

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

47

### 1. Name of Property

historic name: Halfway House  
other name/site number: 24ST166

### 2. Location

street & number: 3951 Highway 78  
city/town: Columbus  
state: Montana code: MT county: Stillwater code: 095  
not for publication: N/A  
vicinity: N/A  
zip code: 59019

### 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.

Mark F. Baunier / CHPO 1/2/2002  
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): \_\_\_\_\_

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
	_____	<u>2/21/02</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**Halfway House**

**Stillwater County, Montana**

Property Name

County and State

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property: Private

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing      Noncontributing

Category of Property: Building

3                      0 buildings

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

0                      0 sites

1                      0 structures

0                      0 objects

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4                      0 TOTAL

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:**

DOMESTIC/ Single Dwelling  
DOMESTIC/Secondary structure  
AGRICULTURE/Irrigation system

**Current Functions:**

DOMESTIC/ Single Dwelling  
DOMESTIC/Secondary structure  
AGRICULTURE/Animal facility  
AGRICULTURE/Irrigation system

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:**

OTHER/American Four-Square

**Materials:**

foundation: STONE/Fieldstone; CONCRETE  
walls: METAL/Aluminum; WOOD/Clapboard  
roof: ASPHALT/Shingle  
other: BRICK

**Narrative Description**

Setting

The Halfway House is located in the Stillwater Valley of south central Montana. The Stillwater River flows just west of the property, and empties into the Yellowstone River at Columbus seven miles to the north. The Beartooth Mountains dominate the landscape to the south of the site. The Crazy Mountains are located to the northwest and the Pryors to the southeast. The valley is characterized as foothills grassland, and vegetation includes bluegrasses, weeds, shrubs, cottonwoods, and spruce trees. Although agriculture (primarily ranching) dominates the economics of the area, the valley has been increasingly subdivided with residences located on small acreages. Recreation has also become an important industry to the valley.

The historic Halfway House property consists of a primary residence, two outbuildings, and an irrigation ditch. Other structures on the property are non-historic, and include a playhouse, treehouse, doghouse, and garden shed. The property is bordered by mature cottonwood trees to the north and south, and two large spruce trees are located east of the residence. Maple trees shade the residence from the north side. A modern white picket fence delineates the property to the east, while post and wire fences define the property to the north, south, and west.

The Halfway House has stood midway on the road (now Montana Highway 78) between the towns of Columbus and Absarokee Montana in the Stillwater Valley since its construction in 1907 as the primary residence of a late nineteenth century homestead. It is located at a bend in the road south of the Whitebird Bridge. The house faces east towards the road, and is situated at the eastern slightly sloping edge of the lower Stillwater Valley, with cultivated fields to the south and pasturelands to the north and west.

Residence

The Halfway House is a vernacular American Four-Square building that stands two stories high. It sits on a fieldstone foundation and a wood bulkhead allows entry into a full, unfinished basement from the rear (west) wall. The building is sided with metal siding that closely resembles the original clapboard still intact underneath. The building features a hipped roof covered with asphalt shingles and an internal brick chimney protrudes from the roof center. The eaves have metal beveled soffits with original wood soffits underneath.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 1

An open, hip-roofed, wrap-around porch dominates the east façade and continues around the east half of the north elevation. The porch roof is covered with asphalt shingles and finished with a beadboard ceiling and beveled soffits. Original turned posts with scrolled brackets support the porch roof. The porch also exhibits a recently installed balustrade railing. The east and north elevation walls beneath the porch roof retain their original clapboard siding and comerboards. The porch rests on a concrete foundation and has plank flooring.

The facade contains a centered entrance flanked to either side by tall 1/1 double-hung windows. The entry has a replacement steel door with a decorative etched oval light. An original one-light transom, also with decorative etched glass, augments the entry. The second story of the facade contains two, evenly spaced 1/1 double-hung windows, both with decorative metal shutters.

Typical of American Four-Square design, non-primary elevations also display symmetrical fenestration. Both the first and second story of the south elevation contain two evenly-spaced window openings. The east side features single 1/1 double hung windows. A three-light casement replacement window fills the opening on the west side at the first story level, and a pair of original 1/1 double-hung windows fill the opening at the second story. All these windows feature decorative shutters.

Fenestration on the west (rear) elevation of the building is limited to a small, single, 6/1 double-hung window on the north side of the first story.

Two small, one-story, gable-roofed additions extend from the west side of the north elevation. Both additions exhibit the same siding and roofing materials as the rest of the house. The more eastern addition is slightly larger and features two door openings. The east elevation entry is a steel door with nine lights flanked to the north by paired 3/1 double-hung windows. The north end wall contains a steel door with three vertical lights and a small 3/1 double-hung window. The smaller addition that serves as the bathroom rests on a concrete foundation. The north and west walls of this addition hold single, small 1/1 double-hung windows.

The first story level of the east side of the north elevation is shaded by the porch roof, and contains a pair of casement windows. The second story of the north elevation contains two, evenly spaced 1/1 double-hung windows with decorative shutters. The north elevation also features a wooden deck that extends from the porch. The deck is surrounded by a milled lumber railing similar to that of the porch. Wooden steps lead to the porch on the east and west ends.

The original floor plan of the house remains largely unchanged. Upstairs, there are three rooms plus an open sitting room. The house contains four rooms downstairs. Two additional rooms extend from the kitchen area, and include a bathroom and mud room. Many historic architectural details are still present in the interior house, including wood flooring, plaster walls, window trim, original interior doors and hardware, and historic built-in cabinetry.

