

Standard Oil Company Bulk Depot
Alongside the Burlington Northern Railroad
near Burlington Avenue
Cody vicinity
Park County
Wyoming

HABS No. WY-149

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Standard Oil Company Bulk Depot

HABS No. WY-149

Location: Alongside the Burlington Northern Railroad near Burlington Avenue
Cody vicinity, Park County, Wyoming
Cadastral grid: NE¼, SE¼, Section 30, Township 53N, Range 101W
USGS Quadrangle: Cody, Wyoming (7½ Minute Series, Provisional Edition, 1987)
UTM Coordinates: 12.654200.4933700

Introduction:

The Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS] documentation for the Standard Oil Company Bulk Depot was conducted by Fraser-design of Loveland, Colorado, under contract with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The Bureau has proposed disposing of property in the Cody Industrial Area, which includes the land on which these buildings stand. This carries the potential that one or more of the historic buildings may eventually be demolished without federal oversight. The HABS documentation is intended to mitigate, in part, the impact on the site by this action. Photographic recordation, research and preparation of this report were undertaken in March-June 1997 by Clayton Fraser. The research for this project has involved four principal archival sources: the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office in Cheyenne; and the Park County Assessor's Office, the Park County Historical Society and the Cody Field Office of the Bureau of Reclamation, all located in Cody.

Significance:

Built in the 1920s, when automobile travel and petroleum distribution were in their formative stages in Wyoming, the Standard Oil Company Bulk Depot forms a nexus among the historical themes of transportation, energy and commerce. The facility has functioned for more than seventy years as an intermediate stage between oil refining and gas consumption, which makes it locally significant among the state's oil-related properties. It is additionally distinguished as one of the oldest and best-preserved of the industrial sites that developed in the railyards north of Cody.

The Depot is organized spatially as a series of small-scale frame sheds aligned immediately south of a side track of the Burlington Northern Railroad (see *Site Plan* on page 12). Positioned between the concrete pedestals for elevated fuel tanks (which have been removed), each free-standing shed is fronted with a timber loading dock. Each also has a rear loading door facing the railroad, illustrating the depot's role as a conduit of bulk oil products from supplier to consumer. The complex is starkly utilitarian, without a hint of aesthetic landscaping or architectural site planning. In this it is typical of industrial construction throughout Wyoming.

History:

Cody, Wyoming, was founded in 1896 by its namesake and chief benefactor, William F. (Buffalo Bill) Cody, along with business partners Horace C. Alger and George T. Beck. To water the nascent community and outlying farmlands, the three also established the Cody Canal Company. They hoped to establish a thriving agricultural community here in the Big Horn Basin but were hampered in their efforts to promote the town by the lack of a rail link. In response, Cody and Beck soon began courting both the Northern Pacific and the Burlington and Missouri River railroads for a rail line into town. The Northern Pacific expressed mild interest in building to Cody. It was ultimately the Burlington, however, that reacted with a surveying party in the spring of 1899. As proposed, the 131-mile Burlington rail would branch from the main line at Toluco, Montana, extend over Pryor Gap and terminate at Cody.

The most serious obstacle—the Shoshone River—lay near the southern end of the branch line, just north of Cody. As construction began in May 1900, the railroad was still undecided about how to deal with the river, as George Beck explained:

The Burlington engineers are now at the Springs and for the past few days they have been working on the north side of the river, believing that they can get a cheaper crossing near the (DeMaris Hot) Springs than they can at the mouth of Sage Creek, near the coal bank. The two propositions are to be submitted by the engineers to the Burlington company and if there is any understanding between our people and the Burlington people, or if any influence can be brought to bear, the South side proposition should be insisted upon. The line as located on the South side, runs through the Salisbury location in Section 32 and their depot grounds would have to be some place on the West end of our townsite. If the road goes on the North side of the River we would be practically two miles from a line of road or a possible depot.¹

To Beck's disappointment, the railroad opted not to cross the Shoshone River at all to reach downtown Cody, evidently deciding that building and maintaining a bridge was not worth the expense. Instead the line extended on a bench across the river, terminating north of town. The tracks ran along a 100-foot-wide right-of-way that the railroad had acquired in a perpetual easement from the federal government, on land that had earlier been withdrawn from pre-emption for use by the Shoshone Irrigation Project.² The railroad soon began building a depot at the end of its line, and to provide access to it the town graded a road, which

¹As quoted by David J. Wasden in "The Beginning of the Cody Canal and Townsite," typewritten manuscript, 1975.

