

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Kero Farmstead Historic District

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: 223 West Bench Road

not for publication: n/a

city/town: Roberts

vicinity: X

state: Montana code: MT county: Carbon code: 009 zip code: 59070

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

Edson H. Beall 8.16.07

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private	Number of Resources within Property		
Category of Property: District	Contributing	Noncontributing	
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: n/a	<u>13</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
Name of related multiple property listing: n/a	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
	<u>16</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:	Current Functions:
DOMESTIC/single dwelling	DOMESTIC/residence
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/agricultural outbuildings	AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/agricultural outbuildings

7. Description

Architectural Classification:	Materials:
OTHER/vernacular	foundation: STONE, LOG, CONCRETE
	walls: STONE, LOG, FRAME
	roof: METAL; ASPHALT
	other:

Narrative Description

Southcentral Montana is defined by the magnificent backdrop of the Beartooth Mountain Front, where numerous clear and rushing streams issue from the mountains. One of these streams, Rock Creek, flows in a northwardly direction to enter the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River near its confluence with the Yellowstone River.¹ The Rock Creek Valley begins to deepen with terraces evident on either side of the basin as one approaches the town of Red Lodge from the north. Rock Creek Valley is formed by the deposition of gravels outwashed during the Pleistocene from the Beartooth Mountains. The later erosion of these gravels that stood above Rock Creek left "high prominent benches which are farmed where water is available for irrigation."²

The Kero Farmstead Historic District is situated on the West Bench above Rock Creek, approximately eight miles north of the town of Red Lodge, in Carbon County, MT. The Kero farmstead is a historic district that consists of 14 buildings and structures, all arranged around a wide open courtyard. The farmstead contains both historic log and stone buildings plus numerous more modern frame buildings, dating from approximately 1907-1958. The domestic unit of the farmstead is primarily situated east of the courtyard and consists of a one and one-half story log house, log sauna, stone root cellar, sandstone well and several frame buildings including a one-story secondary house, shed and garage. West of the courtyard stands the agricultural unit, including a stone barn, log shed, chicken coop, loafing shed, calving shed, granary and grain car. The only modern intrusive component of the farmstead is a 1975 steel building.

The Kero farmstead includes not only the building cluster, but also the irrigation ditches and agricultural fields historically associated with the property. Mature cottonwoods, spruce trees and lilacs adorn the yard in front of the house. The current owners keep about 50 irrigated acres in hay, and the balance of the fields serve as horse pasture.

(see continuation sheet)

¹ Rock Creek originally was called Rocky Fork Creek.
² United States Department of the Interior, "Geology and Mineral Resources of parts of Carbon, Big Horn, Yellowstone, and Stillwater Counties, Montana." *Geological Survey Bulletin 822-A* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office (GPO), 1930):50.

8. Statement of Significance

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

Areas of Significance:
AGRICULTURE
ARCHITECTURE/vernacular
ETHNIC HERITAGE/European
Period(s) of Significance: ca. 1904-1958
Significant Dates: 1904, 1905, 1911, 1958
Architect/Builder:

Narrative Statement of Significance

Dr. Arnold Alanen, a respected cultural geographer who has extensively studied Finnish farmsteads throughout the United States and Canada, visited the Kero farmstead in the summer of 2006. He graciously provided the following significance statement pertaining to the Kero farmstead.

The Kero farmstead in Carbon County is one of the finest examples of an extant Finnish farmstead in the Rocky Mountain states of Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado. It still includes the primary buildings of a typical early twentieth-century Finnish farmstead--a dwelling unit, a sauna (converted from an earlier savusauna or smoke sauna), a dairy barn, and a root cellar. The dwelling and sauna are constructed of logs in the traditional Nordic manner, while the barn is a unique but exceptional example of a building constructed of local stone. Although one recently constructed non-contributing building is found at the center of the farmstead unit, the overall arrangement displays a classic Finnish courtyard pattern. Overall, the entire complex reveals an unusually high degree of integrity.³

The Kero Farmstead Historic District is significant under Criterion A for its historic association with ethnic land settlement in southcentral Montana in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Originally within the Crow Indian Reservation, the West Bench, where the Kero farmstead is located, opened for settlement in 1892. Squatters initially settled at the Kero farmstead location in a strip of land ceded by the Crow, followed in the early twentieth century by homesteaders utilizing the Homestead Act of 1862. Jacob Kero filed on his homestead claim in 1905 and received his final patent in 1911. Throughout the twentieth century, three generations of the Kero family lived and farmed on the Kero farm.

The Kero farmstead also is a representative example of the Finnish farming community established on the West Bench in the early twentieth century. Finnish immigrants came to Red Lodge in the late nineteenth century and worked in the coal mines. In the early twentieth century, the availability of farm lands through the Homestead Act of 1862 allowed many Finns to escape the mines and return to their rural farming heritage. The Kero farmstead is illustrative of the many Finnish farmsteads that appeared on the West Bench, and reflects Finnish agricultural traditions.

The Kero Farmstead Historic District is also significant under Criterion C as it contains examples of distinctive Finnish architectural techniques plus exceptional stone building construction. Buildings of log and stone exemplify traditional farmstead arrangement, skilled workmanship, use of local materials and traditional log craftsmanship. The log sauna is one of the primary identifiers of Finnish culture and the sauna on the Kero farmstead is a rare example of a suvasauna or smoke sauna that still retains the smoke-stained interior walls typical of such saunas. The stone barn, although its construction history has not been fully substantiated, exhibits local craftsmanship and skilled workmanship.

The built environment at the Kero farmstead is a significant representation of distinctive folk vernacular building forms that embodies "the functions, materials, construction methods and farmstead arrangement of rural Finland, as well as their assimilation and adaptation to a new Finnish-American vernacular tradition."⁴

For many years, cultural groups in Carbon County have embraced their ethnicity in an unusual and constructive way through its "Festival of Nations," a week-long event in Red Lodge that continues today in an abbreviated form. It explicitly celebrates traditional folk culture by re-enacting many cultural practices every year. The Finnish community embraced this, and in fact, Robert "Bob" Kero served as emcee for the Finnish programs for many years. The Kero farmstead exemplifies that commitment to historical heritage and traditions by the descendants of the original Finnish emigrants.

(see continuation sheet)

³ Arnold Alanen to Joan L. Brownell. E-mail correspondence, April 3, 2007.

⁴ Dena Sanford, "Korpivaara, Cascade County, 1890-1945," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

Kero Farmstead Historic District**Carbon County, MT****Name of Property****County and State****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:** 82.63 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	12	639420	5017198
B	12	639986	5017215
C	12	639693	5016417
D	12	639380	5016395

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): Parts of SE¼ NE¼ and NE¼ SE¼ Sec. 23 and SW¼ NW¼ Sec. 24, T6S R20E, MPM**Verbal Boundary Description**

74.39 acres in SE ¼ NE ¼ and part of the NE ¼ SE ¼, including Certificate of Survey 314, in section 23, and 8.24 acres in part of SW ¼ NW ¼ of Section 24, (less Certificate of Survey 1779), Township 6 South, Range 20 East, , Montana Prime Meridian. See attached topographic map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn to encompass both the domestic and agricultural buildings and structures of the Kero Farmstead, as well as agricultural lands historically associated with the property. Though the original 320 acres have been divided between several owners, the 82.63-acre property is sufficient to convey its important historical associations.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Joan L. Brownell
organization: Carbon County Historical Society **date:** April 2007
street & number: 224 North Broadway **telephone:** 406-446-3667
city or town: Red Lodge **state:** MT **zip code:** 59068

Property Owner

name/title: Rex and Gina Ternan
street & number: 223 West Bench Road
city or town: Roberts **state:** MT **zip code:** 59070

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Description of Resources

Log House (constructed 1907, one contributing building)

Jacob Kero built this one and one-half story house in 1907. On his final proof, he describes the house as “framed; two-stories, seven rooms.” Elias Paavola, one of his witnesses for his final proof, reports that he had a “four room house, log-framed, part 36 ft by 18 ft and the other part 16 ft by 14 ft.” William Rasperry, his neighbor, states in the same document that Kero had a “log house framed, I think seven rooms, L shape, main part 20 ft by 30 ft, and the L 18 ft by 16 ft.”⁵

Oriented to the east, this one and one-half story house is indeed a log house clad with drop siding. The logs are only visible on an interior south wall and reveal superb craftsmanship of tightly fitted two-sided hewn logs.⁶ The house reflects a vernacular cottage style with Queen Anne features beginning with the classic “L” formed by intersecting gables. Enclosed porches fill the spaces provided by the “L.”

