

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

received \_\_\_\_\_  
date entered \_\_\_\_\_

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic Ralphsnyder Decagonal Barn

and/or common \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

street & number Route 1 (County Route 52/2) \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Masontown \_\_\_\_\_  vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_

state West Virginia code 54 county Preston code 077

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> thematic survey	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Kathy O'Brien / Chet O'Brien

street & number Skyview Farm, Route 1, Box 129

city, town Masontown \_\_\_\_\_  vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state West Virginia 26542

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Preston County Courthouse

street & number \_\_\_\_\_

city, town Kingwood \_\_\_\_\_ state West Virginia

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Round and Polygonal Barns of West Virginia has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes  no

date September 1, 1984 \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Historic Preservation Unit, West Virginia Department of Culture and History

city, town The Cultural Center, Capitol Complex, Charleston \_\_\_\_\_ state West Virginia

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date September 1981
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The original Ralphsnyder barn was 10-sided, constructed with balloon framing and a sectional conical roof covered with a standing seam metal roof. The roof featured a rather unusual steeple-shaped cupola, also covered with a metal roof, which had louvered shutters set into each of the four sides. The clapboard siding was of red pine and the foundation was molded concrete block.

Set on a hillside elevation, the barn was constructed on three levels, with two entrances on the ground floor and one entrance from the hillside to the first floor. There was a six-light window set into each section of the decagonal at the foundation level, and a light opening in every other section at the first-floor level. The ground floor was fitted with stalls for cattle; the first floor was used for equipment and supplies; and the second-level loft was set aside for hay storage.

The cupola extended into a hay chute which ran through the center of the building to the ground level and was used both for ventilation and as a means of getting feed to the livestock below. The barn was originally painted pale yellow with white trim, and deep blue shutters on the cupola.

In 1981, the barn was sold to Kathy O'Brien by then-owner Consolidation Coal Company, with the understanding that she would move it off Consol property. Several changes were necessitated by this move, including the replacement of the metal roof with roll roofing. (The original roof had to be removed before the structure could be dismantled, and could not be salvaged.) They also found that some of the exterior siding had deteriorated to the point where it had to be replaced. Since the barn's first floor subflooring was the same tongue-and-groove red pine as the siding, and a subfloor was not needed in the reconstructed barn, the wood from the subflooring was used to replace the deteriorated sections. Some of the wooden slats in several of the stall gates inside the barn were missing and had to be replaced with new wood, but most of the interior is original, including the central hay chute.

The foundation also underwent certain alterations, since Ulissus Ralphsnyder had built his barn partly into the side of a hill. The O'Brien farm is located on a hilltop, and it was not feasible to attempt to reconstruct the basement section of the barn, but the original foundation blocks were retained and used to construct a decagonal-shape foundation under the relocated barn.

The major alteration made after the relocation was the addition of an enclosed riding ring around the exterior of the original Ralphsnyder structure. Although this does change the barn's appearance to an extent, the original 10-sided building is basically intact within the addition and is partially visible from the outside. The O'Briens also have the original Ralphsnyder weathervane which features a singularly appropriate equine motif. The O'Briens have also retained the original yellow, white, and blue color scheme.

## A. Significance

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

Specific dates c. 1890 Builder Architect Clark Scott

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Ralphsnyder Decagonal Barn is the only 10-sided barn known to have been constructed in West Virginia, and one of only five round/polygonal barns still standing in the state, out of a total of 13 believed to have been built.

