

# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

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

Property Address: **503 North Bozeman Avenue**

Historic Address (if applicable):

City/Town: **Bozeman**

Site Number: **24GA1953**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Gallatin**

Historic Name: **Oswald and Ada Smith House**

Original Owner(s): **Oswald and Ada Smith**

Current Ownership  Private  Public

Current Property Name:

Owner(s): **Brock Anderson & Dr. Mary Cloud B. Ammons**

Owner Address: **503 North Bozeman Avenue**

Phone:

Legal Location

PM: **Montana** Township: **02 S** Range: **06 E**

$\frac{1}{4}$   $\frac{1}{4}$  **NW**  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section: **07**

Lot(s): **1**

Block(s): **C**

Addition: **Bealls 2nd** Year of Addition: **1885**

USGS Quad Name: **Bozeman** Year: **1992**

Historic Use: **single family residence**

Current Use: **single family residence**

Construction Date: **1928**  Estimated  Actual

Original Location  Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference [Google Earth](#)

NAD 27 or  NAD 83(preferred)

Zone: **12** Easting: **497302** Northing: **5058950**

Geocode: **06-0799-07-2-47-01-0000**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District:

NRHP Eligible:  Yes  No

Date of this document: **8/3/2016**

Form Prepared by: **Anthony Wood,**  
**Historical Research & Consulting**

Address: **1957 University Street**  
**Helena, MT, 59601**

Daytime Phone:

MT SHPO USE ONLY

Eligible for NRHP: X yes  no

Criteria: X A  B  C  D

Date: 8/10/2016

Evaluator: Kate Hampton

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: **1928-1968**

## Montana Historic Property Record Form

Property Name: Oswald & Ada Smith House

Smithsonian Number:  
24GA1953

Architectural Style: **Craftsmen** If Other, specify:  
Property Type: **single family residence** Specific Property Type:

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

### Architectural Description:

#### *Setting and Location*

The Oswald and Ada Smith House sits on Lot C, at the Southeast corner of Block 1 in Bozeman's Beall Park neighborhood. Block C is bounded by North Bozeman Avenue to the East, Short Street to the South, North Black Avenue to the West, and East Peach Street to the North. The Home is located on the corner of Short and N. Bozeman, immediately north of Beall Park. The Park and the Smith House is located roughly 7 block north Main Street.

The front yard, extending from the East Façade to North Bozeman, and the side yard, adjacent to Short Street to the South, are both bounded by a metal chain-link fence that surrounds the property. The front yard features a grass lawn on either side of a cement walkway leading from the two, semi-circle front steps, to the city sidewalk. The front yard is dominated by two large Douglas fir trees one on each side of the walkway, and a third large Elm Tree in the small space between the city sidewalk and North Bozeman Avenue. The side yard contains several small trees and bushes, as well as another large Elm tree on the West side of a narrow cement path that leads from a gate in the fence, running for about 6 feet, and turns left (West), leading to the rear entry door on the West Elevation of the house. Due to the dense foliage surrounding the home, neither the rear yard on the West side of the house, nor the North yards are visible.

#### *Introduction*

The Oswald and Ada Smith Home is a one and a half story structure, built upon a concrete foundation, with a gable front and wings, with red, asphalt shingles. The structure has been altered from its original style, adding vertical board siding, and diagonal board siding within the gable peaks. Although the siding, new windows and a new front porch/stoop detract from the original style, elements of the original 1928 Craftsman home are still prevalent. The large shed dormer on the south slope of the main roof, and the occasional decorative bracings beneath the eaves still showcase this style. The general construction of the house includes the large rectangular front gable section, with gable front wings extending from the rear of the building on both the North and South elevations. There also appears to a rear porch/sun room addition to the rear (West) elevation, though the trees near that section of the property block much of the view.