Directly west of the house is a small wood frame outbuilding that serves as a chicken coop. It has a gable roof with asphalt shingles and is clad with novelty siding with comerboards. The east end wall contains a wood door and a small hopper window. South of the house is a wood-framed double-bay garage. It has a gable roof covered with rolled asphalt and has exposed rafters. The walls are clad with novelty siding with comerboards. The east end wall holds vertical tongue and groove bay doors.

Historic irrigation ditches partially lined by cobblestones bound the perimeter to the east and south of the house.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 2

---

## Integrity Statement

The house stands in its original location. The immediate setting is relatively undisturbed. The roadway has existed east of the house since the late nineteenth century. Mature trees bound the site to the north and south and spruce trees conceal the front facade from the road. Numerous historic outbuildings have been removed as the site has evolved. The house exhibits classic characteristics of the American Four-Square vernacular style with its two story massing and hipped roof, a full porch and nearly square floor plan. The house retains original fenestration with the exception of two modern paired casement windows and metal shutters on all windows.

Other modifications to the house have occurred over the years. The small addition on the north wall was installed in 1948. The larger addition was constructed later in the 1950s. Historic photographs reveal a partially enclosed porch on the north wall but today, the larger gable-roofed addition extends beyond the porch roof. The entire building was resided with steel siding around 1980 but the original cladding still exists underneath and is visible on the lower facade walls sheltered by the porch roof. The porch retains its original scrolled brackets, turned posts and beaded ceiling but has lost its original flooring. The porch railing has been recently installed while historic photographs show either no railing or a closed railing. The extended deck was added in 1985. The front door has been replaced with a modern decorative steel door but retains its original transom.

## 8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria:

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT;  
ARCHITECTURE

Significant Person(s): N/A

Period(s) of Significance: 1907-1951

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Significant Dates: 1907

Architect/Builder: Earnest Sale, builder

### Narrative Statement of Significance

The Halfway House is historically significant and eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its historic association with land settlement in the lower Stillwater Valley in southcentral Montana. The Halfway House has stood for nearly 100 years midway on the road between the railroad town of Columbus on the Yellowstone River and the inland town of Absarokee, located approximately 14 miles up the Stillwater Valley. The primary residence of a now subdivided historic homestead, the Halfway House is historically linked with the roadway and once served as a stopping place for travelers. Today it is important to the rural community of the Stillwater Valley as a regional historic landmark that provides a sense of continuity in a rapidly changing landscape and helps to link the community with its past.

The Halfway House is also eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as a representative example of the vernacular American Four-Square architectural style. The Halfway House exhibits classic characteristics of the style combined with individual preferences of the owner/builder.

### Halfway House History

#### Crow Reservation

The Stillwater River flows in a northeasterly direction out of the Beartooth Mountains until it empties into the Yellowstone River near Columbus, Montana. The Stillwater drainage was within the vast portion of southern Montana and northern Wyoming designated as Crow Territory under the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. This territory encompassed all lands south of the Musselshell River between the headwaters of the Yellowstone River to the west and the headwaters of the Powder River to the East and into Wyoming.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequent reductions and cessions resulted in a greatly diminished Crow Reservation by the turn of the century.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, the Stillwater Valley remained within Crow Reservation lands. Prior to the opening of ceded reservation lands for settlement in 1892, the Stillwater Valley experienced limited settlement. In 1875, the establishment of the second Crow Agency on Butcher Creek on a tributary of the Stillwater River, approximately two miles south of present-day

<sup>1</sup>Charles J. Kappler, ed. and comp., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, 2 vols. (Washington: GPO, 1904), vol. 2, pp. 593-596.

<sup>2</sup>The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 drastically reduced Crow Territory to consist only of lands south and east of the Yellowstone River to the present Montana-Wyoming boundary and just east of the Bighorn River. An 1880 Agreement ratified in 1882 eliminated all Crow lands west of the Boulder River plus a wide strip of land that included the town of Red Lodge and extended to the Clark Fork of the Yellowstone River. The Agreement of 1890 ratified in 1891 and modified in 1892 pushed the Crow Reservation boundary east of the Clark Fork and opened up the Stillwater Valley for settlement. The treaties and agreements are available in Kappler, vol. 1, pp. 195-197, 1040-1044, 432-436, 447-453 and vol. 2, pp. 1008-1011. For a general discussion of the reductions, see William M. Brooke, "A Contest over Land: Nineteenth Century Crow-White Relations," in *Montana Vistas: Selected Historical Essays*, ed. Robert Swartout, Jr. (Washington, DC: University Press of American, Inc., 1981), pp. 1-24.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 1

By 1880, one of the earliest traders, Horace Countryman, moved further downstream to the present-day location of Columbus (originally known as Stillwater) where he established a store and stage stop at a crossing of the Yellowstone River. He accommodated traffic for the Crow Agency first with a cable and then a ferry across the Yellowstone. The presence of the Stillwater settlement (now Columbus) on the Yellowstone stimulated the development of a well-used travel route through the Stillwater Valley to the Crow Agency. In 1883, the Crow Agency moved eastward to its final location on the Little Bighorn River.<sup>3</sup>

The removal of the Crow Agency coincided with the arrival of the Northern Pacific Railway to Columbus in late 1882 and the 1883 discovery of copper-bearing ore along the West Fork of the Stillwater. The discovery brought a rush to the region. By late 1883, over 200 claims had been staked and a small tent city called Nye developed as the second settlement in the Stillwater drainage. The Minneapolis Mining Company purchased the majority of the claims and by 1887 had commenced a full-scale mining operation. During its existence, freighters hauled supplies and equipment on a wagon road from the railroad at Columbus to Nye on a tri-weekly schedule. The mining region was abandoned in 1889 after government surveyors discovered it to be six miles within the Crow Reservation boundary.<sup>4</sup>

