

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
Montana Historical Society
PO Box 201202, 1410 8th Ave
Helena, MT 59620-1202

Property Address: **711 8th Avenue South**

Historic Address (if applicable):

City/Town: **Great Falls**

Site Number: **24CA1747**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Cascade**

Historic Name: **David and Katie Knott Residence**

Original Owner(s): **David and Katie Knott**

Current Ownership Private Public

Current Property Name:

Owner(s): **Kathy Reed**

Owner Address: Phone: **708 8th Avenue South**

Legal Location

PM: **Montana** Township: **20N** Range: **3E**

$\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ **SW** $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section: **12**

Lot(s): **11**

Block(s): **484**

Addition: **Great Falls Original Townsite**

Year of Addition:

USGS Quad Name: Year:

Historic Use: **Domestic**

Current Use: **Domestic**

Construction Date: **1892** Estimated Actual

Original Location Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov

NAD 27 or NAD 83(preferred)

Zone: **12** Easting: **477797** Northing: **5260401**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District:

NRHP Eligible: Yes No

Date of this document: **8/1/2015**

Form Prepared by: **Anthony Wood**

Address: **1410 8th Avenue, Helena MT 59620-1202**

Daytime Phone: **406-444-7715**

MT SHPO USE ONLY

Eligible for NRHP: yes no

Criteria: A B C D

Date:

Evaluator:

Comments: Property record form written as part of the "Identifying Montana's African American Heritage Places Project."

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merge pages with this form

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

NRHP Listing Date:

NRHP Eligibility: Yes No Individually Contributing to Historic District Noncontributing to Historic District

NRHP Criteria: A B C D

Area of Significance: **African American History** Period of Significance: 1892-1961

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Property Name: David & Katie Knott Residence

Smithsonian Number: 24CA1747

Architectural Style: Other If Other, specify: **Folk Victorian**
Property Type: **Domestic** Specific Property Type: **Single Family Residence**

Architect: Architectural Firm/City/State:
Builder/Contractor: Company/City/State:
Source of Information:

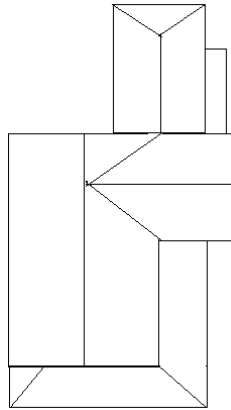
Architectural Description:

Setting & Location

The David and Katie Knott residence located at 711 8th Avenue South, sits on lot 11 on the south central section of block 484 in the Original Townsite addition of Great Falls' South Side neighborhood. The block is bounded by 8th Avenue S. to the south, 7th Avenue S. to the north, 7th Street S. to the west, and 8th Street S. to the east. The South Side neighborhood, defined by roughly ten square blocks, is bounded east to west by 2nd St.-10th St. South, and north to south by Central Avenue-10th Avenue South. The South Side neighborhood lies just off the east bank of the Missouri River, and just south of downtown Great Falls. 711 8th Ave S. is the center lot on the block. Many of the houses on either side of 8th Ave S. are original to the late 1890s and early 1900s. The property features a large front lawn with a tall Green Ash growing in the south east corner. A narrow cement walkway runs from the sidewalk to the west side of the house, ending at a slightly raised wood plank front porch. The sides of the house feature narrow grass lawns, mostly overgrown with various bushes, shrubbery, and small trees. A large grass lawn runs behind the house to the house and garage building of 711 ½ 8th Ave, which is accessible through the alley.

Introduction

The David and Kate Knott residence at 711 8th Avenue South is an Ell-shaped, one and a half story gable front and wing, single-family home, built in the folk Victorian style. The house sits upon a concrete wall foundation. Off-white asbestos siding covers the exterior of the house with exception to the wood shingles that cover the open porch half-wall. The front porch runs from across the entire south façade, wrapping around side of the house to the east, and contained within the Ell. The gable front features two side-by-side windows beneath a white, decorative vergeboard in the gable peak. A shingled roof covers the gable front and wing. The rear of the house features a single story, kitchen extension with a hipped roof, extending from the east end of the north elevation.



