

# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

For the Montana National Register of Historic Places Program and State Antiquities Database

Montana State Historic Preservation Office  
Montana Historical Society  
PO Box 201202, 1301 E Lockey  
Helena, MT 59620-1202

Property Address: **114 N. Hoback St.**

Historic Address (if applicable): **849 5th Ave.**

City/Town: **Helena**

Site Number: **24LC2430**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Lewis and Clark**

Historic Name: **St. James AME Church**

Original Owner(s): **St. James AME**

Current Ownership  Private  Public

Current Property Name:

Owner(s): **Allen F. Minkoff**

Owner Address: **114 N Hoback St., Helena, MT 59601**

Phone:

Legal Location

PM: **Montana** Township: **10 N** Range: **03 W**

$\frac{1}{4}$   $\frac{1}{4}$  **NE**  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section: **31**

Lot(s): **1**

Block(s): **1**

Addition: **Blake Amended** Year of Addition: **1887**

USGS Quad Name: **Helena** Year: **1992**

Historic Use: **RELIGION/religious facility**

Current Use: **DOMESTIC/single-family residence**

Construction Date: **1889**  Estimated  Actual

Original Location  Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference [www.nris.mt.gov](http://www.nris.mt.gov)

NAD 27 or  NAD 83(preferred)

Zone: **12** Easting: **421407.25** Northing: **5159650.00**

Geocode: **05-1888-31-1-39-19-0000**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District:

NRHP Eligible:  Yes  No

Date of this document: **7/20/2016**

Form Prepared by: **Delia Hagen**

Address: **660 River Court, Missoula, MT 59801**

Daytime Phone: **(406) 360-0120**

MT SHPO USE ONLY

Eligible for NRHP:  yes  no

Criteria:  A  B  C  D

Date: **7/20/2016**

Evaluator: **Kate Hampton**

Comments: Identifying Montana's African American Heritage Places Project.

# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 2

## Architectural Description

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430

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### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Architectural Style: **Other:** If Other, specify:  
Property Type: **Religious** Specific Property Type:  
Architect: **unknown** Architectural Firm/City/State:  
Builder/Contractor: **unknown** Company/City/State:  
Source of Information:

The property historically known as 849 Fifth Avenue, now 114 North Hoback, occupies a rectangular parcel on the south side of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave and the west side of North Hoback. The block is bordered by 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the north, Breckrenridge Street to the south, N. Raleigh Street to the west and N. Hoback Street to the east. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue runs east-west. The main building on the parcel, the former church faces east onto North Hoback, and a secondary entrance faces north to 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. The building occupies the northern portion of the parcel with a partially fenced yard, and a large backyard, and slim sideyards planted to grass. The front yard features a mature coniferous tree located to the left of the front entrance.

Formerly the St. James AME Church, the building now functions as a residence and features its historic rectangular footprint with several small shed-roofed additions protruding from its north and south elevations. The main bay of the original church features a steeply-sloped gable roof with steep nearly full-height cross-gables set just off-center to the north in its east and west slopes. The residence sits atop an irregularly-coursed, painted, rough-cut stone foundation. The original horizontal drop lap wood siding is painted grey-blue with white trim. Architectural asphalt composition shingles cover the roof. The central component features a concrete block rectangular chimney, as well as a circular metal chimney. All windows are vinyl unless otherwise noted. The building features a tall entrance tower at its northwest corner.

#### *West (front) elevation*

The façade (west wall) of the house is divided into three components: the original, central mass of the church, the tower to the north side, and a shed addition to the south. The tall cross-gable roof component dominates and defines the building's central mass. Centered beneath this gable end, which runs flush with the west exterior wall, a large, Gothic-arched window opening punctuates building's first and second story levels. This modern five-light window occupies an original opening, and contains a tall gothic arched light above a two-light fixed unit, which in turn is placed above a pair of one-light casements. Single one-over-one modern windows flank the gothic window – each centered in the one-story bays immediately north and south of the front-gabled central portion. These single window units feature a larger fixed sash above a one-light hopper. The original central building component rises above a daylight basement level defined by the stone foundation wall. This lower level contains a single entry door centered in the south side, sheltered by a wood-frame gabled, bracketed awning. Also at the basement level, a single, original, wood-framed, one-over-one, double-hung window appears centered beneath both the central bay and the north bay.

To the north of the central component is a tall square entrance tower. The tower's flat roof accommodates a small open porch surrounded by an iron railing. The tower's north elevation contains an inset entry set between the basement and first story, a single casement highlighted by a wood-frame flower box at the second story, and two small windows – a one-light casement to the south and a fixed one-light window to the north – at the third story level. Four wood stairs with wood railings on either side lead to the inset entry porch, which shelters a modern metal-clad, pressed-panel door protected by a two-light aluminum storm.

