

¹ The Torgrimson homestead is known locally as the Torgrimson Place and will be referred to as such throughout this nomination.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria:

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of 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 (Exceptions): N/A

Significant Dates: 1892; 1900; 1910

Areas of Significance:

Significant Person(s): N/A

Agriculture
 Architecture/vernacular
 Ethnic Heritage/European

Cultural Affiliation: Norwegian

Architect/Builder: John Sivertson

Period(s) of Significance: ca. 1892-1951

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Torgrimson Place on West Rosebud Creek in Stillwater County, Montana is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its historic association with land settlement in southcentral Montana. It represents several phases of land tenure from the squatter claim to the successful homestead patent and subsequent land tenancy. The first homesteading period in Montana occurred in the rich mountain valleys of western Montana in the 1860s and 1870s. The great “homesteading boom” that inhabited eastern and northern Montana happened between 1908 and 1918. Land settlement on ceded Crow reservation lands began in the early 1890s and illustrates a unique episode in the homesteading movement in Montana. The Torgrimson Place represents the development of a homestead originally located on Crow land to the initial “squattening” claim and finally the legal acquisition of the land under the 1862 Homestead Act land patent process. After the original homesteader moved to town, families rented the Torgrimson Place into the 1960s.

The Torgrimson Place also represents Norwegian settlement in this fairly remote section of Montana. The attraction of free and accessible land brought settlers to the fairly isolated valley bottoms of the tributaries of the Stillwater River. In the area south of present-day Absarokee, many of these early settlers were Norwegians, who had either already migrated to Montana or came from the mid-West or Norway following family or friends to the region.¹¹

¹¹ For a general discussion of land settlement in Montana, see Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder and William L. Lang, *Montana A History of Two Centuries* rev. ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

9. Major Bibliographic References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

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

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property : approximately 3.5 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	
	12	613680	5027560	(center of site)

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): T5S R18E SW1/4 SW1/4 Section 13.
Fishtail Montana 7.5 USGS quadrangle map, see attached map

Verbal Boundary Description

The Torgrimson Place is located south of the West Rosebud Road and north of West Rosebud Creek. The east boundary is defined by the east corral wall that extends southward across the irrigation ditch; the south boundary extends from the corner of the south corral wall on the south side of the irrigation ditch westward following the south side of the irrigation ditch to the stone wall. The boundary then follows the stone wall north until it reaches the terrace slope. The boundary then connects on the first terrace with the west fence of the domestic unit. The boundary follows this fence north until it reaches the north fence of the domestic unit. The boundary then continues eastward along the fence line to the northwest corner of the barn. It follows the north side of the barn and then continues east along the north corral fence to place of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn to encompass the domestic and agricultural buildings and structures situated on the first terrace above the floodplain of the West Rosebud and the irrigation ditch immediately below the terrace in the floodplain.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Joan L. Brownell		date: March 2001
organization:		telephone: (406) 254-2601
street & number: 3203 Country Club Circle		zip code: 59102
city or town: Billings	state: MT	

Property Owner

name/title: Jack and Susan Heyneman		telephone: (406) 322-5852
street & number: HC55 Box 265		zip code: 59019
city or town: Fishtail	state: MT	

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The Torgrimson Place is comprised of two distinct components, a historic homestead log home and associated root cellar, and three 1940s agricultural buildings. The domestic buildings consist of the original pre-1900 hewn log house and the stone root cellar. A wire fence defines the boundary on three sides and a pole fence stands along the south boundary at the edge of the terrace. Mature cottonwoods line the fence to the north and west and several lilac bushes flourish within the yard. The well-maintained yard accentuates the historic character of the hewn log house.

The agricultural buildings, all painted red with white trim, stand to the east of the domestic unit along the edge of the terrace. They were constructed later in time and consist of a small log bunkhouse, a pole machine shed and a frame dairy barn. Other agricultural components with the farm include a pole corral south of the barn and a low circular concrete foundation that originally supported a grain bin, now removed. Within the floodplain below the homestead is an irrigation ditch with a stone wall section to divert the overflow.

Description of Resources

Hewn Log House

In January 1900, Henry Torgrimson brought his wife to this log dwelling where "the walls was just bare log as it was outside."² This one-story house of horizontal logs is constructed of two-sided hand hewn fir logs laid carefully and joined by half-dovetail notching at the corners with sawn ends. Telltale score marks and other surface irregularities indicate the planking method. The logs are shaped to fit closely together and the remaining narrow interstices have been filled with mortar. Timbers utilized are relatively thick with widths varying in size from 12 to 20 inches wide.

The foundation is presently faced with concrete but some stone is visible underneath. The building is "L" shaped and has a steep hipped roof with extended enclosed eaves and covered with asphalt shingles. A low brick chimney protrudes from each roof ridge. The building measures overall approximately 33 feet north/south by 40 feet east/west. A small entry porch encloses the original centered entrance on the south wall. This porch is of

² The original handwritten reminiscence circa 1940 of Mrs. Torgrimson is on file in the Isabelle Johnson collection of the archives at the Museum of the Beartooths, Columbus, MT and will be referred to as Mrs. Torgrimson reminiscence hereafter.

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frame construction, sided by horizontal partial round slab logs and has a hipped roof covered with asphalt shingles. The east porch wall contains a solid vertical plank door and wood screen that provides interior access. The porch south wall holds a 9/9 sliding window centered on the wall. A brick walk and single brick step approaches the doorway from the front gate. A second rear doorway is situated on the west side wall of the house and opens onto a small concrete patio.

The majority of windows are 2/2 double-hung sash set directly beneath the eaves to allow for maximum interior light. The east wall holds a single and paired window units. The north wall contains two double-hung windows with a third smaller 1/1 double-hung modified from an original window. The north end wall holds a centered paired 2/2 double-hung windows while the west end wall has no openings. The west side wall has a single 2/2 double-hung window plus the rear doorway. The south wall holds a replacement casement window to the west of the enclosed porch and a single 2/2 double-hung window to the east.

When Henry Torgrimson gave his final proof in January 1906 for his homestead patent, he declared that "the House was built on the land when I became the possessor of the claim."³ Thomas Lay, who squatted on this site in the late 1890s, apparently utilized the expertise of John Sivertson for the log construction. John Sivertson told his grandson, Fred Weiler, that he hewed the logs and helped build this log house. He used a broad axe and an adze to shape the logs. The logs were brought down from the upper West Rosebud.⁴

John Sivertson came to Montana from Tronjheim, Norway before the 1890s. According to Fred Weiler, he first herded sheep on the Musselshell River for Martin T. Grande, another Norwegian. He then went to Alaska where he made enough money to travel back to Norway and marry his wife. They returned to Montana and settled near present-day Fishtail on the recently ceded Crow reservation lands. Although the date of his arrival to the West Rosebud is unknown, Fred's mother was born at Fishtail in 1896. Mr. Sivertson received a homestead patent in

³ Henry Torgrimson, Certificate Patent Case File, Bozeman Land Office, Homestead Certificate No. 2782, Records of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Record Group 49, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereafter referred to as Torgrimson Case File).

⁴ Interview with Fred Weiler, February 18, 2001, Columbus, MT. Interview conducted by Joan L. Brownell.

