

# COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES NOMINATION FORM

**SECTION I**

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**Name of Property**

Historic Name Baxstrom Upper Place Homestead House

Other Names \_\_\_\_\_

**Address of Property**

address not for publication

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City Vicinity of Cortez County Montezuma Zip 81321

**Present Owner of Property**

(for multiple ownership, list the names and addresses of each owner on one or more continuation sheets)

Name Poe Family Partnership & Peter Skartvedt and Ann Rilling

Address c/o Poe 292 Cottonwood Creek Road Phone 970-247-5328

City Durango State Colorado Zip 81301

**Owner Consent for Nomination**

(attach signed consent from each owner of property - see attached form)

**Preparer of Nomination**

Name Jill Seyfarth Date May 5, 2006

Organization Cultural Resource Planning

Address PO Box 295 Phone 970-247-5893

City Durango State Colorado Zip 81302

**FOR OFFICIAL USE:**

Site Number 5MT.12937

\_\_\_\_\_ Nomination Received

Senate # \_\_\_\_\_ House # \_\_\_\_\_

8/11/2006 Review Board Recommendation  
 Approval  Denial

8/31/2006 CHS Board State Register Listing  
 Approved  Denied

**Certification of Listing:** President, Colorado Historical Society

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES**

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**SECTION II**

**Local Historic Designation**

Has the property received local historic designation?

no

yes ---  individually designated  designated as part of a historic district

Date designated \_\_\_\_\_

Designated by \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of municipality or county)

**Use of Property**

Historic Residence, Bunkhouse

Current part time residence (seasonal dwelling)

**Original Owner** Howard Baxstrom and Blanche Ashbaugh Baxstrom

Source of Information Montezuma County Records--Recorded Deeds

**Year of Construction** 1933

Source of Information Memoirs of Blanche Ashbaugh Baxstrom corroborated by surviving Baxstrom family members

**Architect, Builder, Engineer, Artist or Designer** Howard Baxstrom and his father Harry Baxstrom

Source of Information Memoirs of Blanche Ashbaugh Baxstrom corroborated by surviving Baxstrom family members

**Locational Status**

Original location of structure(s)

Structure(s) moved to current location

Date of move \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION III**

**Description and Alterations**

(describe the current and original appearance of the property and any alterations on one or more continuation sheets)

**COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES**

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**SECTION IV**

**Significance of Property**

**Nomination Criteria**

- A** - property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to history
- B** - property is connected with persons significant in history
- C** - property has distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or artisan
- D** - property is of geographic importance
- E** - property contains the possibility of important discoveries related to prehistory or history

**Areas of Significance**

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Economics                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape            |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture            | <input type="checkbox"/> Education                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology – prehistoric          | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Law                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology – historic             | <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment/ Recreation     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic Heritage               | <input type="checkbox"/> Military             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploration/ Settlement       | <input type="checkbox"/> Performing Arts      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Geography/ Community Identity | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics/ Government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Planning and Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Health/Medicine               | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Science              |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Social History       |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation       |

**Significance Statement**

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

**Bibliography**

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

**SECTION V**

**Locational Information**

Lot(s) N/A Block N/A Addition N/A

USGS Topographic Quad Map Mud Creek

**Verbal Boundary Description of Nominated Property**

(describe the boundaries of the nominated property on a continuation sheet)

**COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES**

Property Name Baxstrom Upper Place Homestead House

**SECTION VI**

**Photograph Log for Black and White Photographs**

(prepare a photograph log on one or more continuation sheets)

**SECTION VII**

**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS TO ACCOMPANY NOMINATION**

**Owner Consent Form**

**Black and White Photographs**

**Color Prints or Digital Images**

**Sketch Map(s)**

**Photocopy of USGS Map Section**

**Optional Materials**

**Use of Nomination Materials**

Upon submission to the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, all nomination forms and supporting materials become public records pursuant to CRS Title 24, and may be accessed, copied, and used for personal or commercial purposes in accordance with state law unless otherwise specifically exempted. The Colorado Historical Society may reproduce, publish, display, perform, prepare derivative works or otherwise use the nomination materials for Society and/or State Register purposes.

**For Office Use Only**

Property Type:  building(s)  district  site  structure  object  area

Architectural Style/Engineering Type: No style

Period of Significance: 1933

Level of Significance:  Local  State  National

Acreage less than one

P.M.      Township      Range      Section      Quarter Sections     

UTM Reference: Zone    Easting            Northing           

Site Elevation: 6190 feet

Property Name Baxstrom Upper Place Homestead House

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## DESCRIPTION and ALTERATIONS

The Baxstrom Homestead is located on the gently sloping western edge of the bottom of Trail Canyon about 6-1/2 miles northwest Cortez. The area immediately surrounding the house is an informal yard area that is sparsely vegetated with rabbit brush, sage, and a few juniper trees. A pinyon/juniper forest grows beyond the yard area and to the north, south and west. Out buildings, corrals, fences and pens (constructed later and not part of the nomination) are situated across the yard area and a short distance from the building. A dirt road and driveway turn-off are to the east of the building and serve to separate the homestead from the farmland and pasture area. The agricultural setting appears much the same as it has for the past 75 years. The site has experienced minimal change to the building and the rural setting.