The one-story, southernmost shed extension's west elevation features a single fixed, one-light window set off-center to the south.

# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 3  
Architectural Description

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430

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## *North (secondary façade) elevation:*

The north secondary Façade) elevation consists of multiple components. These include the main two and a half story building's exterior wall beneath the gable end, the two-story northeast corner tower, and two shed roof extensions that extend from the tower's west elevation. The westernmost shed extension slopes down to the west from a nearly two-story height at its intersection with the tower to one story, and dominates the center of the elevation. The second extension rises to one-story and slopes to the west, sheltering a ground-level entry. The two extensions nearly cover the main building's gable end wall. The tower, central shed extension, and main gable wall all feature original horizontal wood droplap siding above the basement level. Vertical wood board siding covers the basement levels and the entirety of the west shed extension.

The gable end wall contains a louvered vent near its peak, with a small centered, fixed, two-light window below. Another window opening on the west side of the second story level houses a pair of one-light casements. At the first story, a large window, with one large fixed light above a one-light hopper, appears on the west side. The tower's north elevation contains two, one-light, tall rectangular windows: one casement on the west side high in the second story, and a fixed light set off-center to the west between the first story and the raised basement level. A large octagonal, stained glass window centered on the central extensions north elevation illuminates the interior space. A simple, wood door located off-center to the east within the westernmost extension's north elevation provides entry.

## *West (rear/side) elevation*

Fenestration on the west elevation is limited to: a small, square, one-light fixed window high on the tower wall – offset just to the north; a circular window located on the north side of main building's first floor; a one-by-one casement high in the gable end; and three, original, wood-framed, evenly-spaced one-over-one double hungs within the rock foundation wall of the basement level. Originally, a large window opening appeared across the first and second story levels of the central, gabled bay, but horizontal board siding now fill that space. The west elevation's south side contains a small shed-roofed, rectangular bay that extends from the first story level. This bump out cantilevers above the daylight basement level and features no window openings, but provides entry via simple wooden steps that rise to its south side.

## *South (side/rear) elevation*

A one-story, shed-roofed sun porch fills the south elevation's ground level. The porch displays large, two-light windows that fill the four bays across its south side. Above, at the main (first story) level, a hip-roofed bay window projects at center, containing a pair of centered one-light fixed windows flanked by one-over-one windows – each a fixed light above a hopper. A triangular, three-light window appears low in the gable end immediately above the bay window. West of the bay window there appears another two-light window in the same one fixed light over a one-light hopper style found throughout the building. The westernmost portion of the south elevation includes the simple wood entry door centered on the west elevation's shed extension. As mentioned above, simple wood steps provide access to the main story entry.

## *Shed*

Though not visible from the street due to a large privacy fence around the back yard, a small, wood-frame shed-roofed modern building occupies the south center area of the parcel. It appears to have corrugated metal panels covering the exterior walls and east-downsloping roof.

# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 4

History of Property

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430

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## HISTORY OF PROPERTY

This property was first platted in 1887 as Lot 1 of Block I of the Blake Addition (Amended), along the south side of 5th Avenue, on the southwest corner of its intersection with N. Hoback Street. Although tax records indicate the current building was built in 1920, it was actually completed much earlier. In 1889, Helena's African-American community built the Saint James African Methodist Episcopal Church ("a handsome frame building with a lime-stone foundation and a steeple"), along with an outbuilding on the south property line, at 849 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and this 1889 church building became the residence now known as 114 N. Hoback Street.<sup>1</sup>

Helena's African Methodist Episcopal (AME) congregation had been founded the year before by Reverend James Hubbard of the Kansas Conference of the AME.<sup>2</sup> Helena's St. James was—along with Portland's Bethel AME (founded in 1889)—one of the earliest AME churches in the Pacific Northwest. Its establishment reflected a development pattern that would become common throughout the American West, where "once a significant number of Afro-Americans migrated to a town or city, the first community institution usually established was a church." As they did throughout the United States, these churches typically became the central institution of African-American communities. Black churches "sponsored or fostered other activities such as social clubs, literary societies, and fraternal orders. Often the church building was used as a meeting place for these organizations and for political gatherings. Predictably, local black ministers became the community leaders and spokesmen. Besides attending to the immediate needs of its congregation, the church also provided a fundamental psychological link to the national Afro-American social and cultural setting."<sup>3</sup>

St. James was no exception. From its base on the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Hoback, St. James fostered "a literary society, a Sabbath school, a women's benevolent association, a theatrical troupe, a nine-piece band, and a baseball team."<sup>4</sup> The congregation also "organized a library."<sup>5</sup> In a testament to its early strength and vibrancy, in 1894, just five years after its establishment, St. James hosted the annual convention of the Colorado AME conference. Two years later, the congregation completed a parsonage that stood south of the church building along the alley. This parsonage soon acquired its own address, 112 N. Hoback.

