

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: **843 8th Ave.**

Historic Address (if applicable): **843 8th Ave.**

City/Town: **Helena**

Site Number: **24LC2446**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Lewis and Clark**

Historic Name: **Dorsey-Blanks Residence**

Original Owner(s): **Richard Hoback and Charles Cannon**

Current Ownership Private Public

Current Property Name:

Owner(s): **Soller, William R and Beck, Marieke M**

Owner Address: **843 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): **9**

Block(s): **604**

Addition: **Hoback and Cannon** Year of Addition: **1881**

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

Historic Use: DOMESTIC/single-family residence

Current Use: DOMESTIC/single-family residence

Construction Date: **c. 1888** Estimated Actual

Original Location Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov

NAD 27 or NAD 83(preferred)

Zone: **12** Easting: **421393.13** Northing: **5159840.34**

Geocode: **05-1888-30-4-03-17-0000**

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: yes no

Criteria: A 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: Dorsey – Blanks Residence

Site Number: 24LC2446

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 843 8th Avenue occupies a rectangular parcel on the south side of 8th Ave and is located on the northeastern quadrant of the block. The main building on the parcel, the building faces north to 8th Ave. The block is bordered by 8th Avenue to the north, East 6th Avenue to the south, North Raleigh Street to the west and North Hoback Street to the east. A gravel alley runs along the north end of the parcel. 8th Avenue runs west to east. A city sidewalk runs parallel to 8th Avenue along the north edge of the parcel. An extended brick sidewalk runs perpendicular to the city sidewalk, and connects it to street parking. The house is centrally located on the rectangular parcel, with a large backyard, and slim sideyards. A wood privacy fence surrounds the backyard which contains a large wood-frame deck at the first story and another above it at the second story. The second story deck wraps around the east side of the addition as well, and a half-wall clad with vertical boards screens its deck from view. A large coniferous tree with a swing provides shade to the southeast corner of the yard. Behind the backyard fence is a large single car garage and concrete slab parking space.

The medium sized, wood-frame building has a gable-front façade, and a large front-gabled extension fills its south (rear) elevation. Originally a one-story extension, a gabled half-story, together with the large second story wood-frame deck, was added during the late twentieth century. Likely added, or at least enlarged, as part of the late twentieth century remodel, large shed dormers appear on both slopes of the original roof, as well as the east slope of the addition. Modern, horizontal wood board siding clads the house, which sits atop a rock wall foundation. The wood cladding is stained burnt umber and the trim is on orangey-tan. White modern vinyl replacement windows stand out on all sides of the exterior. Their sized and proportion indicates that they do not occupy original openings. T-lock asphalt shingles cover the roof, and a large, stuccoed exterior chimney dominates the east (side) elevation's north side. The house features a full-width wood-frame, hip-roofed, open front porch across the north façade.

The north façade's upper half story features a centered, one-by-one sliding window. A wood vent with an arch top is located beneath the roof peak. The porch features six turned spindle supports, and has a simple balustrade railing made of narrow dimensional lumber. The porch is accessed by four wood stairs and sits atop a wood structural frame obscured by decorative lattice. The façade's centered entry contains a 15-light wood-frame door protected by a two-light metal storm. A pair of modern, vinyl-clad, metal-framed, one-over-one single-hung windows appears one either side of the entry.

The west (side) elevation features a side gable roof with a centered, hulking, nearly full-height shed roof dormer above. The dormer contains two evenly-spaced, one-over-one single hung windows. The first story has a pair of one-over-one single-hungs to the north, as well as a large fixed and small fixed window to the south. The east elevation contains a pair of one-over-one single hung sliders on the north side, immediately south of the chimney, and a one-by-one slider to the south side of the main elevation. Above, a centered, nearly-full high shed dormer, with a single one-over-one single hung window off-center to the south, rises from the roof's east slope. Farther south, the extension's east elevation features a pedestrian door protected by a metal storm, and sheltered by the second-story deck above. A shed-dormered entry cut into the addition's east roof slope provides success to the deck from the house's interior.