The foundation varies in height above the ground and consists of deteriorating rubblestone faced with concrete. The north, south and east walls of the original log portion are defined by narrow drop siding, a protruding water table, and corner boards softened with rounded edges. Covered with metal roofing, roof details include extended enclosed eaves and wide vergeboard at the gable ends. Three open gable ends display fish-scale shingles.

A slightly off-center gable roof dormer dominates the facade (east side) wall. This gable exhibits fish-scale shingles, wide vergeboard and a centered one over one double-hung window. An open porch sits symmetrical to the gable dormer. This porch has a hipped roof supported by four evenly spaced unadorned round columns. Concrete steps lead to the porch, which displays tongue and groove flooring and a beadboard ceiling. The facade wall beneath the porch roof holds a door entry, directly below the window in the gable dormer. A cottage window with upper sash divisions sits north of the door. Four over one double-hung units flank the porch to each side, both accented with vinyl shingles.⁷

Originally both the north and south end walls were identical, with symmetrical single double-hung windows centered on each floor. Today, the north end wall retains its original fenestration, with a four over one double-hung window at the first floor and a one over one double-hung in the gable end. The south gable end retains a one over one double-hung window but a ribbon of three, four over one double-hung window units now replaces the original double-hung on the first floor.

The enclosed south porch exhibits wider drop siding than the original portion of the house. A row of four, one over one double-hung windows fills the wall, accented with vinyl shutters and window boxes. A side entry fiberglass door is approached by a concrete walk from the driveway. The west wall of the porch has paired one over one double-hung windows centered on the wall.

Pressed board siding clads the entire west elevation. The end wall has a centered one over one double-hung window in its gable end and a modern three-sided bay window on the first floor. An oval glass fiberglass door provides access into the north enclosed porch.

The north enclosed porch is partially clad with drop siding identical to south enclosed porch and partially with pressed board. The Keros once housed their cream separator in this porch. Centered on the north porch wall a gable roofed vestibule opens onto cellar steps to access the partial basement.

The house is a contributing building within the historic district.

⁵ Jacob Kero, Certificate Patent Case File, Bozeman Land Office, Homestead Certificate No. 190682, Records of Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Record Group 49, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereinafter referred to as Kero Case File). It is interesting that Kero called his house framed while both his witnesses reported it was a log house framed. Presumably he wanted to present a more “upscale” appearance for his final homestead proof. Jim Prinkki knows of four frame houses of similar style in the vicinity of the Kero farmstead, but no other one and one-half story log homes. Jim Prinkki, interview with Joan L. Brownell, April 6, 2007, Roberts, MT.

⁶ Unfortunately the corner notching is not visible.

⁷ Gary Sironen thought that Nick Kero, son of Jacob, installed the window to the south of the porch. Gary Sironen, interview with Joan L. Brownell, March 22, 2007, Roberts, MT.

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Sauna (constructed c. 1911-1920, one contributing building)

This one-storied, rectangular sauna is situated south of the main house and adjacent to the south boundary of the farmstead. This building has experienced three construction phases. The center portion of the building is the original log sauna. The sauna is flanked to the west by a frame dressing room and to the east by a blacksmith shop. All walls sit on a low, deteriorating rubblestone foundation.

Jacob Kero built the original suvasauna or smoke sauna, constructed of two-sided hewn horizontal logs. He does not mention a sauna on his final proof, indicating he built the sauna after 1911.⁸ Today, only the north and south exterior logs walls are visible while the corner notching is not exposed. Following Finnish traditional techniques, the extremely tight horizontal logs exhibit minimal chinking with only a few noticeable pieces of cloth or quarter rounds. The north wall sill log is partially covered with concrete (presumably due to decomposition).

The sauna has a low gabled roof formed by a ridgepole and two purlins. Roof details included metal roofing, a brick chimney protruding from the south slope near the ridge and extended enclosed eaves. A single two light (replacement) window provides natural light to the interior of the sauna on the north wall.

Presumably Jacob built the dressing room as well. Drop siding covers the dressing room exterior walls including the gable end. Corner boards frame the walls. The gable end displays four shaped wood braces set symmetrically at the roof line. A fixed single light window is centered on the west end wall. The dressing room is approached by an approximate ten foot sandstone walkway and entered by a solid plank door.

Robert "Bob" Kero, grandson of Jacob, built a blacksmith shop at the east end of the sauna after he moved onto the place permanently in 1958. The walls are covered with red drop siding framed by corner boards. A sliding door fills part of the north wall and a single fixed four light window is centered on the east and south wall. A stove pipe protrudes from the south slope near the roof ridge. The east gable end displays the same four wood braces as the west gable end.

Entering the sauna is like a step back in time. The dressing room is a narrow rectangular room with three walls (north, south and west) finished with horizontal tongue and groove boards. Wood benches align the north and west walls and wooden spools serve as hooks above the benches. Beadboard covers the ceiling and lilac patterned linoleum covers the floor.

The interior log wall between the dressing room and the sauna is partially blackened. A single light bulb illuminates the sauna through a small squared opening cut into the log wall. A solid tongue and groove door provides entry into the sauna proper.

All of the walls of the sauna proper are blackened, a result of the years as a smoke sauna with no chimney. Nick Kero, son of Jacob, added the stove and the chimney. The stove is against the south wall and sits within a concrete frame filled with river cobbles. The stove pipe rises out from the stones and angles to attach to the brick chimney. This partial chimney stands on two 5 x 11 beams near the west interior log wall. Next to the sauna is a water container that has a narrow metal conduit that extends into the sauna stones (to produce steam). You step on a raised wood platform as you enter the room and tiered benches stand against the interior east wall. The roof is covered with horizontal boards.

The sauna is a contributing building within the historic district. The present owners plan to restore the sauna to its historic appearance by removing the blacksmith shop.

Root Cellar (constructed c. 1904-1911, one contributing building)

Jacob Kero lists a "cellar" on his final proof as one of his improvements and one of his witnesses lists a "root cellar."⁹ This root cellar is located south of the main house and on the east side of the courtyard. It is oriented north/south and large cobblestones are scattered at both ends of the cellar. A low gable roof covered with corrugated metal roofing and a metal ridgecap identifies the cellar. In some places, concrete seals the juncture between the roof and the cellar wall.

⁸ Kero Case File.

⁹ Ibid.

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The north end holds the cellar entry, a solid plank door framed with railroad ties at each side and a round log header. The interior entry walls are cobblestones and concrete steps access the interior plank door.

The interior of the root cellar is rectangular and all walls display random stacked tightly fitted white-washed cobblestones, displaying mortar between stones. The stones probably came from the edge of the bench, east of the farmstead. The stones extend into the gable ends. The roof is formed by a ridgepole and two purlins with unpeeled posts as sheathing. The roof is further supported by an "H" structure at the center of the cellar composed of vertical and horizontal logs. The cellar floor exhibits deteriorating concrete.

The root cellar is a contributing building within the historic district.

