

004177 ✓

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3 Dec. 1980

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Historic Resources of Challis (Partial Inventory: Architectural Properties)

AND/OR COMMON

## 2 LOCATION

The corporate limits of Challis, excluding the extreme eastern and northern areas; see verbal boundary description.

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Challis

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

STATE

Idaho

CODE

016

COUNTY

Custer

CODE

037

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

Multiple Resources

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Multiple ownership

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Challis

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Idaho

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Custer County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Challis

STATE

Idaho

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Idaho Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1972

\_\_\_ FEDERAL  STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Idaho State Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

Boise

STATE

Idaho

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The town of Challis lies at an elevation of 5,280 feet in Round Valley, a circular valley formed by a bend of the Salmon River as it flows through the southern Salmon River Mountains. To the north the town abuts a bluff of volcanic tuff and columnar rhyolite. U.S. Highway 93, which connects Mackay and Salmon, runs near the eastern edge of town. To the west the valley narrows into Garden Creek Canyon, where cottonwoods are abundant. North, west, east, and south, the valley is surrounded by the rugged, pine-skirted Salmon River Mountains and Lost River Mountains. In this physically isolated and sparsely populated area, the town of Challis grew up as a trade center for mines farther north and west in the central Idaho mountains.

Most prominent among Challis's historic resources are preserved examples of mining-town architecture and several stone buildings constructed from rhyolitic scree and quarried tuff obtained from the bluff above town. These buildings were erected over the forty-seven-year period after the town's beginning in 1876, when a small group assembled to name the settlement for a local miner and rancher, A. P. Challis. By 1879 the town was booming, gaining over the course of that year three new hotels, four new saloons, and several houses. By this time there were local sawmills at work. The following year, according to census figures, Challis had 614 residents. A lithograph from this period, though not absolutely accurate, displays a four-block-long Main Street of one- and two-story false-front or gable-front facades. For two blocks north and south of Main, the streets are lined with rail fences enclosing small houses on generous lots.

By 1890, with the gold rush over, the town had lost population. A fire in the commercial district in 1894 destroyed a number of early business buildings. Merchants were encouraged to rebuild when there was renewed mining activity along the Yankee Fork of the Salmon River, about forty miles west by freight road, in 1896. By 1900, however, population of the Challis precinct had further declined to 387. In 1904 the Yankee Fork mines were mostly shut down and the Round Valley economy was changing from a mining base to a ranching base. Through the first three decades of the twentieth century Challis's population stabilized and steadily grew to 803 people in 1930. The town has had few additions to the original townsite, platted in 1878, which borders so closely on the northern bluff and the Garden Creek Canyon to the west that additions perforce were located on the flat east and south.

If any generalized statement can be made about Challis architecture, it is that Challis buildings are small in scale and modest in design. Main Avenue, a wide thoroughfare that divides the town south and north, has a predominantly one- to one-and-a-half-story streetscape. The commercial buildings include false-fronted or gable-fronted frame and log buildings dating as early as 1895 and dressed rubble and rock structures from the early 1880's through 1922, interspersed with a variety of newer designs expressed in cinder block or clapboard and older structures covered with diagonal siding or 1970's board-and-batten. In new and old commercial architecture, styles are suggested in selective details rather than fully expressed. The early buildings exhibit a classicizing impulse in the use of molded cornices

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and balanced entryways. Very little Queen Anne trim survives in the commercial architecture; the I.O.O.F. Hall is a modest example. One galvanized sheet iron front survives on the Buster Meat Market. Balloon frame, board-and-batten, horizontal log, and rock construction are all present on Main Avenue, presenting a street facade of varied textures. The craftsmanship of the dressed rock facades, in particular, represents skilled work.

The residential architecture of Challis is also modest in size and, in most cases, in design. Probably the oldest existing houses, some built of logs, lie south of Main Avenue. North of Main Avenue, at the foot of the bluff, are the more elaborate two-story dwellings. Except where newer houses or trailers have been added to subdivided lots, Challis homes stand on generous plots set back several feet from dirt streets behind cottonwood, locust, and silver maple trees and other plantings. The architectural style of the residential structures is varied, and the inventory of nominated houses provides a good cross-section. A suggestion of Queen Anne decoration and massing survives on some houses, there is one Italianate "mansion" in town (the Penwell House), and several houses draw on the classicizing elements of the American colonial revival.

