

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

RECEIVED

NOV 20 1987

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bemis, Polly, House
other names/site number Bemis, Polly, Cabin; site 001331

2. Location

street & number n/a; accessible on Salmon River via boat ☐ not for publication
city, town Riggins ☒ vicinity
state Idaho code ID county Idaho code 049 zip code 83549

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
☒ private	☒ building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
☐ public-local	☐ district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
☐ public-State	☐ site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
☐ public-Federal	☐ structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
	☐ object	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/ANumber of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this
☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.
Kenneth J. Allen, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Nov. 16, 1987
Signature of certifying official Idaho State Historical Society Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National
Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain:)

Patrick Andrews3/4/88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

domestic/single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

recreation and culture/museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

no style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls wood/log

roof wood/shake

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Polly Bemis House is a one and one-half story log building on a stone foundation. The building faces east; it measures 14'8" by 20'1" on the exterior. On the interior, it has a double-pile floor plan of two rooms on the first story. There is a half-story sleeping loft. Constructed of white fir and red fir timbers left round, chinked, and notched at the corners with square notching, the building has a shallow gable roof supported on log purlins and roofed with hand-split yellow pine shakes. The roof extends a few feet to cover the area in front of the front door. This extension is supported by log posts at each corner. A skirt of split lumber blocks off the gable of this front porch. The house has a gable front with an offset batten door and one gable window, one window on the south wall, two windows on the north wall, and one half-story window set in the west (rear) wall gable. The windows in the east and west gables and on the north wall are non-operable with center mullions. The window on the south wall is a sliding sash window reconstructed in 1985-86 to fit the original opening. Simple window and door frames consist of whipsawn lumber. The joists for the half-story floor are framed into the lateral walls of the building. On the interior the floors on the first and the half stories are splined. Lumber in the building exhibits whipsaw marks.

In addition to the south window reconstruction, the 1985-1986 stabilization and restoration of the Polly Bemis House included total replacement of four deteriorated logs and partial replacement of one log, rebuilding the foundation, new stone floor supports, restoration of flooring with some replacement of deteriorated members with compatible but distinguishable new material, new roofing (replacement in kind), reglazing windows (in original sash), rethinking where needed (replacement in kind), replacing a missing porch post, and porch skirt replacement where members were missing (replacement in kind). In addition, the site was regraded to allow for positive drainage away from the building. The stabilization and restoration work was planned and designed by Fred Walters, preservation technologist, CSW Architects, Boise. The work was completed in November of 1986.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

architecture

ethnic heritage: Asian

Period of Significance

1923-1933

Significant Dates

1923

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Charlie Shepp, Peter Klinkhammer
(builders)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Polly Bemis House is significant under criterion A for its association with the social history of Chinese women in Idaho. The house is significant under criterion C as an excellent example of log construction and of the gable-front single-pen dwelling as they were employed in the central Idaho mountains. The building is important as our only inventoried instance of the use of whipsawn lumber. Constructed in 1923, the building was associated with Polly Bemis until she moved to Grangeville in 1933.

Chinese miners came into Idaho nearly as early as white miners, and by 1870, according to some estimates, Chinese made up about half of Idaho's population. (White suppression of the Chinese during the 1890s encouraged most of the Chinese to move to west coast Chinatowns.) With the Chinese miners came a very few Chinese women, most of them prostitutes, about which little is known. Polly Bemis, born in 1853 in northern China, is an exception. Because of her well-documented career as a slave (serving as a dance hostess), boarding house operator and cook, goldsmith, needleworker, gardener, and nurse, Bemis has become famous among Idahoans as a representative Chinese woman. While her life may not actually be representative of the Chinese woman's experience in early Idaho, the fact that much documentation does exist about Bemis makes her story important in Idaho's social history. Her 1923 log cabin, built to replace an older building that had burned, is a part of that documentation, significant for its evidence of the physical conditions of Bemis' life during the period after her husband Charlie Bemis's death and before she became too ill to support herself, moving to a Grangeville nursing home in 1933. Bemis died on November 6 of that year. Her house survives intact with much of its original materials, or reconstructed materials representing replacement in kind.

☒ See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Elsensohn, Sister M. Alfreda. Idaho County's Most Romantic Character: Polly Bemis.
Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1979.

Yung, Judy. Chinese Women of America. Seattle: University of Washington
Press, 1986.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- ☐ 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 # _____

☐ See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Specify repository:

Idaho Architectural and Historic
Sites Inventory

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 20 acres

UTM References

A

1	1	1
---	---	---

6	0	4	0	0	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

5	0	3	2	0	1	5
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting Northing

C

1	1	1
---	---	---

6	0	4	0	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

5	0	3	1	5	5	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

B

1	1	1
---	---	---

6	0	4	0	0	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

5	0	3	1	5	5	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting Northing

D

--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nomination includes the Polly Bemis House and the property on which it sits, that portion of the NE 1/4 SW 1/4 section 12 T24N R6E that lies south and west of the Salmon River.

