NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 1024-0018

512

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Gebo Barn

other name/site number: 24CB1868

2. Location

street & number: 2.5 miles south of Fromberg on River Road — not for publication: n/a

city/town: Fromberg — vicinity: X

state: Montana — code: MT — county: Carbon — code: 009 — zip code: 59029

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. Baumler/SHPO — 13 April 2005

Signature of certifying official/Title — 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:
X entered in the National Register
__ see continuation sheet
__ determined eligible for the National Register
__ see continuation sheet
__ determined not eligible for the National Register
__ see continuation sheet
__ removed from the National Register
__see continuation sheet
__ other (explain): _____

for Signature of the Keeper — Edson H. Beall — Date of Action — 6/1/05

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property:

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: n/a

Name of related multiple property listing:
Historic and Architectural Properties in Fromberg, Montana

Number of Resources within Property		
Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/
animal facility: horse barn

Current Functions:
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/
agricultural outbuilding: storage barn

7. Description

Architectural Classification:
Other: Concrete Gambrel-roofed barn

Materials:
foundation: Concrete
walls: Concrete
roof: Metal
other: Horizontal wood drop siding

Narrative Description
(see continuation sheet)
Description of Resources

The Gebo Barn is a two-and-one-half story, cross-plan barn with a concrete foundation, full-height reinforced concrete walls, and a plank-frame cross-gambrel roof. The plan consists of a projecting central bay with nearly identical side bays attached on center to the north and south elevations. The barn is 154-feet long and 72-feet at its widest across the center bay.

The barn is located just south of Fromberg in eastern Carbon County, about 35 miles southwest of Billings in south-central Montana. The barn sits on a bench above and to the east of a bend in the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River, in the flat fertile Clarks Fork Valley. The Pryor Mountains rise along the east side of the valley, and the rugged cliffs at the foothills of the Beartooth Mountains are visible in the distance to the west. The barn is accessed by a rural dirt road running south from Fromberg just east of the meandering Clarks Fork River. Cultivated fields and meadows on each side of the road extend to the tree-lined river on the west, and to the hills of the mountains in the east. Houses and farm buildings surrounded by clusters of mature deciduous trees emerge about every half-mile. The barn stands about 60 feet west of the road, and approximately 500 feet east of the river. The main driveway enters directly in front of the barn, then circles around to its backside and slopes steeply downhill providing access to livestock corrals on the flats along the curve in the river. The curve of the river and the line of Highway 310 are visible from the west or rear elevation of the barn.

Directly north of the barn there is a small one-story house, and further north of that house is the original two-story brick farmhouse. The brick farmhouse was built between 1904 and 1909 for Samuel W. Gebo, but has since been altered extensively with large front and rear additions. The small one-story house was moved to the property after 1945 and is clad with white aluminum siding.[1] There is also a 1960s-era trailer nestled among the trees across the driveway, slightly northeast of the barn.

Areas of grass and clusters of mature deciduous trees surround three sides of the main farmhouse, the back or west side of the smaller house, and all sides of the trailer. The remnants of two wood-frame outhouses also can be found just northwest of the barn along the driveway. Large piles of rolled hay lay directly south of the barn, and to the east, across the dirt road, are open fields of corn and wheat. A windrow of deciduous trees at the far eastern edge of the field ends the view east of the barn.

---

[1] Erika Kuhlman, "Gebo-Hill Barn," Preliminary National Register of Historic Places documentation. (Helena, Montana: Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 1989).

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A and C
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a
Significant Person(s): n/a
Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE, EXPLORATION SETTLEMENT; AGRICULTURE
Period(s) of Significance: 1909-1913
Significant Dates: 1909
Architect/Builder: unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary
Since its construction in 1909, the Gebo Barn has become a local landmark, perched solidly above the Clarks Fork River, enduring as the past model of "modern" barns and as a reminder of the boom years in Carbon County when coal mining and dry land farming brought population and prosperity to the Clarks Fork Valley. Contextually, the barn is associated with the National Register Multiple Property Listing *Historic and Architectural Properties in Fromberg, Montana* and the local survey, *Barns of Carbon County*. The Gebo Barn is significant under National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Criterion A as a significant work of agricultural architecture associated with the boom years of settlement and natural resource development between 1909 and 1913. Additionally, the barn is eligible under NRHP Criterion C for architecture representing an excellent example of the use of innovative building materials and techniques, new to agricultural architecture in the early twentieth century.

General history
The Gebo Barn was constructed between 1907 and 1909 on the ranch property of wealthy coal mine developer Samuel W. (Sam) Gebo. The barn was built on a grand scale to house his purebred Belgian horses, general livestock, and farm equipment. At the time, the ranch consisted of 335 acres and was valued at $45,170.[2] It was the largest ranch in Carbon County at the time and was described by a reporter as "one of the finest farms in Montana, equipped from the woven wire fence right into the fireplace with all the modern implements and accessories."[3]

Following his arrival in eastern Montana in the mid-1890s, Sam Gebo had made a fortune in coal mine developments in the Mountain West and had become one of the wealthier citizens in Carbon County. His Gebo Mine, near present day Fromberg, attracted the Northern Pacific Railroad to build a branch line into the Clarks Fork Valley in 1898, further opening the fertile area to mining and agricultural development.[4]

Between 1903 and 1904, he bought 300-plus acres of ranch land just south of Fromberg.[5] It is not clear exactly when construction on Gebo's brick home and barn were completed, but in 1907 Gebo secured a $60,000 mortgage on the Fromberg land.[6] Part of this money was likely used to build the large poured concrete barn. Though the architect and/or builder of the barn are unknown, it is likely that Gebo chose concrete as the primary building material for the barn given the ready availability of concrete from the newly opened Gibson Concrete Works in Fromberg.[7]

