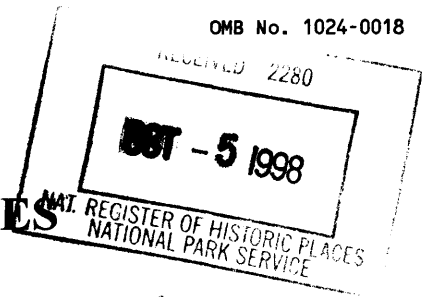


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1338

## 1. Name of Property

historic name: Anna Scherlie Homestead Shack

other name/site number:

## 2. Location

street & number: Highway 241

not for publication: na  
vicinity: X

city/town: Turner

state: Montana code: MT county: Blaine code: 005 zip code: 59542

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally.

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:

- 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

Date of Action

*Wilson H. Beall* 11.5.98

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**5. Classification**

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|  |  |                         |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| <b>Ownership of Property:</b> private  | <b>Number of Resources within Property</b> |                         |
| <b>Category of Property:</b> building  | <b>Contributing</b>                        | <b>Noncontributing</b>  |
| <b>Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:</b> na | <u>  3  </u>                               | <u>    </u> building(s) |
| <b>Name of related multiple property listing:</b> na                                   | <u>    </u>                                | <u>    </u> sites       |
|  | <u>  1  </u>                               | <u>    </u> structures  |
|  | <u>    </u>                                | <u>    </u> objects     |
|  | <u>  4  </u>                               | <u>    </u> TOTAL       |

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**6. Function or Use**

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**Historic Functions:**

DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
DOMESTIC/secondary structure

**Current Functions:**

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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**7. Description**

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**Architectural Classification:**

OTHER: Prairie Homestead

**Materials:**

foundation: Stone  
walls: Clapboard; Drop Siding; Asphalt  
roof: Metal; Asphalt  
other:

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**Narrative Description**

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The Anna Scherlie Homestead Shack is located near the small town of Turner in northern Blaine County. The agricultural area is known as The Big Flat; it is just a few miles south of the Canadian border. The homestead buildings sit isolated and unsheltered on the vast prairie landscape.

**Homestead Shack (contributing building, 1913)**

The homestead shack is a square, woodframe building with a gable roof. It measures 14 feet 6 inches on each side. The house rests on a dry-laid stone "foundation" which consists of stones filling the space between the shack's floor and the ground. The roofing, originally wood shingles (which Anna Scherlie kept painted silver), is metal standing-seam (1994). Clapboard siding with corner boards covers the walls. Imitation brick, asphalt siding is located in the gable ends. A single, one-over-one double-hung sash window is located in the east west, and south walls. A five-panel wood door provides access from the vestibule to the interior. The interior walls and ceiling of the single room are clad with tongue-and-groove boards. The flooring is linoleum.

Two additions were made to the house at unknown dates. A four-foot-square, shed roofed vestibule protects the front door and was used as a "summer kitchen." Anna Scherlie moved her two-burner kerosene stove to the vestibule during the summer. The siding and corner boards match those on the house. An exterior wood storm door and interior screen door open from the east side of the vestibule. Along the rear (north) of the house is a lean-to storage shed. Access to the shed is on the east side through a four-panel door. A square, four-light window flanks the door to the north. Two, one-over-one double-hung windows are on the north wall.

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### **Well (contributing structure, 1913)**

The hand-dug well is located just to the south of the southeast corner of the house. Anna Scherlie listed it as an improvement when she filed for the homestead patent in 1916. Over the well is a raised wooden box. Attached to the box are 2x4s with a crossbar and wooden gussets at the corners. A pulley hangs from the crossbar.

### **Outhouse (contributing building, c.1913)**

To the north of the shack is the outhouse. It is a wood-frame, shed-roofed building. The walls are clad with drop siding. The door is constructed of vertical boards. The floor of the outhouse is wood.

