

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, 1410 8th Ave
Helena, MT 59620-1202

Property Address: **912 8th Ave.**

Historic Address (if applicable):

City/Town: **Helena**

Site Number: **24LC2447**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Lewis and Clark**

Historic Name: **George and Polly Lee Residence**

Original Owner(s): **Charles and Mary Smith**

Current Ownership Private Public

Current Property Name:

Owner(s): **Cardiello, Theresa**

Owner Address: **912 8th Ave., Helena, MT 59601**

Phone:

Legal Location

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

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

Lot(s): **14**

Block(s): **6**

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

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: **421474** Northing: **5459884**

Geocode: **05-1888-30-4-10-07-0000**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District:

NRHP Eligible: X 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: XA B C D

Date: **8/26/2016**

Evaluator: **Kate Hampton**

Comments: Identifying Montana's African American Heritage Places Project

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Architectural Description

Property Name: George and Polly Lee Residence

Site Number: 24LC2447

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 912 8th Avenue occupies a rectangular parcel on the north side of 8th Avenue and is centrally located within the block. The block is bordered by 8th Avenue to the south, 9th Avenue to the north, N. Hoback Street to the west and Idaho Avenue to the east. 8th Avenue runs east-west. The main building on the parcel, the residence faces south to 8th Ave. The building occupies the southern portion of the parcel with a partially fenced yard, planted to grass on its north side. A chain-link fence lines the western boundary of the rear yard, the southern boundary, and the northern outbuildings. A city sidewalk runs along the south edge of the parcel, and adjoins the front entrance, concrete-slab walkway. The backyard contains a large, (non-historic) two car garage, which abuts a rear alleyway that runs parallel to 8th Avenue, as well as a (non-historic) shed with a gambrel roof. A chain link fence surrounds the rear shed and abuts the garage. Both outbuildings sit atop concrete slabs, and face the alleyway. Mature deciduous shrubbery lines the west side of the property until it joins the rear chain-link fence. A mature juniper tree exists on the left side of the south façade, while deciduous shrubbery lines the bottom of the right side of the house.

The medium-sized, wood-frame, two-story Queen-Anne style building has a north-south oriented irregular footprint and a cross-gable roof, with the main roofline being an east-west oriented clipped gable and a large front-gabled, full-height wing projecting the east side of its south(front) slope. The roof features deep eaves with large returns in the front-gable end. The roof is clad in 3-tab asphalt composition shingles. This house is clad in horizontal wood board, vertical wood board, imbricated wood shingles and nonimbricated wood shingles, and sits atop a combination brick and concrete foundation. The wood cladding is painted white and grey with white trim. The top half story is clad entirely in imbricated shingle. The bottom story is clad in wood board. Within the south façade's ell appears a hipped dormer atop the east side of a hipped one-story open entrance porch. The north (rear) elevation features a historic one-story shed extension and modern, shallow-pitched shed-roof, one-story addition.

South (front) elevation:

The various roof types dominate the façade (south side) of the house. A projecting two story gable-front wing extends south from the façade's (south elevation's) east side. The component features prominent eave returns. The second story of the component is clad in imbricated shingle has a historic, wood-framed, wide, one-over-one, single-hung window. The first story of the component is clad in wide horizontal wood board and features a fixed four-light wood-frame window with large distinguishing mullions. Within the ell created by the gable wing stands a hipped porch topped by a hipped dormer. Nonimbricated wood shingles cover the dormer's sidewalls and the plane surrounding its large south-facing wood-framed window. This window features a large one-light fixed unit topped by a two-light transom. Supported by two square posts, the hipped porch roof has a slight flair to it. Horizontal wood board siding covers the porch's half-walls. Within the porch, on the side-gable bay's south elevation, the house's front entrance features a wood storm door with a diamond-light unit above an X-braced panel. An original wood, eight-over-one single-hung window is located to the west of the entrance door. Vertical wood board siding covers the walls within the porch. Four concrete stairs lead to the porch, and feature a wrought-iron railing on the west side.