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1906 for lands on the West Rosebud between Fishtail and the Torgrimson Place. His original homestead house, of similar log construction, has recently been destroyed.⁵

The log house has experienced some modifications over time but retains a well-preserved quality. Originally wood shakes covered the roof, which were replaced in 1990 by asphalt shingles. The introduction of the enclosed porch built around 1967 disturbs the presentation of the south wall but is not overly intrusive. Window placement generally has been retained although windows units have been replaced and metal storm windows added for insulation. The double casement window on the south wall has also replaced presumably a single double-hung window and it appears that an original window on the north wall has been altered to a smaller one. The stone foundation has been faced with concrete and mortar fills the spaces between the logs. In 1991, the present owners completely remodeled the interior of the building and left the interior logs exposed. The interior organization retains its original simplicity of two small bedrooms, a living room and kitchen plus a bath.

This hewn log house is a contributing building within the historic district.

Root Cellar

This deteriorating root cellar is an original element of the domestic component, presumably constructed at the same time as the house in the late 1890s. The cellar sits in the southeast corner of the fenced yard below the house. Built into a slight slope, it measures approximately 22 feet east/west by 19 feet north/south. The dirt and board roof has collapsed inward. The north, south and east walls exhibit dry-laid random stacked horizontal sandstone slabs and incorporates some larger rounded sandstone (both locally accessible) into the walls. The west front wall is more pronounced with the same dry-laid masonry. The double entry is centered on the west wall and topped by a large sandstone slab. The exterior and interior entry doors are both of horizontal boards with concrete walls between the doors.

⁵ Fred Weiler Interview. Land patent information derived from the BLM Official Federal Land Patents Record Site (www.glorerecords.blm.gov).

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All of the local informants recall storing hundreds of canning jars and potatoes in the root cellar. One remembers that rattlesnakes lived in the cellar.⁶ The integrity of the root cellar has been diminished slightly by natural deterioration but still conveys a strong sense of its historic character and association. The root cellar is a contributing building within the historic district.

Bunkhouse

This building stands approximately 64 feet southeast and downslope of the house along the edge of the terrace. Joyce Arthun remembers this was a log chicken house when she lived there in the early 1930s. Pearl Ostrum, who lived at the Torgrimson Place in the 1940s, remembers this was a chicken house that and it was still used as a chicken house when the Weilers lived there in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was eventually converted into a bunkhouse. This building is shown on a circa 1942 photograph of the Torgrimson Place.⁷

The bunkhouse is a rectangular one-story log building with a frame shed roof addition across its south wall. The bunkhouse measures overall 12 feet east/west by 17 feet north/south and is painted red with white trim. The building sits on a concrete foundation that adjusts to ground level. The log portion is constructed of peeled round logs whose log ends are covered by wide vertical boards and accentuated by a corner board. Mortar chinking fills the interstices. The gable roof and the shed extension are covered with steel roofing, have exposed rafters and wide eaves. The gable ends are clad with board and batten siding. A door entry of vertical boards is located on the east end wall and a centered fixed rectangular window on the north wall. The addition serves as a summer sleeping porch and is clad with board and batten siding. A row of three screened windows fills the west wall and the south wall holds two sets of paired screen windows.

The bunkhouse was originally built as a chicken house sometime prior to the 1930s. A low chicken door is still visible on the north side wall. The bunkhouse retains good integrity. The roofing materials have been replaced over time. The bunkhouse is a contributing building within the historic district.

⁶ Interview with Pearl Ostrum, July 28, 2000, Livingston, MT; Interview with Mim Weiler, June 30, 2000, Columbus, MT; Interview with Clarice Hedrick, July 6, 2000, Absarokee, MT; Interview with Joyce Arthun, February 5, 2001, Billings, MT. All interviews conducted by Joan L. Brownell.

⁷ Arthun Interview; Ostrum Interview; Mim Weiler Interview; Photograph circa 1942 in possession of Pearl Ostrum, Livingston, MT.

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Machine Shed

The machine shed stands along the edge of the terrace to the east of the bunkhouse and is painted red with white trim. Sandstone is placed at regular intervals along the south side wall. This rectangular pole building measures 20 feet north/south by 41 feet east/west. The machine shed is clad with horizontal wood siding on the west and north wall and vertical board siding on the south and east wall. Three walls are solid while the north wall holds two large sliding doors. The gable roof has an extended south slope, is covered with steel roofing and has exposed rafter ends. The interior flooring is a combination of deteriorating concrete and dirt. The machine shed retains integrity although the roofing material has been replaced over time.

Fred Weiler believes this building was probably built around the same time they built the barn in 1942 and he remembers the building stood here when they lived on the place in the late 1950s. A portion of the machine shed is shown in the circa 1942 photograph of the Torgrimson Place.⁸ The machine shed is a contributing building within the historic district.

Barn

This gambrel barn with centered driveway and large hay mow was constructed as a dairy barn in 1942 when Jake and Pearl Ostrum lived at the Torgrimson Place. Pearl remembers cooking for the local carpenters who built it.⁹ This rectangular post and beam barn measures 38 feet east/west by 48 feet north/south with a shed roof extension or wing across the south wall. It rests on a concrete foundation that adjusts to ground level. The entire building, painted red with white trim, is clad with horizontal weatherboard and has corner boards. The bellcast gambrel roof has steep side slopes and is covered with steel roofing. A hood extends over the hay mow double-door that fills the apex on the west wall. This door is flanked to either side by two small four-light fixed windows. The west wall contains numerous other openings. The ground floor has a centered sliding vertical tongue and groove door. A row of three six-light (multiple pane) windows are situated to the south of the sliding door.

⁸ Fred Weiler Interview; 1942 photograph.

⁹ Ostrum Interview.

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The east end wall appears symmetrical with two small four light windows in the gambrel end and at ground level, a central sliding door flanked to either side by a small four-light window. Above both the east and west driveway entrances is a framed hinged opening above which the Bench Ranch brand is displayed.

The north side wall holds a row of six small four-light windows. Four four-light windows fill the south wall of the shed wing. Don Peterson built the south wing or lean-to in the early 1950s. It has two entries on its west end wall, a wide hinged double door on its east end wall and a sliding door near the southwest corner on the south wall.

Pearl Ostrum remembers that having a dairy was "a big project because you had to keep everything really clean...and in 1942 is when we got the electricity. Then we had milking machines in the dairy barn. We milked maybe 20 cows." Her job was to help the milkers carry the milk. The wing or lean-to contains an elevated cow stall. Fred Weiler said that Don Peterson put in a "three stall surge dairy parlor" in the early 1950s. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Fred Weiler had about 30 cows and milked the cows in the elevated milk parlor and used the main barn as a holding area.¹⁰ The barn no longer functions as a dairy barn but is still part of the ranching operation. It has retained integrity in all aspects. The barn is a contributing building within the historic district.

Other agricultural elements

A post and pole corral stands east of the barn and uses railroad ties as posts. The corral extends into a water gap at the irrigation ditch below the terrace. An irrigation ditch runs in a generally east/west direction immediately below the first terrace in the West Rosebud floodplain. A cobblestone and concrete wall running north/south divides the ditch with two headgates centered on the wall. The wall stands three to five feet high, measures approximately 160 feet overall and was built to divert the overflow. The corral and the irrigation ditch are contributing structures within the historic district. There is also a low circular concrete foundation with a diameter of 14 feet along the terrace edge west of the bunkhouse where a grain bin presumably sat. A small

¹⁰ Ostrum Interview; Fred Weiler Interview; for information on elevated cow stalls, see J. O. Tretsven and O. W. Monson, "The Montana Elevated Cow Stall," *Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station Circular 186* (November, 1947), 1-8.

