

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: **401 N. Hoback**
(a.k.a. 403 N. Hoback)
Historic Address (if applicable): **900 8th Ave.**

City/Town: **Helena**

Site Number: **24LC2433**
(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Lewis and Clark**

Historic Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

Original Owner(s): **Walter and Almira Dorsey**

Current Ownership Private Public

Current Property Name: **Sleepy Senator**

Owner(s): **Clarkson, Robert N**

Owner Address: **916 8th Ave., Helena, MT 59601**

Phone:

Legal Location

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

$\frac{1}{4}$ **SE** $\frac{1}{4}$ **SE** $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section: **30**

Lot(s): **16** Block(s): **6**

Addition: **Bassett** Year of Addition: **1883**

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

Geocode: **05-1888-30-4-10-01-0000**

Historic Use: **COMMERCIAL/grocery**
DOMESTIC/single family residence

Current Use: **COMMERCIAL/hotel**

Construction Date: **unknown** Estimated Actual

Original Location Moved Date Moved: **1904**

UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov

NAD 27 or NAD 83(preferred)

Zone: **12 T** Easting: **421439** Northing: **5159885**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District:

NRHP Eligible: Yes No

Date of this document: **9/20/2016**

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: **9/20/2016**

Evaluator: **Kate Hampton**

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

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Architectural Description

Property Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

Site Number: **24LC2433**

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Architectural Style: Queen Anne (residence); Western Commercial If Other, specify:
Property Type: **Residential** Specific Property Type: **Single-family dwelling**

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

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The property commonly known as 401 N. Hoback Street (previously 900 8th Avenue/403 N. Hoback) is located in an historic residential neighborhood located east of Rodney Street and Helena's downtown. It occupies a rectangular lot on the northeast corner of the intersection of 8th Avenue and N. Hoback Street. A gravel alley borders the north side of the parcel. The property contains two separately-constructed wood-frame buildings, a commercial store building and a residence, that were moved onto the site and attached to form a single building, as well as a detached carriage-house-cum-garage. The store-residence is situated in the south portion of the lot, abutting both the south and west property lines, while the carriage-house/garage abuts the north property line and the alley. A yard, planted to grass, lies between the two buildings and runs along the east side of the store/residence. A wood privacy fence encloses the yard. City sidewalk bounds the parcel on its south (8th Avenue) and west (N. Hoback St.) sides. A concrete walkway runs northward from the rear entrance of the residence to a concrete parking pad, which extends from N. Hoback Street to the west wall of the garage. A second, shorter concrete walkway runs westward from the rear of the residence to the city sidewalk along N. Hoback Street. A deck, built of wood, extends off the northeast corner of the residence building. A variety of trees grows on the property, and lilacs line the west edge of the backyard.

The main building on the property is composed of two wood-frame buildings—a store and a dwelling—that were reportedly moved onto the lot in 1904 and thereupon joined to form a single building. The one-story grocery component faces south onto 8th Avenue (its original address was 900 8th Avenue) while the 1.5 story residence attached to its rear (north wall) faces west onto North Hoback Street (its original address was 403 N. Hoback Street). The entire building reportedly lacks a formal foundation, resting instead on piled stones that have been parged with concrete, its underside covered with lye. The walls of the building are clad in aluminum siding that overlays the original wood siding on three sides (a second-generation siding, asbestos, was removed when the metal siding was installed in the late 1970s. The original siding on the west side of the building was removed when the asbestos was installed and is no longer extant beneath the metal). The roof is clad in asphalt composition shingles. Unless otherwise noted, all windows in the building are original and have wood frames.

Grocery

The south-facing grocery component is one-story western commercial style building with a north-south oriented rectangular footprint. It has a front-gable roof that originally featured a false front. The corners of the false-front were rotted over time and, by 1975, were sawn off (leaving the triangular gable). The bottom quarters of the west and east (street side) walls are clad in faux-brick plastic panels (in a red, running bond brick design).

The façade (south wall) of the grocery component is an intact commercial storefront.¹ It features a central, recessed entry, with wood floor, flanked to either side by storefront display windows. Each of the window openings contains eight fixed lights beneath four-light full-length transoms. The entry is filled with the original double doors, each of which has two large lights over a wood panel, and is flanked by fixed, angled side lights in the same glazed-and-paneled pattern. The entry is accessed by a concrete step.

¹ Original siding is extant under the current faux-brick and aluminum cladding.

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The west wall of the grocery component contains the original rear entry, which originally accessed the storeroom (and later accessed Clarkson's photography studio at 401 N. Hoback), at its north end. The entry is filled with modern one-light metal door beneath an original wood-frame one-light transom and is sheltered by a small gabled entry overhang. It is accessed by concrete steps and a scored concrete parking pad, originally used for deliveries. Additional features on the west wall of the grocery component are limited to a window opening, filled with a single fixed sash. The east wall of the grocery component contains a single small window opening, situated high in the wall near the rear (it lit the original storeroom). It is filled with a single fixed sash. The rear (north) wall of the grocery component is covered by the attached residence.