### **Storage Shed/Laundry (contributing building, c. 1947)**

Anna Scherlie added this building to her homestead in the late-1940s. It has the appearance of a typical homestead shack of the teens. The wood-frame, rectangular building measures 16 feet 4 inches by 14 feet 4 inches. It rests on a concrete slab and has a shed roof covered with rolled roofing. A door and small, one-over-one sash double hung window are located in the east end. Two small, one-over-one double-hung windows face south and two face north.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria: A and C

Areas of Significance: Exploration/Settlement;  
Architecture

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1913-1948

Significant Person(s): n/a

Significant Dates: 1913

Cultural Affiliation: European-American

Architect/Builder: n/a

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## Narrative Statement of Significance

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### Statement of Significance

Anna Scherlie's Homestead Shack\* is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A and C. In 1913, Anna Scherlie, a 32-year-old single woman, joined in on Montana's homestead boom. The boom, which resulting in the state's population more than doubling from 1900 to 1920, resulted in an economic and geopolitical reorganization of the state. Unlike other homesteaders, or at least those that manage to hang on to their property through two decades of drought and depression, Anna made few changes to her original buildings, or even the landscape surrounding them. They stand today as unusually pristine and well-preserved examples of the initial improvements made by Montana's first homesteaders.

### Introduction

Montana's homestead boom occurred in the first two decades of the 20th century, and was a result of three federal land laws intended to settle the once-derided "Great American Desert." Montana's 20th century development had its beginning in the 1862 Homestead Act. For a nominal \$16 filing fee, the head of a household or persons over the age of 21 could file a 160-acre claim on government-owned land, obtain full title after five years' residency and proof of improvements to the land. One hundred sixty acres, however, could not support a family in the arid regions of the Great Plains. In Montana, only the fertile lands in the Gallatin Valley, the Judith Basin, and Yellowstone River Valley were homesteaded in any great numbers prior to 1900. It was not until passage of two subsequent acts that intensive homesteading began. The first, the 1877 Desert Land Act, allowed purchase of a full 640 acres at \$1.25 per acre after three years' residency and partial irrigation. This act scarcely helped farmers, most of whom could not finance the costs of irrigation themselves. The greatest incentive to settlement was the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act, which allowed for an additional 160 acres, and attempted to compensate for the western states' arid conditions. It marked the largest federal government-sponsored effort for individual, rural home ownership. In combination with new dryland farming techniques and heavy promotional campaigning, the 1909 act created a land rush.

The homesteading era, which would see Montana's population more than double between 1900 and 1920, resulted in an economic and geopolitical reorganization of the state. Over 28 new counties were created between 1910 and 1925 to serve the increased population. Dryland farming became the most popular and profitable form of employment, particularly along the Highline areas north of the Missouri River, and the vast rolling hills in the east half of the state. From 1910 through 1920, the U.S. government granted 88,717 homestead patents involving 18,835,617 acres in Montana. Compared on a nationwide basis, these numbers represent 18.4 percent of all patents and 24.6 percent of all acreage.

And then catastrophe struck. Three years of drought and plummeting grain prices after World War I ruined the homesteaders. In Hill County, just to the west of The Big Flat, between 1921 and 1923 there were 120 foreclosures for every 100 farms. On a statewide level, one out of every two farmers lost their land. The value of farm lands decreased by one-half. Because the homestead boom and bust occurred between the 1910 and 1920 censuses, no accurate numbers document Montana's actual loss, but the names of hundreds of now-abandoned homestead towns bear testimony to the exodus.

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\* "Shack" is a term used historically and today in Montana to describe the houses constructed on 20th century homestead claims to meet residency requirements. Usually of frame construction (sometimes purchased pre-built at local lumberyards and moved to the claim) and only one room, the usage denoted their temporary function until a larger house could be constructed.

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### The Big Flat

Blaine County is bounded by the Missouri River on the south and the Canadian border on the north. The Milk River crosses the county in an east-west direction. The topography of the county varies from mountainous to rolling plains and hills. An unusual area in the northern part of the county is "The Big Flat" which obtained its name because it is so level one can see for miles. The Big Flat is comprised of an area of about 132,000 acres with rich glacial till soils 20 to 30 inches deep. Homesteaders found plentiful water at only 15 to 25 feet below the surface. The Big Flat developed exclusively as a grain-producing area in comparison to ranching or a combination of grain farming and ranching in most of the rest of the county.