²With the construction of the Shoshone Dam (later renamed the Buffalo Bill Dam) in 1905-1910, this land fell under the aegis of the U.S. Reclamation Service, predecessor to today's Bureau of Reclamation.

crossed the Shoshone River on a timber truss bridge. The Burlington's two-story frame depot had been completed by the time that the first train rolled ceremoniously into Cody on November 14, 1901.

Despite the fact that the Burlington's tracks did not even enter Cody, the railroad's land agency, the Lincoln Land Company, demanded ownership of fully half of the new town. Beck chaffed under this usurious order, seeking ways to sidetrack it, but eventually he acceded to the railroad. The town of Cody was platted and incorporated in September 1901 with a population of 550. According to historian Jeannie Cook:

All the development to sustain a new settlement was in place: access to water, lumber mills, coal mines, a stone quarry, brick yard, mercantile, telephone and telegraph service, freight companies, and the railroad. By 1903 Cody had two churches, a school, and a city water system. In 1904 Beck built a power plant, the first wagon road to Yellowstone opened and work began on the Shoshone Reclamation Project.³

The Burlington depot—along with its ancillary structures—for a while represented the only construction along the railroad tracks north of town. Eventually the railyards east of the depot acquired a more heavily industrial appearance, as other rail-related industries developed along the tracks. When construction began on the U.S. Reclamation Service's Shoshone Dam west of town, contractors used the yards as an extended staging area. Between 1905 and 1910 material and equipment were transferred from train cars to horse-drawn wagons for shipment to the damsite.

Soon after the dam's completion, the Burlington began to subdivide its leased right-of-way into variously shaped parcels. The railroad sublet these parcels along with access to its tracks to other commercial concerns, forming an early industrial park aligned along the railroad's length.⁴ Businesses such as stockyards, slaughterhouses and lumber mills found the railyards north of town to be ideally situated: conveniently close to heavy freight transportation and well-removed from the city proper. As these and other enterprises developed along the railroad, North Cody, as the area came to be known, accumulated an assortment of frame industrial structures.

³Jeannie Cook, Lynn Johnson Houze, Bob Edgar and Paul Fees, *Buffalo Bill's Town in the Rockies: A Pictorial History of Cody, Wyoming* (Virginia Beach, Virginia: Doning Company, 1996), 51.

⁴The Standard Oil Company Bulk Depot is situated on Railroad Subdivision No. 29-53-101.