The plat of Challis is common to the Western mining town. A supply center rather than a mining camp per se, the town is not squeezed into a narrow pocket between hills. It had only one commercial street--Main--until the recent introduction of strip development along U.S. 93. Residential areas parallel Main Avenue, conforming to the platted streets except in the northern half of town, where the creek bed and the slope to the bluff force streets and house locations to conform to the lay of the land. No park or public square was planned in the original town plat, although newspapers from the 1890's mention areas for racing and picnicking. Public open space does exist now in a large field behind the courthouse and the high school. Within the southern subdivisions, too, there is open space, but this is quickly being built upon. About one quarter of the town's buildings are commercial establishments along Main Avenue. The remainder are residences, with the exception of the elementary and high schools, three churches, the city offices, the courthouse, and scattered outbuildings.

This multiple resource area nomination is based on a survey conducted by Madeline Buckendorf, Idaho Oral History Coordinator; Brian Attebery, a consultant in American studies; and Jennifer Eastman Attebery, a consultant in architectural history and folklore, the writer of this nomination. The survey was conducted on the request of Idaho's State Historic Preservation Officer and local residents in anticipation of Challis's rapid growth with the opening of

(11/78)

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the nearby Cyprus Mines project. The town was surveyed first, with a mapping of all extant structures and a determination of those structures that could possibly be included in an historic district. Only slightly more than one quarter of the town's buildings were eligible for inclusion in an historic district, and no area of town presented a density of historic structures great enough for a standard historic district. The alternative, preparation of a multiple resource nomination, involved mapping and photography of all structures that might be individually eligible for the National Register; preparing an album for the oral historian's use in her interviews with town residents; and revisiting each structure for further inspection and description, searching through Custer County deeds, and reviewing the local newspapers and any other graphic or written sources—which are, for Challis, unfortunately few.

The criteria used to determine individual eligibility included, first, the building's age. No buildings less than fifty years old were considered. This was an easy decision: few Challis buildings of recent vintage are architecturally significant. Second, the fieldworkers discounted all buildings that had been significantly altered or masked with nonperiod siding, fenestration, and additions. Many buildings in Challis fall into this category. Should a preservation architect be as successful as the re-siding salesmen have been in Challis, some of these altered buildings may become eligible as amendments to the multiple resource area. A third principle applied in this nomination was the representation of types, styles, and periods of architecture in the town's history to 1930. Many of the buildings offered for nomination are the best example—often the only unaltered example—of a building type found throughout town. Where possible, the best example is both representative and architecturally interesting. A final criterion, applied rather sparingly, is the condition of the building. In a few cases, a building otherwise eligible has been discounted because it is severely deteriorated, but only when other, better maintained examples of the same type were found. This criterion was especially applied to the log and board-and-batten structures. All of these criteria have been tempered by a consideration of each structure's historical and social importance to Challis. The I.O.O.F. Hall, for example, is covered by 1970's board-and-batten on the front of its lower story—an ahistorical alteration on a clap-board building—but its importance to the town as a social center since it was built in the 1890's convinced the fieldworkers to nominate the building.

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List of Sites (description and significance on attached individual inventory sheets):

1. Old Challis Historic District 004118
2. McKendrick House 004138
3. Penwell House 003835
4. Bill Chivers House 004136
5. Donaldson Rowles House 004132
6. Bill Peck House 004125
7. 247 Pleasant Avenue 004124
8. Clyde Wilkinson House 004140
9. Emmett Hosford House 004135
10. Thomas Chivers House 004123
11. Thomas Chivers Cellar 004124
12. Henry Smith House 004139
13. Board-and-Batten Commercial Building 004136
14. False-Front Commercial Building 004127
15. Bux's Place 004131
16. Challis Cold Storage 003844
17. Stone Building 004137
18. Buster Meat Market 004129
19. Twin Peaks Sports ~~010209~~ 003837
20. Stone and Log Building 004133
21. I.O.O.F. Hall 001673
22. Custer County Jail 004130
23. Challis High School 001675

# 13 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1876-1930		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Challis Multiple Resource Area (Partial Inventory for Architecture) includes a selection of twenty-two individually eligible buildings and one historic district representative of the town's architecture from its settlement as a mining center in 1876 through 1930. These structures—both commercial and residential—are architecturally significant as a remnant of mining supply town architecture in the upper Salmon River drainage. The selection of structures comprises the least altered, most representative, and best preserved examples of the building types and construction techniques observed in an overall inventory of the town.