Residence

The two-story residence has a cross-gabled roof and an irregular footprint with an integral front porch and a one-story enclosed rear porch on its north side. Both porches have shed roofs. The corner of the front porch roof is supported by a square wood post with decorative brackets, and the same faux-brick panels that clad the lower portions of the grocery's west and south walls cover the porch's knee wall. The rear (north side) porch has exposed rafter ends. On the primary residence component both original interior brick chimneys are extant, one at the edge of the south roof slope and the other, which served the kitchen, at edge of the east roof slope. Unless otherwise noted, the windows in the residence component are one-over-one double-hung sashes with decorative wood shutters.

The primary entrance is located beneath the front porch roof, in the north wall of the front gable component. It is filled with a metal security door paired with the original one-light glazed-and-paneled door beneath an original one-light transom. Also beneath the porch roof is a window opening, located in the west wall, that is filled with a single window. Remaining features on the first floor of the west wall of the residence are limited to three window openings. One of these is located in the one-story front porch component, and is filled with a single fixed light. A larger opening, centered in the wall of the two-story front-gable component, is filled with a pair of windows. There is also a window opening in the one-story rear (north side) porch. It is filled with a nine-light fixed-sash window. On the second story of the west wall are two window openings, one in the front gable and one in the side gable component. Each of these is filled with a single window.

The west end of the first floor of the north wall of the residence is covered by the enclosed rear porch. The porch has a window opening on its north wall that was originally filled with three six-light sashes, one of which has been replaced with a one-over-one double-hung sash. The east wall of the rear porch has a window opening filled with a nine-light sash and an entry opening filled with a metal security door paired with a door. East of the rear porch, the north wall of the residence has an opening filled with a single window, as does the second story of the north wall.

The east wall of the residence contains a window opening, with a single fixed light, in the north side-gable component. The front-gable component features four window openings, the largest of which extends into the south side-gable component. Two of these are on the first floor: the large opening is filled with a pair of windows and a small opening is filled with a single fixed light. The two openings on the second floor each contain a single window.

Grocery and Residence Interiors

In both the grocery and the residence, the interior plan and numerous details remain intact.

The grocery's interior consists of a single large room with original wood floors. On either side of the entry, the original deep built-in display shelves (situated behind the storefront windows so items can be seen from the street) are intact. The original high ceilings remain, and the location of original light fixtures is identifiable, as is the location of the original stovepipe. Original walls are extant, and have not been covered or re-painted: the silhouette of original grocery shelving is visible on the east wall. (See appended historic interior photo for comparison).

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The interior of the residence consists of six main rooms, three on each floor, around a central hallway-stairwell that runs east-west. Upon entry from the front door (on the north wall at the south end of the west-side front porch) one stands in an entry hall that opens onto the parlor, with adjoining dining room (which together form the south portion of the first floor), with the staircase and first-floor hallway to one's left. At the east end of the hallway are doors to the dining room (south side) and large kitchen (north side) with original cabinet. The kitchen connects to an enclosed rear porch through a doorway in its north wall, and has a rear exterior entrance in its east wall, as well as a door to the dining room in its south wall. Upstairs, the landing opens onto three doors and a hallway that runs west, with a door at its west end. The bathroom is located at the top of the stairs, east of the landing, and bedrooms are located in the southeast and southwest corners and the north portion of the second floor. Walls and floors have been updated throughout. Original woodwork includes wide baseboards, window trim and door casing (with bullseyes and plinth blocks), and turned balusters.

Garage (a.k.a. Carriage House)

A detached wood-frame garage, which was originally a carriage house, is located on the north end of the property, along the alley. It has a rectangular footprint that is composed of a north-south oriented, 1.5 story gabled component (which contains a hayloft and horse stalls) on its east end, and a shed-roof one-story component on its west end. Both components were extant by 1930 (a later west-end addition was subsequently removed). Asphalt composition shingles cover roof surfaces, and walls are clad in a variety of wood siding, including board-and-batten, droplap, vertical tongue-in-groove, and T-1-11 plywood panels. No foundation underlies the building.

The west wall of the garage contains a garage-door opening that is accessed by a concrete parking pad and filled with an overhead wood-panel garage door. The north wall of the one-story component is featureless, while the north wall of the taller gabled component contains a centered hayloft door, made of board-and-batten, and, on the first floor, a window opening that has been filled in with boards. The east wall of the garage is featureless. The south wall of the gabled component contains a Dutch, or stable, door that has been boarded over/in and has a two-light fixed-sash window cut into its upper half. The south wall of the one-story component contains a window opening that is filled with two six-light fixed-sash windows.