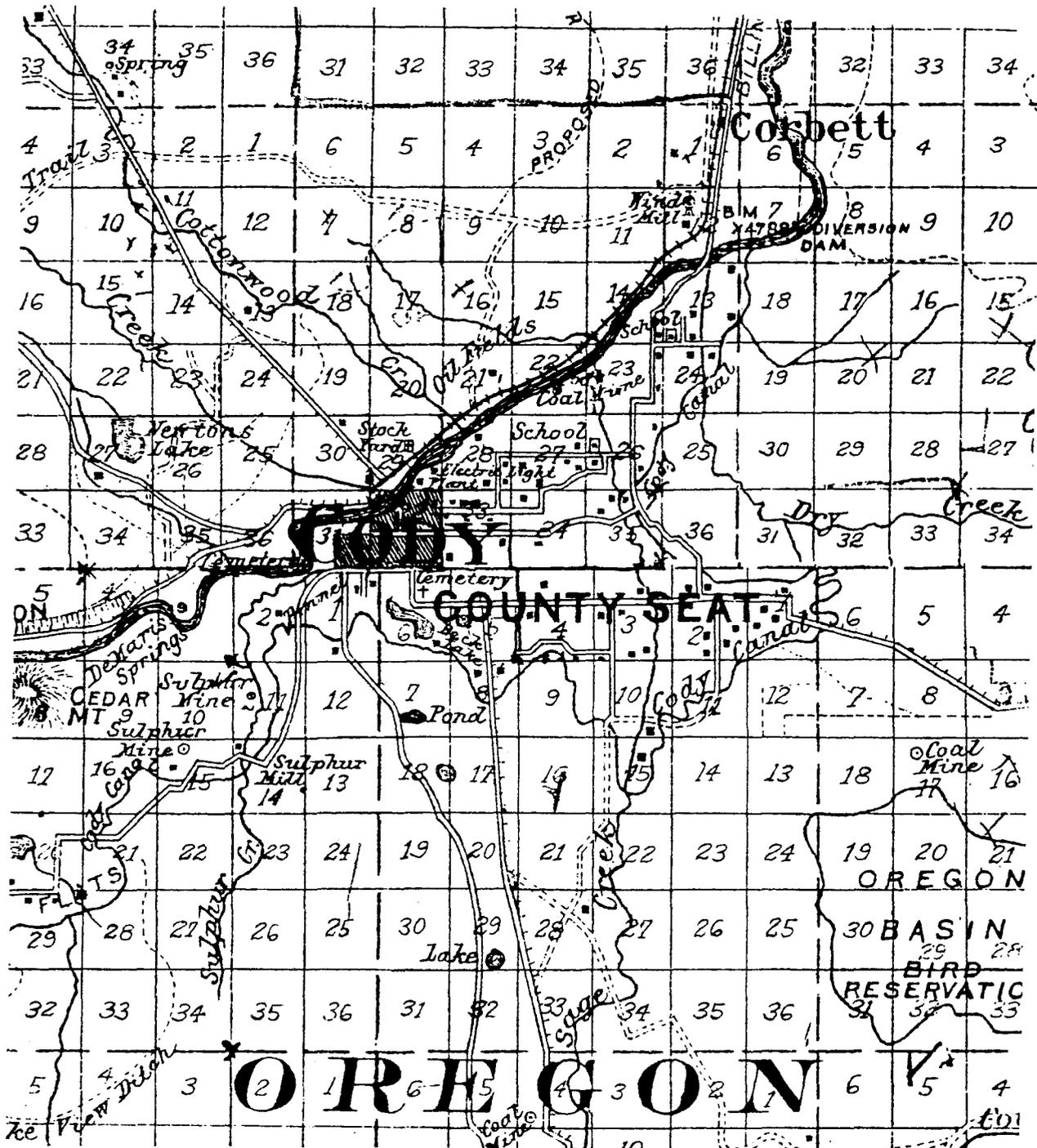


Figure 1. Location Map of Cody, Wyoming, taken from "Park County, Wyoming," 1916.



One of the formative industries to occupy the Cody rail yards was oil production. Exploration of the region's petroleum reserves began in 1911, when government geologists first began searching for commercial-grade oil and gas in the Oregon Basin (see *Figure 1*). Located south of Cody, this six-by-eleven-mile underground dome possessed, according to geologist Thomas Harrison, "unusual prospects for the seekers of oil." Early in 1912 Harrison's Enalpac Oil and Gas Company dug a shallow well near the dome's southern periphery. This was followed that summer by the McFadden Well, a quarter-mile shaft, and the Pauline, which extended a half-mile beneath the surface. About ten wells had been drilled in the basin by 1916, the year that Enalpac began delivering gas for consumption in Cody. The government withdrew basin lands from further development that year but reversed its position in 1920. A year later Enalpac sold its holdings in the basin to the Ohio Oil Company, a former subsidiary of the gargantuan Standard Oil Company.⁵