### EXPLANATORY NOTES

The Ralphsnyder Decagonal Barn was constructed by Ulissus Ralphsnyder in Preston County, near the intersection of Indian Creek Road and Route 19. The Ralphsnyder family, originally from Germany, was a prominent one in Preston County. John M. Ralphsnyder, son of Aaron, came to the area from Martinsburg and purchased land on Indian Creek, eventually owning one of the most extensive farms of his day. He married Elizabeth Riffle of Pennsylvania and had eight children, four daughters - one of whom died in infancy - and four sons. Three of his sons, including Franklin, became known as leading farmers in the area, handling some of the finest blooded stock in the county. Ulissus Ralphsnyder, born in 1868 to Franklin and his wife Margaret, was orphaned soon after birth and was raised by two aunts. After reaching adulthood, he became a farmer and cattle breeder, and is remembered as an affluent man with a passion for fast horses and fancy buggies. He is said to have traveled widely and is reported to have received the inspiration for his 10-sided barn from the round barns he encountered during his trips out west. (He is known to have escorted one of his aunts to Clement, Michigan, for treatment for her arthritis, and would have traveled through several states where round barns were popular, including Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana, as well as Michigan.)

As with most of West Virginia's polygonal barns, no firm date can be established for the construction of the Ralphsnyder barn. However, an approximate date of 1890 has been proposed, which is reasonable given the evidence. Apart from the decagonal shape - unusual in itself, since six-, eight-, and 12-sided structures were easier to build - which generally predated circular barns, other indications include the unusual steeped cupola (not found on any other round/polygonal barn in West Virginia); the rectangular central hay chute, which preceded the circular central silo, first published by Franklin King in 1891; the smaller size (40 feet in diameter); the non-circular interior arrangement; and the split-entry feature with the basement portion built partially into the side of the hill all mark the barn as one built before the turn of the century, possibly along the lines suggested by Lorenzo T. Coffin's published barn plans. And the uncle of one of the current owners, who was born in 1895, has vivid memories of driving past the Ralphsnyder barn as a young boy.

A fairly firm cutoff date of 1909 can be established for the barn due to a tragic circumstance. Ulissus' daughter, who died in October 1909, is supposed to have been buried inside the barn next to the grave of her pony. When the O'Briens purchased the barn from Consolidation Coal Company in the fall of 1981, they found a headstone in one corner, and have photographs showing the tombstone carved with the inscription, "Jesta, Dau. of U. A. & M. E. Ralphsnyder, Oct. 6, 1909." Ulissus himself died in 1916.

The carpenter on the original barn was Clark Scott, and Ulissus' father-in-law, blacksmith Bill Teter, provided the standing seam metal roofing for the barn.

[cont.]

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National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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received

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Continuation sheet Ralphsnyder Decagonal Barn

Item numbers 8 & 9

Page 2

8. SIGNIFICANCE (cont.)

As indicated, the Ralphsnyder farm was owned for a number of years by Consolidation Coal Company, which was engaged in surface mining of the hillside behind the decagonal barn. In 1973, when David Murphy, site supervisor with the National Park Service, prepared a report concerning threats to the barn's continued preservation, the structure had already begun deteriorating. Water from a spring uphill from the barn was flowing against the foundation, causing three sections of the foundation wall to buckle; two of the sections subsequently collapsed. In addition to the water damage, Consol was storing heavy equipment and scrap metal on the main floor of the barn directly over the collapsed foundation walls, which was causing the building to lean uphill. Although Murphy emphasized the immediacy of the threat to the building, and argued strongly in favor of its preservation, the coal company allowed the problems to go unchecked for several years until the barn's increasingly dilapidated condition made the company decide to demolish the structure.

However, in 1981 Kathy O'Brien, an employee of Consol, was looking for a barn for her show horses, and supervisor Ray Henderson told her about the Ralphsnyder barn which the company was planning to tear down. Ms. O'Brien was allowed to purchase the barn on the condition that she move it off Consol property, and in September 1981 she and her father began the job of dismantling, moving, and reassembling the barn on their farm two miles outside Masontown.

The O'Briens, both with training in drafting, documented the entire process, making detailed drawings of both interior and exterior, taking numerous photographs, and carefully numbering and color coding each piece to make certain that the barn would be reconstructed as close to original as possible.