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plank bridge crosses over the irrigation ditch. There was once a large sheep-shearing shed between the homestead and the West Rosebud.

Integrity

The Torgrimson Place retains a remarkably high degree of integrity of setting, surrounded by open pastures, the West Rosebud floodplain and its riparian vegetation with the Beartooth Mountains in the distance. No modern intrusions disturb the viewshed and open natural vistas are found in all directions. The location of the homestead is unchanged.

The Torgrimson Place arrangement consists of two distinct units that represent two different time periods: the original pre-1900 historic homestead log dwelling and associated root cellar combined with later agricultural outbuildings. The continuous use of the log house as the primary dwelling is somewhat unique. A homestead usually evolves where a more substantial dwelling is built to replace the original homestead dwelling. Since the Torgrimsons moved to Absarokee in 1910, they never considered a new house at the homestead necessary for their tenants, thereby preserving the original homestead house into the twenty-first century. The basic form and massing of the house is unaltered. The introduction of newer materials like roofing and windows combined with the original historic fabric have successfully preserved the integrity of the log construction. The enclosed entry to the house is not overly intrusive and does not disturb the overall historic character to a great degree. The root cellar retains its historic character regardless of its natural deterioration.

The two 1940s agricultural outbuildings illustrate a later progression of the farmstead when dairy cows became a viable commodity for farmers in the Stillwater region. All of these later agricultural outbuildings retain integrity with only minimal modifications as roofing materials. Neither the barn or the machine shed have been remodeled and are both able to convey original design and function. The readaptive use of the pre-1930s log chicken house into a bunkhouse does not detract from its integrity. It should also be noted that the use of red on agricultural outbuildings is a common tradition amongst Scandinavians.

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The impressive pre-1900 hewn log building on the Torgrimson Place is eligible on its own merits under Criterion C. Original homestead log buildings are a seriously threatened resource in the twenty-first century. This hand hewn log building is unique in that it has stood for over one hundred years relatively undisturbed and retains excellent integrity, reinforced by the pristine landscape that surrounds the building. The Torgrimson log house is of hand hewn log construction and representative of ethnic vernacular log architecture. The score marks and other surface irregularities testifies to the use of broad ax and adze on the hewn faces of the timbers. These methods of construction attest to the Norwegian heritage of the region. John Sivertson, a Norwegian who settled on the West Rosebud in the mid-1890s, cut and shaped the logs and participated in the construction. Although a crude form, the building displays characteristics of Norwegian log construction, including the choice of thick fir timbers, the use of the broad ax and adze, and the carefully laid logs with minimal spacing between the logs. While square notching is most often associated with Norwegian log construction, the half-dovetail notching exhibits skilled workmanship.¹²

History of Torgrimson Place

Crow Reservation

The Torgrimson Place is situated on lands designated Crow Reservation by the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty. Crow territory encompassed all lands south of the Musselshell River between the headwaters of the Yellowstone River to the west, the headwaters of the Powder River to the east and along the main ridge of the Wind River Mountains in Wyoming at its south boundary. The Mountain Crow occupied the land south of the Yellowstone River while the River Crow occupied the territory north of the river. The Sioux and Blackfeet constantly threatened the Crow within this territory and pushed towards southcentral region of Montana. Simultaneously, their traditional lifeways were rapidly changing with the disappearance of the buffalo. After the discovery of gold in southwestern Montana in the 1860s, continuous pressures by whites gradually resulted in several

¹² For a comprehensive discussion on Scandinavian log construction and its heritage, refer to Terry G. Jordan, *American Log Buildings An Old World Heritage* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

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reductions to the original Crow reservation boundaries. The Stillwater River and all its tributaries remained part of the Crow Reservation until the last decade of the nineteenth century.¹³

During the last half of the nineteenth century, the Stillwater drainage within the reservation boundary experienced limited settlement. The passage of the Bozeman and Bridger Trails in the 1860s through the region to reach the gold fields in southwestern Montana made no lasting impact. In 1875, the Crow Agency moved from Mission Creek on the Yellowstone River to its new location on Butcher Creek, a few miles south of present-day Absarokee, Montana. The presence of the agency created the first settlement within the Stillwater drainage. When the government abandoned the agency, some white citizens remained and squatted on lands in the vicinity of the former agency. The presence of the agency also stimulated development north of the Yellowstone River (and outside the reservation) to accommodate traffic and provide supplies to the agency. This led to the establishment of the present-day town of Columbus (originally called Stillwater). The completion of the Northern Pacific Railway in 1883 along the Yellowstone River valley bottom assured the town's permanence.¹⁴

In 1883, the Crow Agency moved eastward to its present site on the Little Bighorn River. That same year, prospectors discovered copper-bearing ore on the West Fork of the Stillwater, which brought a small rush to the region. By late 1883, over 200 claims had been staked and a small tent city called Nye grew into the second settlement in the Stillwater drainage. By 1887, the Minneapolis Mining Company had purchased the majority of

¹³ For a general historic overview of the Crow Tribe, see Peter Nabokov and Lawrence Loendorf, *Every Morning of the World*. Report for National Park Service, 1994: 31-49. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 reduced Crow territory to consist of lands south and east of the Yellowstone River to the present Montana-Wyoming boundary and just east of the Bighorn River. An 1880 agreement ratified in 1882 eliminated all Crow lands west of the Boulder River plus a wide strip of land that included the town of Red Lodge and extended to the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone. Crow treaties and agreements are available in Charles J. Kappler, compiled and edited, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904). For discussions of the reductions of the reservation, see William M. Brooke, "A Contest over Land: Nineteenth Century Crow-White Relations," *Montana Vistas: Selected Historical Essays* ed. Robert Swartout, Jr. (Washington, DC: University Press of American, Inc., 1981), 1-24 and Burton M. Smith, "Politics and the Crow Indians Land Cessions," *Montana Magazine of Western History* 36 (Autumn 1986), 24-37.

¹⁴ The authority on the Bozeman Trail is Susan Badger Doyle, *Journeys to the Land of Gold*, 2 vols. (Helena, MT: Montana Historical Society Press, 2000); Jim Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, 3 vols. (Billings, MT: Reporter Printing & Supply, 1964), vol. 2, 128-130.

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the claims and developed a full-scale mining operation. This mining region was abandoned in 1889 after government surveyors discovered that the district was within the Crow Reservation boundaries.¹⁵

The activity on the West Stillwater reinforced efforts by whites to remove the Crow from the Stillwater region. In 1890, the federal government came to another agreement with the Crows for a further reduction of their reservation that was not ratified until 1892. Under this agreement, the Crow Tribe ceded all lands east of the Boulder River to a new reservation boundary on the divide between Pryor Creek and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River. On October 15, 1892, the ceded lands opened for settlement. Settlers could now file homestead entries as soon as the government survey was approved.¹⁶

Land Settlement

The *Billings Gazette* announced the opening of the Crow Reservation:

Now For A Home!

Claims Being Staked Out and Locations Filed on the Late Crow Reserve
Hundreds of Settlers Crossing the Yellowstone to the Land of Promise

. . . up the valley, from Laurel, Park City and Stillwater the excitement is intense and settlements are almost deserted, every able bodied man being out on the reservation building a foundation, posting locations notice or camping right down on the spot that he has had in view since early last year.

