Kan. Cong. Dist. No. 3
Larry Winn

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries – complete applicable sections)

STATE:	
Kansas	
COUNTY:	
Franklin	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON: Silkville 059-0000-0007

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: NW 1/4, SW 1/4, Sec. 36, T 18 S, R 17 E; 2 1/2 miles southwest of Williamsburg on US-50, .4 miles south on secondary road, .3 miles southeast on private driveway.

CITY OR TOWN: Williamsburg vicinity

STATE	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
Kansas	20	Franklin	059

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP		STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
☐ District ☒ Building ☐ Site ☐ Structure ☐ Object	☐ Public ☒ Private ☐ Both	Public Acquisition: ☐ In Process ☐ Being Considered	☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Preservation work in progress	Yes: ☒ Restricted ☐ Unrestricted ☐ No

PRESENT USE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

☒ Agricultural	☐ Government	☐ Park	☐ Transportation	☐ Comments
☐ Commercial	☐ Industrial	☒ Private Residence	☐ Other *(Specify)*	
☐ Educational	☐ Military	☐ Religious		
☐ Entertainment	☐ Museum	☐ Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: John L. Netherland

STREET AND NUMBER: Seaman and Schuske Metal Works Co.
Fourth and Mitchell Avenue

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE
St. Joseph	Missouri 64502	29

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Register of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER: Franklin County Courthouse

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE	CODE
Ottawa	Kansas 66067	20

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration

DATE OF SURVEY: 1939 ☒ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Records destroyed. A guide book, Kansas, was published in 1939.

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE

STATE: Kansas
COUNTY: Franklin
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	☐ Excellent	☐ Good	☒ Fair	☐ Deteriorated	☐ Ruins	☐ Unexposed
	(Check One)		(Check One)			
	☒ Altered	☐ Unaltered	☐ Moved	☒ Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL *(if known)* PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Silkville Ranch, which is located three miles south of Williamsburg in Franklin county, still contains three of the original structures from Ernest Valeton de Boissiere's nineteenth century settlement. The buildings can be reached by a driveway which angles to the southeast from a north-south unpaved rural road.

Instead of sitting square with the points of the compass, the original Silkville buildings are square with the lane road. The easternmost of the structures is a white-painted house which was rebuilt from the ruins of the large stone chateau, the three-story living quarters of the colony, which burned in 1916. The present house is believed to be the west end of the original building. It is a two-story structure with a hip roof. A porch now spans the west facade and a door has been cut in the center of the wall directly below the original second story window. On both the north and south facades four rectangular window openings flanked by shutters are evenly spaced at the second floor level. On the first floor, which originally had the same spacing, some window openings were converted to doors when the rebuilding took place. The east facade is rather plain; window openings appear on both floor levels but are unevenly spaced and of unequal sizes. Most likely this wall was not a part of the original chateau and the windows were placed as needed. 059-0000-0036

About 100 yards west of the house is a long rectangular barn of rough-cut stone which is believed to be the cocoonery, or silk house, from Boissiere's silk factory. This two-story building faces southeast and measures approximately 30 feet wide and 75 feet long. Some of the door and window openings have been modified, both on the sides and the front. Sliding barn doors now provide the access on the south; two arched door openings have been closed off. The barn has a simple wood-shingled gable roof. At the present time it is used as a stable. 059-0000-0127

Approximately 200 feet south of the cocoonery is another stone barn facing northwest which measures about 30 feet wide and 80 feet long. Now used for storage and a repair shop, it is variously reported to have been a stable, silk factory, or shop. Considerable repair work has been done to the walls, and the door and window openings have also been altered. A metal roof has replaced the wood-shingled one. In the ranch yard to the northwest of this barn, foundation ruins of other Silkville buildings can be observed. And about one-eighth mile to the south stand what remain of the mulberry groves planted for Boissiere's silk venture in the 1870's. 059-0000-0075

All three of the remaining original structures have been altered, the house more so than the others, but Silkville remains a unique and impressive site. The area being nominated is approximately six to seven acres which includes the three original buildings.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

- [ ] Pre-Columbian
- [ ] 15th Century
- [ ] 16th Century
- [ ] 17th Century
- [ ] 18th Century
- [x] 19th Century
- [ ] 20th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) *(If Applicable and Known)* 1870's

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

- Aboriginal
  - [ ] Prehistoric
  - [ ] Historic
- [ ] Agriculture
- [x] Architecture
- [ ] Art
- [ ] Commerce
- [ ] Communications
- [ ] Conservation
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Engineering
- [x] Industry
- [ ] Invention
- [ ] Landscape Architecture
- [ ] Literature
- [ ] Military
- [ ] Music
- [ ] Political
- [ ] Religion/Philosophy
- [ ] Science
- [ ] Sculpture
- [x] Social/Humanitarian
- [ ] Theater
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Urban Planning
- [x] Other *(Specify)* Western settlement

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Silkville community was located three miles south of Williamsburg in Franklin county. Its founder, Ernest Valeton de Boissiere, was born into a noble family near Bordeaux, France, in 1810. Because of his philosophic and political beliefs, he was forced to flee France when Napoleon III became dictator in 1851. After spending some time in New Orleans, he became interested in settling in some place where he would feel free to practice his ideals and live in the type of community he wanted. Kansas seemed to afford these opportunities.

