

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: **913 Cannon St**

Historic Address (if applicable): **913 Cannon St**

City/Town: **Helena**

Site Number: **24LC2448**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Lewis and Clark**

Historic Name: **Nathanial and Sarah Ford Residence**

Original Owner(s):

Current Ownership Private Public

Current Property Name:

Owner(s): **Strachan, Darcy**

Owner Address: **913 Cannon St., Helena, MT 59601**

Phone:

Legal Location

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

$\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ **NE** $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section: **25**

Lot(s): **10 through 13**

Block(s): **52**

Addition: **Cannon** Year of Addition: **1887**

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

Historic Use: DOMESTIC/single family

Current Use: DOMESTIC/single family

Construction Date: **c. 1901** Estimated Actual

Original Location Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov

NAD 27 or NAD 83(preferred)

Zone: **12** Easting: **419700** Northing: **5161158**

Geocode: 05-1887-25-1-33-13-0000

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: **8/29/2016**

Evaluator: **Kate Hampton**

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

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 2

Architectural Description

Property Name: Nathaniel and Sarah Ford Residence

Site Number: 24LC2448

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 913 Cannon Street occupies a large square parcel on the south side of Cannon Avenue and is centrally located within the block. The block is bordered by Cannon Street to the north, Choteau Street to the south, Lincoln Street to the west, and Garfield Street to the east. A gravel alley runs along the south end of the parcel. Cannon Street runs northwest to southeast. The main building on the parcel, the building faces north to Cannon Street. The building is centrally located within the large parcel with a fenced yard, planted to grass on all sides. A city sidewalk runs along the north edge of the parcel. A concrete slab sidewalk extends from the front sidewalk which runs along Cannon Street, to the front entrance of the house, and is bisected by a front chain-link entrance gate. Although in line with neighboring buildings, 913 Cannon is significantly pushed back from street. The concrete pathway then extends around the eastern portion of the house to the backyard. The north façade contains an off-street perpendicular, gravel parking spot, while the chain-link fence features two large gates for driveway access to the garage. The southwestern corner of the parcel contains a detached one-car garage and the rear of the house contains a large wood patio. A mature juniper tree is located on the northwest corner of the property, as well as a large coniferous evergreen on the northeast corner of the property. Deciduous shrubs line the northeast corner of the property as well, providing privacy. The rear of the house features mature coniferous trees scattered around the south boundary, as well as three large, circular planters made from scaled concrete block. The planters are located in the southwest corner of the property.

The medium sized, wood-frame, two-story building has a north-south oriented rectangular footprint and features an intersecting hipped roof covered with architectural asphalt composition shingles. A circular metal chimney attached to the north side of the west elevation extends from the bottom floor to the top of the building. A large hipped dormer breaks the east slope's plane off-center to the south. The building rests on a concrete wall foundation. Because the lot slopes down to the north, the foundation wall stands approximately three feet above grade at the north elevation, but only half that height at the south elevation. Stucco covers the exterior walls, and a slightly projecting stuccoed band wraps around the house between the first and second stories. The north entrance wall features an enclosed sun porch within the ell formed by the cross-hipped, roughly L-shaped footprint. A large, ground-level, wood-framed deck dominates the back yard. Unless otherwise noted, the windows throughout the house are original one-over-one double-hung style.

North (front) elevation:

The enclosed front porch, set within the ell and sheltered by a hipped roof that extends from the main side-hipped roof slope, dominates the façade (north wall) of the house. Vertical bead board siding clads the porches' half-walls, frieze, and framed entry. A ribbon of three, one-over-one fixed storm windows fills the upper half of the porch's east side. An entrance located on the west side of the porch contains a (non-historic) metal, two-light storm door. Fixed single-light windows appear high on the walls on either side the door. Wrought iron railings stand on either side of the flight of five concrete steps that lead the entry. A knee-braced, front-gable, boxed awning shelters and highlights the entry. The two-story hipped cross-bay dominates the west side of the house's north elevation. It contains a pair of windows centered in both the first and second stories. A small, fixed, one-light window illuminates the basement from the center of the hipped bay.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 3

Architectural Description

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West (side) elevation:

Fenestration on the west wall includes a pair of windows centered on the south side of the second story and a large, hipped, tri-part bay window projecting from the south side's first story. A metal-framed storm protects each of the single windows centered in the projection's three sides.

East (side) elevation:

The east wall is broken into three components, from north to south: the front porch; the main, central, two-story bay; and a small, one-story, shed-roofed rear extension that projects south, located off-center to the east of the south elevation. The porch's east elevation contains a pair of one-over-one storms between the beadboard half wall and frieze. The main bay displays several window openings: a pair of windows in the second story, centered within the south-side hipped dormer; a single window to the north side set between the first and second stories; a tall, narrow, one-light casement set in the first story's north side; and a larger, nearly square, one-light, -fixed window set in the first story's south side. A single one-light awning punctuates the foundation wall off center to the south. The rear (south) extension's east elevation contains a centered entry filled with a modern, pressed metal, one-light over one x-braced-panel storm. A single small, four-light fixed window appears to the north side of the door.