South Façade

The south façade features the gable front on the west, and the south face of the wing to the east. The open front porch, which runs across the entire gable front, wraps into the Ell. The porch terminates at the south elevation of wing. A shingled, hipped pent roof covers the porch, and is supported by four wood beams, one located at the southwest corner of the porch, one on the southeast corner, and one each located in the middle of the south and east facing porch walls. The porch wall, which stands about four feet tall from the ground, is covered in wood shingles. The wall begins at the southwest corner of the house, running south to the edge of the porch. The wall breaks at the corner, where the cement walkway meets the building, giving access to the porch. It continues around the rest of the porch, ending in the south elevation of wing. The floor of the porch appears to be narrow wood planks, which could very well be original to the house. A 12-light fixed pane front door sits beneath the porch roof at the far west side of the façade. To the east, in the center of the gable front, two one-over-one double-hung windows sit within the same fixture beneath the porch roof. The south elevation of the wing, still below the porch also features a single double-hung window.

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The top half story of the house features two one-over-one double-hungs in the center of the gable front, identical to those of the first story, located directly below. The exterior of the entire south façade is covered with off white asbestos siding that terminates below a white fascia, and decorative vergeboard in the gable peak. The south elevation of the wing to the east of the gable front is covered in the same asbestos siding, and terminates beneath the eaves of the wing roof.

East Elevation

The east elevation features the gable end of the wing to the north, and the side of the gable front to the south. The gable end of the wing contains two windows, both one-over-one double-hung, one on the first story in the center of the gable end, and the other directly above. The same asbestos siding extends from the foundation to the white fascia. The south elevation above the porch roof contains no windows or features, and is covered by the same siding found on the rest of the structure, terminating below the eaves of the gable front. The east elevation of the wrapped porch runs south to north, from the front of the house to the wing. The porch half-wall is consistent with that of the south façade, and features two wood beam supports running from the wall to the porch's hipped roof. The asbestos siding covers the exterior wall beneath the porch as well.

West Elevation

Off white asbestos siding covers the whole of the west elevation with the exception of a single window located on the first story's north end. However, the west elevation of the building is mostly covered by trees and bushes, making further description of the window difficult. The west elevation of the front porch is visible as it protrudes south from the front of the house. The wood shingled, half wall meets the main structure exterior wall at the southern edge. A wood support beam extends from the southernmost corner of the porch wall to the eaves of the hipped porch roof, which eastern slope is visible from the western elevation.

Rear Elevation

The view of the northern elevation is greatly limited by the structures at 711 ½ 8th Ave S, which sits at the rear of the Knott house, off the alley. The kitchen extension protrudes from the main Ell section of the house at the intersection of the gable front and the wing. The extension, which features a hipped roof, covered in the same asphalt shingles used in the main roof, appears to feature only one small window in the north elevation. A rectangular, horizontally oriented, fixed pane, five-light window sits in near the top east corner of the elevation, and appears to be the only feature. A small metal stove pipe protrudes from the western slope of the hipped roof, and is visible from the rear elevation. To the west of the extension, only a small portion of the building is visible. The first story appears to feature at least one window fixtures, which is set into the rear elevation just to the west of the center of the rear gable end. The window is a one-over-one double-hung fixed pane window, with wood window surrounds and trim board painted white.

The rest of the rear elevation is hidden from view, although it is clear that it also features the same asbestos siding as is utilized throughout the rest of the house.



711 8th AVE South
GREAT FALLS, MT

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History of the Property

David & Katie Knott

David A. Knott was born in Ohio, in 1853.¹ He spent much of his early life following the Civil War working as a purser, or a supply purchaser, for shipping boats on the rivers between Vicksburg and Memphis. It was in Memphis that David met his young wife, Katie Winston. Born in Memphis in March of 1862, Katie was the daughter of a freed slave, Cornelia Winston. William Knott, Cornelia's Grandson, recalled that the slave owner had freed her and the rest of his slaves for fear that any of his own children would grow up to be slavers.² And so Katie Winston was born free in the south during the Civil War. Katie and David were married in 1885, and soon had a young family. Their daughter Odessa and son David E. were both born in Memphis, in 1888 and 1890 respectively. In 1892, the Knott family, joined by Katie's mother Cornelia and Grandmother Catherine, made the long train ride from Memphis to Denver, then on to Helena, where a stage coach took the Knott's to their new home of Great Falls, Montana. David had heard of the small railroad town in the north central part of the state through a friend of his that had worked on the river boats in the 1870s and 1880s.³ Ed Simms, himself a founding member of Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and purportedly the first black resident of Great Falls, convinced David and his family of the opportunity that the city held for African Americans at the time.⁴