The Rosebud valley and Stillwater river was pretty thoroughly colonized by boomers three weeks or a month ago, all determined to be upon the ground when the glad tidings should be proclaimed.¹⁷

Within a few weeks, one local businessman reported that "the Stillwater, Rosebud, big and little and Fish Tail basin is pretty thoroughly staked out by someone."¹⁸

¹⁵ Annin, *They Gazed at the Beartooths*, vol. 3, 593-596; for a general overview of the development of the West Stillwater, see also Mitzi Rossillon and Mary McCormick, "Cultural Resource Inventory of the Stillwater River Road Project on Montana Forest Highway 83, Stillwater County," Report by Renewable Technology Inc., Butte, MT for Western Federal Lands Highway Division, Vancouver, WA.

¹⁶ Kappler, vol. 1, 432-436.

¹⁷ *The Billings Gazette*, October 20, 1892, 1.

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Problems with government surveys and pre-existing Indian allotments delayed settlers from obtaining land patents within the Stillwater region. A formal application for a land patent was not possible until the federal survey was approved. Early settlers unable to legally file a homestead entry until such a survey was completed became known as squatters. Many squatters filed documents at the appropriate county courthouse called ranch declarations that declared a "valid right" to a certain property. Unfortunately, no ranch declaration has been located for the Torgrimson location and therefore it is undetermined when the location was first settled.¹⁹

The Torgrimson Place is situated in T5S R18E. The General Land Office (GLO) map for this township was not surveyed until late fall of 1899, seven years after the opening of ceded reservation lands for settlement. The surveyor describes "valley lands" that "are of considerable extent and rich soil and are occupied by a large number of resident settlers. Water is abundant furnished by the numerous swiftly flowing streams and irrigation is generally practised [sic]."²⁰ The description of the adjacent township to the west, also surveyed in 1899, provides a more detailed view of this area that included the original Torgrimson homestead.

There is ample water available for irrigating the bottomlands, which yield abundant crops of grain and vegetables. The mountainous and hilly lands support a very nutritious and abundant growth of grass.

The attention of settlers in this township is chiefly devoted to stock raising, especially cattle. There are many hundreds of heads [sic] of cattle grazing throughout the township during the season.

Trout is abundant in West Rosebud and Fishtail creeks. There is no valuable timber in this township. There is a heavy growth of cottonwood and quaking aspen and dense willow undergrowth along Fishtail and West Rosebud creeks.²¹

The survey maps show extensive settlement along the West Rosebud indicated by fence lines, residences, cultivated fields, roads and irrigation ditches. At the location of the Torgrimson Place, both survey maps identify

¹⁸ *The Billings Gazette*, October 27, 1892, 5.

¹⁹ Ranch declarations are generally filed under Miscellaneous Records in the Clerk and Recorder's offices in county courthouses. Both Yellowstone and Carbon County records were investigated for such documents. This area was originally part of Yellowstone County until it became part of Carbon County created in 1895. Stillwater County was not created until 1913.

²⁰ United States Surveyor General, 1900 General Land Office (GLO) map and survey notes for T5S R18E, microfiche, on file Records Room, Montana Bureau of Land Management State Office, Billings, MT (hereafter refer as Surveyor General).

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"Thos. Loy's [sic]" house and field, with the house immediately north of the West Rosebud and the field situated south of the creek.²²

The Thomas Lay house identified on the GLO survey maps is the same log building extant at the Torgrimson Place. Thomas Lay originally came to Montana from Missouri in the late 1870s and settled in the Gallatin Valley near present-day Gallatin Gateway. Lay received a homestead patent in 1888 but apparently moved his family to the West Rosebud after the opening of Crow reservation lands for settlement in 1892. Thomas Lay presumably squatted on the West Rosebud at the Torgrimson location since no records have been located that indicate he filed any claim to the land. The 1900 Census for the Fishtail vicinity lists Thomas Lay as a 50-year-old farmer with his wife Betsey and two children.²³

Although Thomas Lay had no legal claim to the land, Henry Torgrimson accepted Lay's squatter's rights when he filed on his homestead entry. Torgrimson purchased Lay's interest in the property and water rights for \$1200 in October 1901 "particularly conveying all wire post and pole fence, one log house, one log stable, one log hen house, one log smoke house and all other buildings situated on or appurtenant to said lands."²⁴

Norwegian land settlement in the Stillwater

Henry Torgrimson was one of the many individuals of Norwegian heritage who arrived in the Stillwater region after the opening of the Crow Reservation in October 1892. The expansion of railroads westward across North Dakota and Montana encouraged migration from the centers of Norwegian colonization in Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin. Strong communication links of friends and family combined with the extensive efforts by railroad

²¹ Surveyor General, 1903 GLO map and survey notes for T5S R18E.

²² Thos. Loy should read Thomas Lay. Surveyor General, 1900 GLO map for T5S R18E and 1903 GLO map for T58 R17E.

²³ Information pertaining to Thomas Lay was provided by his relatives; Interview with David A. Lay, February 5, 2001, Helena, MT and Lester Lay, January 29, 2001, Roberts, MT. Interviews by Joan L. Brownell; Land patent information derived from the Bureau of Land Management Official Federal Land Patents Records Site at (www.glorerecords.blm.gov); Bureau of Census, 12th Census of the United States (Washington, DC:GPO 1901), microfilm.

²⁴ Jim Annin reported that Torgrimson purchased "the homestead relinquishment of 320 acres of irrigated land plus chattels for \$2,800.00," Annin, *They Gazed at the Beartooths*, vol. 3, 237. However, since Lay had already received a homestead patent in the Gallatin Valley, he could not file for another homestead entry. Several ranch declarations were declared for the West Rosebud but

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agents brought Norwegians to Montana.

In 1900, the Norwegian population of Montana was over 6,000 within the total Montana population of less than 250,000. In Carbon County, the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Finland and Norway) dominated the foreign born population, which totaled 1, 712.²⁵ In 1910, the Norwegian population of Montana was slightly under 14,000 or 7% of the population. Carbon County had an ethnic population of almost 8,000 with 432 individuals of Norwegian heritage. In 1920, the newly created Stillwater County had a total population of 7,630 of which 2845 individuals declared foreign heritage. Of a total of 890 foreign born, Norwegians numbered the second highest ethnic group at 152. Stillwater County's population had declined by the 1930s to 6,253 and the Norwegian population was the third highest with 378 (following Germany and Russia). By the 1930s, almost 90% of the population of Stillwater County were native born therefore making it difficult to trace the Norwegian heritage of the population through the census.²⁶

The pattern of migration of Norwegians to the Stillwater region, especially south of Absarokee, appears to have a strong connection with settlements in the Musselshell River region of central Montana. Martin T. Grande came to America in 1866 and began a successful sheep operation as early as 1877 on the Musselshell and was known to support fellow Norwegians who arrived in the country. He was one of the earliest and most successful Norwegian Montanans. Norwegians from Minnesota arrived here in the late 1870s and established the first

none located in Lay's name or a family member. This quit claim deed between Lay and Torgrimson was not filed in the Stillwater County Courthouse until October 1926, *Abstract of Title*, in possession of Jack Heyneman, Fishtail, MT.