The south elevation is dominated by the second-story full width deck above the another ground-level open deck. The gable end contains a large three-window unite, featuring a centered, one-light fixed window flanked by one-over-one

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single hungs. The south elevation's first story features an entrance to the west side of the house and a ribbon of three one-over-one single hung windows on the east side. Farther east, a projecting component roofed by the second story deck features a one-by-one sliding window.

Detached One-car Garage

A non-historic (c. 1988) detached one-story, wood-frame garage occupies the parcels' southwest corner. Its northwest corner sports an extension, whose gable ridge extends north from the lowermost run of the main roof's west slope. This extension partially occupies the footprint of a historic garage, and may contain parts of the original building. As it stands, the garage features a one-car bay to the south and a storage area to the north, set beneath a common side-gabled roof. A modern overhead paneled garage door provides entry through the south side of the east elevation. Two evenly-spaced one-light fixed windows illuminate the north side of the interior from the east elevation. Its north elevation contains the gabled extension mentioned above, which houses an entry door. Neither the south nor west elevations contain fenestration. The garage stands atop a concrete-wall foundation and is clad in horizontal wood boards that match the house. The garage door opens to concrete slab parking space and abuts the rear alley.

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History of Property

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HISTORY OF PROPERTY

This property was first platted in 1881 as Lot 9 of Block 604 of the Hoback and Cannon Addition, along the south side of 8th Avenue, west of its intersection with N. Hoback Street. Although tax records indicate the current house was built in 1920, it was actually constructed much earlier. By 1888, when the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company first mapped the neighborhood, the property contained the current 1.5 story frame house. Identified as 843 8th, it was then functionally divided into two components, with the west side serving as a residence and the east side containing a grocery. At the time the property also contained two alley houses, identified as 843 ½ and 845 ½ 8th Avenue. The property was then owned by addition-developers Richard Hoback and Charles Cannon. In 1891, Hoback and Cannon sold Lot 9 to William Fowler. It would remain in the Fowler family for 56 years.

During much of that time, the Fowlers rented out the main building, which continued to serve both residential and commercial purposes into the 20th century. By the late 1890s, it was occupied by members of Helena's African-American community: city directories first listed the Walter and Almira Dorsey family at 843 8th in 1899, when the family lived in one side of the building and operated a grocery in the other.¹ The Dorseys had been in the grocery business for several years—in 1896-1897 they ran a grocery at 114 N. Rodney—and operated their store at 843 8th Avenue for the duration of their occupancy there. Married in Helena in 1891, by 1900 Maryland-born Walter, 33, and Missouri-born Almira (nee Kelly), 38, had two daughters, Carrie, 6, and Lena, 2, and they shared their 843 8th Avenue home with Almira's widowed mother, Missouri-born Annie Kelly, 53. The Dorseys' grocery thrived in subsequent years, and in the spring of 1904 they purchased the vacant lot on the northeast corner of the nearest intersection (ie. 8th and N. Hoback) and began assembling a larger combination dwelling-store building (which became 900 8th/403 N. Hoback) on their new property. They soon moved their home and business, and 1904 was the last year that city directories listed the Dorseys and their grocery at 843 8th Avenue.

By 1910—if not before—the main building at 843 8th was again home to African-American residents. That year, census-takers enumerated the family of William A. and Emma Blanks there. The Blanks had been in the neighborhood for some time—in 1908 they lived at 1309 9th Ave. and in 1904 at 824 11th Ave.—and would live at 843 8th Avenue for several years.² In 1910, the Blanks apparently used the entire building as a residence, for no grocery business was noted at the site. Arkansas-born William, 42, instead worked as a “laborer” performing “odd jobs,” while Virginia-born Emma, 40, did “general housework” for a “private family.” Together they supported their family, which in 1910 included five children: the eldest, 9-year-old Ruth, born in Washington, D.C., and the others—including Elizabeth, 5, Naomi, 3, William Jr., 2, and Luella, 1—born in Montana. The following year William was employed as a janitor, and by 1912 he was working as a laborer at the Federal Building. Exactly how long the Blanks family remained at 843 8th is unclear, but by 1920 they'd moved on: city directories that year listed the family at 506 Leslie.³