South (rear) elevation:

The south elevation contains three components, including the cross-hipped bay to the west, the east bay set beneath the main east-west-ridged hip, and the small one-story extension projecting from the east bay's first story. The east and west bays share the same wall plane, and the west bay's south roof slope ends at a height greater than that of the east bay. The west bay first story contains a pair of modern, centered, fully-glazed, one-light patio doors. A single modern, metal-clad, one-light door appears centered low in the west bay's second story. Despite the door's functionality, there is no exterior second story deck or balcony for the door to access. A small original window sits east of the door. The south elevation's east bay contains only the first-story's centered, shed-roofed extension. This extension contains a single, large, one-light fixed window off center to the east. As mentioned above, a large ground-level deck extends from across south elevation. This wood-framed, irregularly shaped deck features a wide milled lumber floor and a partially completed dimensional lumber railing.

Garage:

A detached one-story, front-gable, stuccoed, wood-frame garage is located in the parcel's southwest corner. Constructed c. 1980, it stands atop a concrete wall foundation. Asphalt architectural shingles cover the roof, which features a shallow shed roof extension across its south elevation. Three large multi-paneled doors fill the north elevation, including a single door side-hinged to the east side of the frame, and two doors to the west, hinged together so that they open accordion style. Two one-light, fixed, wood-frame windows appear evenly-spaced across both the east and west elevations. A tall privacy fence made of horizontally-placed logs set in rectangular frames blocks the south elevation from view.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 4
History of Property

Property Name: Nathaniel and Sarah Ford Residence

Site Number: 24LC2448

HISTORY OF PROPERTY

This property was first platted in 1887 as Lots 10 through 13 of Block 52 of the Cannon Addition, along the southwest side of Cannon Street, northwest of its intersection with Garfield Street. Lots in the Cannon Addition sold slowly. In 1888, Emmeline Greene bought Lots 11 and 12 from C.W. Cannon and his wife Catherine and two years later Greene purchased Lot 10 from the Cannons. Seven years later Greene deeded Lots 11 and 12, at least, to Abby Wheelwright, who in turn conveyed the property to H.B. Palmer in 1901. Palmer immediately passed it to Nathaniel Ford, whose family would own and occupy it for the next 55 years.

Whether the Ford family built the extant dwelling or acquired it with the property is unclear: by 1930 when the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company first mapped the area, the lot contained the current house, identified as 913 Cannon. The two-story house and several outbuildings (including garage) stood in what was then a sparsely populated section of the city: numerous nearby blocks contained no houses whatsoever, and the relatively-developed 900 Block of Cannon counted only five. Also unclear is where the Ford family lived before acquiring their Cannon Street property. In 1900, census officials enumerated Nathaniel Ford, along with his wife Sarah and children Arthur and Charlotte, at the Harrison Avenue home of Nathan's employer, the Euro-American family of U.S. Senator Thomas C. Powers. City directories from the late 1890s indicate only that Ford worked for Powers at 604 Harrison as a "coachman."

Originally from the Maryland/Washington D.C. area, the Ford family had moved into their new home by 1902. Like many in Helena's African-American community, they maintained their home and family by working a variety of jobs and supplementing their household income by taking in boarders. Nathan remained with the Powers family for decades—and was an heir to Thomas Powers' ca. 1949 estate—and Sarah worked at least some of that time as a laundress, as she did in 1910. Son Arthur contributed to the family economy as well: in 1917, as a 25-year-old, he could be found working as a chauffeur for J.H. Longward. According to city directories, boarders in the Ford family home over the years included 36-year-old Roe Merrill (1910), a Texan who worked as a "houseman" for a Helena family, and Wesley Cottles (1935), a porter. Both of these men were of African-American descent.