²⁵ Leola Nelson Bergmann, *Americans from Norway* (Westport, CONN: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1973), 108; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900*, Vol. I, part 1: *Population* (Washington, D.C.: US Census Office, 1901), 768. Stillwater County was not created until March 1913 and the area south of the Stillwater was part of Carbon County from 1895 to 1913. Many of these Scandinavian immigrants to Carbon County worked in the coal mines surrounding Red Lodge. See Shirley Zupan and Harry J. Owens, *Red Lodge Saga of a Western Area* (Billings, MT: Frontier Press, 1979).

²⁶ Unless otherwise stated, the population numbers presented are a combination of foreign-born and native born with either one or both parents born in a foreign country. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, Vol. 2: *Population 1910*, (Washington, D.C.:GPO, 1913), 1147, 1152 (hereafter referred to as Bureau of Census); Bureau of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, Vol. 3: *Composition and Characteristics of the Population by States*, (Washington, D.C.:GPO, 1923), 583, 586; Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930. Population*, Vol. 3, Part 2: *Reports by States: Montana-Wyoming* (Washington, D.C.:GPO, 1932), 29, 32, 33.

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Lutheran congregation in Montana by 1885. The presence of Norwegians already settled in this region of Montana obviously influenced a "great influx of Scandinavian people who migrated to the Castle region" in the late 1880s, where a Scandinavian colony grew near Lennep on the Mussleshell.²⁷

The opening of ceded Crow reservation lands for settlement in October 1892 coincided with depressed circumstances of the Castle mining district.²⁸ Free and cheap land now available south of the Yellowstone attracted Norwegians who had come generally from rural areas. A cursory review of the local history of Stillwater County identifies at least 12 individuals of Norwegian heritage who left Castle to settle in the upper Stillwater region. Since Norwegians tended to settle in the proximity to friends or family, later arrivals came to the Stillwater either directly from Norway or, like Henry Torgrimson, from other Norwegian communities in the mid-West. Many of these Norwegians filed homestead entries on the creeks south of present-day Absarokee, as Butcher Creek, East and West Rosebud, Grove Creek and Fiddler Creek.²⁹ Today, third and fourth generations of these Norwegian settlers still live on or near the original homesteads.

A review of the local Stillwater County history shows that a majority of these Norwegians raised sheep in this country or farmed. The southern portion of Stillwater County is primarily livestock grazing country. Early sheepmen were generally transients and moved their bands from one area to another, as water dried up and feed became scarce. Later sheepmen grazed sheep in the Beartooth Mountains during the summer and wintered on irrigated lands. Sheep and cattle have always competed as the primary farming income in Stillwater County. Sheep outnumbered cattle considerably at the turn of the century but the number of sheep declined after the 1920s to the 1950s while the number of cattle increased.³⁰

²⁷ Michael A. Lesson, *The History of Montana 1739-1885* (Chicago, Warner, Beers and Company, 1885), 1286; Edward M. Wentworth, "History of the Montana Sheep Industry," *Montana Woolgrower's Association Newsletter*, July 1940, 11; Bergmann, *Americans from Norway*, 108; Pioneer Society of Sweet Grass County, *Pioneer Memories II* (Big Timber, MT: Pioneer Publishing Co., 1981), 2; Annin, *They Gazed At the Beartooths*, vol. 1, 145, 151.

²⁸ Information about Castle mining region can be found in Muriel Sibell Wolle, *Montana Pay Dirt, A Guide to the Mining Camps of the Treasure State* (Denver: Sage Books, 1963), 339-347.

²⁹ Annin, *They Gazed at the Beartooths*, vols. 1 and 3.

³⁰ Ibid; U.S. Dept of Agriculture, Dept. of Agronomy and Soils, "Soils of Stillwater County" *Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 529* (March 1957), 24-26;

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One of the first Norwegians arriving in the Stillwater region after the opening of the ceded Crow reservation lands was Sever Simonson who had both mined and operated a store in Castle. He located at the present-day town of Absarokee a few days prior to the opening of the ceded lands and became instrumental in the creation and development of the town, eventually platting his homestead for the townsite. His son Lee, who became involved in the sheep business on the Musselshell in 1887, followed his father and moved his sheep to range south of Absarokee. Henry Torgrimson's brother-in-law, Oliver Hovda, had worked for his uncle Sever Simonson in Castle and eventually followed him to the Stillwater. Hovda established a sheep ranch on the East Rosebud and located the homestead on the West Rosebud for Henry Torgrimson.³¹

Henry Torgrimson, Homesteader and Businessman

Born in Grand Meadows, Minnesota in March 1877, Henry Torgrimson was educated and briefly employed as a store clerk in Minnesota until he followed his Norwegian relatives to Montana and acquired the homestead on the West Rosebud. He first settled on the property now known as the Torgrimson Place on January 1, 1900.³²

In February 1901, Henry Torgrimson filed his homestead claim under the 1862 Homestead Act for Lot 4, Section 18 and Lot 1, Section 19, T5S R I 8E. In 1903, he amended his original claim to include the SE1/4 SE1/4 of Section 13 and the NE1/4 NE1/4 of Section 24, T5S R17E after the government approved the survey for the township. He declared on his final proof that "the house was built on the land when I became the possessor of the claim." Other improvements included a "stable, shed, granary, henhouse, roothouse, corralls [sic], fencing, ditches, orchard," all valued at \$2000.00. He stated he was 28 years old with a wife and two children. He also had cultivated five crops, increasing from 20 acres the first year to 52 acres the past two years.³³

³¹ Annin, *They Gazed at the Beartooths*, vol. 3, 184-185; Wentworth, "History of Montana Sheep Industry," 10-11; Annin, vol. 1, 251-52.

³² Tom Stout, *Montana. Its Story and Biography* 2 vols., volume 2 (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1921), 295-296. Although there is some discrepancy on Torgrimson's settlement date of either January 1900 or 1901, the year 1900 is used in this report based on the documents signed by Torgrimson in his case file. His wife in her reminiscence also gives January 1900 when she arrived to join her husband, Torgrimson Case File; Mrs. Torgrimson reminiscence.

³³ Torgrimson Case File.

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Henry Torgrimson received his final patent in August 1906 for approximately 160 acres. He was one of five Norwegian settlers out of fifteen settlers who received homestead patents for lands adjacent to the West Rosebud in his township between 1900 and 1910.³⁴

It appears that Henry Torgrimson struggled as a farmer/rancher. His son, Elmen Torgrimson, recalled that his mother was the farmer, not his father. "In the summertime he was on the ranch but Mother got up in the morning early and go out and irrigate and don't even wake him." In the winters, Henry would work in Absarokee doing various jobs, like tending bar and working in a store.³⁵ Mrs. Torgrimson remembered:

My husband would go out and work at anything he could get to do any spare time he had from the farm. In the fall he would pick turkeys and Make 6 a day and after work he would sometimes walk home from Absarokee Saturday night 13 miles across the hills and then he worked for Lee Simonson's and got \$25 a month tending sheep camp. . . .

My husband finally got a job to clerk in the farmers coop store, and we rented the ranch and moved to Absarokee . . .

Then one of the officers of the Coop store had a son he wanted to have my husband's job so Henry lost his job & after that many people came to Henry & wanted him to start a store of his own. They said we will trade with you if you start so Henry decided to go into the store business, but he had to mortgage the ranch to get the money to start & I was very much worried over the mortgaging the ranch, but it was done & the people that urged Henry to start kept their word & Many others came and traded even people from other towns all around and His business grew and grew and he bought out the store building I have now. ³⁶

Henry Torgrimson first worked for Sever Simonson at the Absarokee Co-operative Trading Company, then for Alec Ross and Freelain Runner who bought the store from Simonson. In 1910, he finally opened his own mercantile store in Absarokee. After purchasing the C. W. Sparr Company in Absarokee, he founded the Stillwater Trading Company in 1912, a mercantile store that became very successful. Torgrimson operated the store for many years, assisted by his

³⁴ Information on land patents is taken from Master Title Plats and Control Documents Index cards of General Land Office, on file Records Room, Montana BLM State Office, Billings, MT.