Upon arriving in Montana, David started work as a janitor for the Montana Power Company, a position he would hold for many years. His wife Katie, though not employed, stayed busy with private seamstress work she took on throughout the years.⁵ The first ten years in Montana were especially busy for the Knotts, as their family more than doubled in size. Cecilia, William (Henry), and Irene all were born before 1900, followed by La Nita Knott in 1902.⁶ Also during this time, David built the one and half story folk Victorian home that still stands at 711 8th Avenue South. While the 1880s were a time of great social progress in Great Falls, the 1890s and early 1900s were times of intense racial conflict and unabashed prejudice. Housing opportunities and residential neighborhoods were strictly segregated at the time David built his home. Eighth Avenue south was within the south side district where the black population was allowed to live and own property at the time. However, most African Americans lived several blocks north of the Knott home, nearer the Union Bethel A.M.E. church on Fifth Avenue. Eventually, the Taylors, and following them, the Reeds, were black families that moved into a house across the street from the Knotts at 708 8th Avenue South.⁷

This relatively confined spatial aspect of African Americans in Great Falls led to the birth of a deeply connected black community. The focal point of this community was without a doubt the Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The brick building, which still operates as the A.M.E. church, stands at 916 5th Avenue South. Founded by Edward Simms, A.W. Ray and William M. Morgan, Union Bethel harbored the Christian community of the city. By 1890, 85 African Americans lived and worked in Great Falls, and many remained connected to other black citizens through the Church.⁸ David and Katie Knott were no exception. As the case was in nearly every city in Montana with a sizable black population, women of the church—usually an A.M.E. church—became the backbone of the community. Katie, who arrived only two years after the founding of Union Bethel, took on the mantle of a church and community leader. For nearly sixty years, Katie Knott worked to better the lives and futures of those around her through charity, women's groups, and church and community functions. In 1919, as chairwoman of the Booker T. Washington Auxiliary, a charitable group, Katie spent a great deal of time making and donating clothes for underprivileged children of the community, both black and white.⁹ This and other such involvement filled the pages of local papers in daily briefs, and society columns, and in many ways shows the impact that Katie Knott and other black women had not only on the African American community, but Great Falls as a whole.

¹ U.S. Census, 1900, (*Great Falls, Cascade, Montana*; Roll: 910; Page: 45B; Enumeration District: 0147; FHL microfilm: 1240910) Accessed online at ancestry.com.

² William, interview by Quintard Taylor, "Mr. William Knott." April 2, 1974. Spokane, Wash: Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries, 2002. (William Knott Interview)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kenneth Robinson. "Early Black American Settlers, Great Falls, MT." *Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana*, May 2, 2009, accessed July 9, 2015, online at <http://blackamericansmt.blogspot.com/2009/05/early-black-american-settlers-great.html>.

⁵ William Knott Interview.

⁶ U.S. Census, 1910, (*Great Falls, Cascade, Montana*; Roll: T624_830; Page: 14A; Enumeration District: 0030; FHL microfilm: 1374843) Accessed online at ancestry.com.

⁷ William Knott Interview.

⁸ Kenneth Robinson. "Early Black American Settlers, Great Falls, MT." *Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana*, May 2, 2009, accessed July 9, 2015, online at <http://blackamericansmt.blogspot.com/2009/05/early-black-american-settlers-great.html>.

⁹ *The Great Falls Daily Tribune*, (Great Falls, Montana, Feb 8, 1919.) *Chronicling America*. Accessed online at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.