The 1890 Agreement with the Crow Tribe modified in 1892 removed all Crow reservation lands west of the divide between Pryor Creek and Clark Fork of the Yellowstone. The agreement stipulated that all lands previously allotted to a member of the Crow Tribe within the ceded lands would be honored and allowed a tribal member three years to surrender his allotment and select a new allotment within the new reservation boundaries. It appears that many Crows took up allotments in the Stillwater region prior to its cession but the majority relinquished their claims with the exception of some Crow women who had married white men. However, the allotments caused delays with the government surveys necessary for settlement.<sup>5</sup>

### Land Settlement

In May 1880, a correspondent for the *Helena Weekly Herald* traveled to the Crow Agency from present-day Columbus and observed that the Stillwater Valley “contains a very superior quality of farming land.”<sup>6</sup> However, this fertile valley was not formally opened for settlement for another 12 years.

On October 15, 1892, the ceded lands of the Crow Reservation opened for settlement. This area encompassed all lands east of the Boulder River to the divide between Pryor Creek and the Clark Fork of the Yellowstone, including the Stillwater drainage.<sup>7</sup> *The Billings Gazette* announced the opening:

---

<sup>3</sup>In 1875, Horace Countryman, who had a saloon near the old agency on Mission Creek ten miles from Livingston, built a log building on the north bank of the Yellowstone River and called his settlement Stillwater. His partner, Hugo Hoppe, built a cabin and storeroom across the river from Countryman for the whiskey trade. Annin, vol. 2, pp. 48-49.

<sup>4</sup>For the advancement of the Northern Pacific along the Yellowstone Valley, refer to Louis T. Renz, *The Construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad Main Line*, (Walla Walla, WA: Louise Renz, 1973). Mitzi Rossilon and Mary McCormick, “Cultural Resource Inventory of the Stillwater River Road Project on Montana Forest Highway 83, Stillwater County,” Report by Renewable Technology Inc., Butte, MT for Western Federal Lands Highway Division, Vancouver, WA, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>Kappler, vol. 1, pp. 432-436. For further discussion regarding allotments, see Charles C. Bradley, Jr., “After the Buffalo Days: Documents on the Crow Indians From the 1880’s to the 1920’s” (Master’s thesis, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT, 1970).

<sup>6</sup>*Helena Weekly Herald*, May 20, 1880, p.2, c.3.

<sup>7</sup>Presidential Proclamation, October 15, 1892.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 2

### Now For A Home!

Claims Being Staked Out and Locations Filed on the Late Crow Reserve.  
Hundreds of Settlers Crossing the Yellowstone to the land of Promise.

. . . up the valley, from Laurel, Park City and Stillwater the excitement is intense and the settlements are almost deserted, every able bodied man being out on the reservation building a foundation, posting locations notice or camping right down on the spot that he has had in view since early last year.

The Rosebud valley and Stillwater river was pretty thoroughly colonized by boomers three weeks or a month ago, all determined to be upon the ground when the glad tiding should be proclaimed.<sup>8</sup>

Twelve days after the opening of the reservation, Pat Lavelle, who owned a hotel in present-day Columbus, reported that “the Stillwater, Rosebud, big and little and Fish Tail basin is pretty thoroughly staked out by someone.”<sup>9</sup>

When the ceded land of the Crow Reservation opened for settlement in October 1892, no approved government survey existed for lands within the Stillwater Valley. Under federal land laws, no individual therefore could make a land entry on a homestead until the land had been surveyed. The early settlers became 'squatters.' Many 'squatters' filed a ranch declaration that declared “a valid right to the occupation, possession and enjoyment of all and singular that tract or parcel of land, not exceeding one hundred and sixty acres, situate lying and being in an unorganized township the limits of the tract of land lately ceded to the Government of the United States by the Crow Tribe of Indians.”<sup>10</sup> Numerous individuals like W.W. Campbell, who first settled at the Halfway House location, filed such declarations within Crow ceded lands in the Stillwater Valley to secure their land claims prior to government survey.

Fertile valley bottoms were always the first to be settled and the lower Stillwater followed this tradition. The General Land Office (GLO) map for T3S R19E surveyed in December 1899 revealed the township was “well-settled and improved” and showed numerous homes (including the McBride residence), corrals, fenced fields, irrigation ditches and roads within the valley bottom. Most of the 'squatters' had occupied the land since the opening of the ceded Crow reservation lands for settlement in October 1892 and subsequently made improvements on their land claims during this eight year period preceding the government survey. The GLO map indicated that no settlement had occurred on the hillsides to either side of the valley.<sup>11</sup>

A review of land patents in T3S R19E on those sections adjacent to the Stillwater River indicates that seventeen out of nineteen settlers utilized the 1862 Homestead Act to acquire their homestead patents. The remaining two individuals acquired land through cash sales which generally accounted for smaller acreages. Most of the homestead patents were for the allowable 160 acres. No women claimed homesteads along the valley bottom and only a few family members settled in proximity to each other.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup>*The Billings Gazette*, October 20, 1892, p.1, c. 5-6.

<sup>9</sup>*The Billings Gazette*, October 27, 1892, p.5, c.5.

<sup>10</sup>W.W. Campbell, “Ranch Declaration” Miscellaneous Record Book 3, Clerk and Recorder’s Office, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT, p. 357.

<sup>11</sup>Surveyor General, 1900 GLO Map T3S R19E.