Ohio Oil joined several other firms in developing the basin's petroleum reserves during the 1920s, trucking tons of drilling equipment into the field from the railhead in Cody. Crude oil had to be hauled in tank trucks back to storage tanks at North Cody for shipment to a refinery—a slow, cumbersome process that severely hampered the basin's output. Conditions improved in 1927 when the Illinois Pipe Line Company built an oil line from the basin to the railroad. Completion of this pipeline triggered the beginning of full-scale commercial oil production around Cody. In 1928 more than 800,000 barrels were piped from the Oregon Basin—about a third by Ohio Oil—at 75 cents per barrel. That year the Texas Refinery Company built a plant to refine the Cody crude oil, further increasing efficiency. Production in the basin increased in 1929 to 1.5 million barrels, the peak yield until World War II.



Much of this oil development in the Oregon Basin and elsewhere in Wyoming was geared toward supplying the rapidly expanding automobile industry. Gasoline consumption in America had burgeoned from 25 percent of total petroleum production in 1909 to 85 percent just ten years later. Wyoming's first car was reportedly assembled by Laramie resident Elmer Lovejoy in 1898 from parts ordered from various manufacturers. Nine years later, when the first auto entered Cody, "the sound brought everybody to doors and windows, teams and saddle horses broke loose from hitching racks and ran in

⁵Spun off from Standard in 1911 in a court-ordered divestiture, the Ohio Oil Company became the Marathon Oil Company in 1962.

every direction.”⁶ Notoriously unreliable and ill-suited for the poorly graded wagon roads, automobiles were initially regarded as novelties, better adapted for short-mileage jaunts than serious travel. There were exceptions, however. In 1913 Gus Holms, who operated Cody’s first taxi, made the first auto journey from Chicago to Cody. Along with A.G. Lucifer, he motored a Studebaker through Rapid City and Buffalo and was the first autoist to traverse the Bighorn Mountains.

Despite such noteworthy early excursions as Holms’s trip or Henry Joy’s early forays for the Lincoln Highway, Wyoming was slow to embrace the automobile, due largely to the poor condition of its roads. Even many of the major routes in the state were little more than wagon tracks, troubled by steep, rocky grades in the mountains and shifting sand in the deserts. In their road construction programs of the 1910s and 1920s, the state and county governments were responding not only to requests from their local constituencies but to pressure from outside the state as well. The state’s profusion of scenic attractions and abundance of game animals drew tourists and hunters from all directions. Most entered Wyoming by train in the early 20th century. But by the 1920s many were touring the state in cars or motor coaches.



As the eastern gateway to Yellowstone National Park, Cody relied heavily on the tourist trade. The Burlington Railroad brought visitors to Cody on excursion trains from Denver and Omaha, widely advertising its “Cody Road to Buffalo Bill Country.” Tourists were shuttled from the depot in North Cody to the park by horse-drawn stagecoaches. Favoring auto touring to the train/stage travel offered by the Burlington, the Cody Club actively courted national road associations to route highways through town. Between 1912 and 1920 the club was able to secure the Black-and-Yellow Trail, which followed Holms’s route from Chicago through the Black Hills; the Yellowstone Highway between Cheyenne and Cody; the Park-to-Park Highway; and the Billings-Cody Way from Billings, Montana. Soon an average of fifteen cars per day were arriving at Cody from out of state, according to the *Cody Enterprise*.

The Cody Club also lobbied the National Park Service to allow autos into Yellowstone National Park, which were then prohibited from entering.⁷ After years

⁶*The Park County Story* (Cody, Wyoming: Park County Story Committee, 1980), 41.