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The Knott Children & Growing up in the West

Much of the history of the Knott Family is centered on the lives of their six children as they grew up in Montana, and the stark difference between their childhood, and that of their parents. The Knott's third child, William (born Henry), recalled many aspects of growing up as a black Montanan in the early twentieth century during an interview with Dr. Quintard Taylor of Washington State University. William, who was born in the house at 711 8th Avenue South, adamantly described himself as a Montanan in every way. He spent much of his very early childhood playing sports with other children and going to school. In these activities, William claimed that one would never know the color of their skin growing up in Montana. Baseball with the young boys of Great Falls, or playing football on a gravel field (not basketball though, as that was strictly a girls sport, and "a boy wouldn't be caught dead playing basketball"¹⁰), and even attending school, all were places that William did not feel the racial tension of the times. It was only after school that he experienced such prejudice. The fine restaurants would not serve him and other blacks, the first class hotels would not rent rooms, and even the black barbers in town would not cut black men's hair for fear that it would damage the image of their business.¹¹

William expressed sentiments that the male African American community, unlike the black women, faced many struggles in creating and maintaining a strong community. Himself a mason, William recalled that there were never enough black men staying in Great Falls on a permanent basis to sustain a black lodge. Eventually, he and other black masons put in their memberships in black lodges in Helena, Lewistown, and eventually as far away as Seattle.¹² The nature of work was the heart of the problem. Most black men in Great Falls during this time worked on the railroad as porters or call boys. However, these jobs were never permanent, and often required men and their families to move every few months or years. The lack of good jobs affected the future of the young black boys, who were forced to quit their education to help their families by working.¹³ William left high school and became a call boy for the Great Northern Railroad around 1912. However, likely due to his mother's work as a private seamstress, William left the railroad soon after and opened his own tailor shop. In spite of the lack of a higher education, he managed to own a successful business in Great Falls, even branching out and opening a shop in Alberta in 1919 to 1920. Following his private business career, William went to work for the State Liquor Control Board as the cashier.¹⁴

The Knotts on Eighth Avenue South

After their children left home, David and Katie Knott continued to live at 711 8th Ave South. David worked at the power company until his death in 1929, at the age of 76.¹⁵ Katie, ten years his younger, lived and worked in the house her husband built until 1961, when she passed away at the age of 99.¹⁶ For nearly forty years, Katie had lived across the street from a fellow member of the A.M.E. church and black community, Gertrude Taylor. Mrs. Taylor lived at 708 8th Ave South from 1921 until 1959.¹⁷ During the last years of Katie Knott's life, a black couple, Ed and Eva Reed, moved into the Taylor home across the street, living with Gertrude for several years until her death in 1964. Eddie Reed, a professional baseball player in the twilight of his career moved to Montana play for the Great Falls Electrics. He had formerly been in the Army, and then later played for both the Cleveland Indians and Los Angeles Dodgers organizations before coming to Great Falls.¹⁸ In 1961, the same year Katie Knott passed away, Eddie Reed and his wife Eva gave birth to their daughter Kathy, who grew up to be a school teacher in Great Falls, and bought the old Knott home across the street at 711 8th Ave South, which she still owns today.

¹⁰ William Knott Interview.

¹¹ Ibid. (whole Paragraph)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "David Knott," Find-A-Grave Index, Accessed online at ancestry.com.

¹⁶ "Katie Knott," Find-A-Grave Index, Accessed online at ancestry.com.

¹⁷ R.L. Polk & Co, Polk's 1923-1959 *Great Falls (Cascade County, Mont.) City Directory, multiple year searches for "Gertrude Taylor."*

¹⁸ "Eddie Reed Obituary" *The Great Falls Tribune*, Jan. 26, 2009. Accessed online at <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/greatfallstribune/obituary.aspx?pid=123328840>

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Information Sources/Bibliography

Ancestry.com. Searches for David and Katie Knott. Results included: U.S. Find-A-Grave-Index; U.S. Census, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 and 1940. Accessed online at www.ancestry.com.

Chroniclingamerica.loc.gov. Access to Historic Newspapers included: *The Great Falls Daily Tribune*. Accessed online at www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.

