

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: **504 Peosta Ave.**

Historic Address (if applicable): **504 Peosta Ave.**

City/Town: **Helena**

Site Number: **24LC2435**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Lewis and Clark**

Historic Name: **Henry and Mary Robinson House**

Original Owner(s):

Current Ownership Private Public

Current Property Name:

Owner(s): **Culham Carol J**

Owner Address: **504 Peosta Ave., Helena, MT 59601**

Phone:

Legal Location

PM: **Montana** Township: **10 N** Range: **04 W**

$\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ **SE** $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section: **24**

Lot(s): **W 17' Lot 14 & E 17' Lot 15**

Block(s): **32**

Addition: **Broadwater** Year of Addition: **1887**

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

Historic Use: DOMESTIC/single family

Current Use: DOMESTIC/single family

Construction Date: Estimated Actual

Original Location Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov

NAD 27 or NAD 83(preferred)

Zone: **12 T** Easting: **420217** Northing: **5161527**

Geocode: 05-1887-24-4-21-11-0000

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: X yes no

Criteria: X A B C D

Date: 9/6/2016

Evaluator: Kate Hampton

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

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Architectural Description

Property Name: Henry and Mary Robinson House

Site Number: 24LC2435

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Architectural Style: **Other:** If Other, specify:

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 504 Peosta Avenue occupies a rectangular parcel on the northeast side of Peosta Avenue, northwest of its intersection with Madison and Benton avenues. The property is bounded by Peosta Avenue on its southwest side, by a graveled alley on its northeast side, and by residential properties on its southeast and northwest sides. The main building on the property – a modest one-story house – sits on the southwest half of the lot and faces southwest to Peosta. A detached two-car garage occupies the northeast end of the lot, off the alley. A yard, planted to grass, surrounds the house. The front yard is enclosed by a fence made of horizontal timbers and tree branches, while the back yard is enclosed in a wood privacy fence. Mature trees and shrubs grow along the side lot lines. Various statues, antiques, art and other items are scattered around the grounds as well as deciduous shrubbery. A city sidewalk runs along the southwest edge of the parcel. A brick sidewalk runs from the city sidewalk to the front porch and wraps around the southeast side of the house into the backyard.

The one-story wood-frame house has a rectangular, southwest-northeast oriented footprint and a concrete foundation. It comprises five components, including a square, hip-roof central component; a rectangular, front-gable front component; a shed-roof front porch; a rectangular rear shed-roof addition, and a small shed-roofed extension that protrudes from the rear addition's southeast elevation. Roof features are limited to two brick chimneys on the central component. The roof is clad in interlocking asphalt shingles. Exterior walls are clad in clapboard siding (narrow on the front wall and wider on the side walls) and the front gable is covered in wood shingles. Unless otherwise noted, windows are vinyl frame.

The shed-roof front porch shelters the front entry, which is located on the southwest wall of the central component and is accessed by a concrete pad and concrete step. The entry is filled with a four-light glazed-and-paneled door paired with a vinyl screen door. The façade of the front-gable component contains a large a window opening with a central fixed light flanked by single-light sliding sashes. The gable has a wood vent at its peak. Located off the rear addition's southeast wall the small shed extension's southwest elevation contains a large one-light fixed window across its upper half.

The northwest wall features three window openings, all containing wood frame windows. Three rows of wood shingles, attached to a piece of clapboard and set at a forty-five degree angle from the exterior wall, serve as a shallow awning above the window openings. Two of the windows are one-over-one double-hung sashes, and the third is a smaller one-by-one sliding sash. Patterns in the siding around the smaller window suggest that there was originally a larger window opening there (of the same size as the other two northwest windows). Fenestration on the rear (northeast) addition is not visible from the city sidewalk. The southeast wall features two window openings, one with a one-over-one single-hung vinyl sash and the other containing a modern greenhouse insert. The small rear extension's southeast elevation is not visible, and neither is the entirety of the northeast (rear) elevation, as it is obscured by the garage and a high privacy fence.

Garage

A wood-frame two-car garage with a side-gable roof and a southeast-northwest oriented rectangular footprint stands atop a concrete-wall foundation at the northeast end of the lot, along the alley. Garage walls are clad in brick-pattern pressed tin panels, and the roof is clad in three-tab asphalt composition shingles. Accessible and visible garage features are limited to the northeast (alley) wall, which contains two garage door openings filled with pairs of wood Z-braced side-hinged garage doors.

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History of Property

Property Name: Henry and Mary Robinson House

Site Number: 24LC2435

HISTORY OF PROPERTY

This property was first platted in 1887 as Lots 14 and 15 of Block 32 of the Broadwater Addition, along the northeast side of Peosta Avenue, northwest of its intersection with Madison and Benton avenues. By 1892, when the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company first mapped the area, the lot contained the current house, identified as 504 Peosta. At the time, it was owned by Oliver and Eva Kinkwold, who'd purchased it the previous year from George and Hannah Diehl. In the 1890s, 504 Peosta stood in the midst of a rapidly developing neighborhood: many bare lots occupied surrounding blocks, but the northeast side of Peosta was lined with houses, with the corner lot at number 502 boasting a building that housed the "Mission of the 1st Baptist Church." Among those moving into the neighborhood was Henry Robinson, who in 1896 bought the house at 504 Peosta. When Robinson acquired the property, it consisted of the west 17 feet of Lot 14 and the east 17 feet of Lot 15. Henry Robinson would own the property for 23 years, and during that time he occupied it with a shifting mix of family members and other cohabitants.

