

# MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

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

Property Address: **817 Wolf Avenue**  
Historic Address (if applicable):

City/Town: **Missoula**

Site Number: **24MO1681**  
(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Missoula**

Historic Name: **Dorsey House**

Original Owner(s): **Anna Singer**

Current Ownership  Private  Public

Current Property Name:

Owner(s): **Melissa Bangs**  
Owner Address: **817 Wolf Avenue**  
**Missoula, Mt, 59802**

Phone:

Legal Location

PM: **Montana** Township: **13N** Range: **19W**

$\frac{1}{4}$   $\frac{1}{4}$  **SW**  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section: **15**

Lot(s): **Frac of 18-20**  
Block(s): **99**

Addition: **Urlin** Year of Addition:

USGS Quad Name: Year:

Historic Use: **Domestic**

Current Use: **Domestic**

Construction Date: **1915**  Estimated  Actual

Original Location  Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference [www.nris.mt.gov](http://www.nris.mt.gov)

NAD 27 or  NAD 83(preferred)

Zone: **12** Easting: **271619** Northing: **5031803**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District: **Northside Missoula Railroad HD**  
**(noncontributing)**

NRHP Eligible:  Yes  No

Date of this document: **8/1/2015**

Form Prepared by: **Anthony Wood**

Address: **1410 8<sup>th</sup> 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."

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

merge pages with this form

SUBJECT	PAGE
ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION	3
HISTORY OF PROPERTY	5
INFORMATION SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY	7
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE	8
INTEGRITY (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, association)	9
CURRENT PHOTOS (building exterior and key interior spaces)	10
SITE PLAN	11
USGS 7.5 MINUTE TOPO MAP	12

### 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: **African American History** Period of Significance: **1915-1945**

# Montana Historic Property Record Form

Property Name: Dorsey House

Smithsonian Number: 24MO1681

Architectural Style: **Other** 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 Dorsey house at 817 Wolf Avenue sits on fractions of lots 18, 19, and 20 of block 99 in Missoula's Umlin addition, within the Northside Missoula Railroad Historic District. The triangular block is bounded by Wolf Ave to the southeast, North Second St. West to the northeast, and Worden Ave to the west. 817 Wolf Ave occupies the southern corner of block 99, at the intersection of Wolf and Worden. The Great Northern Railroad line runs just south of the property, across from the intersection of Wolf and Worden. Directly across Wolf Ave from the property is a triangular lot occupied by several mobile homes. Directly adjacent to the property to the northeast, across the alley, stands 823 Wolf Ave, a two-story, concrete block apartment building built in 1930 that contributes to the Historic District.

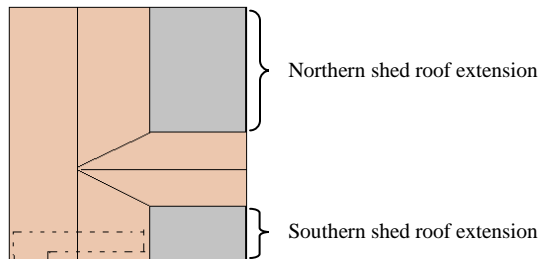
The home at 817 Wolf Ave sits on the northeast end of the property. The southern end of the triangular lots features a large grass lawn with several trees and bushes, enclosed by a horizontal wood board fence. A gate located on the southwest side of the fence, opens to sidewalk. The fence terminates at the southwest corner of the house. The northwest section of fence runs parallel to the sidewalk from the intersection of Wolf and Worden, to the rear of the house. The fence ends at the rear of the house, where a wire fence runs perpendicular from the end of the wood fence to the rear, southern corner of the house, enclosing the triangular yard. The rear yard of the home lies between the fence, Worden Ave, and the alley to the north. It features a small grey, vertical sided shed, facing south, and several large bushes. The alley runs directly adjacent to the northwest elevation of the house.



817 Wolf Ave  
Missoula, MT

### *Introduction*

The house at 817 Wolf Avenue is rectangular single-story, cross-gable structure. The gable front peak runs the length of the house, with the cross gable extending from near the center to the northeast. Either side of the cross gable features a shed roof extending from just above the eaves of the main gable, enclosing the both sides of the Tee, making the house generally rectangular in shape. The walls appear to be plaster stucco, and sit upon a concrete wall foundation. An open front porch sits beneath the gable front, ending at the northwest section of the house which sits below the shed roof extension. The main cross gable roof as well as both shed roof extensions are covered by asphalt shingles.



