

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: **212 S. Beattie St.**

Historic Address (if applicable): **212 S. Beattie St.**

City/Town: **Helena**

Site Number: **24LC2431**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Lewis and Clark**

Historic Name: **William C. and Georgia Irvin House**

Original Owner(s):

Current Ownership Private Public

Current Property Name:

Owner(s): **Teresa L. Asleson**

Owner Address: **212 S. Beattie St., Helena, MT 59601**

Phone:

Legal Location

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

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

Lot(s): **South 1/2 of 20**

Block(s): **538**

Addition: **Easterly** Year of Addition: **1881**

USGS Quad Name: **Helena** Year: **1998 (scanned)**

Historic Use: **Domestic/single family**

Current Use: **Domestic/single family**

Construction Date: **c. 1892** Estimated Actual

Original Location Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov

NAD 27 or NAD 83(preferred)

Zone: **12 T** Easting: **421099** Northing: **5159279**

Geocode: **05-1888-31-1-16-11-0000**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District:

NRHP Eligible: Yes No

Date of this document: **June 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: **7/6/2015**

Evaluator: **Kate Hampton**

Comments: Identifying Montana's African American Heritage Places Project

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Architectural Description

Property Name: William C. and Georgia Irwin House

Site Number: 24LC2431

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Architectural Style: **Other** If Other, specify: **National Folk, gable-front**
Property Type: **Residential** Specific Property Type: **Single-family dwelling**

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

The property commonly known as 212 S. Beattie St. occupies a rectangular parcel on the west side of S. Beattie St., on the northwest corner of its intersection with State Street. The property is bounded on its east and south by Beattie and State streets, respectively, and on its north and west by residential lots. The main building on the property—a modest bungalow—sits on the south portion of the lot and faces east toward S. Beattie. A detached one-car garage, built in 1971, stands north of the house, facing S. Beattie. A paved driveway extends from the curb to the garage door, and a yard, planted to grass and enclosed in picket fencing, surrounds the house. Mature trees grow on the north and south sides of the house, and the south yard features shrubs and raised flower beds. City sidewalks run along the east and south sides of the parcel. A concrete walkway runs from S. Beattie to the front porch steps, and wraps around the south side of the house to the rear entrance, where it connects to a rear walkway (built of brick and concrete) that runs south to State Street.

The one-and-a-half story wood-frame front-gable house has a rectangular, east-west oriented footprint with a half-hipped front porch and an enclosed front-gable rear shed. The roof contains shed-roof dormers on the north and south slopes, and all roof surfaces are clad in 3-tab asphalt composition shingles. With the exception of the dormers, the house's exterior walls are clad in asbestos shingles. All components are constructed on concrete wall foundations. All but one of the windows were replaced with vinyl-clad modern units with original openings.

The half-hipped front porch shelters the front entry on the façade (east wall). The entry is filled with a ten-light wood storm door. The entry is flanked to either side by modern vinyl replacement windows that feature a one-by-one sliding transom windows above a large one-light fixed window. The gable end contains a window opening, filled with a centered pair of one-over-one, double-hung windows, and two metal vents.

The south wall contains two window openings on the main level of the primary component, each filled with a modern, one-by-one light casement. The south wall of the enclosed rear shed contains an entry opening filled with a one-light glazed-and-paneled door. The south wall of the dormer contains a one-over-one double-hung window. Narrow wood clapboard siding clads all sides of the dormer.

The west elevation's first story features a gabled shed at the south side. This shed's west wall is featureless. To the north, the elevation contains two window openings at the first story, both contain a one-over-one double-hung vinyl replacement window. The smaller of the two windows is located on the far north side of the elevation, while the larger is set off-center to the north. The exposed gable of the main component contains a centered wood-frame one-light awning window; a small metal vent appears at both lower edges of the gable end, near the roof-wall junction.