The barn was completed in 1909 and christened with a large party and dance in the cavernous loft. Reports say the lavish event included refreshments and a full orchestra, and that nearly 300 people from around the state attended the celebration despite bad weather and treacherous roads.[8] Soon after, Gebo took out an advertisement for several consecutive weeks in the Bridger Times announcing that his Registered American Stud, "Monico," would be "standing" at the Fromberg ranch and other locations all summer. The stud fee was $20.[9]

(see continuation sheet)

---

2 R.L. Polk and Company, "Directory of Billings, Red Lodge, Yellowstone, and Carbon County." (Fromberg, 1909).

3 T.E. Butler, "Carbon County Montana: Its Resources and Its Future," Holiday Supplement to the *The Republican Picket* (Red Lodge) and the *Bridger Times,* 1909, 2.

4 Mary McCormick, "Historic and Architectural Properties in Fromberg, Montana." National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Listing (1993): Section E, 0.

5 *Survey of Barns in Carbon County.* Gebo-Hill Heritage Barn Site Form. Carbon County Historical Society, Red Lodge, Montana (2000).

6 "More Than 70 Years Hill's Buildings Still Stand" *The Sun (Absarokee, Montana)* March 1982.

7 McCormick, Section E, 3.

8 *Republican Picket,* 1 April 1909.

9 *Bridger Times* (Bridger, Montana), 7 May – 1 August 1909.

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

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 1.84 acres

UTM References: Zone 12 E 664076 N 5024218 (NAD 27)

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): T 5S, R23E, NW ¼ NE ¼ SE ¼ Sec. 32

Verbal Boundary Description
The boundary of the nominated property is a quadrangle, 400 feet by 200 feet, centered on the center point of the barn. The center point corresponds to the following UTM point: Zone 12 664076E, 5024218N (NAD 27). See attached map.

Boundary Justification
The boundary is drawn to include the barn and immediately adjacent grounds historically associated with the Gebo Barn. Only the barn is being nominated in accordance with the property owner's wishes, and the diminished integrity of the original farm house.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Christine W. Brown
organization: CW Brown Consulting date: December 17, 2004
street & number: 423 5th Avenue telephone: 406.459.6478
city or town: Helena state: Montana zip code: 59601

Funding for this nomination provided by

organization: Montana Land Title Association Foundation
street & number: 5 West Sixth Ave/Power Block, Suite 41, PO Box 6322
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59604

Property Owner

name/title: Hill and Hill, Inc. Anna Belle Hill and Myrl Hill
street & number: RR 1 Box 1068 telephone: 406.668.7453
city or town: Fromberg state: Montana zip code: 59029

The most distinctive feature on the exterior of the barn is the concrete walls. The foundation and unfinished reinforced concrete walls of the Gebo Barn are approximately 20-feet high and extend five-feet above floor level in the loft. The pattern of the wood planks used in forming the concrete is clearly visible, and upon close examination, the observer can see that unconventional material, such as barbed wire, pieces of wood, and other construction scraps were used as reinforcing material. The current owner of the barn did not know if the concrete was produced locally by the Gibson Concrete Works, but reported that Clarks Fork River sand and gravel were used as aggregate, and spare metal parts and pieces were used in the absence of a good supply of iron re-bar.[10]

The walls of the gambrel ends on each elevation are clad with wood drop siding, which is painted barn red. The roof is clad with white jointed metal roofing material, installed in 2000. The ends of the eaves are slightly flared and the rafter ends are exposed in the overhanging soffitt. Atop the roof there is a large central ventilator or cupola mimicking the plan and roof type of the barn. Smaller gable roof ventilators are also positioned on center on each of the north and south side bays.

The east elevation or front facade is divided into three sections – the central, north, and south bays. Centered on the central bay are double sliding doors covering an arched entrance opening. The doors are constructed of vertical tongue and groove boards and slide on an exterior steel track. Each panel has a single fixed four-light sash in the center with a two-by-four lumber sill below it, which serves as a grip handle for sliding the doors. In the wall on each side of the doors are paired four light fixed sash.

Directly above the central entrance are the grain loading doors. The sliding double doors each have two panels. The top panel consists of diagonally oriented tongue and groove boards and the bottom has vertically oriented tongue and groove boards. Fenestration in the gambrel end includes paired two-over-two double-hung sash above and on each side of the grain loading doors, as well as a single two-over-two double-hung sash centered below the gambrel peak. Other fenestration on the central bay includes single fixed four-light sash centered on the projecting side (north and south) walls. The only ornamental feature on the central bay facade is the Hill family brand located directly above the grain doors. The brand consists of a letter "L" on top of a sideways letter "H", and is made of white painted dimensional lumber.

The north bay of the front façade has two barn doors. The door at the far south (left) end of the bay is a single panel door constructed of vertical tongue and groove boards, hung on an exterior steel track. A paired four-light fixed sash is centered on the door, and there is a two-by-four lumber sill below it, which is also used as a grip handle for sliding the door. Further north is a double sliding door similar to the central bay doors. They are constructed of vertical tongue and groove boards, and hang on an exterior steel track. Each panel has a single fixed four-light sash in the center with a two-by-four lumber sill below it that serves as a grip handle for sliding the doors. Fenestration on the wall includes two four-light fixed sash between the doors and a single fixed four-light sash about four feet north of the north doors. The windows are aligned with the tops of the doors.