Nathan and Sarah lived at 913 Cannon until they died, he in 1953 and she in 1955, and their children sold the property (which since at least 1940 also included Lots 10 and 13) to close family friends, and fellow longtime black Helena residents, Cornelius and Mildred Harrell in 1956. The Harrells owned it for the next 22 years, conveying it in 1978 to Ellen and Edward Herzog. After six years, during which they built a garage, the Herzogs sold to Donald and Beverly Opitz. They owned it for less than a year, selling it in 1985 to Randy and Marla Miller. The Millers would keep the property for some sixteen years, conveying it in 2001 to Corey and Holly Albright. The current owner and occupant, Darcy Strachan, bought 913 Cannon from the Albrights in 2013. Sanborn Maps indicate that the building footprints did not change between 1930 and 1958.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 5

Information Sources/Bibliography

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Site Number: 24LC2448

INFORMATION SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

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MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 6

Statement of Significance

Property Name: Nathaniel and Sarah Ford Residence

Site Number: 24LC2448

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: **1901-1966**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Purchased, and possibly constructed, in 1902 by Nathaniel and Sarah Ford, a black couple for the Maryland/Washington D.C. area, the Ford-Harrell house is significant under NRHP Criterion A (local level) as a residential property associated with the history of African-American people in Helena, MT. It was successively owned and occupied by two African-American families—that of the Fords and that of Cornelius and Mildred Harrell—for over 75 years. In that time it housed numerous members of Helena’s black community, including lodgers in addition to its locally prominent owner-occupants. Longtime Helena resident Nathaniel Ford was a leader in the Helena black community, and the family lived in their 913 Cannon home for over 50 years, during both the impressive peak and subsequent decline of the local African-American population. Ford served various leadership roles, including, for instance, he served, for instance, as a member of one of Helena’s two “colored” Masonic lodges (1907); a MT delegate, appointed by Governor Edwin Norris, “to attend the National [Negro] Educational convention” in Denver (1911), and honorary pallbearer at the funeral of Miles York (1925), among other things. He also was well known in the white community, intimately associated for decades with U.S. Senator T.C. Powers, for whom he worked as a coachman.¹ After the Fords died in the 1950s, their heirs conveyed the home to close family friends, and fellow stalwart members of Helena’s black community, the Harrells (who previously lived in Cornelius’ family’s N. Ewing St. home, Site No.24LC2452). The Ford-Harrell 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. 1902-1966 (ie. 50 years ago).

The Ford-Harrell house represents these significant historic themes in a number of specific ways. Although black households clustered in several neighborhoods, Helena, like other western cities, did not suffer the strict residential segregation that was common in other regions, and black households could be found in areas across the city, like Cannon Street. The economic activities of the Ford-Harrell house residents likewise were representative of the larger black community. Like many African-American families in Helena, the home’s owners took in boarders to help make ends meet and provide lodging to other local black people. And although the status of Nathaniel Ford’s longtime employer was exceptional, his occupation (like that of other men who resided in the house, working as coachmen, porters, and housemen) was not—these were prototypical positions for black men, who in this period were oft-confined by structural racism to low-status, low-waged work. Sarah Ford’s labor, too, was typical: many black women worked at arduous jobs to help support their families, and doing laundry was primary among them. Nathaniel Ford’s political activities were also representative of black Helena. Paradoxically, the black population that made a living in service positions for white employers 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.

¹ Son Arthur Ford would go on to make history when he became president of New York City’s Department of Water Supply, Gas & Electricity, and the “first black person appointed a commissioner of a New York City agency.”

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 7
Integrity

Property Name: Nathaniel and Sarah Ford Residence

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

While the house likely sported horizontal wood cladding during the historic period, and the east (side) elevation presents a non-historic fenestration pattern across its first story, the house retains sufficient integrity of design, workmanship, and materials to convey its historic associations. Standing in its original location, and displaying its original footprint, in its historic setting, the house remains a single-family residence, contributing to its integrity of feeling and association. The house stands eligible for individual listing in the National Register.

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 8
Photographs

Property Name: Nathaniel and Sarah Ford Residence

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Feature #
Facing: SW

Description:

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 9
Photographs

Property Name: Nathaniel and Sarah Ford Residence

Site Number: 24LC2448



Feature #
Facing: S

Description:

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 10
Photographs

Property Name: Nathaniel and Sarah Ford Residence

Site Number: 24LC2448



Feature #
Facing: N

Description:

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 11
Site Map

Property Name: Nathaniel and Sarah Ford Residence

Site Number: 24LC2448

SITE MAP - MT HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD FORM



PROPERTY:

913 Cannon St
Lewis and Clark County
Helena, Montana
GeoCode:
05-1887-25-1-33-13-0000
LAT 46.599171
LON -112.048397

LEGEND:



Site

NAD_1983_StatePlane
Montana_FIPS_2500 meters
Scale: 1:400



1111 E. Broadway | Missoula, MT 59802
www.wgmgroup.com

Proj Mgr: D. Hagen MOJ 20.313Cannon
Drawn by: SML Date: 1/13/2016
Proj: 15-06-04 Aerial: 2013 ES90

Disclaimer: This map is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as such. This map is a graphic representation. WGM Group does not guarantee the accuracy, current status, or completeness of the material contained herein and is not responsible for any misuse or misrepresentation of the information or its derivatives.

MONTANA COUNTIES



MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

PAGE 12
Topographic Map

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