The house is a side-gable, one-story, one-room building. It is constructed on a foundation of rough cut, locally quarried sandstone blocks. The approximately 24" thick walls are rock face sandstone, which is rough cut in a combination of tabular and blocky shapes and irregularly coursed. The stones are set in a soil sediment mortar made from the soil on the site. The mortar is coarse, containing flakes and chunks of sandstone. A dry laid stone wall measuring about eight inches tall contains a small planting area along the south and east walls of the building. Stacked stones create two steps up to the front door. The stone is in generally good condition. Except for one small north facing window, all of the windows have rock face lugsills and lintels; the doors have stone lintels and thresholds.

Wood shingles cover the gable roof. Metal pipes from a cook stove and a wood-burning stove extend through the roof at the northwest and the southeast corners. The southeast side faces toward the road and has a centered door with a wood screen door, flanked on either side by a wood frame, double hung, 6-over-6 lite window. The northwest side has a wood door and a small wood frame fixed 6-lite window. Both exterior doors are vertical board doors. The jambs, legs and headers are made of 2" x 12" rough sawn wood. Doorsills of 1" x 4" rough sawn lumber sit on stone sills. A set of wood shelves and a hinged-top "cool-storage" box are located against the northwest side, which is shaded throughout the day.

The northeast and southwest sides have vertical rough sawn wood boards in the gable ends. A hatch door is located in the northeast gable and provides attic access. A wood frame double hung 6-over-6 lite window is located in each of the east and west sides.

The interior is a single room with no plumbing or electricity. The walls are plastered and have a series of brands painted in a horizontal line just below the wall/ceiling juncture. According to members of the Reese Malles Family, whose family owned the ranch from 1945-69, the brands are from the outfits that ran cattle through the ranch. The flooring material is sheet linoleum laid in three pieces with metal strip anchoring.

The room has a sleeping area with a bed in the south half and a food preparation/storage area with a stove and a cupboard in the north half. The original wood-burning cook stove remains in the cooking area. It is a powder blue enameled 6-burner "Baker" with two warmers. A wood burning cast iron "Rex" stove is in the sleeping area.

In October 2002, Harold and Kenny Baxstrom, and their uncle Mervin Baxstrom, toured the homestead. Harold and Kenny were born in the homestead in the 1930s. Mervin lived in the lower homestead and was a frequent visitor and occasional resident at the upper homestead. The three Baxstroms all remembered their time at the cabin. None of the three noted any significant changes to the building.

**Property Name** Baxstrom Upper Place Homestead House

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Subsequent owners, the Steerman Family, applied brand decorations to the plaster walls. The Steermans' primary brand was the Bar M 3, which is carved on the frame of one of the south windows of the homestead.

Minor restoration was conducted in 2003-04 in accordance with a Colorado State Historical Fund approved historic structure assessment. The restoration work consisted of repair with minimal replacement to the original materials. New doors replaced hollow core veneered doors (that were apparently replacement doors from the 1960s), and wood shingles replaced severely weathered asphalt shingles that had been installed over the original wood shingles approximately 30 years ago. The windows were repaired. Broken glass panes were replaced with old glass scavenged from other buildings.

A historic photograph of Harold and Kenny's father at the house is located below. The photograph is roughly dated to 1935-40. It shows that the homestead building has retained its original proportions and most of its original materials. The setting is remarkably unchanged.



*Photograph courtesy of Harold Baxstrom*

**COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Page 3  
Section III**

**Property Name** Baxstrom Upper Place Homestead House

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South Elevation

Sketch Map

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### SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

The Baxstrom Homestead House is eligible for the State Register under Criterion C for Architectural significance. The homestead illustrates the building techniques of the local Baxstrom family stone masons whose work was known in nearby McElmo Canyon and Cortez. The method of construction represents the ingenuity in the application of readily available local materials during a period of local and national economic depression. The building was small and was very inexpensive to build since the stone and mortar mix came from the land, and the use of wood was kept to a bare minimum in a region with very little timber.