<sup>12</sup>Information on land patents is taken from Master Title Plats and Control Documents Index cards of General Land Office Records, on file, Records Room, Bureau of Land Management State Office, Billings, MT.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 3

Seven homestead patents were immediately issued in 1902, the most active year for lands adjacent to the Stillwater River. These patents were received two years after the official opening of the township for homestead entry. Only two final patents were issued in 1903 followed by six patents issued in 1904. E.K. McBride received his homestead patent for the Halfway House location in 1904. After 1904, only one patent was issued in 1905 and two in 1906. The last homestead patent issued in 1907 saw all lands in the lower Stillwater valley bottom patented.<sup>13</sup>

The remaining lands in T3S R19E were settled during the homestead boom between 1910-1915. The dry farming system of agriculture promoted settlement of the timbered and broken hillsides above the valley floor. Congress passed the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 that gave 320 acres rather than 160 acres to farmers who entered public lands that could not be irrigated. In 1912, Congress further assisted homesteaders with passage of the Three-Year Homestead Law that required only three years in residence and cultivation instead of five years. Scattered homesteads appeared along the smaller tributaries of the Stillwater drainage between Columbus and Absarokee, like Joe Hill Creek, Whitebird Creek and Beaver Creek.

### Halfway Ranch

W.W. Campbell was the first known 'squatter' at the Halfway Ranch location. In April 1893 he filed a water right where he claimed he had been on the land since November 1, 1892, approximately two weeks after the opening of the Crow Reservation. The previous month Campbell had filed a ranch declaration. Little is known of Campbell except he possibly had a Crow wife and in the 1890s had mining properties at Nye on the upper Stillwater.<sup>14</sup>

In April 1894, *The Stillwater Bulletin* announced that "E.K. McBride of Canyon Creek [north of Park City, MT] purchased the ranch of W.W. Campbell on the Stillwater this week, to which place he removed his family Thursday." W.W. Campbell was "to devote his time and labor this summer to the development of his mining property at Nye City."<sup>15</sup> E.K. McBride originally came from Missouri and settled in the Yellowstone Valley around 1892 or 1893. E.K. McBride's residence is identified on the 1900 GLO survey map immediately west of the road.<sup>16</sup>

On March 6, 1901, E.K. McBride filed a homestead entry for land in the W1/2 SW1/4 of Section 13, T3S R19E, land which he had occupied since 1894. In September, he proposed an amendment to his original entry to include Lot 4 and the SE1/4 SE 1/4 of Section 14, T3S R19E, making his total acreage 159.22. The requested land consisted of a recently relinquished Crow Indian allotment where McBride had cultivated approximately 50 acres for seven years. Between his initial settlement in April 1894 and his final proof in January 1903, McBride had made numerous agricultural improvements to his land. He had cultivated approximately 80 acres for nine crops. He also had planted orchards, built fences and irrigation ditches. At the time of his final proof, McBride was 44 years old with a wife and seven children. McBride made his final proof in January 1903 and received his final patent on March 19, 1904.<sup>17</sup>

McBride developed a good reputation for his produce and was apparently quite successful with his orchard, particularly his apples. *The Tri-County News* exclaimed in 1906 that his apples "were as fine as any we have ever seen . . . and this . . . only emphasizes that

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>*Abstract*; Montana Cultural Resource Inventory Site Form 24ST166, on file Montana Archaeological Records, Anthropology Department, University of Montana, Missoula, MT (hereafter referred to as MT Site Form).

<sup>15</sup>*The Stillwater Bulletin*, April 14, 1894, p.4, c.2.

<sup>16</sup>MT Site Form 24ST166; Surveyor General, 1900 GLO Map T3S R19E.

<sup>17</sup>Everett McBride Case File.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 4

fact that the best of everything can be grown in abundance on the Great Stillwater."<sup>18</sup> McBride continued to expand his orchard, raised a herd of cattle and reportedly supervised a sheep shearing shed at Whitebird Creek.<sup>19</sup>

By December 1907, McBride had built a new home for his family that became known as the Halfway House. However, they only enjoyed their new home for a few years. In 1909, Mr. McBride traveled to California and decided to emigrate.<sup>20</sup> In March 1909, he advertised his ranch for sale at a bargain.

The E. K. McBride ranch of 159 acres, six miles south of Columbus, on the Stillwater. A good orchard of 500 apple trees, plum and cherry trees. New eight-room dwelling, barn 40x48 and other buildings. Sixty head of cattle and 15 head of horses.<sup>21</sup>

Monterville Sylvester purchased the McBride Ranch in November 1910 and the McBride family moved to California. Sylvester originally came to Cooke City, Montana in 1883 where he was involved in mining and his wife operated a hotel. He later farmed below Cinnabar on the Upper Yellowstone River. Sylvester purchased a ranch on the Stillwater just north of Absarokee in the early 1900s. This ranch was well irrigated with a "prolific and profitable" apple orchard. He sold this ranch, moved to California for a year, returned to the Stillwater Valley and bought the McBride Ranch declaring "the old valley looked so good to him that he couldn't leave it again."<sup>22</sup>

The Sylvesters only lived at this ranch for five years. After his wife died in 1915, Mr. Sylvester left Montana. In 1918, he contracted the Halfway Ranch to Thomas Overhuls. Overhuls had been in Montana since 1910 and by 1920, his family included his wife and eight children. After Sylvester's death in 1925, difficulties arose between his estate and Overhuls, which resulted in a foreclosure. In March 1929, Oliver T. Kem became owner of the Halfway Ranch.<sup>23</sup>

Oliver Kem should have been familiar with the Halfway Ranch. He had been a freighter between Columbus and Absarokee for many years and married Myrtle Sylvester, the daughter of Monterville Sylvester in 1903. Prior to acquiring the Halfway Ranch, Kem had a ranch on the Stillwater where he raised purebred Shorthorn cattle.<sup>24</sup>

Mr. Kem held the Halfway Ranch until April 1941 when Keith and Blanche Culbertson purchased the ranch. The Culbertsons sold the ranch in 1948 to Lewis and Arvilla Rash. They owned the property until 1966, when Don and Merle Pederson purchased the property. This sale ended the site's history as a working ranch. The Pederson's subdivided the property, thereby separating the domestic and agricultural units of the original ranch. The current owners, Calvin and Robin Watkins, purchased the Halfway House with 2.8 acres in 1998.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>18</sup>*The Tri-County News*, September 20, 1906, p.4, c.2.