#### *East Façade*

The first story of the East Façade features the main entry door, a metal screed door, atop two semi-circle front steps, located on the South side of the façade. To the North, a large picture window and metal awning dominate the center portion of the façade. The window fixture contains a large single pane window on the right, and a smaller, out swinging window on the left. Presumably the section on the left opens while that on the right does not. The window surrounds are likely plastic, and are painted tan to match the color of the rest of the trim on the exterior. The vertical board siding that covers the entire first story of the house is painted an olive green, and extends to a horizontal divider board, painted tan, that separated the bottom story from the gable peak. The siding in the peak runs diagonal outward from the center to the fascia boards under the eaves. The center of the gable end features a single double-hung window with wood surrounds that are painted tan. The peak of the gable, beneath the eaves, features a single decorative brace, painted olive green.

The East elevations of the North and South wings are also somewhat visible, though they are mostly obscured by tree cover. The North wing contains two small, rectangular windows just beneath the eaves, roughly centered in the exterior wall. There does not appear to be any features on the East elevation of the South wing. The East elevation of the dormer of the South slope of the roof also contains no features. All sides of the wings and dormers feature the same, olive green, vertical board siding.

#### *South Elevation*

The South elevation is comprised of the main story of the building on the East, the large shed dormer in the roof slope above, and the South gable front wing on the far west side. The bottom story of the main structure contains three large, identical windows. Equally spaced from the West corner to the wing on the East, the three windows feature a large, single pain picture window with a swiveling transom below. The widow surrounds are all painted tan. Above the windows, the large shed dormer extending from the East end of

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the Southern slope of the roof features two identical window fixtures. Each is an out-swinging, six light-by-six light window fixture with wood surrounds painted tan. The siding of the dormer is the same vertical boards found throughout the exterior.

The South end of the gable front wing dominates the West end of the elevation. The bottom story features a large picture window, identical to the one on the East façade of the home, with a smaller swinging single pane window on the left (west) and a larger fixed pane window on the right. Above the window, a large tan horizontal board runs the length of the gable end at the level of the eaves, separating the bottom story from the gable peak. The siding in the peak runs diagonal outward from the center to the fascia boards under the eaves. The peak of the gable, beneath the eaves, features a single decorative brace, painted olive green, as well as two matching braces on either edge of the wing at the lowest level of the eaves.

A shed roof covering a rear porch or sunroom is also visible, but is mostly obscured by the many small trees located near that end of the building. This rear portion appears to be sided with lattice board, and contains a rear entrance door, though it is not visible.

### West and North Elevations

Due to the heavy tree cover around the Smith House, details of the remaining elevations are not available. The West Elevation does appear to feature a rear entry door, beneath a shed porch extension. The extension is sided on the South elevation by what appears to be wood lattice board, painted green.

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### History of the Property

The Oswald and Ada Smith house on the corner of North Bozeman Avenue and Short Street has stood there since 1928. The Oswald family occupied the lot, originally the location of a modest one-and-a-half story home, since moving to Bozeman sometime between 1916 and 1920. By 1927, the original house no longer appeared on the Sanborn maps of Bozeman, and the current home erected in 1928.<sup>1</sup> The Smiths continued to live in their new home for over 40 years, presumably making minor improvements, though the foot print of the building appears to be original to the 1928 design.

#### *Oswald Smith*

Born June 6, 1884, in Alexandria Louisiana, Oswald Smith began his life thousands of miles away from where he would eventually make his home in Bozeman, Montana.<sup>2</sup> Little is known about his early life in the South, but it appears from the 1900 census that Oswald's father Israel, and his second wife, 19 year old Anna Smith, managed to send Oswald to school in Rapids Parish Louisiana.<sup>3</sup> By 1910, young Oswald decided to go west, and traveled to Billings Montana where he lived until 1916.<sup>4</sup> Possibly for lack of work, or young marriageable African American women, Oswald left Billings around 1916 and moved to Kansas City. Missouri had a strong connection with the black community of Montana at this time. Kansas City and other large towns along the Missouri River were home to some of the largest communities of African Americans following the Civil War. As it happened, Fort Benton and Great Falls, Montana was the end of the line for west-bound riverboats. Many families in Kansas and Missouri kept in touch with sons and husbands who had gone west in search of better work and less persistent prejudice. Oswald arrived in Kansas City in 1916, and before the year was up, he married twenty year old Ada B. Finnes.<sup>5</sup> Sometime between 1918 and 1919, the Smiths returned to Montana, heading farther west this time, choosing to stay in Bozeman, Montana.