Garage (constructed c. 1920s, one contributing building)

This gabled roof rectangular garage originally housed the family car. Historic 1930s photographs show this garage in the background.¹⁰ Of post and beam construction, it is situated northwest of the main house. The garage has a concrete slab floor. The walls are covered with drop siding framed by corner boards tied to vergeboards. Roof details include asphalt shingles, a metal ridgecap and extended enclosed eaves.

The west and north walls have no openings. A sliding wood door clad with drop siding fills half of the east wall. This wall also holds a horizontal plank door. Sometime after 1975, Bob Kero introduced a small gabled roof extension to accommodate his larger farm machinery. A fiberglass overhead garage door fills the south wall of this extension. Other details include boxed eaves, corner boards, metal roofing and vertical siding. The garage interior is open, with an oil trap at the west end.

The garage is a contributing building of the historic district.

Secondary Residence (constructed in 1958, one contributing building)

According to John Collins, Bob Kero bought and moved this house from the Cliff and Jesse Wallace place about ½ mile south of the Fox elevator. He and his first wife, LaVerne, moved into the house after they got married in 1958. Two other informants thought that part of the house came from the Mouat mine in Stillwater County. Bob and LaVerne lived in this house until her death in 1993. He then moved to the main house and made this building a rental unit.¹¹

This one-story frame house faces the county road and sits south of the main house across the driveway. The house has a "T" shape formed of intersecting gables. It has a full concrete basement with daylight windows piercing the walls. Asbestos siding clads the walls while asphalt shingles cover the gable roof. Other roof details include enclosed eaves with decorative end returns and vertical boards in the gable ends. A small gable roof dormer is centered above the south wall.

Fenestration is asymmetrical throughout the house. Windows vary in type and size and include fixed, awning, casement, one by one sliders, and picture windows. Vinyl shutters adorn the picture windows. A modern slab door on the east end wall opens onto a wood deck. A second slab door on the east intersecting wall is approached by wood steps and covered with an open shed roof.

The house is a contributing building within the historic district.

Bunkhouse (constructed in 1958, one contributing building)

Robert "Bob" Kero built this bunkhouse around the same time (1958) he built his one-story house. Gary Sironen said it just had to be big enough for a bed.¹² Located behind the secondary residence to the west, this one-story gabled roof building sits on a low concrete foundation. Clad with red drop siding, the building is framed by white corner boards tied to wide vergeboards. Metal roofing covers the gable roof, finished with wide enclosed eaves.

¹⁰ Ann Kero, the widow of Robert Kero, allowed the author to view some of the Kero family albums. Ann Kero, interview with Joan L. Brownell, March 21, 2007, Park City, MT.

¹¹ John Collins, interview with Joan L. Brownell, March 28, 2007, Red Lodge, MT; Ann Kero Interview; Rayno Kasala, interview with Joan L. Brownell, March 23, 2007, Red Lodge, MT.

¹² Gary Sironen Interview.

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The west wall holds a vertical board door with exterior framing and a fixed four light window accented by a window box. A fixed six-light window is centered on the south end wall. The interior is one room finished with plywood painted white.

The bunkhouse is a contributing building within the historic district.

Stone Barn (constructed pre-1911, one contributing building)

Jacob Kero in his final homestead proof lists a cow barn as one of his improvements. William Rasperry, one of his witnesses, mentions Kero had a stone barn. Robert Kero told the present owners, Rex and Gina Turner, that his grandfather with some neighbors constructed the barn. Jim Prinkki, who lives directly northeast of the Kero farmstead, had a similar stone barn that burned several years ago. Mr. Prinkki attributes the stone barns to the early English settlers on the West Bench, not the Finnish farmers.¹³

This impressive one-story, rectangular sandstone barn is located across the courtyard west of the house. The barn measures approximately 26 feet east/west by 54 feet north/south. A steep gable roof formed of pole rafters tops the barn. The plate logs at all four corners of the barn are joined with full dovetailed notching and all rafters are fitted into the plate logs. Metal roofing covers the barn and horizontal drop siding covers the gable ends. The north gable end holds a centered hinged vertical plank hay mow door.

According to several local informants, sandstone is available to the west in the dry hills and also on the East Bench above Rock Creek.¹⁴ The barn stones shapes are not uniform and tool marks are visible on the majority of stones. The arrangement of stones within the rows is irregular but approximately horizontal. Bed joints display mortar and some cement has recently been utilized. Precision stone work is particularly noticeable at the squared openings and corners. The stone walls are doublefaced and average 20 inches thick. The interior stones do not exhibit the same workmanship as those on the exterior walls.

Openings are found along the east and west walls. Plank doors on the east and west wall near the north end of the barn are positioned directly opposite each other. A steel tension rod ties the east and west walls together with a steel plate visible above these doors. The east wall also holds a double sliding wood door near the south end. The west wall also holds a second plank door. Two recessed windows accented by flower boxes pierce the east wall between the two door openings. The stone work at the corners and surrounding the window openings is especially notable.

A small shed roofed addition extends off the south wall. This addition is covered with red drop siding with a hinged door entry on the east wall. A frame wall set beneath a cross log divides the barn interior. The north portion of the barn once served as a dairy barn, attested by the milk cow stanchions and concrete floor. The upper level stored hay. The south portion of the barn is open.

The barn is a contributing building within the historic district.

Chicken House (constructed c. 1904-1911, one contributing building)

Jacob Kero lists a chicken house on his final homestead proof.¹⁵ The chicken house is on the west side of the courtyard and aligned with the stone barn.¹⁶ This rectangular one-story frame and pole half-monitor chicken house consists of opposing shed roofs, a common form for early twentieth century poultry houses. Metal roofing covers the roof. Roof details include extended enclosed eaves and a tall gabled roof plywood vent protruding from the east slope near the roof ridge. The raised portion formed by the opposing roofs holds across its north half a row of nine window openings, eight of which contain four-light fixed windows, and the ninth is covered from the interior.

Red drop siding clads the building, framed with white corner boards tied to continuous vergeboard. The chicken house sits on a low rubblestone concrete foundation, being highest under the west wall and varying heights under the north and south end walls. A portion of the east wall is filled with a large double wood door entry with oversized hinges and a small chicken door within the north door. Both end walls hold wood doors clad with drop siding. The south door is centered on the wall, flanked to each side by a

¹³ Kero Case File; Rex and Gina Turner, interview with Joan L. Brownell, March 7, 2007, Roberts, MT; Jim Prinkki Interview.

¹⁴ Gary Sironen Interview; Jim Prinkki Interview; John Collins Interview.

¹⁵ Kero Case File.

¹⁶ Originally a large horse barn stood between the stone barn and the chicken house. The owners recently removed that building due to excessive decay.

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window opening covered with a six-light window frame. Another small window opening on the west wall is covered with a six over six window frame.

The interior of the building is divided into two rooms. The north room has a concrete floor and is now used as a feed shed. The south room has a low wood ceiling with beadboard covering almost all the walls. Gary Sivonen thought that Bob Kero probably just had some extra siding and used it in the chicken house to help insulate the building.¹⁷

The chicken house is a contributing building within the historic district.

Loafing Shed (constructed c. 1955, one contributing building)

Oriented east/west, this long rectangular loafing shed is enclosed on three sides and stands perpendicular to most of the buildings within the agricultural unit. The shed roof is supported by two rows of five vertical posts, all set in rubblestone concrete piers, spaced approximately five feet apart. The posts are fitted into horizontal squared beams that extend the length of the building.¹⁸ Cross ties at each post provide further stability. The low gable roof is covered with metal roofing and exhibits exposed rafters.

Of post and beam construction, the north, east and west walls are all clad with board and batten slab lumber. The south wall is partially open. At each end of the wall, two sets of hinged horizontal wood panels fold up to open the entire length of the wall. A corral system of metal gates and fences incorporates the loafing shed.

The loafing shed is a contributing element of the historic district.