As mentioned in the Description section, the relocation of the barn occasioned certain alterations, several of which would probably have been necessary if the barn had been restored without being moved. The major alteration, the addition of an enclosed circular riding ring around the exterior of the barn, is compatible with and complementary to the original design intent. The new appearance is also consistent with that of older, unmodified round and polygonal barns based on the Illinois stock barn publicized by Lloyd Z. Jones in Wallace's Farmer in January 1903. In general, the Ralphsnyder-O'Brien barn is a reasonably accurate reconstruction, although it has been modified to suit the needs of the current owners.

However, the barn is once again in use as a stock barn. The basic structure still retains 90% of the original integrity, and the fact remains that the barn had to be altered in order to remain useful, and would have been demolished if it had not been moved.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (cont.)

Wiley, Samuel T., History of Monongalia County, West Virginia, Preston Publishing Company, Kingwood, West Virginia, 1883.

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

- Oral Interview with Kathy and Jo O'Brien, Masontown, West Virginia, July 29, 1984.
- Oral Interview with Jo O'Brien, Masontown, West Virginia, August 14, 1984.
- Letter from Kathy O'Brien, Masontown, West Virginia, March 28, 1984.
- Murphy, David, site supervisor, National Park Service, Report on Ralph Snyder Round Barn, 1973.
- Little, Margaret, "Ralph Snyder's Round Barn," West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University, 1984.

### 10. Geographical Data

(cont.)

Acres of nominated property Five Acres Approximately  
 Quadrangle name Masontown Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A	<u>17</u>	<u>606280</u>	<u>4378700</u>	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

#### Verbal boundary description and justification

Beginning at a point on County Route 52/2 200 ft. northeast of the barn at a point where the road turns to the northeast (apex of curve), the boundary runs 500 ft. in a straight line to intersect with the 1600 ft. U.S.G.S. contour line, 250 ft. south along the contour line, List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

### 11. Form Prepared By

name title Ralph Pedersen, A.J.A. Architect / Margo Stafford  
 organization Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, Inc. date September 1, 1984  
 street & number P. O. Box 1135 telephone 624-9298  
 city or town Clarksburg state West Virginia

### 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

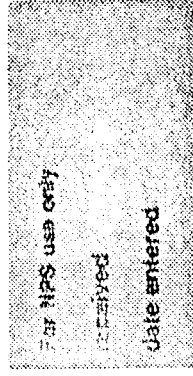
The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:  
 national  state  local

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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature]  
 title State Historic Preservation Officer date May 2, 1985

For NPS use only  
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
 date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of the National Register  
 Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief of Registration

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National Park Service  
**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet    Ralphsnyder Decagonal Barn Item number    10    Page    2

Verbal Boundary Description

thence 600 ft. in a straight line southeast to County Route 52/2, and thence 300 ft. north along the west edge of Route 52/2 to the point of beginning. Inclusive of the barn only and grounds only.

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Continuation sheet Ralphsnyder Dectagonal Barn Item number 10