<sup>19</sup>Annin, vol. 3, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup>*The Tri-County News*, December 19, 1907, p.8, c.3; February 11, 1909, p.5, c.1; July 8, 1909, p.5, c.1.

<sup>21</sup>*The Tri-County News*, March 11, 1909, p.5, c.2.

<sup>22</sup>Annin, vol. 3, p. 51.

<sup>23</sup>*Abstract; Progressive Men of the State of Montana*, (Chicago: A.W. Bowen, 1902), pp. 1236-37; *The Columbus News*, December 1, 1910, p.1, c.1.

<sup>24</sup>*Abstract*; MT Site Form.

<sup>25</sup>Annin, vol. 1, p. 282.

<sup>26</sup>*Abstract*; MT Site Form.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 4

## Halfway House as a Stopping Place Along the Road between Columbus and Absarokee

The unwritten law of western hospitality demanded that if a traveler stopped at your place around dinner or suppertime he would be invited to join in the meal and if in the event of a late hour or inclement weather, he would be invited to stay for the night. Malcolm MacKay, an early rancher on the East Rosebud, explained that anyone who arrived at mealtime was "sure to be asked to get down and come in and have some supper."<sup>26</sup> In the first decades of the twentieth century, the Halfway House followed this unspoken law and became known as a convenient stopping place where western hospitality ruled. There is no indication that the Halfway House was ever an established lunch stop or inn.

Location determined the perception of the Halfway House as a recognized and familiar stopping place. From the construction of the McBride residence in 1907, the presence of such a substantial two-story building along the road, combined with its strategic location nearly equidistant between Columbus and Absarokee, has historically linked the Halfway House to the main transportation corridor in the Stillwater Valley.

In the late nineteenth century, rural roads generally followed the path of least resistance. These early roads took advantage of topography and adjusted their route according to weather conditions. Beginning in 1875, traffic for trade and freight between the newly established Crow Agency and corresponding settlements on the Yellowstone River created the most practical and reliable travel route along the eastern slightly sloping edge of the lower Stillwater Valley. In the mid to late 1880s, mining operations at Nye and vicinity on the Upper Stillwater required equipment and supplies that were hauled tri-weekly over the wagon road from the railroad town of Columbus.

This fairly consistent traffic over this route created an established road that hugged the eastern edge of the valley as shown on an USGS topographic map surveyed in 1889.<sup>27</sup> Yellowstone County Commissioners opened this road as a county road on July 7, 1893. It appears that historically a house has stood west of and adjacent to the road at the same general location of the Halfway House today. When the county surveyor laid out the road, he noted the road passed between "Campbell's house and stable." W.W. Campbell protested that the road location divided his ranch into two parts and suggested that they moved the road around his bam. However, the commissioners ignored his request and the road continued to divide his domestic and agricultural units.<sup>28</sup>

The 1900 GLO map for T3S R19E shows the original McBride residence adjacent to the road, seven years before the Halfway House was built. The road, identified as the "Road from Absarokee to Columbus," appears to follow a similar route as the earlier 1889 map. The road was reportedly rebuilt in 1915 and again in 1935 but the configuration remained basically the same as initially developed in 1893.<sup>29</sup>

The construction of the Halfway House in 1907 corresponded with an increase in the population of the region. In the early twentieth century, settlement of the area created the inland town of Absarokee, smaller scattered villages like Fishtail, Dean and Roscoe and also dry land communities. The road gained importance as a farm to market road, connecting these outlying populations with the railroad at Columbus. Daily stage and freight lines provided service from Columbus to these communities. By the second decade of the twentieth century, automobiles began to compete with the horse on this primary roadway.

---

<sup>26</sup>Malcolm McKay, *Cow Range and Hunting Trail*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1925), p. 43.

<sup>27</sup>United States Geological Survey, "Montana Stillwater Sheet," 1892, on file, Montana Historical Society Library, Helena, MT.

<sup>28</sup>"Stillwater Road", Yellowstone County Road Record Book 1, pp. 133-134, Public Works Department, Yellowstone County Courthouse, Billings, MT. In the early 1890s, all land east of the Stillwater River was part of Yellowstone County, then became Carbon County in 1895 and Stillwater County in 1913.

