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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NOV 6 1995  
INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions on the back of the form. Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Pyburn House  
other names/site number The Pyburn Apartments, The Cornerstone Inn

2. Location

street & number 203 Fourth Street  not for publication  
city or town Lovington  vicinity  
state New Mexico code NM county Lea code 025 zip code 88260

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
[Signature] 10/24/95  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
New Mexico SHPO  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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): \_\_\_\_\_  
[Signature] 12.13.95  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
Edson H. Beall  
Entered in the National Register

The Pyburn House  
Name of Property

Lea County, New Mexico  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single-family

Domestic/Multiple housing

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Hotel

Domestic/Single-family

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other/Folk architecture

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete, steel (rebar)

walls brick, rock, stone, steel (rebar)

\_\_\_\_\_

roof slate

other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

(See continuation sheets)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our 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**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education

Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1935-1945

**Significant Dates**

1935-1937

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Pyburn, John Wesley

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Pyburn, John Wesley

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

(See continuation sheets)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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

Name of repository:

Lovington Library

The Pyburn House  
Name of Property

Lea County, New Mexico  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 0.75

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

1	3	6	5	3	9	0	0	3	6	4	6	7	0	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

  
2 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

3 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

  
4 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

  
 See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)  
(See continuation sheets)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) (See continuation sheets)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Veronica Jones, Owner

organization Veronica Jones & Associates date October 3, 1995

street & number 6413 Academy NE #186 telephone 505/856-5837

city or town Albuquerque state NM zip code 87109

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

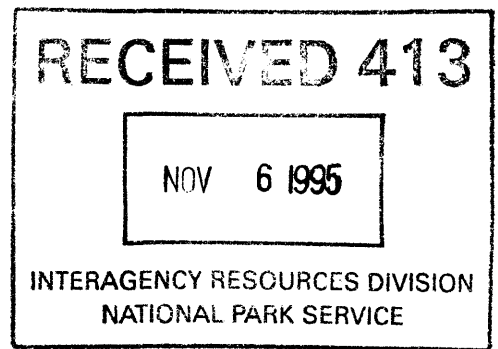
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet



Name of Property: The Pyburn House

Section number 7 Page 1 County and State: Lea County, New Mexico

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### NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

#### Summary

The Pyburn House, formerly known as the Pyburn Apartments, in Lovington, New Mexico, is an example of highly individualistic and expressive folk architecture. Pyburn House is significant for both its architectural uniqueness and its association with J.W. Pyburn, superintendent of the Lovington schools from 1930 to 1938. Pyburn was a mason who built the house himself, with the assistance of relatives and friends, in the summers of 1935, '36, and '37. He built it "to last" as both the Pyburn family home and as a boarding house, especially for teachers in the rapidly expanding Lovington school system. Pyburn's wife, Ethel, managed the "apartments" and kept the house full of boarders from the time it was completed until her death at the age of 96 in 1986.

Pyburn House is approximately 7,000 square feet and two stories. In its original design as a teacherage, all of the upstairs rooms were bedrooms which shared a common bathroom, and the only dining room was downstairs. Then in 1949, when another oil boom swept southeastern New Mexico, the house was converted to nine independent apartments with their own kitchens and bathrooms. That is how it remains today, with five individual apartments (containing a bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom) upstairs and two downstairs, plus two other bedrooms downstairs. One of the kitchens downstairs, in the south west corner of the house, has been converted into office space for the current owners, who simply removed sink fixtures and other appliances and use the cabinet space as a desk area.

The house features 9'2" ceilings downstairs, a slate roof, deep window sills, wide baseboards, concrete, "two-lane" (wide) cement staircases, the original wooden tongue-and-groove floors throughout the downstairs, 18-inch exterior walls and 12-inch interior walls (also of concrete), a large basement area that is finished except for the dirt floor, two shaded porches with concrete walls, and a network of fully finished storage spaces throughout the house. Pyburn said he was "born a mason", and he took painstaking care to gather a harmonious collection of rocks and to build a solid, comfortable, functional, yet ultimately unique home.