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HISTORY OF PROPERTY

Around 1866, in Sandy Spring, Maryland, Caroline Dorsey (nee Holland) gave birth to her third son, Walter R. Dorsey. Walter joined older brothers William (4) and Augustus (6). What happened to the boys' father Elijah is unknown, but by 1872 Caroline had remarried, to farmer Horice Mitchell. Over the next 7 years Horice and Caroline had six more children, and 1880 found the African-American Mitchell-Dorsey family in Berrys, Montgomery County, Maryland. Not long thereafter, at least two of the Dorsey boys headed west. By 1891 eldest son William Dorsey had made it to Marysville, Montana, where he worked as a helper at the Montana Co. and boarded at the Bon Ton Hotel. That year, his younger brother Walter was also in Montana. He could be found not too far away, in the booming mining city, and state capital, of Helena: there, on the last day of 1891, Walter R. Dorsey, 26, married Almira E. Kelley, 29.²

Almira was from Weston, Missouri, the oldest, and only daughter, of Richard and Anna Estes Kelley's five children. Just 11 when her daughter was born, Almira's mother Anna was widowed around the time she had her fifth child, ca. 1878. Almira was by then 17, and had likely spent much of her young life working with her mother to help take care of the family. After their marriage, Almira and Walter, who may have known each other before arriving in Montana (one source suggests Walter came to Helena from Missouri), settled at 21 S. Jackson and soon started a family of their own. Daughter Annie A. was born in 1892, and two years later daughter Carolyn E. (Carrie) followed. Other relatives joined the growing family in Helena. In 1892, William Dorsey lived next door at 17 S. Jackson while he worked as porter at the Montana Club. By 1894, Annie Kelley, Almira's Missouri-born mother, was living with the Dorseys.³

In these early years, Walter worked a variety of jobs to support their brood. In 1892, Walter ran a restaurant at 104 Broadway. Two years later he was at the Montana Club, where he worked as a steward and a waiter. He remained at the Montana Club in 1895 (during which time the family lived at 122 Grand), but by 1896 Walter and Almira had opened a grocery store at 114 N. Rodney. They moved their family—including Almira's mother Annie—onto the premises and established an enduring family-owned business: the Dorseys would operate a grocery in Helena for the next 35 years.⁴

The first Dorsey grocery location proved fleeting, as 1898 brought change to both the family and the business. That year, their daughter Annie died, and Walter and Almira buried her at Forestvale Cemetery.⁵ At the same time, they welcomed a new baby, daughter Lena M., and after successfully establishing their business on Helena's booming east side, they moved both their residence and their grocery from Rodney Street to an existing combination grocery/residence that they rented at 843 8th Avenue (Site 24LC2446).⁶ For the next five years the Dorseys, along with Annie Kelley, ran their grocery and lived at 843 8th Ave., providing staples and other goods to the growing east side neighborhood. During that time Walter sometimes had to take additional work to make ends meet (1900 found him working as a clerk at the Union

² Bureau of the Census, "10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory" (Washington, D.C. : National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1880); "Marriage License, Lewis and Clark County (Dorsey-Kelly)," December 31, 1891; R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk's Helena City Directory* (Helena, Mont.: R.L. Polk & Co., 1900).

³ Bureau of the Census, "10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory"; R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk's Helena City Directory*; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of the United States, 1900: Population Schedules: Montana: Lewis and Clarke County" (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1978); Hornsby, Jr., *Black America: A State-by-State Historical Encyclopedia* (ABC-CLIO, 2011), 474.

⁴ Hornsby, Jr., *Black America*, 474; R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk's Helena City Directory*.

⁵ "Annie Dorsey Headstone (Forestvale Cemetery)," *U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current - Ancestry.com*, September 5, 1898.

⁶ Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps from the 1888, 1890, and 1892 show the main (front) building at 843 8th with a grocery in its east half and a dwelling in its west.

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Mer Co) but the Dorsey family, and grocery, persevered.⁷ In 1901, at the age of 39, Almira bore a fourth and final daughter, Emma O.⁸

With their growing family living in the midst of an expanding neighborhood, the future must have seemed promising, and the Dorseys began to explore the possibility of buying their own place. They stayed in the neighborhood where they had an established clientele: in the spring of 1904, they purchased the vacant lot on the northeast corner of the nearest intersection, ie. Hoback and 8th Avenue, which they could see—a literal stone’s throw away—from their front porch. First platted in 1883 as part of the Bassett Addition, the lot had remained undeveloped through a series of previous owners, including Isaac Cutler (1883-1887), Charles Senior (1887-1891), Charles K. Anderson (1891-1900), and Jay K. Sheffy (1900-1903). It wound up in the hands of the Pratt & Heath Company in December 1903, from whom the Dorseys purchased it about three months later.⁹

The Dorseys reportedly moved a store building and a house onto the property almost immediately, joining the two buildings into a single entity with two facades: the store faced south to 8th Avenue while the home faced west to North Hoback Street. Longtime neighborhood resident, and current owner, Bob Clarkson, believes that the buildings may have come from Canton when that Missouri River settlement was flooded after the construction of the Canyon Ferry dam, but it was the 1954 dam, not the 1898 one, that flooded Canton. However, physical evidence does suggest that the buildings were moved from elsewhere onto the site—no permanent foundation underlies them but rather “both structures sit on piled stones . . . they dug out a trench for the areas with plumbing on the east side and also a large space was excavated under the now studio for the floor heater in the house. That area was used as a root cellar for produce while the store was open. Except the root cellar storage, the entire area underneath the buildings is covered with a thick layer of white lye to keep out insects and vermin.”¹⁰ It thus appears as though the buildings were set on the property already assembled and then joined (the sawn ends of the original store-roof rafters are visible in the attic of the house).