The south bay of the front façade consists of two identical sliding doors, one on the far north and one centered to the south. The sliding doors are single panels, constructed of vertical tongue and groove boards hung on an exterior steel track. Paired four-light fixed sash are centered on the doors, and there is a two-by-four lumber sill below the sash that serves as a grip handle for sliding the doors. Single four-light fixed sash, aligned with the tops of the doors, are located about four feet to the south of each opening.

The west elevation or rear façade is nearly identical to the front façade. The only major difference is the fenestration pattern on the north bay. Instead of two doors, there is one single panel sliding door on the south end, closest to the central bay. As with the front façade there are two four-light fixed sash north of the door; but no other windows to the north as on the front façade. The only other difference in the rear façade is the absence of the Hill family brand above the grain doors.

The north elevation consists of the farm vehicle entrance. The opening is positioned west (right) of center and is approximately 12-feet high and 20-feet wide. Two narrow cross-buck doors are hung by roller hinges from a steel track installed along the underside of the

[10] Anna Belle Hill, interview by author, 27 November 2004, Fromberg, Montana, written transcript, Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena.

wood support beam. The doors are painted red, and the cross-pattern boards and trim pieces are painted white. About three-feet to the east of the doors is a single four-light fixed sash. Above, in the gambrel end are paired two-over-two double-hung sash flanking the central single-leaf drop hay mow doors. The bottom of the tall rectangular wood clapboard door is about 4-feet above the loft floor level and extends to the roofline where the hay loading mechanism protrudes from the wall. Two large exterior strap hinges at the bottom rail of the door allow it to open.

The south elevation is symmetrically arranged with four evenly spaced four-light fixed sash positioned about eight feet above ground level along the width of the concrete wall. Paired two-over-two double-hung sash flank the hay mow doors in the gambrel end. The hay mow door is identical to its counterpart on the north elevation.

Decorative features on the barn are few and simple. Corner boards on the small north and south ventilators are painted white for emphasis, as are the corner boards and framing for the large central ventilator. In addition, the original weathervanes topping the ventilators are intact. There is a tall shaft, directional arrows, and an iron horse on the central vent, and a cow and sheep on the south and north ventilators, respectively.

Interior

The ground floor of the barn is now used only for storage of machinery and shop equipment. The central bay on the ground floor consists of a central, east-west aisle with four box stables located on each side of it at the front and rear of the barn. The stall walls on each side of the aisle have been removed, and there is a long narrow storage room along the south wall. Concrete pads have been poured at the east and west entrance doors, while the rest of the central bay has a dirt floor.

In the south bay of the barn, the stall walls have also been removed to create a large open space for farm vehicles; however, the tack rooms along the north and south walls are intact. Narrow stairwells on the east and west end of the north wall allow access to the loft. The west stairwell is missing and the east stairwell is deteriorated, but functional.

The north bay of the barn is now divided into two rooms and an open area adjoining the open space of the central bay. The north half of the bay is separated from the south half by a solid concrete wall, and used to house large farm vehicles. A pedestrian door in the concrete wall provides access to a workshop and garage in the southeast corner of the bay. The workshop and garage is walled off from the rest of the open space of this bay with plywood walls. The southwest corner of the north bay is open space, which connects to the central open space of the central bay.

Originally, the ground floor of the barn was divided into four sections – the central and north bays, north vehicle room, and the south bay. The long central bay consisted of a central aisle with box stalls at the front and rear, and lines of horse stalls along both sides of the aisle . More stalls in the south half of the north bay likely adjoined the central rows of stalls. The far north room of the barn was likely used to house carriages or tractors; and the south bay was likely divided by a double row of stalls in the space between the doors, with tack rooms and office space along the end walls.

The most significant feature of the interior of the barn is the roof framing system visible in the hay loft. The roof is supported by a Shawver truss system, with the trusses positioned 12-feet apart for the length of the 154-foot span. Each Shawver truss consists of a series of two by eight, two by six, and two-by-four truss members supporting the roof rafters. This type of framing provided support for the roof while taking up minimal loft space. Though this type of roof framing became much more common after 1910, it was considered the latest in barn framing technology when the Gebo Barn was built.[11]

[11] Allen G. Noble and Hubert G.H. Wilhelm ed., *Barns of the Midwest,* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995), 151. John L. Shawver, a carpenter and writer, promoted "plank" framing beginning in 1894. The distinguishing feature of Shawver's plank frame was a truss arrangement which contained a long support post of two members extending from where the mow floor met the sidewall up to the purlin plate that held the roof. Supporting this double-member post was a single-member principal rafter that ran from the plate to the ridge. Each truss, typically spaced twelve feet apart, supported the purlin plate that carried the lower end of the upper rafter and the upper end of the lower rafter. The resulting Shawver truss gave a rigid and strong frame well suited for large barns, wide barns, and those with vertical siding.

The plan of the loft reflects the footprint of the building and consists of mostly open space, except for four granaries, located on each side of the grain loading doors in the east and west gambrel ends. The only intact grain bin is the southeast bin. The walls are constructed of horizontal one-by-eight boards with removable canted boards along the south wall for grain loading and unloading. The floor and roof are constructed of one-by-three tongue and groove boards. The floor of the northeast grain storage room has collapsed, and the walls of the two west-end grain rooms have been dismantled. Other features of the loft include the framing for the central ventilator, and the ventilator ladder, which is constructed of horizontal two-by-fours nailed to vertical posts. Also, on the north end of the loft, there is a platform raised about four-feet above the rest of the loft floor, which accommodates a 14-foot ceiling below. The ceiling is supported on each side of the platform by King post trusses with central iron rods tied into the floor structure.

