MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

Montana State Historic Preservation Office Montana Historical Society PO Box 201202, 1410 8th Ave Helena, MT 59620-1202

| Property Address: 308 South Tracy Historic Address (if applicable): City/Town: Bozeman | Site Number: 24GA1919 (An historic district number may also apply.) County: Gallatin |
|--|---|
| Historic Name: McDonald House Original Owner(s): Richard McDonald Current Ownership Private Public Current Property Name: Owner(s): Robert and Joanna Nute Owner Address: 308 South Tracy Phone: | Legal Location PM: Montana Township: 02 S Range: 06 E 1/4 1/4 SW 1/4 of Section: 7 Lot(s): 8-9 Block(s): F Addition: Black Year of Addition: USGS Quad Name: Year: |
| Historic Use: Domestic Current Use: Domestic Construction Date: 1872 | UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov ☐ NAD 27 or ☑ NAD 83(preferred) Zone: 12 Easting: 497125 Northing: 5058043 |
| National Register of Historic Places NRHP Listing Date: Historic District: NRHP Eligible: Yes No | Date of this document: 8/1/2015 Form Prepared by: Anthony Wood Address: 1410 8 th Avenue, Helena MT 59620-1202 Daytime Phone: 406-444-7715 |
| MT SHPO USE ONLY Eligible for NRHP: □ yes □ no Criteria: □ A □ B □ C □ D Date: Evaluator: | Comments: Updated property record form written as part of the "Identifying Montana's African American Heritage Places Project." |

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Property Name: McDonald House Smithsonian Number: 24GA1919

Architectural Style: **I-Style National** If Other, specify:

Property Type: **Domestic** Specific Property Type: **Single Family Residence**

Architect: Architectural Firm/City/State: Builder/Contractor: Company/City/State:

Source of Information:

Architectural Description:

Setting & Location

The McDonald House located at 308 South Tracy Avenue, sits on lots 8 and 9 of block F, in Bozeman's Black Addition. The immediate neighborhood—bounded roughly by Main Street to the North, South Bozeman to the East, South Grand Avenue to the West, and Story Street to the South—contains many structures original to Bozeman's first housing boom in the 1880s. The McDonald house, itself being the first two-story home in Bozeman and built in 1872, remains as one of the earliest homes erected in the Black Addition as well as the Gallatin Valley.

Block F, an elongated block that runs the length of the two blocks opposite South Tracy, is bounded by South Tracy to the West, East Curtiss Street to the North, South Black Ave to the East, and E Story Street to the South. The McDonald house at 308 S Tracy sits near the Northwest corner of the block, one lot south of the corner of S Tracy and E Curtiss. A majority of the houses standing on the block today exhibit several distinct architectural styles prevalent to structures built prior to or around the turn of the century. The opposite side of S Tracy features several early Craftsman style homes, as well as a handful of smaller single-family National style homes. Most of the larger homes contain clear folk Victorian influences, as well as a distinctly Queen Ann residence on the far south end of the block.

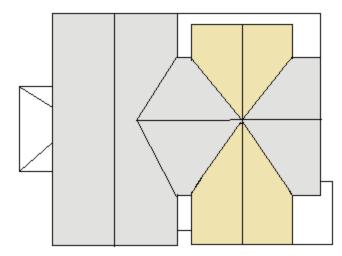
The front (west) yard of the McDonald house features an abundance of bushes, trees and foliage, all cleanly manicured. A very large Douglas fir stands in the north half of lawn, obstructing the view of the house from the street. Opposite the cement walkway that extends from the city side walk to the front porch, a medium sized Maple tree stands on the south side of the lawn. The narrow lawn between the sidewalk and street contains several large Birch, as well as two smaller Maple trees. Flowers and other manicured foliage skirt the house on all sides, only breaking on the front and rear elevations for the steps giving access to the main entry and rear open porches. The property features a large back yard, which, like the front, contains many trees and gardens. In addition to the greenery, a narrow cement walkway runs from the steps of the back porch to the alley behind the property.