³⁵ Elmen H. Torgrimson, Interview by Julie Foster, September 10, 1982, Absarokee, MT, Oral History Interview 376, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

³⁶ Mrs. Torgrimson reminiscence.

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son, Elmen, who eventually took over the business.³⁷ One reason for his success was his association with other Norwegian settlers and since he spoke the ". . . language fluently, it was but natural that he attracted to himself in no small measure the confidence and respect of the Scandinavian population of this territory and became to them a leader and a spokesman."³⁸

Henry Torgrimson contracted influenza during the epidemic of 1918 and never truly recovered. He died on June 2, 1923. Although they left the ranch to live in Absarokee in 1910, Henry Torgrimson expanded his land holdings by purchasing additional acreage adjacent to his original homestead in 1910 and 1917 until he held over 500 acres at his death. His wife writes that just prior to his death he had bought farm machinery and planned to move back up to the ranch and run it.³⁹

Land Tenants on Torgrimson Homestead

Henry Torgrimson discovered fairly quickly that he was better suited as a merchant than a farmer and moved into Absarokee in 1910. In February 1910, Torgrimson had an auction sale "of livestock, farm machinery, etc., consisting of one stallion, a number of mares in foal, two-year old and yearling colts, one milch cow and a large lot of farm machinery and household goods."⁴⁰ The Torgrimson family retained ownership of the property until the 1960s and rented out their ranch consistently throughout this period.⁴¹

In Montana, tenancy has been a common practice "where a large portion of the land in farms is leased or rented from the owners by the farm operator." The number of farms/ranches operated by tenants increased "almost continuously since 1880." The 1920 Census for Stillwater County shows farms numbered 1,370 with 203 or 14.8% operated by tenants. By 1930, the number of farms had decreased to 962 and tenancy increased with 279 or 29% operated by tenants. Conditions worsened in the droughts and Depression of the 1930s.

³⁷ Annin, *They Gazed at the Beartooths*, vol. 3, 236-237; *The Absarokee Enterprise*, June 7, 1923, 1; Stout, *Montana. Its Story and Biography*, vol. 2, 295-296.

³⁸ *The Absarokee Enterprise*, June 7, 1923, 1.

³⁹ Mrs. Torgrimson reminiscence; *Abstract of Title*; *The Absarokee Enterprise*, June 7, 1923, 1.

⁴⁰ *The Columbus News*, February 17, 1910, 1.

⁴¹ *Abstract of Title*, Mrs. Torgrimson reminiscence.

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A 1935 survey indicated that Stillwater County had one of the highest percentages of tenancy in Montana, being 35% and over. In 1940, the number of farms had again decreased to 796 while tenants numbered 242, maintaining the 35% tenancy in the county. Such increased tenancy resulted from the inadequate size of most farms to successfully sustain an efficient operation. World War II and farm mechanization affected a significant decrease in farm numbers and subsequently tenants.⁴² In the region south of Absarokee, tenancy provided a means for sons and daughter to remain close to their parents and the home place. It also allowed the younger generation to continue farming or ranching during the depressed economic conditions.

In the first half of the twentieth century, livestock grazing, both sheep and cattle, dominated agriculture in the upper Stillwater region. By the 1940s, climatic conditions improved and allowed the region to recover from the devastating 1930s. Farm and ranch sizes increased while the number of farms and ranches decreased. Most stockmen combined their livestock operation with crop production, concentrating on wild and alfalfa hay.⁴³

Dairying was also common on the farms within the Stillwater drainage. Before 1910, dairying in Montana was conducted by individual farmers, supplying milk and cream to their family and animals.

Excess cream would be stored and taken to a cream station in the nearest town. During the economic depression after World War I, dairying became a side-line for many farmers and during the 1930s depression, many farmers added dairy cows to provide supplemental income. In 1900, Montana had approximately 48,500 milk cows and by 1929 had 173,303 milk cows. By 1933, there were 78 creameries in the state, including one in Columbus.

⁴² Roland R. Renne, "Readjusting Montana's Agriculture IV. Land Ownership and Tenure," *Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Bulletin* No. 310 (February, 1936), 15, 18; Bureau of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, vol. 6 Part 3: *Agriculture* (Washington, D.C.:GPO, 1923), 109; Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930 Agriculture*, vol. 3, Part 3: *Type of Farm, The Western States* (Washington, D.C.:GPO, 1932), 122; Bureau of Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940 Agriculture*, Vol. 1, Part 6: *First and Second Series State Reports, Statistic for Counties* (Washington, D.C.:GPO, 1942), 20, 25; Bureau of Census, *Census of Agriculture, 1950*, vol. 1, Part 27: *Counties and States Economic Areas, Montana* (Washington, D.C.:GPO, 1952), 51.

⁴³ For a general overview of agriculture in Stillwater County, see USDA, "Soils of Stillwater County," 23-31.

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Absarokee also briefly had a creamery and a cheese factory. By the 1940s, dairying was an integral component of diversified farming in the Stillwater region.⁴⁴

Mary Williams, who was born in the dry hills between Fishtail and West Rosebud Creek in 1920 and lived in the area until 1942, remembers that “most of the farms in the country always had milk cows.” They separated the milk and cream and sold the cream they didn’t use for their own animal consumption. They had a spring box that kept the milk cool until they took it to town. In fact, her father ran the cream station in Absarokee and later in Columbus in the 1920s. In the 1940s, many ranches on the West Rosebud “milked cows and sold the milk to the cheese factory in Columbus. A truck picked up the milk in milk cans. Later, ranchers purchased coolers to set milk cans in and it was picked up in insulated van. Then we got modern and refrigerated bulk tanks were purchased by all producers and it was picked up in bulk tanks and sold in Billings.”⁴⁵

Two of the tenants on the Torgrimson Place had milk cows and all ran sheep. The complete sequence of tenancy for the Torgrimson Place is undetermined at this time. Of the three known families that rented the Torgrimson Place, all were related to early settlers who homesteaded in the region in the late 1890s and early 1900s. All were of Norwegian descent and had other family members in the immediate vicinity, reinforcing the strong communal ties of Norwegians.

Joseph and Jesse Arthun with their two daughters leased the Torgrimson Place for approximately eight years in the 1930s. Numerous members of the Arthun family, of Norwegian descent, had settled on Butcher Creek in the late 1890s. Joseph Arthun worked with his father and brother in the sheep business while he rented the Torgrimson Place.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Information on dairying in Montana found in Raymond S. Lanier, “The Development of a specialized industry in Montana, 1919-1939” (Master’s Thesis, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT, 1956); Montana Dept. of Agriculture, Labor and Industry, Division of Publicity, *Montana Resources and Opportunities Edition of 1933*, Helena, MT: Naegle Printing Co, 1933, 78

⁴⁵ Mary Williams, Interview with Joan L. Brownell, March 20, 2001, Billings, MT; Bob Pelton, “The Pelton Family” *Montana Free Press*, January 1996, 21.