Integrity

The Gebo Barn retains excellent integrity, which is best reflected in its unchanged rural setting, and intact architectural material. The setting and feeling on the property is much as it was during its period of significance from 1906-1913. The barn's original location above a curve in the Clarks Fork River, the mature Cottonwood trees, narrow dirt road, fields, and corrals provide a historic backdrop for the barn that is distinctive of the Clarks Fork Valley in the early twentieth century. Additionally, the surrounding countryside has not been altered by new housing developments, and the existing residences and deteriorated outhouses do not detract from the agricultural setting.

The quality of design, materials, and workmanship in the barn has also been maintained. The original concrete walls, wood siding, windows, doors, ventilators, and interior roof framing have survived unchanged. The only visible deterioration on the exterior consists of isolated cracks in the concrete walls, which do not appear to be a threat to the stability of the structure.

Alterations to the exterior of the barn have been sensitive and have prolonged the useful life of the barn. Though the roof cladding was replaced in 2000 with jointed metal cladding, the ventilators and framing, including the overhanging soffit and flared eaves were left intact. The modern roofing material does not diminish the integrity of the barn given that it has not significantly altered the original roof shape, massing, or scale of the barn. Reconstruction of some of the sliding barn doors has been sensitive and has not altered the character of the barn. And, despite the fact that the ground floor stalls were demolished when the barn was adapted for storage, the loss does not detract significantly from the overall excellent integrity of the barn.

Despite Gebo's apparent success as a businessman and gentleman farmer, he made national news shortly after the barn party when he was indicted on federal land fraud charges in Wyoming.[12] In early 1913, he plead guilty to the charges and abruptly left North America for Guatemala, allowing the Fromberg ranch, including the house, the barn, and all of his livestock and equipment, to be put up for auction.[13] The Myers and Chapman Bank of Red Lodge bought the property, and for the following 32 years rented it to August Descheemaeker, who farmed and raised Hereford cattle.[14] In 1945, Loren and Anna Belle Hill bought the property. The Hills reared five children, farmed, and raised Simmental cattle. In 2005, Mrs. Anna Belle Hill still resided at the property and her oldest son Myrl and his son-in-law were running the farm.

Development of Gebo and Fromberg

The area of eastern Carbon County where the Gebo Barn is located opened to settlement in 1892 after the Crow Indian tribe ceded the region to the federal government. The first wave of homesteaders promptly claimed the rich bottom lands along the Clarks Fork River, and entrepreneurs launched efforts to develop the area's rich coal fields along the west side of the valley. Already, coal mining had become a major industry in Montana given the demand from coal-fired steam locomotives, as well as for the mining and smelting operations of the copper industry at Butte and Anaconda.[15]

Sam Gebo was responsible for the first major development in the area, the Gebo Mine and town of Gebo, Montana, one mile northwest of the present town of Fromberg. In 1895, Gebo explored the valley for coal deposits and found the fields to be sufficient for commercial production. Over the next two years Gebo secured several investors in the property, initiated some minor improvements at the mine, and helped lay out the "Gebo" townsite on the adjacent low rolling hills. The Clarks Fork Coal Company was created in 1897 by Gebo and a group of investors, who then successfully persuaded the Northern Pacific Railroad to extend a branch line into the Clarks Fork Valley and a spur line directly to Gebo in 1899.[16]

With the railroad in place the Gebo Mine was expected to become one of the largest and most significant coal mines in the region, but it never reached its full potential due to a tangled web of legal disputes over its ownership. The mine remained closed from 1899 to 1906, but was revived in 1907 when it was sold to a new group of investors. The town was renamed Coalville the same year, and for the next five years was quite productive, until the company abruptly closed the mine in 1912.[17]

Although the Gebo Mine did not bring great population or wealth to Carbon County, it did succeed in bringing the railroad, which spurred the development of railroad towns along its line. The town of Fromberg was established in 1899 as soon as the Clarks Fork Branch of the Northern Pacific Railroad was extended south from Rockvale. The town grew slowly at first, likely stunted by stagnating production at the nearby Gebo Mine. But by 1906, Fromberg's population and prosperity began to boom with the arrival of new settlers and new businesses opening to serve them.[18]

Spurred by the promise of dryland farming techniques and persuaded by aggressive promotional campaigns by the railroads designed to lure new settlers to the region, homesteaders seeking new fortune in farming poured into eastern Montana after 1905. Those settling in the Clarks Fork Valley found the rich fertile bottom lands suitable for the production of not only small grains but sugar beets and fruit as well. Successful harvests of large apple crops near Fromberg resulted in the town's nickname "the fruit basket of Carbon County." Between 1900 and 1910, Carbon County farm values increased 295 percent, from a total of $3.5 million to $14.2 million.[19]

---

12 *Colorado Springs Gazette,* 8 September 1909.
13 *Fromberg Herald,* 20 February 1913.
14 *The Sun, March 1982.*
15 McCormick, Section E, 0.
16 McCormick, Section E, 0.
17 GCM Services, Inc. *Cultural Resources Inventory and Assessment of Selected Abandoned Coal Mine Sites Throughout Montana and Selected Hardrock Mines Sites in Butte.* (Butte, Montana: 1986), 38. File ZZ 2 010784, Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena.
18 McCormick, Section E, 1.
19 U.S. Census Bureau, Agricultural Census (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1910).

