NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: **Don E. Olsson House and Garage**

other name/site number: **Olsson-Rohr-Winchell House; 503 4th Avenue, SW**

2. Location

street & number: **503 4th Avenue, SW** not for publication: n/a

city/town: **Ronan** vicinity: n/a

state: **Montana** code: **MT** county: Lake code: **047** zip code: **59864-2918**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this _X_ 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 _X_ meets __ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant __ nationally __ statewide _X_ locally.

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau (__ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property __ meets __ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
__ entered in the National Register		
__ see continuation sheet		
__ determined eligible for the National Register		
__ see continuation sheet		
__ determined not eligible for the National Register		
__ see continuation sheet		
__ removed from the National Register		
__see continuation sheet		
__ other (explain):		

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Buildings

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: n/a

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

Number of Resources within Property		
Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	____	buildings
____	____	sites
____	____	structures
____	____	objects
2	____	Total

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: Domestic; Residence and Garage

Current Functions: Domestic; Residence and Garage

7. Description

Architectural Classification:
Modern Movement, Ranch Style

Materials:
foundation: Concrete; concrete slab
walls: Wood frame, wood horizontal lapped cedar siding
roof: Originally asphalt shingle; currently concrete tile
other: Ledge stone chimney and fireplace

Narrative Description

The Don E. Olsson House faces east onto 4th Avenue, SW in the city of Ronan. The east view also encompasses the Mission Range that forms the eastern boundary of the Mission Valley. As designed by architect Thomas Balzhiser, it was originally a one-story, rectangular-plan, gabled roof, frame house that was built in 1950-1951 near the middle of its three lots. The lots, 6, 7 and 8, are located in Dellwo's Addition to the City of Ronan bounded by Cleveland Street on the north, and 4th Avenue on the east; Eisenhower Street is south of an extension of the Dellwo's Addition. A 20-foot wide alley forms the western boundary. The property, centered on the block with four houses to the north and south, has 141 feet of frontage and is 160 feet deep. Set back from the street, the house has a wide and deep, sweeping front lawn that retains a mature birch tree and a large spruce along the north property line. To the north of the house is a detached two-car garage, in the same design as the house, built in 1952. Its concrete driveway connects to 4th Street.

In 1954 an addition was constructed near the northwest corner of the house to provide an enlarged dining room and a master bedroom suite; this formed an L-shaped plan. Between the house and garage is a flagstone paved terrace with a low concrete retaining wall at the west side, also completed in 1954. A wooden rail fence and arbor above steps is set along the retaining wall. The terrace connects to the driveway and extends into a flagstone walkway leading to the east front door of the house; near the east side of the terrace is an oval shaped planter set into the flagstone paving. At the north elevation of the house, a secondary doorway from the dining room and a doorway from the kitchen open onto the terrace, which provides access to the south garage doorway. The unfenced south side yard and the rear yard are grass and gently rise to a row of mature spruce trees that separate the property from the alleyway. A modern, six-foot high, solid white plastic fence borders the north property line and belongs to the north neighboring property. Most of the house's foundation plantings are recent replacements.

Residence

The steeply pitched gabled roofs of the original structure, the ridge of which parallels 4th Avenue, and the perpendicular roof of the wing, set at the same height as the main ridge, are surfaced with reddish concrete tiles that replace the original red asphalt shingle roof. It is believed that the roof was replaced by subsequent owners probably between 1972 and 1978. The main roof ridge near of the north elevation of the house is pierced by a ledge stone chimney stack near the north end. The eaves have a deep fascia that is slightly canted inward and extends up the verges; the soffits are sheathed in plywood that abuts the wide exposure cedar siding that is typically mitered at the corners.

(see continuation sheet)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: **C**

Areas of Significance: **Architecture**

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: **1950-1954**

Significant Dates: **1950; 1952; 1954**

Significant Person(s): n/a

Architect/Builder: **Thomas Balzhiser, Eugene, Oregon**

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Don E. Olsson House is significant, under Criteria "C" for its mid-century modern residential architecture that represents an early example of the style in Ronan and Lake County when it was built in 1950-51. The house, its 1954 addition, and its 1952 garage were designed by architect Thomas Balzhiser, the brother of Don E. Olsson's wife, Mildred "Petie" Balzhiser Olsson. The house became a model for subsequent residential construction in Ronan including the Harald Olsson House at 408 Eisenhower, also designed by Thomas Balzhiser.