The house was built using construction techniques that reflect the influence and traditions of a well known local stone mason. The foundation, sills and lintels are carefully shaped and placed in anticipation of the location of the doors and windows. While the homestead lacks the refinement of the finely cut and shaped stone block buildings of the earlier masonry tradition of Peter Baxstrom, the rock and mortar house exhibits qualities of his descendant who was an experienced mason, and the application of local building traditions and materials.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The homestead is located northwest of Cortez in Trail Canyon, between Goodman Point and McElmo Canyon. Trail Canyon saw some of the earliest cattle activities in southwestern Colorado. The Canyon is believed to have received its name as the location of an early route for cattle drives. The first account of cowboys in the area dates to 1876 when Texas cattlemen drove herds through the Mancos area. Montezuma County lands were used primarily for grazing between 1870 and 1900. Homesteaders did not have any notable presence until about 1910. Between 1911 and 1925 over 62 people filed for land on nearby Goodman Point under the provisions of the Homestead Act.

Interviews with descendants of the Goodman Point homesteaders indicate that the most desirable properties were those with close proximity to water. The first priorities were to build a home, develop a water system and plant a garden. Vegetables for the settlers and corn for the livestock were integral parts of the garden. Dry crops, primarily pinto beans and potatoes, were successful in this area as they are today. Some of the best years for the crops were 1927 and 1947 when beans produced 10 to 12 sacks per acre. The two worst years were 1934 in the midst of the Depression and 1951 when one farmer recalled harvesting 10 sacks of beans from 30 acres.

Colorado shared the national devastation of the Great Depression. The 1930s began on a short-lived optimistic note when Colorado's farmers produced a record harvest in 1930. The excess supply ultimately contributed to a surplus that helped to drive prices even lower. In 1931, statewide farm income dropped to \$125.9 million representing about two-thirds of the previous year's return. In southwestern Colorado, the economic impacts were particularly hard on agriculture. O'Rourke's (1980) history of southwest Colorado provides a summary of the values of agricultural products in the region. From 1930-40, the value of livestock products on southwestern Colorado farms decreased from \$13,076, 817 to \$9,298,005 and the value of harvested crops dropped from \$8,046,340 to \$6,139,973.

Montezuma County felt the impacts of the Depression very early on. In 1931 Montezuma County laid off government employees and reduced salaries across the board. Consignments of relief flour, food and clothing from the federal government found their way to the county, beginning in 1931.



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Agricultural efforts were further hampered by Mother Nature. A record drought struck the county in 1934 and was hailed at the time as the driest year experienced since the first settlers arrived. Farmer Barney Seitz recalled "In 1934, we had to sell our livestock except our work animals. It was so dry, we didn't raise anything....All the springs, everything went dry." As a relief effort, the federal government purchased cattle at an average of \$12.50 a head to reduce ranch inventories and help keep the ranching industry solvent.

#### Baxstrom Family

The economic setting was dire when Howard Baxstrom decided to homestead a piece of property near McElmo Canyon. But Howard had the support of an established family. Howard's grandfather, Peter Baxstrom, had immigrated to the United States from Sweden some time around the Civil War. After working for twenty years as a stone mason in other parts of the United States, Peter arrived in southwest Colorado in 1884. Peter opened a quarry on Hartman Draw just west of the new town of Cortez.

Peter constructed many local landmarks. His buildings in Cortez include the (1889) Wilson Building; a (1890) two story schoolhouse at 23 East Montezuma Avenue that has been partly remodeled on the second floor, but retains its original masonry; the (1908) First National Bank Building; and the original part of the (1909) Calkins School Building. He was also responsible for a number of stone buildings in McElmo Canyon including the (ca. 1913) Battlerock School and the Zwicker House (date unknown). The Baxstrom buildings are still easily recognized today by their artful design, carefully arranged stonework and skillfully cut stone.

Peter died in 1917. His son Harry continued as a mason. Among his professional accomplishments, Harry trained WPA workers in how to build the stone addition to his father's Calkins School Building. Harry married Bernice Sayler and located a homestead in Trail Canyon which drains into McElmo Canyon. Their son, Howard, was born on the Trail Canyon homestead and grew up with the children of the settlers in McElmo Canyon including his future wife, Blanche Pearle Ashbaugh. The couple married on Valentine's Day in 1933, and immediately went to work at proving up a homestead located just up the canyon from Harry's land. Blanche wrote in a short memoir for her family that the young couple lived with her in-laws until June of 1933 while her husband and his father "...together built us a little house that we started housekeeping in." This little house is the Baxstrom Upper Place Homestead House. Howard and Blanche obtained title to the property in 1939 (homesteader patent #1101686). Father and son had adjacent "lower" and "upper" homestead properties in Trail Canyon.

The Baxstroms financed their farm by working for other people during the day and working their own property in the evenings. Blanche noted in her memoirs, "We were good farmers and worked hard at it. Our first garden froze with little cucumbers, tasseling corn and blooming string beans on the second day of June. We started over and had a good garden but not so early."