West (side) elevation:

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The west (side) elevation's first story consists of a shallow, gabled extension, clad with horizontal rough-cut wood board siding, that protrudes slightly from the upper's story's plane. Across the first story, three wood-frame window units appear: a large centered opening that contains a three light vertical fixed unit flanked by three-light casements, a pair of three light casements centered in the south side, and a single one-light casement farther south. The upper story is clad in imbricated shingle, and displays a single one-over-one wood-framed single-hung window centered in the clipped gable end. The west elevations of the additions attached to the north (rear) elevation were not visible/accessible at the time of survey.

East (side) elevation:

Much like the west elevation, the east elevation features original fenestration, with an upper story one-over-one fixed window centered in the hipped gable end, and three pairs of one-over-one double-hung windows staggered across the first story. Imbricated shingles clad the second story, while wide, horizontal rough-cut wood siding encases the first story. The wing at the south side of the elevation stands flush with the clipped gable wall, and contains no fenestration. The historic one-story shed extension is also flush with the clipped gable bay, and contains the northernmost pair of original windows. Farther north, the modern one-story modern shed addition is visible where it extends beyond the historic east elevation's plane. It's roof is pitched slightly down to the east and displays deep boxed eaves.

North (rear) elevation:

The north (rear) elevation is largely obscured from view by vegetation and a tall wood privacy fence. At the upper story, a dormer protrudes from the east side of the main roof's north slope. By 1930, both an L-shaped shed addition, with a cut-out porch sheltered by a hipped roof at its west side, enveloped the north elevation's first story. Today, a modern addition extends north from that addition's east side, dominating the eastern two-thirds of the first story. The modern addition is clad in wide horizontal hardie board, and features corner windows: one-by-one sliders at the north sides of the east and west elevations, and the same at the west and east edges of the north elevation.

Garage:

A detached one-story, wood frame, side-gable garage is located on the northern portion of the parcel. It is a large one car garage with a wood frame overhead garage door that displays 16 panels and four lights and fills the east three-quarters of north (front) elevation. It stands atop a cement foundation and is clad in horizontal wood board painted a mossy green, with orange trim. The roof is clad in 3-tab asphalt shingles. The west wall is connected to the neighboring garage.

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History of Property

Property Name: George and Polly Lee Residence

Site Number: 24LC2447

HISTORY OF PROPERTY

This property was first platted in 1883 as Lot 14 of Block 6 of the Bassett Addition, along the north side of 8th Avenue, east of its intersection with N. Hoback Street. Tax records indicate the current house was built in 1875. This date is likely inaccurate—it predates original platting—but by 1890, when the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company first mapped the neighborhood, the property contained the current house. Identified as 912 8th, it was then a 2-story L-shaped dwelling, with a front porch, situated near the south end of the lot. A small outbuilding stood in the northwest portion of the property.

At that time, 912 8th was owned by the Smith family. Charles P. Smith had acquired “part of Lot 14” in 1887, after it had passed through three short term owners since original platting. Smith family members owned it until 1901, when Charles and Mary Smith deeded “the East 35 feet of Lot 14” to Albert G. Peterson. Albert and his wife Sofia owned the property for six years, selling it to Polly D. Lee, a woman of African-American descent, in 1907. Missouri-born Polly and her South Carolina-born husband George M., along with their Montana-born sons George Jr. and Alfred Julian, would own and occupy the property until several years after Polly’s death in 1926.

The Lee family moved into their new home immediately. They had lived nearby on the 300 block of 9th Avenue since at least 1898, when George Lee was “elected Auditor on the Republican ticket and the rest of the ticket was defeated.” Lee’s election that November made news locally and farther afield: the *Wichita (KS) Tribune* reported on it the following month, noting that “he is the second colored man that has been elected to such an office.”

Like many members of Helena’s African-American community, the Lee family relied on the wages of multiple people to support the household. In 1910, 51-year-old George Sr., who’d previously worked as a porter at the Helena Hotel, was working as a “steward” at a “social club.” That year Polly D., 45, worked from home as a seamstress. George Jr., who’d earlier waited tables at the Montana Club, was by then 24 and working as an “automobile chauffeur.” Young Alfred Julian, just 13, was in school. Julian must have done well there, for in 1920 he was a student at the prestigious, historically black Howard University in Washington, D.C. By that time, George Sr. was working as a janitor at Central School while Polly had a dressmaking business. Polly died in 1926, and three years later George Sr. could be found at MT States T & T Co., where he was again a janitor.

