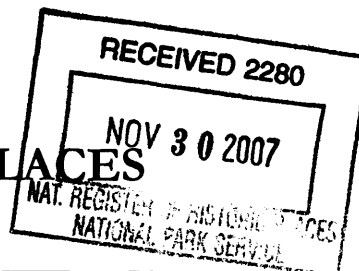


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



1364

1. Name of Property

historic name: **Ferris/Hermsmeyer/Fenton Ranch**  
other name/site number: **Jane Ferris Preemption Claim; Hermsmeyer Farm; Fenton Ranch**

2. Location

street & number: **144 Duncan District Road** not for publication: **n/a**  
city/town: **Sheridan** vicinity: **n/a**  
state: **Montana** code: **MT** county: **Madison** code: **057** zip code: **59749**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

**Montana State Historic Preservation Office**  
State or Federal agency or bureau

(  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register  
 see continuation sheet

determined eligible for the National Register  
 see continuation sheet

determined not eligible for the National Register  
 see continuation sheet

removed from the National Register  
 see continuation sheet

other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**Elson F. Beall** **1-9-08**

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property: **Private**  
 Category of Property: **District**  
 Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: **n/a**  
 Name of related multiple property listing: **n/a**

Number of Resources within Property	
Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>9</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>12</u>	<u>1</u> Total

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions:  
**DOMESTIC: single dwelling**  
**AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: agricultural fields, agricultural outbuilding, animal facility; irrigation facility**

Current Functions:  
**DOMESTIC: dwelling**  
**AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: fields, agricultural outbuilding; irrigation facility**

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification:  
**OTHER: Rustic**  
**OTHER: I-house**

Materials:  
 foundation: **STONE, CONCRETE**  
 walls: **LOG, WOOD/plank, ASBESTOS/tile, STUCCO**  
 roof: **METAL/steel, ASPHALT, WOOD/shingle, EARTH**  
 other: **n/a**

**Narrative Description**

**Regional Environmental Context**

Located in the heart of the Intermountain region of the Rocky Mountains in southwestern Montana, the Ferris/Hermsmeyer/Fenton Ranch is located in Madison County’s spectacular Ruby River Valley, a semi-arid agriculturally-based basin primarily used for livestock production, irrigation hay, and other fodder crops. The valley is flanked by the scenic Tobacco Root and Gravelly Mountains to the east and the Ruby Mountains to the west. The Ruby River originates high in the Ruby Mountains, approximately 20 miles south of the town of Sheridan, Montana, located 1.8 miles east of the ranch. The Ruby Reservoir, located downstream from the headwaters of the Ruby River, supplies water to the rich agricultural fields of the Ruby and Jefferson Valleys. From the reservoir, the Ruby River flows north from the mountains, continuing in a northwesterly direction to its confluence with the Beaverhead River about 1.5 miles downstream of Twin Bridges, Montana. The Beaverhead and Big Hole Rivers converge downstream of Twin Bridges to create the headwaters of the Jefferson River.

Setting

The 160-acre preemption claim that became the ranch is located in a beautiful rural setting in the heart of the lower Ruby Valley agricultural region. The ranch is divided by the east-west running Duncan District Road that begins in Sheridan as Water Street. Thirty acres of land as well as the ranch’s building cluster are located north of the road while 113 acres are located south of the thoroughfare. The 113 acres of original preemption land located south of Duncan Road retains its historic use and appearance as agricultural land used as pasture and hay fields. A 1937 map of the historic property demonstrates the division of the fields—the southern acres maintained alfalfa, oats, clover and barley, and even 1.9 acres of potatoes, while the northern fields were reserved for meadow and alfalfa.<sup>1</sup> Today, that same acreage is comprised of wild hay fields. The acreage is irrigated by a ditch (appearing on the 1937 map) from Mill Creek, which traverses the quarter section east-west, south of Duncan Road. The ditch route is clearly detectable by a line of high grass growing along the path of the ditch.

<sup>1</sup> Fred McCrea. Map of the Agricultural Organization of the Fenton Ranch; Unpublished material from the Helen Fenton Collection maintained by Kathleen Wuelfing. 1937.

**8. Statement of Significance**

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

Areas of Significance: **EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT;  
AGRICULTURE**  
Period(s) of Significance: **1866-1959**  
Significant Dates: **1866, 1876, 1890s, 1937**  
Architect/Builder: **John Barber (Jane Ferris); Fred  
Hermsmeyer; George Hermsmeyer; Stanley  
Fenton.**

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

**Statement of Significance**

The Ferris/Hermsmeyer/Fenton Ranch is significant under Criterion A for its significant association with women's history and the use of federal public land law for settlement in southwest Montana during the formation of Montana territory. The lands of the lower Ruby Valley opened for settlement in 1863, shortly after the discovery of gold in nearby Bannack and Alder Gulch, and prior to any government survey of the land. A resident of mining communities in the American West during the 1850s, Ferris was induced to immigrate to the lower Ruby Valley following the death of her husband and the exploit the economic opportunities created by the gold boom.

In 1872, Jane Ferris, a widow with two small children, successfully used nineteenth century federal land law, in the form of the 1841 Preemption Act, to secure land and a home for herself and her heirs. This law, passed despite the protest from some Eastern states, was meant to encourage settlement in the American West by widows and heads of household on any 160 acres of unsurveyed land. Jane Ferris appears to be the only woman in Sheridan-area history to use preemption to secure land during Montana's formative decades of the 1870s and 1880s, making the ranch historically significant within the context of the rural settlement patterns as well as women's history during the late-nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The 1866 cabin portion of the main residence and 1866 barn are directly associated with the Ferris era of occupation, and are described by Ferris in her 1872 application for preemption.

Additionally, the historic buildings located at the property represent some of the earliest building development associated with the formative Euro-American settlement of the area. By securing the 160-acre preemption claim, Ferris created the conditions for the continued, agriculturally-based use of the property throughout its existence, including by her own daughter and her family in the late-1870s and early-1880s.

The Frederick and George Hermsmeyer families improved the property with several additions and buildings to foster agricultural traditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Following with local trends in agriculture and economic challenges, the property witnessed a series of owners after World War I, until 1937, when the Stanley and Helen Fenton family took ownership. The Fenton family managed to bring the ranch back to prosperity and add their own improvements, particularly during and after World War II, when agricultural prices rose nationwide. The period of significance continues through 1959, the year of Stanley Fenton's death. The Fentons and their descendants have retained the working ranch for the last 70 years.

<sup>2</sup> General Land Office, Montana Tract Books, volumes 37, 38, 39, Bureau of Land Management, Billings, MT.

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

(see continuation sheet)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Specify Repository:

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property: 160 Acres**

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	(NAD 27)
A	12	404206	5033609	
B	12	404197	5032803	
C	12	403398	5032809	
D	12	403400	5033618	

**Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)):** NW1/4 of Section 33. Township 4South Range 5 West.

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The historic 160-acre property occupies the NW1/4 of Section 33, Township 4 South, Range 5 West, Montana Prime Meridian. The boundary of the historic property is also shown as the line on the accompanying location map entitled "USGS Sheridan (MT) 7.5 Topographic Map."

**Boundary Justification**

The selected boundaries mirror the historic preemption claim as applied for by Jane Ferris in 1866 and approved by the federal government in 1872. The boundaries associated with the preemption have remained unchanged since 1866, capturing the cluster of historic buildings and structures as well as the agricultural fields and unaltered woodlands historically associated with the property.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: **Jim Jenks**  
organization: **Wheelhouse Consulting** date: **July 31, 2007**  
street & number: **425 Clarke Street** telephone: **208-818-1886**  
city or town: **Helena** state: **MT** zip code: **59601**

**The Montana Land Title Association Foundation's Montana Heritage Property Fund provided the funding to complete this nomination. Montana SHPO and the property owners are very grateful for MLTA's ongoing support of the National Register Program in Montana, and their dedication to documenting and celebrating historic properties across the state.**

**Property Owner**

name/title: **Kathleen F. Wuelfing**  
street & number: **170 Duncan District Road** telephone: **406-842-5211**  
city or town: **Sheridan** state: **MT** zip code: **59749**

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**Description of Resources**

The heart of the historic property is the northwestern 30 acres. Of this, 16 acres are wild hay land, 13 acres are naturally occurring trees and vegetation crossed by Mill Creek, while the ranch's building cluster occupies a single acre. The building cluster itself serves as a sort of division point for the two vegetative profiles. The naturally occurring landscape, dominated by tall grasses and mature cottonwood trees, is north and northwest of the building cluster, and is traversed by bubbling Mill Creek (a perennial tributary of the Ruby River) which runs east-west across the historic property. Meanwhile, the southern and eastern portions parts of this 30-acre portion are meadow. Photographs from the late-nineteenth century demonstrate that the land around the building cluster was once shaded by a number of cottonwood trees since removed. Further, two acres south of the main residence (feature 1) was once an apple tree orchard, converted to hay meadow. The orchard was removed during the Fenton era of ownership, though six apple trees remain—three immediately west of the main residence, and three to the northeast of the main residence. The northern 30 acres has been encircled by a new wood fence, and a second wood fence divides the building cluster from the meadow immediately north of Duncan District Road.

The twelve contributing resources of the historic ranch display significant rustic rural vernacular characteristics and are arranged in a manner consistent with ranching practices in the latter half of the nineteenth century and first half on the twentieth century. The complex is anchored by the Main Residence (feature 1), from which emanates a bunkhouse (feature 2), a well (feature 3), a root cellar (feature 4), a garage (feature 5), a blacksmith shop (feature 6), a chicken house (feature 7), and two barns (features 8 and 9), a small brooding hut (feature 10), and irrigation ditch (feature 11). Nestled within the 13 acres of naturally occurring vegetation is a clearing once used as a large garden by Helen Fenton. Though no longer is use, the garden space is identifiable as a developed area within the natural landscape, and serves as a contributing site within the historic property.

The historic building cluster is adjacent to intact historic agricultural fields which enhance the historical integrity of the property. 130 acres of wild hay fields are located south and east of the historic building cluster, Approximately 17 acres of hay field is located immediately south and east of the building cluster, north of Duncan District Road. The remaining approximate acreage of 113 acres of hay fields are located south of Duncan District Road. The irrigation ditch traverses this section of the hay meadows, flowing east to west. The agricultural fields are counted collectively as one contributing site.

Feature 1 ~ The Main Residence (c.1886 and 1900, one contributing building)

This feature is situated on the west side of historic property's building cluster. The feature consists of the 1866 log cabin and its large 1900 two-story addition.