The end of the Blanks' occupancy appears to have marked the end of the property's association with Helena's African-American community. The Fowler family continued to own, and presumably rent, the property until 1947, when they conveyed it to Edward C. Naughton. By then, Lot 9 contained only the main (front) house (featuring front and rear porches added between 1892 and 1930) and a relatively modern garage: between 1892 and 1930 both alley houses were

¹ In 1897, the Dorseys were running a grocery at 114 N. Rodney, where they'd been since the previous year. Before that, in 1896, they were living at 122 or 222 Grand and Walter was working as a waiter at the Montana Club.

² In 1900, William A. Blanks lived at 307 Joliet, and then from 1900-1902 at 37 S. Main., during which time he worked as a porter at the Montana Club. In 1900, William was still married to and living with his previous wife, North Carolina-born Alice, with whom he had a daughter, Talethia (b. 1895). That year they also shared their home with a boarder, J.M. Lyon, whom census enumerators listed as “white.”

³ By 1930 they'd moved to Seattle.

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torn down, and the one-car garage built. Naughton owned the property three years before conveying it to A.L. Larson, who in turn owned it for twelve years. During Larson's tenure, a lean-to that had been attached to the garage was removed. In 1962, Larson deeded 843 8th Ave. to A. H. Cooper. Cooper would own it some 25 years, selling it in 1987 to David S. Ames. Five years later it passed to Kathryn Bramer, and in 2000, from Bramer to Max A. Phelps. Phelps owned 843 8th Ave. less than a year before conveying it to Deborah Karon. Current occupant owners, Marieke Beck and William R. Soller, acquired it from Karon in 2006.

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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Helena, City of, Town Plats

1881 Hoback and Cannon Addition

Lewis and Clark, County of. Clerk and Recorder's Office, property title records.

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Statement of Significance

Property Name: Dorsey – Blanks Residence

Site Number: 24LC2446

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: **1899-1904, 1910-ca.1912**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Occupied in 1899-1904 by the Dorsey family and their grocery, the building at 843 8th Avenue is significant under NRHP Criterion A (local level) as a commercial and residential property associated with the history of African-American people in Helena, MT. The building housed black residents, after the Dorseys tenure as well, when it seems to have served exclusively residential purposes. The Dorseys were perhaps Helena's most prominent black family—in large part due to their growing grocery business, which became the most visible and substantial black-owned business in town (the Dorsey Grocery and Residence they operated after 1904 is listed in the NRHP). During the Dorseys' tenure, the combination residence/store at 843 8th became visibly associated with the black community and the black business sector that thrived during the heyday of that community. The building is thus associated with the heyday of Helena's, and Montana's, African-American community, ca. 1875-1910. The property's period of significance is the period during which it was known to be occupied by African-American people and/or their businesses, ie. 1899-1904 and 1910-ca. 1912.

The building at 843 8th represents this significant historic theme 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. The economic activities of the building's residents likewise were representative. William Blanks worked as a laborer and a janitor—prototypical positions for black men, 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. Emma Blanks' labor, too, was typical: many black women worked at arduous jobs to help support their families, and housekeeping for a white family was primary among them.

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Integrity

Property Name: Dorsey – Blanks Residence

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

While very significant, the property no longer retains sufficient integrity to be considered eligible for listing in the National Register. Modern windows, siding, roof features, and additions adversely impact its integrity of design, workmanship, and materials. While its location and setting remain unchanged from the historic period, and its continued use as a residence contributes to its integrity of feeling and association, the profound changes to its appearance render it ineligible.