The Olssons asked Thomas Balzhiser, Mildred Olsson's brother, to design their new house. When asked what his criteria were for the new house, Don E. Olsson replied, "a place to live." The architect only was provided with a budget. Thomas Balzhiser (1921-1995) was born in Drummond, Montana. He was in the US Navy on the Bunker Hill aircraft carrier during World War II. Following the war he completed a degree in architecture at Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana, and in 1948 he moved to Eugene, Oregon, along with his twin brother, who was an engineer. In Eugene, Thomas Balzhiser set up an architectural practice that eventually included offices in Portland, Oregon, Seattle, Washington, and Juneau, Alaska. The Don E. Olsson House was one of his first commissions. Balzhiser went on to design the garage and the addition to the house at 503 4th Avenue, SW. He also designed the second Don E. Olsson House built in 1960 two miles south of Ronan on the west side of Highway 93, and the Community Bank buildings in Ronan in 1970 and the Pablo Community Bank in the 1980s. Don E. Olsson recalled that Balzhiser designed the Drummond High School, in Montana, as well as the Harald Olsson House at 408 Eisenhower Street at the intersection with 4th Avenue, SW, adjacent to the south end of the Dellwo's Addition to the City of Ronan. However, his major commissions were in the Pacific Northwest particularly buildings at the University of Oregon and for various hospitals. His design for the first Don E. Olsson House displays many characteristics of mid-century architecture of the Pacific Northwest with its wide cedar siding and gabled roof, and use of large expanses of glass.

The years following World War II saw profound changes to American life and culture. A booming economy and increasing middle class affluence after the War caused a significant rise in the number of new homeowners in the country. Unlike their parents, however, most did not live in the cities and, instead, purchased homes in suburbs that lay outside the urban limits for which they easy automobile access. The suburban homes reflected the new domesticity of post-war prosperity, but were not usually ostentatious like their Queen Anne, Craftsman, and Colonial Revival predecessors. Instead, the residences were relatively small with a minimum of decorative elements that reflected the prosperity of the times, but did not overtly boast about it. The initial dominant architectural style was the Minimal Traditional style residence that originated during the depths of the Great Depression in the 1930s. The style is characterized by a simple square footprint with a gable or hip roof, a small vestibule on the façade, and asbestos, slate, or masonite siding. The Minimal Traditional style has little, if any, decorative or ornamental details. The simplicity of Minimal Traditional style homes made them attractive to first-time homebuyers because of their affordability. By the early 1950s, though, Minimal Traditional-style homes were being rapidly replaced by a new style that not only represented the continued affluence of the decade, but also the increased spending power of the American middle class and the desire for more space in and around and the houses. The Ranch style best represented a significant change in the evolution of American architectural tastes at that time.[1]

The Ranch style originated in California and had its roots in the Spanish Colonial style of the American Southwest. Popularized by San Diego architect Cliff May in *Sunset* and other periodicals beginning about 1935, it was a hybrid of the "Hispanic Rancheria home style with elements of Modernism" intended to blend the hominess of the Rancheria style with the sterility of Moderne. One author wrote that the "Ranch was a modern house with touches of Western influence and an open floor plan suggesting family, entertaining, heritage, and the future." Post-War prosperity caused the Ranch style to gain in popularity in the United States, especially in the American West where the predominance of the automobile and generally cheaper land prices and larger lots easily accommodated the larger lots required for rambling Ranch-style residences. The sprawling designs of the houses reflected a new emphasis on open interior space, but also maintained a connection to the outdoors with an open front porch, screened-in porches, patios, large picture windows, and dove cotes built into the gable-ends. Horizontal plans and low-pitched gable or hipped roofs sheathed in wood shingles

(see continuation sheet)

[1] Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 477-479; Ranch-style House, www.Wikipedia.com; Katherine Ann Samon, *Ranch House Style*, (New York: Clarkson Potter, 2003), 21. Alan Hess, *Ranch House*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 11-13.