Already the point of trade and shipping for area farmers, Fromberg's importance grew again in 1911 when the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad built a new route to Cody, Wyoming, utilizing the Northern Pacific's Clarks Fork Branch through the town. One year later, the closing of the Coalville Mine increased Fromberg's population, as Coalville became abandoned and miners simply moved to Fromberg. By the time Fromberg was officially incorporated in 1912, it had a diverse array of business establishments and supported a population of nearly 500.[20]

Fromberg and rural agricultural communities throughout eastern Montana enjoyed general prosperity over the next several years. Consecutive years of above average rainfall confirmed farmers' faith in dryland farming in the west, as bumper crops each year exceeded the years before. Rural towns showed wealth by adding social and civic buildings, sidewalks, bridges, and street lamps. At the same time, affluent town residents bought automobiles and built sturdy homes, while prosperous farmers mortgaged more land and livestock, and built better farm buildings.[21]

The end of the agricultural boom came in 1918 when drought and falling wheat prices brought economic depression to most of eastern Montana. Though there was a brief recovery of the economy in the early 1920s, the closing of coal mines in the region in the mid-1920s and the national Great Depression marked the end of the most prosperous days of development in eastern Montana.[22]

Construction

The boom years in Fromberg and the Clarks Fork Valley brought a variety of buildings to the area. Residential construction was varied and included substantial brick houses for the towns emerging class of businessmen and professionals, and small wood frame houses for the middle classes. Several modest houses were also moved in from Gebo to accommodate the town's working class. Commercial buildings were of an unpretentious vernacular design common to a small western town. Most were long and narrow one-story blocks, built to the sidewalk and sharing party walls. Brick construction predominated with the exception of several concrete buildings built after 1909. Concrete became a popular building material in Fromberg and was used in the construction of several commercial buildings, sidewalks, curbs, and notably the Fromberg concrete arch bridge.[23]

The first agricultural buildings in the region were simple structures designed and built by the landowner or local labor, from logs harvested locally in the Beartooth or Pryor Mountains. Most were small and narrow, with a few window openings, and a gable roof. Many of these barns were enlarged later with the extension of wood-frame lean-to sheds on the side elevations or expanded gambrel roofs.[24]

After 1906, local materials and labor were still used to build farm buildings, but the form and design of barns built during the dryland farming boom in Carbon County appear to have been primarily influenced by the advent of ready-made architectural plan books, rather than by any cultural or ethnic building tradition. Most barns were rectangular in plan, with a gambrel or sometimes gable roof, and built using "plank" frame (common lumber) construction, instead of the traditional, but expensive, heavy timber construction. Stone or poured concrete foundations were common and horizontal wood or vertical board and batten siding predominated as an exterior cladding. Very few, if any, barns in Carbon County were built to the scale of the Gebo Barn during the early 1900s. It wasn't until the late 1930s and 1940s that innovative barns, such as the concrete Hurst-Cumin Barn near Fromberg, and the solid brick Kent-Ferrar Round Barn near Red Lodge, were constructed. [25]

Construction in Fromberg and the Clarks Fork Valley benefited from the availability of a variety of materials. Timber harvested from the nearby Pryor Mountains was plentiful, and rich deposits of clay and limestone provided ready material for the construction of new

---

20 McCormick, Section E, 2.

21 Michael P. Malone et al, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, Revised Edition, Fourth Printing, 1991), 232-253.

22 McCormick, Section E, 3; Malone et al., 281.

23 Ibid.

24 *Survey of Barns in Carbon County*. Carbon County Historical Society, Red Lodge, Montana (2000).

25 Ibid.

buildings. In addition to having two lumber yards in 1907, Fromberg had a small brick factory, operated by John Gibson. By 1909, demand for bricks spurred the construction of a larger brick manufacturing facility, the Billings [later Fromberg] Pressed Brick and Tile Company. Sam Gebo's modern and stylish ranch home southeast of town was constructed with Fromberg bricks as were many of the commercial and residential buildings in the area.[26]

Concrete was another important building material in the construction of Fromberg area buildings and structures. In 1909, John Gibson, founder of Fromberg's first brick works, opened the Gibson Concrete Works and started manufacturing concrete blocks. Gibson advertised his plant in the Bridger Times offering everything from sidewalk blocks, to drain tile, flue liners and fence posts. He even built his own house in Fromberg out of concrete blocks, presumably to demonstrate its viability and durability.[27] He also supplied the concrete for the National Register-listed 1914 Fromberg Concrete Arch Bridge over the Clarks Fork River.[28] Although unverified, it is likely that Gibson supplied the concrete for several commercial buildings in Fromberg, and most likely for the Gebo Barn. If he did supply the concrete for Sam Gebo's barn, the barn would be an early and rare example of the use of Gibson's concrete in such a large agricultural building.

Early 20th century barn construction

The use of plank framing and concrete walls in the Gebo Barn represent innovative and modern barn building practices developed in the early twentieth century. The period from 1890 to 1920 in the United States was marked by great innovation and experimentation in farming technology and farm building design. A corresponding farm modernization movement also encouraged agricultural scientists to test their new designs and products in the "real world" laboratory of the farm. At the turn of the century most farmers built traditional heavy timber, brace-frame or mortise-and-tenon barns from locally harvested and hand hewn timbers; but, by 1910 the widespread availability of dimensional lumber and the need for ever larger farm barns, transformed the American barn into a comparatively light-weight plank frame (similar to balloon frame) barn with a gambrel roof over a spacious uninterrupted second floor hay loft.[29]

The movement toward plank-frame barns was a direct result of innovations in breeding, growing, feeding, harvesting, and marketing, which had the net effect of increasing the farmers need for more production and storage space. At the same time, the supply of massive old growth trees, traditionally used in timber frame barns, was disappearing, as lumber mills were improving their output of dimensional lumber. In addition, the USDA and state agricultural colleges, the Agricultural Experiment Station, the Extension Service, and professional and popular agricultural journals, plan books, circulars, and catalogs, all promoted and directly influenced the development of the "modern" plank-frame barn.[30]