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Photographs

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Feature #
Facing: SW

Description: North and east elevations

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Photographs

Property Name: Dorsey – Blanks Residence

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Feature #
Facing: SE

Description: North and west elevations

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Photographs

Property Name: Dorsey – Blanks Residence

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Feature #
Facing: NW

Description: South elevation

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Photographs

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Feature #
Facing: NW

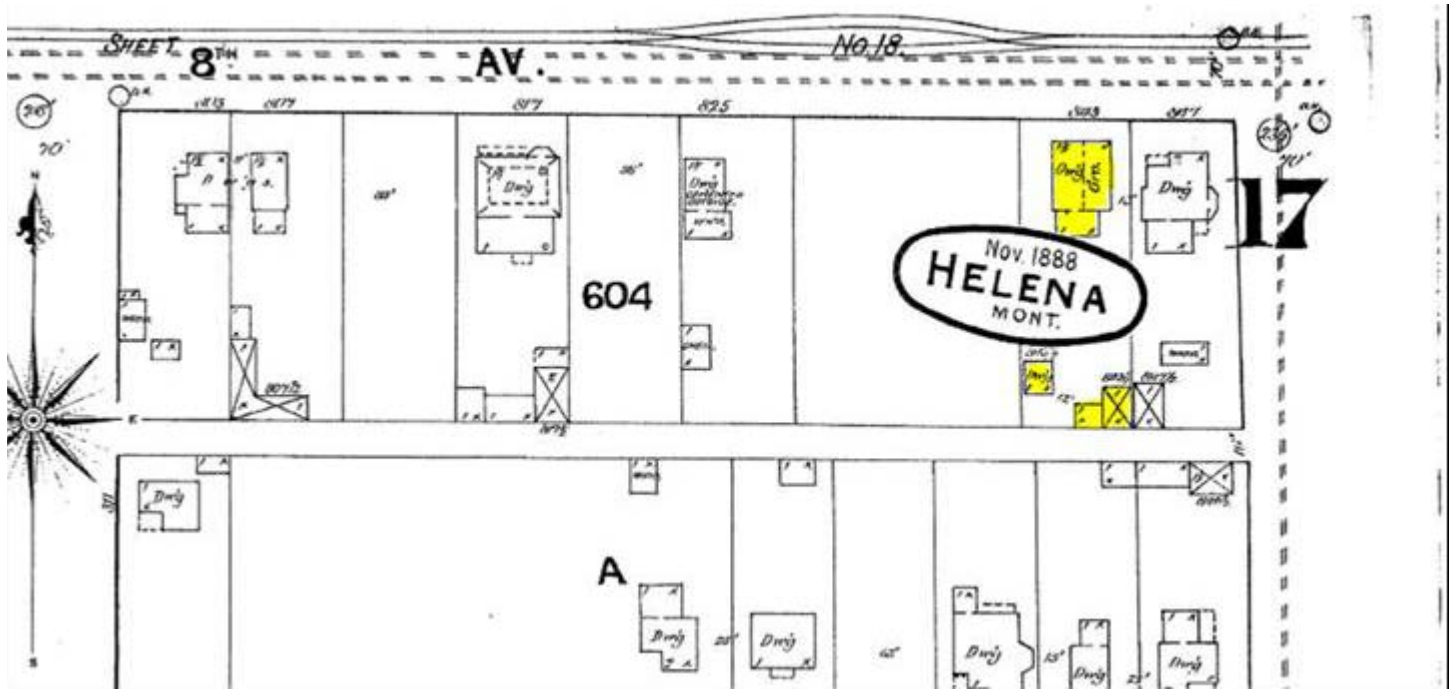
Description: 843 8th, garage, view to NW, south and east elevations