With a store/dwelling in place, the Dorseys set about moving their business and home to their new property. By 1905 city directories listed the Dorsey Grocery at 900 8th Avenue, where the business sold “Groceries, Provisions, Salt Meats, Canned Goods, Fruits, Vegetables, Confectionary, Tin and Granite Ware.” The following year, the Dorsey Grocery boasted a telephone, and could be reached by dialing number 236-B.¹¹ (see ca. 1905 image w/ Walter, Carrie and Lena Dorsey standing in front, MHS *Pac 74-104.266GP*). The attached three-bedroom residence, with large kitchen and formal parlor and dining room adorned with embossed fleur de lis wallpaper, provided a spacious and elegant residence for the grocery’s proud owners.

The substantial and successful grocery and residence reflected, and deepened, the Dorsey family’s prominence in Helena’s African-American community. Walter Dorsey had by then been a noteworthy personage for some time—the local black newspaper published in 1894, the *Colored Citizen*, reported on his activities in its pages—and by 1906 he was a pillar of the close-knit black community. In addition to being perhaps the most visible and prosperous black business owner and operating a business that was itself a valued community institution, Walter played a variety of formal and informal leadership roles. In a 1970s interview with historian Quintard Taylor, longtime community members Mr. Ad E.

⁷ R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk’s Helena City Directory*; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].” By 1900 older brother William Dorsey was back in Maryland, where he’d remain.

⁸ Bureau of the Census, “13th Census of the United States, 1910: Population Schedules: Montana, Lewis and Clark County” (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1910).

⁹ “Lewis and Clark County Property Title Records,” Clerk and Recorder’s Office. Lot 16 was still vacant when the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company mapped it in 1892, and the current property owner has always believed that the Dorseys moved the buildings onto the property. It is possible that the buildings were extant by the time the Dorseys purchased Lot 16.

¹⁰ Bob Clarkson to Delia Hagen, “Re: Dorsey Eighth Av Grocery,” August 24, 2016.

¹¹ R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk’s Helena City Directory*.

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and Elenorah (Anderson) Banks remembered the Dorseys as “the most prominent people” among Helena’s African-American population.¹²

The Dorseys were especially active in the St. James African Methodist Episcopalian Church, located three blocks to the south of their grocery on the southwest corner of Hoback and 5th Avenue (Site 24LC2430). When the church gave a reception to welcome the Reverend and Mrs. Osborne in October 1906, Walter served as the event’s Master of Ceremonies, and he was also one of the leaders of the St. James Literary Society.¹³ At that time, under the leadership of Walter Dorsey as well as the new Reverend (W. T. Osborne), Mrs. Eugene Baker, and Joseph Clark, the Literary Society “boast[ed] 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.” Prominent among Society activities were 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.”¹⁴

In addition to his business skills and religious and intellectual pursuits, Walter Dorsey was an accomplished musician. He was a noted member of Helena’s “local all-black band,” and put his musical talents to use in support of other central institutions in the black community. In May, 1907, when residents held a benefit concert for the African-American newspaper, the *Plaindealer*, at Electric Hall, Dorsey starred as “premier vocalist and musical director” of the grand event.¹⁵ The *Plaindealer* hailed his assistance in the fundraiser, as it did his other community endeavors. The previous January the paper reported his presence—along with Nathaniel Ford, B.F. Hooper, H. Baker, Eugene Clark, and many unnamed others—at a banquet of one of Helena’s two “colored” Masonic lodges.¹⁶ A prominent member of the Masonic orders, Dorsey was also active with the local black Odd Fellows Lodge. He played a leadership role in area Republican Party activities as well, serving as convention delegate on at least one occasion.¹⁷

The Dorseys also served as community leaders in less formal ways. The parties they hosted—like the summer 1906 group outing to the Missouri River Dam—were among the notable social events of the season and made the pages of the *Plaindealer*.¹⁸ Meanwhile, they stepped in to assist other community members in less enjoyable affairs. In December of 1906, Mrs. James Ingram, who lived on the next block at 311 N. Hoback, shot and wounded her husband, apparently in self-defense during a domestic violence altercation. When she fled to the Police Station “to have him arrested for assault,” the authorities arrested her instead, and her bond was set at a significant sum—\$750. But she was soon released: B.F. Hooper and Walter Dorsey arrived and acted “as her bondsmen.”¹⁹

With their business and personal lives apparently flourishing in 1907, the Dorseys must have looked forward to marking their 16th wedding anniversary on December 31st. Perhaps they planned one of their famed parties, or maybe they looked forward to a calm, cozy New Year’s night spent in their handsome North Hoback home. Whatever their hopes for that day, they were surely shattered: on the last day of 1907, Walter Dorsey died. Just 41 years old, Dorsey succumbed to

¹² “Local and Personal,” *The Colored Citizen*, September 3, 1894; A. E. Banks and Elenorah Banks, Banks, Mr. and Mrs. A.E. July 21, 1973, interview by Quintard Taylor, Sound, July 21, 1973, Black Oral History Interviews, 1972-1974: Washington State University; “Local and Personal: 1894,” *The Colored Citizen*, September 3, 1894.