In a plank-frame barn, the roof itself is self-supporting or supported by purlins, which, in turn, are supported on specially designed, self-supported trusses. The gambrel roof became the common roof type on plank-frame barns as it lent itself well to the framing system and allowed for increased loft storage capacity. In addition, the lack of supporting cross members in plank-frame barns also enabled hay forks running on interior tracks on the interior ridge of the roof to operate without hindrance – an innovation that caused many farmers to replace the roof of their timber barns with a modern gambrel roof. Plank-frame barns were also more economical to build, given that they required 20 percent less wood than a timber frame of similar size.[31]

The use of plank-framing in the Gebo Barn allowed for the massive cross-plan gambrel roof, which covers over 8,000 square feet of storage space in the hay loft. It also lent itself to the most modern hay loading system available at the time. A track system running along the interior length of the roof ridge operated with a hoist and grapple fork, which made quick work of hoisting and loading hay

---

26 McCormick, 3.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid. The Fromberg Concrete Arch Bridge was listed in the National Register on January 28, 1993 as part of the Fromberg MPS.

29 Ibid, 222

30 Ibid, 215-217.

31 Allan G. Noble, *Wood, Brick, and Stone, The North American Settlement Landscape, Vol 2: Barns and Farm Structures* (Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 43.

from the north or south hay mow doors. The bales of hay would then be dropped directly into the stalls below from consecutive chute openings in the loft floor.

Concrete residue remaining on the lumber used to frame the roof of the Gebo Barn indicates that it was first used for the concrete forms in the construction of its poured concrete walls. Concrete had become increasingly important and popular on the farm in the first decade of the twentieth century.[32] Between 1905 and 1910, two of the leading Portland cement manufacturers published full length books on the benefits and uses of concrete for farm buildings and structures.[33] These books, and popular plan books like the 1909 *Radford's House and Barn Plans* and Breeder's Gazette's 1911 *Farm Buildings,* promoted the use of concrete and offered plans to build everything from troughs to foundations, to retaining walls and complete buildings. The literature appealed to the farmer's sensibilities, promoting concrete as the most superior labor-saving, fireproof, and sanitary building material available. The walls of the Gebo Barn represent not only an efficient and fireproof choice, but also point to the latest thinking on sanitary engineering given that they could be washed down completely without fear of rot or pest infestation.

Like plank-framing, concrete was also a popular topic covered in agricultural college extension service and experiment station bulletins. In 1908, the Montana State University Agricultural Experiment Station at Bozeman published a study, "The Effect of Alkali on Portland Cement." Though primarily a scientific study on the deterioration of concrete structures, the author of the study notes that concrete had been typically used to build drainage structures and bridges, but that its uses would expand to farm buildings.

> Conditions are pointing to a more general and larger use of cement in the structural works of the future. This material is also becoming more and more generally used in agricultural construction. In fact, it is difficult to prophesy to what extent cement may enter into the development of the resources of the country.[34]

The Gebo Barn is a strong reflection of the extent to which the abundant resources of Carbon County brought prosperity to the region and modernity to its agricultural architecture. From its prime setting on the Clarks Fork River, to its concrete walls and expansive plank-frame hay loft, the Gebo Barn endures today as a symbol of the past prosperity of the region and as a product of early twentieth century innovations in agricultural engineering.

Biographical Sketch of Samuel W. Gebo

While Sam Gebo was a significant figure in the development of coal mines and coal mine towns in Montana, Wyoming, Alberta, and even Latin America, Gebo's biography depicts a man whose erratic business interests were not rooted in any one community. He was born in 1862 and grew up on a farm in Plattsburg, New York on the banks of the St. Lawrence River.[35] When he was 20 he and his father, Frank Gebo, left New York and became the first settlers to file homestead claims in Silver Leaf Township, Becker County, Minnesota. Shortly after arriving in Minnesota Sam Gebo left for Detroit, and staying away too long, lost his homestead claim to another claimant.[36]

He soon claimed another 160 acres in Becker County, but left again and later married Bertha Rachel Hall in the early 1890s.[37] Sometime after 1892, Gebo and his wife moved to Montana. Census records show that their first son, Frank, was born in Montana in 1894. Three more sons would follow in 1896, 1898, and 1900.[38] Between 1895 and 1897, Gebo worked on financing and building the

---

32 *Barns of the Midwest, 220.*

33 Atlas Portland Cement Company, *Concrete Construction About the Home and on the Farm* (New York 1909). Universal Portland Cement Company, *Concrete in the Country* (New York 1905).

34 Montana State Agricultural College, Article in *Bulletin 69* "The Effect of Alkali on Portland Cement," (Bozeman, Agricultural Experiment Station, 1908), 94.

35 U.S. Census Bureau, *Twelfth Census of the United States,* (Carbon County, Red Lodge Twp, Enumeration District 5, 1900).

36 *A Pioneer History of Becker Co., Minnesota.* (St. Paul, Pioneer Press, 1907), 592.

