

Teton County Historic Site Survey

1. Name of Property

historic name Elias Wilson Barn

other name/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 130 N. Millward ☐ not for publication

city or town Jackson ☐ vicinity

state Wyoming code WY county Teton code 039 zip code 83001

3. Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

4. Category of Property

(check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

5. Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>
	Total

Property Owner

name/title Dorothy Wilson and Dorothy F. Loose

street & number P. O. Box 740 telephone

city or town Jackson state WY zip code 83001

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

National Register Status:

- ☒ Eligible ☐ Unevaluated
☐ Not Eligible ☐ District Potential

6. Function or Use

Historic Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture: barn

Current Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

vacant: storage

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: vernacular barn

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation

log

walls

log

roof

wood

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

Social History

Architecture

Period of Significance

c.1920-1955

Significant Dates**Significant Persons**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation**Architect/Builder**

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other Name of repository:

Jackson Hole Historical Society

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property less than 2 acres**UTM References**

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/2 5/1/9/0/5/2 4/8/1/4/2/2/6
Zone Easting Northing2 1/2 / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing3 1/2 / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing4 1/2 / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10**11. Form Prepared By**

Michael Cassity, Ph.D.
Historical Research and Photography
304 W. Albuquerque
Broken Arrow, Oklahoma 74011
Phone: 918 451-8378 • Fax: 918 451-8379
mcassity@valornet.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Maps**
- **Photographs:** Representative photographs of the property.

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Continuation Sheet

Section No. 7 Page 645

Elias Wilson Barn

Narrative Description

The Elias Wilson Barn is a tiny structure, exactly appropriate for its intended function, to provide shelter and feed for a single milch cow. It is located in the heart of Jackson, just a block and a half west of the town square. Situated at the east end of the lot, behind a house that faces west on Millward, the barn also faces west.

The barn is made of logs, carefully joined at the corners using a square notch, or, what is often termed locally Tennant Corners, a term derived from the joiners' craft of mortise and tenon. The building has a gabled wood plank roof with its ridge on a north-south axis. The east slope of the roof includes a gabled dormer that rises from near the top of the elevation through the eave; plank board closures are located in each of the three gables and an additional swinging board door is located at midpoint up on the north side of the east elevation. The main entrance to the barn is located on the west elevation under the eave.

Although somewhat worn from its approximately eighty-five years of use and lack of use, the building possesses good integrity. The only known change, and that is discernible only from other sources, not from an examination of the building itself, is the roof which once was flat with a barrier around it to protect hay stored on top from being accessed by wandering elk in the town. That change in roof, however, came well within the period of significance and reveals additional elements of the significance of the building.

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Elias Wilson Barn



Elias Wilson Barn, Jackson, Wyoming. South and east elevations, looking north. Photo: Michael Cassity, 1999.

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Elias Wilson Barn



Elias Wilson Barn, Jackson, Wyoming. Looking southwest. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2005.

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Elias Wilson Barn



Elias Wilson Barn, Jackson, Wyoming. Looking east. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2005.

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Elias Wilson Barn

Narrative Statement of Significance

This building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of significance Social History and under Criterion C in the area of significance Architecture.

The Elias Wilson Barn is significant because it provides an important key to understanding the social dynamics of Jackson and Jackson Hole in the early years and as it developed over the subsequent four decades.

Jackson, Wyoming, was incorporated as a town only at the beginning of the twentieth century after a sparse and spread out pattern of settlement in the valley in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Although a handful of people had gathered in the area around Charles Deloney's general store and the Jackson Hole Gun Club House, the town was platted only in 1901 and had grown only to 900 people in 1909. The community did not have electricity on an institutional basis until 1921, each home generating its own if it could, or doing without entirely as many did. Contemporary photographs show that the houses were scattered and, as was common in many villages and towns many had gardens and livestock for their own domestic consumption and use. Where a garage would become a standard feature in twentieth century residential areas, in this village just springing from the soil and with an agricultural service sector dominant, the small barn behind the residence served an important purpose.

More and more people were moving to Jackson from the farms and ranches they operated, from the homesteads they had worked hard to call their own. One of these families was that of Elias and Verda Wilson. Like so many others, these two came to Jackson Hole at the beginning of the century from Idaho following other members of their families. Married in 1906 in St. Anthony, the two started their own family and a ranch in South Park, and filed on a homestead in 1909 farther down, where Camp Davis would be in the future. One account relates that "The first summer they grubbed sage brush and worked to get something together for the winter. Along in the late summer Elias went out with his dudes, a source of income that could always be depended on for a winter grub stake. In those days they bought their supplies for the years and they freighted them from Rexburg." The Wilson family grew and the ranch did well, at least it did so until the end of World War I. Verda Wilson's obituary notes that "In 1918 and 1919 Jackson Hole suffered a terrible drought and the winter of 1920 the Wilsons had to take their stock to Menan, Ida. for feed. Hay sold at \$50.00 a ton and the next fall cattle sold at \$2.00 a head. What happened to the Wilsons happened to every other rancher, they went broke. Undaunted Elias went to carpentering and Verda started with a few milk cows and together they worked to the top once again." What the account leaves out is provided in the legal record. On September 25, 1920 Elias Wilson purchased this property in town from Etta Leek. The Wilsons may have kept their ranch for a while longer, but they were doing their carpentering and keeping their milk cows in town.