¹³ *The Montana Plaindealer*, October 26, 1906.

¹⁴ William L Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (1979): 55.

¹⁵ *The Montana Plaindealer*, May 10, 1907; Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 52.

¹⁶ “*The Montana Plaindealer*, January 4, 1907.

¹⁷ Other black delegates were Edward Johnson, L.V. Graye & David Gordon; Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 52.

¹⁸ *The Montana Plaindealer*, August 31, 1906.

¹⁹ *The Montana Plaindealer*, December 7, 1906.

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sickness variously reported as pneumonia or “la grippe” (ie. influenza).²⁰ His death made front page news in the African-American community, and both the *Plaindealer* and Helena’s main daily paper, the *Independent Record*, reported on the “The Last Sad Rites” of W. R. Dorsey.²¹

Almira Dorsey, 45, must have been devastated by her husband’s sudden death, but she had little choice but to soldier on. She had a business to run and a family to support. Moreover, when Walter died “his children [were also] ill with *la grippe*”: Carrie (13), Lena (9), and Emma (6) needed their mother’s care.²² Saddled with these multiple burdens, Almira weathered her early widowhood with the help of her extended family. In February 1908, Walter’s older brother Augustus G. Dorsey arrived to “assist Mrs. Dorsey in conducting the business left by her husband,” bringing with him his 12-year-old son Bernice A. Dorsey. Almira’s mother Annie also remained with her, traveling temporarily to Weston, Missouri in 1909 and bringing another relative, Floyd Kelly, back to Helena when she returned. Although Anna Kelley was widowed long before he was born, census takers enumerated Floyd as Almira’s much younger brother in 1910 when, at the age of 17, he was living at the Dorsey Grocery property on 8th and Hoback.²³

With her family by her side, Almira Dorsey continued the successful grocery business tradition she’d begun with her husband. She would own, occupy and operate the property for another 25 years (see photo in MHS collections of interior picture of grocery with two African-American women behind counter. The note on the back reads “Interior, Grocery Store, Helena. Possibly W.R. Dorsey Store, 900 8th Avenue, no date, unidentified photographer.” Several features of the picture—like the counter, countertop scale and heating stove—remain in the property owner’s possession. These items, combined with visual comparison, indicate that this photo is indeed the Dorsey Grocery.) During that time, she ran the grocery and shared the dwelling—and sometimes the store work—with a shifting array of relatives. In 1910, census takers enumerated a total of eight people at 900 8th Avenue, including Almira and her daughters and mother, Annie Kelley, as well as Floyd Kelley and Augustus and Bernice Dorsey. That year, Floyd and Augustus, at least, both worked with Almira in the store, which enjoyed pride of place in the *Plaindealer*’s May list of the “many business enterprises in Helena conducted by colored people.” According to the newspaper, first “among them should be mentioned a very large grocery store, operated by Mrs. R.C. Dorsey [sic].” Dorsey’s grocery served as the anchor of Helena’s black business sector, which that year also included “Miles York Express line & barbershop, J.E.W. Clark’s hair dressing parlors, A.J. Walton’s second hand store & the Broadway Suitatorium conducted by Harry Salsburg” and his wife Ada (Site 24LC2429).²⁴

In the wake of Walter’s death, the Dorseys also managed to maintain their active role in the African-American community more broadly. Like his late brother, Augustus Dorsey became a leader in community affairs. In 1911, he was among “a delegation of colored men from this state” appointed by Governor Edwin Norris, a Democrat, “to attend the National [Negro] Educational convention” to be held that year in Denver, joining longstanding local black luminaries like “Nathaniel Ford, Arthur Palmer, B.F. Hooper, J.E.W. Clark . . . G.W. Alexander, H.J. Baker, Miles York, [and] Rev. B.R. Guy” as well as African-American men from other Montana cities. Bernice Dorsey, meanwhile, joined up with the son of famed black Helena mine developer, and one-time millionaire, H. Porter Grove, and together the young men struck out

²⁰ Another version of his death has him dying of a heart attack. See “The Eighth Ave Store in Helena, Montana,” *clarksonstudio.com*, accessed September 13, 2016, <http://www.clarksonstudio.com/wisebldg.htm>.

²¹ *The Montana Plaindealer*, January 10, 1908; *Helena Independent*. January 1, 1908.

²² *The Montana Plaindealer*, January 10, 1908.

²³ *The Montana Plaindealer*, February 14, 1908; R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk’s Helena City Directory*; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910.” Missouri census documents from Almira’s childhood suggest her mother Annie was only 11 year older than her: in 1880, 19 year old Almira was the oldest of 30-year-old widow Anna Kelley’s 5 children, the other four of whom were boys ranging in age from 2 to 16.