As a result of a mining accident in 1902, during which he was trapped and unable to move for 76 hours, Pyburn developed an appreciation for big houses. His family recall his desire to create a spacious home which could accommodate the needs of a growing family and boarders without anyone feeling "cramped".

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: The Pyburn House

Section number 7 Page 2 County and State: Lea County, New Mexico

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### Description

Pyburn House is a masonry structure built from uncut rock, dressed stone, and brick. The rocks vary in size from fist-sized to many that are 400 to 500 pounds. All of the rocks used in construction were gathered by Pyburn himself from Lovington and the surrounding area with help from his son Thomas Pyburn and son-in-law Heywood Heidel. One gigantic boulder used at the base of the north wall, near the chimney, weighs an estimated four tons and was carted in on a wagon from Maljamar, a thirty-mile trip. Pyburn paid careful attention to the look of the rocks he used and patterned the walls in large swathes, from roof to ground, of similarly colored and shaped rocks apparently gathered from the same area.

In the walls are several manos and metates and many rocks containing fossils. Some of Pyburn's favorites include a "petrified potato" and several "petrified terrapins", geodes, crystal formations, agate, petrified wood, and some highly distinctive shapes, colors, and textures.

The house, dubbed the "biggest house in Lovington", has nine bathrooms and six kitchens. On the ground floor the main door is in the east wall off of an 8-foot deep porch. The porch was originally enclosed with screens above the concrete half-walls and a screen door. The current owner has removed the screening and the porch is now open. It remains heavily shaded and cool because of the thick concrete walls.

The Pyburn House is irregularly shaped by design. Pyburn constructed his home in stages, beginning with what is today the kitchen and kitchen storage area, which probably served as a bedroom in 1935. Originally, the short hallway to the garage off the kitchen storage area seems to have been a bathroom; there are indications from markings on the floor, plumbing fixtures now leading nowhere, and even a temporary wall which now serves to mark the space as a storage area. This three-room construction served as the Pyburn family's first living quarters at 203 Fourth Street.

As a result of the multi-stage construction, the roof has numerous projections and multiple gables. It is steeply pitched throughout, and as a result of this and the various intersecting sections of the roof, there is a complex attic system off the second floor rooms. The current owner has explored the obvious attic entrances but believes that there are portions of it to which he has not found access.

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: The Pyburn House

Section number 7 Page 3 County and State: Lea County, New Mexico

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The windows are metal casements with bi-color brick surrounds framing the outside. Braced against the large boulders that form the outer walls, these bi-color brick surrounds are a character-defining feature of The Pyburn House. The tall chimney on the north wall of the house repeats the bi-color brick design of the window surrounds.

All of the doors throughout the house are originals, installed by J.W. Pyburn during construction in 1935-37. All are of solid wood construction. The front door features a simple carved double panel pattern and has a small window at eye level.

The front door of the house opens into with a living room 16.5' x 25', with a fireplace on the north wall. In this living room the carpet, which appears to be "brand new", is approximately 50-year-old 100 percent wool, put in by Ethel Pyburn when the house was converted to apartments in the 1940s. West of the living room is a 14'x13' dining room and the central kitchen and kitchen storage room. This kitchen has a free-standing gas stove with a large exhaust. The storage room to the west of the kitchen serves as a kitchen storage area. Modifications to the kitchen have not yet been necessary as it was originally designed to serve as a quasi-institutional kitchen to serve the constant stream of boarders at The Pyburn House.

A long hallway running south out of the kitchen provides access to the current owners' living quarters as well as two guest bedrooms. An entry in the south wall of the living room provides access to the southeastern-most apartment, which is in the midst of remodeling. A long hallway connects this apartment to the rear of the house and the current owners' living quarters and two rear guest bedrooms. Remodeling remains to be done in the southeastern apartment kitchen area, which has not been used for many years and requires new surfaces, fixtures, and painting.

Off of the living room is the main stairwell to the upstairs apartments of Pyburn House. This stairwell is approximately four feet wide and the stairs of solid concrete with a fine, polished finish. Another stairwell, equally substantial, leads up from the foyer area near what is now an entrance to the house off the carport, and what was originally the "first stage" of the house completed.

