

SHPO DOE: ☐ SR ☐ NR

☐ Eligible ☐ Not Eligible ☐ Insufficient

Date _____

Vermont Division for Historic Preservation Determination of Eligibility (DOE) Form

A "Determination of Eligibility" is a decision regarding whether a district, site, building, structure, or object meets the State or National Register Criteria for Evaluation, although the property is not formally listed in the State or National Register.

Please complete this form by clicking in the checkboxes and entering text in the grey fields.

SECTION I

Property Address: 9596 VT Route 36, East Fairfield, VT

Property Name: Ralston Building

This DOE is for the:

- ☒ State Register of Historic Places
 - ☒ State project – 22 VSA 14 review
 - ☐ Act 250 project – Criterion 8 review
 - ☐ State Tax Credits
 - ☐ Barn Grant Application
 - ☐ Historic Preservation Grant Application
 - ☐ VDHP staff request
 - ☐ Other _____
- ☐ National Register of Historic Places
 - ☐ Federal project – Section 106 review
 - ☐ Federal Tax Credits (RITC)
 - ☐ VDHP staff request
 - ☐ Other _____

Who is making this request?

☐ Division for Historic Preservation Staff: Name, Title

-or-

Judith Ehrlich

VTrans Historic Preservation Officer

802-595-3744 judith.ehrlich@vermot.gov

May 7, 2025

SECTION II

Eligibility Recommendation

- ☐ Does **NOT** meet the Criteria for Evaluation and is NOT eligible for the State/National Register of Historic Places
- ☒ **Meets** the Criteria for Evaluation and is eligible for the State/National Register of Historic Places

Number of Resources:

Building 1 Structure 0 Site 0 Object 0

Evaluated under:

- ☒ Criterion A: Event ☒ Criterion C: Design/Construction
☐ Criterion B: Person ☐ Criterion D: Information Potential

Criteria Considerations: _____

Integrity: ☒ Setting ☒ Location ☒ Design ☒ Materials ☐ Workmanship ☒ Feeling ☒ Association

Period of Significance: LVRR/LVRT (1877-1972); Ralston building (1948-1974)

Level of Significance: ☐ Local ☒ State ☐ National

Justification for Eligibility Recommendation: _____

Previous documentation of the LVRT:

The Lamoille Valley Railroad (LVRR) (now the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail or LVRT) has been previously determined eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A – Transportation – for being an influential and major component of the State’s railroad network as it led to significant expansion of commerce and industry. The LVRR/LVRT is eligible under Criterion C – Architecture and Engineering – for its design and representation of a railroad. Although some components have been removed (ballast, tracks, and ties), the railbed and infrastructure (150+ bridges, culverts, cattlepasses) and buildings (depots, for example) remain.

In 2009 and 2010, VHB completed historic resource identification reports for the LVRT in conjunction with VTrans and Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST). At the time of the 2010 study, VHB and VTrans did not evaluate buildings within the ROW that were not built by the railroad. In other words, the study did not evaluate non-railroad-built buildings, such as the building that is the subject of this DOE: 9596 VT Route 36 in East Fairfield.

While not explicitly stated in the early studies of the LVRR/LVRT, the period of significance can be identified as the length of the time that the railroad operated, whether for passenger or freight. The period of significance spans 1877-1972.

Comparative Examples of Non-Railroad Built Buildings within the RR ROW:

As mentioned, prior evaluations of the LVRT only included buildings constructed by the railroad (such as passenger and freight depots). However, a later railroad study – the 2024 railroad BUILD grant mitigation survey - conducted by VHB for VTrans, evaluated buildings within the railroad ROW, whether they were built by the railroad or by private entities. Some of these include grain elevators, creameries, ice houses, storage bins, warehouses, stockyards, and lumber yards. These buildings were constructed to benefit from the transportation corridor and represent private investment in the trackside infrastructure.

A review of the rail valuation sheets, as well as a review of the 2024 VHB survey of the 281 miles of state of owned railroad, reveal that it was common to have buildings constructed by a private business within the railroad ROW, often near a depot in a village. Examples of similar non-railroad-built buildings within the railroad ROW include:

- Charlotte (on the Vermont Railway (VTR)): Creamery (no longer extant except the foundation)
- Florence (VTR): HP Hood & Sons Creamery
- Arlington (VTR): Miles Lumber Buildings
- Mt. Tabor (VTR): E.C. Crosby & Sons Feed & Fuel Complex
- Barton (on the Washington County Railroad (WACR)): FC Brown Warehouse, 199 Lake St
- Barton (WACR): HP Hood & Sons Milk Station, 3 Lake Street
- Barton (WACR): Ice house, originally a storehouse for the Vermont Butter Tub Company, 189 Lake St
- Newbury (WACR): 8 Engle Drive Warehouse

Judging by this list from the 281 miles of state-owned rail lines, only a handful of these once common buildings remain within the railroad ROW throughout the state of Vermont. Certainly, many other businesses constructed buildings outside of the railroad ROW to benefit from the railroad stopping in their towns; however, non-railroad-built buildings within the railroad ROW would not have been built within the ROW (thereby having to negotiate with the railroad corporations) unless those specific companies were benefiting from (i.e. using) the railroad transportation.