²⁴ R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk’s Helena City Directory*; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910.”; *The Montana Plaindealer*, May 27, 1910; Delia Hagen, “Montana Historic Property Record: 106 E. Broadway, Helena” (Helena, Mont.: MT Historical Society, September 2016).

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“to make it for themselves.” The *Plaindealer* reported the departure of Bernice and Sirlas Grove in August 1911, noting that “the last heard of them, they had got as far as Bozeman.”²⁵ Several years later, the *Kansas City Sun* reported on Dorsey family members in its regular Helena news column, noting that Emma Dorsey had attended “a delightful surprise party” in honor of Milton Wilson’s 16th birthday and Augustus G. Dorsey had been at a “delightful luncheon” given by “Mrs. Wm. Mason of Cannon Street.”²⁶ Augustus, who frequently made the pages of the *Kansas City Sun* in this period, was at the time something of a newlywed: on a June day in 1915, at the age of 55, he married 42 year-old widow Carrie J. Walker (b. Bowling Green, Kentucky).²⁷ The network of Dorsey kin in Helena expanded accordingly.

In subsequent years, as it shifted with life events, the extended Dorsey family continued to center around the grocery and home on the corner of 8th and Hoback. In 1918, city directories showed Almira’s mother Mrs. Anna Kelly at 834 8th Avenue, where she lived with Catherine A. Kelly, a stenographer who was probably a relative.²⁸ The following year, Walter and Almira’s third daughter, Lena, married Elihu J. Reid, 28, in Fergus County, Montana.²⁹ Lena had been living at her parents’ house, going to school and helping at the grocery or working as a “maid,” but after her marriage she moved with her husband to Lewistown, where he was a barber. Sixteen-year-old Emma O. remained at home with her mother in 1920, working in the grocery and as a maid at the Marlow Theatre, but she likely married and moved out soon thereafter: in 1922, when eldest surviving daughter Carrie Dorsey married Leroy Martin in Silver Bow County, one of her witnesses was Emma Dorsey Phelps.³⁰

Walter Dorsey’s brother Augustus eventually took work outside of the grocery—in 1920 he was a porter at Whitman’s and in 1922 a wiper at the NP shops—but he stayed close by. He and his wife Carrie J., who worked as a “charwoman” (ie. cleaning lady), lived briefly at 541 5th Avenue, next door to Ad E. Banks, before moving to 1002 E. Broadway, where they remained for years. Augustus’ son Bernice Dorsey was less settled, but stayed in the region, moving repeatedly between Helena and nearby cities. He married Sophonia Brown (b. Great Falls, daughter of Priscilla Dennison Brown) in 1922 in Anaconda, worked in Butte and Anaconda in subsequent years, and in 1931 could be found working as a porter at Helena’s Harvey Hotel and living with his dad and stepmother at 1002 E. Broadway.³¹

Almira Dorsey was by then about 69 years old, and she’d been running a large grocery, as a widowed mother and a black businesswoman in a realm dominated by white males, for 35 years. In 1932, as the Great Depression set in, Almira sold her property, home and business, and moved to Los Angeles. There, she joined daughter Lena, who by 1930 had divorced and moved to L.A.: that year, Lena lived with Althea Mitchell, whom census enumerators identified as her sister but who

²⁵ “*The Montana Plaindealer*, August 4, 1911. Additional Montana delegates included Great Falls: David Knott, W. McCracken; Missoula: Edward Miller; Billings: Charles Browning, Henry Canola; Bozeman: William Walker; apparently there were none from Butte.

²⁶ *Kansas City Sun*, May 27, 1916.

²⁷ “Marriage License, Lewis and Clark County (Dorsey-Walker),” *Montana, County Marriages, 1865-1950 - Ancestry.com*, June 2, 1915.

²⁸ The Dorseys likely owned this nearby property as well: members the Gloege family, that later took over their grocery, also lived in 834 8th in later years.

²⁹ “Marriage License, Fergus County (Reid-Dorsey),” July 14, 1919, <http://interactive.ancestry.com/60062>. Reid was previously a Helena resident, and leader in the local black community. In 1910, the *Montana Plaindealer* listed “J. Reid” as one of the members of the “house committee” of the newly reorganized Manhattan Club. *The Montana Plaindealer*, February 25, 1910. The records of the Manhattan Club are held at the MHS.

³⁰ R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk’s Helena City Directory*; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana, Lewis and Clark County” (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1992). Carrie may later have become Mrs. Gibson and Emma may later have become Mrs. Hillman.

³¹ R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk’s Helena City Directory*; “Marriage License, Deer Lodge County (Dorsey-Brown),” *Montana, County Marriages, 1865-1950 - Ancestry.com*, September 14, 1920.