As St. James flourished so, too, did AME and other African-American congregations regionally. "Early churches in Portland and Helena were followed by church organizations throughout the region."<sup>6</sup> By 1900, Montana counted enough black churches to support "statewide conventions or conferences of the two major denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and the Baptist Church."<sup>7</sup> The expansion of black church networks connected area communities to African-Americans elsewhere, and helped stitch together communities across the region: "virtually all of the earliest ministers were recruited from the South or the Midwest and shared a similar cultural experience with their congregations." Then, "as the churches became more numerous in the Pacific Northwest, ministers were often shifted between various congregations within the region."<sup>8</sup> This pattern likely provided some continuity in leadership despite the relatively short tenures of early ministers at St. James. In the 1890s, St. James had at least three different reverends, including John P. Watson (1894), William A. Moore (1895, 1896), and S. W. Bird (1897, 1898). Moore was the first to live in the associated parsonage. In 1895, before the parsonage was completed, he lived close by, at 15 S. Hoback.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 52.

<sup>2</sup> African-Americans in Montana Timeline: <http://svcult.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/AAinMTTimelineMain.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 344.

<sup>4</sup> Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 52.

<sup>5</sup> Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 51.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 344.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 344.

<sup>9</sup> This address came up in title research for 1068 N Ewing too, in relation to white owners who preceded the Harrells here.

# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 5  
History of Property

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430

The relatively short tenure of ministers likely reinforced the importance of lay leaders in the church community, and in these the St. James congregation was rich, for Helena's African-Americans were energetic and dedicated participants in their church-centered community. In 1894, leaders of the St. James Literary Society were listed in the city directory, and included Jas. Clark, president, A. M. Drew, Secretary, and Mrs. Louisa Banks, treasurer. Other lay leaders came from a spectrum of Helena's black society, including "businessmen" like Walter Dorsey, Andrew J. Walton, and M. O. J. Arnett, "waiter" J.B. Reid, "plasterer" Ward Cole, "janitor" James Crump, "porter" Miles York, and a "printer" Joseph Tucker.<sup>10</sup>

As the new century dawned, Helena's black community "was vibrant," boasting "business establishments, literary and debating societies, a baseball team, and even a progressive newspaper, begun in 1906. Its social center was the St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church at Fifth and Hoback Streets."<sup>11</sup> In this period, the St. James Literary Society, under the leadership of Walter Dorsey, Mrs. Eugene Baker, and Joseph Clark, was soon counting "over 100 participants at its weekly meetings. The society provided black Helenans with a forum for discussion of community issues, an audience for performing artists, and an opportunity for local poets, playwrights, and essayists to present their work." The society also sponsored formal debates (followed by "furious discussions") on such topics as "Resolved, that the Negroes of the South enjoy more prosperity than in any other section of the U.S." or "Resolved, that slavery was a benefit to the Negro race"; or "Resolved, that woman suffrage is detrimental to the welfare of the nation."<sup>12</sup>

As before, active lay leaders and intraregional church networks provided continuity and connection even as ministers served but briefly. The first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a series of ministers to the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Hoback. The Reverend J.T. Smith served St. James in 1900, followed by the Reverend John F.C. Taylor in 1901. The following year John P. Watson returned to St. James, and stayed two years before being replaced by John Turner in 1904. Two years later, the Reverend Jordan Allen ministered for a year, and then in 1907 William T. Osborn arrived. Osborn continued in his position in 1908, and in 1909 the Reverend F.P. Greenlea served St. James.<sup>13</sup> In 1910, the minister was S.J. Collins, and, according to city directories, the church counted 50 members. That year, St. James stood as one of numerous thriving black churches in the region, and area AME ministers kept busy establishing new ones as well. Ministers Cate & Abbot, for instance, visited Lewistown, Livingston, and Miles City to start churches. Both the Baptist and AME denominations had "regional gatherings that included the four Pacific Northwest states."<sup>14</sup>

In 1912 the "last black troops left Fort Harrison," and thereafter the African-American population in Helena and Butte dwindled. Population decline undermined the support base for black businesses and black institutions like St. James, which in turn drove further emigration. Before too long, Helena's African-American population was "less than a fourth of what it had been in 1900."<sup>15</sup> St. James continued to function through the 1930s, but after World War II it ceased to exist as a regular church organization.

