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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Max Steinke Barn

other names/site number Charles DeChenne Barn

2. Location

street & number Route 1, Box 130

not for publication

city, town St. John

vicinity

state Washington

code WA

county Whitman

code 075

zip code 99171

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private public-local public-State public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s) district site structure object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, and Total.

Name of related multiple property listing: Grain Production in Eastern Washington

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: [Signature] Date: 7/28/88 Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official: Date: State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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. removed from the National Register. other, (explain:)

Entered in the National Register [Signature] 9/27/88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Agriculture: animal facility, storage

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Agriculture: animal facility, storage

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Other: centric

Round (dodecagonal) barn

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls concrete

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roof wood

other wood

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Located about 5 miles west of St. John on the flood plain of Cottonwood Creek, the Steinke barn towers above the more modern structures on the Charles and Martha DeChenne farm. The barn is in excellent structural condition, despite lacking a few shingles on its massive domed roof. It retains its integrity of design, materials, workmanship, location, feeling, and association. Included in the farm complex are two residences, two garages, a machine shop, woodshed, hayshed, chicken house, granary, cistern, and windmill. Although the barn, granary and windmill were all apparently built by Max Steinke during the period of significance, the other buildings on the property constitute intrusions into the historic setting. The original Steinke farmhouse and an earlier barn have been razed, further diminishing the historic setting. As a result, the barn alone is included in the nomination. All the remaining buildings are in use on this fully-operational wheat ranch, including the round barn, which now primarily serves as feed storage for a small herd of cattle kept in the adjacent fenced lot.

The barn itself is not actually round but dodecagonal (12-sided), measuring 16 feet on a side. Its walls consist of reinforced concrete standing to a height of ca. 9 feet. The two main doorways with double sliding wood doors (all original) are situated at opposite ends of the structure, one opening to the west toward the vehicle driveway, the other to the east into the fenced livestock yard. A utility door was installed in one of the south-facing walls in the early 1950s to accommodate the rerouted manure trolley. Original wood window casings are centered on the other 8 sides, although no glass remains in them.

Atop the walls, a broad, frieze-like frame belt course encircles the structure under the boxed flared roof eaves. The roof itself accounts for the most surface area found on the building as well as its height (estimated to be ca. 60 feet). It is a rather low-vaulted dome in comparison with higher domed roofs common on other round barns. The dome is supported by 12 ribs of laminated 1 X 10 inch planks that are nailed rather than glued together, with their protruding corners hewn off to conform to the dome's curvature. One of the ribs is continuous across the dome; the other 10 are separate elements, joined together at the apex with the continuous rib under the wooden, 12-sided louvered cupola which is 16 feet in diameter.

Like the barn roof, the cupola's roof has a nearly matching boxed flared eave. Unlike most others in the Palouse, the cupola is entirely frame and comparatively short. Other round barn cupolas tended to be all metal, manufactured and shipped in, probably ordered by the owner/builder from a catalog. Steinke built his own frame cupola, which was no doubt much lighter than the metal varieties, and in doing so probably prolonged the longevity of his barn. Theories explaining the collapse of most round barns center on the failure of the roof. A heavy metal cupola exerts considerable force on the bowed ribs, which tend to

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weaken and cause the structure to lean. Once a round barn begins to lean, there is almost no way to strengthen or repair it, short of encircling the roof in steel bands. In the case of the Steinke barn, the combination of the light cupola, strong ribs, and rounded dome shape may be responsible for its relative structural soundness.

When building the round barn, Max Steinke used sawn boards from an older rectangular barn he had dismantled nearby as sheathing for the round barn roof. A lattice frame of sawn boards nailed edgewise vertically and horizontally between the ribs provides the skeletal support for the sheathing. Reportedly two men hired by Steinke roofed the barn with cedar shakes. Composition shingles put on the roof in ca. 1960 have since deteriorated and, for the most part, fallen off, exposing the original shakes across nearly the entire roof. (Some newer shakes have been added as spot repairs).