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History of Property

Property Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

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was likely a cousin, daughter of one of her Maryland-born father's Mitchell half-siblings. Almira died in L.A. several years later.³²

The Gloege Grocery Era

By the time Almira sold the store and residence on the corner of 8th and Hoback, the lot contained the grocery with attached dwelling as well as several outbuildings, including a carriage house that had been converted to a garage (situated at the north end of the lot, along the alley) and a shed that sat off the northeast corner of the house along the east property line.³³ The grocery business that occupied the store portion of the building was well established, and the house in the rear was ample and attractive. Soon, another family saw the property's appeal and bought it with the intent of carrying on its grocery tradition. In 1935, Caroline D. Gloege acquired it from Schroeder Bros. Corp.³⁴ Like the Dorseys before them, the Gloege family became resident grocers. They immediately undertook some repairs to the property, re-shingling the roof and re-building the back porch as well as other unspecified improvements (including, at some point, an addition to the west end of the west component of the garage), and then settled in.³⁵

Like Almira before her, Caroline was soon thereafter widowed. Husband Henry Gloege died in August 1941, at the age of 70.³⁶ Led by son Louis and his wife Margaret M., the Gloege family continued living in the 403 N. Hoback dwelling portion of the building, and they ran the 900 8th Avenue grocery store for some thirty years.³⁷ In the 1950s, Richard Richter briefly became a partner in the business, and the Gloege and Richter Grocery operated for several years before it reverted, by 1956, to the Gloege Grocery once again. By that time, large "national chain stores [had] moved into the community," undermining the business of local, neighborhood groceries. The 1956 city directory was the last that listed the Gloege Grocery, and Gloege family members were thereafter identified as working elsewhere. Louis and Margaret continued to live at 403 N. Hoback, but Louis spent his workdays as a steward at the Eagles Club.³⁸

Dorsey family members may have been among Gloege Grocery customers. Augustus and Carrie J. Dorsey remained nearby at 1002 E. Broadway until Augustus died, at about 83 years of age, in 1942. Bernice Dorsey continued his established pattern of moving between area cities. In 1942, when he registered for the draft, he was living in Anaconda. In 1950 and 1953, at least, he roomed with the Irvin-Donnell family in the family's longtime Helena home at 212 S. Beattie (Site 24LC2431), and several years later he could be found renting a room at Helena's YMCA.³⁹ He continued to work in this period—as a porter at Hand's Barber and Beauty Shop and a shoeshiner at Lee Leary and then at Guy's Barber Shop—but he may have been in failing health. In 1960, Bernice Dorsey died in Spokane.⁴⁰

Bernice Dorsey's death came just a few years after the grocery established by his uncle Walter and aunt Almira closed its doors for good. Louis Gloege continued to own the property and occupy the residence, with the store building subsequently used as a "paint contractor's warehouse for about four years" before becoming the Wise Penny Consignment

³² "Lewis and Clark County Property Title Records"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana, Lewis and Clark County" (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1930); "California, Death Index, 1905-1939 (Almira Dorsey)," December 6, 1935.

³³ Sanborn Map Company, "Fire Insurance Maps of Montana: Helena, Lewis and Clark County- 1930" (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1930).

³⁴ "Lewis and Clark County Property Title Records."

³⁵ "City of Helena Building Permit Records."

³⁶ "Henry W. Gloege Headstone (IOOF Cemetery, Helena)," *U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current - Ancestry.com*, August 27, 1941.

³⁷ Louis' brother Wilbur M. Gloege clerked in the store, living with his wife Dorothy T. in the nearby house previously inhabited by Annie and Catherine Kelley, ie. 834 8th Avenue.

³⁸ "Richard Edmond Richter," accessed August 17, 2016, <http://helenafuneralhome.com/obituaries/richard-edmond-richter/>; R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk's Helena City Directory*; "The Eighth Ave Store in Helena, Montana."

³⁹ The 1950 city directory listing identifies a "Billy Dorsey" at that address, which is likely Bernice, who was at that address in 1953.

⁴⁰ "Augustus G. Dorsey Headstone (Forestvale Cemetery, Helena)," 1942.

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History of Property

Property Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

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Store. Gloege still owned the property when he died, and in 1975 the current owner, Robert Clarkson, acquired it from his estate. Thereafter, the Wise Penny operated for years in the store component of the building—run first by founders Ms. Kellner and Ms. George before being taken over by Gerda Anderson. It closed after Gerda Anderson’s death in 2002.⁴¹

According to Sanborn Maps, the footprint of the main building at 401 N Hoback/900 8th Avenue has not been modified since before 1930 (or likely since being brought to the site). The building has, however, been modified in other ways. In 1974 “the building was partially remodeled and upgraded for the media assignment and portrait photography studio, business and retail store selling Magic Items and Theatrical Make-up” (with the “old carriage house, or small barn, in back of the building, used for storage of the Magic Show’s Illusions”). In the late 1970s the second-generation asbestos siding was removed and metal siding was applied over the original wood. Various other upgrades, to wiring, heating, roofing, etc. were completed in the years that followed. Then in 2002-2003 “the house was vacated” and the residence portion of the building renovated. The “house became the Sleepy Senator . . . operating as a Bed and Breakfast Suite.”⁴² It continues to be used as a vacation rental.