Introduction

The original structure built by Richard McDonald in 1872 featured a National I-Style construction, and still remains intact on the front side of the building. The rear of the house now contains several, slightly complicated additions. An original kitchen extension with a gable end still extends to the rear of the structure, but is obscured by a second one-and-a-half story side-gable section running parallel

to house's original side-gable section. On the north elevation, the second-side gable section does not extend out to the same level as the main section of the house, and sits upon a wrapping pent roof, thus making it a dormer. The south elevation's eastern (right) side-gable extends to the same level as the main structure, giving the section a bay-like feature.

The foundation, though not visible from the exterior, is presumed to be a rock wall foundation, due to the early date of construction. Gray, horizontal wood board siding covers the entire exterior of the house, extending from the foundation to the eaves of the 12 different roof slopes (not including the front and rear porches). All sections of roof are covered with asphalt shingles.



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West Façade

The west façade of the McDonald house showcases the typical features of an I-style structure. The façade contains four double-hung windows, a front door at the center of the façade, and an open porch with a hipped roof. The first story windows each sit about three feet on either side the front door, both beneath the overhang of the porch roof. On the second story of the façade, two identical window fixtures sit directly above the two first story double-hungs. All window and door surrounds on the façade are painted white, and appear to be wood. The hipped roof of the front porch overhangs a deck, raised one step above ground level. The northwest and southwest corners of the porch roof feature white wooden support beams. The supports, identical to each other, are decoratively carved, squared at top and bottom, and cylindrical at the center. The west slope of the main side-gable section is visible on the façade, and features the same asphalt shingles as the hipped porch roof.

North Elevation

The elevation is roughly comprised of three sections; the main section of the original I-style home to the west, the north side of the rear kitchen extension to the east, and the north dormer section rising from a low-pitched, pent roof that extends from the northeast corner of the kitchen extension to the main section of the home. The north elevation contains at least three double-hung windows. The main section of the I-style home, located on the western half of the north elevation, features double-hung windows at the center, one in the elevation of the first story, and the other directly above the first in the second story. A third visible window appears to be located in the north, first story elevation of the rear kitchen extension. Like the other two, the third widow features the double-hung design, but unlike the standard tall rectangle shape of the other fixtures, the third window sits closely under the eaves of the kitchen



extension and is generally square in shape. Though it is not visible, through the thick tree cover, the top half story of the north dormer's gable end almost certainly contains another window, which would likely be double-hung, similar in shape and style to the other windows on the elevation. The horizontal board siding that covers the north elevation is consistent with the siding featured throughout the house's exterior.

South Elevation

The south elevation is only partially visible due to thick foliage and proximity to the neighboring house. Like the north elevation, several distinct sections comprise the south side of the structure. On the west side, the two-story section of the original I-style home contains two double-hung windows, one in the first story and the other directly above in the second story. To the east of the main home, the side gable addition also contains two windows, identical in size, shape, and placement to the main section. The two side gable sections stand close to each other, but do not meet. Between them, though not visible, the exterior wall of the kitchen extension spans the gap, covered by its gabled roof. The far eastern section of the south elevation is not visible, though it likely contains the south side of the rear porch.

Rear Elevation

Like much of the McDonald house, bushes and trees hide large sections of the rear elevation from view. At the center of the elevation, the original kitchen extension's gable end contains three window fixtures. The first story of the gable end features the same double-hung style prevalent throughout the house, located on the far southern end of the kitchen extension. The top half story contains two, square, double-hungs, set near either edge of the gable end. To the left of the kitchen extension, a pent roof covers the small porch that leads to the rear entry door. The only feature visible beneath the porch roof, the wooden, rear door contain six, large, fixed panes, running two across, and three down. Little else is distinguishable on the rear elevation other than the eastern slopes of the side gable addition's roof, and a small section of the main I-style section's eastern slope.

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History of the Property

Richard and Mary McDonald

Born in 1841, twenty years before the start of the Civil War, Richard McDonald, began his life as a slave in Missouri, but died in a home he built and owned, a free man, and a pioneer of the West. The woman who he would wed, Mary, was bought away from her mother when she was just a girl. This tragic situation led to the two meeting, and marrying in 1861. In 1863, when Lincoln issued the emancipation proclamation, the McDonalds were freed, even though the decree only affected those slaves in the south, not boarder states like Missouri. Nevertheless their owner felt impelled for one reason or another to free his slaves. That same year, pulled by oxen, their covered wagon made the six month journey from St. Paul to the bustling mining hub of Virginia City, Montana Territory. With the birth of a son, Eddie, the ruckus western town proved too much for the young family, and in 1864, the McDonalds settled in the Gallatin Valley, just south of the handful of structures that would come to make up downtown Bozeman. Eddie, like his brother Robert before him, would die in infancy. Sadly, the McDonald's would have two more sons, neither living past 15. However, Richard and Mary welcomed their first daughter, Mary Mollie McDonald into the world on April 30, 1873, making her the first black child born in the Gallatin Valley.

