

Historic Name: JOHNNIE WALSH HOMESTEAD HS-1395

Location: T35N; R21W; E 1/2, NW 1/4, SE 1/4, Section 9.

Acreage: approximately 6 acres

UTM Reference: 11/5309400/697700

Ownership: National Park Service

Access: The site is located approximately 1/2 mile east across Big Prairie from Glacier Route 7 from a point 1/4 mile north of the River Campground

Evaluation of Significance and Architectural Integrity:

The Johnnie Walsh Homestead is eligible for listing in the National Register under criterion A due to its historical role as a focal point in the North Fork homesteading community between 1918-1925 when the Walsh's initial residence served as the Kintla Post Office. Two primary buildings remain from the original homestead complex: the residence with its post office front addition, and the log springhouse where Harriet Walsh kept the butter, cream, and eggs that she sold to local settlers, summer residents, and tourists. Only the residence, however, retains its physical integrity and exhibits the typical characteristics of a first generation homestead cabin.

Historical Information:

Johnnie Walsh first came through Big Prairie as a freighter for one of the oil outfits working across the border in Canada, which got its supplies at the railhead in Belton, Montana. Johnnie was from Columbia Falls, Montana, his father, Patrick Walsh, being one of the first settlers in that area. At age 22, Johnnie Walsh established residency on his claim.¹ In 1909, he married Harriet, a Columbia Falls school teacher, and not until the winter of 1910-11 did they stay up on the North Fork year-round.²

In the spring of 1918, the Kintla Post Office moved from the Schoenberger Homestead to the new addition on the Walsh residence, where it remained until 1925 when it was moved to Hensen's Store at Polebridge.³ The road through Big Prairie originally ran to the east of the present Glacier Route 7 and swung in to the Walsh place. Approximately 250 people from both sides of the river got their mail at the Kintla Post Office during the late teens. In 1920, a west-side post office was

1Case file #339615, Testimony of Claimant, National Archives

2Interview with Mary Kickbusch by Cindy Mish, August 1981

3U.S. Postal Records, microfilmed, Montana Historical Society

established at Ben Hensen's Store. Mail came once a week, delivered by either Theodore Christensen or William Raftery, two mail carriers on the North Fork's Belton-Kintla-Polebridge-Trail Creek route, a total distance of about 100 miles on very poor roads.

In 1922, Walsh began construction of the second large log house which he hoped to make into a guest lodge. This building had a full concrete basement which still exists at the homestead site. The lodge and accompanying 10- by 16-foot privy were moved to their present location on Glacier Route 7 in 1963 by Johnnie's brother Dick Walsh.⁴ The building was never finished on the upper floor.

Johnnie Walsh and Harriet moved to Apgar during the 1930s, where Johnnie worked as a foreman for the Civilian Conservation Corps camp there. The land was sold to the U.S. Government by Harriet Walsh in 1961.⁵

Physical Description:

The Johnnie Walsh Homestead is located on the small east bench of Big Prairie and is oriented toward the southwest. The complex consists of two standing structures, the original residence and springhouse, a concrete foundation, collapsed root cellar, and remains of a log barn. The boundaries for the property are drawn along the timbered edge of the prairie and include the area of primarily domestic use. From the point of beginning at the NE corner of the SE 1/4, NW 1/4, SE 1/4 of Section 9; T35N; R21W, thence approximately 600 feet south, thence 350 feet west-northwest, thence 500 feet north, thence 300 feet east to the point of beginning.

1. LOG RESIDENCE/KINTLA POST OFFICE (Constructed 1907, addition 1918). Contributing.

Originally composed of two rooms, measuring 19 by 15 feet, the residence is of lap-notched log construction, has a low pitched plank gabled roof, with log gable ends, and is covered with long split shakes. The interior walls were hewn and covered with muslin. The Kintla Post Office addition to the front, measuring 16 by 15 feet, is of butted log construction and carries the roofline forward, with a 4-foot overhang above the entrance. The original wooden post office boxes are still in place on the interior. The building has three small sliding sash, multi-paned windows. The rear portion of the residence was used as an ice house for a time after 1922 and the post office section as a blacksmith during the later 1920s.

⁴Personal communication, Dick Walsh, September 1, 1986

⁵Land Records, file #3-161, Glacier National Park Headquarters, West Glacier, Montana.

2. LOG SPRINGHOUSE (Constructed ca. 1910). Non-Contributing.

The 10- by 12-foot log springhouse has suffered considerable deterioration and is missing its roof and portions of its log walls. One can still discern, however, its original function and design. It was built just below a free-flowing spring on the side of the bench. The water supply was supplemented with water carried by a flume from the Henthorn spring 1/2 mile to the north on the bench when the spring faltered. The water from the spring was held in a concrete basin that spills out beneath the building and then pooled in a small pond below. The constant stream of cold water kept the spring house at 35 degrees, even during the -20 to- 30 degree weather during the winter. Fish reputedly lived in the small pond year-round. A hydraulic pump also brought spring water to the house.