Born in Kentucky in 1836, Robinson shared his Helena home with multiple generations. According to the census, in 1910 his household included his wife Mary G. (71, also born in Kentucky), adults David H. and Edith Harris (a married couple, 33 and 22 respectively, one of whom was likely Mary's child from a previous marriage) and children Charles J. Harris (12), Roy Robinson (10) and David H. Harris, Jr. (1). At that time David H. Harris, a veteran of Fort Harrison's "colored" Co. D, 24th Infantry, who had recently switched from working as a waiter at the Montana Club to being a barber, seems to have been the primary breadwinner for the household. Robinson, then 74, had for many years worked a variety of jobs that were common among Helena's African-American men, including stints as a "yardman" at a private residence, a janitor elsewhere, and (ca. 1906-1908) a porter and a bartender at 28 N. Main.

As Robinson's working days dusked, he and Mary retained ownership of their home, likely supplementing the household income by renting rooms: over the years people listed as living at 504 Peosta included not only identifiable family members but also Alexander Calhoun, who worked in mining, and Howard H., a painter, who lived there in 1901; Mary E. Sampson (1905); Patrick Keys (1912, also a veteran of Fort Harrison's "colored" Co. D, 24th Infantry), a porter at the Lambs Club; Royal I. Parsons (1916-1918), who likely went from high school student to soldier at Fort Harrison; and the Rev. Henry C. Parsons (1916-1917), pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church.

In 1919, the Robinson, then in his 80s, sold 504 Peosta to the Lewis family, who owned it but a short time before conveying it to Bessie Murphy. Bessie and her husband James sold it seven years later to Emilia Butler who, with her husband Phancey, also owned it for about seven years. By 1935, when the Butlers sold it to Frank Gibson, the property had undergone several modifications, including the replacement of the rear porch with a full-length rear addition and the construction of a garage on the north corner of the lot (along the alley), both of which were completed by 1930. By that time, the building next door was no longer being used as a Mission of the 1st Baptist Church, and was serving only residential purposes.

The Gibson family owned 504 Peosta for almost 20 years, selling it in 1954 to Anna Elizabeth Hartman. Hartman family members owned it until 1980, when it was conveyed to Mary Jane Rice. The current front porch, which replaced a smaller original front porch sometime after 1958, likely dates to the Hartman's tenure. The property subsequently underwent a series of at least six ownership changes before being acquired by the current owner and occupant, Carol Culham, in 2005.

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Information Sources/Bibliography

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INFORMATION SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Bureau of the Census. "9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana, Lewis and Clark County." Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1870.

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1887 Broadwater Addition

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R.L. Polk & Co. *Polk's Helena City Directory, 1901- 1922*. Helena, Mont.: R.L. Polk & Co.

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Statement of Significance

Property Name: Henry and Mary Robinson House

Site Number: 24LC2435

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: **1896-1919**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Purchased in 1896 by Henry Robinson, a black man from Kentucky, the Robinson-Harris house is significant under NRHP Criterion A (local level) as a residential property associated with the history of African-American people in Helena, MT. Originally owned and occupied by the extended Robinson-Harris family during the heyday of the black community in Helena, the house remained the family's home until 1919, when the local black community was in the midst of rapid decline. The Robinson-Harris house is thus associated with two significant historic contexts: it black owner-occupants lived there during the heyday of Helena's, and Montana's, African-American community, ca. 1875-1910, and they sold their home and left it in the midst of the community decline and endurance 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. 1896 through 1919.

The Robinson house represents these significant historic themes in a number of specific ways. Located near the black Baptist Church (on the corner of Wilder and Harrison), it was one of multiple homes in the surrounding west-end/Broadwater Addition neighborhood that housed a cluster of extended, multi-generational African-American families, many of them containing veterans of the "colored" army units stationed at nearby Fort Harrison. And like other black families in the region, the Robinsons migrated to Helena in the late 19th century from a border state, ie. Kentucky. Once in Helena, the Robinson-Harris men and their housemates worked as porters, waiters, janitors etc.—prototypical positions for black men, who in this period were oft-confined by structural racism to low-status, low-waged work. Robinson's stint as a barber was also representative, for that field was primary among African-American male occupations in Montana. So, too, were residents' stints at the Montana Club, which along with other hospitality businesses like the Lambs Club, was the single largest employer of black Helena residents. Like many black families in Helena, the home's owners took in boarders to help make ends meet and provide lodging to the African-American community.