Knott, William. Interview by Taylor, Quintard. "Mr. William Knott, April 2, 1974." Spokane, Wash: Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries, 2002.

R.L. Polk & Co. *Polk's Great Falls (Cascade, Mont.) City Directory*, Salt Lake City, UT: R.L. Polk & Co., 1903-1959.

Robinson, Robinson. "Early Black American Settlers, Great Falls, MT." *Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana*, May 2, 2009, accessed July 9, 2015, online at <http://blackamericansmt.blogspot.com/2009/05/early-black-american-settlers-great.html>.

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Statement of Significance

The Knott residence at 711 8th Avenue South exhibits great significance through its deep connections with the early history of African Americans in Great Falls and Montana, as well as through association with the lives of the Knott Family. Though the house may not be individually eligible at this time, it most certainly contributes to a possible South side historic district within Great Falls. However, further research may show that the home is in fact eligible under Criteria A for its association with Mrs. Katie Knott, who doubtlessly had deep ties to the African American community of Great Falls and the Union Bethel A.M.E. church.

This possible district, roughly ten square blocks in size, housed nearly every black citizen of Great Falls in the late 1800s and early 1900s, with well over 200 residents in 1930. Within the South side neighborhood, a total of 71 houses have been identified as having historical significance in the black community for the years of 1910 and 1930. These 71 houses do not include the homes still existing with significance from the 1910s and 20s, or any home associated with black history after 1930. However, out of those 71, the Knott residence is one of only 17 which remain standing today.

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Integrity (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, association)

The Knott residence at 711 8th Ave South retains sufficient integrity to convey its historical and architectural significance. Its location, feel and setting are still very much intact, as are its original design, materials, and workmanship. The only notable changes to the exterior appears to be the addition to the rear of the house prior to 1929, and the residing of the building with asbestos shingle siding. However, both changes occurred within the period of significance from 1895-1961. The house also stands within the South side neighborhood of Great Falls, the historic district of African Americans in the city. Several of the adjacent houses also share historical significance to the black community, and are of the same general age and feeling.

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Photographs



Knott Residence
South Façade, facing north
7/24/15
Photo by Anthony Wood

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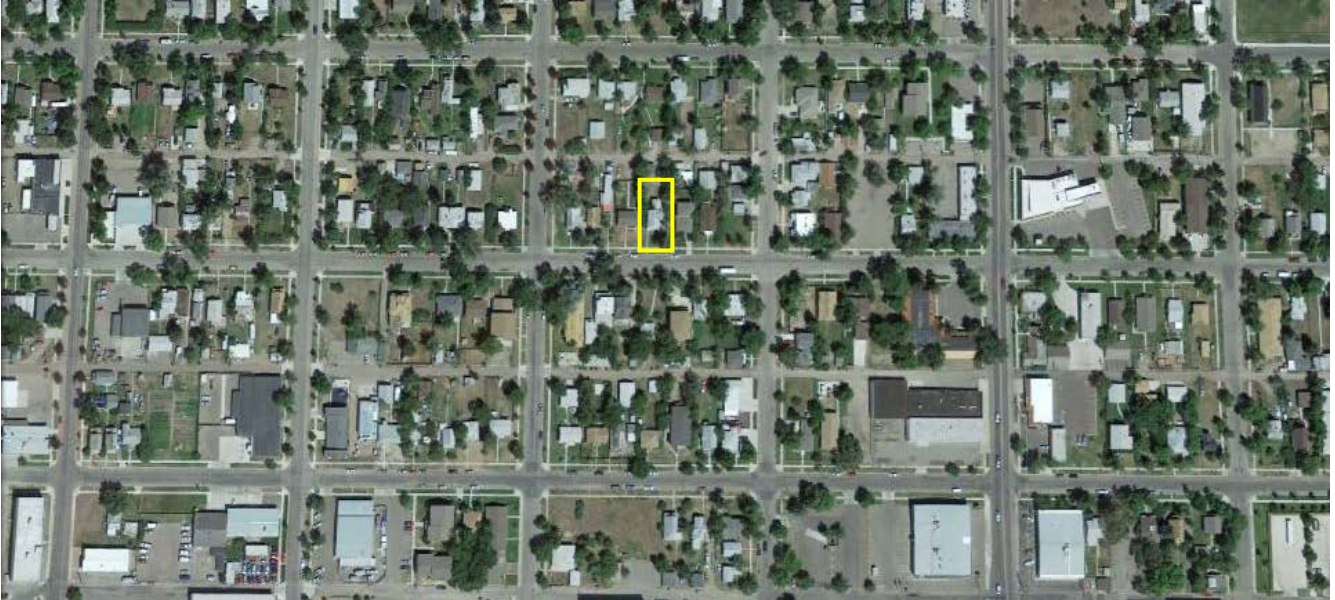
Knott Residence
North Elevation, facing south
7/14/15
Photo by Anthony Wood