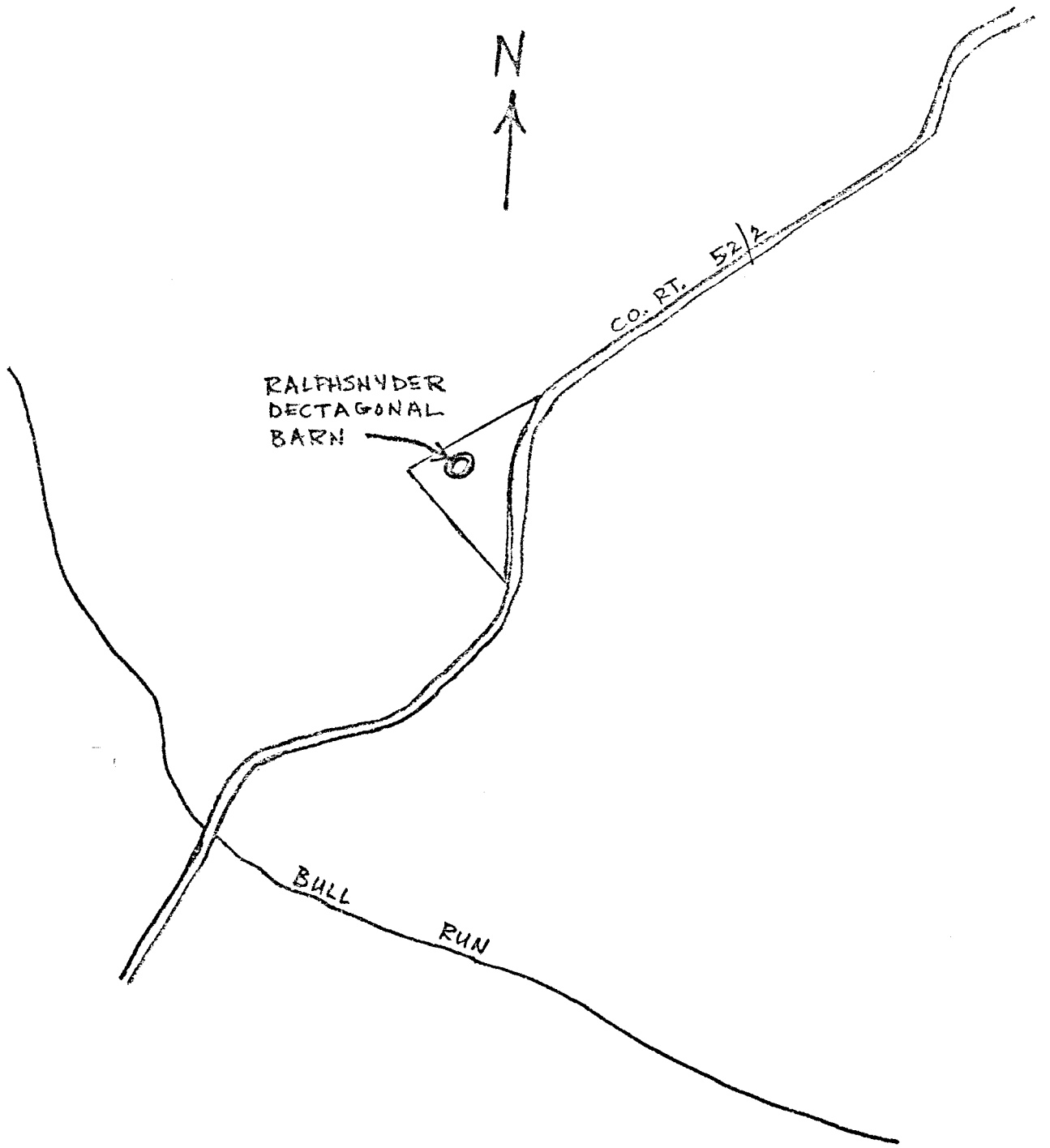
Page 3

Geographical Data

Acreage - .9 acre

Verbal Boundary Description

Inclusive of the barn only and immediate grounds beginning at the apex of the curve of County Route 52/2 (at the point where the road turns southward), and proceeding from the point in a continuous straight line southwesterly 200 ft., thence southeasterly in a straight line 180 ft.; and thence 175 ft. along the west edge of County Route 52/2 to the point of beginning, to form a triangle. (See sketch map)