The house's north elevation features a small one-by-one vinyl slider high on the east side, and a modern pedestrian metal-clad one-light door in an original opening off-center to the west. A two-light, pressed panel vinyl storm door protects the entry door. Square posts support the shallow gabled roof of a new open porch that features a modern Trex deck. The porch shelters the entry. Above, a shed dormer protrudes from main roof's north slope. Clad with narrow wood clapboard and cedar shingles, the dormer contains a single, centered modern one-over-one vinyl window.

A wood-frame one-car garage with a front-gable roof and an east-west oriented rectangular footprint stands north of the house. Constructed on a concrete wall foundation, the building features a shallow-pitched roof covered with asphalt

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Architectural Description

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shingles, and wide horizontal wood siding. A single pedestrian hollow-core door appears at the west side of the south elevation, and the east, (front) elevation contains a large metal overhead garage door. Neither the west nor the north elevations contain any fenestration.

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History of Property

Property Name: William C. and Georgia Irwin House

Site Number: 24LC2431

HISTORY OF PROPERTY

This property was first platted in 1881 as Lot 20 of Block 538 of the Easterly Addition along the west side of South Beattie Street, on the northwest corner of its intersection with State Street. By 1892, a house stood just south of the north lot line, facing S. Beattie. At the time, this house and the one on the lot immediately to the north were both known as 212 S. Beattie: the house to the north would later become 206 S. Beattie. The original Lot 20 house was torn down in the ensuing years (by 1906), after which the current house was built near the south side of Lot 20.

The property known as 212 S. Beattie was occupied by African-American residents as early as 1896, when city directories listed a “Mrs. Savannah E. H. Carter, (col'd).” Carter apparently lived there only that year, and other early residents are unknown. At the time, Lot 20 was owned by Myron L. Thompkins. Thompkins lost the property in 1898, and James Eastman then acquired it. After Eastman’s death, the property was sold in 1906 at an estate auction, where Tennessee-born William C. Irvin (a.k.a. Irvine) purchased it. At the time of Irvin’s purchase, according to family members, the lot was bare, and Irvin had the extant house constructed on his new property. This may indicate that Irvin purchased the property well before the purchase was formally recorded with the county, for city directories first list him at 212 S. Beattie in 1905, when he was living there with his Kentucky-born second wife, Georgia (a.k.a. Georgina, nee Lewis, formerly Mrs. William H. Donnell or Donnel), whom he’d married in 1902, and her sons William Harrison Donnell and George Albert Donnell).¹

Irvin had come to Helena after living in Marysville in 1891-92, and worked at the Montana Club in the late 1890s as a porter then a waiter before becoming Helena’s first black city policeman. The Irvin-Donnell family, in various iterations, would occupy the property for much of the next 50 years. City directories indicate that Georgia Irvin likely remained at 212 S. Beattie until her death in 1954, and that various extended family members (and possibly unrelated people) joined her there over the years. George Albert Donnell was often listed as a resident, including in 1953, the year before he, like his mother, died. William H. Donnell was listed at 212 S. Beattie as late as 1930, and other family members who lived at the site included Nancy Lee Donnell, Georgia’s granddaughter, who lived with her grandmother from shortly after her birth 1931 (her mother died soon after she was born) until 1949, when she went off to college at Seattle University.² Additional occupants over the years included Jessie Brown, in 1911, Billy or Bernice Dorsey (of the locally-prominent African-American Dorsey family) in 1950 and 1953. During the Irvin-Donnell family’s long tenure, neighbors may have included other members of Helena’s African-American community, including the Lizzie Cole family.