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: The Pyburn House

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Upstairs, each of the living quarters has a large bedroom, kitchen area, and bathroom. The central hallway opens onto a second-story porch, from which an outside staircase leads down to the "front yard," the eastern yard, of the house. Each room also features a large closet and there are nooks and crannies that lead to a network of storage areas beneath the twists and turns of the multi-gabled roof. These storage spaces are almost all neatly finished, with wooden, polished doors and small bolted handles. There is a lot of light in these upstairs rooms, which seems incongruous with the thick walls; however, Pyburn took care to include windows in the bedrooms. Several of these apartments are currently occupied

The Pyburn House and outbuildings occupy a double lot at 203 Fourth Street, near the Lovington town center. The outbuildings include a well-house dating to the time of original construction and a detached "mother-in-law" apartment that was originally the Pyburn family's barn. The current owner has converted the barn and made structural changes to that building necessary for modern living. Its original stone walls are intact, however, and match the style of the house itself. The well-house contains a new, fully operational well which supplies water for the house (and its nine bathrooms) as well as the detached apartment.

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### Summary

The Pyburn House is significant for its association with J.W. Pyburn, a Lovington educator in the 1930s, and for its distinctive folk architecture. Pyburn was superintendent of the Lovington schools from 1930 to 1938. News articles from 1930 indicate that there was a lot of pressure on the school board to find a highly qualified superintendent to lead the school system through challenging times and record enrollments. The distinctive architecture represents J.W. Pyburn's vision of a house for his family and for his teachers, for whom he built The Pyburn House as a sort of dormitory.

Tied as it was to the school system, in both its service to teachers and its significance as the home of Superintendent Pyburn, Pyburn House has touched the lives of many of the current families of Lovington. It is only a few blocks from the location of the "Old Central" school building, constructed in the late 1920s, which served Lovington children as the main school building until the Fall term of 1956, when the school was closed. "Old Central" was left standing for eleven years until it was razed in 1967, leaving Pyburn House one of the only buildings in the town significant to its educational history.



## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: The Pyburn House

Section number 8 Page 5 County and State: Lea County, New Mexico

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“Everybody knows this house,” says Betty Garner of Lovington, granddaughter of J.W. Pyburn. “Seems like almost everybody has lived here at one time or another.”

### Statement of Significance

John Wesley Pyburn was born in a small log house in Comfort, Tennessee. In 1902, when he was working in the coal mines for Campbell Coal Company in Orme, Tennessee, he was trapped for 76 hours after a mine cave-in. During his ordeal he could not move beyond a crouching position; after he was rescued his hip, elbow and shoulder joints remained stiff, sore and painful. He was incapacitated for two years during which he repeatedly attempted to work as a coal miner. Doctors diagnosed him with arthritis and advised he move to a dry climate.

“My buddy had taken some picks to the shop and had left me to put in the cutting....I had worked my way back about five feet when I heard a rumble like distant thunder, and before I could extricate myself from the cutting I was caught by a downpour of water, mud, and rock. Tons upon tons of rock kept breaking loose and coming down and one large piece closed against my back. This was fortunate, because it caught on both joints of my cutting and became a closed door holding back the crushing weight that sought to destroy me. The water and mud were moving down the slope....I realized that I was entombed and that my chances of escape were slim.

“I was in a cramped position, but I could breathe. the air vent was close enough and the water seemed to freshen the air so that I did not suffocate, although I could not move. I soon lost all sense of time. My light was blown out by the fall and I had no way of relighting it. Time moved slowly and I became thirsty and hungry. I was fully aware that I could have neither drink nor food. I began to get numb and cold. This was distressing...I either went to sleep or lost consciousness for a time. I awoke to a tapping in the distance and knew the crew had arrived to set me free.

“...I knew that if I could hold out long enough they would rescue me. This I was determined to do. But as time went on I became weak and uncertain of the outcome. If I could have moved about a little or could have seen anything, or eaten anything, I would have been more normal....I thought of Christ in the tomb, and of Jonah in the whale, and how they must have suffered....” (excerpted from an unpublished manuscript by Pyburn, 1965)

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: The Pyburn House

Section number 8 Page 6 County and State: Lea County, New Mexico

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One week later, Pyburn was back on the job. But the scars of this ordeal marked him for the rest of his life. Family members speculate that as a result of his experience trapped in the coal mine, Pyburn suffered not only arthritis but a palsy, or shaking of his hands and arms, which plagued him with increasing intensity as he grew older. Despite his physical hardships, however, J.W. Pyburn was known in Lovington as a "big, strong man," and a lover of hard work. He once told a friend he could haul a bale of cotton (estimated to weigh 500 pounds) all by himself.