Homestead settlement on The Big Flat began primarily after passage of the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act. Among the first settlers to file under the new act was Neil J. Scherlie. Over the next four years, five of Neil's brothers and sisters--Veigo, Bernard, Martha, Nora, and Anna--followed, all of them locating homesteads near each other. Anna Scherlie filed a homestead application for the south half of Section 25, T36N, R25E on March 28, 1913. Anna, an unmarried woman, was 32 years old at the time. She took up residence on her claim two days later, and built a house the same month. Anna's patent application showed that she put 20 acres under cultivation in 1913, added 20 acres in 1914, and another 20 acres in 1915. The 20 acres planted to flax in 1914 yielded 1 bushel per acre. Flax and durum wheat were the only crops which could be successfully grown on a homesteader's newly plowed prairie lands. Although experts recommended letting the land lay fallow the first year as Anna Scherlie did, few homesteaders had the financial resources to sit out a year without any income. In 1915, Anna's twenty acres of wheat yielded 35 bushels per acre and 20 acres of flax produced 17 bushels per acre. The 40 acres were planted to wheat and oats in 1916. Each year, Anna also planted a one-acre vegetable garden.

At the time Anna Scherlie filed on her homestead in The Big Flat, the local newspaper reported few remaining homesteads available in the area. The fertile soil and rumors of a railroad to the area had already attracted settlers. Even while the newspaper printed this message, its local correspondent in The Big Flat wrote of the need for permanent settlers. He boasted of the rich soil which in 1912 had produced 100 bushels of oats to an acre. He wrote, "The man who has faith and works forth will never be disappointed. The Big Flat is all O.K. and more than O.K." A general store had been established at Turner, "the social and political center of [The Big Flat], and schools operated at Twete, Silver Bow, and Little Jewell. The newspaper correspondent reported frequent dances, baseball games, and even a wrestling match and masquerade ball. The settlers held a pie social to raise money for a community hall. Women homesteaders found mutual support in the Ladies Aid, and The Young People's Society held regular meetings. One gathering of the latter organization included a debate with the topic that "Dryland Farming is a Success." The men took the positive position, the women the negative. Whatever the results of the debate, 1913 proved a successful year for the homesteaders, although not as good as 1912. By September, the local newspaper reported that farmers were busy hauling flax to Harlem.

Homesteaders in The Big Flat found themselves isolated for long periods of the winter and spring. In 1913, the Harlem News reported that "quite a number [of homesteaders] are leaving their homes here [The Big Flat] to spend a part of the winter with friends and relatives in the east." Among those was Anna Scherlie. Anna religiously filed notices with the local land office of her departure from and return to her homestead each year during the patenting process. From about November 1 to April 1, she left to work for wages. Local legend has it that she spent the winters employed by the James J. Hill family in St. Paul. Beyond a bank account in St. Paul which suggest links to that city, the story is unverified.

Harlem, the closest market town, and the Great Northern Railway were located 30 to 50 miles south of The Big Flat. Large amounts of grain often had to be stored over the winter if the roads became impassable because of mud or snow. In January 1916, for example, Harlem businessmen banded together to open the roads, and thus also business from The Big Flat. The county loaned its grader, and the businessmen collected \$200 to pay the wages of an operator to clear snow from the roads. In July of the same year, the Commercial Club announced an auto tour of the Big Flat in order "to cement a firmer bond of friendship between the people of this city and the farmers of this vicinity . . ." When the Harlem participants awoke to rain and canceled the trip, the homesteaders found themselves eating the large noon dinner they had prepared without the "honored" guests. In an attempt to mend relations, the Commercial Club hurriedly scheduled a

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smaller trip the following weekend. The homesteaders made their hurt feelings clearly evident. No one greeted the party at Jewell or Silver Bow, and they found Turner deserted until the mayor finally showed up after having "been to a neighbor's on a little business . . . ."

Finally, in the late 1920s the long anticipated branch line of the Great Northern Railway became a reality. In August 1927, Ralph Budd, president of the railway, visited The Big Flat. The Board of Directors of the company then approved expenditure of \$2 million for an 80-mile branch line. The line would begin at Saco, head in a north-northwest direction, and then turn directly east about 10 miles below the Canadian border. The Great Northern placed one stipulation on construction: it was to be "furnished first with the right-of-way required free of charge." To raise the necessary funds for the right-of-way, farmers within six miles of the proposed route were asked to subscribe 10 cents per acre. Farmers between six and 12 miles from the road were asked to subscribe 5 cents per acre. In late December, when the Railway Right-of-Way Fund found itself with only 25 percent of the estimated \$19,000 needed to purchase the land, it, in an obvious attempt to pressure the slackers, published the names and amounts of the contributors to the fund.

