

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

HABS No. MT-106-E

HABS
MT-106-E

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, BLACKSMITH BUILDING

HABS No. MT-106-E

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 blacksmith building is on the north side of the homestead complex, approximately 200 feet north of the house.

Quad: Decker

UTM: Zone: 13; Easting 358040; Northing 4989410

Date of Construction: ca. 1900

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

Present Use: Abandoned

Significance: The blacksmith building contributes to the overall significance of the Benjamin and Miranda Shreve Homestead. The structure represents an important building type commonly found at local agricultural complexes, and reflects the need for the ranch to maintain relative self-sufficiency for its maintenance and repair chores. The building is also significant as an example of the well-crafted stone architecture which characterizes many of the historic ranch buildings in the immediate region. This workmanship remains evident even though the building is deteriorated, and the attention to detail is less than that of the nearby ice house.

Benjamin and Miranda Shreve Homestead,
Blacksmith Building
HABS No. MT-106-E
Page 2

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

II. HISTORY

As with the other surviving resources at the Shreve property, the precise construction date of the blacksmith building is unknown, and little building-specific historical data is available. It is apparently not among the improvements listed in Benjamin Shreve's 1893 homestead patent application for his land.¹ It is likely, however, that the building was constructed within a few years following the patent application. The well-crafted stonework evident in the building is similar to that of other turn-of-the-century ranch buildings in the Tongue River area.

III. DESCRIPTION

This feature consists of the structural remains of a stone blacksmith shop (or farm shop). It displays construction techniques similar to those of the ice house, although the level of craftsmanship is considerably lower. The structure measures approximately 14 feet (north-south) by 16 feet (east-west). Only substantial amounts of the lower portions of the west and north walls remain; the other walls are largely gone, and there is no evidence of the former roof. The surviving walls are approximately 18 inches thick. Considerable mortar remains in place, but there is no evidence of decorative intent in either the stonework or mortaring.

The only evidence of the building's original fenestration pattern is a partially-intact wood-cased window opening centered on the north wall. The building's interior features a simple stone hearth in the room's northeast corner, marking the former location of the blacksmith's forge.

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.