Michel Bourdon's brigade of Hudson's Bay Company trappers discovered Round Valley in 1822, and a number of fur hunting expeditions came through there for a decade or more. Prospectors arrived in 1864, and after 1870, when miners discovered gold on the Yankee Fork, some ranchers came into the Challis area. A. P. Challis, who had been in John Stanley's gold discovery party through Stanley Basin in 1863, expanded his operation to Round Valley, where he herded cattle. The town grew up as a pack trail station on the trails that linked Custer, Salmon, and other mining towns with the Utah and Northern railway terminals. Its history, like its origins, is closely linked with the transportation system that developed to service the Salmon River Mountain mines, particularly those at Bonanza and Custer on the Yankee Fork.

During the Yankee Fork gold rush of 1878-1879, the town's population grew to about nine families and two hundred additional men. Although the Bannock War did not get near Challis, stone forts and lookouts were constructed in 1878: their remains may be located in future archeological surveys of the town. After the Utah and Northern railroad was completed to Blackfoot in 1879, a Challis-Blackfoot stageline began regular service. The same year, a toll road was cut into the Yankee Fork from Challis, with a Challis-Bonanza stageline.

The settlers who had come to Challis by 1880 were a predominantly Mid-Atlantic- and Midwestern-born group, but a substantial number were immigrants from England, Ireland, and Western Europe. There were, in addition, eight Chinese households. As one would expect, men outnumbered women five to one, and there were few children. Slightly less than half of the population were miners; the remainder were occupied with services and trades necessary for the subsistence of Challis and the surrounding mining towns. Many people were occupied as laborers, teamsters,

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freighters, and packers. The area's eventual change from a mining to an agricultural economy was anticipated by the town's one stock raiser, ten herders, and twelve farmers. Finally, in 1880 Challis had thirty-three carpenters and two stone masons, a substantial number of builders for a town of 614. When Custer County was carved out of the existing Lemhi and Alturas counties in 1881, Challis became the county seat.

Between 1888 and 1896 a road along the Salmon River (following the present route of U.S. Highway 93) from Challis to Clayton and Sunbeam was built, connecting with a road up the Yankee Fork to Bonanza, and the Challis toll road became a free route. This development coincided with a slump in the Yankee Fork mining activity that lasted until about 1896. The Blackfoot News observed in 1894:

Challis has changed but little in the past few years, the greatest change being the vacant places where the great fire of some months ago licked up the hotel and other business houses. The citizens of the town are hopeful of the return of the good old times of the prosperous mining days gone by. Mines of rich ore are still near by, and when work is resumed Challis will be the busy, bustling town as of the past. [Quoted in The Silver Messenger, 18 September, 1894, p. 1, col. 4]

Eighteen ninety-five was a hopeful year for Challis. The local Silver Messenger reported a "building boom," which consisted of three buildings and a church belfry; during the following two years bids were put out for a new school, the Buster Meat Market was erected, and O. E. Penwell purchased the land for his mansion. In September of that year a wagon road was completed to Yellowjacket. There is no indication in the local news that the town's population was further declining, as indeed it was.

Soon after the turn of the century, railway travel was available into Mackay, much closer to Challis, making supplies more accessible than before. During this period, two factors helped stabilize the decline of mining activity: the establishment of Challis National Forest in 1908 (Challis became the headquarters) and the increase of ranching and farming in Round Valley. In 1910, when the General Custer Mill on the Yankee Fork—the major mill in the area—closed, people moved from Custer and Bonanza to Challis and other Salmon

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River towns. Challis developed into a ranching center and gradually grew to 803 people in 1930, the end date for this nomination. Even though the town was then located on a highway and was near a railway terminal at Mackay, a degree of isolation persisted in the Salmon River communities: in 1927, for example, mail was carried by sleigh and horses from Challis to Stanley during the winter.

