

Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project,  
Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow  
On Island between Forebay Channel and  
Clark Fork River  
Town of Thompson Falls  
Sanders County  
Montana

HAER No. MT-90-A

HAER  
MONT  
45-THOFA  
3A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
THOMPSON FALLS HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT,  
POWERHOUSE FOREMAN'S BUNGALOW

HAER  
MONT  
49-THOFA,  
3A-

HAER No. MT-90-A

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: The Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow is located within the Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Dam Historic District in the town of Thompson Falls, Sanders County, Montana. The house is located on a man-made island between the forebay channel and the Clark Fork River.

Quad: Thompson Falls, Montana

UTM: Zone: 11  
Easting: 623500  
Northing: 5272205

Date of Construction: 1916

Present Owner: The Montana Power Company  
40 East Broadway  
Butte, Montana 59701

Present Use: Abandoned

Significance: The Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Dam Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Thompson Falls Multiple Resource nomination in 1986. The Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow contributes to the significance of the district. The building is representative of turn-of-the-century hydroelectric companies' custom of providing employee housing to ensure the efficient operation and maintenance of their facilities. The Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow is also a well-preserved example of the Bungalow Style.

Historian: Lon Johnson  
Renewable Technologies, Inc.  
Butte, Montana 59701  
March 1993

## II. HISTORY

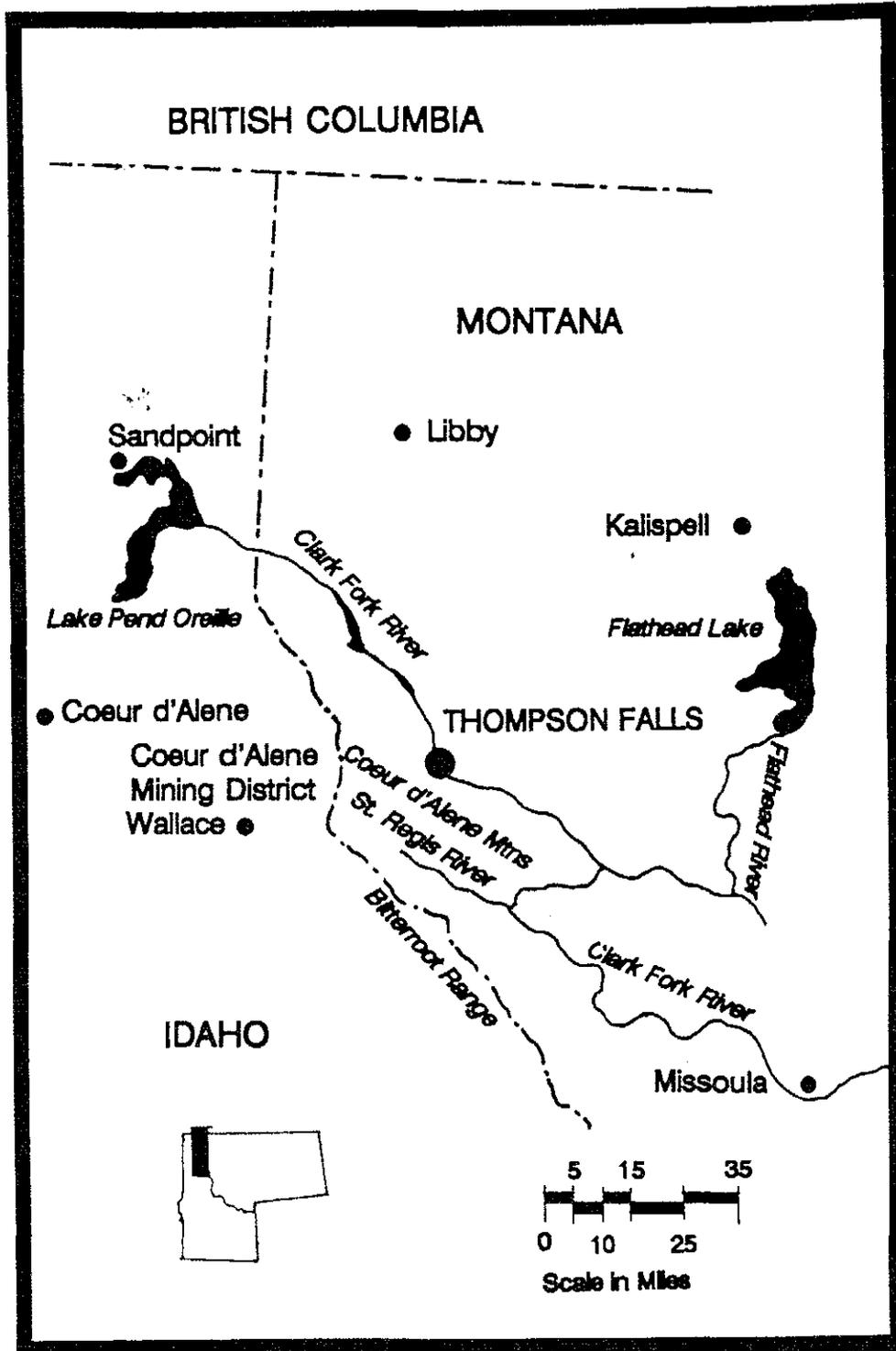
### A. THOMPSON FALLS HYDROELECTRIC DAM HISTORIC DISTRICT<sup>1</sup>

The Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Dam Historic District is located in the town of Thompson Falls, Montana. The district is spread over a wide geographic area and consists of five buildings and six structures.

As early as 1905, the Thompson Falls Ledger reported of local interest in taking advantage of the Clark Fork River to provide electrical power to the community. In 1910, several leading citizens in Thompson Falls, including Senator Edward Donlan, Dr. Everett Peek, and Arthur Preston, formed the Thompson Falls Light and Power Company to provide and regulate electricity for the community, and to promote the concept of a hydroelectric power station. Donlan, who was president of the Northwestern Development Company, owned the land and water rights west of Thompson Falls along the Clark Fork River near the waterfalls. In an agreement with Northwestern, he relinquished those rights in exchange for 12,000 shares of stock in the company. Donlan sold half of these to John D. Ryan, a board member of the Milwaukee Land Company, which then turned over its interests to the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway (the Milwaukee) in 1912. The Milwaukee intended to build a plant to generate electricity as part of its plans to electrify its line from Deer Lodge, Montana to Avery, Idaho. The Milwaukee, however, decided to purchase electricity and Ryan then bought back the shares in Northwestern and converted them into stock to form the Thompson Falls Power Company. The company built a small power plant and dam in 1912-1913 on Prospect Creek (west of town) to provide electrical power for the towns of Paradise, Plains, and Thompson Falls, and for the construction of the major hydroelectric project (across the river) which was started in 1912. In February 1913, Ryan sold his interests in the Thompson Falls Power Company to the Montana Power Company for \$5 million.<sup>2</sup>

The new power plant, which had two turbine generators on line by 1915, originally called for providing 10,000 kw of power. Two more generating units expanded the plant's capacity to 30,000 kw in 1917. This additional power largely served the Coeur d'Alene mining and smelting area, to the west of Thompson Falls in Idaho.

The Thompson Falls area benefitted greatly from the economic impact of the construction of the hydroelectric facility; the company employed 400 men to build just the powerhouse. An area in Thompson Falls stretching from the waterfalls along Maiden Lane accommodated a number of buildings and structures related to the project, most of which have since been demolished. Among these buildings were ten



Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project  
Area Map

bunk houses, a large mess hall, and numerous sheds, workshops, and other outbuildings. The office building at 915 Maiden Lane (1913), the two Chief Operator's Houses at 106 and 116 Pond Street (1913), and the Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow on the island (1916) are the only buildings which are extant.

#### B. MONTANA POWER COMPANY OPERATOR'S CAMPS<sup>3</sup>

Early in the Montana Power Company's history, construction camp buildings often saw continued residential use once a facility went into operation. During the 1910s, Montana Power officials realized that the company's permanent housing needs at hydroelectric sites could not be properly met by the physical remnants of the construction camps. By the time of the Company's consolidation in 1912-1913, the first stage of what was to be an ambitious program of erecting permanent housing at hydroelectric sites had begun. This construction effort reached its peak during the last half of the 1910s. By the mid-1930s, modern employee housing was available at all Montana Power locations.