The residential stability of the Irvin-Donnell family endured despite changes within the family and their economic situation. As he had before purchasing the property, William Irvin worked a variety of jobs over the years: in 1907 he was a partner in the firm of Gordon & Irvine, in 1910 a steward at a “social club,” and in 1915 a porter at Hands Barber & Beauty Shop. With everyone chipping in, the family managed to hold on to their home at 212 S. Beattie throughout these transitions—in 1910 all four family members worked, with Georgia laboring as a “laundress” in the family home and her teenage sons working as well, one as a waiter in a café and the other, like Irvin, as a steward at a “social club”—and after Irvin died in 1930 the property passed to his widow Georgia. The 1930 Sanborn suggests that, at the time, the property consisted of the south 97 feet of lot 20 and contained a 1.5 story house, with a full-length front porch facing S. Beattie and a side entry porch on the north wall, as well as a one-car garage (located at the northeast corner of the parcel) and an outbuilding (located at the northwest corner of the parcel). Family members recall that the yard in this period was put to productive uses, with a large garden and a few chickens, a couple of turkeys, and rabbits. The rabbits never lasted long:

¹ In 1900 William Irvin was still married to Clara, from whom he was divorced shortly thereafter.

² Both of Georgia’s sons also lived elsewhere at different times. George served in WWI, and in 1917, at the age of 21, lived in Pocatello, ID. That year William, then 27, was living in Deer Lodge and working as an engineer for the ACM Co. When George married his second wife, after being widowed, in 1935 he lived in Bellingham, WA.

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they “became Sunday dinner or got loose.” The yard also contained an apple tree on each side of house (one on State and one on Beattie).

Despite the ongoing labors of both Georgia Irvin and her cohabitants, by the mid-1940s the family was unable to pay property taxes on their home, and Lewis and Clark County took title to the property, via Tax Deed, in 1944. The County apparently owned it for the duration of the Irvin-Donnells occupancy: both Georgia and her son George died in 1954, and the following year Lewis and Clark County deeded the property to H. Moody and Beverly L. Brickett. In subsequent decades the property was transferred multiple times, and none of the subsequent owners appears to have been linked to Helena’s African-American community. Of the numerous owners in later years, only one family owned the property for an extended period, ie. that of Joseph A. and Agnes E.. Skeba, who acquired the property in 1958 and sold it in 1990. Judging from Sanborn maps, when the Skebas acquired the property it hadn’t been modified for decades (appearing much as it did in 1930), although the parcel by then consisted of only the south 81 feet of lot 20. In 1971 they replaced the one-car garage with a new, larger garage in the same location.

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Information Sources/Bibliography

Property Name: William C. and Georgia Irwin House

Site Number: 24LC2431

INFORMATION SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

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1881 Easterly Addition

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Statement of Significance

Property Name: William C. and Georgia Irwin House

Site Number: 24LC2431

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: **1906-1954**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Purchased in 1906 by William Irvin, the Irvin house is significant under NRHP Criterion A (local level) as a residential property associated with the history of African-American people in Helena, MT. The home served as a rental occupied by other members of the local black community prior to Irvin's purchase, and the extended Irvin-Donnell family would own and occupy it for almost 50 years. Irvin was a prominent member of Helena's black community. In the late 19th century he became the first black person to serve as a Helena policeman, a position he held for many years, and he was also a longtime local businessman, operating a variety of business ventures that at various times included a barbershop and the Luzon bar (est. ca. 1906). Irvin was also a community leader in other realms, including the St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church (Site LC242430), the "colored" Odd Fellows Lodge, and "a civic improvement association" as well as an officer of the Manhattan Club, the local private black social organization. His wife Georgia was a leader in the community as well, playing an active role in the Pleasant Hour Club and the Montana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, of which it was a chapter. At the tail end of the Irvin family's ownership, their home also housed what may have been the last local member of the Dorsey family, longtime owners of the black community's most prominent and successful business. The Irvin house is thus associated with two significant historic contexts: its black owner-occupants lived there during the heyday of Helena's, and Montana's, African-American community, ca. 1875-1910, and they lost their home and left it after the deep community decline that followed, ca. 1910-1940. The property's period of significance is the period during which it was owned and occupied by African-American people, ie. 1906-1954.