Boissiere purchased about 3,500 acres of land in the southwest corner of Franklin county from the Kansas Educational Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1869. He began making plans for a communal living arrangement, using the silk industry as a means of subsistence. Silkville, which was also referred to as Kansas Cooperative Farm, Prairie Home and Valeton, was unique because of its cooperative economic and housing plan. Boissiere's principal aim was to organize his labor force on the basis of remuneration in proportion to production, thus making the work both efficient and attractive to industrious settlers.

Boissiere brought 40 French emigrants to Silkville during the early years of the community and in 1870 began the construction of stone buildings which altogether cost over $100,000. The largest building, called the "Chateau" by the neighbors, was the three-story living quarters which housed 100 people. This 60-room building constructed in 1874-1875 had spacious dining rooms, a parlor, offices, a 2,500 volume library and over forty family rooms. Other buildings included a cocoonery, silk and cheese factories, an ice house, and a blacksmith shop. Silk production began in 1869, and by 1880 Silkville was prospering to a degree. Boissiere's community manufactured silk which won various awards, including prizes at the Philadelphia Exposition in 1876 and the Paris Exposition in 1886.

Once members of the community learned about better opportunities in homesteading and in other Kansas industries, however, Boissiere began having difficulty in keeping his labor force.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Blackmar, Frank W., editor, Kansas, A Cyclopedia of State History (Chicago, Standard Publishing Co., 1912), v. 2, pp. 694-696.

Carpenter, Garrett R., Silkville: A Kansas Attempt in the History of Fourierist Utopias, 1869-1892, Emporia State Research Studies, v. 3, no. 2 (December, 1954).

"Cattle Roam Silkville," Ottawa Herald, July 8, 1971.

"The Colony of Grand Dreams," Kansas City Star, April 19, 1942.

"French Aristocrat Dreamed of Utopia on Kansas Prairie," Topeka Journal, September 8, 1956.

History of the State of Kansas (Chicago, A. T. Andreas, 1883), p. 615.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY						OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES					
CORNER	LATITUDE			LONGITUDE			LATITUDE			LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	°	'	"	°	'	"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"						
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"	38	26	26	95	29	11
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"						

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 6-7 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Richard Pankratz, Planner

ORGANIZATION: Kansas State Historical Society

DATE: May 15, 1972

STREET AND NUMBER: 120 West Tenth Street

CITY OR TOWN: Topeka

STATE: Kansas 66612

CODE: 20

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☒ Local ☐

Name: Nyle H. Miller

Nyle H. Miller

Title: Executive Director, Kansas State Historical Society

Date: June 16, 1972

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

Form 10-300a
(Dec. 1968)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Kansas	
COUNTY	
Franklin	
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(Number all entries)

6. Survey of Historic Sites and Structures in Kansas
1957 State
Kansas State Historical Society
120 West Tenth Street
Topeka, Kansas 66612 Code: 20

8. To help his financial situation, he started producing cheese and butter products, and by 1880 this was fairly successful. Later, stock raising was added as conditions worsened. Finally, because of failure in each of these, Boissiere returned to France, and the property, worth approximately $150,000, was donated in 1892 to the International Order of Odd Fellows for an orphanage. Shortly after this, the Odd Fellows renounced any claim to the gift because they were unable to support it. Court cases involving the land followed, and eventually two shrewd Topeka lawyers gained possession of it. In 1916 a fire destroyed much of the living quarters. Three stone buildings-the cocoonery, a barn and a house which has been rebuilt from the frame of the chateau--still stand.

The uniqueness of this settlement as a commune, plus the unusual feature of a silk industry, makes it a significant part of Kansas history.

9. Holmes, Joel O., Silkville (unpublished term paper, Ottawa University, Kansas, 1963). (Copy filed in the Franklin County Historical Society Library, Ottawa.)
Huron, George A., "Ernest Valeton Boissiere," Kansas Historical Collections, v. 7 (1901-1902), pp. 552-564.
"A Kansas Landmark Gone," Kansas City Star, May 7, 1916.
"Kansas Town Originally Utopian Colony," Wichita Morning Eagle, June 3, 1955.
Keroher, Grace Cable, "Silkville Colony of Dreams," Common Ground, v. 5, no. 4 (Summer, 1945), pp. 86-91.
"Mons. E. V. Boissiere's Silk Factory--A Magnificent Enterprise," Ottawa Journal, June 1, 1871.
Nordhoff, Charles, The Communistic Societies of the United States (New York, Harper and Bros., 1875), pp. 375-382.
Richards, W. M., "Some Ghost Towns of Kansas," Heritage of Kansas, v. 5, no. 1 (February, 1961), pp. 6-9.
"The Romance of de Boissiere," Kansas City Times, June 20, 1909.
Schwilling, Lyle, "French Colony Made Silk in Kansas," Topeka Daily Capital, September 28, 1952.
"Successful Oneida Community Led to Communal Living Venture in Kansas," Kansas City Star, January 29, 1951.
"Williamsburg," Leavenworth Appeal and Tribune, February 10, 1880.