The 1866 Cabin

The original rectangular, 18' by 36' log cabin (reduced to 18' by 20' when the addition was completed in c. 1900) was constructed c. 1866, likely by John Barber for use by Jane Ferris and her two young children. According to the preemption application filed by Ferris in 1872, the cabin had three rooms, a board floor, a board and dirt roof, four doors and three windows. In its original condition, the cabin featured a low-pitched dirt and board roof that was supported by five log purlins that extended slightly from the elevation the southern (front) and northern (rear) elevations. Based on a historic image of the cabin prior to alteration, the cabin was 16-17 peeled pine logs high, culminating in gables on the southern and northern elevation. The original roof design has been modified. While the northern (rear) gable remains, the roof is now at a steeper pitch. Further, the logs which were once set inside the gable on the southern end have been replaced with new vertical lapped wood siding. Today's cabin roof is a metal roof that matches the addition's roof, and both date to

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2006. The original foundation for the cabin portion remains, and is comprised of large uncut, courseless stones. These stones are much larger than the stones found in nearby Mill Creek, and likely came from the surrounding mountains.

Originally, the southern elevation of the cabin displayed a single door, with a single double-hung, six-light wood frame window set east of the door. That elevation was removed to accommodate construction of the c. 1900 addition. Today's western elevation, however, consists of a non-original three-paned casement wood frame window symmetrically placed within the elevation. Further, the southern two-thirds of this elevation have been covered with stucco, an alteration that occurred sometime during the Fenton era of ownership.

Historically, the northern elevation featured a single door on the east side of the elevation to allow simple access to Mill Creek, flowing a mere 30' to the north. This door was removed during a 2006 renovation to the feature, and today a single window opening is located on the west side of the elevation, which contains a new single-pane wood-framed casement window. The original pine logs are quite visible on this elevation, though a portion has been covered by the same new vertical lapped wood siding as occurs in the gable. The new electrical system is also visible along this elevation, and a security light has been located in the apex of the gable. This elevation has also been painted white. The east (side) elevation has been coated entirely in stucco, and contains two symmetrically-placed wood double-hung windows which appear to date to the Ferris era of occupation. The first window, set on the southern portion, is a two-light, wood-framed window. The second window, a four-light double-hung wood frame window, is the larger of the pair, and set into the northern portion of the elevation.

As noted, the cabin was renovated in 2006 after years of neglect. The corners of original cabin walls are connected roughly with saddle notches, and that condition is still viewable on the northeast and northwest corners of the cabin. The notches on the portion of the cabin connected to the addition were removed during the construction of the addition. On the cabin's stucco-less exterior walls, concrete chinking is visible between the logs. The interior, meanwhile, has been altered to suit modern use as a kitchen and dining room. The southern elevation of the interior, once the front of the cabin, now connects to the c. 1900 addition's (west to east) bathroom, stairwell to the upper floor, and living room.

The c. 1900 Two-Story Addition

The two-story, rectangular addition was connected to the southern portion of the log cabin in c. 1900 by the George Hermsmeyer family, creating a new 23' T-shaped dwelling. The addition was constructed in fashion similar to an I-style home, which are generally one-room deep, and two-rooms wide. These two-story structures were very common in working class neighborhoods and on farms in the Midwest,<sup>3</sup> the location of the Hermsmeyer family's the first known home in the United States. The house is constructed of wood framing members, between which are brick walls. During the 2006 renovations, portions of the interior brick walls in the living room and bathroom were left exposed for viewing purposes. Despite the brick walls, the home has historically been sided, initially by lap wood siding during the Hermsmeyer era (as demonstrated by historic images), then by asbestos siding by the Fenton family. The original wood siding remains under the asbestos siding.

Popular between 1820 and 1890, the thin, tall I-houses generally lack decorative details. Most were built in the late 19th century, which is indicated by basic scroll work on porches, tall vertical windows, and narrow clapboard siding.<sup>4</sup> As noted, the original wood lap siding was covered with asbestos tile in the 1940s, and has been recently painted white. All

<sup>3</sup> McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.) 309-310.

<sup>4</sup> McAlester, 309-310.

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of the original windows from this Hermsmeyer period addition remain intact. The side-gabled roof is a 6 ½ pitch that was originally cedar shingles and is now metal. A brick chimney once located on the center of the roof was removed in 2006.<sup>5</sup>

The southern (front) elevation of the addition faces Duncan District Road and the hay meadows of the original preemption claim located to the south. On the ground-floor, a rectangular bay window occupies the south side of the elevation. Five, two-over-two, wood-frame, double-hung windows occupy the bay window extension: a single window faces east; a pair face south; and another single window faces west, overlooking the porch. As noted, a hipped-roof open porch, located in the "L" formed by the bay window, stretches along most the remaining southern elevation at the first story level. The porch roof extends to function as the roof of the bay window. Helen Fenton enclosed this porch during her long tenure there, and the current owners re-opened the porch and restored ornamented porch columns in 2006.<sup>6</sup> It is covered by a new metal roof. The main entrance to the residence is located to the east side of the porch next to the bay window, while a two-over-two, wood-framed double-hung window is west of the door. The upper floor contains three, two-over-two, wood-framed double-hung windows spaced across the elevation. The middle window is spaced slightly off-center to the west.

The ground floor of the gabled west (side) elevation contains two evenly-spaced two-over-two, wood-framed double-hung windows, while the fenestration for the second floor consists of a centered single window of the same type. The window head is centered at the bottom of the gable end.

The north (rear) of the addition displays no features, and is largely obscured by the attached 1866 cabin.

Finally, the east (side) elevation includes two evenly-spaced two-over-two, wood-framed double-hung windows at both the first and second story. Like the west elevation, the window heads at the second story align with the bottom of the gable ends.

The room orientation of the interior of the addition remains unaltered since its construction. The ground floor consists of a large living room oriented around the bay window, and a study located on the west portion of the interior. As noted, a bathroom is located off the cabin portion—indoor toilet facilities were not completed until 1947, when Jack Fenton, a veteran of the Second World War, used his discharge money to fund the installation of an electric pump.<sup>7</sup> A steep, narrow stairwell leads to the second floor from the cabin portion. Three bedrooms are located upstairs, oriented around an exposed brick chimney.

The building is surrounded by a well-maintained lawn. A stone path leads from the front porch to the parking area located just east of the dwelling. To the rear, a new, non-contributing wood deck connects the rear of the cabin portion to the front of the bunkhouse (feature 2). The deck occupies the area that was once home to an intrusive 1960 kitchen addition. That addition was removed in 2006.<sup>8</sup>

Feature 2 ~ The Bunkhouse (c. 1890, one contributing building)

The bunkhouse is located immediately northeast of the main residence and was constructed c. 1890 by Fred Hermsmeyer for use as a bedroom by his two daughters, Rose and Annie.<sup>9</sup> This simple building is 12' by 23', with a 5'-deep covered porch supported with peeled pine columns. The eaves are supported, front and rear, by five peeled logs which traverse the length of the bunkhouse. The building is constructed out of roughly-hewn peeled cottonwood logs and the building's

<sup>5</sup> Fenton, Jack, Kathleen Wuelfing and Gus Wuelfing. Interview on July 5, 2007, Sheridan, MT.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, July 5, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, July 5, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Interview, July 5, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Interview, July 5, 2007. In 1953, the two Hermsmeyer daughters visited the Fenton family, describing the construction of the bunkhouse.

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walls are perched on a courseless rock foundation. The logs are chinked with concrete, and the walls are connected with square-style notches. The roof was originally sod, but a metal roof was placed on the feature by the Fenton family some years ago.

The west (front) elevation features a single, symmetrically-spaced door. The south (side) elevation has a single, symmetrically located wood-frame double-hung window single-pane sash. The east (rear) elevation features a single wood-frame double-hung window single-pane sash that is set slightly on the northern portion of this elevation. The north (side) elevation is without fenestration.

On the interior, deteriorating drywall covers the interior log walls and ceiling, and linoleum covers the original board floor.

Feature 3 ~ The Stone Well (pre-1937, one contributing structure)

A round stone well is located 13' east of the main residence, and approximately 8' south of the bunkhouse. This well is approximately 12' deep, and lined with river rock. It was already constructed when the Fentons acquired the property in 1937; the actual construction date is unknown but attributable to the Hermsmeyer era. A hand pump was once set into the well, with a pipe driven to a depth of 23'. That pump has been removed, and the well has been covered with an iron grate for safety reasons.

Feature 4 ~ the Root Cellar (pre-1937, one contributing building)

The large root cellar is located approximately 30' east of the bunkhouse, along the northern portion of the property's gravel driveway. Approximately 30' in diameter and rising approximately 5' feet above grade, the cellar was already constructed when the Fentons acquired the property in 1937. The south (front) elevation features the visible exterior wall, and therefore the only fenestration: a step-down wood-framed door surrounded and supported by stone. Covered with sod to create the dome appearance, the interior board ceiling is supported by several peeled log columns over a wood board floor. The building has heavily mortared rock walls which serve to maintain canned goods and vegetables from freezing or heating during Montana's severe weather cycles. The Fentons also used the property as shelter for calves and lambs during severe winter weather.<sup>10</sup>

Feature 5 ~ The Garage (1942, one contributing building)

Located approximately 20' east of the root cellar, this simple, shed-roofed 18' by 18' building was constructed in 1942 and used by the Fentons as a shop and single vehicle garage. Stanley Fenton cut and hauled the pine logs from the surrounding mountains to a small sawmill owned by neighbor Ben Carver. Carver milled the logs to lumber and assembled the garage. The building was covered with tar paper, and then sided with asbestos tile siding to match the main residence. The tar paper roof has since been covered with a corrugated metal roof, but the original siding is intact. The building, constructed without a foundation, is today used for storage.

The south (front) elevation has a wood, two-door garage entrance wide enough for a single vehicle to use, located on the east portion of the elevation. West of the garage door is a horizontally-oriented window opening, with three wood-framed, sliding windows, with 4 lights per sash. The west (side), north (rear), and east (side) elevations are featureless.