37 Ibid, 593.

38 U.S. Census Bureau, 1900.

Gebo Mine, which he would eventually sell to Bozeman investors in 1898 before it ever opened for production. The Gebo townsite was eventually sold at a Sheriff's auction for just over $450 in 1901.[39]

Perhaps because of the poor quality of the coal in eastern Carbon County, Gebo set his sights higher after 1898, and began to travel back and forth between Alberta, Canada; Montana; Wyoming; New York; and Paris, France. Much like the Gebo Mine, he would find the coal, secure mineral rights to the land, and find investors to finance the construction of a coal mine. In 1900 he secured financial backing from Butte businessman, Henry L. Frank, and founded the coal town of Frank in Alberta, Canada.[40]

The venture was extremely successful for Gebo. The Red Lodge Picket reported in 1902 that Gebo owned one-quarter interest in the $1,000,000 Canadian American Coal and Coke Company operation, and that he had recently built a $15,000 house in British Columbia.[41] The next year, he would also buy over 300 acres of ranch land for his estate in the fertile Clarks Fork Valley in Carbon County, Montana, and begin construction on a brick residence there.[42] By 1909, when Gebo celebrated the completion of his modern concrete barn near Fromberg, he was one of the wealthier, if not the wealthiest, citizens in Carbon County and his stature in the coal industry was at its height.[43] Gebo also went on to develop the Spring Creek Mine, near Lewistown, Montana and the Owl Creek Coal Mine at another of his namesake towns, Gebo, Wyoming.[44]

But only a few months after the barn party, in September 1909, Gebo made national news when he was indicted, along with several other wealthy New York businessmen, in a federal land fraud case in Wyoming. The indictment asserted that in 1906 nearly 200 New York bartenders and barbers posed as entrymen filing false claims, which were found to be made in the interest of the Owl Creek Coal Company (at Gebo, Wyoming) and the Northwestern Fuel Company.[45] Apparently, Gebo and his investors were trying to buy up more than 1700 acres of mineral rich government land that could not otherwise be claimed by one entity under a legal federal mineral claim.

Despite the indictment, Gebo's success continued. In November 1909, the Canadian American Coal and Coke Company was reorganized and renamed the Canadian Consolidated Coal Company. Gebo was named managing director of operations.[46] At the same time, Gebo began to expand his reach into municipal power development. In 1910, the Republican Picket reported that Gebo "bought outright" the Citizens' Electric Company and the Spring Creek Power and Electric Company of Lewistown. He reorganized the companies and merged them with the Lewistown, Coal, Gas and Light Company, which he had bought earlier. According to the Republican Picket, this was Gebo's first step in carrying out a plan for a system of electric railways to run from Red Lodge to Kendall, Montana, north of Lewistown.[47]

But by early 1913, Gebo had decided to pursue business in Central America. He left North America for Guatemala and allowed the Fromberg ranch holdings, including all of his livestock and equipment, to be put up for auction.[48] In May, he then pleaded guilty (presumably in absence) to the land fraud indictment in Wyoming. According to the *Reno Evening Gazette*, the only punishment was a $1,500 fine and payment of court costs.[49]

---

39 GCM Services, 38-44.

40 L.W. Felske, Calgary to Dave Walter, Helena, 17 November 1982. Response letter, Biography vertical files, Reading Room, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

41 Red Lodge Picket Journal, 7 November 1902.

42 *Survey of Barns in Carbon County.* Gebo-Hill Heritage Barn Site Form. Carbon County Historical Society, Red Lodge, Montana (2000).

43 R.L. Polk and Company, "1909; T.E. Butler, Holiday Supplement, 1909, 2.

44 *Republican Picket,* 28 April 1910; GCM Services, 44. *Fromberg Herald,* 20 February 1913.

45 *Colorado Springs Gazette,* 8 September 1909.

46 *Republican Picket* (Red Lodge), 19 November 1909.

47 *Republican Picket,* 28 April 1910.

48 GCM Services, 44. *Fromberg Herald,* 20 February 1913. L.W. Felske letter to Dave Walter.

49 *Reno Evening Gazette,* 16 May 1913.

Little is known about Gebo's business career after 1913. He succeeded in developing a marble quarry in Guatamala and was a partner with F.H. Cozzens in the Cascade Coal Company's operation in the Deep Creek area. Gebo retired to Seattle in 1927 with his second wife, Leoda.[50] Sam Gebo's life ended tragically several years later in 1940. The *Helena Independent Record* reported that "Sam Gebo, a once-wealthy Wyoming and Montana coal mine operator" was found dead in his gas-filled home. His wife drowned a few months later in December 1940.[51]

Despite Gebo's unfortunate demise and somewhat unaccountable business dealings, his influence in the Clarks Fork Valley was important and is still represented today in the Gebo Barn. His Gebo Mine was the impetus for improved rail access into the area, which directly affected settlement, and later allowed for the widespread development of dry land farming in the valley. In addition, construction of his concrete barn demonstrated the use of the latest materials and technology available, and reflected his success and the general wealth of farmers at the time. For the past 60 years, the Hill family has sensitively maintained the barn, preserving its massive concrete walls, expansive roof, and wood siding. The hard work of the Hill family is embodied in the excellent integrity of the Gebo Barn, which will continue to stand as a local landmark and symbol of early twentieth century agriculture and architecture in the Clarks Fork Valley.

50 L.W. Felske letter to Dave Walter.
51 Helena Independent Record, December 23, 1940, page 1.

Bibliography

A Pioneer History of Becker Co., Minnesota. St. Paul: Pioneer Press, 1907.

Atlas Portland Cement Company. *Concrete Construction About the Home and on the Farm.* Revised. New York: Atlas Portland Cement Company, 1909.

Butler, T.E. "Carbon County Montana: Its Resources and Its Future," *Holiday Supplement to the The Republican Picket* (Red Lodge) *and the Bridger Times.* Red Lodge, Montana, 1909.

Felske, L.W. Calgary to Dave Walter, Helena, 17 November 1982. Response letter. Biography vertical files, Reading Room, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

GCM Services, Inc. "Cultural Resources Inventory and Assessment of Selected Abandoned Coal Mine Sites Throughout Montana and Selected Hardrock Mines Sites in Butte." Butte, Montana: GCM Services, Inc., 1986. File ZZ 2 010784, Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena.

