

Homestead Research Guidelines

Primary Goals:

1. Identify ALL homestead structures remaining in Sublette County. This requires systematic research, focusing on the well-known structures, as well as the little known ones that are likely to disappear sooner.
2. Document the location and current condition of all of the identified structures. Most structures will be on private land, but if permission can be obtained, the site should be visited. During site visits, GPS coordinates should be noted, pictures taken, and a site form with structure description and current condition completed.

Secondary Goals:

1. Identify and document locations of homestead structures that no longer exist. During identification of existing structures, researchers may be able to locate and document site where homestead structures once stood, but are now gone.
2. Document the history of the homestead structures through interviews, old photos, local histories and whatever else can be found. The project does not have the funding for this, but if the sites can be identified, the history can be researched at a later date. However, if information is readily available or an oral interview can be taped, researchers should take advantage of the opportunity.

Notes:

1. Homestead –Defined as land transitioned from public ownership to the first private owner. All private land in Sublette County was once public and later transferred to private ownership, primarily through the Homestead Act and Dessert Claims, but there were several other similar programs. In most cases the law required improvements of the land including living on it before the patent (title) could be obtained. The vast majority of homesteads in Sublette County date from the late 1880's to the 1930's. Mostly consisted of 160 to 640 acres.
2. Homestead Structure – In general, this is any building including homes, barns, out buildings, etc that were built by the original owner during the process of improving the land to obtain patent. This basically means the first buildings on the property constructed by the first owner that are at least 50 years old. Structures will mainly be buildings, in a few cases there could be other structures still existing of note like corrals, head gates, fences, canals, reservoirs, etc.
3. Remaining Homestead Structure – Emphasis is on homestead structures being maintained by the current owner, much like they were when originally built. However, partial remains of homestead structures should also be noted and documented, even if it is non-functional or even just a foundation.
4. Ranch – A ranch is considered to be an entity that formed after the original homestead and usually consists of multiple homesteads consolidated by an owner. Structures constructed after the original homestead are considered ranch structures and will be identified and documented in future years.
5. Private Property – Most homestead structures will be located on private property. Cooperation of the current owner is necessary and their permission must be obtained before visiting their property to document a structure or site. The current

owner is under no obligation to cooperate with this project. Also the documentation project does not impact the current owners private property rights at all. These surveys are for documentation purposes only. If permission cannot be obtained, the structures on the property will not be surveyed.

6. Copyright – All information, documentation and photographs collected and produced by researchers will be owned and copyrighted by the Sublette County Historic Preservation Board (HPB). The intent of the HPB is to make this information available to the public for research purposes. Permission must be obtained from the HPB, and appropriate credit must be given to the HPB, before data can be republished or used for commercial purposes.

Research Resources –The focus should be on finding and documenting existing homestead structures. For the most part contacting current owners and long time residents in the area are the most effective way to find existing structures. However, some traditional research can support this effort and help complete site forms.

Fortunately most of these resources are available on the internet.

1. Homestead Records – The BLM has provided a database online of the original patents where land transferred from public to private. This is very valuable in determining the original owner of a homestead. Community memory can be wrong sometimes. <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/>
2. To allow people to homestead the government needed to first survey the land so people could file on it. Those surveys were done by the Government Land Office (GLO) starting on 1870 in southern Wyoming near the railroads and moving north. Most of Sublette County was done in the 1890's. The maps can be valuable to identify buildings at that time. But most importantly they established the legal township, range, sections and lots that could be filed on. The GLO maps are available online: <http://www.wy.blm.gov/cadastral/surveydocs.htm>
3. Current topographic maps from the US Geological survey can also be very helpful in relating township, range and sections to current land features and development since the original GLO maps. These are also all available online and are referred to as Digital Raster Graphics (DRG). The 1:24000 series are the most detailed. <http://wgiac2.state.wy.us/html/aboutDRG.asp>
4. Sublette County has been forward thinking enough to post current land ownership information on the internet. That is updated on a monthly basis. It is not as easy to search as the patent records database, but you can download the data and view it with a free viewer discussed on the website. There is also contact information for the current landowners who you will need to contact to get permission to visit structures. <http://www.sublettegis.com/GISmain.htm>
5. GPS, digital camera, and digital voice recorders will be available to borrow to document structures and record interviews.
6. The biggest research tool is almost certainly going to be talking with the current land owners and long time residents.

Structure Documentation – The preference is for data to be provided digitally, but information can also be scanned later if not digital. Site and structure documentation forms have been developed to help in documenting homestead structures. A site form should be filled out for each homestead site visited and a structure form filled out for each homestead structure at that location. If permission can not be obtained to visit a known structure, fill out a site form anyway with available information. The forms are available printed or in word format to be filled out on a computer. These are mainly a guideline and filling out every item is not critical, but when visiting and documenting a site or structure the following information is desired:

- Current owner of the homestead location
- Original homestead owner from patent database
- Year each structure was built if known
- GPS location of each structure with indication of where on the building the GPS location was taken (i.e. northeast corner).
- Structure size, number of rooms, construction material, interesting or unique features, etc.
- Original purpose of the structure
- Current use and condition of structure
- Pictures (digital preferred) of structure including all external sides, wide shot to show location and relation to other structures, all interior rooms if practical, unique features, and whatever else is appropriate to document construction and condition of structure. With digital, more pictures are better, so take
- If there are several structures at the site a simple hand draw map giving general layout would be helpful.
- Where you have the opportunity to record or write down an oral history about the homestead or homesteaders, please take advantage of it. But the focus of the project is documenting the structure and that is where most time should be spent. Unfortunately we do not have the budget for in depth research or histories. However, these may be follow-on projects and either museum might have funds for more extensive histories.