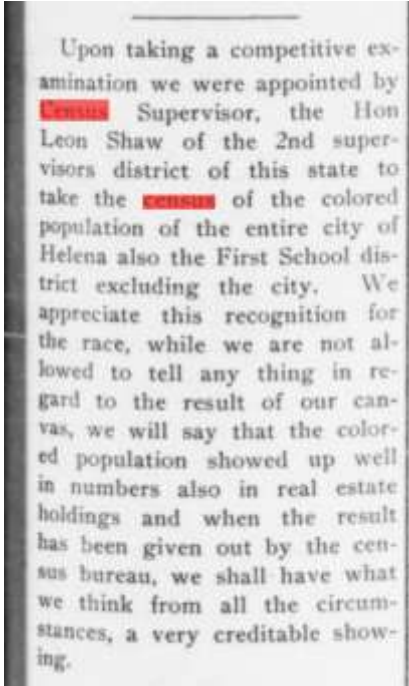


## About the 1910 Helena Census

The 1910 Federal Census of Helena, Montana is unique. Unfortunately, what makes it so also makes it problematic. Unlike censuses taken throughout Montana during the year—that followed the enumeration process of going street by street, house by house, documenting the names and information of all peoples—Helena recorded the names and addresses of its nearly 450 African American residents in a separate enumeration process. For reasons unknown, Joseph Bass, the editor of the Montana Plaindealer, a black newspaperman, was charged with compiling census data for members of the African American community alone. While perhaps it might seem useful to have a high ranking and well educated member of the community perform the task for a group of people he would have known very well, factors out of his control made the final product difficult to read in some cases, and entirely inaccurate in others.

The most common problem lay in a simple oversight, one not an issue in typical censuses, that is, when only one or two individuals were listed on a single street, there was often not sufficient space to write the street names vertically next to them. The problem is compounded by only a handful of people living at one street, and directly below them are a couple who lives on a different street, and so and so forth, leading to sheets that look like the one below.

A photograph of a handwritten census form. The form is organized into columns and rows. The columns contain names, addresses, and other details. The handwriting is dense and somewhat difficult to read. The form appears to be a list of individuals, possibly related to the African American community in Helena, Montana, as mentioned in the text. The entries include names like "Lodge", "Mason", "Harris", "Hill", "Hess", "Kridgeway", and "Mann". The addresses are listed in the left column, and the names and other details are in the right columns. There are some numbers and symbols scattered throughout the form, possibly indicating page numbers or other identifiers.

1910 Census, Ancestry.com

The second most prevalent issue with the Joseph Bass Census is actually quite telling about the African American community in Helena. Several times, the same individual is listed twice or even three different times, all at different addresses. This in part tells historians about the highly fluid and migratory nature of

early black community of the Capital City. From Bass' census, it appears that a sizable population of black residents, particularly those living in the State Street neighborhood, had a less than permanent home. Most individuals that are part of that group are listed as young, single, wage laborers. Therefore it is understandable how a single man could lose track of who he had already listed at a different address.

Another issue occurs frequently in the neighborhoods of the Blake Addition between downtown and the capitol area. This was a section of town where most of the large black families made their homes at the turn of the century. On several occasions, two different families lived at the same number but different street, e.g. 212 South Ewing and 212 South Beattie. By cross checking the census with the Polk City Directories of 1909 1910, and 1911, we can determine that Bass simply confused the streets of certain families. Examples like 818 and 918 Breckenridge, both homes of large African American families showcase times when Bass confused the house numbers of individuals living on the same street. Interestingly, this might give historians a better understanding of how Bass performed the census enumeration. A likely theory is that instead of going door to door, as was customary, Bass used places like St. James AME Church or social functions to make a call for Helena's black residents to self-report the data. This makes sense, as several places show next door neighbors listed on two different sheets, many names apart from each other.

Those who search for the Helena census will notice that black residents in 1910 also are listed on the regular census. Names of Helena's black citizens can be found at the bottom of census sheets containing the names of the city's white residents. However, these names were written in a different ink, or perhaps pencil, making the second census practically unreadable today.

93		General Thomas	roomer	M W 34 S	Missouri	Ill
94		Hicks Ladio	roomer	M W 61 S	Missouri	Can Engle
95		Thompson Walter	roomer	M W 20 S	Montana	Okla
96		Swick Hannell	roomer	M W 34 S	Massachusetts	W. Va
97		Carlson John	roomer	M W 9 S	Swed. Swedish	Swed. Swed
98		Carlson John	roomer	M W 34 S	Missouri	Pennsylvania
99	325 193 177	Jones Richard	head	M W 47 B	Ant. Christian	Ant. Broth
100		Jackson James	bird help	M 13 38 S	Maryland	Virginia
101	300 K X	Thomas Lamm	roomer	M W 55 S	Alabama	Alabama
102	212	Thomas Eldon	roomer	M W 35 S	Kansas	Alabama
103	430 141	Thomas Perry	roomer	M W 42 S	Kentucky	Kentucky
104		Thomas Perry	roomer	M W 34 S	Missouri	Missouri
105	812	Thomas Perry	roomer	M W 21 S	Texas	Texas
106		Thomas Perry	roomer	M W 18 S	Tennessee	Tennessee
107	142 14	Thomas Perry	roomer	M W 24 S	Tennessee	Tennessee
108	21	Thomas Perry	roomer	M W 21 S	Tennessee	Tennessee
109	430 141	Thomas Perry	roomer	M W 34 S	Tennessee	Tennessee
110		Thomas Perry	roomer	M W 34 S	Tennessee	Tennessee

1910 census, Ancestry.com

The information contained in the 1910 Helena Census spreadsheet on this site is derived from checking the names and addresses against city directories, Sanborn insurance maps, and other pertinent information to create the most accurate resource possible.