The Irvin house represents these significant historic themes in a number of specific ways. Located on State Street near the black St. James AME Church (Site LC2430), it was one of multiple homes in the surrounding south and east-side neighborhoods that housed a cluster of African-American people who often lived in multigenerational, extended-family households. Like other black families in the region, residents of the home migrated to Montana from border-states like Kentucky and other southern locales. The economic activities of the Irvin-house residents likewise were representative. Like many African-American families in Helena, the home's owners took in boarders to help make ends meet and provide lodging to other local black people. Male residents of the home worked as porters, waiters, stewards—prototypical positions for black men, who in this period were oft-confined by structural racism to low-status, low-waged work. William Irvin's employment also included the Montana Club, the single largest employer of black people in Helena. Georgia Irvin's labor, too, was typical: many black women worked at arduous jobs to help support their families, and "laundress" was primary among them. Irvin family members also engaged in economic activities that illustrate the achievements of Helena's black community in spite of the racist structures that limited opportunities. As Helena's first black policeman, William Irvin was a point of pride and a leader in the fight for racial equality. Irvin's business endeavors, meanwhile, are a good example of the numerous black business enterprises that existed in Helena during the heyday of the town's African-American community. The family's social and political activities were also representative of Helena's black population, which tended to be highly educated and politically active, taking active roles in their community and its institutions, many of which focused on "racial uplift" and combatting racism in its many forms.

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Integrity

Property Name: William C. and Georgia Irwin House

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

Modifications to the property since its construction have been limited primarily to replacement of outbuildings and replacement of original windows in the house itself. These changes have slightly compromised integrity of design, materials and workmanship, but for the most part the property retains these and other aspects of integrity, including location, setting, feeling and association. The house continues to convey its historic associations. Hagen Historical Consulting recommends that it be considered eligible for listing in the NRHP.

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Photographs

Property Name: William C. and Georgia Irwin House

Site Number: 24LC2431



Feature #
Facing: SW

Description: 212 S. Beattie, view to SW

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Photographs

Property Name: William C. and Georgia Irwin House

Site Number: 24LC2431



Feature #
Facing: NW

Description:
212 S. Beattie, view to NW

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Photographs

Property Name: William C. and Georgia Irwin House

Site Number: 24LC2431



Feature #
Facing: N/NE

Description:
212 S. Beattie, view to N/NE

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Site Map

Property Name: William C. and Georgia Irwin House

Site Number: 24LC2431

SITE MAP - MT HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD FORM



PROPERTY:

212 South Beattie
Lewis and Clark County
Helena, Montana
GeoCode:
05-1888-31-1-16-11-0000
LAT 46.582450
LON -112.029844

LEGEND:



NAD_1983_StatePlane
Montana_FIPS_2500 meters
Scale: 1:400



1111 E. Broadway | Missoula, MT 59802
www.wgmgroup.com

Proj Mgr: D. Hagen MOJ 02_212SouthBeattie
Drawn by: SMA Date: 11/20/16
Proj: 15-06-04 Aerial: 2013 ESRI

Disclaimer: This map is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as such. This map is a graphic representation. WGM Group does not guarantee the accuracy, current status, or completeness of the material contained herein and is not responsible for any misuse or misrepresentation of this information or its derivatives.