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Integrity

Property Name: Henry and Mary Robinson House

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

Modifications to the property since its construction include replacement of the original front and rear porches (the former with a larger porch after 1958 and the latter with a rear addition between 1892 and 1930), the construction of a garage, and the replacement of original windows in the house itself. These changes have somewhat compromised integrity of design, materials and workmanship, but they mainly date to the period of significance and 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

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Feature #
Facing: N

Description: 504 Peosta, view to N

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Photographs

Property Name: Henry and Mary Robinson House

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Feature #
Facing: NE

Description: 504 Peosta, view to NE

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Photographs

Property Name: Henry and Mary Robinson House

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Feature #
Facing: E

Description: 504 Peosta, view to E

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Photographs

Property Name: Henry and Mary Robinson House

Site Number: 24LC2435



Feature #
Facing: S

Description: 504 Peosta, garage, view to S

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Site Map

Property Name: Henry and Mary Robinson House

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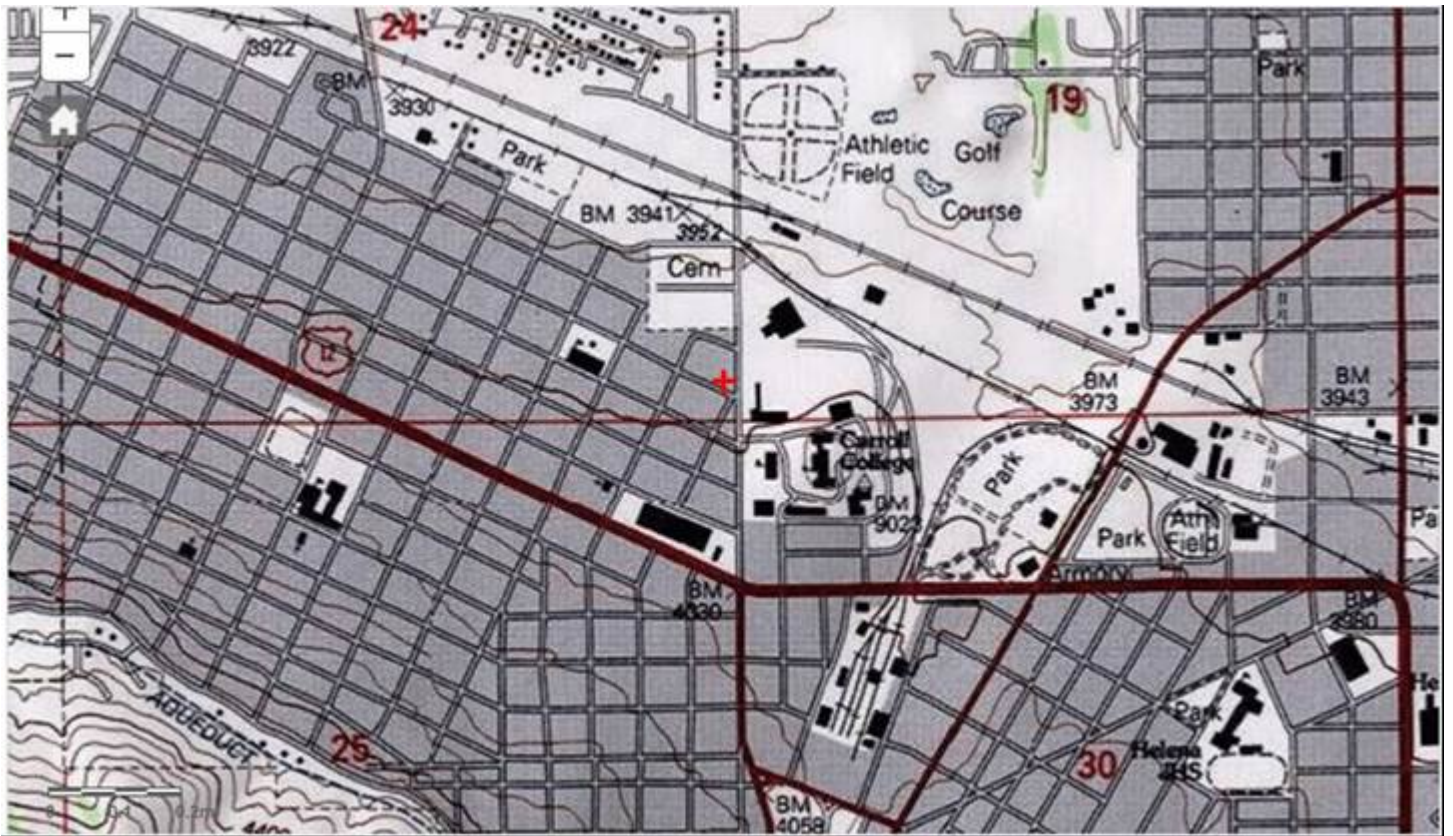
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Topographic Map

Property Name: Henry and Mary Robinson House

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PROPERTY:

504 Peosta Ave
Lewis and Clark County
Helena, Montana
GeoCode:
05-1887-24-4-21-11-0000
LAT 46.602568
LON -112.041729