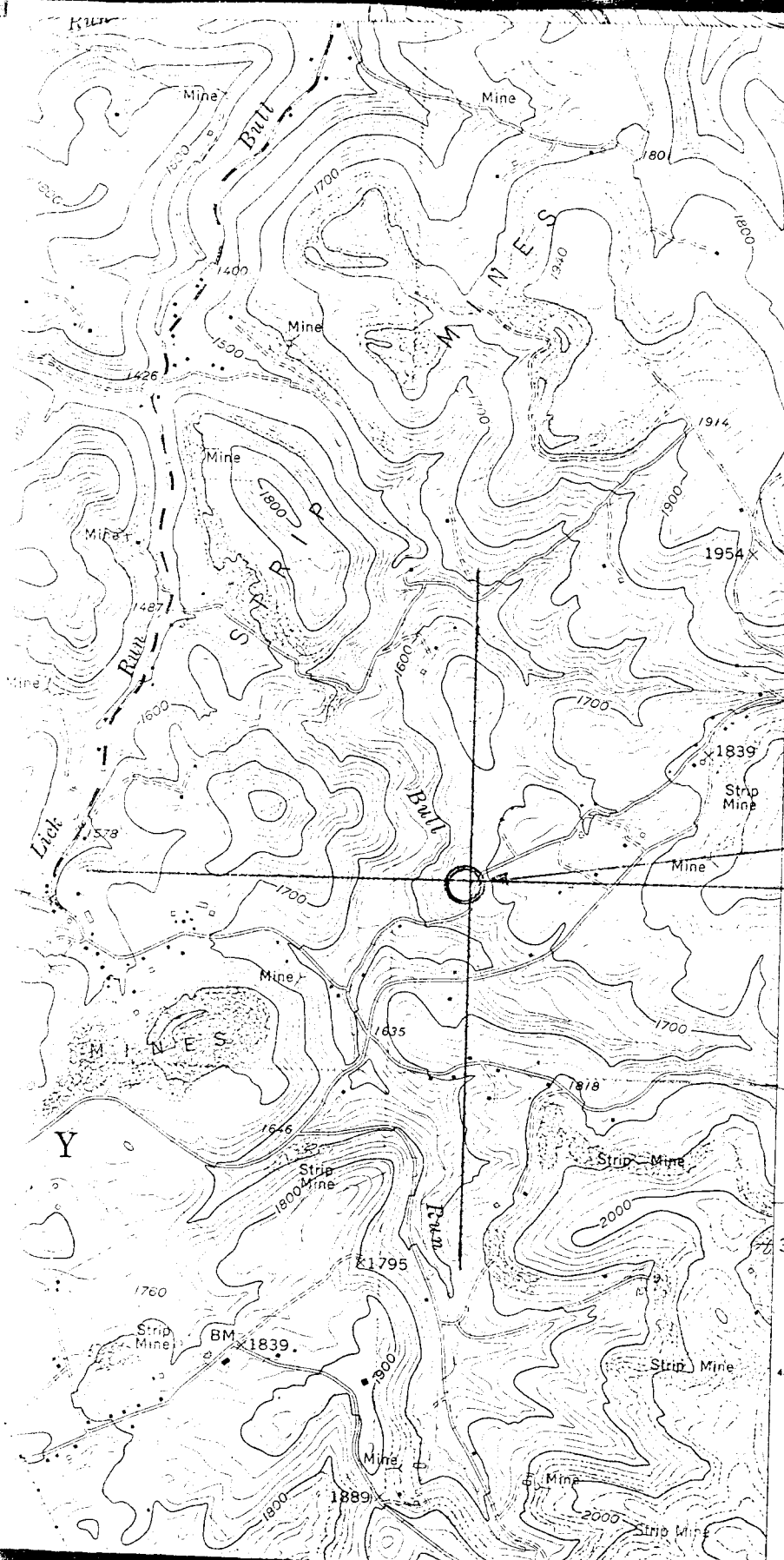


1 IN. = 200' approx.

PRESTON CO., W.VA.

— BOUNDARY OF NOMINATED  
PROPERTY





4381

(VALLEY POINT)  
5063 II SW

4379 RALPH SNYDER  
DECAGONAL BARN

UTM:  
17/606280/4378700

CO. ROUTE 32 1/2  
MASON TOWN VICINITY  
PRESTON CO., W.VA.

HERRING 0.9 MI.

32'30"

MASON TOWN QUAD,  
W.VA.

4377