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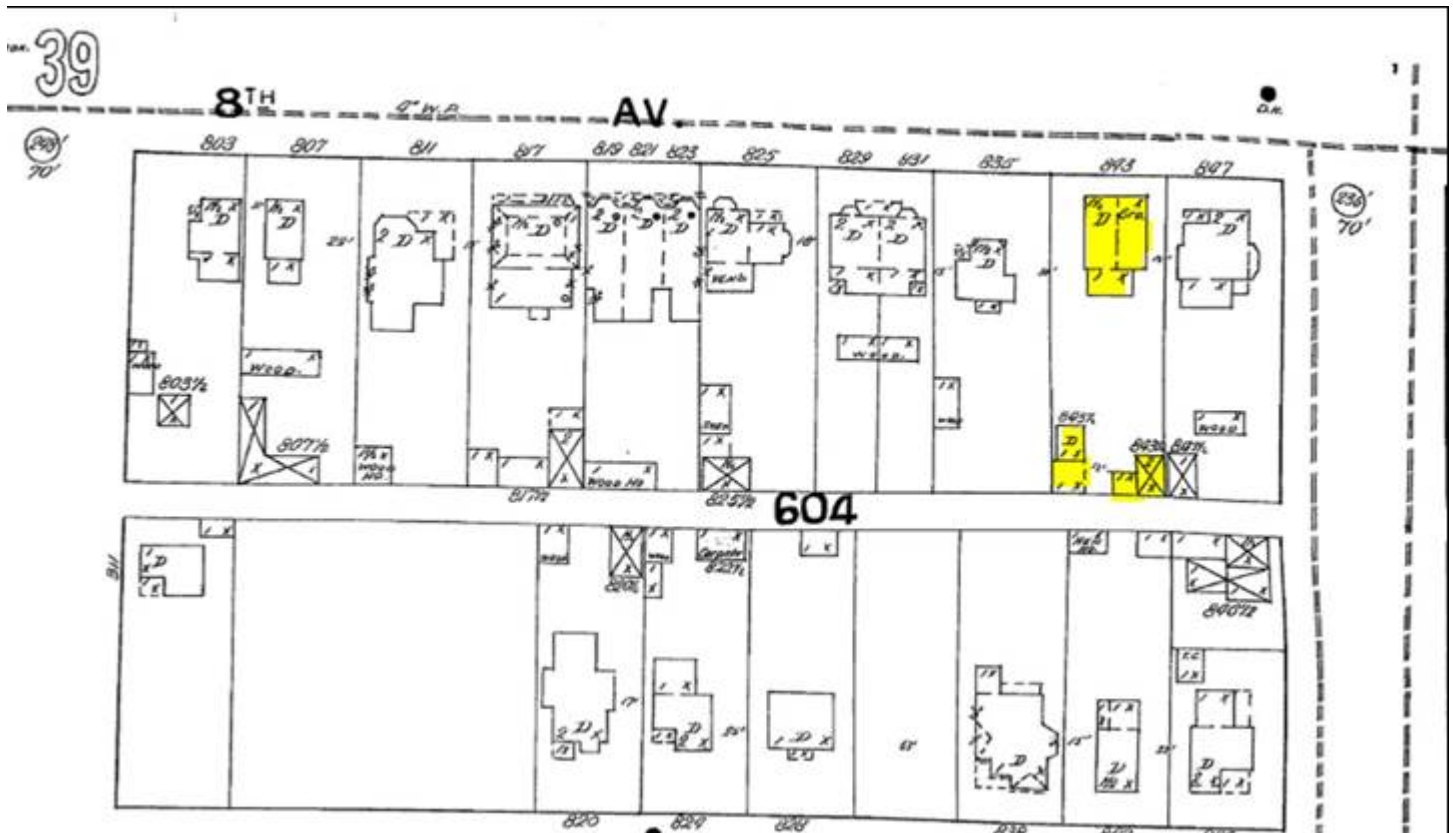
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Sanborn Maps

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Detail of 1888 Sanborn Map, Helena, Sheet 17, highlighting building's at 843 Eighth Avenue.