Montana Historic Property Record Form

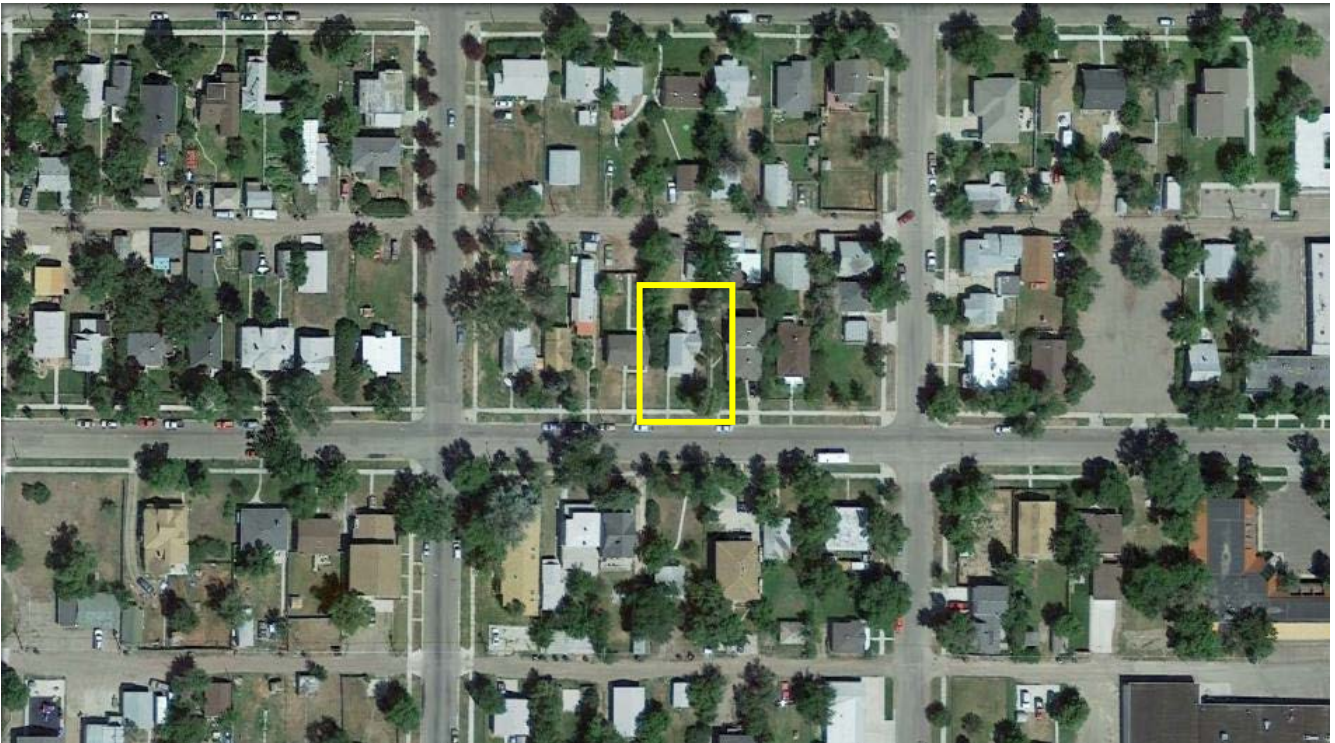
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Site Map/Aerial Photo