It is unclear whether the Lees also supplemented their wages with income from boarders during their tenure at 912 8th. In 1900, when they lived on 9th Avenue, census takers enumerated an African-American boarder in the home—40-year-old Bettie J. Foukerson, a laundress from Missouri. Subsequent records contain no information about possible boarders in the Lee family home.

As executor of Polly’s estate, widower George Sr. conveyed the property to Martin Findel in 1930. By then, the house had been expanded with a rear addition and a rear porch, and the original outbuilding had been replaced, with the new shed situated along the east, rather than the west, lot line. George Lee Sr. died three years later, in 1933. His former home at 912 8th was by then in the possession of Ida M. and Arlin J. Allison, husband and wife. The Allisons had purchased it from Findel and his wife Emma in 1931, and owned it 15 years before selling it to Russell and Bonita Nora in December 1946. Less than a year later, the Noras conveyed 912 8th Avenue to its occupant, Bernice Arts.

The Arts family would own the property for some 43 years: in 1990, Bernice and her children sold 912 8th to Wilam and Marsha Davis. By that time, the property included a newer garage, built in 1967. In 1995, Mr. and Mrs. Davis conveyed it to the James and Susan Gordon family, who in turn transferred it to Brian and Audrey Cameron in 1998. The current owner and occupant, Theresa Cardiello, acquired 912 8th from the Camerons in 2003. Sanborn Maps indicate that the footprint of the house has not been modified since before 1930.

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Information Sources/Bibliography

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INFORMATION SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

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1883 Bassett Addition

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Statement of Significance

Property Name: George and Polly Lee Residence

Site Number: 24LC2447

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:

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

[period of significance = 1907-1930]

Purchased in 1907 by Polly and George Lee, the Lee house is significant under NRHP Criterion A (local level) as a residential property associated with the history of African-American people in Helena, MT. George Lee was for years a prominent member of the local black community—as well as being an elected Republican Party Official he was, for instance, Chief Councillor of the Washington Lodge No. 1 A.O.H.P, one of two “colored” “councils of the American Order of Home Protection, about 300 strong” that flourished in Helena (“this order is similar to the A. O.U.W.” [Ancient Order of United Workmen]). With his wife Polly and their two sons, George occupied the property until 1930, when he sold it in the wake of Polly’s death. The local black community, which peaked ca. 1910, had by then long been in decline. The Lee 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 sold 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. 1907-1930.

The Lee house represents these significant historic themes in a number of specific ways. 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. Like other black families in the region, residents of the home migrated to Montana from border-states like Missouri and other southern locales. The economic activities of the Lee-house residents were likewise representative. Male residents of the home worked as janitors, waiters, porters, chauffeurs—prototypical positions for black men, who in this period were oft-confined by structural racism to low-status, low-waged work. George Jr.’s employment included a stint at the Montana Club which, along with other hospitality businesses like hotels, was the single largest employer of black people in Helena. And like women in many of Helena’s black families, Polly Lee worked to help support the family. Home-based sewing businesses like Polly’s dressmaking were one of the preferable occupations open to black women in this period, providing more independence and respect than other common jobs like housekeeping for white families. George’s political activities reflected a common paradox: the black people who worked at the lower echelons of the economy 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

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

Changes to the George and Polly Lee residence after the historic period include replacement siding across the first story and a large one-story modern addition on the north (rear) elevation. Despite these alterations, the house retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic associations with Helena's African American community in the early 20th century. While the addition interferes with the integrity of design, its location at the rear of the house diminishes its impact. Integrity of materials is compromised by modern siding at the first story, but made less impactful by the decorative shingle work at the second story and the presence of historic windows. The building remains in its original location and setting, and its continued use as a single family residence reinforces its historic feeling and association.