<sup>29</sup>Surveyor General, 1900 GLO Map T3S R19E.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 5

Henry Parsons remembers the roads were just dirt between Absarokee and Columbus and “became almost impassable when there was a heavy rain or when the frost was going out of the ground in the spring.”<sup>30</sup> He recalled that from Old Nye on the Upper Stillwater

. . . it took three days to make the trip to Columbus and back for groceries when the roads were good and dry. It usually took one day to go down and two coming back. If the roads were not dry it sometimes took quite a bit longer to make the trip as the lower half of the road was awful in places when it was wet. The gumbo would stick to the wagon wheels so that at times the wheels would drag. Whenever this happened, one had to get off and shovel the mud from the wheels so they could turn.<sup>31</sup>

Once Parsons had to walk his horse all the way to Columbus “because the road was so deep and slippery that the horses couldn't travel any faster.” The next day on the way home he passed “an old time automobile which was stuck deep in the mud in the road. This made us feel happier for at least we knew that our horses could overcome the mud holes and we would not have to walk.”<sup>32</sup>

Such circumstances as poor road conditions raised the local importance of the Halfway House as a recognizable landmark during inclement weather to gauge distance and undoubtedly for shelter if necessary. The Halfway House was also apparently used as a resting place for stockmen, a common practice where stockmen would pasture and feed their cattle for the night at a ranch a few miles from Columbus before taking them to town and loading the railroad stock cars. When Upper Stillwater Valley residents would travel to Columbus for supplies, it often took them three days and on the second day they would often travel south of Columbus and presumably stay at a farmstead or ranch. Henry Bedford remembers his family usually got as far as Joe Hill Creek (the next creek below Whitebird). Presumably the Halfway House also served as a stopping place for local settlers on their return trip.<sup>33</sup>

Everett McBride, the grandson of E.K. McBride, the original homesteader and builder of the Halfway House, remembered that his grandmother cooked meals for people who slept upstairs in the house. Charles Bare, whose parents leased the Halfway Ranch for three years in the second decade of the twentieth century, remembered that travelers would stable their horses in the barn across the road and spend nights in the house.<sup>34</sup>

Mrs. Sylvester, who died in 1915 while living at the Halfway House, was remembered for her western hospitality.

Many are the autoists who, driving by the big ranch house near the White Bird bridge who have waved their hands in an exchange for a cheery saluation [sic] from Mrs. Sylvester. Many are the freighters who have stopped for a drink at the well and if perchance it was the noon or supper hour have tied their horses in the barn and enjoyed a meal.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup>Henry Parsons, “Stillwater County: A General Study of Historical Information Relating to Stillwater County,” unpublished manuscript, Bozeman, MT, 1956, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup>Parsons, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup>Parsons, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup>*The Columbus News*, October 14, 1954, p.1, c.1; p. 33; Henry Bedford, Interviewed by Julie Foster, September 12, 1982, Oral History Interview 379, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

<sup>34</sup>E.K. McBride, phone interview with Robin Watkins, March 6, 2000; Charles Bare as cited in Janene Caywood et al., “Cultural Resource Inventories of Montana Department of Highway Project F78-2(5)27, Absarokee-Columbus, Stillwater County, Montana,” 1988, Report by Historical Research Associates, Missoula, MT for Montana Department of Highways, Helena, MT.

<sup>35</sup>*The Columbus News*, May 13, 1915, p.1, c.5.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 6

Today, the mention of the Halfway House brings instant recognition to most residents of the Stillwater Valley. The Halfway House represents an important place in the changing landscape of the Stillwater Valley to the people of the region.

### Halfway House - Architectural Significance

The Halfway House is representative of late nineteenth and early twentieth century vernacular American Four-Square architectural style constructed in a rural setting that incorporates individual stylistic preferences of the owner. The Halfway House also illustrates the evolution of a homestead residence from a simple presumably log dwelling to a more substantial residence that signifies prosperity and success.

W.W. Campbell, the original 'squatter' at this location, claimed he had been on the land since November 1, 1892, approximately two weeks after the opening of the Crow Reservation for settlement. Everett K. McBride purchased the ranch of Mr. Campbell in 1894 and immediately moved his family to the ranch, indicating a suitable dwelling existed for his family.<sup>36</sup>

The 1900 General Land Office (GLO) map, surveyed in 1899, shows McBride's residence west of and adjacent to the road.<sup>37</sup> McBride proceeded to file a homestead claim and on his final homestead proof in 1903, he declared that "the house was built by the Party I bought claim from." McBride described the house as 20x20 but further stated he "built 14x18 and 13x15." While this description is confusing, a witness to his final proof, R.N. McBride (his brother) testified that McBride had three houses. McBride had seven children in 1903 so it is not surprising he needed more room. His agricultural buildings included barns, a granary, hen houses and two root cellars. He also had planted an orchard, dug ditches for irrigation and built fences. He valued his improvements in 1903 at \$3000.<sup>38</sup>

McBride's success as a farmer enabled him in August 1907 to begin "getting the material in the ground for his new residence, the construction of which will begin at once."<sup>39</sup> By the end of the month, Earnest Sale began construction of the new residence. Earnest Sale arrived in Columbus around 1894. He briefly worked for a department store in Columbus and then homesteaded in the Dean area on Fishtail Creek. After he sold out his ranch, he moved back to Columbus and built his own home. Sale was "a competent carpenter, and one of the town's first painter and paper hangers."<sup>40</sup>

Mr. Sale completed the Halfway House by December 1907 and the McBrides celebrated with a house warming party. *The Tri-County News* praised their "splendid new ranch home" whose "spacious rooms of the well-planned [sic] new home were indeed pleasant." The party was a great success with a "bounteous feast for which Mrs. McBride is justly renowned." Dawn arrived before guests departed "wishing them many years to enjoy the beautiful home they so richly deserve."<sup>41</sup>

The newly finished Halfway House is revealed in an early historic photograph as an American Four-Square, often called the Classic Box. The American Four-Square was a popular house form built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The ground plan of the Four-Square is massed, comprised of square or near square massing. The Four-Square house is generally wood frame, two

---

<sup>36</sup>*Abstract of Title T3S R19E Section 13*. In possession of Robert Kem, Columbus, MT; *The Stillwater Bulletin*, April 14, 1894, p.4, c.2.