☒ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated area includes the Bemis house and its immediate setting; recent recreational housing constructed by the current owner has been excluded from the nominated area.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jennifer Eastman Attebery, State Architectural Historian

organization Idaho State Historical Society date September 22, 1987

street & number 210 Main Street telephone (208) 334-3861

city or town Boise state Idaho zip code 83702

11/20/87

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 1

Bemis' cabin was built for her by two neighboring prospectors turned ranchers, Charlie Shepp and Peter Klinkhammer. In form and construction the building represents construction techniques and a house plan that were typical of the ranches and mining country of the central Idaho mountains. The house plan is a single-pen house with a gable front and a front porch formed by an overhanging roof, called a Rocky Mountain cabin by Mary Wilson in her Log Cabin Studies (Ogden, Utah: U.S. Forest Service, 1984). Features that typify central Idaho horizontal timber construction include the use of round logs, chinking, square notching, and the gable roof on purlins and roofed with shakes. With its recent restoration work, the Bemis cabin survives as an excellent example of these techniques. In addition the building exhibits the marks of careful crafting in its splined floor, and it represents our only inventoried instance of the use of whipsawn lumber.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

RECEIVED

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

JAN 19 1988

NATIONAL
REGISTER

Section number 8 Page 2

BEMIS, POLLY, HOUSE

Additional information provided - January 14, 1988

The Polly Bemis House is significant under criterion A for its association with the social history of Chinese women in Idaho. The house is significant under criterion C as an excellent example of log construction and of the gable-front single-pen dwelling as they were employed in the central Idaho mountains. The building is important as our only inventoried instance of the use of whipsawn lumber. Constructed in 1923, the building was associated with Polly Bemis until she moved to Grangeville in 1933.

Chinese miners came into Idaho nearly as early as white miners, and by 1870, a majority of Idaho's miners were Chinese. Chinese made up about half of Idaho's population. (White suppression encouraged many Chinese to move to west coast Chinatowns in 1886.) With the Chinese miners came a very few Chinese women, most of them identified in census statistics as prostitutes, about whom little is known. Polly Bemis, born in 1853 in northern China, is an exception. She arrived in Warrens around 1871 under an indenture to cover costs of her long trip from China. After she had lived there awhile, Charlie Bemis won her contract in a poker game, and they became business associates. Because of her well-documented career as a dance hostess, boarding house operator and cook, goldsmith, needleworker, gardener, and nurse, Bemis has become famous among Idahoans. While her later career may not actually be representative of the Chinese woman's experience in early Idaho, the fact that much documentation does exist about Bemis makes her story important in Idaho's social history. When Polly and Charlie were married in 1894, their new status marked a significant change in Idaho social history with a modified perception of Chinese elements; a shift from aversion and misunderstanding to interest and eventual pride in Chinese aspects of Idaho's heritage. Her 1923 log cabin, built to replace an older building that had burned, represents that later era and is a part of that documentation, significant for its evidence of the physical conditions of Bemis' life during the period after her husband Charlie Bemis's death and before she became too ill to support herself, moving to a Grangeville nursing home in 1933. Bemis died on November 6 of that year. Her house survives intact with much of its original materials, or reconstructed materials representing replacement in kind.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

RECEIVED

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

JAN 19 1988

NATIONAL
REGISTER

Section number 10 Page 1

BEMIS, POLLY, HOUSE

Additional information provided - January 14, 1988

Verbal Boundary Description

The nomination includes the Polly Bemis House and the lot on which it sits, that portion of Homestead Entry Survey No. 817 that lies in the NE 1/4 SW 1/4 section 12 T24N R6E, Boise Meridian.

Boundary Justification

The nominated area includes the Bemis house and its historic homestead entry lot; a small portion of the homestead entry lot containing recent recreational housing constructed by the current owner has been excluded from the nominated area.



Bemis, Polly, House

Riggins, Idaho vicinity

photograph by James P. Campbell

May 17, 1987

negative on file at Salmon River Resort Club,
Boise, Idaho

View from NE

photograph 1 of 3



Bemis, Polly, House

Riggins, Idaho, vicinity.

photograph by James P. Campbell

May 17, 1987

negative on file at Salmon River

Resort Club, Boise, Idaho

view from **SE**

photograph 2 of 3



Bemis, Polly, House

Riggins, Idaho, vicinity

photograph by James P. Campbell

May 17, 1987

negative on file at Salmon River
Resort Club, Boise, Idaho

view from SW

photograph 3 of 3