The Ralston Building Eligibility Evaluation

Feed stores (or similar) are a distinct building type related to the railroad, in Vermont and across the country. They are typically rectangular, one-story gable front buildings (sometimes with false fronts), constructed parallel to the railroad tracks with full width front porches, large front doors, small windows set close to the eaves on the side elevations, and/or freight doors set on the trackside.

While it does not appear that the Ralston building was constructed with trackside freight doors or a side platform; the porch served dual purpose as a porch and loading platform. Given that feed stores were constructed by private entities, there was not a standard railroad company design to follow. Since the freight for a feed store would not be excessively large, a long side platform or extra wide freight door were not necessarily required for the building to function. The rectangular footprint of the building is a very common footprint of rail-adjacent buildings.

The Ralston building has been minimally altered on the exterior and interior. It retains its original standing seam metal roof and siding, gable roof, front porch/platform, freight doors on either gable end, small side elevation windows, and window openings at the northeast corner (which is the office on the interior). One change to the exterior is the removal of the small railroad station addition. The removal of this small addition does not affect the integrity of the feed store, as the building operations related to freight for a greater period than as a small passenger stop. Once the original depot was removed, the passenger service was second to the commerce and freight service in this location. Similar to agricultural buildings, buildings within the railroad ROW often changed their use. It was more economical to reuse a building than to demolish it and construct a new building. Although its setting has been somewhat altered by the conversion of the railroad to the rail trail, the overall setting is not lost and the Ralston building retains its historic integrity of setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Non-railroad-built buildings within the ROW of the LVRT include this one – the Ralston building and the nearby 1905 Cary Maple Sugar Co. building (same address, 9596 VT Route 36). Thus, what remains is rare. It is worth noting that there were feed stores located outside of the ROW along the St. J & LC RR corridor, including one in Walden, VT. Developing a full list of these resources that once stood on the St. J & LC RR would require a close reading of the 94 miles of railroad valuation sheets which is ultimately less relevant than studying comparable extant examples of buildings within the railroad ROW.

While the railroad-built buildings such as the passenger and freight depots, section houses, engine houses and others are the obvious contributing elements to a railroad historic district, unique commercial buildings in the railroad ROW such as the Ralston building help to tell the full story of the railroad's operation. The St. J & LC RR relied on freight to sustain itself; passenger service was always secondary. Its freight included talc, asbestos, limestone, gravel, grain feed, lumber, Christmas trees, and milk. Passenger service declined beginning in the 1930s and ended in 1956, but freight remained profitable and persisted for decades after passenger service ended. Feed stores such as the Ralston building represent the evolution of the railroad. The depot was removed when passenger service declined, replaced by a business who could invest in the trackside infrastructure and profit from use of the railroad through rural Vermont. The small station addition on this feed store was removed once passenger service ended. In the 1970s many important businesses utilizing the freight services of the railroad closed operations in Vermont, including the Ralston Purina plant in St. Johnsbury in 1974. And with that, the building no longer benefited from the railroad and the railroad freight stopped soon after.

The Ralston building is eligible for listing as a contributing resource to the Lamoille Valley Railroad Historic District. Under Criterion A – Commerce and Industry, it represents the commerce and industry that benefited from the use of the railroad transportation corridor and the impact it had on the economy of the state. It is an example of a privately constructed and privately owned building operated by a significant business that benefited from the St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain (later St. Johnsbury and Lamoille County) Railroad. Under Criterion C in Architecture, the Ralston building is an example of a warehouse-type building related to the railroad. While these buildings were simple and vernacular in style, they are recognizable by key features. The Ralston building retains character defining features that demonstrate its former commercial use as a feed store/warehouse and that show its relationship to the railroad. These features include the loading platform, rectangular footprint, large freight doors, the open, simple interior with a separate office, side windows close to the eaves, and its location parallel to the railroad tracks.

SECTION III

Required Attachments:

- ☒ Survey or Inventory Form (VARI, cemetery, culvert, bridge, landscape, VAI)
- ☒ Recent photographs of the property showing exterior views of each elevation; overall views of the property and the surrounding context. If available, include copies of historic views as well. For a historic district, include streetscape views showing how the properties relate to each other.
- ☒ Map showing the location of the property in relation to streets, intersections, or widely recognized features. For a historic district, include an approximate boundary showing the extent of the district.

Please email this form and all required attachments to:

ACCD.projectreview@vermont.gov

Section IV

**for completion by VDHP staff only*

Division for Historic Preservation Determination or Concurrence:

☒ Eligible

☐ Not Eligible

☐ Insufficient Information for Determination

Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D Criteria Considerations: _____

Integrity: ☒ Setting ☒ Location ☒ Design ☒ Materials ☐ Workmanship ☒ Feeling ☒ Association

Number of Resources:

Building 1 Structure _____ Site _____ Object _____

Staff Comments: _____

Requires Vermont Advisory Council Review? ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

Advisory Council Finding: _____

Date: 5/22/2025

Recorded by: Elizabeth Peebles, State Architectural Historian

Date: 5/8/2025

Signature: _____