Three roof ribs separate each of the four roof dormers. Situated immediately above the concrete walls, the dormers sport decorative boxed eaves under arching roofs. Small windows in the shake-covered gables are centered above the sliding wooden doors on each gable. The doors were essential for loading loose or bundled hay when a motorized conveyor belt was used. The belt has since been abandoned for the more convenient method of loading chopped hay with a so-called hay cutter that blows the material into the loft or mow. Because the cutter is capable of blowing the hay into the far reaches of the mow, only one dormer is ever used; doors on the other three have been nailed shut. Chopped hay weighs considerably more than unchopped, exerting more pressure on the mow floor. For that reason, the floor was reinforced with vertically-placed 8 X 8 inch timbers in the late 1930s. Installed to prevent hay particles from falling through cracks to the ground level, the original tongue-in-groove construction has been retained in the mow floor, except in the center where the floor was cut out to allow chopped hay to drop through to the ground level, thereby providing greater storage capacity.

On the ground level, the barn's floor is concrete throughout. Centered in the interior is the entryway (via wood ladder) into the second floor mow. Two doors enter the central hay storage area created when the mow floor above that area was removed. Feed bins face outward from the hub onto a walkway separating them from the 12 animal stalls radiating to the outer walls. Of the 12 stalls, 10 were designed to hold 2 draft horses each; the other 2 stalls could accommodate 3 head of cattle each. Along the inner edges of the stalls are original mangers, or wooden feed troughs, to which were attached so-called chop bins that held oats for draft horses. The bins were removed when the horses were sold in the late 1930s. Original stanchions hang from overhead cross-beams above the mangers, still used to keep animals in place while feeding. When in the stanchions, all animals face inward toward the center of the barn, allowing for easy feeding and, in the days of draft horses, harnessing by the farmer from the central location.

Running through the stalls just inside the outer walls is the so-called manure trolley, which consists of a large bucket or drum traveling on a single metal track mounted on the ceiling. The track runs the entire way around the interior, exiting via a swiveling cantilevered arm that hangs out from the door cut into a south-side wall. Originally the trolley exited what is now the front door of the barn. When Steinke's original farmhouse was abandoned to the east of the barn and a new residence erected (ca. 1951) directly in front (west) of the door, the trolley was rerouted to allow for disposing of manure to the south side of the barn further away from the new house.

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Although the roof of the Steinke barn needs new shingles and one of the ribs is starting to bow out slightly, the structure is in very good condition overall. The barn retains integrity of design, workmanship and materials. The minor modifications reflect functional necessity, as in the case of the rerouted manure trolley through the added door, or technological evolution, as seen in the reinforcement of the mow floor to support the added weight of chopped hay blown into the mow by modern devices. Removal of the center of the mow floor to allow for greater storage capacity may reflect the farm's shift from boarding draft horses to feeding beef cattle in the barn, or it may simply have been an innovation. Retention of the barn's original floor plan, roof shape, cupola, wooden doors on the dormers and at ground level, and the many interior features such as stalls, mangers, and stanchions provide this relatively rare and architecturally charming structure with authentic historic character.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1916  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1916  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder

Steinke, Max  
\_\_\_\_\_

Steinke, Walter  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Max Steinke barn is a significant example of centric barns in Washington state. Round or centric barns in Washington are significant primarily for their form, which was far less prevalent than the more conventional rectangular design. The Steinke barn is an excellent example of the type, and meets the registration requirements established in the Grain Production in Eastern Washington Multiple Property Documentation Form. Enhancing the structure's significance is its exceptional integrity of materials and workmanship. The Steinke Barn is one of only about a dozen historic centric barns known to exist in the state.

Max Theodore William Steinke was born in Sibley County, Minnesota, near Minneapolis in 1885. His father, Theodore Steinke, was a German immigrant who, according to a granddaughter, was "sort of a land speculator" as well as a farmer. The elder Steinke retained ownership of lands in the Midwest even after moving west, where he soon acquired considerable acreage in Washington.