Calving Shed (unknown construction date, one contributing building)

Used as a calving shed, this shed stands almost flush with the east end of the loafing shed. This rectangular, one-story gabled roof shed sits on concrete blocks. Constructed of two by sixes, the shed is sided with vertical wood slabs in the board and batten style. The low gable roof has metal roofing with extended eaves and exposed rafters. The open eaves reveal rafters have been shaped to fit into notches set in the top plate.

The east and west walls have no openings. The north wall holds a wide horizontal board hinged opening while the south wall door is covered with drop siding with an upper single light.

The shed is considered a contributing building within the historic district.

Log Shed (constructed pre-1911, one contributing building)

This rectangular, one-story, gabled roof log shed is located west of the stone barn and sits on a combination of sandstone and field stone under the north, south and west walls. The gable roof is formed by pole rafters with wide board sheathing under its metal roofing. The horizontal logs are round, unpeeled and saddle notched at the corners with both projecting sawn and axed log ends. Board and batten slab boards clad the gable ends. The interstices display some chinking and daubing.

The east and west walls both have small square openings. The east opening holds a fixed four-light window while the west opening is boarded over from the interior. A wide framed opening on the east wall provides interior access through a metal wire mesh gate. The shed has been primarily used as a calving shed.

On his final proof, Kero mentions there was a one-room log house when he arrived.¹⁹ However, there is no way to determine whether this is the original homestead building or possibly a field barn often associated with Finnish farms and moved onto the farmyard.

The log shed is a contributing building within the historic district.

¹⁷ Gary Sironen Interview.

¹⁸ Wood plates cover the joinings of the beams so it is not known how they are fitted.

¹⁹ Kero Case File.

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Granary (constructed c. 1904-1911, one contributing building)

This rectangular one-story gabled roof granary sits on two by six boards on the ground. It has exposed two by six studs on the south exterior wall while drop siding covers the remaining three walls. Roof details include board and batten in the gable ends, enclosed extended eaves and metal corrugated roofing. There is one opening on the south wall. The interior of the granary was not accessible but presumably has interior board walls and flooring.

Jacob Kero lists a "granery" as one of his agricultural improvements to this homestead.²⁰ This type of granary is common to early twentieth century farms. This building recently has been repositioned to stand perpendicular to the box car. The grain grinder was once located in this granary.

The granary is a contributing building within the historic district.

Grain Car (unknown installation date, one contributing building)

Railroad boxcars are fairly ubiquitous elements of the built environment on Montana farmsteads and often, as here, used for granaries. This car is a 37-foot grain car used by the Northern Pacific and constructed between 1885-1908. Located adjacent to the west farmstead boundary, this grain car continues to function as a granary. It sits on nine regularly spaced concrete piers that span the width of the grain car between the east and west walls. Covered with beadboard siding, the grain car has a gently curved roof topped with tin sheeting.

The grain car is a contributing building within the historic district.

Irrigation Ditches and Well (constructed pre-1911, two contributing structures)

Irrigation ditches run along the east, north and south farmstead boundaries. These ditches are components of the original Kero ditch.

At the center of the courtyard is the original farmstead well (now capped). According to John Collins, this is a hand dug sandstone-lined well with a depth of approximately 60 feet.²¹ The present owners have landscaped a medicine wheel of river cobbles using the well as the center.

The irrigation ditches and the well are contributing structures within the historic district.

Agricultural Fields (one contributing site)

North, south, and west of the building cluster are irrigated fields. Approximately 50 acres are used for hay production, and the addition fields are presently used as horse pastures. These fields, transected by irrigation ditches and laterals, convey the patterns of use on the property and contribute to the district's significance.

Cuckler Building (constructed 1975, one non-contributing building)

Erected in 1975, this substantial Cuckler Building measures 30 feet by 40 feet and is the most modern building within the farmstead. This steel building has steel framing, roofing, siding and a concrete foundation and floor. A large overhead door fills the east wall.

This building is a non-contributing building within the historic district. It is also the most intrusive, as the building is the only building out of context within the farmstead arrangement of the open courtyard. The present owners plan to relocate the building outside the historic district as time and money allows.

²⁰ Kero Case File.

²¹ John Collins Interview.

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District Integrity

The Kero Farmstead Historic District retains a high degree of physical integrity given that it is a three generational farm that continuously operated throughout the twentieth century. In order to remain viable, farmsteads must evolve and often historic elements are lost during this transition. Fortunately, the Kero farmstead preserves both historic log and stone buildings and incorporates later domestic and agricultural buildings into a cohesive rural farmstead.

The location and setting are basically undisturbed. The surrounding viewshed has not been disrupted by modern intrusions with the exception of a gravel operation to the south. The county road still experiences little traffic and irrigated fields surround the farmstead in three directions. The farmstead design retains its original courtyard arrangement typical of Finnish farmsteads.

Alterations to historic buildings are minimal and generally do not detract from their historic character and appearance. Most buildings today are covered with metal roofing in an effort to stabilize the buildings. The main house has experienced some modifications over time but retains most of its original design and historic fabric. Some recent changes to the house have occurred to the fenestration but the current owners have chosen compatible materials. The stone barn and stone root cellar retain their original appearance and character. The original one-room log sauna evolved in a natural progression with the addition of a dressing room while the attached blacksmith shop is a minimally intrusive element. All the agricultural buildings are basically unchanged since their construction.

The secondary residence and bunkhouse appear somewhat out of character within the farmstead but illustrate an important component of the family farm evolution. Bob Kero moved the one-story house to the farmstead so he and his new bride would have their own dwelling. This second residence on the farmstead allowed both father and son to continue to work the farm together but live separately. The introduction of a second residence secured the historical continuum of the farm.

The Cuckler steel building is the only non-contributing building in the Kero farmstead. Unfortunately, this substantial building stands in the middle of the open courtyard and disrupts the arrangement of the farmstead. The present owners plan to remove this building to another location and restore the Finnish courtyard to its original arrangement.

The Kero farmstead is a wonderfully preserved Finnish farmstead that effortlessly reflects its ethnic agricultural identity. The Kero farmstead preserves its distinctive Finnish character and arrangement of farm and domestic buildings even after a century of occupation and use. The farmstead's ability to convey its historic associations is augmented by the rural character of the landscape and continued use of the irrigated fields.

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History of Kero Farmstead

Crow Indian Reservation

The Kero Farmstead Historic District is situated on lands designated Crow Indian 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 the main ridge of the Wind River Mountains in Wyoming as its south boundary. The Mountain Crow occupied the land south of the Yellowstone River while the River Crow occupied the territory north of the Yellowstone. The Sioux and Blackfeet constantly threatened the Crow within this territory and pushed them towards the southcentral region of Montana. After the discovery of gold in southwestern Montana in the 1860s, continuous pressures by non-Indians gradually resulted in several reductions to the original Crow Indian Reservation boundaries.²²

An 1880 agreement ratified in 1882 eliminated all Crow lands west of the Boulder River. The Crow Tribe also ceded a wide strip of land that extended to the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone encompassing the area surrounding the present-day town of Red Lodge. This agreement changed the southern boundary of the Crow Indian Reservation "to a point six miles south of the first standard parallel, being on the township-line between townships six and seven south."²³ The Kero farmstead location fell north of this line and therefore remained within the boundaries of the Crow Indian Reservation.

The 1882 agreement allowed for the development of recently discovered coal deposits, located within the ceded strip, under the benches immediately east and west of the present-day town of Red Lodge. The Rocky Fork Coal Company opened the first mine in 1887. The Rocky Fork and Cooke City Railroad completed a railroad line to Red Lodge in 1889, which was eventually purchased by the Northern Pacific. The Northwestern Improvement Company, a Northern Pacific Railroad subsidiary, succeeded the Rocky Fork Coal Company and successfully operated the Red Lodge coal mines until the early 1920s.