David & Katie Knott Residence
711 8th Ave South,
Great Falls, MT
T20 N R03 E S12

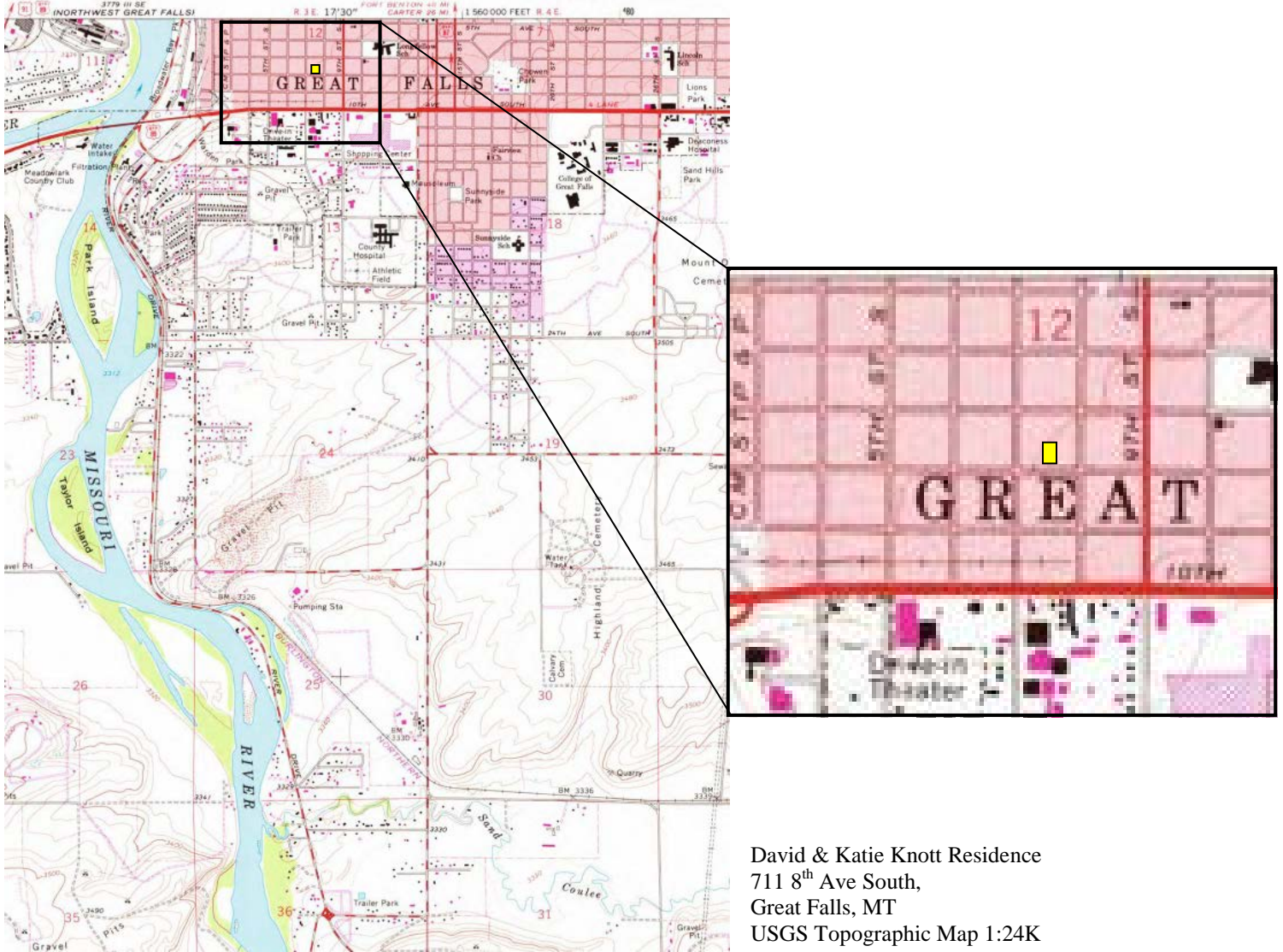


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Topographic Map



David & Katie Knott Residence
711 8th Ave South,
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USGS Topographic Map 1:24K