MONTANA COUNTIES



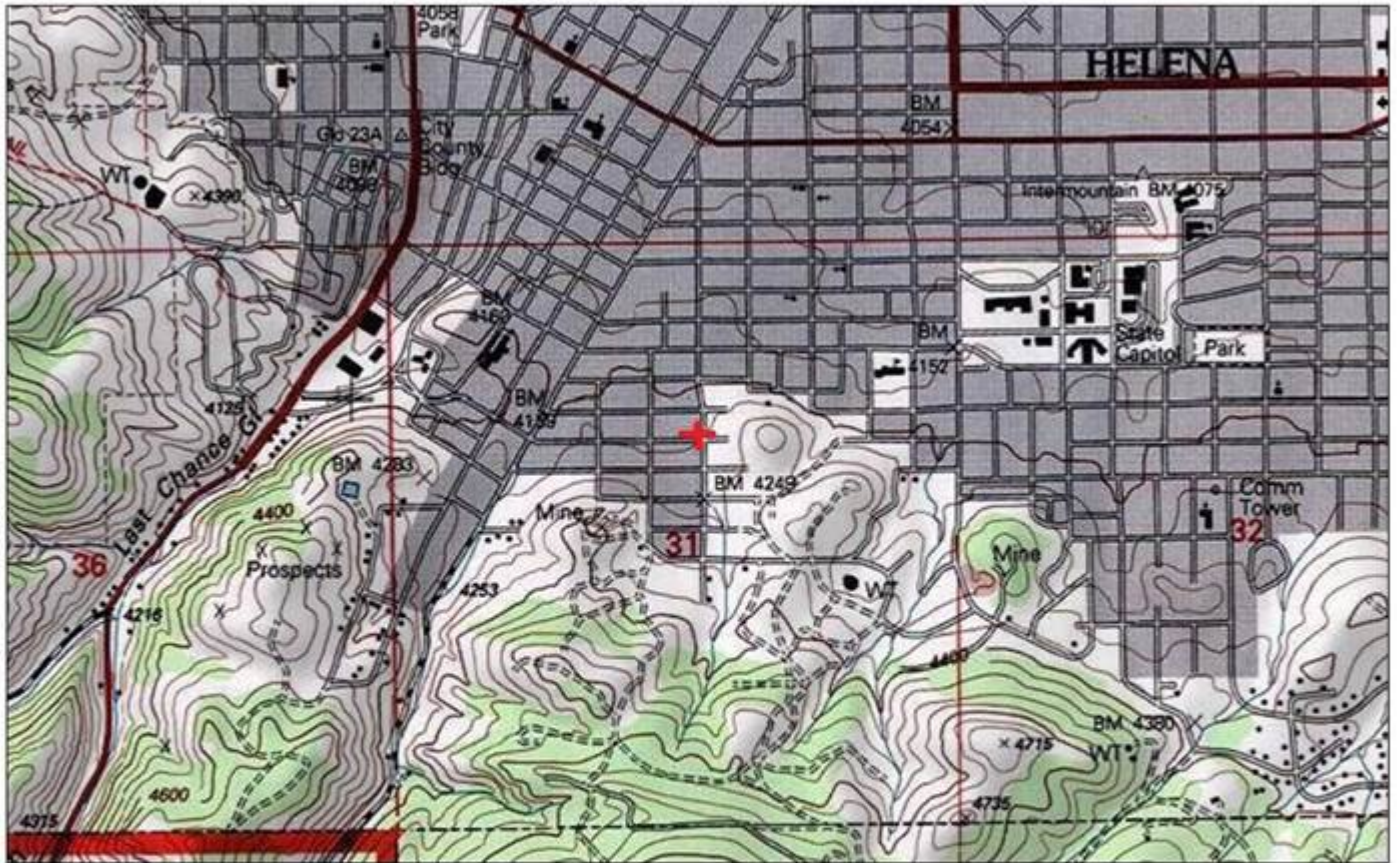
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Topographic Map

Property Name: William C. and Georgia Irwin House

Site Number: 24LC2431



Map created using the Digital Atlas July 5, 2016
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

Montana State Library - Digital Library
(406) 444-5354 | geoinfo@mt.gov | <http://msl.mt.gov>

PROPERTY:

212 South Beattie
Lewis and Clark County
Helena, Montana
GeoCode:
05-1888-31-1-16-11-0000
LAT 46.582450
LON -112.029844

Our thanks to the National Park Service Underrepresented Grants Program and the Montana History Foundation for their generous contributions to this project.

Disclaimer:

This material is based upon work assisted by grants from the Department of the Interior, National Park Service and the Montana History Foundation. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Interior nor of the Montana History Foundation.



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