Regardless of these developing coal fields, most lands north of Red Lodge, including the Kero farmstead location, remained within the Crow Indian Reservation. In 1890, the federal government negotiated another agreement with the Crow Tribe (ratified in 1892) for a further reduction of their reservation. 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 in the Clarks Fork, Rock Creek and Stillwater drainages opened for settlement and individuals could now file homestead entries as soon as the government survey was approved.²⁴

Land Settlement on the West Bench

The Kero farmstead is located in T6S R20E within the 1892 ceded lands. This township constitutes a large portion of the farming area known as the West Bench.²⁵ Problems with surveys and the existence of pre-existing Crow allotments delayed land patenting activity for these newly ceded lands. Without a government survey, land was not officially open for settlement and applications under various public land laws could not be made. Regardless, individuals, known as squatters, settled on these ceded lands in T6S R20E and considered their claims as homesteads. These same squatters also filed water rights as early as 1894, to appropriate water from Rock Creek for irrigation purposes.

Field work for the General Land Office (GLO) survey for T6S R20E did not begin until 1901. The resulting survey map reveals extensive settlement within the township, indicated by roads, houses, fences, irrigation ditches and cultivated fields. In 1904, the

²² Treaty of Ft. Laramie, 1851, Charles J. Kappler, ed. and comp. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties 2 vols.*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1904), 594-596. Crow treaties and agreements are available in Kappler at <http://www.digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/>. For a discussion of reductions to the Crow 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 America, Inc., 1981), 1-24 and Burton M. Smith, "Politics and the Crow Indian Land Cessions, 1851-1904," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History* 36:4 (Autumn 1986), 24-37.

²³ Act of April 11, 1882; Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, vol. 2, 1063-1064. The Little Big Horn College Library at Crow Agency, MT provides all of the Crow treaties on their web site at <http://lib.lbhc.cc.mt.us/about/government/>.

²⁴ Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, vol. 1, 432-436.

²⁵ For the purposes of this nomination, the West Bench and T6S R20E will be considered one and the same, although the West Bench extends both north and south of the township.

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surveyor for the township noted that the "Eastern portion for the township is entirely enclosed and claimed by settlers."²⁶ The survey for this township was finally approved in July 1905. Many legitimate settlers, like Jacob Kero, immediately filed their homestead entries in August 1905.

A review of GLO records for the eastern portion of T6S R20E encompassing most of the West Bench, provides information pertaining to the disposal of public lands in this township.²⁷ The Homestead Act dominated as the preferred public land law and homestead patents accounted for over 95% of all patents in this township. The 1862 Homestead Act allowed heads of households, widows, single persons over 21 years of age, and naturalized citizens, to apply for 160 acres. Patents for the land would be issued after five years of residence and cultivation. Most individuals on the West Bench filed under the 1862 Homestead Act for the allowable 160 acres. A few individuals purchased small acreages through cash sales.

The year 1906 saw seventeen homestead patents issued to settlers on the West Bench.²⁸ The next most active year was 1911 when thirteen individuals received their final homestead patent, including Jacob Kero. Between 1912 and 1921, patents issued ranged from one to a maximum of four each year, with only a few individuals taking advantage of the expanded homestead laws for more acreage. By early 1920, all of the land had been taken up on the West Bench.

Jacob Kero Farmstead

The GLO survey map identified the house of D. Kisth in the same general location as the Kero farmstead, indicating that someone had squatted here by 1901.²⁹ Sometime between 1901 and 1902, Etna [Aetna] Rasperry obtained this location from Kisth (or Kisth abandoned it). Because a survey was not yet available, Rasperry described his location as "lying about two and one half miles west of Rock Creek and about one and one half miles North of what is known as the Old Black Line, and adjoining the ranch of J. W. Ingalls on the South and Archie Rasperry's on the North ..."³⁰

It appears that individuals filing under the 1862 Homestead Act acknowledged squatters rights and honored any lands claims made prior to the approved survey, even if these claims were not legitimate. In 1902, Rasperry sold to E. E. Carrier for \$800 "all of the improvements of whatsoever description now on the land owned and occupied by the said Etna [sic] Rasperry."³¹ In February 1904, Carrier sold the same to Jacob Kero for \$1000 using the same imprecise land description. The sale also transferred existing water rights.³²

Jacob Kero declared on his final homestead proof that he first resided on the land in April 1904, two months after he purchased the land from Carrier. On August 4, 1905, Kero filed his homestead entry for 160 acres for the NE ¼ SW ¼, N ½ SE ¼ Section 23 and NW ¼ SW ¼ Section 24, T6S R20E. In April 1911, Jacob Kero received his final homestead patent. The previous year (1910), Kero bought for \$5000 the 160 acre homestead of his neighbor directly to the north, Henry (Archie) Rasperry, giving him a total of 320 contiguous acres plus water rights. The acreage for the Kero farmstead remained basically unchanged for almost 100 years.³³

Jacob Kero filed his homestead patent near the beginning of the homestead "boom" years in Montana from 1907 to 1917 when thousands of homesteaders came to Montana influenced by three factors, "... the dry farming system of agriculture, the availability of

²⁶ United States Surveyor General, GLO 1905 survey map and notes T6S R20E, microfiche on file, Records Room, Montana Bureau of Land Management State Office, Billings, MT.

²⁷ This review is based on 63 homestead patents in sections within the eastern portion of T6S R20E. The information is derived from Controlled Document Index (CDI) cards for T6S R20E, microfiche, Records Room, Montana Bureau of Land Management State Office, Billings, MT. For a good general discussion of public land laws, see James Muhn and Hanson R. Stuart, *Opportunity and Challenge The Story of BLM*, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (Washington, DC: GPO, 1988).

²⁸ Since this is only a year after the approval of the GLO survey and not the required five years under the 1862 Homestead Act, further study is needed to understand this discrepancy.

²⁹ US Surveyor General, GLO 1905 Survey Map for T6S R20E. No information on D. Kisth was located.

³⁰ Deed Book 5, Page 255, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Carbon County Courthouse, Red Lodge, MT.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Deed Book 5, Page 295, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Carbon County Courthouse, Red Lodge, MT. One possible reason Kero could afford this amount is because in February 1904, he sold his property in Red Lodge to his brother, August Joki for \$800, Deed Book 9, Page 369, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Carbon County Courthouse, Red Lodge, MT.

³³ Kero Case File; Deed Book 19, Page 72, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Carbon County Courthouse, Red Lodge, MT.

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large tracts of land either free or at low prices, and the mammoth promotional campaign which cranked up around 1908.³⁴ However, circumstances on the West Bench did not fit into this pattern. First, irrigation had already been introduced on West Bench lands. Secondly, squatters took up much of the land by 1900 and their prior right generally appears to have been honored by legitimate homesteaders. Thirdly, most of the West Bench settlers arrived in Montana prior to the homesteading boom years and therefore the promotional campaigns were not relevant.

All of Montana experienced favorable weather conditions beneficial to agriculture during this homesteading period. During these prosperous years, two small communities developed within the Rock Creek Valley, along the Northern Pacific branch line to Red Lodge. Roberts, at the north end of the West Bench, has been described as the "agricultural hub of Carbon County." Roberts served as the major shipping point for Rock Creek Valley produce and "at the height of harvest time, wagons and trucks would line up for miles for their turn to sent their grains to market on the railroad." The first grain elevator was built in 1915 and the second one in 1916.³⁵ Fox, a small community at the entrance to the West Bench, also at one time had two elevators and a railroad siding for shipping stock. Although the communities declined after the homesteading boom, the elevators continued to service area farms for decades.

Unfortunately, drought years began in 1917 and by 1919, drought encompassed two-thirds of the state. With the drought came other problems, like grasshoppers, fires and high winds. General economic depression followed the drought and in Montana, one out of every two farmers lost their land to foreclosure. The 1920s had a few good years until the next drought cycle began in 1929, followed by the 1930s depression. Ultimately, the presence of well-developed irrigated fields on the West Bench helped farmers like Jacob Kero survive periods of drought and depression.