On September 6, 1904 Pyburn boarded a train at Tracy City, Tennessee for Dallas Texas. He arrived two days later and got a job picking cotton, which also proved impossible for him. He turned to picking corn and fared much better, finding a job with Tom Ham for the harvest season. When the harvest was complete, Mr. Ham advised Pyburn to go to school at Texas Christian University in Waco, Texas (TCU is now in Fort Worth). John, who had had only nine sporadic months of schooling in his life, agreed. He interviewed with the president and vice-president of the University, was accepted, and graduated five and a half "school years" later, having worked a variety of jobs to put himself through. One of his jobs was as a substitute teacher, an occupation he continued to enjoy throughout his career in education. While in school he was able to save money and send some to his older sister for the care of their younger twin brothers and a younger sister. When he graduated he sent for his twin brothers, then seven years old, and put them in school.

In December 1909 J.W. Pyburn married Ethel Mae Kelley, whom he had met at the University, and in Fall of 1910 he accepted a principalship and began his forty-year career in education. He himself returned to school many times for certifications and higher degrees, earning an M.S. degree from A& M College in Stillwater, Oklahoma, post-graduate studies at Chicago University, a Master's degree from the University of New Mexico, and teaching certifications for Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. He was a teacher for ten years in Texas and Oklahoma, superintendent of the Butler, Oklahoma public schools from 1920-22, the Jennings, Oklahoma schools from 1923-25, and the city schools of Guymon, Oklahoma from 1925 until 1930, when he became superintendent of the Lovington, New Mexico schools. He was a life member of the Oklahoma Educational Association, chairman of the Panhandle P.T.A., author of the book "Consolidation of Schools in Greer County, Oklahoma", and the comedy "Those Wives of Ours".

Pyburn was also an ordained Baptist minister, a 32-degree Mason, a member of the Rebekkah Lodge, the Order of the Eastern Star, the Woodsmen of the World, the International Order of Odd Fellows, and the Lions Club.

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: The Pyburn House

Section number 8 Page 7 County and State: Lea County, New Mexico

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Lovington was named for Florence Love, who homesteaded the area in 1903; a post office was established in 1908. In 1917, when Lea County was created, Lovington was made the county seat; Lovington was incorporated as a village in 1930. Several prominent buildings were constructed there as a result of nearby oil and gas development, including a new school. As a result of a fight with Hobbs over the location of the county seat, a new courthouse was constructed in Lovington in 1937.

When J.W. Pyburn arrived in the newly incorporated village of Lovington in 1930, the population was 961. In 1940 the population had doubled to 1,916, and the Lovington schools also provided services for the families living in more sparsely populated towns around the county seat.

Beginning as a one-room, rural school in late October 1908, with a school term of five months or less, progress was made through the years in school plant facilities so that, by June 30, 1938, there was a three-story school building, a four-classroom addition, two one-room frame buildings, a frame gymnasium building, a shower house for physical education, a pump house, a partial playground, and an athletic field. Advancing from a rural school district in 1908 to a municipal school district in 1915; advancing from one teacher in 1908 with minimum professional qualifications to a faculty of 25 with degree qualifications; advancing from a very basic educational program for elementary grades only to an expanded curriculum offering for all twelve grades -- all this and more characterized the first 30 years of the Lovington schools.

