

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received JUL 29 1985

date entered AUG 29 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Pierson Farm

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number N/A not for publication

city, town N/A vicinity of York

state North Dakota code 38 county Benson code 005

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
☐ district	☐ public	☒ occupied	☒ agriculture	☐ museum
☒ building(s)	☒ private	☐ unoccupied	☐ commercial	☐ park
☐ structure	☐ both	☐ work in progress	☐ educational	☒ private residence
☐ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	☐ entertainment	☐ religious
☐ object	☐ in process	☒ yes: restricted	☐ government	☐ scientific
	☐ being considered	☐ yes: unrestricted	☐ industrial	☐ transportation
	N/A	☐ no	☐ military	☐ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Orville Pierson

street & number Rural Route

city, town York vicinity of state ND

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds

street & number Benson County Courthouse

city, town Minnewaukan state Nd

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? N/A yes no

date N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent
☐ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Pierson Farm, located three-and-one-half miles south of York, North Dakota, consists of about 19 structures but only one, the farm house, represents the farm as it appeared prior to 1940. The house is a two-story frame structure, in a subdued Arts and Crafts style, purchased as a "catalog" or "pattern book" house in 1923 and erected the same year. The exterior was covered with horizontal lap siding and shingles. Over the years the structure has been altered by the enclosing of its porch, replacement of all windows and the covering of the ground floor exterior with aluminum siding. The interior is largely unchanged except for the kitchen and the deletion of a partition between the living and dining rooms.

The farm house is a two-story frame building built over a full-sized basement with poured concrete foundations and cellar floor. It is a "catalog" or "pattern book" house purchased by Ralph and Evangeline Pierson in 1923 and erected later that year by two local carpenters. The building arrived at York in one or more boxcars containing pre-cut lumber and all necessary supplies and equipment.

Of a subdued Arts and Crafts architectural style, the house faces east from the top of a small hill which affords it a commanding view in all directions but north, where tree growth in recent years has obscured the vista. The upper floor contains a central hall and north and south bedrooms. The ground floor was laid out quite simply: living and dining rooms, separated by a partition with sliding doors, occupy the front with a large kitchen-pantry on the southwest, a bathroom on the north center and master bedroom on the northwest. The walls and ceiling are plaster-on-lathe with hardwood floors and woodwork.

The exterior was covered with horizontal wood lap-siding on the ground floor and wooden shingles outside the second floor and on the gables. The most noticeable exterior feature was a large, open front porch built under a roof whose lines are the smooth sloping extension of the house's main roof line. The porch roof was supported by four square posts, one at each outer corner and two flanking the entry and stairs which was located in the center. A low railing, covered with lap-siding extended from the first floor siding, surrounded all sides of the porch except for the entryway.

The lap-siding apparently has always been painted white. The shingle siding is presently a dark green but there is evidence it might have been yellow or gold at some time in the past.

Several changes, both exterior and interior, have been made in the house, most occurring during the past forty years. Most noticeable was the enclosing of the front porch, which was done about 1943-44. The change included the placing of six double-hung windows which, in effect, converted it into a sun porch, usable all year-around. The door into the enclosed porch was first left in the same location as the original entryway and stairs; later it was moved to the south side.

All windows, except those in the original front wall, have been replaced. Casement windows replaced the side-by-side, double-hung windows on the upper floor while a variety of replacement styles were used on the ground floor. Most noticeable was the

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substitution of a picture window for the two double-hung windows on the south wall of the dining room. Remodeling of the kitchen during the 1950's also resulted in not only the replacement but the relocation, of the kitchen windows on the south side.

Family members recall the original windows as being poorly constructed and the source of constant rattles and air infiltration. Ralph Pierson blamed this defect on the window casings being stored in the barn while the house was under construction where they absorbed moisture; following installation they dried out and no amount of bracing and caulking would alleviate the problem.

During 1984 the ground floor lap-siding was covered with white aluminum siding. The basement windows were closed off and the foundation covered with a foam insulation; changes were done chiefly to lower the cost of heating the building during the winter.

Interior changes include removal of the partition and sliding doors between the living and dining rooms. Beginning in the 1940's the kitchen was updated and remodeled several times for more efficient work space and allow use of more electric appliances. New cupboards and counters were also installed. The partition between the kitchen proper and a small pantry located in the southwest corner of the house was removed during the 1950's (probably at the same time the windows were rearranged) and the kitchen was expanded into that space; a new sink was also put in at that time.

While the Pierson Farm presently consists of no less than 19 structures, only the farm house and part of the bunk house (in a greatly altered state), were on their present sites prior to 1940. Indeed, most of the present out-buildings were built or moved onto the farm after 1950.