#### Subsequent owners

Montezuma County property deeds indicate the upper homestead property was sold in 1943 to Pearl and R.R. Carpenter. Millard Steerman bought both of the Baxstrom homestead properties in 1946 to form the core of his Trail Canyon Ranch. He added a few adjacent large parcels and ran a large cattle operation with his wife, Genevieve O'Laughlin Steerman. The Steermans lived in Cortez and used the

**Property Name** Baxstrom Upper Place Homestead House

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upper homestead as a bunkhouse for the ranch hands during haying and branding operations and for other McElmo cattle operators traveling through the canyon. Their primary brand was the Bar M 3, which is carved on the frame of one of the south windows of the homestead.

Millard and Genevieve's daughter Leslie Ann married Reece Malles, a son of a local ranching family, in 1965. The Malleses went into partnership with the Steermans in 1966 and became owners of the ranch in 1969. The Malleses did not make any changes to the upper homestead house, which continued to function as a bunkhouse. The Malleses sold the ranch in 1997. All of the owners have maintained the building and used it for agricultural purposes.

#### Integrity

Perhaps because the property continued in agricultural use and is isolated, the rock homestead and its setting remain unchanged. The property is only accessed via a locked gate and a seasonally available dirt road. The nearby fields and pasture are used intermittently for grazing. No modern intrusions are visible from the homestead. The location, setting and feeling of this property accurately reflects the historic use. The building remains substantially unchanged. The original design, materials, workmanship and resulting association with the Baxstrom family remain.

Property Name Baxstrom Upper Place Homestead House

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Backstrom, Blanche Pearl Ashbaugh. Memoir loaned from the personal collection of Harold Baxstrom, Durango, Colorado. ca. 1974.
- Connolly, Marjorie. "The Goodman Point Historic Land-Use Study." *The Sand Canyon Archaeological Project: A Progress Report Occasional Paper No. 2*, 1992 pp 33-44. Crow Canyon Archaeological Center: Cortez.
- Cortez Public Library. History of Montezuma County File : compilations of clippings on file. Cortez, Colorado.  
Obituaries and death notices of pioneers of Montezuma and Dolores Counties on file. Cortez, Colorado.
- Cortez Downtown Building Plaques with building histories in Cortez, Colorado. N.D.
- Cortez Memorial Cemetery Headstones of the Baxstrom burials, Cortez.
- Cortez Sentinel*, Peter Baxstrom obituary. 12 July 1917.
- Daughters of the American Revolution, Sarah Platt Decker Chapter *Pioneers of the San Juan Country Volumes 1-4*. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1995.
- Freeman, Ira S. *A History of Montezuma County*. Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Publishing Company, 1954.
- Matlock, Gary and Phillip Duke. *The Archaeology and History of the Trail Canyon Ranch, Southwest Colorado*. Durango, Colorado: Fort Lewis College Center of Southwest Studies, 1997.
- McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.
- Montezuma County Records. Assessor's records. Clerk's Records, Deeds. Cortez, Colorado.  
Clerk's records, including homesteading patent 1101686. Cortez, Colorado.
- O'Rourke, Paul. *Frontier in Transition, A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1980.
- Shields, Susan. "Alice Baer Remembrances". *Cortez Sentinel*, Cortez, Colorado, December. 28, 1981.
- Wickens, James. *Colorado in the Great Depression*. New York City: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979.
- Zeller, Chris. "An Historic Structure Assessment of The Baxstrom Upper Place Homestead, Trail Canyon Ranch, Colorado", *Colorado Historical Society State Historical Fund Project 2003-HA-006*. Denver. 2003. On file in the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado.

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**Interviews**

Baxstrom, Harold and Judy. Interview with Jill Seyfarth, Durango, Colorado, May 2002.

Baxstrom, Harold, Kenney, Mervin and Charlotte. Interviews and comments during visit to homestead, 2002.

Head, June [Local genealogist in Montezuma County]. Telephone interview with Jill Seyfarth, 2002.

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The nominated parcel includes the footprint of the building plus ten feet.

**JUSTIFICATION**

This boundary encompasses all features of the rock homestead that can be undisputedly associated with the Baxstrom family. Other nearby buildings and structures could not be directly associated with the Baxstroms and do not display the masonry techniques used on the house.

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**PHOTOGRAPH LOG**

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1- 6:

Name of Property: Baxstrom Upper Place Homestead House  
Location: Cortez vicinity, Montezuma County  
Photographer: Jill Seyfarth  
Date of Photographs: March 28, 2006  
Negatives: Located at Cultural Resource Planning, Durango

Photo No.                      Photographic Information

- |   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Looking NW at front         |
| 2 | Looking NW at front         |
| 3 | Looking E at side and rear  |
| 4 | Looking SE at side and rear |
| 5 | Looking N-interior          |
| 6 | Looking S-interior          |