In 1920, when Oswald and Ada first appear in the public records of Bozeman, the young couple already had two boys, Asa and Oswald Jr., both under the age of two. Oswald began his work around town as a janitor, presumably for the Bozeman Theaters, in addition to other odd jobs.<sup>6</sup> By 1927, the Smith house was beginning to fill up. Lucile Frances, Charles Nicholas, and Harold were all born in the early 20s, joining their older brothers in the small home on the corner of North Bozeman and Short Street.<sup>7</sup> In 1927, the old Smith family home was torn down, and replaced by a larger house later in 1928. From this new home on Bozeman's north side, the Smith children played at the adjacent Beall Park and rec center, and attended Bozeman Public Schools. Oswald continued to work for the Bozeman Theaters until around 1953, when he retired.<sup>8</sup> Ada kept active in the community and church, eventually landed the Smiths in controversy with one of the other prominent black families of Bozeman.

Unlike some cities in the state which boasted larger black populations, Bozeman was unique in that it did not maintain an all-black church, at least for very long. The prominent McDonald sisters, who were the first black children born in the Gallatin Valley in the 1870s and 1880s, had long been active in the Baptist church, which the Smiths also attended. Mary Mollie McDonald, in 1929, had been appointed as a trustee of the St. Johns Baptist Church in Bozeman. The church, however, ceased to meet at that building. Over many years, and after the deaths of the other two trustees, Mollie became entrusted by the congregation as the manager of the church building, charged to operate the finances, lease the building, and ensure its upkeep. In 1947, Mollie leased the church building to a Mrs. Ella Ross, with a provision that after two years, Ross would be allowed to purchase the building if she desired. Late in 1948, Mollie appointed her sisters Belle and Mellissa McDonald as trustees so they could sign the deed in sale to Mrs. Ross. Nine months after the sale was final, Oswald and Ada Smith brought suit against the McDonalds for unlawful sale of church property and fraud. The lower court in Gallatin County upheld the sale as legal, saying that sisters acted within their roles as trustees of the church to sell. The ruling was appealed by the congregation, headed by the Smiths, to the Montana Supreme Court, which heard the case in December of 1949. The ruling of the lower court was eventually overturned, stating that the duties given to the trustees only allowed the sisters to operate the leasing and upkeep of the church building, but to sell was not within their power, and would have need to be

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<sup>1</sup> Sanborn Map Sheet 3, Bozeman Montana, September 1927.

<sup>2</sup> "Oswald W. Smith," Obituary, *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* (Wednesday, July 24, 1968) pg. 6.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census, 1900 (*Police Jury Ward 8, Rapides, Louisiana; Roll: 578; Page: 15A; Enumeration District: 0135; FHL microfilm: 1240578*). Accessed online at ancestry.com.

<sup>4</sup> Oswald W. Smith Obituary, *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* (Wednesday, July 24, 1968) pg. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census, 1920, (*Bozeman Ward 2, Gallatin, Montana; Roll: T625\_970; Page: 13A; Enumeration District: 72; Image: 974*). Accessed online at ancestry.com.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census, 1930, (*Bozeman, Gallatin, Montana; Roll: 1256; Page: 4A; Enumeration District: 0002; Image: 590.0; FHL microfilm: 2340991*). Accessed online at ancestry.com.

<sup>8</sup> "Oswald W. Smith," Obituary, *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* (Wednesday, July 24, 1968) pg. 6.

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brought before the congregation first, which they did not. The deed was taken from Mrs. Ross, but no other actions were taken against the sisters.<sup>9</sup>

It is likely that relations between Bozeman's only two large black families remained strained following the case, although no further animosity between the Smiths and McDonalds has been discovered. Oswald lived for 19 more years until succumbing to death on July 23, 1968 at the age of 84.<sup>10</sup> He had worked for the Bozeman Theaters for over 40 years, and a mainstay in the black community of Bozeman. It is unclear when and how Ada passed away, though she likely moved away to live with one of her adult children or family members following Oswald's death.

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<sup>9</sup> Montana Supreme Court, *Smith v St. John's Baptist Church*, Dec 1949. Accessed online at <https://casetext.com/case/smith-v-st-john-bap-church>.