<sup>10</sup> Wuefling, Kathleen. "Montana Historic Property Record for 144 Duncan District Road," (National Register Files, Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT), 2006



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Feature 6 ~ The Blacksmith Shop (pre-1937, one contributing building)

The small, wood-framed, rectangular blacksmith shop is located approximately 35' northeast of the garage. The building was already constructed when the Fentons acquired the property in 1937, and which received extensive use in subsequent years. The 12' by 15' front-gabled feature sits on a sill log foundation which rests on the ground. The entire feature is sided with flush, rough hewn boards nailed to the sill log and interior framing. This type of wall system is mimicked for the roof, where the original board roof has been covered with a non-original corrugated metal roof. The roof is further supported by five log purlins which traverse the length of the building and protrude from the gabled ends. Interestingly, the historic board roofing material matches the historic material used on the feature 2 bunkhouse, known to be constructed by Fred Hermsmeyer.

The southeastern (front) elevation has a single door opening, placed at the southwest end of the elevation. The door is missing. The northeast (side) and northwest (rear) elevations are without fenestration, though a vertical pole is affixed to the southwest elevation, probably to support a power line that has since been removed. The southwest elevation (side) contains a small window opening, without a window, on the southeast portion of elevation, next to the door opening.

The interior of the blacksmith shop is home to several tools and equipment associated with the blacksmith trade. Most prominent among these is the large bellows that includes a "Fort Benton, Montana Territory" painted stamp, indicating the place of shipment as well as vintage. The building has not been used in years and is nearly surrounded by overgrown vegetation.

Feature 7 ~ the Chicken House (1946, one contributing building)

Located approximately 80' northeast of the blacksmith shop, the simple, well-built 18' by 19' chicken house was constructed in 1946 by Stanly Fenton.<sup>11</sup> It has a low-pitch, front-gabled roof originally topped with asphalt shingles, which were subsequently replaced with a metal roof. The perimeter wall's peeled logs, which are stacked nine high, are perched on a deep foundation of concrete to discourage invasion by predators. The logs are chinked with concrete.

The gabled west (front) elevation has a single door located along the south end of the elevation. The gable end is vertically sided with flush wood boards. The south (side) elevation features a centered horizontal window opening, covered in heavy mesh. A single six-light wood-frame window sash is set into the west side of the opening; additional sashes appear to have been removed from the rest of the opening. The east (rear) elevation is without fenestration, and the siding within the gable end mimics the west elevation. The north elevation is also without fenestration, and features only log walls.

The interior of the chicken house maintains its historic spatial organization, with nesting areas, warming areas and feeding areas clearly visible.

Feature 8 ~ The 1866 Barn and Addition (c. 1866 and pre-1937, one contributing building)

Located approximately 45' south of the chicken house, the west 18.6' by 20' bay of this historic building is the original c. 1866 barn that was briefly described in the 1872 Preemption Act application filed by Jane Ferris. The east bay of the building repeats the 18.6' width, but it extends a further 30'. The east bay was constructed sometime between 1866 and 1937, likely during the Hermsmeyer era of occupation. The entire building is roofed with vertical wood boards, topped with metal flashing along the roofline. The west log bay is constructed of peeled pine logs stacked 17 high, and the log walls are connected using saddle notching. The west log bay sits on a foundation of large uncut stones, and as with the

<sup>11</sup> Wuelfing, Montana Historic Property Record.

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1866 residence foundation, these rocks appear too large to have originated from Mill Creek. The east frame bay is sided with vertical boards and is without a foundation.

The gabled west (front) elevation is part of the 1866 building. A hay door is located within the gable end, and a wood ladder that is attached to the elevation leads between the hay door and the grade. Immediately south of the ladder is a metal-mesh-covered window opening. Wood boards side the gable end above the log wall of the first story. The south (side) elevation demonstrates the division between the older and newer portions of the building. A single wood door is centered within the peeled log walls of west bay, while a large opening is centered within the east frame bay. A single wood-trimmed window opening is located immediately west of this opening, and this portion of the elevation is sided with vertical, flush wood boards. The gabled east (rear) elevation of the building is part of the east frame bay. Constructed with vertical board siding, the elevation's only fenestration is a large hay door located approximately 6' off the ground, in the center of the wall. Like the south elevation, the north (side) elevation displays both the log and frame construction methods of the two bays. A single door opening, partially boarded closed, is centered within the east frame bay.

The interior of both bays remains intact from their period of construction. The building is currently used as storage for farm implements, with hay currently stored in the rafters.

Feature 9 ~ The Horse Barn (pre-1937, one contributing building)

Located approximately 35' south of the 1866 barn, this building was constructed prior to the Fenton family's 1937 purchase of the property. The Fenton family used this 18.6' by 23' peeled log building to feed and harness their work horses out of weather. The side-gabled building features a low-pitch roof covered with cedar shingles. The log walls, chinked with concrete, are stacked 20 logs high and connected using dovetail notching, the third type of log wall notching used throughout the historic property. The log walls rest on a foundation of loose uncut stone.

The west (front) elevation has a single, wide (horse-sized) entrance, located just off-center toward the southern side of the elevation. A "Z"-braced wood board door covers the entrance to the barn. The gabled south (side) elevation features a secondary entrance to the barn, located along the western portion of the elevation. A small window opening covered with plexiglass is set into the gable end, just off-center to the east. Horizontal boards fill the gable end. The east (rear) elevation has only single opening where a log was removed. This provided a horizontal opening along the center of the elevation by which feed was poured into an interior trough. The opening extends across approximately two-thirds of the elevation. The gabled north (side) elevation also has a small window set high into the gable end, just off-center to the east. Like the opposite elevation, horizontal boards fill the gable end. The barn's interior retains its historic appearance, with a wood feed trough, equipment storage area, and food storage area.

Feature 10 ~ The Brooding Hut (c. 1942, one contributing building)

This small structure was constructed by the Fenton family, and was originally located to the north of its current location, closer to Mill Creek. While it was moved by the Fenton family from its original location, it has only been moved within the historic building cluster and during the historic period. This 6' x 11' wood, shed-roof structure was used to shelter young chicks, providing a comfortable and healthy environment for the growing birds. The south (front) elevation has a single entrance on the west side of the elevation. To the east of the entrance is the structures single window opening, covered today with mesh. A peeled log pole extends up from the southwestern corner of the structure, which once served as an electrical pole.

No fenestration exists on the west, north, or east elevation, and there is no foundation for this feature.

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**Feature 11 ~ The Irrigation Ditch (one contributing structure)**

This small irrigation ditch crosses and irrigates 130 acres of hay fields, located generally east and south of the historic building cluster. Flowing east to west, the ditch uses water from the original 1866 water right associated with Mill Creek.

**Contributing Sites**

**130 Acres of Agricultural Fields. (one contributing site)**

Contributing to the historic integrity of the historic ranch is the 130 acres of irrigated wild hay fields which exist immediately to the east and south of the historic building cluster. These lands comprise the rest of the historic preemption claim, and today's intact agricultural use demonstrates the continuity of use since officially acquired by Jane Ferris in 1872. 4.1 acres of meadow exist immediately south of the historic building cluster, west of the dirt driveway and north of Duncan District Road. Another 13.2 acres are also north of Duncan District Road, though east of the driveway. Duncan District Road itself is a former stage coach road, shown on an 1869 GLO survey map of the region.

The bulk of the agricultural fields are located south of Duncan District Road. A narrow strip of acreage, located south of the road, is visible from the building cluster. South of this strip, a line of mature cottonwood trees and dense brush crosses the property east/west, obscuring the approximate 100 remaining acres from view from the building cluster.

The remaining acres of wild hay meadows continue south of the trees and brush, traversed only by the small irrigation ditch (feature 11) which winds its way through the fields, flowing in an east-to-west direction.

**The Helen Fenton Garden (one contributing site)**

Helen Fenton's large garden area is nestled within the 30 acres of natural landscape located across Mill Creek, north of the historic building cluster. While currently not in use as a garden, today's clearing was used by Helen Fenton as a garden for several decades.

**Non-Contributing Element**

**Wood Deck (one non-contributing structure)**

The single non-contributing element located at the ranch is a wooden deck, a substantial structure that bridges two of the contributing resources, the main house and the bunkhouse. It was constructed in 2006. For this reason, this resource was determined non-contributing.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, July 5, 2007

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**Integrity:**

The Ferris/Hermsmeyer/Fenton Ranch, clearly retains integrity of location, as the only feature moved within the boundary was moved within the historic period. The setting reveals the overall historic rural and agricultural character of property, as the ranch remains within an intact rural setting that is still in traditional use. That setting has been compromised by the removal of the orchard and mature cottonwoods near the residence, though six of the original apple orchard trees remain. Its integrity of design is intact, as the buildings generally retain their historic forms and structure, while the contributing elements retain their historic spatial organization. Historic building materials used for contributing structures generally remain intact, and those changes to historic materials, such as the addition of metal roofs to some contributing elements and the addition of stucco to some exterior walls of the 1866 cabin do little to diminish the ability of the property to express its feeling and association with its historic period and historic events. On the contrary, the property's ability seemingly to transcend time to articulate its associated historic era is perhaps the property's strongest overall attribute.

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**Native American Context**

Prior to Euro-American settlement, several American Indian tribes used the southwest region of present-day Montana as both a thoroughfare for intertribal trade and access route to seasonal hunting grounds. Major tribal groups that maintained traditional ties to the area include the Crow<sup>13</sup> and the Shoshone-Bannock as well as the Lemhi Shoshone and Blackfeet people. The homelands of these tribes overlapped in the area around Virginia City-Sheridan-Twin Bridges-Three Forks area, making the Ruby Valley a cultural meeting ground for Intermountain Region tribes.