3. COLLAPSED ROOT CELLAR (Constructed ca. 1910).
Non-Contributing.

A large ground depression, measuring approximately 12 by 15 feet, marks the location of the root cellar in the side of the prairie bench, approximately 15 feet from the homestead house.

4. REMAINS OF LOG BARN/CHICKEN COOP/HAY SHED (Constructed ca. 1911). Non-Contributing.

The collapsed remains of the Walsh Homestead outbuildings were piled for burning in 1963.

5. CONCRETE FOUNDATION (Constructed 1922). Non-Contributing.

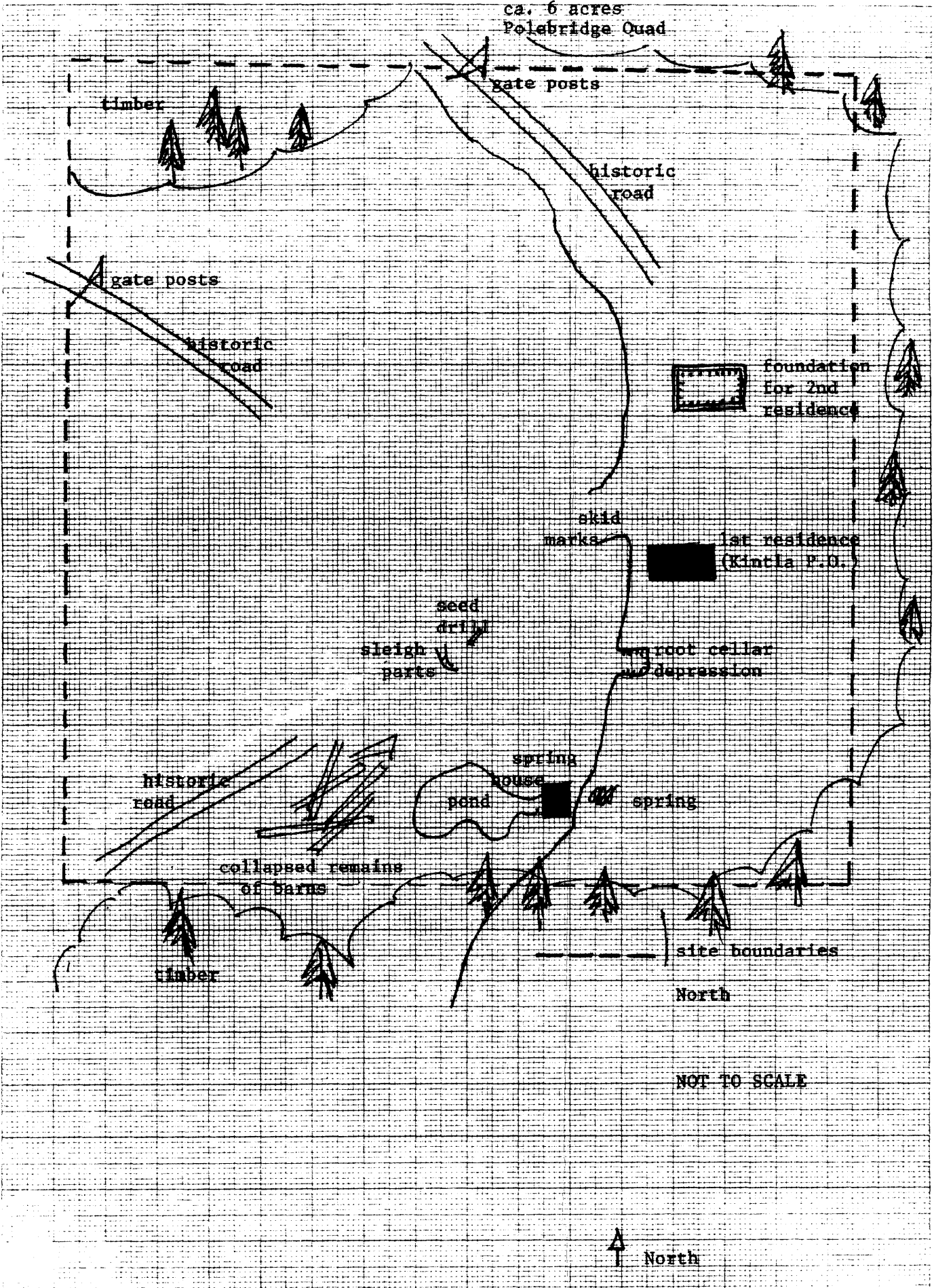
The 32- by 30-foot cement foundation for the second log residence, which was moved in 1963, exists to the north of the residence.

Historic debris at the site includes metal sleigh and automobile parts and various metallic remains from the blacksmith shop.

Form Prepared by: Patricia L. Bick, Historian, October 1986.

JOHNNIE WALSH HOMESTEAD

ca. 6 acres
Polebridge Quad



LOWER BIG PRAIRIE AREA