<sup>37</sup>United States Surveyor General, 1900 General Land Office Map T3S R19E, microfiche on file, Records Room, Bureau of Land Management State Office, Billings, MT.

<sup>38</sup> Everett McBride, Certificate Patent Case File, Bozeman Land Office, Homestead Certificate No. 2062, Records of Bureau of Land Management, Record Group 49, National Archives, Washington, DC (Hereafter referred to as Everett McBride Case File).

<sup>39</sup>*The Tri-County News*, August 8, 1907, p.5, c.2.

<sup>40</sup>Jim Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, 3 vols. (Billings, MT: Reporter Printing & Supply, 1964), vol. 3, p. 156.

<sup>41</sup>*The Tri-County News*, December 19, 1907, p.8, c.3.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 7

---

stories in height and bears a medium sized pitched pyramid or nearly pyramid hipped roof. Four-Square residences often contain dormers and a one-story porch, which extends across the facade. The porch and dormer roofs generally echo the hipped form of the roof. The design was overall symmetrical with minimal ornamentation.

Four-Square house plans were readily available in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century through catalogues or mail. Standardized construction materials and commercialized plans allowed an almost limitless array of choices. These buildings were mass produced and therefore easily accessible to rural communities by rail, although house plans and materials could be purchased locally. The plans also allowed for stylized individual preferences to be easily incorporated. Fenestration patterns, entrances and chimney locations were all variable. The cost was relatively low and house type easily constructed.

The Halfway House exhibits primary elements of the Four-Square architectural style while incorporating its own personal preferences. It has nearly square massing, two stories and a hipped roof. The full-width front porch has been expanded into a wrap-around porch. It does not have a dormer. Simplified decorative elements that contribute to the individual character of the house include turned posts and scrolled brackets. The fenestration is overall symmetrical. The Four-Square house is a substantial and dignified house form. The Halfway House presents a rural representation of this vernacular architectural style that retains essential physical features.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 1

---

## Bibliography

Annin, Jim. Miscellaneous Files, Museum of the Beartooths, Columbus, MT.

Annin, Jim. *They Gazed at the Beartooths*. 3 vols. Billings, MT: Reporter Printing & Supply, 1964.

Axline, Jon and Chere Jiusto. Montana Cultural Resource Inventory Site No. 24ST166, May 2000. On file at Montana Archaeological Records, Anthropology Department, University of Montana – Missoula, MT.

Babcock, Albert L. *An Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*. Spokane: Western Historical Publishing, 1907.

Belford, Henry. Interview by Julie Foster, September 12, 1982. Oral History Interview 379, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

*The Billings Gazette*, September-December 1892.

Bradley, Charles Crane, Jr., "After the Buffalo Days: Documents on the Crow Indians From the 1880's to the 1920's." Master's Thesis, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT, 1970.

Brooke, William M. "A Contest Over Land: Nineteenth Century Crow-White Relations." In *Montana Vistas Selected Historical Essays*, edited by Robert R. Swartout, Jr., 1-24. Washington, DC: University Press of America, Inc., 1981.

Bureau of Land Management. General Land Office Records, on file, Records Room, Bureau of Land Management State Office, Billings, MT.

Burlingame, Merrill G. *The Montana Frontier*. Helena, MT: State Publishing Co., 1942.

Carbon County. Deed Books, Miscellaneous Record Books and Road Record Books. Office of Clerk and Recorder. Carbon County Courthouse, Red Lodge, MT.

Caywood, Janene, et al. "Cultural Resource Inventory of Montana Department of Highways Project F 78-2(5)27, Absarokee-Columbus, Stillwater County, Montana." Historical Research Associates, Missoula, MT, 1988 for Montana Department of Highways, Helena, MT.

*The Columbus News*, 1909-1916, June 25, 1925, October 14, 1954.

*The Helena Weekly Herald*, May 20, 1880.

Kappler, Charles, ed. and comp. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*. 2 vols. Washington, DC: GPO, 1904.

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

McBride, Everett. Certificate Patent Case File, Bozeman Land Office, Homestead Certificate No. 2062. Bureau of Land Management Record Group 49, National Archives, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Page 2

---

## Bibliography (cont)

McKay, Malcolm. *Cow Range and Hunting Trail*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1925.

Muhn, James 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.

Parsons, Henry. "Stillwater County: A General Study of Historical Information Relating to Stillwater County" unpublished manuscript, Bozeman, MT, 1956.

*Progressive Men of the State of Montana*. Chicago: A.W. Bowen, 1902

Renz, Louis P. *The Construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad Main Line*. Walla Walla, WA: Louis Renz, 1973.

Rossillion, Mitzi and Mary McCormick, "Cultural Resource Inventory of the Stillwater River Road Project on Montana Forest Highway 83, Stillwater County," Renewable Technologies Incorporated, Butte, MT. For Western Federal Lands, Highway Division, Vancouver, WA, June 1991.

Scott, Mattie Latham. Interview by Julie Foster, September 2, 1982, Oral History Interview 370, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

*The Stillwater Bulletin*, 1894-1895.

Stillwater County. Deed Books, Miscellaneous Records and Road Records. Office of Clerk and Recorder. Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT.

*Title Abstract* T3S R19E Section 13, in possession of Robert Kem, Columbus, MT.

*Tri-County Atlas: Meagher, Sweetgrass and Carbon Counties*. Big Timber, MT: Henry & Geiger, 1907.

*The Tri-County News*, 1901-1909.

Trees, June. Interview by Joan L. Brownell. October 21, 2000. Absarokee, MT.