Mary gave birth to Mollie at home, in a two story wooden house that Richard had built the year before. On the site of their original cabin, on what would be South Tracy Street, Richard collected scrap wood and other materials from around the small town and built what would be his family's home for the next 128 years. The construction of the McDonald home in 1872 made it the first two story house in the valley, and predated Bozeman's housing boom of 1880. Two more McDonald girls were born during the first ten years at 308 South Tracy. Belle McDonald followed shortly after Mollie in 1875. Mellissa, the last daughter was born in 1878. During this time of growth, Richard provided for his family by hauling freight with his wagon and team of oxen. By any standard, hauling freight was difficult work. Dangers abounded in Montana during the 1870s and 80s. American Indian tribes still saw themselves at war with the settlers. And general lawlessness made a single man hauling goods across the vastness of the territory a prime target. Richard made the trek from Bozeman to Virginia City often, with longer hauls over passes to Butte and Billings, and even as far as Fort Benton, in the northeast corner of the state.²

Mary's life at home with the children presented its own dangers. American Indians from time to time would still venture down to the city, much to the terror of Mary, who is reported to have been greatly afraid of the natives.³ The building of Fort Ellis only three miles east of the Bozeman Townsite in 1867 added much needed security to the valley.⁴ Aside from these rare visitations, Montana's western frontier challenged all who lived there. The long hard winters made travel treacherous, and a simple cold or fever could spiral into a life threatening illness for children and adults alike. This possibly could have been the fate of the two younger McDonald boys, both dying in their early teens, though the cause of their deaths is not entirely clear. Mellissa, the youngest, survived a bought with fever in 1880, but her brother Lewis, also listed as being sick in the 1880 federal census, would not.⁵

Race remained an issue for the McDonalds in their new home, though compared to their past, conflict seemed minimal. The girls all attended Bozeman's schools with both black and white children through at least the first year of high school equivalent. Several other African American families had come to Bozeman shortly following the arrival of the McDonalds, creating a tight-knit black community. Most notably, a perennially successful businessman, property developer, and barber, Samuel Lewis, came to Bozeman in 1868. Lewis in nearly every way worked to break the racial barrier that existed for blacks like Richard and himself. On a personal level, Lewis succeeded in this as he did in every other aspect of life. His barber shop on Main Street continued to thrive, his properties and investments continued to produce for him, and local doctors and judges even rented his different houses on South Tracy, a block from the McDonalds. At the time of his death in 1896, it is estimated that the black man from the East Indies was worth close to \$25,000, a fortune for the time (about ¾ of a million dollars today). However, apparent in his obituary in Bozeman's Avant Courier, Lewis' success did more to diminish the color of his skin than it did to raise the stature of his race. It did not praise him as a great black man, instead they relabeled him "as white as they come."

¹ Gail Schontzler, "McDonald House Hold History of Freed Slaves Who Helped Settle Bozeman," *Bozeman Daily Chronicle, February 13, 2011.*

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Thid

⁵ U.S. Census, 1880 (*Bozeman, Gallitan, Montana*, Roll: 742; Family History Film: 1254742; Page: 205C; Enumeration District: 015; Image: 0417)

⁶ B. Derek Strahn, "Samuel Lewis House NR nomination form" On file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, December 1999, Section 8, 1-5.

