

Benjamin and Miranda Shreve Homestead,
Cow Shed
North of County Road 25
Decker Vicinity
Big Horn County
Montana

HABS No. MT-106-C

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Intermountain Support Office - Denver
National Park Service
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
BENJAMIN AND MIRANDA SHREVE HOMESTEAD,
COW SHED

HABS No. MT-106-C

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: The Benjamin and Miranda Shreve Homestead is in Big Horn County, Montana, in the south-central portion of the state. The homestead site is in the upper Tongue River Valley, and near the eastern shore of Tongue River Reservoir. Access is via Otter Creek Road (County Road 25), which heads eastward from Montana Secondary Highway 314, just above the southern end of the reservoir. Within one mile, a private mine haul road branches north from the county route, and accesses an unimproved two-track lane leading to the site. The homestead is about 1¾ miles northeast of the Highway 314 junction, and is approximately 3½ air miles north of the Wyoming border.

The cow shed is near the west side of the homestead complex, about 210 feet northwest of the house.

Quad: Decker

UTM: Zone: 13; Easting 357990; Northing 4989400

Date of Construction: ca. 1886

Present Owners: Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
1520 E. 6th Avenue
Helena, Montana 59620

Present Use: Abandoned

Significance: The cow shed contributes to the significance of the Benjamin and Miranda Shreve Ranch. The building reflects the site's important association with the agricultural development of the Tongue River Valley during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although in deteriorated condition, the cow shed also continues to display the characteristic features of period vernacular post-and-beam outbuilding construction.

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Historian: Mark Hufstetler
Renewable Technologies, Inc.
Butte, Montana
March 1999

II. HISTORY

As with the other surviving resources at the Shreve property, precise historical information on the cow shed is limited. It may, however, be one of the oldest remaining resources at the site: Benjamin Shreve's testimony supporting his application for a homestead patent stated that he constructed a "Cow shed 16 x 40" on his property sometime between 1886 and 1893.¹ While the dimensions given do not precisely match the size of the surviving structural remains, it still seems probable that the current building is the cow shed described in Shreve's application. The heavy, axe-hewn log structural framing is appropriate for a nineteenth-century pioneer-era homestead outbuilding. The presence of some milled lumber in the building, however, is locally reflective of a later period of historic construction. This suggests alternate possibilities: that the building may be an historic replacement structure, or that it was modified or improved after its initial construction.

III. DESCRIPTION

This feature is a log-framed farm outbuilding, described variously as a barn and a cow shed in other analyses of the site. The cow shed is a rectangular structure, measuring approximately 30 feet (north-south) by 14 feet (east-west). The structure is a good example of vernacular post-and-beam construction; the building skeleton consists of heavy vertical timbers embedded in the ground, and connected by horizontal braces of either milled lumber or poles. While this framework is largely intact, relatively little of the building's exterior cladding remains in place. That which does survive (largely on the west elevation) consists of roughly-cut lumber laid in a board-and-batten pattern. The wall areas also retain framed door and window openings on the east and west elevations; the west elevation door is a Dutch door.

The building has a shallow-pitch gable roof with a log ridgepole and purlins. A series of four vertical interior posts help support the ridgepole. Most of the rough-cut lumber slabs which once covered the roof are now missing. The building has a dirt interior floor; a primitive wooden feed bin runs along a portion of the west wall. Numerous fence posts to the west of the barn mark the probable former location of a corral area.

IV. ENDNOTES

1. General Land Office, Miles City, Montana. "Final Certificate No. 291, Homestead Application No. 506: Benjamin F. Shreve," October 1893. On file, General Land Office Records Group, National Archives, Washington, D.C.