

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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The Bergtholdt House (1885) is being nominated to the National Register under criteria B and C for its historical association with Christian Bergtholdt and for its architectural significance as an example of the Queen Anne/ Eastlake style.

Christian Bergtholdt and his family came to Halstead in 1877 from Summerfield, Illinois as part of the Mennonite migration and settlement of this area. He was a prosperous miller and land speculator. In 1885, with Jno. W. Ruth as contractor, he built his house on a half city block. After a two year sojourn to California (1887-1889) he returned to Halstead and his house where he dealt in real estate, insurance and coal until his death in 1900.

Christian Bergtholdt was born in Friedelsheim, Germany (Bavaria), September 7, 1839. He immigrated to the United States in 1857 and settled with fellow Mennonites in Illinois. While there, he married Elizabeth Strohm and had three children. In 1877, Bergtholdt moved his family further west and settled in Halstead, Kansas.

The Mennonite immigration to Kansas reached its zenith in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Russian Mennonites, escaping religious persecution under Czar Alexander II, flocked to Kansas bringing their unique strain of hardy winter wheat with them. Polish and German brethren followed, including a large German contingent from Illinois that had migrated a generation earlier. Bergtholdt belonged to this latter group.

Halstead, Kansas (pop. 2000) is located in the fertile plains of central Kansas. It was settled in 1874 and incorporated in 1877. Halstead and Harvey County were the center of the Mennonite immigration of the 1870s and 1880s. These industrious German/Russian farmers introduced wheat to the state and helped to establish Kansas as the "bread basket of the world". "The city, besides supporting the usual number of business enterprises, has the largest flouring mill in the county, two elevators with a capacity of 15,000 and 12,000 bushels respectively, and a feed mill." (Andreas, 1883)

The Russian Mennonite immigrants brought sacks of Turkey Red wheat with them to Kansas. This proved to be the first successfully grown hard winter wheat in this area. Warkentin and his Father-in-law, C. Eisenmeyer, built the first and largest mill to specifically handle the hard-kernel wheat. Due to the rapidly growing population and the abundance of wheat being grown, several storage elevators and mills were soon built in Halstead, including Bergtholdt's.

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With the sudden vast amounts of Mennonite grain being produced, Bergtholdt began a milling and grain elevator operation.

CHR. BERGTHOLDT. Although not quite so large as P. Wiebe's, yet its facilities are of the best and Mr. Bergtholdt has had his share of the grain coming into town. And right here it may be said that our grain market operated by Messrs. Warkentin, Wiebe, Bergtholdt and Logan, of whom we will speak more fully further on, has been the best in the county during the past year. It was no uncommon thing last fall to see 100 loads of grain unloaded in our city in a single day by the farmers of this vicinity. (The Halstead Independent, 28 April 1882)

Halstead Elevator and Roller Corn Mill. C. Bergtholdt and Co., Proprietors. Highest Market Price paid for all Kinds of Grain. We have just completed the erection of a ROLLER CORN MILL, and are prepared to grind corn by the NEW PROCESS. We make a superior quality of BOLTED CORN MEAL, and grind all kinds of grain into chop feed. We do a general custom and exchange business. Farmers desiring their grain chopped or their corn manufactured into first-class meal will do well to give us a call. HALSTEAD, KANSAS. (The Halstead Clipper, 28 January 1887)

During these boom years, Bergtholdt built his home for his wife and three teenage children. The 2 1/2 story clapboard house was built in 1885. The cruciform building used a blend of Renaissance Revival, Eastlake, and Queen Anne exterior ornamentation. The overall impression of the house is symmetrical. Jno. W. Ruth was the contractor for the original construction. A fellow Mennonite immigrant, Ruth was primarily a farmer, but supplemented his income with construction work. Because of this, the house was started in May - after planting - and finished in August - before harvest.

The construction of the Queen Anne/ Eastlake house was chronicled in the local papers of the day.

"C. Berghold (sic) is having started for a residence, the foundation for one of the finest houses in the country. It will be a building 40 x 48 feet. The location being near D. C. Hege's residence. Jno. W. Ruth is the contractor." (The Halstead Clipper, 8 May 1885)

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In 1887, Bergtholdt sold his Halstead business and followed a new Mennonite migration to California. During the next two years, he established a fruit shipping business in Placer County, California. Leaving his son in charge of the fruit business, Bergtholdt returned to his home in Halstead, where he was engaged in the real estate and coal business until his death in 1900 at the age of 61. With the death of his widow in 1904, the house passed to his unmarried daughter, Anna, who died in the house in 1936.

Bergtholdt's maiden daughter Anna continued to live in the house after her parents death. Having attended the Bush Conservatory of Music in Chicago, Anna was an accomplished pianist and gave music lessons in the house. With little other income, Anna began selling off lots and turned the house into an apartment/rooming house in 1913.

With Anna's death in 1936, the house passed to her brother Jacob, who was living in California. He immediately sold the property to Floyd and Eda Arnold from Topeka. Mr. Arnold was stationmaster at the Halstead Santa Fe Depot. After his death, Mrs. Arnold, no longer renting rooms, continued to live alone in the house until her death in 1979. The Arnold's son continued to spend summers in the house until selling the property to the current owners in 1990.

The Bergtholdt house was originally sited on a 1 1/2 acres of land encompassing a half block on what was then the southern boundary of Halstead. Part of the land was a small orchard. This parcel remained intact until the 1920s, when several lots were sold off the south end of the property. The house today sits on approximately 1/2 acre of land. Outbuildings include a 25' x 15' clapboard house directly east of the main residence and a circa 1925 4-bay garage.

The Bergtholdt house is significant as a representation of the affluence achieved by German Mennonite immigrants. their rapid rise in economic stature was testament to their industriousness and the richness of the virgin prairie. The house, by virtue of its size and style, is one of the earliest demonstrations of Kansas Mennonite prosperity. The cruciform 2 1/2 story structure is representative of the homes built by affluent Mennonite immigrants during the last quarter of the 19th century. It is one of the earliest homes of this size and style in Halstead and one of only four extant.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is located on the N. 33.3' lot 12, all of lots 13 and 14, Block 43, in Halstead, Kansas. The property is bounded to the north by East Fifth Street, to the west by Spruce Street, and to the east and south by adjacent property lines.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

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