

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Lee Homestead

and/or common caretakers house, Tongue River Dam

2. Location

street & number NE of Decker not for publication

city, town Decker vicinity of congressional district 2

state Montana code 030 county Bighorn code 003

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

street & number 32 South Ewing

city, town Helena vicinity of state Montana

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bighorn County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Hardin state Montana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Lee homestead is located in the remote Tongue River Canyon of southeastern Montana, 18 miles northeast of Decker. The homestead lies in the cottonwood lined canyon on a slight rise that slopes to the north, down the canyon. To the east and west are canyon walls sprinkled with yellow pine and junipers. The earthen grass covered Tongue River Dam rises 75 yards to the south of the homestead, and crests about 80 feet above it.

Many of the homesteads' buildings date from its early years. The first cabin on the homestead was built in 1891 by Erasmus Lee. It was a one story log structure of unknown size. In 1897 a 16x28 one story log addition was built (see #1 on sketch map). The original log cabin was taken down around 1920. That same year a 21x30 1 3/4 story frame section (see #2 on sketch map) was built on to the south end of the 1897 addition, forming a "T" shaped house. Also, the 1897 section was covered with 4" bevel siding. Each section has a covered porch built along one of its lengths.

Two outbuildings also contribute to the historic value of the homestead. An unusual sandstone chicken house, (see #3 on sketch map) was built by, and made of stone cut by a member of the Lee family in 1925. The 21x27 coop includes an addition built that same year from salvage lumber. Another older outbuilding is a frame shop and storage shed with wood siding (see #4 on sketch map), built in 1920. A fourth building on the homestead, a frame garage (see #5 on sketch map) with sawn log siding, was built in 1950, after the homestead had become the residence for the Tongue River Dam caretaker.

The boundary of the Lee homestead nomination is drawn to include the homestead buildings and the remaining bottomland adjoining the buildings. Cottonwood trees have grown up in the bottomland fields in recent years.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1891 **Builder/Architect** Erasmus Lee

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

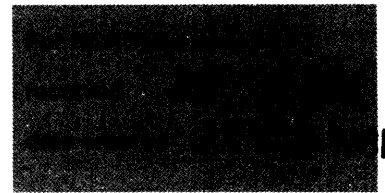
The Lee homestead, established in 1891, is significant as one of the few pre-1900 homesteads in the Tongue River valley on which a portion of the early buildings remain.

Although the benchlands of southeastern Montana were heavily homesteaded by dry land farmers from 1915 to 1920, the bottomlands in the Tongue River canyon were generally settled before the turn of the century. Erasmus Lee established his homestead in the canyon in 1891. This was during the first phase of settlement and agricultural development in the area, a phase characterized by large ranches and open range. Erasmus Lee, like most ranchers in the Tongue River country, ran cattle on the open range land above the valley, and grew hay in the bottomlands along the river.

In 1939 the homestead was purchased by the state of Montana. The Tongue River Dam was built just southwest of the homestead buildings, inundating 13 ranches upstream from the Lee homestead, and much of the Lee's land as well. The homestead house and outbuildings have since been used as the Dam caretaker's residence. That position is currently held by Erasmus Lee's son, Robert Lee.

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Continuation sheet

Item number

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION:

Follow a contour around the embankment, northeast then northwest, to the spillway. Follow the southeast bank of the spillway northeast to the point of beginning.

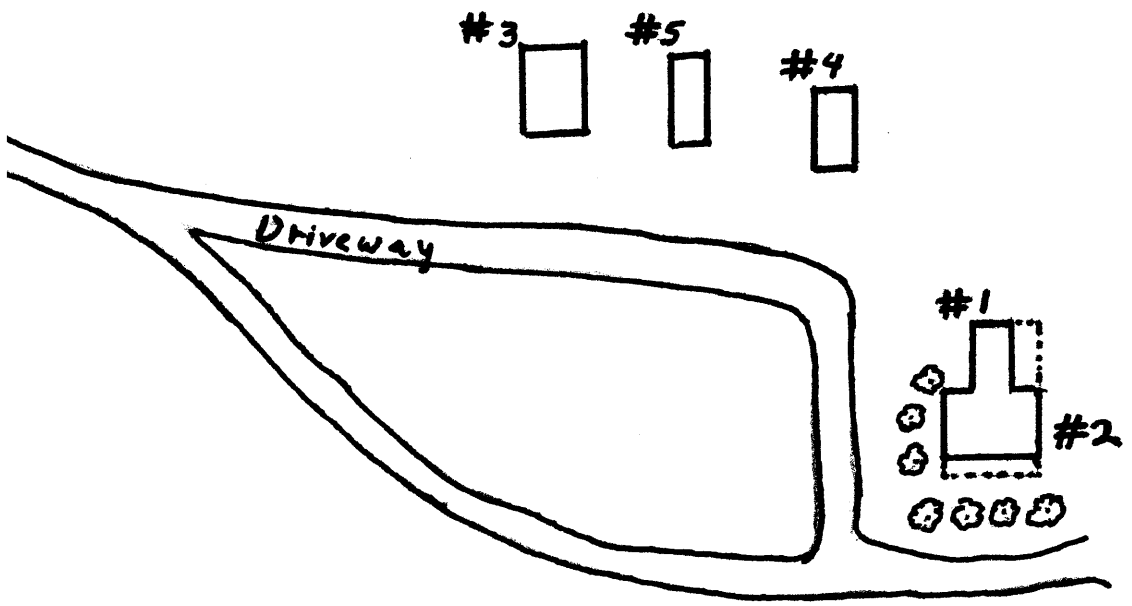
The property is located in T8S, R40E SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 13 and T8S, R40E W $\frac{1}{2}$ of Section 18.

Sketch Map, Lee Homestead

North ↑

← Spillway

Old Tongue River Channel →



Tongue River Dam ↓

JUL - 8 1981