Photographic evidence shows a large barn located west of the farm house. This was demolished in 1961 and replaced with metal-sided pole barn. About half of the buildings were acquired elsewhere and moved onto the farm. Several of these are former railroad buildings, including no less than three former Great Northern Railroad. section hand car houses, the scale house from the Great Northern stockyards at Towner, N. D., and a part of the former Northern Pacific Railway depot at Leeds, N. D.

All buildings present a well cared for appearance and are painted either white or red with white trim, although several recent structures covered with galvanized metal have not been painted. Most of the farmstead is fronted on the east side with a white fence which is also extended west along the north and south sides of the farm house to separate it from working areas. The fence line, which encloses the grassy farm year around the farm house, makes a fine visual boundary to enclose the site while it separates the farm house from the other, non-significant, structures. For this reason it has been selected to form three sides of site boundary.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
☐ prehistoric	☐ archeology-prehistoric	☐ community planning	☐ landscape architecture	☐ religion
☐ 1400-1499	☐ archeology-historic	☐ conservation	☐ law	☒ science
☐ 1500-1599	☐ agriculture	☐ economics	☐ literature	☐ sculpture
☐ 1600-1699	☒ architecture	☐ education	☐ military	☐ social/
☐ 1700-1799	☐ art	☐ engineering	☐ music	☐ humanitarian
☐ 1800-1899	☐ commerce	☐ exploration/settlement	☐ philosophy	☐ theater
☒ 1900-	☐ communications	☐ industry	☐ politics/government	☐ transportation
		☐ invention		☐ other (specify)

Specific dates 1923 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Pierson Farm is significant for a number of reasons. It was the first farmstead in rural North Dakota to be electrified as a result of the establishment of the Rural Electrification Administration in 1935. The farmhouse also has architectural significance and represents a style rarely seen on North Dakota farmsteads of the 1920's.

The Pierson farm is located on the site of an earlier farmstead which was homesteaded in May, 1899, by Charles H. Banks and proved up, with title acquired from the federal government, in April, 1906. The Bank's homestead consisted of 160 acres of prairie land in parts of Sections 5, 7 and 8 of Township 155 North, Range 69 West of the Fifth principal Meridian. The farmstead was located on the 40 acre plot comprising the Southeast quarter of the Northeast quarter of Section 7, a site no doubt selected for the presence of a small hill which provided a commanding view in all directions.

In June, 1919, Banks sold his property, including the farmstead, to Olaf Pierson, a Swedish immigrant who lived a short distance away. Pierson had already amassed a considerable amount of farm land and was developing a reputation as a breeder of Percheron draft horses. In 1921 Olaf's son Ralph married a neighbor girl, Evangeline Sandven, and the couple moved onto the old Banks farmstead. In 1923 they purchased a "catalog house" from the Gordon Vantine Company of Davenport, Iowa. The price was \$3,000 for the structure plus another \$1,000 for a coal-fired hot water heating system. Evangeline supplied the money from an inheritance. The new farm house was erected and occupied before the end of 1923.

Ralph Pierson developed the farm, to which title was obtained in 1937, into a combination grain and livestock operation. He also assisted in the operation of the considerable acreage owned by his father. Olaf Pierson owned about 14,000 acres of land at the time of his death in 1948, part of which was inherited by Ralph who enlarged his operations accordingly. Ralph was active in the government of both Beaver Civil Township and Beaver School District and had a particular interest in conservation, planting and nurturing a large number of trees to protect the farmstead as a shelter belt on the north and west sides.

Ralph and Evangeline raised a family of four - two girls and two boys. Their eldest son, Orville, became involved in the farm's operation about 1950 and was established on a small, tree protected farmstead across the section line road to the east from the parents' farm. Following the death of Ralph Pierson in 1977 and Evangeline's subsequent move to a retirement home in Rugby, North Dakota, Orville Pierson became the operator of the farm and is so at present.

The Pierson Farm was the first to be electrified in North Dakota under R.E.A. through a series of coincidental circumstances. The pattern book house purchased in 1923 came equipped for electrical wiring and that wiring was installed at the time of

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name York

Quadrangle scale 7.5' series

UTM References

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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ Section 7, T155N, R69W, Benson County, North Dakota, beginning at a point 2,025' south of the northeast corner of Section 7, thence 335' west, 120' south, 335' east and 120' north to the point of beginning.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Frank E. Vyzralek

organization Great Plains Research

date March, 1985

street & number 702 Capitol Avenue

telephone (701) 223-1857

city or town Bismarck

state ND

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

 national X state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Alois B. Spielman
State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Alois B. Spielman

title State Historic Preservation Officer (North Dakota)

date 7/1/85

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Melores Byun
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 8/29/85

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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construction. Orville Pierson recalled that each room had a hole in the wall - an uncovered switchbox - and one in the ceiling where light fixtures were to be installed. When the opportunity to obtain electricity for the farm was imminent it was a simple matter for Ralph Pierson to hire an electrician to complete the wiring and install the necessary switches and fixtures.