9. Major Bibliographic References

Siegrist, Inez (ed.). *In the Shadows of the Missions*. Ronan, MT: Mission Valley News, 1966.
Interview with Don E. Olsson, Sr., August 7, 2007, at the Community Bank, Ronan, MT

Previous documentation on file (NPS):
___ 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 # _____

___ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
___ Local government
___ University
_x_ Other
Specify Repository: **Lake County Abstract & Title Co., Polson, MT**

Primary Location of Additional Data:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: **Less than one acre**

UTM References: **Zone 11** **Easting 718039** **Northing 5267554**

Legal Location: Township 20 W, Range 20 N, Section 2

Verbal Boundary Description:
The boundary includes three lots, 6, 7, and 8, purchased by Don E. Olsson in Dellwo's Addition to the City of Ronan, MT, platted March 1, 1948. The three lots comprise part of the half-block that is bounded on the north by Cleveland Street, on east by 4th Avenue, on the south by Eisenhower Street, and on the west by an alley. The property is 141 feet on the east and west and 160 feet on the north and south.

Boundary Justification:
The property is drawn to include the three lots that were purchased by Don E. Olsson from the Nicholas Dellwo estate, July 25, 1950, and continues to comprise the current and historic legal description of the residence.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: **Rodd L. Wheaton, *Architectural Historian***
organization: date: **October 2007**
street & number: **3021 S. Cornell Circle** telephone: **303 789-9550**
city or town: **Englewood** state: **CO** zip code: **80113-3012**

Property Owner

name/title: **Carl E. Rohr and Jon E. Winchell**
street & number: **503 4th Avenue, SW** telephone: **406 676-0450**
city or town: **Ronan** state: **MT** zip code: **59864-2918**

Description of Resources (continued)

East (front) Elevation

The façade is characterized by an inset entrance stoop one step above the walkway. The south wall of the entrance is perpendicular to the walk and the north wall is diagonal to give full visual acknowledgement of the entrance from the driveway. Between the entrance feature and the northeast corner are five large vertical Thermo-pane windows within wooden mullions. The windows, which light the living room, extend from nearly floor level to the eave soffit. South of the entrance feature is a band of ribbon windows with two openings with fixed lights and one opening with sliding sash that typically replaced an awning style window. It is believed that the sliders were installed sometime after 1978. Typically, the windows openings have flat board trim with a one-by-one fillet on the outside edges. A drip cap is located above each. The sills are plain without aprons and receive the trim of the jambs.

South Elevation

The south elevation has two ribbon window openings of similar design. The eastern ribbon has two openings, one with fixed sash and one with sliding sash. The western ribbon has three openings with two fixed sash and one slider opening. The cedar siding extends into the gable end to a metal louver set into the apex. At the south elevation of the rear wing, there is one large opening set into the cedar siding near the west wall. This window, which lights the dining room and was installed in 1954, has a large fixed sash in the upper section and a narrow bottom section presently infilled with an air conditioner. Originally, the bottom opening had an awning style sash.

East Elevation

The eaves of the south elevation of the wing merge into the eaves of the west elevation of the original house that has two sets of ribbon style windows set into the siding. The south has two openings, one with fixed sash and one with sliding sash. The other is sliding sash lighting the original bathroom. At the west gable end of the wing, there is a single opening near the south corner that lights the master bathroom. It has a fixed upper light and a sliding sash in the lower light that replaced an awning style window. Similar to the south gable, the cedar siding extends to a louvered vent set into the apex.

North Elevation

The north elevation of the wing has three large vertical Thermo-pane windows that extend from nearly floor level to the soffits of the eave and light the master bedroom. The eastern window has a slider set into a lower opening that replaced an awning style window. Set back into a reveal is a doorway providing access directly to the dining room; a modern glazed door is in the opening.

At the extended original west wall of the reveal is the kitchen window. A horizontal mullion extends across the center mullion dividing the opening. The north lower opening has sliders; all other openings are fixed.

At the north gable end elevation of the original house, there is a doorway near west corner with a modern glazed door. Adjacent to it is a window opening with a slider lighting the basement stairway. Like the opposite south gable end, the cedar siding extends to a metal louver set into the apex.