As a legal entity, the St. James AME retained title of the property on the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Hoback until 1973. In the years after it ceased regularly congregating, the AME organization rented the building out. During the 1950s, for instance, it was used by the Assembly of God, which met in a building that may have had a two-story northeast corner tower added sometime between 1930-1950. In 1973, the St. James organization conveyed the property, which may still have contained the parsonage at that point, to James Howard Nybo and his wife Suzanne Mackney. Nybo and Mackney recognized the historic value of the property, and wished to save it from demolition. Hearing rumors that the City of Helena was looking to purchase the property and tear the church down, the young couple contacted the AME Church leadership in Seattle, and

<sup>10</sup> Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 52.

<sup>11</sup> Lang, "Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906," 9-10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> In 1909, St. James hosted "Honor Lincoln Day" on the centennial of Lincoln's birth.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 345.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 342; Lang, "Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906," 14.

# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 6

History of Property

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430

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arranged to purchase the parcel. After stabilizing it, Nybo and Mackney sold it to Ellen Austin Goers , who owned it from 1978 until 1994, when she deeded it to Jan Lee Craig. Jan Lee Craig became Jan Kovich, and in 2000 she conveyed the old church building to Kathryn Bramer. Bramer owned it about 13 years before deeding it to Robert L. Turgeon in 2013. Current owner and occupant Allen Minkoff acquired it from Turgeon in 2015. By then, the parsonage had been removed and the church building alone remained.

# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 7

Information Sources/Bibliography

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430

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## INFORMATION SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

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1887 Blake Addition (Amended)

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# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 8

Statement of Significance

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430

## 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: **Ethnic Heritage & Social History** Period of Significance: **1889-c. 1945**

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built in 1889 by a congregation founded the year before, Helena's St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church may be the earliest black AME church established in the region, and it became the core of the thriving, interconnected black community that developed in Helena and Montana at that time. It is significant under NRHP Criterion A (state level) as the single most important property associated with the history of African-American people in Helena and the surrounding area. Its significance derives not from its religious status but from the role it played in the development of black Helena, Montana's largest black community and the heart of regional African-American life.

St. James was the primary independent community space in several senses. As the first community institution erected when a town attained a sufficient number of black residents, it was in essence the harbinger of that community's existence. It subsequently served as the social, religious and political backbone of the community, the vessel for community members' many, varied activities. Its primacy is also reflected in the spatial character of the community: although African-American people lived in areas across Helena, they clustered principally in the neighborhoods around St. James. The AME church bound together the local black community, and at the same time it connected it to African-Americans throughout the region, undergirding a web of relations that stretched from Kansas City to Seattle. As the core African-American community institution, it was central in the lives of many black individuals and also a key platform for local leaders, many of whom played leadership roles in St. James and numerous other sectors simultaneously. A handsome, solid edifice on a prominent corner, St. James and its associated parsonage also symbolized the achievement and respectability of the black community, in a nation that oft sought to deny it both.

St. James thrived in Helena with the local African American population, and it withered with it as well. Much as its construction marked the establishment of Helena's black community, St. James' closure bespoke the community's end. After WWII, Helena's black population had shrunk to the point that it could no longer really support independent community institutions like St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church. St. James AME is thus associated with two significant historic contexts: its origins and early years lie in the heyday of Helena's, and Montana's, African-American community, ca. 1875-1910, and its later period and eventual end epitomize the community decline that followed, ca. 1910-1940. The property's period of significance is the period during which it functioned as an African-American community institution, ie. 1889 to ca. 1945.



# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 9  
Integrity

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430

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**INTEGRITY** (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, association)

Despite the integral part the St. James AME Church played in the history of Helena's black community, changes to the exterior of the house render it ineligible for individual listing in the National Register. Modern windows and the introduction of new fenestration patterns affect its integrity of design, materials, and workmanship, and significantly impair the building's ability to convey its historic and architectural associations. It's conversion to a residence adversely impacts the integrity of feeling.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 10  
Photographs

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430



Feature # 1  
View to: S

Description: North elevation, facing 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

**MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD**

PAGE 11  
Photographs

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430



Feature #  
Facing: W

Description: East elevation (façade), facing Hoback



MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 12  
Photographs

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430



Feature #  
Facing: NW

Description: East and south elevations

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 13  
Photographs

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430



Feature #  
Facing: SE

Description: North and west elevations



MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 14  
Photographs

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430



Feature #  
Facing: SE

Description: 114 N. Hoback, view to SE, W wall

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 15  
Site Map

Property Name: St. James AME Church

Site Number: 24LC2430



Property:  
St. James AME Church  
114 N. Hoback, Helena, MT 59601  
Lewis and Clark County  
Geocode: 05-1888-31-1-39-19-0000  
UTM: Zone 12 / 421407.25 E / 5159650.00 N  
Lat: 46.585818 / Long: -112.025874



# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 16

Topographic Map

Property Name: St. James AME Church

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Property:

St. James AME Church

114 N. Hoback, Helena, MT 59601

Lewis and Clark County

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