Within the recent historic period and until forced to reservations, the Blackfeet held most of an immense territory stretching from the North Saskatchewan River, Canada, to the headwaters of the Missouri in today's Montana. Fifty years before Lewis and Clark, the Blackfeet Indians had a reputation of being hospitable to European traders, such the Hudson Bay Company, who occasionally even wintered with the tribe.<sup>14</sup> The Blackfeet were regular commerce partners with Canadian-based British merchants, and in their frequent visits to trading posts, tribal people exchanged wolf and beaver pelts for guns, ammunition and alcohol. This relationship had lasted more than 20 years, and during that time, the Blackfeet—using firearms—successfully dominated their regional rivals.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, the Shoshone Tribe occupied areas both east and west of the Rocky Mountains. Shoshone-Bannock homeland generally came to encompass an area that coincides with today's state of Idaho. The Shoshone-Bannock as well as the related Lemhi band pursued buffalo northeast into Montana, along the Madison and Jefferson River corridors. However, due to long-standing hostilities with the Blackfeet, the Lemhi and Shoshone-Bannock groups generally retreated west, back beyond the continental divide following a hunt. Like the Shoshone-Bannocks, the Lemhi Shoshones were buffalo hunters who had once lived on the plains of what is now Montana. Their enemies, such as the Blackfeet, had acquired firearms, but the Shoshone traded with the Spanish, who had refused to give them firearms. This limited the Lemhi ability to cope with Blackfeet power and put them at risk for attacks like the one in the spring of 1805, when rival tribes killed or captured many Shoshone men, stole their horses and destroyed most of their tools and material.<sup>16</sup>

Historically, Crow homeland came to encompass a large area in north and central Wyoming, as well as most of Montana. Stretching east to west from the Three Forks region to the current Montana-North Dakota border and north to south from the Milk River to the North Platte, Crow land included mountains, valleys, plains, and river systems, offering different climates and food sources throughout the year.<sup>17</sup>

The various tribal movements through the region made the area important for trade, into which the Crow quickly established themselves. The arrival of horses in the mid-eighteenth century had large repercussions for Crow culture. Horses became the basis for wealth and power for individuals; they made hunting easier and allowed for the transportation of more of the meat following a hunt, and they transformed the Crow into formidable mounted warriors.<sup>18</sup> The Crow traded horses and other goods from the Shoshone and the Flathead, and offered elkhorn bows, buckskin clothing, tipis, arrows, shields, and dried meat for exchange. Crow trade, although centered in the Montana/Wyoming area, essentially linked them to both sides of the continent, a comment on the extensive Indian trade networks. Crow people exchanged

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<sup>13</sup> Raymond J. DeMallie, ed, *Handbook of North American Indians: Volume 13, Plains*. Parts 1 and 2. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2001) 694.

<sup>14</sup> DeMallie, "Blackfeet," 405.

<sup>15</sup> DeMallie, "Blackfeet," 406.

<sup>16</sup> Warren L. D'Azevedo, *Handbook of North American Indians: Volume 11, Great Basin*. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2001) 515.

<sup>17</sup> DeMallie, "Crow," 696.

<sup>18</sup> DeMallie, "Crow," 695.

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buffalo goods from the Plains for salmon oil and pemmican from the Pacific Northwest as well as Spanish horse bridles from the Southwest and Sioux eagle feather warbonnets from further east.<sup>19</sup> The Ruby Valley, then, and the associated large-scale waterway the Jefferson River, formed a portion of the critical transportation corridors that maintained thriving Crow trade networks.

As the nineteenth century unfolded, the once plentiful bison herds became increasingly scarce as more non-Indians moved into southwestern Montana, forcing tribes to withdraw further into core homelands and away from outlying seasonal hunting grounds. Discovery of gold in Virginia City attracted thousands of white settlers to the region and the impact was felt throughout Crow country. This new population of non-Indians resulted in the U.S. government's agent in Montana to report in the early 1860s that "the whites are now overrunning their [Crow] whole country."<sup>20</sup>

Non-Indian settlement continued and inter-tribal power shifted and weakened. The last two decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century began a century of tragedy for the Blackfeet. The population was drastically reduced by a small pox epidemics in 1781, and between 1785 and 1805 large numbers of both the Blackfeet and Shoshone tribes were killed in battles over hunting territory. In 1837 another smallpox epidemic killed nearly 6,000 Blackfeet. This was an estimated two-thirds of the total population.<sup>21</sup> However, the Blackfeet maintained their traditional way of life based on hunting bison, until the near extinction of the bison by 1881 forced them to adapt their ways of life in response to the effects of the Euro-American settlers. The tribe was restricted to land assigned in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, but this attempt to designate Blackfeet hunting territory failed when white settlers began taking the land. In 1870, American soldiers attacked the camp of the peaceful Piegan Blackfeet leader Heavy Runner. Over 200 Blackfeet were killed during what became known as the Massacre on the Marias River. The Blackfeet did not retaliate and in 1888 those left alive were placed on a 3,000 square-mile reservation in northwest Montana, under the terms of the Sweetgrass Hills Treaty. The Shoshone and the Crow continued their alliances with non-Indians, most notably serving as scouts for Lieutenant Colonel George Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876. In 1880, under the leadership of Plenty-coups, the Crow sold the western portion of their reservation to the United States, and by 1884, the tribe had settled on today's Crow Agency centered near Hardin, Montana.

The Shoshone-Bannock endured their own territorial loss. The 1863 Fort Hall Reservation near today's Pocatello, Idaho, was established by an agreement between the United States and the Shoshone and Bannock tribes in the wake of the Bear River Massacre. Then, United States Army troops slaughtered over 200 Shoshone under Chief Old Bear in present-day southeastern Idaho. Chief Pocatello, another Shoshone leader, received advance warning of the attack and led his people out of harm's way. He subsequently sued for peace and agreed to relocate his people to the newly-established reservation along the Snake River.<sup>22</sup> The Lemhi Shoshone, meanwhile, do not officially reside at Fort Hall and continue efforts for federal recognition by the United States.

### Regional Historic Context

The region now known as Madison County was originally part of the French and Spanish colony of Louisiana, acquired by the United States with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. It remained part of the Territory of Louisiana until 1812 when it was then included in the newly organized Territory of Missouri. It was later included in the Dakota Territory, organized in 1861. Later, when gold was discovered, Madison County (created by the first legislature of Idaho) was included within

<sup>19</sup> DeMallie, "Crow," 696.

<sup>20</sup> Hoxie, *Parading Through History*, 88.

<sup>21</sup> D'Azevedo, "Shoshone," 517.

<sup>22</sup> D'Azevedo, "Shoshone," 518.

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the limits of Idaho Territory. In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln signed a bill creating Montana Territory, which included Madison County.<sup>23</sup>

The first known Euro-American explorers to enter the region were the Corps of Discovery led by Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, who ascended the Jefferson River in August 1805. The Jefferson River was again used by Captain Clark's command on their return journey in 1806. For the following several decades, the river remained the primary form of travel for the fur traders which entered the area seeking beaver pelts. Generally, however, today's Madison County remained outside the path of immigrant travel for decades. Famed road builder Captain John Mullan, for example, only skirted the Madison area during his extensive travels in the region during the 1850s.

In 1858, gold was first discovered in Montana on Gold Creek, in the northern portion of Deer Lodge Valley, and in 1862 a gold rush led to the establishment of the town of Bannack, where hundreds of miners began the search for the prized metal. Bannack soon became the place of assembly for the first Montana Territorial Legislature.

In 1863, the groups of miners who had failed to secure claims near Bannack planned to visit the Yellowstone country to investigate rumors of gold in that region. Both parties were attacked by the Crow and both turned back toward Bannack. One group of miners continued west across the Gallatin Valley, ascending the Madison River and finally reaching the Ruby Valley in late-May 1863. On May 26, 1863, this group of miners discovered gold, and one miner, Henry Edgar, dubbed the creek Alder Gulch.<sup>24</sup>

The May 1863 Alder Gulch discovery drew miners from all directions and stole much of Bannack's population as well, which by this time had grown to about 1,000. An 1863 territorial poll recorded the total population of the massive territory at 32,342, with 11,043 people alone counted in Montana, with most crowded along Alder Gulch. In response to this demographic reality, Congress created the Territory of Montana in May 1864. By the middle of 1864, thousands of miners were living in a number of communities lining Alder Gulch, including Virginia City and Nevada City. Of the fledgling settlements of scattered along the gulch, Virginia City became the largest and most permanent, and the growing town was also the cultural focal point of the territory. The population of Alder Gulch was diverse in the early years, including Euro Americans, Chinese (in 1870, about one third of the residents of Virginia City were Chinese), Native Americans, as well as miners from Mexico, and those of African-American descent.<sup>25</sup>

In 1865, Virginia City became the capital of the Montana Territory. It became the largest settlement with an estimated population of 5,000 by mid-1864, and at its peak, an estimated 10,000 people flooded the area around the gulch.<sup>26</sup> It rapidly became the territory's first social center and transportation hub. Virginia City served as the hub of a vast transportation network until 1875, with supplies coming in from Salt Lake City, Portland, Omaha, and Fort Benton.

Alder Gulch was part of a broad expansion of mining throughout the American West, beginning in California in 1849 spreading into many parts of the Intermountain West through the 1860s. However, the discovery of gold in Last Chance Gulch near today's Helena, Montana, in the summer of 1864 foretold the coming decline of Virginia City. Many Alder Gulch miners and merchants left Virginia City for new opportunities in Helena. Gold from placer mining in Alder Gulch became more difficult to recover and began to give way to quartz mining, a much more expensive enterprise because it required heavy equipment and financial backing. During the 1870s, Virginia City endured serious losses in population,

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<sup>23</sup> Work Projects Administration. *Inventory of the County Archives of Montana: No. 28. Madison County.* (Bozeman, MT: The Inventory of Public Archives, Historical Records Survey, 1940.) 5.

<sup>24</sup> Work Projects Administration. *Inventory.* 2-4.

<sup>25</sup> John Ellingson, "Virginia City: People Say We're Old-Fashioned—We Hope So." (Virginia City Chamber of Commerce, July 2007) 3.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Leeson. *History of Montana, 1739-1885.* (Chicago: Warner, Beers and Company, 1885.) 773.

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mineral production, and overall economic health.<sup>27</sup> In 1875, the territorial capital was relocated to Helena. After 1900, few new buildings were constructed in Virginia City, and many old structures collapsed, were destroyed by fire, or were torn down.<sup>28</sup>

In 1937, just two years after Congress assigned the National Park Service responsibility for surveying historic properties of national significance, the agency concluded that Virginia City warranted consideration of national recognition. Virginia City is now a National Historic Landmark. Further, the historic preservation of the region became the personal interest and responsibility of the Charles Bovey family, who acquired much of the historic town with the intent to preserve for posterity. The family's efforts over several decades provided one model for historic preservation and boosted Virginia City's economy, helping to keep the community alive. After Charles Bovey's death in 1978, little more than very basic maintenance was done on any of the buildings in Virginia City or Nevada City. By 1989, many of the Bovey-owned properties were for sale. In 1997, the State of Montana purchased the Bovey properties in Virginia City and Nevada City for \$6.5 million. The state now owns about half the historic buildings in Virginia City and all of the historic community of Nevada City.<sup>29</sup>

**Sheridan, Montana Historic Context**

The town of Sheridan, Montana is located in Madison County, and sits on the east side of the northern portion of the Ruby Valley along Mill Creek, one of the Ruby River's major tributaries. Sheridan is located only a few miles downstream from the mouth of Mill Creek's canyon in the Tobacco Root Mountains, and their snow-capped peaks provide a scenic background to the local landscape. Mill Creek and the two drainages to the north, Indian Creek and Wisconsin Creek, all carry relatively significant amounts of spring runoff from mountain snow pack. The creeks serve as major sources of irrigation for the lower Ruby Valley. The smaller Ruby Valley communities of Laurin and Alder are approximately 7 and 10 miles southeast of Sheridan. Virginia City, the county seat of government is approximately 9 miles east of Alder at Alder Gulch, which is known historically as the most productive placer gold region in Montana.