These new operating camps varied noticeably in size and configuration, but most utilized the same basic building types. The housing needs were met with groups of small, frame bungalows; somewhat larger bungalows were often provided for supervisory personnel. Bungalows were similar in design to contemporary working-class housing in nearby Montana communities. In general, houses exhibited a commonality of design, suggesting that standard Montana Power blueprints were employed. Although the houses were far from ostentatious, limited architectural detailing helped make the buildings more attractive; many of the late 1910s buildings, for example, displayed bracketed eaves and other qualities typifying the then-popular Craftsman style.

#### C. POWERHOUSE FOREMAN'S BUNGALOW

No historical information is currently available documenting the construction of the Thompson Falls Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow, or the decision to isolate the house from the rest of the operator's camp to the north of the forebay. Four historic photographs and a tracing of the floor plan (ink on linen) located at the Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project identify the date of construction and the building's original appearance. (See HAER Photographs No. MT-90-A-19 through 22).

One historic photograph, largely documenting construction of the powerhouse, dated May 10, 1916, shows the Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow being framed. Two additional undated photographs record the house near its completion; workers can be

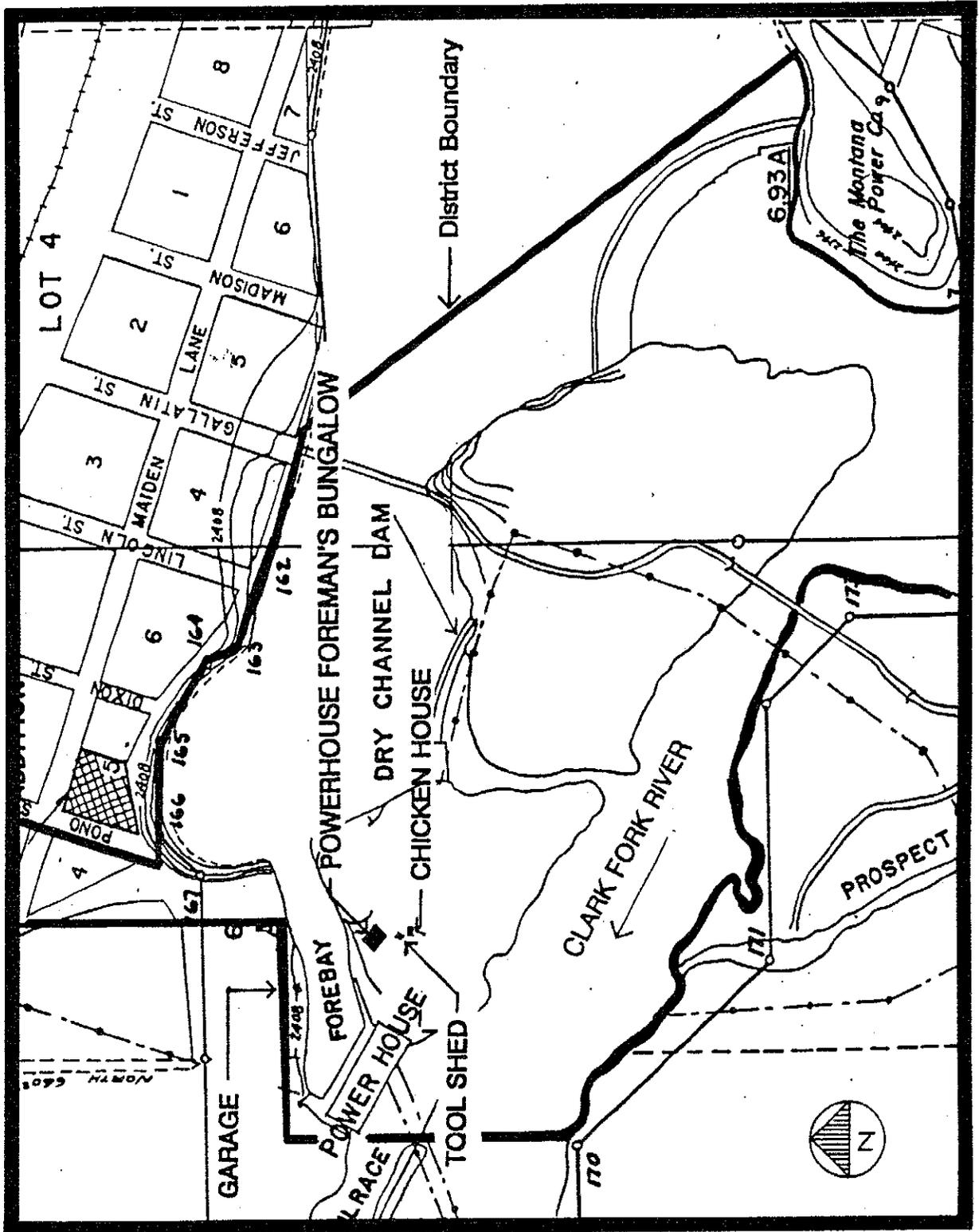
seen landscaping the east yard with stones. The final photograph, dated October 10, 1916, shows the completed bungalow. The floor plan provides no information as to the architect.