Hill, Anna Belle. Interview by author, 27 November 2004, Fromberg, Montana. Written transcript, Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena.

Kuhlman, Erika. "Gebo-Hill Barn." Preliminary National Register of Historic Places documentation. Helena, Montana: Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 1989.

Malone, Michael P., Richard P. Roeder, and William L. Lang. *Montana: A History of Two Centuries.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, Revised Edition, 1991.

McCormick, Mary. "Historic and Architectural Properties in Fromberg, Montana." National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Listing. Helena, Montana: Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 1993.

Montana State Agricultural College. *Bulletin 69.* "The Effect of Alkali on Portland Cement," Bozeman, Montana: Agricultural Experiment Station, 1908.

Noble, Allen G. and Hubert G.H. Wilhelm eds. *Barns of the Midwest.* Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995.

Noble, Allan G. *Wood, Brick, and Stone, The North American Settlement Landscape, Vol 2: Barns and Farm Structures.* Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984.

R.L. Polk and Company. "Directory of Billings, Red Lodge, Yellowstone, and Carbon County." Fromberg, Montana, 1909.

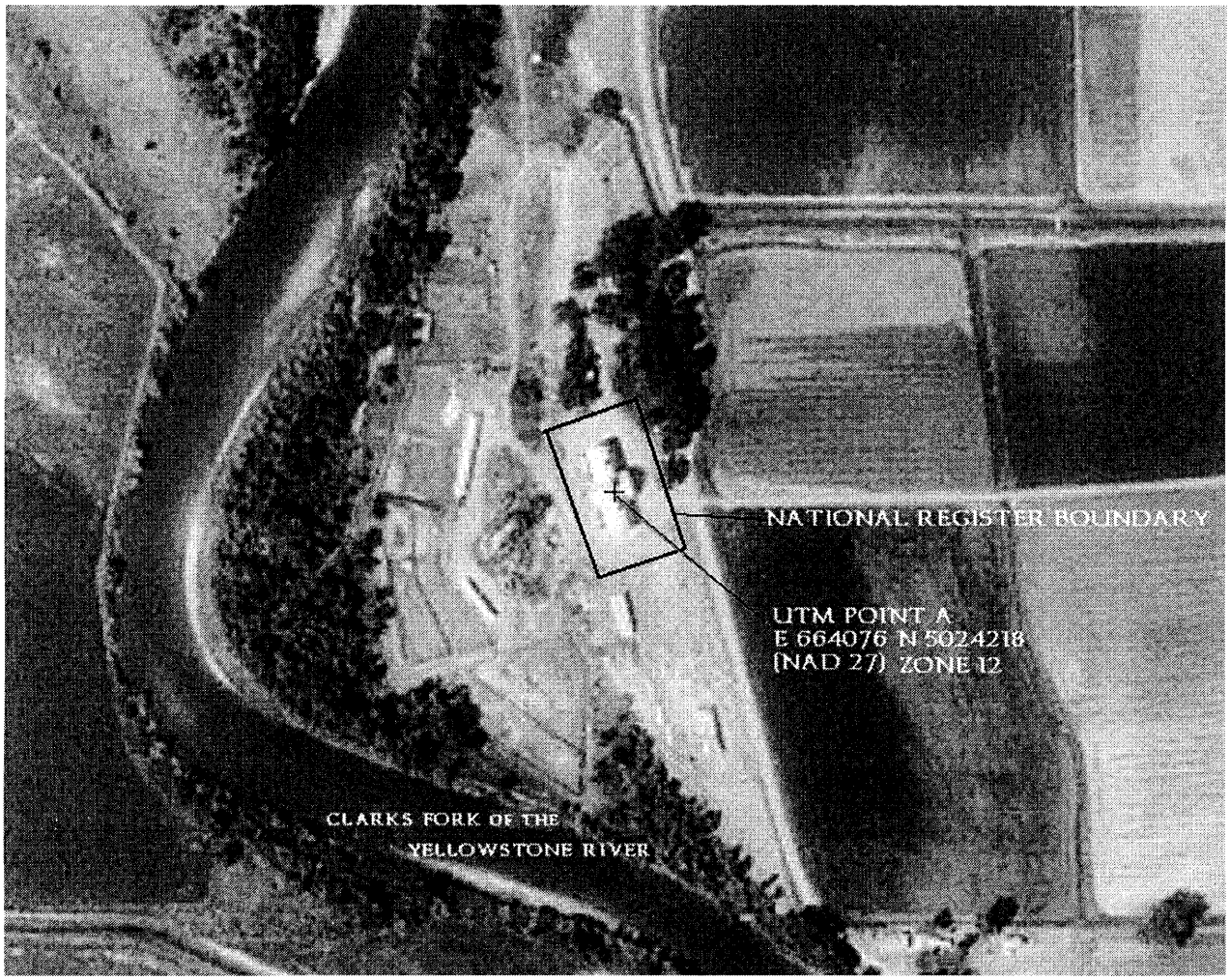
"Survey of Barns in Carbon County." Gebo-Hill Heritage Barn Site Form. Red Lodge, Montana: Carbon County Historical Society, 2000.

United States Census Bureau. "1910 Agricultural Census" Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1910.

United States Census Bureau. *Twelfth Census of the United States.* Carbon County, Montana: Red Lodge Twp, Enumeration District 5. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1900.

Universal Portland Cement Company, *Concrete in the Country.* Philadelphia: Association of American Portland Cement Manufacturers, 1910.

Aerial Photograph



Detail of Bridger 7.5 minute Orthophotoquad.