The structures included in this multiple resource nomination represent building during the first and second Yankee Fork mining booms, and later construction between 1900 and 1930. The earliest datable structure is the Challis Cold Storage (Shoup store, 1881), though some log and board-and-batten structures may predate it. Several of the commercial and institutional structures are constructed of local stone, including the Challis Brewery office (site A), which is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places. According to oral sources, these buildings are the work of Challis stonemason J. C. Fox of Fox and Peters. There was at least one other firm bidding on stonework in Challis, Bristo and Gardner. The nominations include houses, commercial structures, the I.O.O.F. Hall, the county jail, and the 1922 school. No other public buildings survive from the period before 1930, and the one surviving church has suffered from a large rear addition and non-period alterations in its fenestration and entrance.

The Challis Multiple Resource Area includes structures related to one state-wide figure, Governor George L. Shoup, and to several locally prominent figures. Shoup, governor of Idaho during the year before and during the change from territory to statehood (1890), was owner of general mercantile stores in Salmon and Challis (site 16). The I.O.O.F. Hall (site 21) was erected by the local Lodge # 21, which from newspaper accounts was the most important social organization in Challis. Its officers included Hugh C. McKendrick (associated in local memory with site 2), Oscar E. Penwell (first owner of site 3, the town mansion), J. C. Fox (remembered as mason for some of the town's stone buildings), and William H. Peck (associated in local memory with site 6).

The location and growth of Challis were dependent upon the transportation system in the Salmon River Mountains. The availability of building materials was equally dependent on transportation, and the relative isolation of the town encouraged dependence on local materials. Local builders used logs from the creek and foothills, dressed and rubble stone from the Challis bluff, and



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rough-cut lumber from local sawmills. Part of the significance of the nominated buildings is their exhibition of local skills. A number of log buildings (sites 1, 5, and 11), early board-and-batten structures (sites 1 and 13), and stone structures (sites 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, and 23) have been included. In the case of log and stone construction, the use of these local materials has persisted into the twentieth century.

The resource area also documents the building types present in an Idaho mining town. In residential architecture, Challis homes reflect the fact that the Queen Anne, Italianate, and American Colonial Revival styles did reach the relative isolation of the mining area town, with some styles being built later than one would expect in a less isolated setting. Commercial buildings reflect the persistence of the gable storefront, often obscured with a clapboarded false-front. One building—the Buster Meat Market (site 18)—preserves an increasingly rare item in Idaho architecture, a galvanized iron front.

No areas in Challis offered a density of historic structures great enough to warrant drawing up a historic district of any size. One small area—identified in local memory as a very old section of Challis—did yield four structures in close proximity, a half-block. These log and board-and-batten structures have potential as an interpretive site exhibiting methods of folk log construction, and they are offered in nomination as the Old Challis Historic District.

Local residents of Challis and the Custer County Historical Society have shown an interest in the nomination of Challis properties to the National Register. Cyprus Mines, developer of an open-pit mine near Challis, also has shown some interest in initiating a restoration project in Challis. The Custer County Historical Society, owner of structures within the Challis Brewery Historic District (site A), is considering restoration of its district buildings. All sites in this nomination have been included in the Idaho Historic Sites Survey. No local comprehensive plan exists for Challis.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

QUADRANGLE NAME Challis

QUADRANGLE SCALE 15 minute

UTM REFERENCES

A [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

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### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The multiple resource area includes the corporate limits of Challis, Idaho, excluding the land east of U.S. Highway 93 and the land north of UTM point 11/49,32,00.

### LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Jennifer Eastman Attebery, Architectural Historian and Folklorist; Brian Attebery, American Studies Consultant; Madeline Buckendorf, Oral History Coordinator

ORGANIZATION

Idaho State Historical Society

DATE

18 Sep 1980

STREET & NUMBER

610 North Julia Davis Drive

TELEPHONE

208 334 3356

CITY OR TOWN

Boise

STATE

Idaho

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Made Wells*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE 18 Sep 1980

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

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Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman (Boise). 29 April 1879, p. 2.

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