

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Tracy General Store is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level, under Criterion A, for its role in the small community of Almo, Idaho. The store was constructed in 1894 and first owned and operated by the Harry and William Eames families. The store was a general merchandise facility, which served the needs of the homesteaders with everything from food staples, to tack, dry goods to tools, shoes, household equipment, and farm implements. It also served the needs of the community as a cultural gathering place. The second floor of the store was built as an entertainment center where dances, recitations, and plays were held. The store is one of the oldest continuously operating stores in the state of Idaho (1894-2008) and continues to serve the local ranchers and farmers as well as national and international visitors to the area.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND:

The following information is drawn from the Historic Resources Study City of Rocks National Reserve Southcentral Idaho 1996.

Almo, Idaho is located in the Raft River Valley in southern Idaho at the base of Cache Peaks' southern slope. The valley was crisscrossed by Indian and emigrant trails. The California Trail, Salt Lake Alternate, Oregon Trail, and the Kelton Stage Road converged in City of Rocks National Reserve near Almo. Indians traveled through the valley between the Fort Hall area, and Grouse Creek, Utah, where they hunted meat and harvested pinion nuts for food. The California Trail passed through the tribal country of the Bannock and Shoshone.

Until 1851, the Indians' interaction with the emigrants was friendly, if cautious. As emigrant numbers increased through the early 1850's, The drain on the tribes' grazing resources intensified, leaving Indian lands impoverished. Hostilities increased and in 1860-1863, the area became a dangerous threat to travelers. The Treaty of Soda Springs was signed in 1863. A promise was exacted from the tribes that they would not molest travelers along the Oregon and California Trails and along the new roads between Salt Lake City and the mines near Boise City and Beaver Head.

In 1878, Henry R. Cahoon and Myron R. Durfee and their families settled along Almo Creek with the intention of farming. Encounters with the Indians were described in early settler's memoirs. The Indians were frightening and sometimes menacing as they approached their homes begging for food. The settlers complied with their demands for food and traded deer hides for gloves and moccasins. By 1882, 35 Mormon families had settled in the area. Schools and churches were established to serve the population.

By the turn of the century, Almo boasted a school, a post office (with mail every Thursday), and a store (Tracy Brothers). Charles Heath and John Eames had formed a drama company and brass band (both of which traveled to surrounding towns) and also performed for dances and entertainment on the second floor of the store. The three saloons and other undesirable remnants of the village had been controlled through creation of the Village Control Organization, composed of church leaders. The Almo Water Company established in 1889, controlled the

domestic and irrigation water supply from Almo Creek. Each man who wanted water bought shares in the Company and was given water accordingly.

Schooling was brief and the children helped in the house and the fields. The economic contribution of women and children to their homes and community was strengthened by the lack of cash within the local economy. The products of their labor – eggs, butter, cheese, handiwork, soap, candles – and the crops that they helped to harvest sustained the family. Surplus eggs, potatoes, and grain were traded at the general mercantile (Eames Bros.) for staples they could not grow themselves. Sheepmen, passing through, carrying cash, and in need of potatoes and flour, provided the merchant with the requisite legal tender.

The Eames Bros. Store:

The following information is drawn from:

William L. Eames Personal History
Oral History between William L. Eames and Phyllis Tracy
Robert Eames Personal History
Phyllis Tracy , Personal Knowledge

In 1883, Henry and William Eames, two young brothers from Plain City, Utah, came to the Almo Valley on a hunting trip. They were impressed with the valley and the following year they returned. Using the Squatters Rights of 1884, Harry settled on a piece of land on Edward's Creek.

They worked hard building a cabin and clearing the land, while Henry's wife and baby stayed with their Aunt Matilda Brackenbury, who was also living in the valley. In 1884, William went back to Plain City and brought his mother, Emma Beecroft, and his half-brothers with him. His brother, Robert and his family followed shortly after.

Henry and William raised garden produce and grain. They supplied produce, butter, eggs, and potatoes for the Southern Pacific Railroad in Terrace, Utah sixty miles south of Almo. They also supplied to the hotels and machine shops located there. Freight was hauled to Almo on the return trip.

In 1894, a well was dug, the land cleared, and a log store was built. Robert Eames sold out his business interest to Harry in exchange for Harry Eames' homestead.

The store wasn't large enough and they built an addition. They knew how to make bricks, having done so in Plain City. Two Swedish bricklayers looking for work were hired. The new addition had two stories. The top floor was used for dances and entertainments. A stairway was built on the outside so the public didn't have to go through the store.

The music for entertainment was provided by John Pettingill Sr.'s family. They brought their organ in the back of a sleigh or wagon and played until the early morning hours. John was a violinist, his bow was twice as long as an ordinary bow and his talent was well-known.

The store changed hands several times. It stayed within the two families (Eames and Tracys) from 1894 to 2007 with the exception of one year, 1920-1921, when Bateman & Horn purchased it.

1894-1901	Eames Brothers	Henry and William Eames
1901-1906	Tracy Bros.	William Tracy, Albert Tracy, and Fanny Marilla Tracy
1906-1919	Tracy Bros.	Albert Tracy
1920-1921	Unknown	Bateman & Horn
1921-1927	Name Unknown	Henry Eames
1927-1940	Eames & Tracy	William Eames and Joseph Tracy
1940-1946	J.E. Tracy	Joseph Tracy
1946-1954	J.E. Tracy	Joseph E. Tracy & Bert Franklin Tracy partnership
1954-1981	J.E. Tracy.	Bert Franklin Tracy
1981-1984	J.E. Tracy Inc.	Tracy Corporation
1984-2007	Tracy's General Store	William Tracy & Phyllis Tracy
2007	Tracy General Store	Wynn R. Dewsnap

Wynn R. Dewsnap purchased the store from William and Phyllis Tracy in January 2007. The interior of the store was thoroughly cleaned, repaired, and restocked to meet the demands of his customers. Historic elements of the store's past were preserved. The U.S. Post Office was relocated from the northeast corner to the southeast corner in the original log store area, to increase space and facilitate convenience. A log wall of the original log store was exposed on an interior wall. The original hardwood floors were cleaned and refinished. Historic display cases, the brass cash register, McClasky, scales, candy counter, and clerk's counter, are in use or on display. Historic photos of the store grace the walls. These items retain the store's history and enhance the customer's experience while trading at the store.

(Note) Henry Eames was also known as Harry Eames.

Conclusion:

Almo, Idaho has remained a small rural village of about 150 people. The community continues to be served by the Tracy General Store and post office, church, and school. Agriculture and tourism are the main contributors to the economy of Almo. A majority of the residents of Almo are descendants of the early settlers. The Tracy General Store (originally Eames Bros.) has emerged into the 21st century with the goal of retaining the history and heritage of the store, while accommodating the needs of their customers.

City of Rocks National Reserve and Castle Rocks State Park have drawn the tourist and recreation industry to this small town. Tourism demands have necessitated the expansion of services. Tracy General Store provides fuel, groceries, postal, internet and ATM services, feed, vet, and automotive supplies.

The Tracy General Store (Eames Bros.) has continuously served the community for 114 years. The store played a significant role in the community as a gathering place, a source for staples and postal service, all adding to its importance as the commercial center of Almo. It also served as a cultural center for entertainment in the second floor dance hall. As such, it is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.