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Richard would die two years after Lewis, to far less fanfare. Richard had turned 65 earlier in 1898, leaving Mary, still in her fifties, to look after the wellbeing of their three daughters, all in their twenties. At this time, marriage was still seen as an important step towards financial and social stability. However, the McDonald girls were challenged by a lack of young black men to marry in Bozeman. By 1909, Montana had made it illegal for the McDonalds to marry a white man, as per the new anti-miscegenation laws. Of the McDonald girls, only Mollie would marry. On March 9, 1900, Charles H. Ward, a black man from Butte, took Mollie as his wife. The 32 year-old Ward worked as laborer in Butte for only a short amount of time, traveling back and forth from Bozeman to find work. Shortly after, the couple gave birth to their first son, Richard, in 1901. Richard lived most of his life in Bozeman with his mother, aunts and grandmother. In February of 1920, Richard got into a dispute over a debt owed to him by another black man, Fred Rogers. Rogers apparently refused to pay the \$3.40 he owed Ward. Richard shot the man, killing him. Richard was arrested and sentenced to life. He would die in prison at the age of 36.9

The wards second child, Belle, lived a far longer and happier life than her brother. Born in 1907, Belle spent for most of her years at 308 South Tracy, though she did spend some time living in Butte during the 1930s. She married Richard Fisher of Helena in 1925, and the two stayed married until Richard's death in 1950, at the age of 46. ¹⁰ Born at 915 Cannon Street in Helena, next door to T.C. Power's black coachman, Nathaniel Ford, Richard grew up in Helena before moving to Butte in the early 20s, and finally to Bozeman, where he met Belle Ward (although, because of the fluidness of western Montana's black community during this time, the two very likely could have met prior to this). ¹¹ Throughout the late 20s and 30s, Richard is listed as living in Butte, where he worked. Census data suggests that Belle spent some amount of time there with him also, but for the most part she lived and helped care for her grandmother, mother, and aunts, all of whom still live on Tracy Ave. ¹²

Mary McDonald spent 70 years living in the home her husband built from scrap in 1872. In 1941, Grandma McDonald, as she was known passed away at the age of 100.¹³ She had lived in the Gallatin Valley from 1864 to 1941, longer than any other African American, and quite possibly anyone of any color. Her three daughters and granddaughter followed suit, and each lived at the family home for the rest of their lives as well. The sisters' lives in Bozeman after their mother's death were anything but mundane. For three women in their sixties and seventies, the McDonalds soon found themselves embroiled in controversy, a controversy that could be resolved by the highest court in the State.

Mary Mollie McDonald, in 1929, had been appointed as a trustee of the St. Johns Baptist Church in Bozeman. The church, however, ceased to meet at that building. Over many years, and after the deaths of the other two trustees, Mollie became entrusted by the congregation as the manager of the church building, charged to operate the finances, lease the building, and ensure its upkeep. In 1947, Mollie leased the church building to a Mrs. Ella Ross, with a provision that after two years, Ross would be allowed to purchase the building if she desired. Late in 1948, Mollie appointed her sisters Belle and Mellissa McDonald as trustees so they could sign the deed in sale to Mrs. Ross. Nine months after the sale was final, members of the St. John's congregation sued the McDonald sisters for the unlawful sale of the building and charged them with fraud. The lower court in Gallatin County upheld the sale as legal, saying that sisters acted within their roles as trustees of the church to sell. The ruling was appealed by the congregation to the Montana Supreme Court, which heard the case in December of 1949. The ruling of the lower court was eventually overturned, stating that the duties given to the trustees only allowed the sisters to operate the leasing and upkeep of the church building, but to sell was not within their power, and would have need to be brought before the congregation first, which they did not. The deed was taken from Mrs. Ross, but no other actions were taken against the sisters. ¹⁴

By no means were the public and civil lives of the McDonald sisters defined by this legal dispute. The women all were very active in the Montana State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. ¹⁵ The MSFCWC, worked to promote education, the family, and the

⁷ "Marriage Certificate for Charles Ward and Mollie McDonald," March 9,1900. Accessed online at ancestry.com

⁸ U.S. Census, 1910, (Bozeman Ward 4, Gallatin, Montana; Roll: T624_832; Page: 15A; Enumeration District: 0140; FHL microfilm: 1374845).

⁹ Billings Gazette, (Billings, Montana, February 10, 1919.) Chronicling America. Accessed online at http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.

¹⁰ "Marriage Certificate for Richard Fisher and Belle Ward," August 15, 1925. Accessed online at ancestry.com

¹¹ U.S. Census, 1910, (Helena, Lewis and Clark, Montana; Roll: T624_833; Page: 7A; Enumeration District: 0153; FHL microfilm: 1374846).

¹² U.S. Census, 1920, (Bozeman Ward 4, Gallatin, Montana; Roll: T625_970; Page: 4A; Enumeration District: 75; Image: 1030).