⁷The first auto to enter Yellowstone Park was a Winton driven there in 1902 by Henry Merry of Electric, Montana. Merry was turned back just inside the gate. Cars were not then allowed.

of intransigence, the Park Service finally relented, allowing the first cavalcade of cars to drive from Cody to the Canyon Hotel on August 1, 1915. The Park Service insisted on calling the terms of auto travel within the park. "Very stringent rules were laid down to govern these cars as to the condition of brakes, tires and lights," Agnes Chamberlin later wrote, "This was all for the protection of the inexperienced motorists who were not used to mountain driving. In those days, all cars were expected to stop in Cody and have their carburetors adjusted for the high altitude."⁸



nd fill up with gasoline. Cody's first service station was established in 1916 by Glen Newton and Dudley Watkins on Sheridan Avenue, the town's main street. Named the Park Garage, the establishment dispensed Texaco gasoline from a single pump in front of a concrete-block storefront. The Park Garage eventually received competition from other curbside pumps in town, but fuel was dispensed as well from one or more bulk depots near the railroad tracks. Transportation historian Michael Witzel explains the role of bulk depots:

Early refueling outposts known as bulk depots served as crude gasoline sales outlets for the infrequent oddity of the horseless carriage. Located outside highly populated areas, these depots generally merchandised the liquid in cans and other bulk containers. The specialized equipment required for safe and efficient refueling of automobiles had not yet been designed, so vehicle owner and depot operator had to manage with contrivances designed for other purposes. Consequently, the process of purchasing gasoline required a number of steps unheard of at today's gasoline station. For the new motorist, it wasn't hard to see that pouring a highly flammable liquid down the small opening of a machine that sputtered and smoked was something for which the bulk oil operator was ill prepared.⁹

Eventually, as gasoline merchandising became more compartmentalized, the bulk oil depots served primarily as wholesale jobbers for many small-scale retail outlets. The Standard Oil Company depot is one of the earliest of these facilities built in Cody. Situated alongside the Burlington tracks in the North Cody rail-yards, the depot received shipments of gasoline and other petroleum products by rail car, stored the supplies in sheds or tanks, and distributed them to motorists or retail filling stations. The construction of its three main storage buildings coincides

⁸Agnes B. Chamberlin, *The Story of the Cody Club: 1900-1940* (Cody, Wyoming: by the author, 1940), 33.

⁹Michael Karl Witzel, *The American Gas Station* (Osceola, Wisconsin: Motorbooks International, 1992), 13.

with major developments in local oil production. The Center Shed (**HABS No. WY-149-A**) was built in 1920, as the Oregon Basin was opened permanently for oil development. The West Shed (**HABS No. WY-149-B**) and East Shed (**HABS No. WY-149-D**) were both built in 1928, at about the same time that the Texas Refinery began operations and the basin was experiencing its peak prewar production.

The original ownership of the bulk oil depot is unknown, but at some point it became affiliated with the Standard Oil Company. With its massive refinery in Casper—producing 615,000 barrels of gasoline and 170 barrels of kerosene per month, it was the world's largest—Standard maintained a formidable presence in Wyoming. By 1922 Standard Oil and Ohio Oil controlled 97 percent of the state's oil production. The Cody depot functioned in relative obscurity through the 1930s, overshadowed by the depressed oil economy that forced the closure of the Texas Refinery around 1932. In 1938 the Husky Oil Company refinery opened in North Cody, east of the Standard Bulk Depot.¹⁰

Eventually, shipment of bulk oil products by train to the depot was discontinued in favor of trucks. In recent years, the function of the depot has changed as the complexion of fuel delivery has evolved. During the late 1970s George Friesen operated the depot from the Center Shed, discontinuing the business in 1991. After construction of a series of upright storage tanks east of the East Shed in 1979, the Cody Feed Store began storing and distributing fertilizer here. The fertilizer sales continue, but the historic complex is now essentially abandoned, with only peripheral storage in the two of the three sheds. With little potential use for them, their future is clouded.

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¹⁰The Husky Refinery operated until its closure in 1979.