Interior

The Olsson House originally was built as a two-bedroom, one-bath residence with an open living room, kitchen, and small dining area. Original owner Don E. Olsson reported that there also was a small office near the bathroom in what is now the dining room. Below the original house is a basement containing a recreation room and laundry, furnace and storage rooms. The wing addition, that

included enlarging the dining room by nearly one-third and adding a master bedroom suite with a three-quarter master bathroom, was built on a concrete slab. As a custom built house there are built-in wardrobes flanking drawers in each of the two original south bedrooms. Of similar construction is a built-in buffet in the south wall of the dining room that has cupboards surrounding open shelves. Opening from the dining room is the master bedroom suite. Separating the living room, which opens to the entrance vestibule and coat closet, from the dining room is an offset right-angled half partition set with four-by-four columns extending to the ceiling. The most distinctive feature of the house is the living room fireplace set into the northwest corner of the room. Constructed of carefully laid ledge stone in random horizontal courses, it has a shallow raised hearth and the firebox is open on two sides, which face into the room. The chimney stack extends from the hearth to the ceiling as a solid mass above and to the north of the firebox and is anchored with a ledge stone wing wall that extends south from the hearth to the ceiling.

Garage

Located approximately twelve feet from the house is the gabled roof, two-car garage designed to match the architecture of the house. The double garage door, a paneled modern overhead door, extends partially into the east gable end. A doorway, with a solid core, flush panel door, is located near the east corner on the south elevation. There are no openings on the west gable end and the north elevation. Both the garage and the house have barn-red painted siding and chartreuse green painted trim, fascias, and soffits that approximates the original color scheme from 1950-51. The barn-red was originally coordinated with red asphalt shingle roofing; the red concrete tile roof is red in color imitates the original color scheme.

Integrity

The original rectangular plan house of 1950-51 was altered by a west wing addition that formed an L-plan in 1954. This wing, designed by the original architect, matched the original construction. Between 1972 and 2003, when the house was owned by the Fitschen family, the awning style window units were converted to sliding sash in the bedrooms, bathrooms, and the kitchen. It was at this time that the original red asphalt shingle roof was replaced with red concrete tiles. It is the intent of the current owners to restore these features to their original appearance. Despite the changes to the roof material and some of the window designs, the house and garage retain sufficient integrity to convey its significant historical and architectural association.

Statement of Significance (continued)

were also common to Ranch houses. Indeed, architecture critic Alan Hess wrote that the style "represented a whole range of powerful images and myths: new possibilities, rugged individualism, self-determination, ease and convenience, informality, wide open spaces. The Ranch was . . . a product of the West . . . ." All this combined to make Ranch Houses popular with middle class American families. The houses were generally one-story with an asymmetrical plan that often incorporated an attached garage – one symbol of the decade's prosperity and a measure of success for the dwelling's owner. Long, low rooflines with low-pitched roofs, and exteriors of stucco, brick or wood are common to the style. Ranch houses displayed moderate to wide eave overhangs that were sometimes supported by decorative roof supports. Also included were ribbon windows and large picture windows in the living area. Partially enclosed courtyards or patios were also common features of Ranch-style houses. Interior spaces also included vaulted ceilings with exposed beams, and simple and open floor plans that blended functional spaces.[2]

Don E. Olsson recalled that the house was sited on 4th Avenue for the view to the Mission Range of mountains. The construction contractor was Frank Berry of Ronan. Dan Bumgarner of Ronan was the stone mason who built the fireplace utilizing horizontally laid ledge stone from a quarry at Chief Mountain near Elmo, Montana, on the Flathead River. The house was built with roof trusses assembled on site by the contractor as were all the custom cabinets and built-ins. The Olssons lived in a rental property in Ronan until their house was finished. Olsson recalled that he had purchased lots 6, 7, and 8 of Dellwo's Addition for $400 and that the house construction cost $9,000 in 1950-51; the 1954 addition cost $2,000. Olsson, himself, planted the spruce trees on the property as he a particular fondness for that species. Bumgarner went on to provide the stone masonry construction for the second Don E. Olsson House south of Ronan and for the bank building constructed in 1970 in Ronan.

Ronan, Montana, originally Spring Creek, grew with the 1872 establishment of the Flathead Indian Reservation for the Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Major Peter Ronan was Reservation Superintendent in 1877 until his death in 1893; at which time the settlement was renamed for him. It was a center for flour milling for reservation subsistence and subsequently was the site of a saw mill set up in 1904. The town grew slowly and by 1910 there were several businesses including the Ronan State Bank. In 1912 Ronan was incorporated and it continued to grow slowly around four blocks of commercial structures on Main Street that has 1920s and 1930s structures and various later utilitarian buildings. Ronan architecture was based on economics and the community remained very conservative with small residential structures of various simplified wood framed designs based on national architectural patterns of the 1920s and 1930s. Don E. Olsson noted that his family lived in a house, which has some characteristics of the English Tudor style, on 5th Avenue. Olsson went on to recall that 5th Avenue, west of his original property, was known as "Silk Stocking Row." It still retains its small detached single family residences that are generic in design.