In April 1928, the Great Northern let the contract to build the Saco-Turner branch line. The railroad announced it would plat eleven new towns along the line. The Turner news correspondent to the Harlem News said "We are still waiting patiently for the location of our new townsite. Where will it be?" Finally, the railway announced it had purchased a portion of Anna Scherlie's homestead, two miles south of Turner, and would hold a sale of lots in July. Deed records show that Anna Scherlie sold 160 acres to the Dakota and Great Northern Townsite Company on May 19 for \$5,000. The sixteen block Turner townsite was the most successful of the ten or so new towns created by the railroad.

The tradition of women homesteaders in Montana goes back to 1870. On August 1 of that year, Margaret Maccumber filed homestead entry number 298. Although no study of the numbers of women homesteaders exists for Montana, they are probably similar to those for North Dakota. In the western part of that state, 15 percent of the homestead applications were made by women. Similarly, a sampling of land office filings in Wyoming found 18 percent to be women. *Thunderstorms and Tumbleweeds*, the East Blaine County history book, lists the homesteaders in each of the townships. Eighteen percent of the names in the eight townships making up the Big Flat are obviously female. In the four townships around Anna Scherlie's homestead, female homesteaders make up almost one-quarter of the total.

Anna Scherlie apparently found fulfillment in a Spartan lifestyle on her homestead. Long after her neighbors had replaced their homestead shacks with more substantial dwellings, she continued to live in her one-room shack. Her decision could not have been based on finances, at least after the partial sale of her homestead to the Great Northern Railway in 1928. Anna Scherlie's homestead remained unchanged for most of her occupancy. At unknown dates, she added a small vestibule and storage shed to the shack. In the 1940s, a combination storage/laundry was constructed. Even while her neighbors looked forward to the benefits of electricity in 1946, Anna felt she "was too old for any modern conveniences."

Anna Scherlie lived on her homestead until 1968, when at 88 years of age, she moved to the Havre Hotel in Havre. Anna passed away on January 8, 1973. As stipulated in her will, her body was cremated, but not "until at least 84 hours" had passed after her death. Anna's ashes were spread beneath a lilac bush on the homestead. Eighteen nieces and nephews shared in an estate of \$107,575.

Leon and Nellie Cederberg purchased Anna Scherlie's homestead in 1968. Bucking the typical trend to burn vacant homestead buildings and return their site to crop land, the Cederbergs, personal friends of Anna's, maintain the buildings as they were when she left. Inside the one-room shack are Anna's single bed, a table, bench, and a rocking chair. The wood and coal camp stove used to heat the shack and on which she cooked stands in the center of the room. The two-burner kerosene stove sits in the vestibule. A wood box, wash stand, and curtain-covered cupboards make up the rest of the furnishings.

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### 9. Major Bibliographic References

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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:

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### 10. Geographical Data

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**Acreage of Property:** 1.85 acres

|                        |             |                |                 |
|------------------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <b>UTM References:</b> | <b>Zone</b> | <b>Easting</b> | <b>Northing</b> |
|                        | 12          | 691440         | 5413870         |

**Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)):** NE¼ SE¼ Section 25, T36N, R25E

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#### Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning where the east-west one-half line of Section 25 intersects the centerline of Highway 241 run west 49' along the one-half line to the point of beginning; then 294 feet south along the right-of-way of Highway 241, then 292 feet west, then 294 feet north, then 292 feet east along the one-half line of Section 25 to the point of beginning.

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#### Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn to include the land surrounding the buildings that has been historically associated with the homestead buildings.

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### 11. Form Prepared By

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|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| name/title: Nellie and Leon Cederberg and SHPO Staff |                     |
| organization:  | date: July 1998     |
| street & number:                                     | telephone:          |
| city or town:  | state: MT zip code: |

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#### Property Owner

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|                                       |                         |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| name/title: Nellie and Leon Cederberg |                         |
| street & number: HC 67 Box 1          | telephone: 406-379-2321 |
| city or town: Turner                  | state: Montana          |
|                                       | zip code: 59542         |

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# National Register of Historic Places

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### **Bibliography**

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Riley, Glenda. *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and Plains*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988.

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ANNA SCHERLIE HOMESTEAD SHACK  
Blaine County  
Montana

SITE MAP