With fertile soil, lush native grasses, and abundant water and timber resources, as well as close proximity to rich metal deposits, the Sheridan area of the lower Ruby Valley was one of the earliest regions of Montana to experience permanent Euro-American settlement. One of the first known Euro-Americans to enter the land now known Sheridan was James Gammell, who led a small party of trappers from Utah into the lower Ruby Valley in the summer of 1856 to trade with regional tribes. Gammell continued trapping and trading into the fall before journeying toward the Yellowstone region. He returned to the Ruby Valley, where he spent the winter. That spring, Gammell traveled back to Utah, but he returned to region in 1862, arriving in Bannack.<sup>30</sup>

Tiring of the nomadic life, Gammell purchased a saw mill at Fort Benton, and, with a team of mules, hauled the mill from Fort Benton to today's Brandon, located 3 miles northeast of Sheridan. In the spring of 1864, Gammell's family joined him on a homestead located immediately northwest of present-day Sheridan, shown on the 1869 General Land Office survey map of the area. At this same time, the flow of miners and freight through the Ruby Valley increased substantially throughout 1864. The first major roads through the region came on the heels of the discovery of gold in 1863, linking the Bannack and Alder Gulch camps with Fort Benton as well as to steamship navigation along the Missouri River. The discovery of gold near Helena in 1864, just 140 miles north of Virginia City only increased the regional population of

<sup>27</sup> Ellingson, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ellingson, 3

<sup>29</sup> Ellingson, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Melvina Lott and Mrs. G.W. Rightenour, *History of Madison County, Montana*. (Madison County Federated Women's Club writings, 1925-1931.) Chapter IX.



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miners and settlers, and in 1865 the Gilmer and Salisbury Stage Company established the primary route between the two gold centers known as the Virginia City-Helena road (today's State Highway 287), demonstrated on the 1869 General Land Office survey map.<sup>31</sup>

By the mid-1860s, small cabins began to be constructed at the intersection of the Virginia City-Helena Road and the side road (or Mill Creek Road) which led to Brandon and the Gammell mill. Two cabins were constructed on the east side of the road, where today's Ruby Hotel now stands. Across the road, Rozelle P. Bateman built two cabins, and established a small store and informal hotel. Settlers soon established a small schoolhouse near the Bateman cabins, and the role of Bateman himself was soon magnified. In 1867, a post office was established with Bateman as postmaster, and he dubbed the fledgling community "Sheridan," in honor of famed U.S. Army General Phillip Sheridan.<sup>32</sup>

In 1871, Bateman received, through the use of preemption, the patent to 160 acres of land on which his buildings stood and constructed a new, two-story log cabin, moving his store and the post office into the new building. That year, the community held its first church services, and a second, larger mercantile opened for business, carrying both mining and agricultural implements.

While the first religious services were held by Methodist preacher Reverend George Comfort in 1868, it was not until 1873 when the first church was built under the direction of Reverend Hugh Duncan, on land donated by Bateman. Duncan himself later became locally prominent, establishing the so-called "Duncan District," a family-based ranch compound, approximately one mile west of Sheridan. The following year, Bateman platted the Sheridan town site, a mere 15 blocks of varying sizes. It straddled the Virginia City-Helena Road, which essentially became Main Street in Sheridan, while the segment of Mill Creek Road that headed east was renamed Mill Street. Likewise, the western segment of Mill Creek Road became Water Street.

Sheridan continued to grow at a slow but steady rate. By 1879, 150 people called the Sheridan area home. Its location along the Virginia City-Helena Road, the continued agricultural settlement in the well-watered lower Ruby Valley, and the active nearby placer gold mining all contributed to its development. In 1884, Michael Leeson's *History of Montana* (1888) notes that the small town boasted three sawmills, two flouring mills, two merchants, including a "dealer in wagons and agricultural implements," as well as a shoemaker, butcher shop, carpenter, blacksmith, church and schoolhouse, saloon, and hotel/livery stable.<sup>33</sup>

This growing economic infrastructure and stable population led to improvements to Sheridan's built environment. By the 1890s, most the town's early, rough-hewn log cabin buildings had been replaced by single-story, wood-framed buildings with simple storefronts and false fronts. But in the 1890s, civic improvements began to take on a new sense of permanence. Early in the decade, Sheridan incorporated, and developers began using masonry for the first time in commercial construction. Examples of this include the brick Rossiter Building located at 115 S. Main, built c. 1897 and listed in the National Register in 1999, and the 1896 cobblestone Christ Episcopal Church at 302 S. Main, listed in the National Register in 1988.<sup>34</sup>

Prominent among these new buildings was the Ruby Hotel. Located at the north end of Sheridan's historic commercial core, the two-story hotel is composed of a 1889 wood-frame section which comprises one-third of the building. This portion housed a general store. The remaining two-thirds of the building are built of brick and comprise the 1893 hotel.

<sup>31</sup> Bureau of Land Management. General Land Office Survey Map, Township 4 South, Range 5 West, 1869.

<sup>32</sup> Lott and Rightenour, Chapter IX.

<sup>33</sup> Leeson, 792.

<sup>34</sup> "Sheridan—Southeast, Madison County. MT Highway 287 Reconstruction Project: Cultural Resource Inventory and Evaluation," (Prepared by Renewable Technologies, Inc. for the Montana Department of Transportation, 2007) 14.

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The 1889 portion of the building was constructed by William J. Haverstack who lost ownership of the property over a mortgage dispute with financier Frederick Hermsmeyer. German immigrant Hermsmeyer, who had made a fortune at Alder Gulch, took ownership of the property in 1892-93 and began construction of the brick addition. When completed in late-1893, the Ruby Hotel was the largest and most substantial building in Sheridan. The hotel stayed under the ownership of the Hermsmeyer family until 1932.<sup>35</sup>

Though slowly developing, Sheridan had no direct rail service. Until 1890, Dillon remained the nearest point on the railroad, over 30 miles from Sheridan that meant days of freighting for Rudy Valley residents to get their agricultural and mineral products to markets. Then, the Northern Pacific established a station at Whitehall. Finally, in 1895, the Northern Pacific began construction of a secondary line between Whitehall and Twin Bridges that was eventually intended to reach Alder. However, slow construction continued for years, and it was not until January 1902 that a depot was finally established at Sheridan and trains began rolling through the Ruby Valley.

The arrival of the railroad immediately stimulated agricultural and mineral production. The 1902 Sheridan business directory lists, for the first time, five hardrock mines along Wisconsin Creek.<sup>36</sup> But while mining production and wealth remained cyclical, years of higher than normal precipitation during the first decades of the twentieth century stimulated new levels of agricultural production through World War I. However, the railroad also impacted some local businesses' negatively, as Sheridan area flour mills and sawmills were closed. Local farms found it economical to ship their products out of the valley for processing, and local sawmills could not compete with a new lumberyard in Sheridan that used the railroad to stock finished lumber that had been milled more cheaply at larger facilities outside the Ruby Valley.

Even with the coming of the railroad, water remained the vital component of agricultural activities in the Sheridan area since the first Euro-American farmers and ranchers began settlement in the early-1860s. Mill, Wisconsin, and Indian Creeks were and remain the major suppliers of irrigation waters in the area, and many of the farmers and ranchers have developed their own small-scale irrigation systems. Generally consisting of a simple water diversion structure and ditch along a creek, some ranchers pooled resources to develop larger systems for shared use. Besides ditches, these systems had a small reservoir for water storage. By the twentieth century, a fairly-extensive network of privately-owned and maintains irrigation ditches covered Sheridan-area agricultural lands.

Growing wealth allowed a new class of professionals to establish themselves in Sheridan, giving rise to a Progressive-era middle class. By World War I, a variety of professionals offered services in Sheridan, including physicians, a dentist, lawyers, engineers, and insurance and real estate agents. Additionally, the town became home to the offices of the United States Forest Service's Beaverhead National Forest Madison District, as well as the offices of the Madison River Electric Company, which included the construction of an electric substation in Sheridan. Local development is reflected in the growing population. By 1900, the population of Sheridan stood at 300. By 1920, the population had reached 538 people.<sup>37</sup>

But the coming of the 1920s saw the beginning of the end for the burgeoning rural economy, both at local and national levels, a trend which continued until World War II. A dramatic drop in farm commodities following World War I and the emergence of terrible drought conditions brought economic chaos to farmers and ranchers throughout the American West, including Montana. Fortunately, lower Ruby Valley farmers, like their counterparts in the well-watered Gallatin Valley, weathered the drought better than the region's dry land farmers. Sheridan's population experienced a minor drop during these years, and local New Deal programs, such as the paving and transformation of the Virginia City-Helena Road into

<sup>35</sup> Renewable Technologies, Inc. 44.

<sup>36</sup> Renewable Technologies, Inc. 9.

<sup>37</sup> United States Census on Population and Housing 1940. 622.

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today's Highway 287 provided some relief to the period's economic woes. Still, the overall population of Madison County plunged during the 1920s. The federal census for 1920 stood at 7, 495. After ten years of drought and economic depression, Madison county's population was reduced to 6, 323.<sup>38</sup>

The region's need to combat drought conditions led to other New Deal programs. In 1936, local interests convinced both state officials and federal Public Works Administration to construct and finance a large-scale irrigation project. The Ruby Reservoir and canal system became one of 17 state-federal reclamation projects to be built in Montana during the Depression. The reservoir and canal were completed in 1938, though the entire irrigation network was not finished until 1943. The West Bench Canal eventually served nearly two dozen farmers, while the eastern Vigilante Canal eventually extended to Wisconsin Creek, just north of Sheridan, dispersing water into new ditches as well as some of Sheridan's oldest systems.

During the 1940s, the Ruby Valley economy revived somewhat as Americans benefited from the unprecedented economic growth of the postwar era. However, the revival did not translate into an economic boom. Interestingly, improvements to the state highway mirrored some of the effects of the railroad, with local residents using the highway to seek professional services in Dillon or even Butte, and bypassing local professionals. Additionally, the valley's population of farmers and ranchers also began to slowly decline, beginning a pattern of ranch consolidation and population loss that continued throughout the ensuing decades.