“The new superintendent comes to Lovington with some of the best recommendations from many of the most prominent educators of the nation, who testify to his splendid scholarship, his successful school work, and excellent character...he...is listed in the Who’s Who in American Education, 1928.” (Lovington Leader, February 21, 1930)

J.W. Pyburn served as the Lovington schools’ superintendent for eight years from 1930 to 1938, twice as long as the longest-serving of his predecessors. His tenure was a time of tremendous growth in attendance at Lovington schools and rapid population growth in Lovington and in Lea County. The oil rush had been predicted when Pyburn arrived, and it had been realized by the time he retired in 1938. The Great Depression hit soon after he took over ; teachers were paid in script discounted ten to twenty percent, and higher taxes were necessary to compensate for sinking funds as the Lovington district’s assessed value fell into a downward spiral. In addition, a controversial bond issue initiated before his arrival resulted in a legal settlement of over \$10,000

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: The Pyburn House

Section number 8 Page 8 County and State: Lea County, New Mexico

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against the school district, which was paid in full by the time Pyburn retired. Yet the schools continued to grow, and during the first five years of Pyburn's tenure as superintendent a new four-room addition was built to accommodate the influx of students, a shower house facility was constructed, the heating system for the "Old Central" school was replaced, and the school board approved the first policy on teacher qualifications.

The Lovington schools were a tremendous point of pride for local leaders and a draw for families heading west to their fortunes. In June of 1930, a newspaper printed an article encouraging "oil families" to come to Lovington because the town offered such superior education for their children.

"With the opening of the oil fields almost at its very door, Lovington's excellent public school offers one of the greatest inducements to the people who are coming into this city. The better class of oil men are seeking a place where their families can find a home with all the things that make a home pleasant. They want their families with them in a town where their children may have the very best educational advantages, and to such Lovington has a direct appeal. Here they can find an ideal place for their families to live, away from the usual things that make a shack oil town so repulsive to the average oil man and his family. Here they will find a school for their children that is second to none in the country... the Lovington board extends a hearty welcome to the oil workers to make their homes in Lovington and to avail themselves of the advantages of the excellent school for their children." (Lovington Leader)

Pyburn worked toward full accreditation for Lovington High School and was granted accreditation in July 1935. At the time of accreditation there were six full-time high school teachers and 128 students in grades nine to twelve. Superintendent Pyburn of the Lovington school was notified by Dr. , secretary of the North Central Association, that the Lovington school was been fully accredited as a member of that association and entitled to all the privileges enjoyed by any of the schools in the state. Dr. Diefendorf stated that this (Lovington) school met all the requirements of the association.

"The work of securing this recognition has been a rather complicated and long-drawn out affair and has necessitated much planning and work on the part of the school management and both faculty and pupils are proud that their efforts have been rewarded." -- Lovington Leader, April 26, 1935

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Name of Property: The Pyburn House

Section number 8 Page 9 County and State: Lea County, New Mexico

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Pyburn began collecting rocks in the summer of 1934 and began construction of the house in the summer of 1935. He finished it in stages, allowing for him and his family to occupy it before it was completed in 1937. Although he had assistance from plumbers, electricians, and carpenters, he oversaw the entire project and was ultimately responsible for most of the work himself. He and his son, Thomas Pyburn, and his son-in-law, Heywood Heidel, moved most of the rocks themselves and hoisted them into the wall through the creative application of a block and tackle. Pyburn once explained that he was "born a mason", and that he built many buildings and walls as a young man. A friend of Pyburn's, Sparky Fairweather, says that the Pyburn House reminds him of its builder because "It's here to stay, and it says he (J.W. Pyburn) was a man who never did anything halfway."

While "kitsch" may be used to describe buildings such as the Pyburn House, it remains an outstanding example of individualistic construction, and it will stand for many years as a demonstration of masonry and construction that is both imaginative and functional. There are few good examples of such folk architecture available to us in the Twentieth Century/New Mexico.

### THE HISTORY OF PYBURN HOUSE SINCE THE PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

After J.W. Pyburn's retirement in 1938, the Pyburn House continued to host boarders and new arrivals to Lovington for the next 48 years. Ethel Pyburn managed the house, cooking three meals a day for her boarders until the house was converted into apartments in 1949-50. Even then she continued to prepare meals for some of her bachelor renters who were disinclined to cook. Ethel was 96 when she died in 1986, and she managed the apartments until the day she died.