<sup>10</sup> "Oswald W. Smith," Obituary, *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* (Wednesday, July 24, 1968) pg. 6.

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### Information Sources/Bibliography

Ancestry.com. Searches for Oswald and Ada Smith. Results included: U.S. Census, 1900, 1920, 1930 and 1940. Accessed online at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).

Chroniclingamerica.loc.gov. Access to Historic Newspapers included: *The Bozeman Daily Chronicle* and *The Billings Gazette*. Accessed online at [www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov).

"Oswald W. Smith," Obituary. *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*. Wednesday, July 24, 1968.

R.L. Polk & Co. *Polk's Bozeman (Gallatin County), City Directory*, Salt Lake City, UT: R.L. Polk & Co., 1922, 1925, 1927, 1929, 1931, 1933, 1935, and 1940.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. "Bozeman, Montana." New York, New York. Sheet 3. 1927.

Smith v St. John's Baptist Church. Montana Supreme Court. Dec 1949. Accessed online at <https://casetext.com/case/smith-v-st-john-bap-church>.

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### Statement of Significance

The Oswald and Ada Smith House at 503 North Bozeman garners its significance from its historic association with the Smith Family, and the greater black community of Bozeman. It joins the Samuel Lewis House on South Black and the Richard and Mary McDonald House on South Tracy as large family homes built and owned by members Bozeman's very small black population in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As such, the Smith House also represents a rare property type, gaining further significance.



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

The Oswald and Ada Smith House at 503 North Bozeman Avenue does not exhibit sufficient integrity to be listed individually. Though the footprint of the original 1928 home remains mostly intact, with the exception of the rear porch extension, the replacement of most windows and the addition of new siding are detrimental factors to its feeling and design. In addition, the front porch area feature new circular cement steps that are not in line with original materials, workmanship, or feeling, and cause a significant negative impact to the façade of the house.

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### Photographs



Oswald and Ada Smith House  
503 North Bozeman Avenue  
East Façade, facing West  
Photographed by Anthony Wood  
8/1/16

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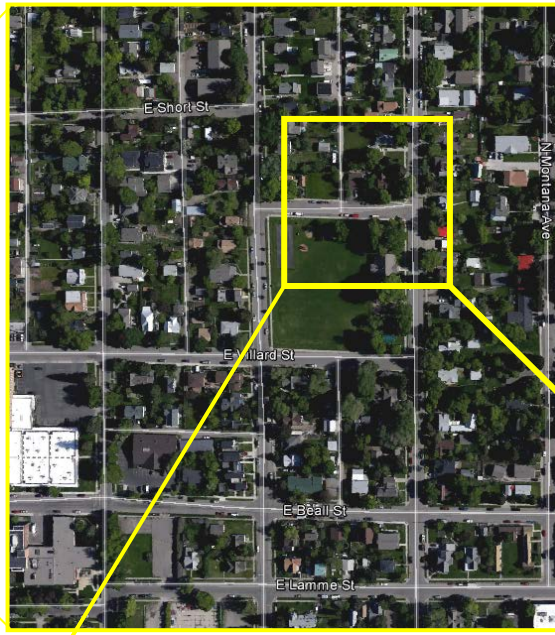
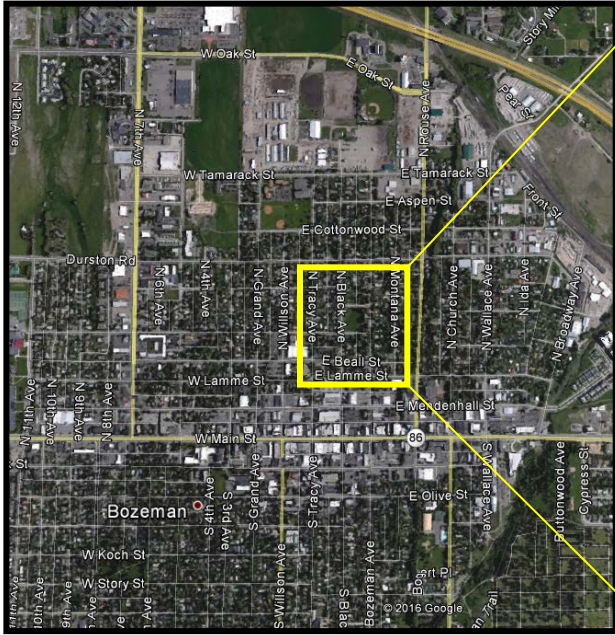
Oswald and Ada Smith House  
503 North Bozeman Avenue  
South Elevation, facing North  
Photographed by Anthony Wood  
8/1/16