Construction in Ronan, like across the United States, came to a halt during World War II. When Don E. Olsson decided to build in 1949 he purchased three lots in an area that was newly platted vacant land several blocks south of Main Street. Having left the design totally to his brother-in-law Thomas Balzhiser, the house was a major departure from earlier residential architecture in Ronan and ushered in residential modernism that included his parents' house at the corner of Eisenhower and 4th Avenue and a house across 4th Avenue on the east side. Elsewhere in Ronan, dating from the 1950s, there is a simplified International style library located on Main Street and a small Tribal Health Center building. However, modernist architecture in Ronan was not fully realized until the late 1960s and 1970s when Olsson, himself, platted the Olsson Addition south of Eisenhower Street. Generally, when it was built, the Don E. Olsson House stood out in the community as a distinctively designed structure, but had little influence on the community as a whole at the time of its construction.

Don E. Olsson's father, Harald Olsson (1896-1973), settled in nearby Pablo, Montana, in 1922 to work at the local bank. When that bank failed, he moved on to the Ronan State Bank in Ronan in 1924. Harald Olsson became Executive Vice President of Ronan State Bank in 1937 and President in 1944. Don E. Olsson started his banking career in Ronan after graduation from high school in 1942. Eventually he replaced his father as President in 1964 of what is now Community Bank. Upon his father's death in 1973 he became Chairman of the Board. Don E. Olsson oversaw the expansion of the bank into a new structure, built in 1970, and expansion into branches in Pablo and Polson under the name of Community Bank. From this position Don E. Olson, Sr., has played a significant role

[2] McAlester, *American Houses*, 477, 479; Wikipedia; Samon, *Ranch House*, 6, 12; Hess, *Ranch House*, 11, 12, 14, 17.

in the development of the Mission Valley and continues to do so, though his son, Don E. Olsson, Jr., is involved in the management of the Community Bank.

Harald Olsson, who was born in Troy, Idaho, was married to Vida Hogan Olsson whose descendents arrived in Montana in 1864 and settled in Hall as ranchers. She met Harald Olsson in Hall where he worked in the local bank. Harald, whose parents were Swedish and Norwegian, served in World War I and subsequently moved to Hall. He married Vida in 1920 in Hall and then they moved to Pablo in 1922 where he worked for the Farmers State Bank until it failed. He moved on to Ronan and found employment with the Ronan State Bank in 1924.

Don E. Olsson, who was born in Pablo in 1924, joined the bank in 1942 before leaving to join the armed forces as a pilot for the US Army Air Force. He was a "hump pilot" over Burma and China during the war. He returned to Montana as a First Lieutenant in 1946 and worked for a while at a bank in Hall, Montana. There he met and married Mildred "Petie" Balzhiser of Drummond, Montana. Their son, Don E, Jr., was born in 1947 while Don E., Sr., finished law school at the University of Montana, graduating in 1949. The family returned to Ronan so that Don E. Olsson could practice law, though he eventually continued his career at the bank managed by his father. Their house was begun in 1950 and they lived there until 1959. During this time two daughters were born in 1950 and 1954.

The Don E. Olsson House was owned by the Olsson family until it was sold to Lawrence Sandmark, August 11, 1959, at which time the Olssons moved to their new modernist, Balzhiser-designed house two miles south of Ronan on the west side of Highway 93. Lawrence Sandmark was the Ronan Superintendent of Schools. He sold the house to Stuart E. Fitschen on August 21, 1972. His wife, Peggy A. Christensen Fritschen inherited the house in 1998; her children, Gary A. Christensen and Gayle Gustine, inherited the house in 2003. I was sold April 4, 2006, to Carl E. Rohr and Jon E. Winchell.

Photographs

1. East façade house and garage looking west.

2. East façade of house looking west.

3. Detail of east façade of house looking southwest.

4. South elevation of house looking north.

5. West wing looking northeast.

6. West elevations of garage and house looking southeast

7. North elevation of house looking southeast.

8. North elevation of west wing looking southwest.

9. West elevation of house and west wing looking southeast.

10. North elevation showing dining room doorway alcove and kitchen window looking south.

11. Living room fireplace looking northwest.

12. Partition between living room and dining room looking northwest.