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Jake and Pearl Ostrum moved to the Torgrimson Place in the spring of 1939, soon after the Arthun family left. Jake's father came from Norway and also settled on Butcher Creek. Pearl was the granddaughter of Thorvald T. Brown and Knute Haugan, both Norwegians who came to the Stillwater Valley in the early 1890s. Jake Ostrum married Pearl in December 1935. The Ostrum's lived on the Torgrimson Place for about 12 years or until 1951 or so. Jake ran between 700 and 800 sheep on the place. They also had milk cows after the barn was built in 1942.⁴⁷

According to Mim Weiler, Donald Peterson leased the place in the early 1950s for a few years. Fred and Mim Weiler moved onto the Torgrimson Place around 1956 and left in 1962. They had milk cows and raised some sheep. Mim Weiler, the daughter of Charley and Gladys Pelton, grew up on the West Rosebud a few miles below the Torgrimson Place. Fred Weiler's Norwegian grandfather, John Sivertson cut and hewed the logs and helped build the Torgrimson house.⁴⁸

In the early 1960s, Elmen Torgrimson sold the Torgrimson Place to Jack Heyneman and it is now part of the larger Bench Ranch. Since 1992, the Torgrimson Place has served as a guesthouse for visitors who desire to relax in the beautiful West Rosebud Valley beneath the splendor of the Beartooth Mountains.

Life at the Torgrimson Place

The handwritten reminiscence of Mrs. Margarethe Torgrimson reveals the struggles and joys of early homesteading on the West Rosebud. Mrs. Torgrimson was born Anna Margarethe Hovda on October 13, 1877 in Minnesota, one of twelve children. Her great uncle on her mother's side was Sever Simonson who created the town of Absarokee. Mrs. Torgrimson married Henry Torgrimson in Grand Meadows, Minnesota in August 1898. After two years, Henry left for Montana, influenced by Margarethe's relatives who already were in the

⁴⁶ Arthun Interview; Hedrick Interview; Annin, *They Gazed at the Beartooths*, vol. 1, 18-20.

⁴⁷ Ostrum Interview; Annin, *They Gazed at the Beartooths*, vol. 2, 82-85.

⁴⁸ Mim Weiler Interview; Fred Weiler Interview.

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Stillwater Valley. Her brother Oliver Hovda, who had a sheep ranch on the East Rosebud, helped Henry Torgrimson obtain the Lay ranch.⁴⁹

Mrs. Torgrimson was a somewhat reluctant participant in this new adventure.

It seemed an awful rush to me. Henry wrote back to me and told me and said sell everything as everything is here in the house that we need. So they sold every bit of furniture I had, and I had nice furniture but as luck I kept my sewing machine and shipped it. All the rest was sold and went to pay up bills we owed even to my cow that I had gotten from my mother. Henry was oweing [sic] his brother for this and that that I did not know anything about.⁵⁰

After meeting her husband in Columbus on January 1900, they left for the ranch.

When I got to the ranch, I found the stove and furniture that I had got in place of my new ones that was sold in Minnesota. Was an old cook stove standing on part buck and part legs with a front hearth and low oven on side and so very old and the heating stove was an old box stove with a big crack in both sides so the ashes run out. The table was homemade and just three chairs that had backs on and an old cupboard for the dishes. My beds, all but one, was homemade; and they had ticks with hay in for mattresses with no springs. The one old dresser was without any glass. The house had no door casings and the walls was just the bare log as it was outside.

I did not say anything but I though [sic] a lot if we could be happy I would not complane [sic] & Henry seemed happy

Brother Oliver bought all the cattle, 90 head. We bought 6 horses, hogs, machinery, and wagons. The wagons were old and rickety, plow was an old wooden walking plow, mowing machine had one wheel broken in two and wired together. It was only 18 acres plowed into hay and 13 acres in another place.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Mrs. Torgrimson reminscence.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

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Somehow, they made it through the first winter but the following spring all their hogs died, someone shot their bull and all their cows were wild.

All summer we worked together trying to do our own work putting up hay and picking rocks as we had no money to hire help with so Henry pitched hay both ways and I loaded and stacked while our little boy sat on the hay waiting for us to get through. We sowed our grain by hand and plowed what we could with the old broken plow but we couldn't do much.⁵²

They picked berries, caught more fish than they could eat, raised a nice garden and sold potatoes that fall which Henry hauled 25 miles to sell (presumably into Columbus). Other trials included loss of livestock, both calves and horses. They bought a sow to raise hogs who ate most of her litter except for two. They cared for two of the baby pigs but they died after she fed them chokecherry pits.

The third winter, she had her second child at the homestead since the roads were impassable but a local woman came in to help them "through this trouble." The next spring she

. . . worked with my husband as I had done before. In the morning, I would get up early at 4 o'clock feed my chickens do my baking & often times have my washing out before any of the rest of the house was out of bed and the water to wash with & to be used for cooking and drinking had to be carried from the river up a hill to the house.⁵³

After a horrible experience when she attempted to save her husband who she thought had fallen into the river, Mrs. Torgrimson fell ill for the rest of the summer. She recovered by the following spring and found their "luck had changed as everything we bought lived and grew . . ." Henry "would go out and work at anything he could get to do any spare time he had from the farm." while she stayed "home alone looking after the ranch & stock for weeks." Finally Henry got a job in Absarokee and they moved to town.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

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After the Torgrimson's moved to town, they began to rent the homestead, often to other Norwegians from the immediate vicinity. Joyce Arthun and Clarice Hedrick lived on the homestead as young children in the early 1930s during the depression years. Both sisters remember they had no electricity or running water. Clarice Hedrick remembers the house was dark, with terrible windows with thin glass. They both remember lots of mice. Joyce remembers a coal heater in the living room while Clarice remembers a potbelly stove and they both agree there was a Home Comfort cookstove in the kitchen. Their mother spent her time cooking, canning and taking care of the girls. Their father worked with his father and brother in the sheep business. They also had some milk cows. The girls had chores as milking and gathering the cows and feeding chickens.⁵⁵

When asked what her life was like, Clarice recalled

"We thought it was good. We had mice in the bed. We were never ever hungry. We had an old old car that would barely go up and down the road but we thought it was wonderful. All the neighbors had teams of horses. We would horseback a lot. We had a big flock of chickens. We had about 40 old hens. All the eggs you had was what those old gals made."⁵⁶

Pearl and Jake Ostrum lived at the Torgrimson Place for 12 years where their two children were born. Pearl remembered "when we moved there, we had just a little of everything. One of the neighbors said, 'Jake, you will never make it.' But we did. That was when Roosevelt was president, and we had gotten a Farm Security loan so we could buy some sheep and cattle." Pearl did lots of canning "a couple of hundred jars of fruit usually and there were potatoes always, and they were kept in the cellar." She planted willows near the house, had a large garden and strawberry patch. In 1942 they got electricity and Jake fixed up a hand pump in the house. Pearl did all the cooking for the carpenters that built the dairy barn in 1942. Jake and Pearl also kept a small herd of about 20 dairy cows. Pearl remembers that "almost all the neighbors had a dairy business. They would come and pick up the milk."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Arthun Interview; Hedrick Interview.

⁵⁶ Hedrick Interview.

⁵⁷ Ostrum Interview.

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Fred and Mim Weiler raised sheep during the late 1950s and early 1960s. They also fixed the barn up and had milk cows too. Strict government regulations eventually halted small dairy operations.⁵⁸ In the early 1960s, the Torgrimson Place was purchased by Jack Heyneman.