So it was that Elias Wilson built his barn behind his house to store feed for the cow. Exactly how long the family retained the cows is not known but the practice of maintaining livestock, even large

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Elias Wilson Barn

animals, remained for a good while in Jackson. Others in the community, of course, had similar structures to stable their horses. In fact, in close proximity to this building—just across the alley—was a blacksmith shop operated by Deloney and then Walt Spicer, but Spicer turned his business into one that serviced automobiles. The rise of the automobile, making unnecessary the stables for horses, spelled the end of many of these barns; the rise of commercially available dairy products likewise made the family cow superfluous. An essential element in the modernization of communities, this was part of the transformation in which individuals became increasingly specialized in their economic activities and identities and more dependent upon others elsewhere in supplying their daily needs. One photograph of the town shows the lot in 1934 or 1935 with clearly this barn in existence, but it also shows a multitude of other barns and stables in the towns—along with the town's water tank on a tower which provided potable water before the acquisition of a community water infrastructure in the 1930s. The point at which the barns and the livestock faded dramatically was the broad period of the 1930s and World War II, a period in which the town of Jackson underwent a dramatic change, opening up more and more to the outside world as a destination for tourists.

What this brief account reveals, of course, is more than the history of a single family; it actually just puts names and concrete places onto the larger pattern of social change in the community, and, for that matter, in the nation. The valley and the nation were urbanizing at a dramatic pace. In 1920 for the first time in American history more people lived in villages and towns with more than 2500 people than lived in the countryside or smaller villages, and that move to the city increased each year. But the move to town was not just a response to the lure of bright lights and beckoning opportunities. It often came out of necessity, and not out of yearning. John Daugherty lists other farmers and ranchers and homesteaders farther up in the valley who suffered the same fate as the Wilsons. And Struthers Burt in 1924 wrote that “the first farmers came into my valley about ten years ago and today they are broken and ruined men.” In this context, this small barn serves as almost a monument to the rural lives that were slipping away from the people who moved to town. In another way, this barn, a small and simple structure, reflects a particular stage in the development of Jackson, a stage that lasted until just before or during World War II.

There is one other element that makes the barn revealing of that early period too, and this one is clear from the careful research of Larry Kummer and Jill Anderson on this property. For as long as white settlement has intruded upon their range, the elk of Jackson Hole have been an issue in terms of the consequences of human habitation and cattle grazing, one large consequence being the resulting displacement of elk forage. In the 1920s the results of the displacement came to be felt even in town as elk roamed broadly and desperately seeking food, sometimes finding it only in the haystacks ranchers and others had set aside for their own livestock. Photographs of the community, for example, show elk trying to get to the hay that the Van Vleck family had created for their livestock a half block east of the Town Square. Haystacks in town were no more secure from the desperate elk than those in the countryside of the valley. Thus when Elias Wilson built this barn he gave it a distinctive feature: a flat roof with a protective siding to allow the hay to be stored on top of the barn and be walled away from the hungry elk. By the middle of the 1930s that flat roof had been replaced with the current gabled roof with hay storage and access through entrances in the gable. This is

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Elias Wilson Barn

clearly an instance in which architectural design is subtly interwoven with the fibers of social and environmental history to create a seamless fabric of historical meaning that is all the richer thereby.

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Elias Wilson Barn

Bibliography

Anderson, Jill and Larry Kummer. "Elias Wilson Cow Barn," presentation of local preservation award, November 6, 2003, in Jackson Hole Historical Society files.

Attebery, Jennifer Eastman. *Building with Logs: Western Log Construction in Context* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1998).

Daugherty, John. *A Place Called Jackson Hole* (Moose, Wyoming: Grand Teton National Park, 1999).

"Elias Wilson," Jackson Hole *Guide*, November 25, 1965.

Hayden, Elizabeth Wied. *From Trapper to Tourist in Jackson Hole* (n.p.: Grand Teton Natural History Association, 1957).

"Jackson, Wyoming," photograph in *Living Wilderness*, VIII (October 1943), pp. 12-13. This photograph, undated and unattributed, shows considerable detail and was made around 1934, and positively between 1930 and 1937, given the presence of the water tower, which was dismantled around 1935, and the Ideal Lodge which was constructed in 1929 and 1930, and the absence of the Teton Drug Company (built, 1937) and the condition of the Town Square which was just being developed in 1934.

Land Records, Office of the County Clerk, Teton County, Wyoming.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 2000).

Nelson, Fern. *This Was Jackson's Hole: Incidents & Profiles from the Settlement of Jackson Hole* (Glendo, Wyoming: High Plains Press, 1994).

Sloane, Eric. *An Age of Barns* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967).

----- . *Our Vanishing Landscape* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1955).

"Verda Barker Wilson Dies at Age 85," Jackson Hole *Guide*, April 9, 1970.

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Elias Wilson Barn

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

This property consists of part of lot 13, block 6, Original Townsite, Town of Jackson.

Boundary Justification

This boundary includes the property historically associated with the Elias Wilson Barn.