Despite consolidation, agriculture has remained the mainstay of the local economy, in addition to the promotion of tourism in recent years. Further, some ranchers have sold their ranches for redevelopment as wealthy residential subdivisions or large, single-family estates. Many of Sheridan's brick historic commercial blocks remain, though many of these buildings have sustained extensive exterior and interior alterations.

### **The History of the Ferris/Hermsmeyer/Fenton Ranch**

The history of the Ferris/Hermsmeyer/Fenton ranch begins with the transitory and westward trending nature of the American population of the nineteenth century coupled with the magnetic pull of mineral wealth throughout the American West during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Jane (or Jennie) Ferris (maiden name unknown) was born in Scotland in 1830.<sup>39</sup> By the early-1850s, her family had immigrated from Britain to the United States, settling in Illinois. A teacher, Jane eloped with a Henry Ferris in 1857, apparently against her father's wishes, and relocated to Colorado. For the next four years, the Ferris' lived in the mining camps of Golden and Mountain City, where Henry worked the mines and Jane boarded miners. In 1858, a son named Charles was born, and two years they had a daughter, Millicent Montania.<sup>40</sup>

In June 1864, Henry Ferris set out for Montana as word of the Alder Gulch strikes spread through the continent. He sent for his family later that year, but was killed in a mining accident before they reached him. Historic accounts state that Jane Ferris received word of her husband's death while en route, and chose to return to Mountain City.<sup>41</sup>

The following year, however, Jane and her family reached Virginia City, where she resided for a short time. By 1866, the Ferris family relocated to the Sheridan area, settling on what would become the historic ranch. At that time, Ferris' property was apparently part of a larger property owned by a John Barber (or Barbour), who had claimed the land in 1864.

<sup>38</sup> United States Census on Population and Housing 1940. 622.

<sup>39</sup> United States Census Bureau. "Schedule 1, Inhabitants of Madison County, 1870," (Census on Population and Housing, 1870) 16.

<sup>40</sup> Madison County History Association. *Pioneer Trails and Trials: Madison County, 1863-1920*. (Madison County, MT: Madison County History Association, 1976) 830.

<sup>41</sup> Madison County History Association, 830.

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The 1869 General Land Office map for the area shows that the claim (the northwest quarter ¼ of Section 33) was then a portion of a ranch labeled as owned by a "Barbour" and at least one structure is visible on the map.<sup>42</sup>

According to local history, Jane Ferris worked as a housekeeper (the 1870 individual census lists her occupation as "keeping house") until John Barber died c. 1872. In July 1872, using the 1841 Preemption Act, Jane Ferris sought to patent the 160 acres located in northwest quarter of Section 33. In the application, Ferris stated that she had resided on the land since May 1866. The application also includes a brief property description, noting that the property contained "a dwelling house [sic] 18 by 36 feet 3 Rooms Board floor Board and Dirt Roof 4 doors 3 windows." The application also described an "18 by 20 foot shack corrals [sic] and other outbuildings that she [Ferris] appraises as worth at least five hundred dollars."<sup>43</sup> That amount of \$500 corresponds to the "Value of Real Estate" listed by Ferris in the 1870 census. The deed for the property under preemption was finalized in August 1872. These historic buildings and structures—the original dwelling, a log cabin (feature 1) as well as the 18' by 20' barn (feature 8) and ditch (feature 11) remain intact on the ranch.<sup>44</sup>

The 1841 Preemption Act used by Ferris was passed by Congress in response to the demands of the Western states that squatters be allowed to preempt lands. Immigrants often settled on public lands before they could be surveyed and auctioned by the U.S. government, clearly the case with Barber and Ferris, who were residing and developing the land prior to the 1869 federal survey. At first the squatter claims were not recognized, but in 1830 Congress passed the first of a series of temporary preemption laws. Opposition to preemption came from Eastern states, which saw any encouragement of western migration as a threat to their labor supply. A permanent preemption act was passed only after the Eastern states had been placated by the principle of distribution, where the proceeds of the government land sales would be distributed among the states according to population, a remedy which clearly favored the East. Distribution was discarded in 1842, but preemption survived. The act of 1841 permitted settlers to stake a claim of 160 acres and after a year of residence to purchase it from the government for as little as \$1.25 an acre before it was offered for public sale. After the passage of the 1862 Homestead Act, the value of preemption for bona fide settlers declined, and the practice more and more became a tool for speculators.

Generally, the use of preemption to acquire property was fairly common in the late-nineteenth century Sheridan area. As the mineral wealth of Alder Gulch played out during the late 1860s and into the 1870s, some miners were naturally inclined to attempt new forms of economic viability. However, official General Land Office surveys of the Ruby Valley were not complete, prompting significant local individuals such as Rozelle P. Bateman in 1871, James Gemmell in 1873, and Hugh Duncan in 1874 to use preemption to secure 160 acres of land. Overall, approximately fifty farmsteads were established in the Sheridan region using preemption during the 1870s. By the 1880s, this number fell dramatically to approximately twelve such applications, some of which were cancelled.<sup>45</sup> By this time, surveys of Montana were complete and use of the 1862 Homestead Act as well as cash sales were much more common. Congress repealed the Preemption Act in 1891.

Locally what was quite uncommon, and thus, significant, was the use of preemption by a woman. Jane Ferris appears to be the only woman in Sheridan-area history to use preemption to secure land during the formative decades of the 1870s and 1880s, making the property historically significant within the context of the rural settlement patterns during the late-nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup> While she was one of the first, Ferris was not the only woman, of course, single or married,

<sup>42</sup> General Land Office Survey Map, 1869.

<sup>43</sup> Register of the Land Office. "Proof of the Right of Pre-emption: Certificate No. 443, Jane Ferris," Issued Helena, MT, July 1872.

<sup>44</sup> "Proof of the Right of Pre-emption: Certificate No. 443, Jane Ferris. 1872.

<sup>45</sup> Montana Tract Books, Volumes 37, 38, 39.

<sup>46</sup> Montana Tract Books.

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eventually to claim land in the area. Subsequent women included Catherine Canaday, who purchased 160 acres just a few miles from Ferris' claim in 1876, and Christina Duncan, who arrived with her family in 1869 and patented her own 160-acre homestead adjacent to her late-husband Hugh's land in 1894. Indeed the practice of women acquiring lands adjacent to family claims continued through the early 1920s in the Sheridan area and throughout the West.

Why Ferris originally came west appears to fit into established historical patterns. In *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest* (1997), noted historian Gregory H. Nobles states that there was no single factor in why nineteenth century Americans would come west, suggesting instead that there were "a whole host of psychological and economic motives."<sup>47</sup> He notes that gold seekers, predominantly from the lower-middle class, like the Ferris family, were the most likely group to undertake the journey west. However, Nobles also asserts that whatever motivated men to emigrate cannot also be ascribed to women. The decision to move west was always made by the head of the household, and while untold numbers of individual males came west, women, like Jane Ferris, most often came west as part of a family. Generally, while men embarked on new economic opportunities in the west, women performed the same traditional tasks as they did back home—cooking, cleaning, and caring for children.

While echoing this view of the role of women in the American West, the prominent historian Patricia Limerick observed that women have been essentially invisible in most historic accounts of the establishment of the west. Limerick notes that throughout much of the twentieth century, scholarship on nineteenth century women in the west concentrated on the study of prostitution. In her classic study *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1987), Limerick provides an example from 1867 Virginia City, Montana, where a man, convicted of killing a prostitute, found support among the town's "respectable women," who circulated a petition that sought to commute the man's death sentence. To these ladies, the victim was "only" a prostitute, and meanwhile, the widowed Jane Ferris toiled anonymously on her land only twenty miles away. Ferris would have been invisible to traditional studies of history which focused on an epic telling of the opening of the American West.

In fact, Limerick reports that the truth is far from the stereotypical view of women in the west. She describes new studies which "show female western settlers as full and vigorous participants in history,"<sup>48</sup> and "that a recent close study of homesteading in Colorado demonstrates that single women took advantage of the spinster's and widow's right to claim land..."<sup>49</sup> In two counties, land entries for such women ranged between 12 and 18 percent.

Part of the reason for the exclusion of women in our history comes from the traditional view that women did not work. In her historiography of U.S. women's history, which appeared in *The New American History* (1997), historian Linda Gordon wrote that "studies of women's labor began with the task of dispelling that notion, dating from the Victorian Era, that women did not work."<sup>50</sup> Gordon notes that the idea of a "family wage," the premise that working class men could alone earn enough to support a family was largely a myth, which contributed to the idealized notion of dependence by women on men. Yet Gordon notes that women were, throughout the nineteenth century, contributing significantly to the family economy, maintaining gardens and livestock, taking in borders as well as laundry and ironing. For decades, historians have presented domesticity as idleness; in reality, it meant unrelenting labor for women like Jane Ferris.

These conditions, as well as way many traditional historians, such as Frederick Jackson Turner, who recorded and narrated the growth of the American West, contributed to the near invisibility of women in the west. The experience of Jane Ferris turns these notions of the role on women in the west on their heads, and provides an important example of the

<sup>47</sup> Gregory H. Nobles, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 181.

<sup>48</sup> Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, (W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> Limerick, p. 53.

<sup>50</sup> "U.S. Women's History." Linda Gordon, in *The New American History*, Eric Foner, ed. (Temple University Press, 1997), 267.

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evolution of our understanding of our history. Like her counterparts in Colorado, Ferris used preemption to acquire land to support her family. Unlike the Colorado experience, Ferris appears to be the only single woman to use this federal act to establish a property claim in the Sheridan, Montana region. Her “invisibility” in history is only an indication of the way history has been studied and reported for over a century, yet her experience is clearly an important one that demonstrates the role of women in the American West as heads of households. Now visible, Ferris’ experience on the Montana frontier is new information on the way women came west, claimed land, and took on the role as a head of household and sole family provider. The ranch is clearly historically unique in the region as an intact example of the use of preemption by a widow. In this way, the property is a singular local representation of regional settlement patterns and women’s history.