¹³ Gail Schontzler, "McDonald House Hold History of Freed Slaves Who Helped Settle Bozeman," *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, *February 13*, 2011.

¹⁴ Montana Supreme Court, Smith v St. John's Baptist Church, Dec 1949. Accessed online at https://casetext.com/case/smith-v-st-john-bap-church.

¹⁵ Billings Gazette, (Billings, Montana, July 2, 1930.) Chronicling America. Accessed online at http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.

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general enhancement of black women in the home and the community. This state-wide organization had a significant impact on the lives of African Americans in Montana, as they fought to quell prejudice in the community, pushed for civil rights legislation in the Capitol, and helped dozens of black students pay for college. In this way, the McDonald women would have stayed connected with Montana's numerous black women who all helped guide and lead their respective communities. The club itself was organized by Armeta Duncan of Butte, who likely would have known both Mollie and Belle Ward Fisher very well from their time in the mining city. The clubs members came from cities like Great Falls, Anaconda, Billings, Bozeman, as well as several others, and in many ways the women of the MSFCWC were the backbone of Montana's African American community as a whole.

The year after the St. John's Church case, Belle McDonald took sick and died in 1950, at the age of 75. She never married and lived her entire life in the house her father built. Eight years later, in 1958, Mollie passed away at the age 85. Like her mother, Mollie had most likely lived in the Gallatin Valley longer than any other resident at the time. However, this mantel would not remain hers, as Mellissa, the youngest of the McDonald girls, passed away in 1967 around the age of 90, and had spent her entire life at South Tracy. Mollie's daughter Belle Fisher, now 60, lived at the family home alone. She spent the remainder of her life in the Bozeman community. When Belle passed away on February 9, 2000, at the age of 92, she gifted her house to her lifelong friends Robert and Joanna Nute, marking the first time that a McDonald family member did not live at 308 South Tracy, 128 years since its construction. ¹⁶

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¹⁶ Gail Schontzler, "McDonald House Hold History of Freed Slaves Who Helped Settle Bozeman," *Bozeman Daily Chronicle, February 13, 2011.*

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Information Sources/Bibliography

Ancestry.com. Searches for Richard McDonald, Mary McDonald, Mollie McDonald, Charles Ward, Richard Fisher. Results included: Marriage Certificate for Charles Ward and Mollie McDonald, 3-9-1900; Marriage Certificate for Richard Fisher and Belle Ward, 8-15-25; U.S. Census, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 and 1940. Accessed online at www.ancestry.com.

Chroniclingamerica.loc.gov. Access to Historic Newspapers included: *The Bozeman Daily Chronicle and The Billings Gazette*. Accessed online at www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.

Schontzler, Gail. "McDonald House Hold History of Freed Slaves Who Helped Settle Bozeman." *Bozeman Daily Chronicle. February* 13, 2011.

Smith v St. John's Baptist Church. Montana Supreme Court. Dec 1949. Accessed online at https://casetext.com/case/smith-v-st-john-bap-church.

Strahn, B. Derek. *Samuel Lewis House NR nomination form* On file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office. December 1999, Section 8, 1-5.

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Statement of Significance

The McDonald House at 308 South Tracy, while already listed as a contributing building to Bozeman's Black addition for its age and connection the early housing boom of the 1870s and 1880s in the Gallatin Valley, gains further significance for its pivotal role in the early history of some of Montana's very first African American settlers. Not only is it one of the oldest standing homes in Bozeman, but 308 S Tracy is also believed to be the first two story residence built in the Gallatin Valley. The National I-Style architectural design was prevalent throughout the south and made its way to Montana via settlers like Richard and Mary McDonald. In addition to this, the McDonald family became heavily involved in the social atmosphere of Montana's early black community. The McDonald children and grandchildren were pinnacles of the black community in Bozeman for over 128 years, the entire time of which they spent at their family home on South Tracy Ave.