One of the properties he gained title to was the farm on which the round barn now stands. Theodore Steinke reportedly bought the place from the original homesteader and farmed it for a number of years before leasing it to his son Max. It is not certain how and when Max came to the farm; his daughter believes he was farming on land owned by his father in the Spokane Valley prior to arriving in the Palouse. She thinks Max began leasing the place from the elder Steinke about two years before he, Max, married Ida Falk in 1906. Falk was also a native of Minnesota, born in the town of Young America in 1883. She came west with her family in 1904, settling first in Springdale, Washington. She soon left the northeast part of the state and came to work on a farm as a domestic laborer in the Ewan/Rock Lake area and there met her future husband.

Max Steinke and his bride took up residence in the house that appears to have been built by the property's first owner. (Its foundation can still be seen east of the windmill). He set about making improvements on the farm he was leasing from his father, who farmed other property in the Ewan vicinity. Max enlarged the house, installed the cistern on the hill (the original brick top has been replaced), dug the well, erected the windmill, and built a milk house (now razed) and the granary. While he raised some pigs and chickens and kept a few milk cows, Steinke's primary preoccupation was growing wheat (and some barley) on his 345 acre farm. For plowing, harrowing, and harvesting, he maintained twelve draft horses in a rectangular barn on the place.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

DeChenne, Charles and Martha (Steinke). Interview with Craig Holstine on the DeChenne/Steinke Farm, November 1987.  
Drawings of the Steinke Barn made by an unknown draftsman. In the possession of Charles and Martha DeChenne.  
Plat Book of Whitman County. Seattle: Anderson Map Company, 1910.  
Weddell, Jim. Round Barns of the Palouse. Unpublished typescript report on file in the Department of Architecture, Washington State University, Pullman, dated ca. 1977.

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**

Acreeage of property less than one acre

UTM References

A 

1	1
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4	4	8	8	9	0
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5	2	1	8	0	1	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property extends 10 feet outward from each of the 12 wall corners of the polygonal structure, forming a circular property boundary. The boundary is described thusly: to reach point of beginning, proceed southeasterly from the southeast corner of the intersection of Route 23 and the DeChenne Farmstead drive approximately 500 feet along the east edge of the drive to a point about 10 feet from the northwest face of  See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn to include only the barn, which is the sole structure on the property meeting the registration requirements for National Register eligibility. The farmstead as a whole has lost its historic integrity due to the introduction of new buildings and the removal or alteration of other structures dating to the period of significance.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Craig Holstine, Historian  
organization Archaeological & Historical Service, EWU date March 31, 1988  
street & number Eastern Washington University telephone (509) 359-2239  
city or town Cheney state Washington zip code 99004

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Sometime around 1915-1916, Max began serious planning for a new barn. He favored the round style that had supposedly caught his fancy in the Midwest. He liked the convenience of the central feeding area and the spacious stalls promising more room for harnessing draft horses. An unknown draftsman sketched a round barn design apparently according to Steinke's expressed wishes (with "Max Steinkie," obviously misspelled, hand-written at the top). The drawings are interesting in that they depict a 12-sided barn appearing strikingly similar to the structure that was later built; but the sketched building has a noticeably higher domed roof and a large, tall cupola on its top, making the structure appear much like most of the other round barns that were built in the region.

For reasons unknown, Max Steinke modified the plans when he built the barn and made the dome shorter and rounder and topped it with a short, light-weight wooden cupola. Against the wishes of his father, who preferred traditional rectangular barns, Max hired a carpenter (possibly the man who had sketched the original design) and enlisted his younger brother Walter Steinke to help build the round barn. Before starting work, the old rectangular barn on the place was torn down and its lumber used for roof sheeting on the new structure. Reportedly two men were hired to roof the round barn with cedar shakes. The total cost of the project was \$1700.

