

CROUSE HOMESTEAD, BARN  
9720 Walker Road  
Belgrade vicinity  
Gallatin County  
Montana

HABS MT-170-A  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY**  
**CROUSE HOMESTEAD, BARN**

**HABS No. MT-170-A**

- Location:** 9720 Walker Road, near Springhill Community Road, Belgrade vicinity, Gallatin County, Montana.
- The UTM coordinates for the barn are 12T 496789.47 E 5075913.94 N and were obtained through Google Earth on December 5, 2013 using NAD 1983. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.
- Present Owner:** Crouse 423 LLC
- Present Occupant:** Lester E. Crouse Jr.
- Current Use:** The barn is still used for the agricultural purposes of hay storage and calving.
- Significance:** The Crouse Homestead is significant not only for its connection to a pioneering family of Montana's agricultural industry, but also as an example of a transitional period in the architectural structure of large buildings. Homesteader, Henry Crouse(e), arrived in the Montana Territory in 1864, only two years after the first gold strike. After unsuccessful attempts at gold mining, he became a leader in the emerging agricultural community of Springhill, twelve miles north of Bozeman, Montana. The Crouse barn was built at a time between 1900 and 1910, and uses a hybrid system of heavy timber and light wood frame construction. This experimental design signifies the transitional process Montana builders were undergoing as journeymen carpenters, and new milling technology became more widely available in the Gallatin Valley with the railroad's arrival in 1883. Experience with light wood frame construction at the time was limited in large buildings until it had been proven structurally sound. The Crouse Barn developed as a transitional hybrid between the traditional, sturdy heavy timber structure and light wood frame construction.
- Description:** Between 1900 and 1910,<sup>1</sup> Henry Crouse and his family embarked on the task of erecting a barn structure, intended to house hay, draft horses and dairy cows. While it is not fully known, this design may have been in response to the blisteringly cold winter of 1886-1887. During previous decades, large quantities of winter hay were not produced, so there was no need for storage. Cattle were left to feed on open ranges, but in the harsh winter of 1886-1887 it became difficult for the cattle to find food to eat. It was estimated that 60 percent of the cattle in Montana died during that

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth W. Karsmizki, and Joan Louise Brownell, "Pat # FHE 1057." In *Gallatin Valley homestead survey*. Bozeman, Mont.: Museum of the Rockies, Montana State University, 1983. 673.

winter, making it apparent that Montana winters could not always sustain cattle through open range grazing alone.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it became a necessity to store a winter hay supply.

The center bay of the barn was constructed with heavy timber consisting of milled eight by eight inch fir, pine or hemlock timbers. These serve as the primary structural members, creating large interior volumes for maximum storage of loose hay. The large dimensions of the material allowed for longer spans and hefty mortise and tenon connections. The floor girders in particular span a distance of over 19 feet while the posts tower up to 15 feet before meeting the top plate. This large span was designed to leave space for the operation of a hay carrier. While a hay carrier remains in the barn today, it is unclear whether it was original to the barn or not. Knowledge of the technology would have been available, and the span may have been made in preparation for the future. Six by six inch tie beams provide the critical lateral support, with queen posts which support purlins at the mid-span of the rafters. This construction method recognized the structural capacity of the heavy timbers and utilized the techniques of post and beam construction to optimize the overall volume of the barn.

The construction of a longitudinal shed addition along one eave appears to have occurred shortly after the completion of the main structure. This shed, designed to house primarily draft horse teams, was erected from light wood frame materials, a new construction method for large buildings during that time in the area. The cheaper and lighter structure relied upon the heavy timber structure for stability.

About twenty years prior to the barn's construction, the Northern Pacific Railroad made its way to Bozeman, allowing for the rapid development of the Gallatin Valley. In particular, wood mills were able to acquire new, state of the art equipment for their operations. The establishment of these mills enabled widespread light wood frame construction throughout the region, providing large volumes of more affordable two-by lumber. Furthermore, the consistency of the lumber produced allowed for more precise construction. Light wood frame construction of large buildings and long spans was not well understood by many who established roots in the Gallatin Valley in the 1800s. However, by the turn of the twentieth century, the influx of skilled carpenters into the region contributed to a growing confidence in the potential of light wood framing for barn construction.

For the Crouse family, light framing construction served as the most viable option for the approaching winter season. While the same eight inch by eight inch fir or hemlock members were used for the floor girders and sills

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2 James Andrew Crutchfield, "Chapter 21: The Hard Winter 1886-1887." In *It happened in Montana*. Helena, MT: Falcon Press, 1992. 67.

sitting atop a stone foundation, the construction of the walls and roof utilized two by four inch lumber. Spaced at two feet on center, the construction proved to withstand the next ten decades of intense winters.