The current owner has been cosmetically remodeling the interior of Pyburn House to transform Pyburn's Apartments into a bed and breakfast to be named The Cornerstone Inn. At this time just the downstairs living room and dining room (the room to the west of the living room and east of the central kitchen) have been completed. The current owners occupy the southwestern-most bedroom/apartment. Very little has been required in the effort to bring all electrical and plumbing systems throughout the house up to specifications, because Pyburn was meticulous in his planning and execution of the house construction. There have been no breakdowns in the plumbing or electrical systems, and all the wiring and pipes were set in so they could be easily accessed for repairs. All of the windows in the building have been replaced, and one upstairs bedroom has had windows added. Painting and refurbishing will continue at least until the end of 1995; however, no structural changes will be made to the building. The owners have decorated with a Victorian theme and hope to be open for business in early 1996.

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: The Pyburn House

Section number 9.10 Page 10 County and State: Lea County, New Mexico

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### SOURCES and INTERVIEWS

Sources:

"Lea, New Mexico's Last Frontier," by Gil Hinshaw. Published by the Hobbs Daily News-Sun, 1976.

"Then and Now: Lea County Families." Compiled by the Lea County Genealogical Society, copyright 1979.

Articles, Hobbs News-Sun and Lovington Leader, from 1930 through 1935.

"The Lovington Schools: 1908-1965, A Chronology," by H.C. Pannell.

Application for Registration, New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties--The Pyburn House.

Unpublished manuscript, J.W. Pyburn, 1965.

Interviews:

Dr. Mary Ann Anders, Architectural Historian,  
New Mexico Historic Preservation Division Office of Cultural Affairs  
Betty Garner, Pyburn granddaughter, of Lovington, New Mexico  
Don and Sharon Ritchey, owners of Pyburn House, Lovington, New Mexico  
Sparky Fairweather, resident, Lovington, New Mexico  
Hazel Berry, resident and former teacher, Lovington, New Mexico

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The East Half (E 1/2) of Lot 1, the South 2.5 Feet of the West 18.5 Feet of Lot 9, the South 42 Feet and the North 8 Feet of the West 18.5 Feet of Lot 10, and all of Lots 11 & 12, Block 32, West Addition.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

Those lots historically associated with The Pyburn House as described in the Verbal Boundary Description.

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: The Pyburn House

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page 11 County and State: Lea County, New Mexico

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## PHOTOGRAPHS

ALL Photographs:  
The Pyburn House, Lea County, Lovington, New Mexico

<u>Number on Photo</u>	<u>Date of Photo</u>	<u>Name of Photographer</u>	<u>Location of Negative</u>	<u>Description of View</u>
1	not avail.	unknown	Pyburn family	Facing West, from across the street
2	"	"	"	Facing West (porches are closed in)
3	-1936	"	"	Facing West; house incomplete Ethel Pyburn stands before "first phase" of completed construction
4	1937	"	"	Facing West, North-West
5	not avail.	"	"	Facing West, North-West
6	"	"	"	Pyburn family portrait
7	-1920	"	"	J.W. Pyburn graduation photo from Texas Christian University
8	6/95	Veronica Jones	State Historic Pres. Office	Facing North, front living room
9	"	"	"	Facing South-West, front living room
10	"	"	"	Facing West, upstairs hallway
11	"	"	"	Facing South, front porch
12	"	"	"	Facing West, South-West
13	"	"	"	Facing West, South-West
14	"	"	"	Facing North, North West
15	"	"	"	Facing North, North East (from rear of house)
16	"	"	"	Facing East, from back yard

77'-0"

18'-2"

GARAGE  
21'-6" x 20'-0"

23'-4"

STAIRS  
UP

20'-0"

*Storage  
Area*

KITCHEN  
13'-0" x 16'-0"

7'-6"

BEDROOM  
9'-6" x 13'-0"

*Dining Room*  
BEDROOM  
14'-0" x 13'-0"

LIVINGROOM  
16'-6" x 25'-0"

UP

HALL

28'-0"

43'-0"

KITCHEN  
16'-8" x 15'-8"

BR  
8'-8" x 15'-6"

CL

CL

BEDROOM  
14'-0" x 19'-6"

CL

BEDROOM  
12'-0" x 15'-8"

KITCHEN  
8'-0" x 19'-6"

UP