The West Bench irrigated farm lands primarily produced alfalfa hay and occasional grains like oats and barley. At one time the Keros and others on the West Bench tried to grow seed peas for the Red Lodge Cannery. In the early 1920s, the Kero farm, like many others, added dairy cows to provide supplemental income. Especially after the Depression, farms diversified and combined two or more products with some cattle. In Carbon County from the 1920s to 1950s, every decade saw a decrease in the number of farm and in population. Land holdings on the West Bench increased slightly but never expanded like elsewhere in Montana. By 1950, the number of farms in Carbon County declined considerably, with irrigated farms remaining.. Like most Finnish farmers, Jacob Kero persevered, making subtle changes in his farming practices where necessary.

Jacob Kero came to the United States around 1890. Like many Finnish immigrants, he first worked in the iron mines in Michigan. In 1891, he arrived in Red Lodge to work in the coal mines and in 1896 became a naturalized citizen. He reportedly returned to Finland for his wife and two children in 1899. Although he moved his family to the homestead in the spring of 1904, Kero worked in the coal mines at Red Lodge during the winters of 1904 and 1905.³⁶

On his final homestead proof, he declared the homestead improvements consisted of a two-story frame house with seven rooms, a cow barn, stable, hen house, cellar and a granary. The 1910 Census lists Jacob Kero as a 40-year-old rancher with his wife Margaret and eight children, ranging in ages from 20 to less than a year. Eventually the Kero family grew to include eleven children. In 1941, Jacob Kero transferred ownership of the ranch to his oldest son, Nick and died the following year. Nick ran the ranch until he passed it on to his son Robert in 1966. Nick remained on the farm until his death in 1985, working the ranch with his son. Bob Kero lived at the ranch his entire life and died in 2002, just two weeks after leaving the farm.³⁷

³⁴ Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder and William L. Lang, *Montana A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 236.

³⁵ Lauri Travis, *Red Lodge North, Highway 212 Improvements: A Cultural Resource Inventory from Roberts to Boyd, Carbon County, Montana*, Report for Kadmas, Lee and Jackson, Engineers by Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc., Helena, MT 2002.

³⁶ Kero's original surname was Pouljoki but he took his wife's maiden name after a custom of taking the name of the more prominent family. His brothers changed their name to Joki; Shirley Zupan and Harry J. Owens, *Red Lodge Saga of a Western Area Revisited*, (Billings, MT: Frontier Press Inc, 2000), 333-34; "Red Lodge Finns Carbon County Montana," *Finnish-American Historical Society of the West Pioneer Series*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (December 1993): 14-15.

³⁷ Kero Case File; Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population*, Montana, Carbon County; Miscellaneous files, Carbon County Historical Society Archives, Peaks to Plains Museum, Red Lodge, MT.

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Of the 160 acres within his original homestead, Kero declared on this final proof that he had 127 acres "now cleared, broken and in cultivation." The first two years, 1904 and 1905 he harvested oats and wild oats; then clover and timothy for the following three years and oats and hay the last two years.³⁸ Like most farms after the depression, the Kero farmstead diversified over the years to raising cattle (including dairy cows) and growing hay and occasionally grains. Ann Kero, the widow of Robert Kero, remembers they had five hay fields and about 100 to 120 head of Angus cattle before they sold out in 2002.³⁹

Fox Finnish Farming Community

Jacob Kero was one of many Finns who settled on the West Bench above Rock Creek in the early twentieth century. Many experienced similar journeys to arrive on the West Bench. A study of migration patterns of Finnish immigrants showed "the majority were between the ages of 20 to 35, single, landless and originating from rural areas, once being tenant farmers, small land holders or landless agricultural laborers."⁴⁰ To escape the difficult social and economic conditions in Finland, they came to the United States where many found employment in the mining and lumbering regions in Minnesota and Michigan. As mining fields opened in the West, the Finns traveled further westward and arrived in Montana, finding work in the mining communities of Silver Bow, Cascade and Carbon County.

In 1900, Finnish people constituted approximately 3.3 % of the total population in Montana. In Carbon County, the total foreign-born population was 1712 with 382 individuals born in Finland, the largest ethnic group in the county. In 1910, Carbon County had the third largest Finnish population in Montana after Silver Bow and Cascade County. In Carbon County, the Finnish foreign-born population numbered 1126 or over 25% of the total ethnic population in the county. The Finns continued as the largest ethnic group in Carbon County in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴¹

The majority of the Finnish population in Carbon County worked in the Red Lodge coal mines. They lived in boarding houses or homes in Finn Town, east of the commercial downtown district of Red Lodge. Immigrants usually had the lowest paying jobs and worst working conditions, and often conflicted politically with labor and local authorities. Therefore, the opening of the Crow Indian Reservation in 1892 allowed groups of Finns to contemplate returning to their agricultural roots. Although Finns did not squat on the lands, many immediately filed on the West Bench as soon as it opened for settlement after the approval of the GLO survey. They chose the West Bench for several reasons: one, irrigation had already been partially developed; two, proximity to the railroad and therefore access to markets; three, the closeness of Red Lodge and Finnish cultural and social organizations so important to their heritage. There is one story that so many Finns settled on the West Bench because of the rocky soil where "there were more rocks for the sauna there than anywhere else."⁴²

The successful patents in the eastern portion of the township identify numerous settlers of Finnish heritage (many related), like Kero, Joki, Paavola, Housko, Poutio, Prinkki, Kiviahu, Poumala, Luoma, Koski, Maki and others. All received their homestead patents between 1906 and 1917. The proximity of Finn farmers to each other on the West Bench allowed Finns to help other Finns during haying or threshing. The clustering of Finnish families on the West Bench created a high degree of interrelationship and further strengthened the strong ethnic identity of the community.⁴³

Irrigation secured the success of the small farming community of the West Bench, being a "well-irrigated gravity fed agricultural area."⁴⁴ After the opening of the Crow ceded lands, individuals quickly filed water rights to appropriate water from Rock Creek for

³⁸ Kero Case File.

³⁹ Ann Kero Interview.

⁴⁰ Sanford, "Korpivaara."

⁴¹ US Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900*, Vol. 1, Part 1: Population (Washington, DC: US Census Office, 1901), 768; Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, Vol. 2: Population 1910, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1913), 1152; 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, DC: GPO, 1923); Bureau of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Population*, Vol. 3. Part 2: Reports by States: Montana-Wyoming (Washington, DC: GPO, 1932).

⁴² "Fox Friendly Finnish Farmers," *Montana Free Press*, February 1996, 24.

⁴³ CDI cards, T6S R20E.

⁴⁴ United States Department of Agriculture, *Water Resources Survey, Carbon County, Montana Revised*, (Helena, MT: State Water Conservation Board, Helena, MT, 1966), 41-42

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irrigation. Jacob Kero acquired water rights when he purchased the land and extended his Kero ditch to water most of his acreage. In 1947, Nick Kero combined his ditch with several others and formed the Consolidated Ditch Company, which irrigated over 2000 acres in 1964. Leoni Lampi considered that the Consolidated Ditch "is undoubtedly the result of the ditch started by the Finnish Irrigation Company in the early years of the century to irrigate the farms ..."⁴⁵

The Finnish West Bench community is closely integrated both socially and economically. This Finnish farming community strove to preserve its Finnish culture and traditions. They first organized a school district in 1909 and built a school on donated land that operated until the late 1960s. In 1914, the Finns erected Fox Hall as a community building for meetings and social events. Both Finnish men and women from the West Bench belonged to the Kaleva Lodges, first founded in Belt, MT, to preserve their Finnish heritage. In 1924, the Kaleva Lodge purchased 40 acres near Fox along Rock Creek for a park and built a lodge house, saunas and picnic area. In the 1930s, young men of the West Bench started a baseball club and played surrounding teams.⁴⁶