Although the Rural Electrification Administration was established May 11, 1935 by an executive order issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt nearly two years passed before the first rural electric co-op was formed in North Dakota. In early 1937 Baker Electric Cooperative, Inc., was organized and soon after received its first construction load. Headquartered at Baker, North Dakota, a small town located about nine miles southwest of the Pierson Farm, the cooperative's first transmission lines were to run east and west from that point, connecting the towns of Harlow and Balta, with a second line planned to be built north and east to York. This latter line was projected to pass down the section line in front of the Pierson Farm.

The lights went on at the Pierson Farm on the evening of November 24, 1937, the day before Thanksgiving. Several switches left on in the upstairs bedrooms alerted the Pierson children that the transmission line was energized and they rushed to inform the rest of the family. Mrs. Pierson remembers her first reaction was to begin dusting furniture because "everything looked dirty." The new electric lights revealed the accumulation of dust theretofore unnoticed under the weak rays of the old kerosene lamps.

Beyond convenience and the improvement in lifestyle which electricity brought to the Pierson family, it also helped to increase their economic well-being. Until electrification Ralph Pierson's livestock raising operations had been limited to about 30 cattle by a lack of water. The water was available from wells drilled on the farmstead but Pierson's forced-water system was dependent upon a windmill to power the pumps and the wind was an uncertain source of power. With electric pumps water was easily available and by 1962 he had become a breeder of purebred Hereford cattle with a herd of more than 200 animals.

The Pierson Farm's right to be called the first REA-electrified farmstead in North Dakota has never been challenged and it has been formally recognized as such by North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives.

The Arts and Crafts architectural style in residential buildings was popular in North Dakota roughly from the late teens through the 1920s. While it does not appear in large numbers, representative examples may be found in many of the state's cities and villages. A combination of historic circumstances has made them a very rare style on rural farmsteads, however.

While the late 1910s were a time of agricultural prosperity in North Dakota due largely to the wartime inflation of farm prices, it was not a period of great building construction because of supply and manpower shortages during World War I. Following

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the war it was not until late 1919 and early 1920 before most American industries had retooled for volume domestic production. Agricultural prosperity in North Dakota collapsed abruptly in 1921 as farm prices underwent a rapid deflation at the same time that prices of most other goods were increasing - the press of that day began to routinely refer to the "high cost of living" as a principal ingredient of American life. The result, as historians of that era point out, was that economic depression came to rural North Dakota almost a decade before it struck the rest of the country. And it was not until well into the 1940s, in the midst of another war, that prosperity began to return to rural North Dakota.

Thus, few North Dakota farmers had the economic ability to build and pay for new farm residences during most of the period that the arts and crafts style was at the height of its popularity. The Pierson family can be considered an anomaly in that only Evangeline's inheritance made possible their acquisition of a catalog house in the Arts and Crafts style during 1923 at a time when, as one writer phrased it, "small town banks were bursting like popcorn" while foreclosures, low prices and poor crops were driving many rural North Dakotans from their farms.

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August 27, 1948, p. 1 [obituary of Olaf Pierson]

October 20, 1977, p.16 [obituary of Ralph J. Pierson]

Bruce Nelson, Land of the Dacotahs, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1946), pp. 299-317.

Doris Stadig, Acorn to Oak (n.p., n.d.) [A history of Baker Electric Cooperative, Inc. Copies available at their office, Cando, North Dakota.]

Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 371-440.

"Evangeline Pierson," (3 page manuscript, author unknown) [Copies available from Baker Electric Cooperative, Cando, North Dakota.]