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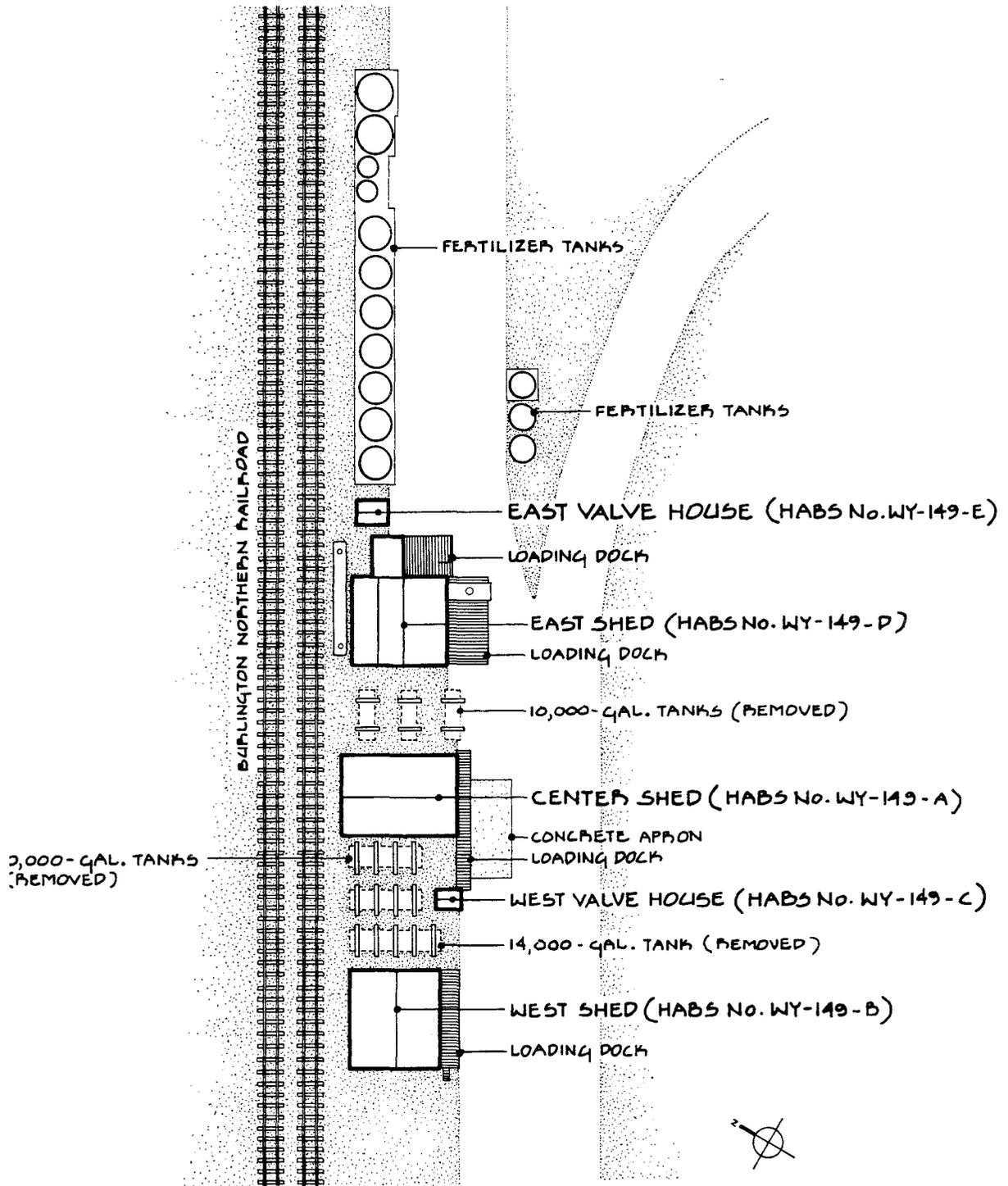
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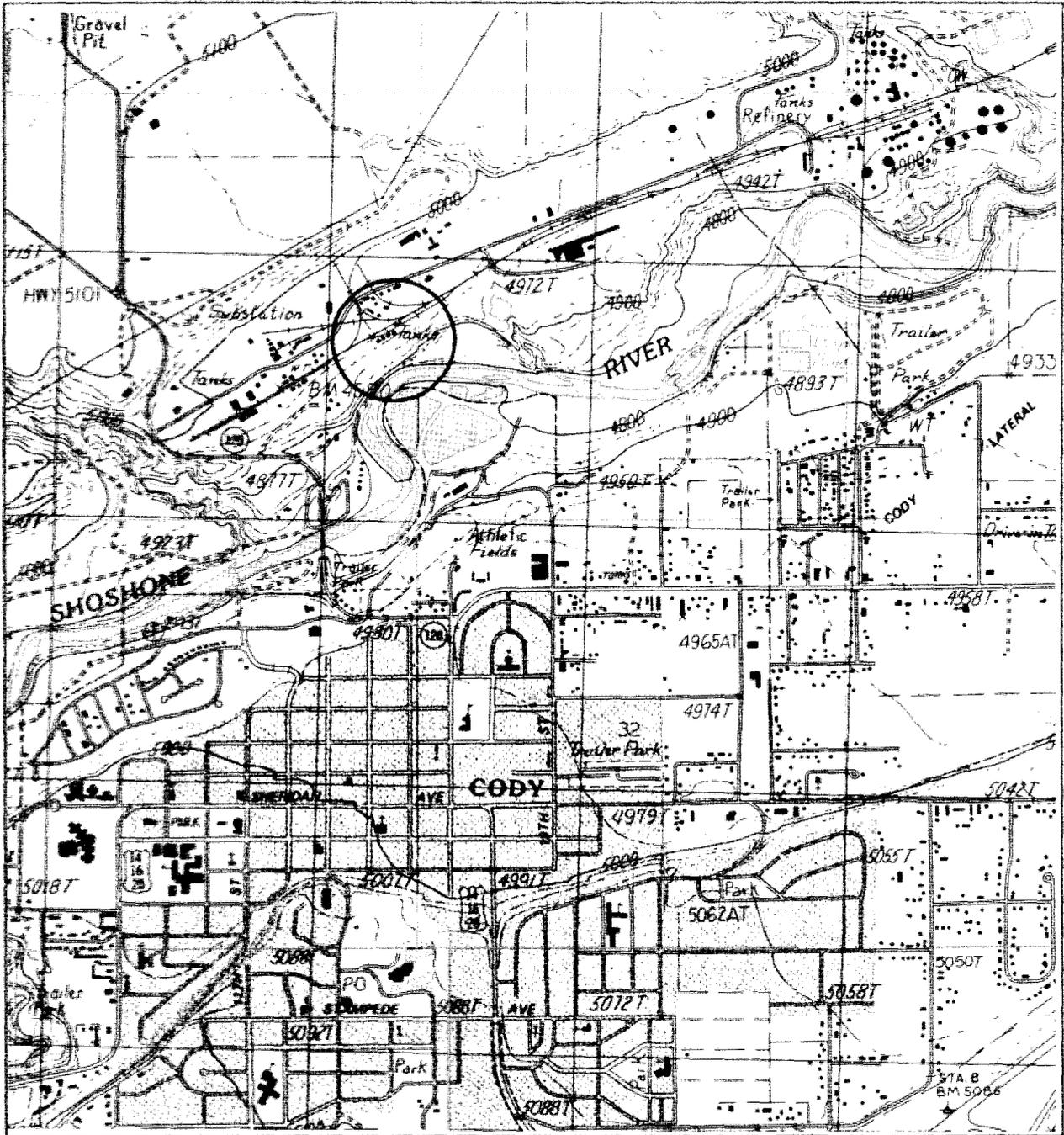
Architect: Clayton B. Fraser
Fraserdesign
Loveland Colorado

June 1997



SITE PLAN Not to scale

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LOCATION MAP Taken from USGS Cody, Wyoming. 7½ Minute Quadrangle Map, 1987.