Unfortunately, Ferris was unable to enjoy her home for very long. She died in 1873 when her daughter was 13 and her son 15. While little is known about Charles, Millicent remained in Sheridan, living with a local school teacher named Minerva Noble, who had a son named Herbert. Herbert and Millicent were engaged, but marriage was forbidden by Minerva Noble until Millicent turned 18. In the meantime, Millicent returned to her mother’s family in Illinois. It appears that the Noble family maintained the Ferris property during this period.<sup>51</sup>

In 1877, Herbert and Millicent Noble were married in Utah, and the couple returned to Madison County. As the patent provided ownership to “Jane Ferris and her heirs”, they returned to the property and began ranching. In 1882, the Noble family moved to Beaverhead County, Montana, selling the 160 acre ranch to Frederick Hermsmeyer in 1883.<sup>52</sup>

### The Hermsmeyer Family

Frederick Hermsmeyer and his family represent both the historic presence and persistence of German ethnicity in the Ruby Valley. Beginning in the 1860s, German immigrants like Hermsmeyer attracted to the economic opportunities offered at Alder Gulch. German immigration to the United States was tied to the economic and political chaos in Germany during the 1860s and 1870s. During that time, Germany was racked by economic turmoil, conflicts between Church and State, and most significantly, long-term, seemingly endless wars related to German unification. For many Germans, immigration to the United States and especially the American West represented more than simple economic opportunity—it represented personal preservation.

The 1870 federal census for the vast Montana Territory demonstrates a total population of 20, 595, with approximately 8,000 individuals born outside the United States. Native Germans accounted for 1, 233 people, second only to the 2,000 Chinese that resided in Montana at that time.<sup>53</sup> By 1890 in Madison County, the census shows that Germans comprised the second-highest foreign-born population, behind only Canadians.<sup>54</sup> By 1910, foreign-born Germans and those born in the United States to German-born parents represented the highest ethnicity in Madison County.<sup>55</sup> These local demographic developments mirror nationwide trends, because by World War I, foreign-born Germans represented approximately 25% of the total foreign-born population in the United States.<sup>56</sup> Today, German ancestry is still strongly represented in Madison County, with 22% of the population of German descent.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Lott and Righenour, Chapter IX., and Madison County History Association, 831.

<sup>52</sup> Lott and Righenour, Chapter IX.,

<sup>53</sup> United States Census Bureau. “Special Nativity By States and Territories, 1870.” Washington, D.C.: Census of the United States and Territories; Census on Population and Housing, 1870. July 2007. 336.

<sup>54</sup> United States Census on Population and Housing 1890. 339.

<sup>55</sup> United States Census on Population and Housing 1910. 1154.

<sup>56</sup> United States Census on Population and Housing 1910. 782.

<sup>57</sup> “Madison County, Montana: Ancestry and Family History.” <http://www.epodunk.com/cgi-bin/genealogyInfo.php?locIndex=22329>,

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Frederick Hermsmeyer was one of late-nineteenth century Sheridan's leading citizens. Born in Germany in 1832, Hermsmeyer came to the United States when he was 20, settling in Cincinnati, OH and working as a carpenter. In the late-1850s, he relocated to California and began gold mining, where he met with moderate success. By 1866, he had arrived at the Alder Gulch digging and began working various claims. Over the next decade he made an estimated \$80,000, and parlayed his earnings into various real estate ventures and investments.<sup>58</sup>

In 1870, he returned to Cincinnati and married a Menna (or Minnie) Willmire, returning to Alder Gulch that same year. He continued mining until 1877, when he purchased a sawmill six miles east of Sheridan. It was in 1883, during his years as a sawmill owner, that he purchased the historic ranch. After settling there, Fred Hermsmeyer and his family of six children were joined by a relative, George (likely Fred's nephew, though George has also been identified as Fred's brother), George's wife Anna, and their children Minnie, Harry and Louis.<sup>59</sup>

By the mid-1880s, Fred Hermsmeyer had moved his family to Sheridan, to a residence at 207 S. Main Street that he had also purchased c. 1883. He retired from a lifetime of manual labor and began a new role as a commercial developer, building Sheridan's Ruby Hotel in 1893-94. His Main Street dwelling was featured in a sketch of Sheridan in Leeson's *History of Montana* (1888).<sup>60</sup> According to Grace McClurg, a granddaughter of George Hermsmeyer, George Hermsmeyer and his family remained on the property, ranching and farming. George died in 1917, and the following year, his wife Anna married James Duncan, the eldest son of Hugh Duncan of the nearby Duncan District.

It was during the Hermsmeyer era of ownership, from c. 1883 to c. 1917 that the historic property began to take the shape that is still expressed today. The Ferris-era log cabin and outbuildings remained in use, while a large two-story residential addition was made to the log cabin (feature 1) in c. 1900. Further buildings directly attributable to Fred Hermsmeyer include the log bunkhouse (feature 2), located immediately northeast of the main residence. This was confirmed in the 1950s, when two of Fred Hermsmeyer's daughters, Rose and Annie, visited the property and confirmed to the Fenton family that their father had constructed the bunkhouse as a separate bedroom for the two girls. It is likely, too, that the Hermsmeyer's constructed the substantial root cellar (feature 4), horse barn (feature 9), and blacksmith shop (feature 6) built prior to the property's 1937 acquisition by the Fentons.

The Hermsmeyer phase of architectural development on the ranch, represented most significantly by the c. 1900 two-story addition of the main residence, is one of the handful of local buildings to accurately reflect the civic development of the Sheridan-area built environment during the 1890s. During the decade, Sheridan began to evolve beyond the log construction and false-front architecture of the homesteading and village phases to enter a new "civic" phase. The Civic Phase was manifested in the use of brick and the construction of two-story buildings, all of which created a new sense of permanence for the small community. In the town of Sheridan, this phase is represented by the construction of the brick, two-story 1893 Ruby Hotel, the masonry-constructed 1896 Christ Episcopal Church, and the brick 1898 Rossiter Building. The brick and frame, two-story I-style main residence constructed by the Hermsmeyer family stands as a significant residential component of this era.

According to Grace McClurg, her grandmother Anna moved from the ranch to Sheridan soon after her marriage to James Duncan. For the next several years, the ownership of the property is somewhat unclear, with shifting ownership that is reflective of the deteriorating agricultural and economic conditions throughout the West in the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>58</sup> Joaquin Miller, *An Illustrated History of the State of Montana*, (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1894.) n.p.

<sup>59</sup> Lott and Rightenour, Chapter IX.

<sup>60</sup> Leeson, 765.

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County records show that the property passed among several individuals until William Bray took ownership in 1927, then again in 1932. In December 1932, Bray apparently defaulted on a \$12,000 mortgage, and the Vermont Loan and Trust foreclosed. In May 1934, the Monaduock Savings Bank took possession of the mortgage.<sup>61</sup>

**The Fenton Family**

On June 11, 1937, (John) Stanley and Helen Fenton purchased the ranch from the bank for \$3,250. Stanley Fenton was born in 1897 in Nebraska, the son of Charles Fenton, a circuit-riding Methodist preacher and his wife Amanda. His family eventually relocated to eastern Montana, and Stanley attended Montana State University and served in World War I before graduating from Utah State University in Logan, Utah. Helen, meanwhile, was born in 1902 in Utah to James and Blanche Brim. At age 12, she began an apprenticeship at the Provo Public Library, and graduated from Utah's Proctor Academy in 1919.<sup>62</sup>

In 1922, Stanley and Helen were married in Provo, Utah. Their son, Jack, was born in Provo the following year. In 1925, the Fentons relocated to McGill, Nevada, when Stanley began work as an engineer for the Nevada Consolidated Copper Company. There, daughter Virginia was born the same year. By 1930, the Fentons returned to ranching, living near Coeur D' Alene, Idaho before moving, permanently, to the Sheridan area in 1932, and purchasing the ranch five years later.

Over the ensuing decades, the family became quite active in the Sheridan community as the Fentons maintained their ranch. Stanley was a member of several local boards, served as Secretary of the Madison County Farm Union, helped compose the state Farmers Unions bylaws, and was a former president and secretary of the Tobacco Root Livestock Association. He also worked for many years (and was ultimately successful) in extending the Vigilante Canal, served for many years on the advisory board for Beaverhead National Forest, worked as a U.S. Conciliation Commissioner (a forerunner of today's conflict resolution forums) during the Depression. Stanley also served on various county committees during World War II, including the chairmanship for the county gas rationing program for farm machinery and trucks.<sup>63</sup>

The Fentons also made a number of improvements to the historic property during the initial years of their ownership, coinciding with the end of the Depression and later the economic optimism following World War II. These include a vehicle garage (feature 5), built by Stanley and a neighbor in 1942, as well as a substantial log chicken house (feature 7), constructed by Stanley Fenton in 1946. Helen Fenton also constructed a large garden in the northwest portion of the property.<sup>64</sup>

In 1943, the Fenton's adopted a daughter, Mary Ann, from the Montana State Children's Home at the nearby town of Twin Bridges, and began a long-standing interest in the welfare of orphans housed at that institution. Many children had been at the orphanage since birth, and the Fentons's started to provide monthly birthday parties for children at the ranch, for children over the age of six who had birthdays during the past month. Jack Fenton, the son of Stanley and Helen, recalls children curiously and even cautiously touching the sofas and chairs in the house, having never felt cushioned, upholstered furniture before, as well as children who did know that they were to blow out the candles on their cake, having never had a birthday party. The Kiwanis Club later assumed responsibility the parties as a statewide project.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Wuelfing, "Montana Historic Property Record for 144 Duncan District Road."

<sup>62</sup> Madison County History Association. *Progressive Years: Madison County Volume II, 1920-1950*. (Madison County, MT: Madison County History Association, 1982) 223.

<sup>63</sup> Interview, July 5, 2007..

<sup>64</sup> Interview, July 5, 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Interview, July 5, 2007.



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Stanley died suddenly in 1959. Over the next decade, Helena developed a series of new interests, completing a degree in writing at Utah State University in the mid-1960s. In 1969, she became a correspondent for six Montana newspapers, and the Associated Press, winning many awards before retiring in 1980. She lived at the family ranch until her death in 2000. Jack Fenton owns a nearby ranch, while Jack's daughter Kathleen Wuelfing and husband Gus reside and ranch on the property immediately west of the historic property and retain ownership.

**Conclusion**

The Ferris/Hermsmeyer/Fenton Ranch near Sheridan, Montana is reflective of the changing patterns of settlement and agricultural history from 1866 through the mid-twentieth century. Established as a preemption claim by Jane Ferris, this 160-acre parcel retains cultural resources from the area's earliest non-Indian settlement period, through the period of agricultural bounty and increased development of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Typical of Montana ranches in the 1920s and 1930s, the property went through a series of owners during the drought and depression. The period of significance continues to include the further development of the ranch during the Fenton tenancy, during the post-war agricultural period of stronger commodity prices and increased harvests, and concluding in 1959, with the death of Stanley Fenton.