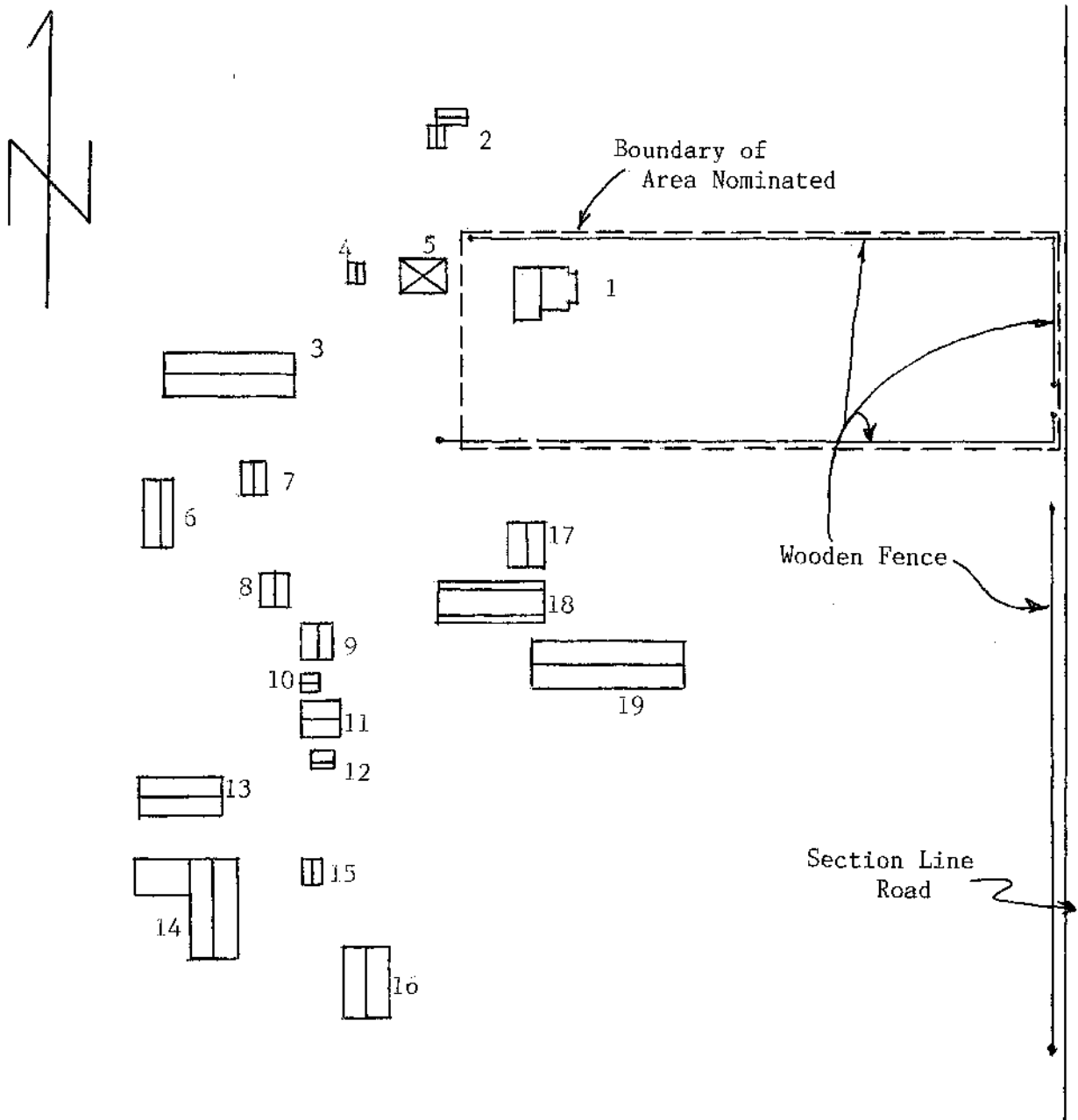
Evangeline Sandven Pierson, "Grandma's Memories" (privately printed, n.d.) [Reminiscences of Mrs. Pierson's life. Copies available from her or other family members.]

Interview with Orville L. Pierson, at the Pierson Farm, March 18, 1985

Lisa Swanson Faleide, "Palmer Stadum---A Man With a Dream," (9 page manuscript) [Copies available from Baker Electric Cooperative, Cando, North Dakota.]

"North Dakota's First Rural Electric Farm," North Dakota Rural Electric Magazine, (August, 1962), pp. 4-5.

Telephone interview with Evangeline Pierson, March 18, 1985.



THE PIERSON FARM
 Sec. 7, Township 155 North, Range 69 West
 Benson County, North Dakota

(Not to Scale)

THE PIERSON FARM
Benson County, North Dakota

Sketch Map Key

- 1 - Farm House
- 2 - Bunk House
- 3 - Pole Barn
- 4 - Storage Shed
- 5 - 3 Car Garage
- 6 - Barn
- 7 - Storage Building
- 8 - Storage Building
- 9 - Storage Building
- 10 - Storage Shed
- 11 - Storage Building
- 12 - Chicken Coop
- 13 - Barn
- 14 - Barn with Lean-to
- 15 - Storage Shed
- 16 - Granary
- 17 - Machine Shop
- 18 - Quonset
- 19 - Pole Barn