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Photographs

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Feature #
Facing: N

Description: South (front) elevation

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Photographs

Property Name: George and Polly Lee Residence

Site Number: 24LC2447



Feature #
Facing: NE

Description: South (front) and west elevations

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Photographs

Property Name: George and Polly Lee Residence

Site Number: 24LC2447



Feature #
Facing: NW

Description: East elevation

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Photographs

Property Name: George and Polly Lee Residence

Site Number: 24LC2447



Feature #
Facing: SW

Description: East and west elevations

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Photographs

Property Name: George and Polly Lee Residence

Site Number: 24LC2447



Feature #
Facing: SW

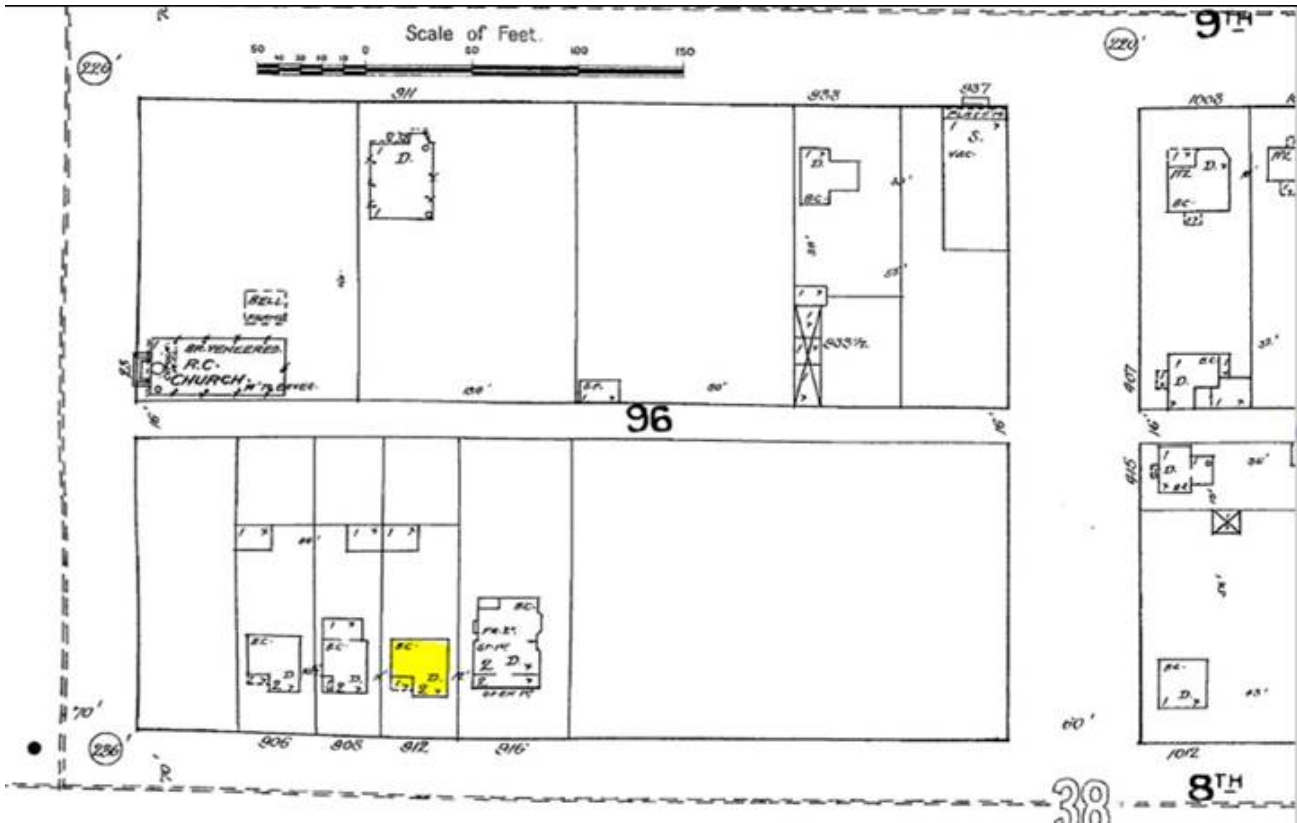
Description: 912 8th Ave., garage, view to SW