Based on the fact that the original tracing is in possession of The Montana Power Company and that it does not carry the name of an architect, it is likely that the house was designed by a company architect or engineer.

### III. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow is located on a rocky man-made island near the west end of the Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Dam Historic District. (See map on page 5). The construction of the forebay diverting water to the powerhouse isolated this piece of land from the mainland. The architect took advantage of the dramatic setting, providing wide porches around three sides of the building. The front (southwest) of the house is oriented to the Clark Fork River and the powerhouse. The northwest porch overlooks the forebay, and the southeast porch provides a view of the Coeur d'Alene Mountains. Historic photographs show little effort to disturb the natural setting of the island. A minimal area was leveled to provide a terrace for the house, paths, and landscaping. The pedestrian entrance (the house cannot be reached by automobile) to the house was historically from the powerhouse. One-foot high walls of cut stone define the curvilinear pathway as it climbs through the natural vegetation to the terrace on which the house is sited. A similar, but much shorter pathway exists to the north of the terrace. Today, the house is reached via a suspension bridge (date of construction unknown) across the forebay. Although the northwest entry is clearly visible as one crosses the bridge, the walk from the bridge directs visitors to the back (northeast) porch.

The building measures 44'-10" x 33'-10" with 6'-4" wide porches wrapping around three sides. It is of wood-frame construction sided with narrow (3-inch exposure) clapboard siding. The house rests on a concrete foundation and is dominated by a low-pitched hipped roof that is continuous over the porches. The historic wood shingles are now covered with white, three-tab asphalt shingles. Low, flat dormers originally pierced the roof near the ridge on the northwest, southwest, and southeast elevations. Only the original southwest dormer remains; its shallow windows are divided with wood muntins into a diamond pattern. The northwest and southeast dormers were extended (date unknown) to provide additional space in the bedrooms. The remodelled dormers have gable roofs and six-over-one wood double-hung windows.



Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Dam Historic District  
Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project

Tapered, square posts at the porches support the roof; the posts rest on concrete bases atop battered, cut stone piers. Cut stone also closes the area between the piers below the porch floor and provides railings for the southwest and northwest exterior stairs. Gable roofed pediments (no longer extant) at the fascia originally further emphasized these two stairways. Semi-elliptical arches filled with horizontal wood lattice flank the southwest stairway and provide ventilation for the crawl space beneath the porches. The porch balustrades of spaced 1x4s placed flat add to the horizontal appearance of the house.

The facades of the house are symmetrical with ample windows providing continuity between the interior and exterior spaces. The front (southwest) entry system consists of Craftsman style paired doors enframed with transoms and sidelights. The square lights in the doors are placed over four recessed, vertical panels. Wood muntins divide the shallow, horizontal transoms into small lights. The transoms continue across the multi-paned sidelights and have blue-pink slag glass at these locations. The original floor plans for the house show the entry system flanked by square windows. The sash for these windows are located in the attic (in their original wood crating) and are multi-paned glass of blue-pink slag. Cottage-style windows light the living room and bedroom, to either side of the entry; the center light is topped with a leaded glass transom and flanked by one-over-one double-hung units.