Also in keeping with their Finnish agricultural heritage, the farming community organized a cooperative Finnish Farmers' Organization in 1906. This organization appears to have been replaced with a Finnish Farmers' Fire Insurance Association, an organization that served area farmers until 1985. The elevator at Fox provided a very accessible market for their grains.⁴⁷

The West Bench remains a small irrigated agricultural community today. Farms raise timothy, hay, small grains, cattle and sheep. However, many of the original Finnish homesteaders are no longer associated with the community. In 1995, Leona Lampi produced a map of the West Bench township to show those farms still owned or occupied by Finnish families. The maps also designated Finns who owned farms early in the century. A review of this map shows only the Kero's, the Prinki's and the Joki's still occupied the same land originally homesteaded by their family.⁴⁸

Finnish Architecture of the Kero Farmstead

In 1992, Dena Sanford completed a National Register nomination for "Korpivaara," a Finnish farming community in Cascade County composed of rural homesteads exhibiting Finnish log buildings and much of the following is derived from this nomination. The Kero farmstead, similar to these homesteads at "Korpivaara," transferred "traditional Finnish concepts" like the log construction techniques, the courtyard plan and the "construction of modest-size specialty-use buildings, particularly the sauna and granary."⁴⁹

The Finnish farmstead organization is based on the arrangement of buildings into a distinctive courtyard plan that evolved over time in Finland. "By the late nineteenth century when the major movement of Finns to America began, the basic farmstead forms most familiar to the emigrants were the western version with its orderly grouping of buildings around an open courthouse ..."⁵⁰ The Kero farmstead is a classic example of this open courtyard plan which separates the domestic unit from the agricultural unit.

Several buildings within the Kero farmstead built environment illustrate Finnish log construction techniques. The Finns used traditional tools to shape the logs, including broad adze for precise finishing. When constructing a Finnish building, a scribe or *vara*, was commonly used to "trace the natural curve and contours of the upper side of a log to the underside of the log to be placed immediately above it."⁵¹ This results in an "airtight" building requiring little chinking or daubing. The horizontal logs are joined by tight-fitting corner notching, historically in Finland by either "tooth, hook, or tongue" notches and generally by full or half dovetail notching on western homesteads.⁵²

⁴⁵ Ibid.; Leona Lampi, *At the Foot of the Beartooth Mountains A History of the Finnish Community of Red Lodge, Montana* (Coeur d'Alene, Idaho: Bookage Press, 1998), 179-180.

⁴⁶ *Montana Free Press*, 25-26, 30-31, 34.

⁴⁷ Lampi, *At the Foot of the Beartooth Mountains*, 40-43, 118, 179.

⁴⁸ Lampi, *At the Foot of the Beartooth Mountains*, 213.

⁴⁹ Sanford, "Korpivaara."

⁵⁰ Arnold R. Alanen and William H. Tishler, "Finnish Farmstead Organization in Old and New World Setting." *Journal of Cultural Geography* 1 (Fall-Winter, 1980):66.

⁵¹ Sanford, "Korpivaara."

⁵² For further discussion of Finnish construction techniques, see Arnold R Alanen., "Little Houses on the Prairie: Continuity and Change in the Finnish Vernacular Architecture and Landscapes of Canada." *Finnishness in Finland and North America: Constituents, Changes, and Challenges*. Ed. Pauliina Raento. Special Issue of *Journal of Finnish Studies* Vol. 9 No. 2 (December 2005): 117-138 and Stanford, "Korpivaara."

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The Kero farmstead contains two log buildings, the house and the sauna that strongly reflect the Fenno-American traditional log construction techniques. The log house is "L" shaped, with an exposed log wall on the interior but no visible notching. The smooth, tight-fitted, hewn log wall clearly demonstrates skilled workmanship and craftsmanship. Jim Prinkki noted that there are several other frame houses in the immediate vicinity built by Finns but none are log. The building siding is in keeping with Finnish settlers desire to present an upscale appearance.⁵³

There are also extant saunas situated on the West Bench but the Kero sauna is a rare example of a suvasauna or smoke sauna. The sauna is "an invariable appendage of the Finnish farms." Cotton Mather and Matti Kaups, in their study of Finnish sauna in Michigan and Minnesota, concluded that "the most significant aspect of saunas may not be that his feature is a signpost of Finnish population, but that seeing the sauna is like going through a gateway into an ethnic field of inquiry."⁵⁴ The sauna at the Kero farmstead is indeed a step back in time.

A suvasauna is so-called since the fire box has no chimney, allowing the smoke to fill the room and cover the walls and ceiling to escape through a small vent in the roof. Traditional saunas were one-room made from squared logs, hewn and mortised at the ends and then placed horizontally on top of each other.⁵⁵ The construction used a vara to create a tight fit. The sauna is "unarguably the most identifiably Finnish structure in the Finnish -American rural landscape."⁵⁶ On the Kero farmstead, the smoke sauna expanded to include a dressing room and a chimney. Family and friends used the Kero sauna for generations and it is still a functioning sauna today.

Within the agricultural unit of the farmstead and separate from the domestic buildings by the open courtyard is a stone barn. A barn is one of the traditional buildings within a Finnish farmstead, often, as here, with a steep roof to house hay. The Kero stone barn is a highly crafted stone barn that cannot be easily attributed to traditional Finnish architecture. Finns are generally acknowledged for their skill and workmanship in log construction, not with stone. Dr. Alanan considered the Kero stone barn to be unusual for a Finnish farmstead but not totally atypical.⁵⁷ This well-crafted stone work displays an architectural sophistication in the composition of this visually impressive and aesthetically pleasing building. However, Finnish log construction methods are visible at the corners where full-dovetail notching joins the plate logs. The dovetail notch was widely used for house and barn construction in Finland.

The other buildings within the Kero farmstead maintain the open courtyard arrangement with the exception of the steel building. While farms in Finland contained large numbers of outbuildings, the American Finnish farms appear as more practical, constructing buildings when necessary for their operation but retaining the courtyard arrangement. For over 100 years and three generations, the Kero farmstead has preserved its traditional cultural values and heritage.

⁵³ Jim Prinkki Interview.

⁵⁴ Cotton Mather and Matti Kaups, "The Finnish Sauna: A Cultural Index to Settlement." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Dec., 1963):494; 500.

⁵⁵ Cotton Mather and Matti Kaups, "The Finnish Sauna: A Cultural Index to Settlement," :494.

⁵⁶ Dena Sanford, "Korpivaara."

⁵⁷ Arnold Alanan Interview.