Vernacular Architecture of the Torgrimson Place

Log carpentry in the West reveals “a cultural confluence and mixing that lies at the very root of western character.”⁵⁹ This statement is well represented by the hand hewn log house at the Torgrimson Place. The log house exhibits some distinctive Norwegian attributes combined with corner notching that reflects probable cultural assimilation.

Early settlers depended on locally accessible natural resources to provide materials for shelter. On the West Rosebud, timber was readily available in the Beartooth Mountains. Normally, early cabins were crude, temporary buildings, built to shelter both man and animals during the first few winters. Generally, more substantial residences would be constructed of either log or milled lumber to replace the original log cabin. The log cabin would often then be used as an agricultural outbuilding. The log house at the Torgrimson Place, however, was never replaced.

The log house on the Torgrimson Place is unique, marked by skilled craftsmanship of John Sivertson, a local Norwegian homesteader. Norwegians built with logs “because their folk tradition encouraged it and timber was close by, plentiful and cheap.”⁶⁰ Horizontal log construction was a common method of construction in Scandinavian countries like Norway. According to a recent study, hand hewn log construction in the West is less common than the typical round log form. The hewn log building appears most often among ethnic groups, especially Scandinavian peoples. Scandinavian countries shaped logs carefully “to eliminate tapering and permit

⁵⁸ Mim Weiler Interview.

⁵⁹ Terry G. Jordan, Jon T. Kilpinen and Charles F. Gritzner, *The Mountain West Interpreting the Folk Landscape* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 60. This study reveals the folk architecture of the West presents a complex cultural landscape that displays continuity, innovations and ethnicity. For this discussion, Scandinavian includes Sweden, Finland and Norway.

⁶⁰ Allen G. Noble, *Wood, Brick, and Stone The North American Settlement Landscape*, 2 vols, Vol. 2, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 142.

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a snug fit against one another, leaving no chinks or space between the logs.” Both the broadax and the foot adze, the two primary hewing tools used for the log houses, are a component of the traditional Scandinavian tool ensemble.⁶¹

The half dovetail notching of the log house at the Torgrimson Place exhibits one splayed surface on each log. Both the full and half dovetail notching techniques are common in the West and “form superior, difficult-to-fashion, locking joints that delight the eye.” Such corners function expertly to drain water. While various ethnic groups probably introduced the full dovetail notch into the West, including Scandinavians, half dovetailing is not usually associated with a particular ethnic group. The notching on the log house possibly illustrates the cultural assimilation of John Sivertson, who worked on the Musselshell and traveled to Alaska prior to settling on the West Rosebud.⁶²

While the domestic unit within the Torgrimson Place has remained basically the same since its inception, the agricultural unit has experienced constant change. The agricultural buildings have always stood east of the domestic unit. An early 1930s photograph shows numerous small frame outbuildings to the east of the house. Joyce Arthun remembers an old barn, a chicken house, a garage, icehouse and the large sheep-shearing shed across the irrigation ditch. A later 1940s photograph shows various outbuildings including the extant log bunkhouse and machine shed. Pearl Ostrum remembers a bunkhouse, a large frame granary, a coal shed and a garage her husband built. The extant bunkhouse and the machine shed represent simple utilitarian vernacular agricultural outbuildings.⁶³

The most substantial agricultural building on the Torgrimson Place is the dairy barn. The dairy barn on the Torgrimson Place was built in the early 1940s. There is no standard dairy barn form but they are generally built for the needs of the farmers. The dairy barn on the Torgrimson Place was erected to house a small number of milk cows. It exhibits the basic

⁶¹ Jordan, et. al., *The Mountain West Interpreting the Folk Architecture*, 60; Terry G. Jordan, *American Log Buildings: a Folk Architecture* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1978), 43; Terry G. Jordan, *American Log Buildings An Old World Heritage*, 47.

⁶² Jordan, *The Mountain West Interpreting the Folk Architecture*, 72; 74-75.

⁶³ Photograph circa 1934 in possession of Joyce Arthun, Billings, MT; photograph circa 1942 in possession of Pearl Ostrum, Livingston, MT; Ostrum Interview; Arthun Interview.

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rectangular form with large hay storage that requires heavier walls and timber in construction. This barn is similar to the Wisconsin dairy barn that was a popular form (a product of the University of Wisconsin's Agricultural Experiment Station). In Montana, agricultural experiment station bulletins provided guidance toward the management of dairy cattle, stressing the importance of comfort and sanitation. Barns were to be warm, well-lighted and properly ventilated. Notable features of this barn include the hay hood to exclude weather from the door loft opening and the gambrel roof constructed of lumber truss framing to increase loft capacity.⁶⁴ From its construction in the early 1940s to the early 1960s, the dairy barn served as an important component to the farming operation at the Torgrimson Place.

The agricultural landscape undergoes constant change to reflect the economy and needs of the farm. While the Torgrimson Place mirrors such change by its agricultural buildings, the hand hewn log house conveys a sense its history, standing relatively undisturbed for over 100 years.

The Torgrimson Place has been part of the Bench Ranch since the early 1960s. The Bench Ranch is a 4,000 acre working ranch. The Bench Ranch practices holistic resource management (HRM) whose goal is to preserve and enhance the natural resources of the ranch. The basic tenet is that "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts." The ranch does not use chemical fertilizers or herbicides. Instead, HRM provides a healthier ecosystem for animals, both cattle and sheep, land and the community. The Bench Ranch is operated under a conservation easement with the Montana Land Reliance and the Torgrimson Place is one of only six homesites that can never be developed.⁶⁵ The Torgrimson Place is therefore assured to remain as a testimony to land settlement in the extraordinary West Rosebud Valley.

⁶⁴ The discussion on dairy barn is derived from H. O. Henderson, *Dairy Cattle Feeding and Management*, 3rd Edition, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1938), 429-447; H. E. Murdock, R. M. Merrill and J. O. Tretsven, "Dairy Barns for Montana Farms," *University of Montana Agricultural Experiment Station Circular 130* (June 1925), 1-22; Noble, *Wood, Brick, and Stone*, 7, 11, 43, 63.

⁶⁵ Heyneman Interview.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographer: Joan L. Brownell

Date: October 2000 (unless otherwise stated)

Negatives: Joan L. Brownell, Billings, MT

Photo Number

Description

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1. | Overview of Torgrimson Place, view to south |
| 2. | Log House, north elevation, view to south |
| 3. | Log House, south elevation, view to north |
| 4. | Log House, east elevation, view to west |
| 5. | Log House, north and east elevations, view to south |
| 6. | Log House, north and west elevations, view to east |
| 7. | Log House, southeast corner close-up, view to north |
| 8. | Root Cellar, north and south elevations, view to southeast (date: February 2001) |
| 9. | Bunkhouse, south and east elevations, view to northwest |
| 10. | Bunkhouse, north and west elevations, view to south/southeast |
| 11. | Machine Shed, north and west elevations, view to southwest |
| 12. | Machine Shed, south and east elevations, view to northwest |
| 13. | Barn, west and south elevations, view to northeast |
| 14. | Barn, north and west elevations, view to south |
| 15. | Barn, east elevation, view to west |
| 16. | Corral, view to south (date: February 2001) |
| 17. | Irrigation ditch with rock wall in background (date: February 2001) |

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