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Sanborn Maps

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Site Number: 24LC2447



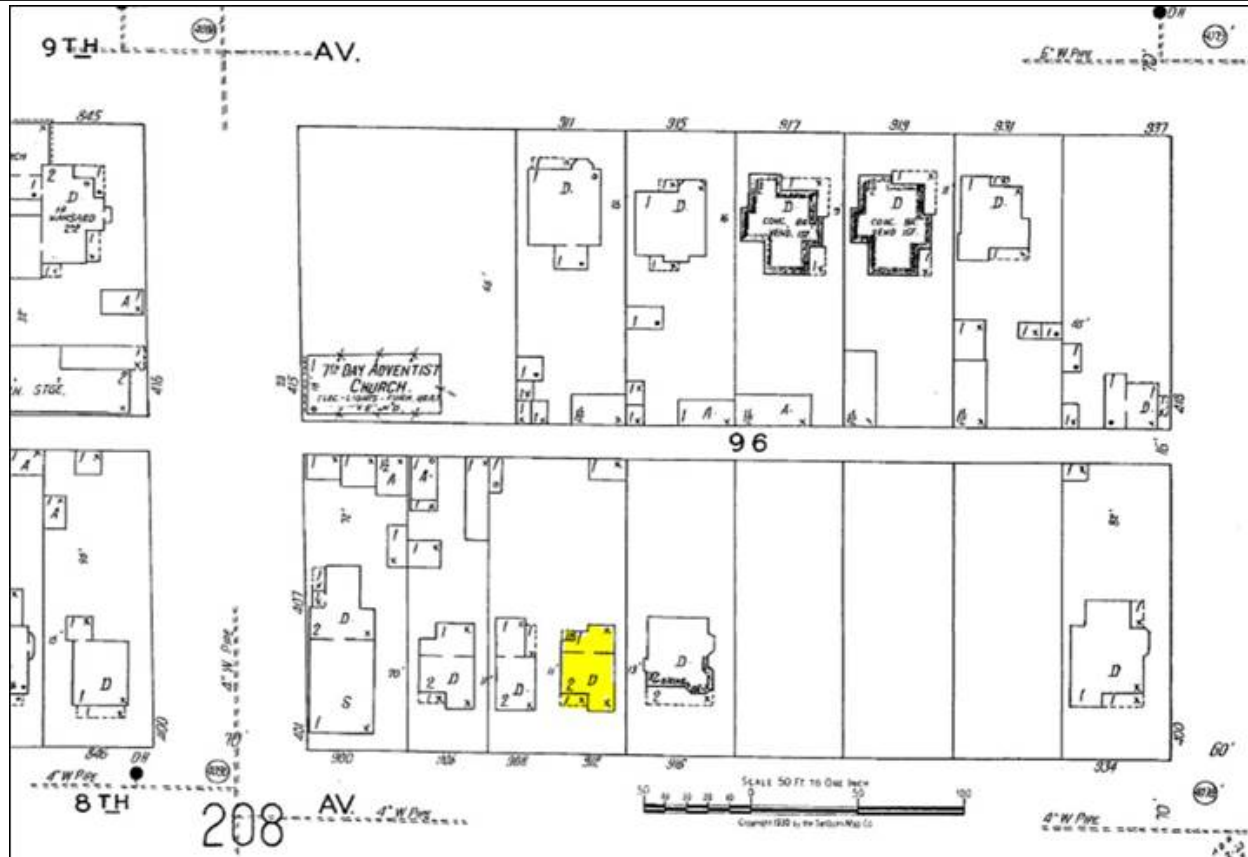
Detail of 1892 Sanborn Map, Helena, Sheet 40, highlighting residence at 912 Eighth Avenue.

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Sanborn Maps

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Detail of 1930 Sanborn Map, Helena, Sheet 204, highlighting buildings at 912 Eighth Avenue.

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Site Map

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Topographic Map

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PROPERTY:

912 Eighth Ave
Lewis and Clark County
Helena, Montana
GeoCode:
05-1888-30-4-10-07-0000
LAT 46.587912
LON -112.025025