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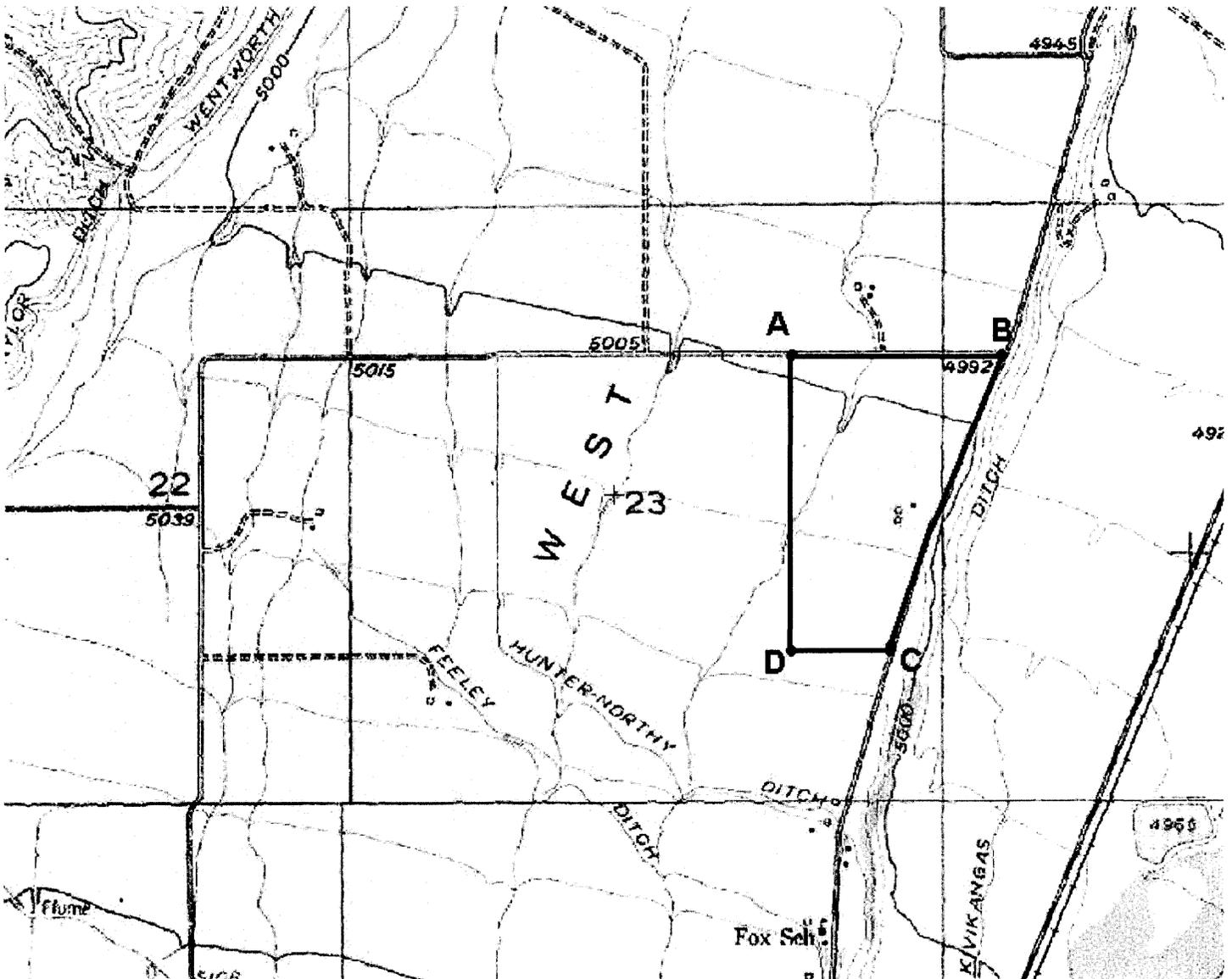
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Detail of USGS 7.5 minute Quadrangle showing the location of the Kero Farmstead Historic District.

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2005 aerial view of Kero Farmstead showing the historic district boundary.

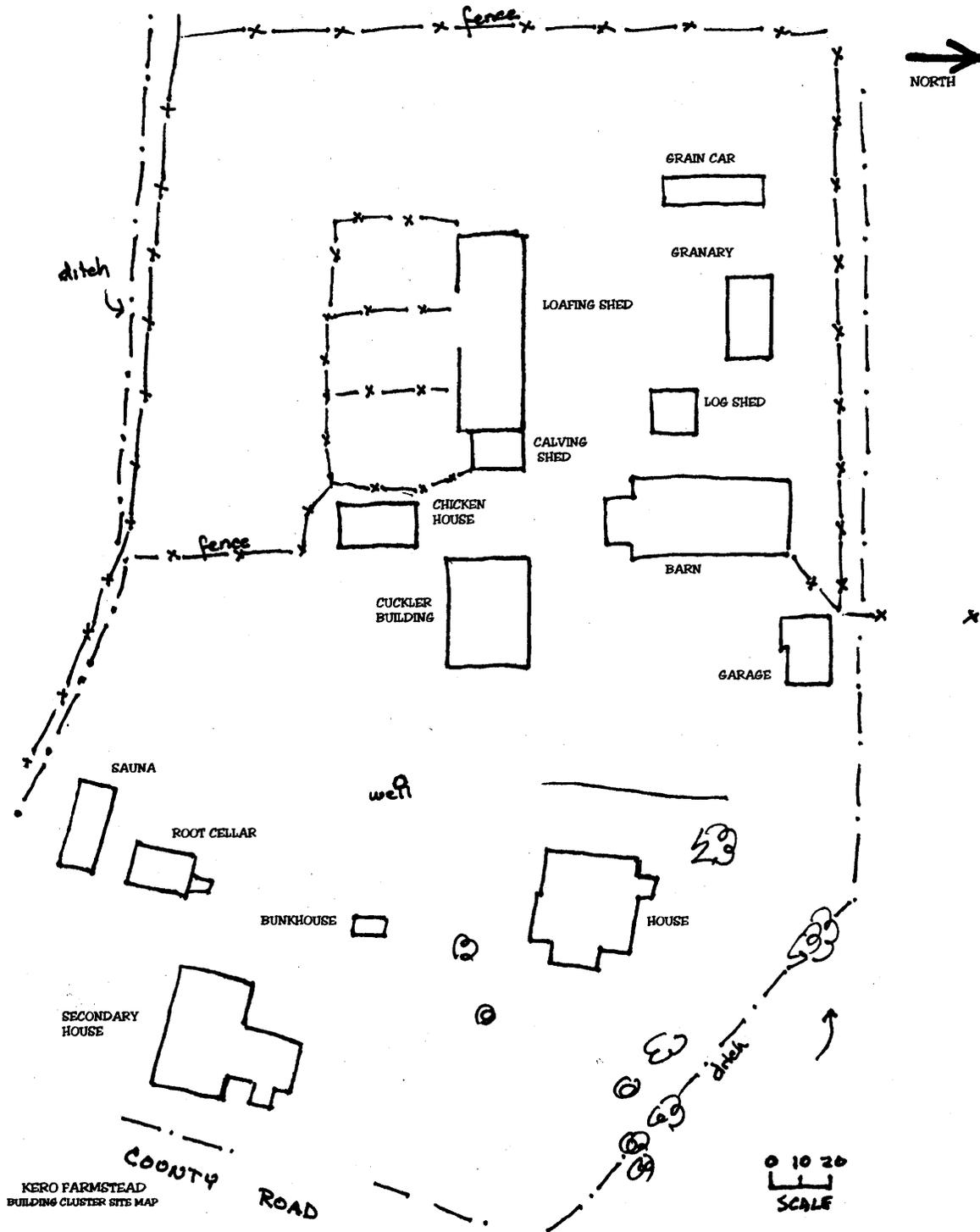
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Photographs

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In accordance with the March 2005 Photo Policy expansion, the photos that accompany this nomination are printed on HP Premium Plus Photo Paper, using a Hewlett Packard 100 gray photo cartridge. This combination of paper and inks is included on the NR's list of "Acceptable Ink and Paper combinations for Digital Images." The images are also recorded on an archival CD-R with a resolution at least 1200x1800 pixels, 300 dpi in "true color" 24-bit format.

Photographer: Joan L. Brownell
Date: March 2007
Negatives: Joan L. Brownell, Billings, MT.

<u>Photo Number</u>	<u>Description</u>
1.	Overview of farmstead on West Bench, view to west
2.	1975 Aerial photograph
3.	Main House, view to southwest
4.	Garage, view to northwest
5.	Root cellar, view to southwest
6.	Sauna, view to southeast
7.	Secondary House, view to northwest
8.	Bunkhouse, view to northeast
9.	Barn, view to northwest
10.	Chicken house, view to northwest
11.	Log Shed, view to northwest
12.	Granary, view to west
13.	Grain Car, view to northeast
14.	Loafing shed, view to northwest
15.	Calving Shed, view to north
16.	Well, view to east
17.	Cuckler Building, view to northwest
18.	Irrigation Ditch, view to east