The east bay of the barn was built in the teens as a milking parlor with wood stanchions. Recognizing a number of structural failures within the construction of the west wing over time, the east wing fortified a variety of members to avoid similar problems. One improvement in particular was concentrated on the construction of the roof, increasing its rafter depth from four to six inches. As a necessary action, this change was in response to a drastically sagging roof line calling for the need of retrofitted support members. In addition to this, loft floor joists were also increased in depth to accommodate for the intensified weight from hay storage in the colder seasons.

In the northwest corner of the barn, the draft horse stalls were removed recently to pour a slab for storage of a tractor.

### **History:**

Arriving five weeks after Montana became a territory, family sources state Henry Crouse left his family farm in Illinois to settle in the territorial capitol, Bannack, on July 8, 1864, as a hopeful gold prospector.<sup>3</sup> After minimal success, he moved to Virginia City, Montana in March of 1865 and returned to Illinois by that September.<sup>4</sup> He returned to Virginia City in the spring of 1866 for three more months of marginal prospecting until he decided to begin driving a freight team between Fort Peck and Fort Benton, Montana.

After several years of freighting and fruitless prospecting, Henry decided to try agriculture. He arrived in the Gallatin Valley in July, 1869, and began establishing his first homestead in the fall of 1870 on a section of land neighboring the present homestead. He planted apple trees and wheat fields, which were irrigated by Ross Creek.<sup>5</sup> Henry would homestead over five hundred acres in total through separate land patents with his wife, Anna Millhouse Crouse. The particular homestead the Crouse Barn is located on was proved-up on November 25, 1895.<sup>6</sup> The homestead is nestled near the base of Ross Peak in the Bridger Mountains and has the benefit of being irrigated all year by Ross Creek.

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3 "Andersen & Crouse Genealogy." *Andersen Genealogy*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Nov. 2013.  
<[http://andersengenealogy.info/henry\\_\\_anna\\_millhouse\\_crouse\\_history](http://andersengenealogy.info/henry__anna_millhouse_crouse_history)>.

4 A.W. Bowen, *Progressive men of the state of Montana*. Chicago, 1902. Print.

5 Phyllis Smith, "Chapter Eleven." In *Bozeman and the Gallatin Valley: a history*. Helena, Mont.: Falcon Press Publ., 1996. 75.

6 United States Land Patent, Homestead Certificate Number 1057, Application 2048, Nov. 25, 1895.

**Land Ownership: Henry's Children:** While documentation of deed transfer cannot be found, it is assumed Henry passed his land down to his eight children after his death. Henry donated a portion of his land to the Springhill Presbyterian Church on April 25, 1907 and died on August 3, 1913. Henry's remaining six descendants deeded their land interest to Lester Earl Crouse, Henry's eighth and youngest child, for a dollar on September 6, 1941.<sup>7</sup>

**Lester Earl Crouse:** Lester, 1892-1975, was born at the Springhill family ranch and continued to ranch until 1948.<sup>8</sup> He was an active community member of Gallatin County, serving memberships in the Farm Bureau and Grange, the County Fair Board, president of the Sons and Daughters of Montana Pioneers, Elks No. 463. He assisted in organizing the Gallatin Farmers Company and devoted much time to activities for conserving wildlife resources.<sup>9</sup> Lester Sr. sold the land to his son, Lester Crouse Jr., on December 2, 1970.<sup>10</sup>

**Lester E. Crouse Jr.:** The land was placed into a trust, Crouse 423 LLC, on November 6, 1997.<sup>11</sup>

## Sources

"Andersen & Crouse Genealogy." *Andersen Genealogy*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Nov. 2013.  
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Gallatin Valley Grantee Index Book 34, pg 1817.

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Karsmizki, Kenneth W., and Joan Louise Brownell. "Pat # FHE 1057." In *Gallatin Valley homestead survey*. Bozeman, Mont.: Museum of the Rockies, Montana State University, 1983. 673.

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7 Gallatin Valley Grantee Index Book 85, pg 547.

8 *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, "Obituaries: Lester Crouse," November 24, 1975.

9 Ibid.

10 Gallatin Valley Grantee Index Book 34, pg 1817.

11 Gallatin Valley Grantee Index 2318148.

Smith, Phyllis. "Chapter Eleven." In *Bozeman and the Gallatin Valley: a history*. Helena, Mont.: Falcon Press Publ., 1996. 75.

United States Land Patent, Homestead Certificate Number 1057, Application 2048, Nov. 25, 1895.

**Project Information:** This historical report, as well as the accompanying drawings and photographs were prepared for a graduate architectural course at Montana State University under the direction of Dr. Maire O'Neill, NCARB. All fieldwork, documentation drawings, and historical research were done by Steven Berkas, Madison Gabig, and Trae Schwenneker. The course aimed to study the tools, techniques and technological forces that shaped the built environment which represents the lives and work of ordinary people in the Rocky Mountain West.