United States Geological Survey. "Montana Stillwater Sheet," 1892, Montana Historical Society Library, Helena, MT.

United States Surveyor General. General Land Office survey map and notes T3S R19E. Records Room, Bureau of Land Management Regional Office, Billings, MT.

Watkins, Cecil and Robin. Interview by Joan L. Brownell. October 18, 2000. Columbus, MT.

Williams, Mary. Interview by Joan L. Brownell. October 20, 2000. Billings, MT.

Yellowstone County. Deed Books, Miscellaneous Record Books and Road Record Books. Office of Clerk and Recorder. Yellowstone County Courthouse, Billings, MT.

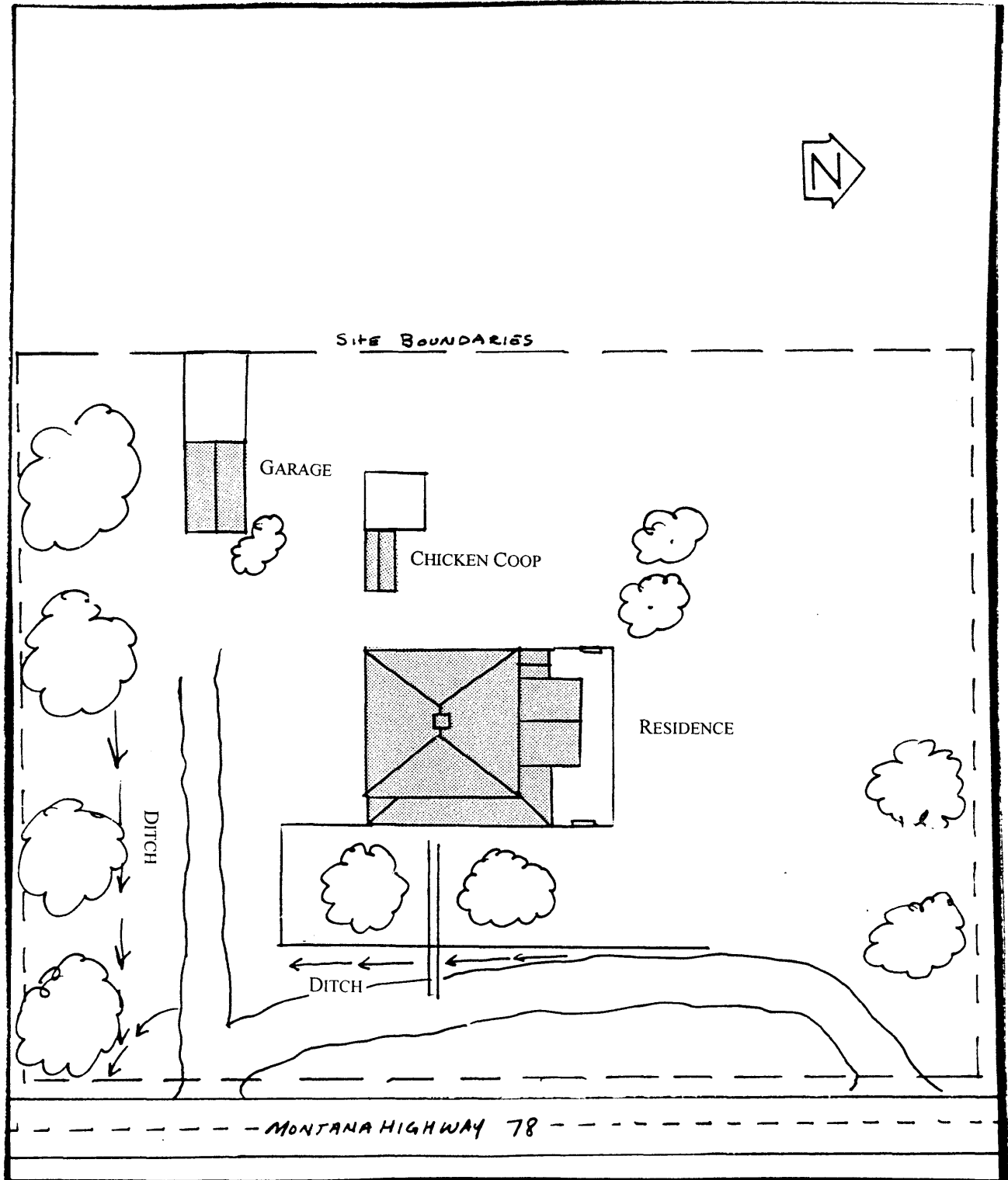
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Site Map

Halfway House  
Stillwater County, Montana

Map not to scale.





**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: Robin Watkins, Columbus, MT.

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property:** approximately one acre

<b>UTM References:</b>	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Easting</b>	<b>Northing</b>
	12	630120	5047280

**Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)):** T3S R19E Section 13 NW1/4 SW1/4 SW1/4

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The Halfway House is located on Montana Highway 78 approximately seven miles south of Columbus on the west side of the Highway midway between Columbus and Absarokee, Montana.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary of the Halfway House is defined by a white picket fence to the east and wire fences in all other directions. The fenceline encompasses the historic buildings, structures, and landscaping historically associated with the residence.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Jon Axline and Joan L. Brownell, Consultant	date: November 2000
organization: Montana Department of Transportation	telephone: (406) 444-6258
street & number: 2701 Prospect Ave, P.O. Box 201001	zip code: 59620-1001
city or town: Helena	state: MT

**Property Owner**

name/title: Calvin and Robin Watkins	telephone: (406) 322-5852
street & number: 3951 Highway 78	state: MT
city or town: Columbus	zip code: 59019