The outbuildings have also been modified over the years. The shed along the east property line was removed sometime after the 1950s. So, too, was the west-end addition to the west component of the garage, which restored the garage to the footprint it had on the 1930 Sanborn Map of the Dorsey Grocery and Residence.⁴³

⁴¹ “Lewis and Clark County Property Title Records”; “The Eighth Ave Store in Helena, Montana.”

⁴² Sanborn Map Company, “Fire Insurance Maps of Montana: Helena, Lewis and Clark County- 1930”; Sanborn Map Company, “Fire Insurance Maps of Montana: Helena, Lewis and Clark County- 1951” (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1951); Sanborn Map Company, “Fire Insurance Maps of Montana: Helena, Lewis and Clark County- 1958” (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1958); “City of Helena Building Permit Records”; “The Eighth Ave Store in Helena, Montana.”

⁴³ Sanborn Map Company, “Fire Insurance Maps of Montana: Helena, Lewis and Clark County- 1958”; Sanborn Map Company, “Fire Insurance Maps of Montana: Helena, Lewis and Clark County- 1951”; Sanborn Map Company, “Fire Insurance Maps of Montana: Helena, Lewis and Clark County- 1930.”

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Information Sources/Bibliography

Property Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

Site Number: **24LC2433**

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Property Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

Site Number: **24LC2433**

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Statement of Significance

Property Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

Site Number: **24LC2433**

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: **1904-1932**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Constructed in 1904 and closed in 1932, the Dorsey Grocery and Residence is significant under NRHP Criterion A (local level) as a residential and commercial property associated with the history of African-American people in Helena, MT. Established by one of Helena's most prominent black families—the Walter and Almira Dorseys—the residence and store housed several generations of extended Dorsey kin while the store was the most visible and substantial black-owned business in town. As such, it not only served African-American and other customers but also functioned as a focal point of the local black community, an exemplar of black achievement and an independent space owned by, and supportive of, African-American residents. The Dorsey Grocery & Residence is thus associated with two historic contexts, ie. The Heyday of Helena's African-American Community, ca. 1877-1910, and Decline and Endurance of Helena's African-American Community, ca. 1910-1970. The Dorsey Grocery and Residence was significantly associated with Helena's African-American community for over 25 years. The property's period of significance thus extends from its initial construction in 1904 through 1932, when Almira Dorsey sold the property and it passed out of African-American ownership and operation.

The Dorsey Grocery and Residence represents these significant historic themes in a number of other specific ways as well. Located near the black St. James AME Church (Site LC2430), it was one of multiple homes in the surrounding east-side neighborhood that housed a cluster of African-American people, many of whom lived in multigenerational, extended-family households. Like other black families in the region, residents of the home migrated to Montana from border-states like Missouri and other southern locales. Outside of the grocery, the economic activities of the building's residents likewise were representative. Men worked as stewards, waiters, porters and women worked as maids—prototypical positions for black Helenans, who in this period were oft-confined by structural racism to low-status, low-waged work. Both William and Walter Dorsey also worked at one point for the Montana Club, the single largest employer of black people in Helena, and other family members worked in the hospitality industry, which commonly employed black people. Family members' leadership in African-American organizations also reflects common trends in the community. Helena's black population 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: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

Site Number: **24LC2433**

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

The Dorsey Grocery and Residence retains integrity of design, setting, feeling, and association. The buildings may have been moved onto the site, but if they in fact were that move occurred at the behest of the Dorsey family when they purchased the vacant property and assembled the buildings thereon to serve as their grocery and residence. Their installation at the site marks the beginning of the property's association with the Dorseys and the beginning of its historic significance. The grocery/residence thus retains integrity of location where it attained historic significance. Although the cladding on the building has been changed (compromising integrity of materials) and the corners of the false front were sawn off after they rotted, the exterior remains largely intact and easily conveys its essential historic character and significance. Extant interior plans and details add to the property's integrity, as does its enduring historic function as a combined commercial-residential property.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

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Photographs

Property Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

Site Number: **24LC2433**



Feature #
Facing: N

Description: Dorsey Grocery, South elevation

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

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Photographs

Property Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

Site Number: **24LC2433**



Feature #
Facing: E-SE

Description: Dorsey Residence, West elevation

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Site Map

Property Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

Site Number: **24LC2433**

SITE MAP - MT HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD FORM



PROPERTY:
401 N Hoback
(aka 900 Eighth Ave)
Lewis and Clark County
Helena, Montana
GeoCode:
05-1888-30-4-10-01-0000
LAT 46.587924
LON -112.025481

LEGEND:
 Site

NAD_1983_StatePlane
Montana_FIPS_2500 meters
Scale: 1:400

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Proj Mgr: D. Hagen AIG 18, 401 Hoback
Drawn by: SGA Date: 5/3/2018
Proj: 15-06-04 Aerial 2013 ESRI

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MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

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Topographic Map

Property Name: **Dorsey Grocery and Residence**

Site Number: **24LC2433**



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(fka 900 Eighth Ave)
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