# Montana Historic Property Record Form

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## Site Map/Aerial Photo



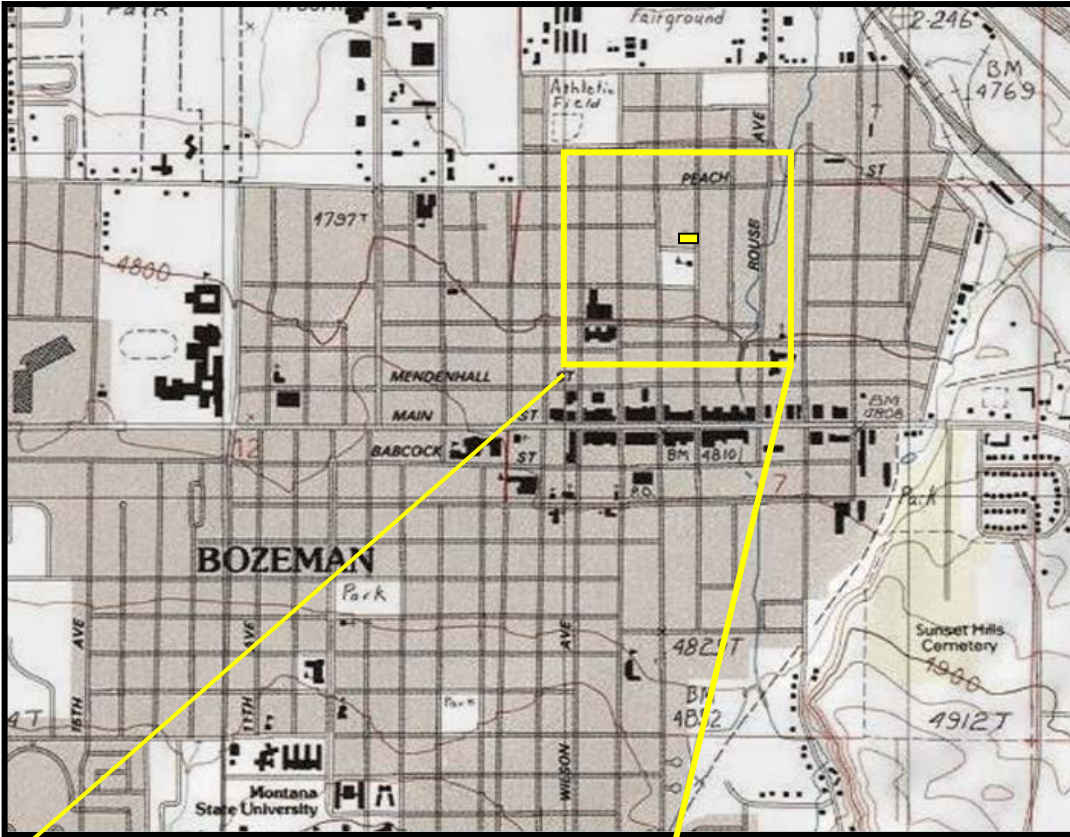
Oswald & Ada Smith House  
503 N. Bozeman Ave  
Bozeman, Mt  
Google Earth Photos  
Zone: 12 Easting: 497302 Northing: 5058950  
Geocode: 06-0799-07-2-47-01-0000

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## Topographic Map



Oswald & Ada Smith House  
503 N. Bozeman Ave



Oswald and Ada Smith House  
503 N. Bozeman Avenue  
Bozeman, MT  
USGS Topographic Map 1:24K  
Zone: 12 Easting: 497302 Northing: 5058950  
Geocode: 06-0799-07-2-47-01-0000