

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

HABS No. MT-106-B

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MT-106-B

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,  
ICE HOUSE

HABS No. MT-106-B

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 1¼ miles northeast of the Highway 314 junction, and is approximately 3½ air miles north of the Wyoming border.

The ice house is on the south side of the homestead complex, approximately 25 feet northwest of the house.

**Quad:** Decker

**UTM:** Zone: 13; Easting 358030; Northing 4989370

**Date of Construction:** ca. 1886

**Present Owners:** Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation  
1520 E. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Helena, Montana 59620

**Present Use:** Abandoned

**Significance:** The ice house contributes to the overall significance of the Benjamin and Miranda Shreve Homestead. The structure represents an important building type commonly found at local ranch complexes, and reflects both the need for on-site perishable food storage and the mechanism by which it was accomplished. The ice house is also significant as an example of the well-crafted stone architecture which characterizes many of the historic ranch buildings in the immediate region. Although deteriorated, the building continues to evidence a high level of craftsmanship and significant attention to exterior visual detail. This workmanship easily surpasses that of the other extant Shreve Homestead buildings.

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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 ice house is limited. Benjamin Shreve's testimony supporting his application for a homestead patent stated that he constructed a "ice house" on his property between 1886 and 1893, but no additional details are given.<sup>1</sup> While it is possible that this building is Shreve's original icehouse, the substantial construction and careful craftsmanship evident in this building suggest that the current structure is more likely a replacement for the original ice house.

## III. DESCRIPTION

This feature comprises the structural remains of a ruined, two-room stone building, reportedly used as an ice house. Its eastern wall is located approximately 20 feet northwest of the homestead cabin (MT-106-A). The exterior dimensions of the ice house are approximately 14 feet (north-south) by 25 feet (east-west). The building's north wall, west wall, and roof are largely gone, but much of the south and east walls survive. A portion of a stone, north-south interior wall also remains.

The ice house is noteworthy primarily for the relatively high level of craftsmanship displayed by the surviving stonework. Walls are of coursed, roughly-squared sandstone, dressed on the exterior face only. Random tool marks are visible on these faces, and well-crafted, patterned tooling was used at building corners. Exterior mortar joints are beaded. The walls average 18 inches in thickness, and are generally comprised of at least two horizontal courses of stone. Interior courses (and wall faces) are uncoursed common rubble. This construction method resulted in often-large air spaces within the interior of the walls, and may be hastening the building's deterioration.

One window opening, in the eastern portion of the south wall, remains; it features a shallow stone sill. (The existence of the window suggests that the building's east room, at least, was probably used at one time for something other than ice storage.) No other evidence of the building's original fenestration pattern is evident. Similarly, few traces of the building's former roof structure remain, although masonry fragments at the site suggest that the ice house originally had a flat, concrete slab roof. The interior wall divided the structure into two rooms, approximately equal in size.

## 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.