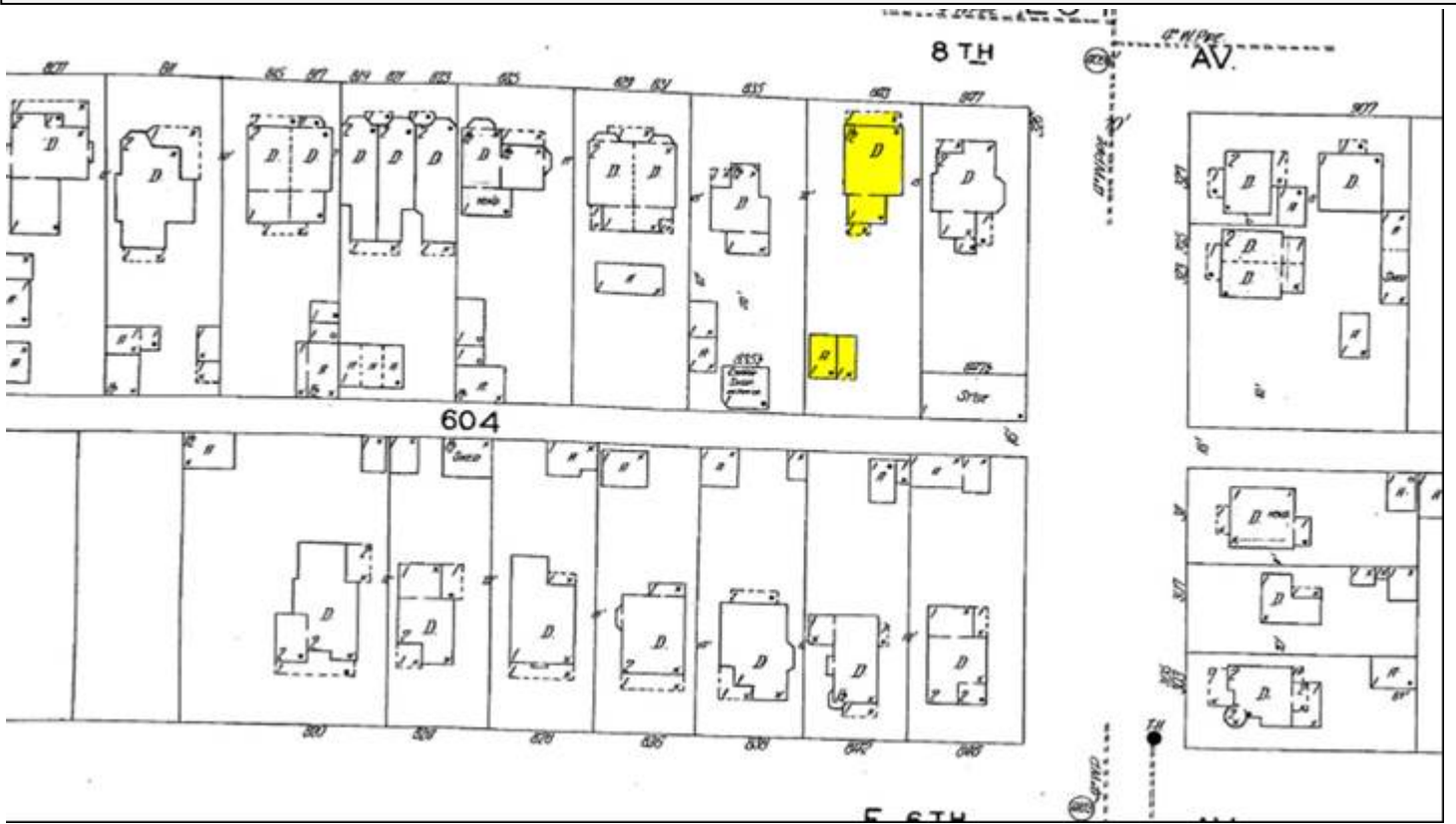
Detail of 1892 Sanborn Map, Helena, Sheet 37, highlighting buildings at 843 Eighth Avenue.

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Sanborn Maps

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Detail of 1930 Sanborn Map, Helena, Sheet 208, highlighting buildings at 843 Eighth Avenue.

Note the presence of an automobile garage roughly in the place where the northwest projection of the modern garage now stands. As seen in the earlier Sanborns as well, a single-story building has occupied this space since 1888.

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Site Map

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843 8th Ave, Helena, MT
Lewis and Clark County
Geocode: 05-1888-30-4-03-17-0000
UTM: Zone 12 / 421393.13 E / 5159840.34 N
Lat: 46.587531 / Long -112.026078
T10N R3W SE ¼ of Sec 30

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Topographic Map

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