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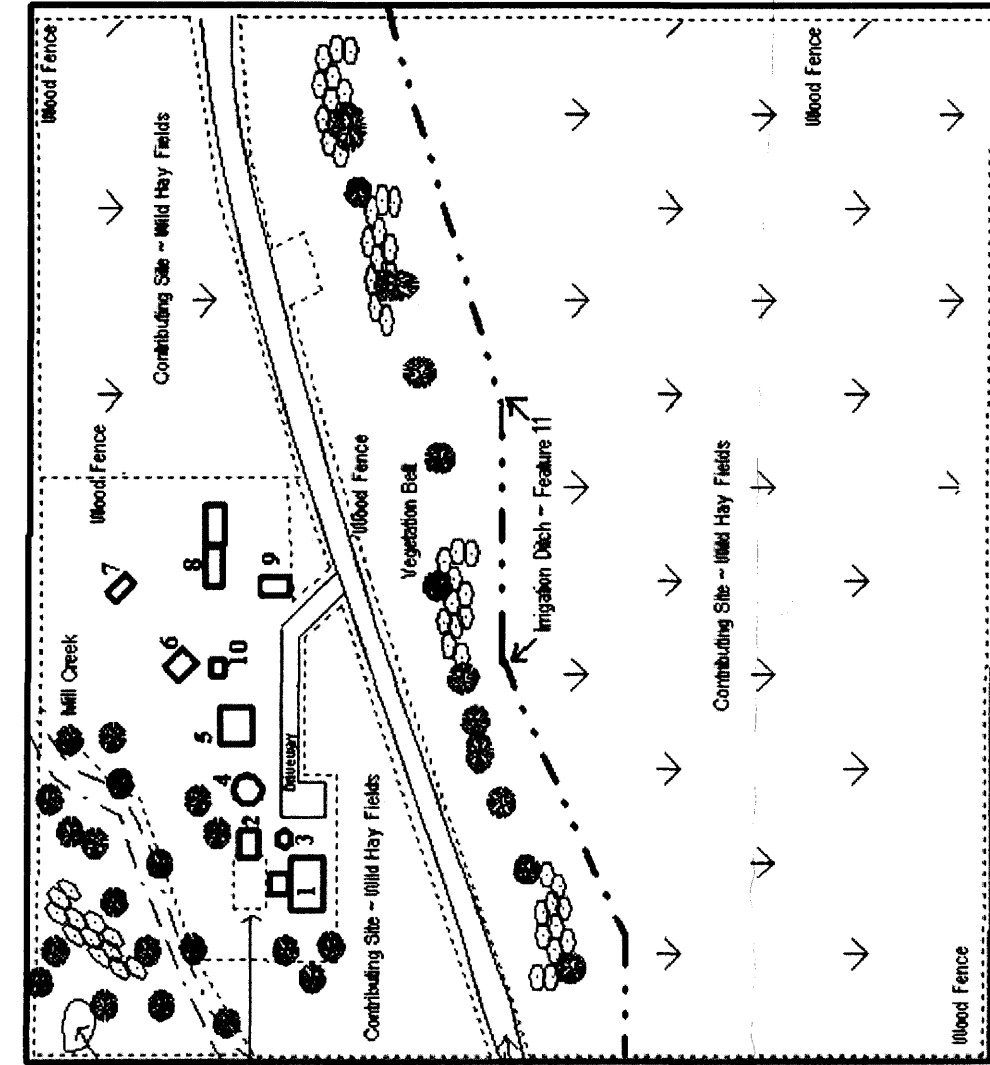
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Sketch Map of the Ferris/Hermsmeyer/Fenton Farm



North, map not to scale

Contributing Site - Garden area

Non-contributing deck

160 Acre Parcel Boundary

Duncan District Road

Key to Built Features

- 1. Main Residence with 1866 Cabin
- 2. Bunkhouse
- 3. Stone Well
- 4. Root Cellar
- 5. Garage
- 6. Blacksmith Shop
- 7. Chicken House
- 8. 1866 Barn & Addition
- 9. Horse Barn
- 10. Brooding Haul
- 11. Irrigation Ditch

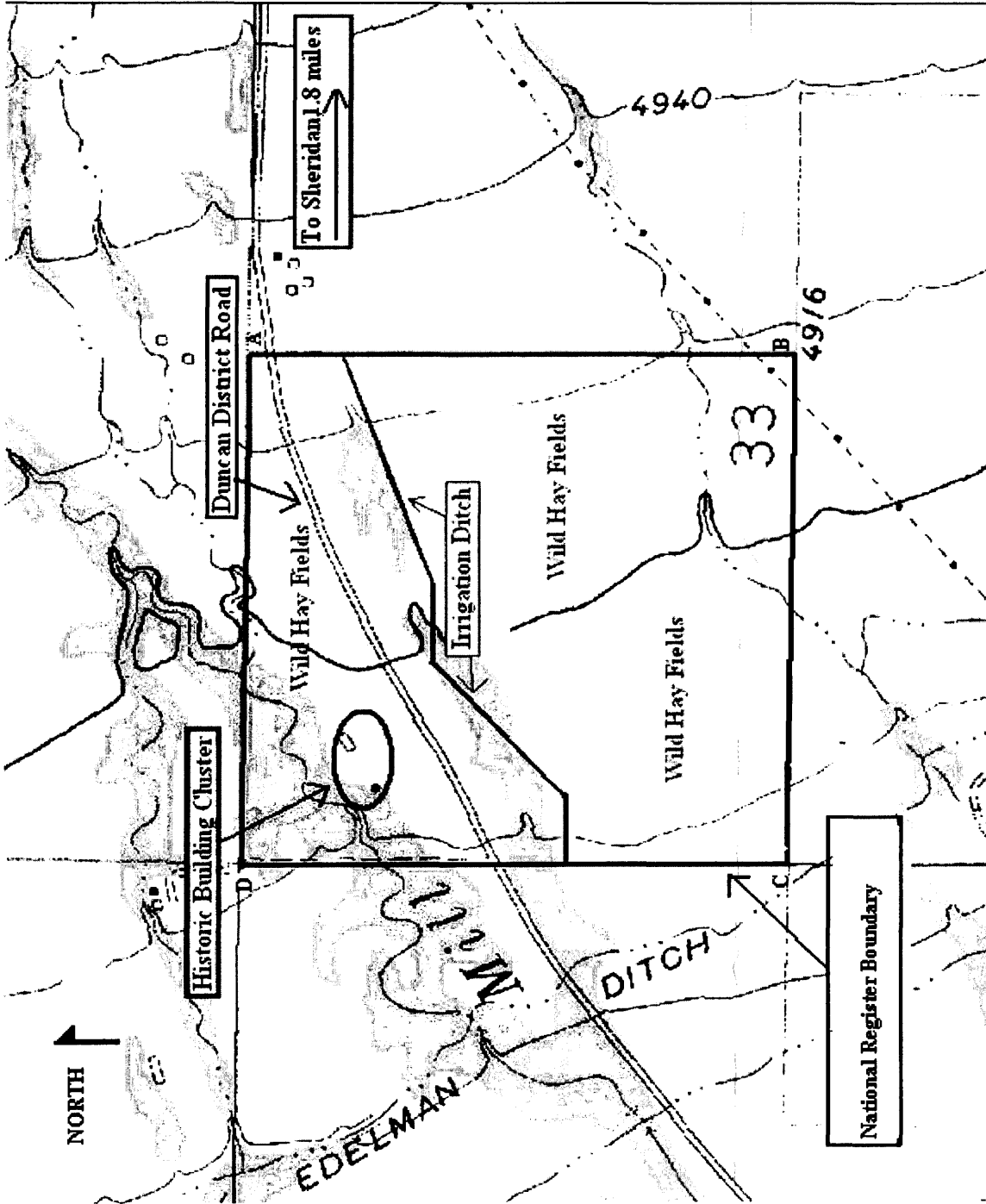
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USGS Sheridan (MT) 7.5 Topographic Map (1979)

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Historic Photographs



George Hermesmeier family, c. 1898, prior to the construction of the two-story addition, view to north showing the 1866 cabin prior to alteration.

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Main residence, shortly after the c. 1900 construction of the two-story addition, view to northeast.



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c. 1947 image of Stanley (left) and Jack Fenton (right), with an unknown individual (center). The main residence and 1866 cabin are viewable in the background, view to west.

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**Photographs**

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

All photographs are of the nominated property, the Ferris/Hermsmeyer/Fenton Ranch, in the vicinity of Sheridan, in Madison County, MT. Photographed by Jim Jenks, June through August 2007. Electronic images stored at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

- Photo 1 of 22. Overview of ranch, view to east.
- Photo 2 of 22. View of original meadows, view to south from main residence.
- Photo 3 of 22. View of Mill Creek to north.
- Photo 4 of 22. Main Residence (feature 1), view to north.
- Photo 5 of 22. Side of Main Residence and 1866 Cabin (feature 1), view to east.
- Photo 6 of 22. Rear of 1866 Cabin (feature 1), view to south.
- Photo 7 of 22. Bunkhouse (feature 2), view to east.
- Photo 8 of 22. Stone well (feature 3), view to southwest.
- Photo 9 of 22. Root cellar (feature 4), view to north.
- Photo 10 of 22. Garage (feature 5), view to north.
- Photo 11 of 22. Blacksmith shop (feature 6), view to northwest.
- Photo 12 of 22. Chicken House (feature 7), view to north.
- Photo 13 of 22. 1866 barn (left) and 1883-1937 addition (right) (feature 8), view to north.
- Photo 14 of 22. Horse barn (feature 9), view to east.
- Photo 15 of 22. Brooding Hut (feature 10), view to north.
- Photo 16 of 22. Irrigation Ditch (feature 11), view to west.
- Photo 17 of 22. Associated agricultural field, wild hay meadow, view to west at the front of the building cluster.
- Photo 18 of 22. Associated agricultural field, wild hay meadow located east of the building cluster, north of Duncan District Road.
- Photo 19 of 22. Associated agricultural field, wild hay meadow with irrigation ditch in foreground, view to southeast.
- Photo 20 of 22. Associated agricultural field, wild hay meadow with vegetation belt in foreground, view to southwest.
- Photo 21 of 22. Helen Fenton Garden, view to northeast.
- Photo 22 of 22. Non-contributing element: The 2006 wood deck, view to northeast.