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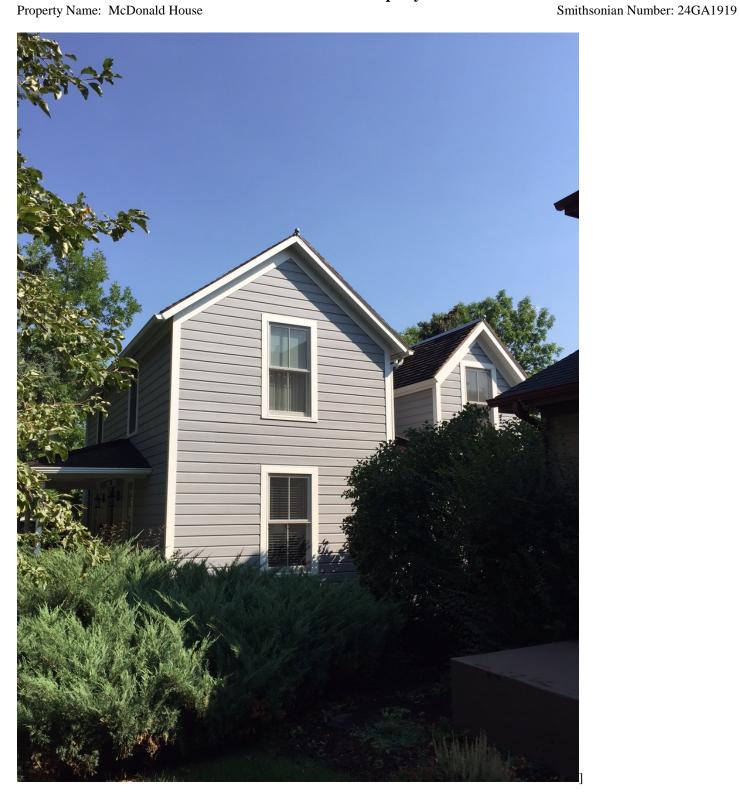
Integrity (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, association)

The McDonald House retains the original I-Style National architectural design first built by Richard McDonald in 1872. This design is especially apparent from the front (west) façade. A kitchen addition off the rear of the house was quickly added by the 1920s, well within the period of significance. However, the integrity of the house has been slightly diminished by the addition of a side-gable bay and dormer, protruding from either side of the kitchen extension. It is unclear when these were added, although it is also entirely possible that the additions took place during the time the McDonalds still resided there. New siding has also been added, though it conforms to the feel of the original design in style and materials. The location, setting, feeling, and association all retain high levels of integrity. The surrounding neighborhood is largely composed of houses that are of significant age, though none are as old, as 308 S Tracy was among the very first residences in the neighborhood.

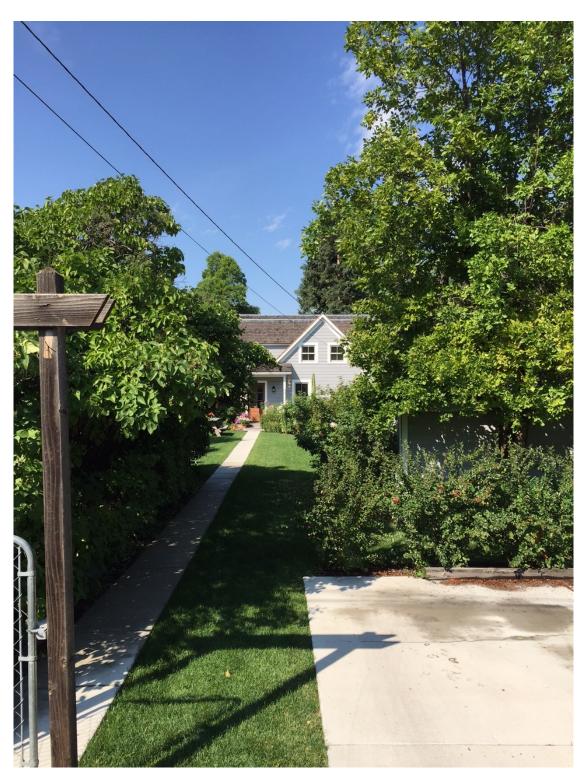
Photographs



McDonald House View of West Façade and partial north elevation, facing southeast Photo taken 8/30/15, by Crystal Alegria



McDonald House View of south elevation, facing northeast Photo taken 8/30/15, by Crystal Alegria



McDonald House View of east elevation, facing west Photo taken 8/30/15, by Crystal Alegria

Site Map/Aerial Photo



McDonald House 308 South Tracy Ave Bozeman, Mt T02 S R06 E S07



Topographic Map