The northeast facade has a slightly off-center single door and transom similar to the main entry doors. The door is flanked by cottage windows identical to those on the southwest facade. The three bedroom windows on the southeast facade are eight-over-two double-hung units, three feet wide.

The northwest and southeast porches extend forward, flanking the northeast elevation of the house. The area enclosed by the porch ceilings on the other elevations, but exposed on this elevation, is sided with wood shingles. The northeast facade has been slightly modified since the house's construction. A narrow stoop originally covered the centrally placed door. It had a hipped roof supported on square columns. The stoop has been replaced (date unknown) with an enclosed porch. One-over-one double-hung windows surround the porch; it is entered through a modern mill-finish aluminum storm door. Some modifications have also been made to the windows and fenestration on this elevation. As originally designed, the fenestration was almost symmetrical: double-hung windows flanked the door; they were in-turn flanked by another set of double-hung windows. The two double-hung units to the north of the door have been removed and replaced with a pair of one-over-one double-hung units (likely shorter than the originals). The second window to

the south of the door has been covered over on the inside, but remains intact. Towards the north corner is located a pair of six-over-one double-hung units; towards the south corner is a single eight-over-two double hung unit.

The plan of the Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow is squarish. (See HAER Photograph No. MT-90-A-22). The entrance hall divides the living room and dining room from the three bedrooms. The kitchen is located at the back of the hall. Walls and ceilings are plaster on lath. The floors are softwood with softwood bases. The door frames are also softwood and consist of a plinth, plain jamb and head, and a cornice molding. The doors into the first floor bedrooms are topped with shallow, single-light transoms. The window frames are similar to the door frames. The woodwork has a glossy, clear finish which brings out the grain of the wood.

An open staircase is located in the entrance hall. The balustrade is composed of plain, square balusters (two per tread), 1¼-inch square, with square newel posts at the top and bottom. A closet with sliding doors and "photo-finish wood paneling" was added along the north wall of the entrance hall (ca. 1970). A colonnade of square posts resting on bookcases with glazed doors separates the living room and dining room. A built-in buffet is located in the dining room. The leaded glazing in each of the upper doors of the buffet is decorated with a small piece of green slag glass.

The kitchen was remodelled in the 1940s or 1950s. The remodelling combined the former kitchen and pantry into a single room. New cabinets were added to the east and north walls. The bathroom has also been remodelled and a closet off the entry hall was converted to a one-half bath.

The second floor contains a sizeable hall at the top of the stairs and two T-shaped bedrooms. The extension of the dormers added about 5'-6" to the leg of the "T" in each bedroom. Newer closets with sliding doors were added at an unknown date.

The Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow remained in use until the early 1980s. The overall condition of the historic materials shows regular maintenance by The Montana Power Company. Except for a few minor modifications, the building retains excellent integrity of design and materials from its date of construction.

Three buildings with a direct relationship to the Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow have been identified within the Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Dam Historic District: a wood-frame tool shed (non-contributing), a chicken house (HAER No. MT-90-B, and a two-car garage (HAER No. MT-90-C).

#### IV. FUTURE OF THE PROPERTY

The Montana Power Company will undertake redevelopment of the existing Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (FERC Project No. 1869). The plans include the addition of a steel-frame and concrete decked bridge across the forebay and removal of the Powerhouse Foreman's Bungalow, chicken house, and shed. The Company has sponsored recording of the buildings, in accordance with the provisions of the FERC license for Project No. 1869 and to the standards of the Historic American Engineering Record.

## V. ENDNOTES

1. Unless otherwise note, all history of the Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Dam is from "Historic Resources of Thompson Falls, Montana," National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form, prepared by Michael Koop, 19 June 1986.
2. Carrie Johnson, "Electrical Power, Copper, and John D. Ryan," Montana the Magazine of Western History (Autumn 1988): 31-32.
3. The following section is from: Renewable Technologies, Inc., "Plant Operating Facilities and a Private Recreation Camp," Evaluations of Eligibility for Listing in the National Register of Historic Places, Missouri-Madison Hydroelectric Project, September 1991.