It is not known how long it took to build, but reportedly sometime in 1916 the barn was completed. Following an old tradition, local families gathered for a barn dance to christen what was without doubt Max Steinke's masterpiece of self expression. Musicians played from atop the chop bin (since removed) in the center of the mow as neighbors and lovers (some undoubtedly one in the same) danced about under the spacious dome.

Wheat farming was profitable for the Steinke's as it was for other farmers during the First World War. By 1920 many wheat ranchers in the St. John area were going into "semi-retirement," leasing their farms, moving to town, and living off rents or profit sharing arrangements from crops harvested by tenants. The tenant system was short-lived, however, as the agricultural depression of the 1920s took hold. Most farmers were forced to move back to their farms and make the best living they could from marginal profits.

After several prosperous years, the Steinkes, like many farmers in the area, began leasing their farm to tenants about 1919. (Ed Shuster was one of the first tenants; others came and went over the next 16 years). Max, Ida, and their children moved to Post Falls, Idaho, where his father and brothers were living. There Max and his family lived on a "timber ranch" and kept a few dairy cows. He worked in a box factory that he invested heavily in before it went broke. From ca. 1922 to 1926 the family ran a dairy farm east of Cheney before moving to Ewan and starting a similar operation there, which eventually furnished most of the town's dairy products. After leaving the farm on Cottonwood Creek in ca. 1919, Max never again farmed the place, although it remained in the Steinke family.

In 1935 Martha, one of Max Steinke's daughters, moved back to the farm with her husband, Charles DeChenne. (Max and Ida remained at the dairy in Ewan). That year the DeChennes harvested the wheat crop in the usual fashion with their team of fine draft horses. But that year was different: during frequent breaks taken to rest their tired horses, they watched as their neighbor harvested, without stopping, using a tractor. It was to be the last harvest in which they used draft horses. In the fall of 1935 the DeChennes, like some of their neighbors had earlier and some were to do later, sold their horses to so-called

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"horse dealers" and have ever since relied upon internal combustion engines for their motive power.

With the draft horses gone, Charles DeChenne began making numerous alterations on the barn, primarily to better suit beef cattle that replaced the horses as the structure's main inhabitants. In 1936 he started using one of the so-called "hay cutters" that chopped and blew hay into the barn mow. To support the added weight of the chopped hay, DeChenne braced the mow floor with 8 x 8 inch timbers. Later he cut the center of the mow floor out, creating a bin reaching to the ground level in the center of the structure's interior. Other minor alterations included removal from the mangers of chop bin feeders especially suited to horses.

In 1950-1951 the DeChennes built a new house on the opposite (west) side of the barn from the old homestead house. The original bucket trolley dumped manure out what had been the barn's back (west) door uncomfortably close to the new house. To remedy the situation, DeChenne rerouted the trolley through a new door he cut in one of the south-facing concrete walls. The next year he tore down the old homestead house that Max Steinke had lived in, and used some of the lumber to build the chicken house that stands today just south of the barn. Eventually the milk house Steinke had built was razed, and the granary was partially rebuilt after bursting when loaded with grain. Other buildings have over the years been added to the farmstead complex.

Max Steinke continued to live in Ewan until 1951 when he and his wife moved to Olympia to live near a daughter. He died there in 1963; Ida died four years later. If they were to return today to the farm on Cottonwood Creek where they first farmed together and started their family, they would find it much changed. Nearly all of the structures are new and the focus of activity has shifted westward away from where their house stood under the clump of locust trees. But they would readily recognize the round barn, whose exterior has remained virtually unchanged. For nearly three-quarters of a century, it has withstood the test of time and the elements. Max Steinke's structural masterpiece has outlasted nearly all other barns like it built in the region, and continues to serve as one of the outstanding structural landmarks on the landscape of the Palouse.

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Verbal Boundary Description (continued)

the barn. From this point of beginning, proceed in a 360 degree route around the circumference of the barn to the point of beginning.