### *Southeast Façade*

The southeast façade of the building is composed of two distinct sections. The southern side of the façade features the gable front with an open porch set within the façade. The porch features a half wall running from a porch support beam at the southwest corner of the building to the northern section of the façade, breaking only for an opening on the southern side, which gives access to the porch. A single stone step rises to this porch opening, matching the decorative stone work of the porch floor. Within the porch enclosure, two, side by side, one-over-one double-hung windows sit directly below the gable front. Directly to the southern side of the windows, a

## Montana Historic Property Record Form

Property Name: Dorsey House

Smithsonian Number: 24MO1681

wooden door sits in line with the porch's half wall opening. The stucco plaster walls extend above the porch enclosure to the gable. A single metal air vent sits within the gable peak. The northern section of the southeast façade contains the shed roof extension which is contained within the cross gable and the gable front. The center of the northern side of the façade features a one by one slider window. The frames of this window, as well as those within the porch enclosure, are not original to the building and appear to be plastic. Brick-red colored trim is featured around all windows on the façade. The stucco plaster wall of the northern section is identical to that of the southern section. The façade's northern and southern sections are continuous with no breaks or ridges in the exterior wall, but are clearly distinguishable by the intersecting of the gable front slope and the shed roof.

### *Southwest Elevation*

The southwest elevation of the house faces the large triangular side yard. It features two windows on the western end of the elevation, a double glass door at the center that opens to a raised platform deck extending into the yard, and the southwest end of the front porch on the far eastern side of the elevation. Both windows feature plastic window surrounds with brick-red colored trim. The square window opening farthest to the west of the elevation features a one-by-one slider window. The next window opening, between the west window and the glass door, is similar to the first window, except being rectangular in shape and horizontal in orientation. Just east of center of the elevation, the double glass sliding door opens to a raised platform deck. The area around the door is covered with vertical board siding, suggesting that the door opening is a more recent addition. The southwest side of the front porch sits at the eastern end of the elevation. Throughout the entire elevation, except around the glass sliding door, the stucco plaster exterior walls extend from foundation and terminate beneath the eaves.

### *Northeast Elevation*

The Northeast elevation of the house faces the side alley running between Wolf Ave and Worden Ave. It features the cross gable end to the east of center of the elevation, with the shed extensions contained between the gables on either side. The east end of the elevation, or the side nearest the front façade, contains a single one-by-one slider window in the center of the shed extension section. To the west, the cross gable section of the elevation features a single one-over-one double-hung pane window fixture directly below the gable peak, which also contains a metal air vent. The western half of the elevation, extending from the cross gable end to the northwest corner of the building, features two windows. The eastern of the two, appears to be a one-over-one double-hung window similar in size and shape to the window within the cross gable end just to the east. The western-most window on the elevation appears to be a one-by-one slider window, and is set near the center of the shed extension section nearest the rear of the structure. All windows on the elevation feature white plastic surrounds, and red-brick colored trimming. The stucco plaster walls, identical to the rest of the building, extend from the foundation, and terminate beneath the eaves of the shed extension roof to either side of the cross gable. The shingles of the shed roofs appear to be black asphalt shingles, opposed to the red colored shingles featured on the front and cross gable sections of the roof.

### *Rear Elevation*

The rear elevation of the 817 Wolf Ave features the rear gable end on the southern side of the elevation, and the rear shed extension section to the north. The shed extension section contains a larger, rectangular, single-light fixed pane window at the center. The rear gable end features a wood, rear door, opening to what appears to be a small, concrete stoop. The door is set on the northern side of the rear gable section, nearer the center of the elevation. To the south of the door, the rear gable section features a larger, single-light, fixed pane window. Both windows on the rear of the building feature white window surrounds, which appear to be made of wood. The wood surrounds of the rear door are painted a brick-red color, matching the window trimmings of the front and side elevations of the house. A small metal air vent sits within the gable peak. The stucco plaster exterior walls are identical to the rest of the structure in color and style.

## Montana Historic Property Record Form

Property Name: Dorsey House

Smithsonian Number: 24MO1681

### History of the Property

#### *Original Property, 1894-1915*

*(From July 1993 Dorsey House Historical and Architectural Inventory Form, prepared by the Missoula Historical Preservation Office)*

“The original property went through a number of owners including A.J. Urlin, Thomas McGregor (1894) and Levi Keim. Keim was a miner, stage station operator (Bearmouth), volunteer soldier against Chief Joseph, and farmer. He arrived in the Missoula Valley in 1877. His son, Frank, was a newspaper man, serving as editor of the *Daily Item*, a competitor of the *Weekly Missoulian* in 1888. Levi Keim also had interest in the Stensrud Building at 341 North 1<sup>st</sup> street West. By 1896, there was a structure on this property which Keim sold to the 7<sup>th</sup> day Adventist Church. Ten years later the property was sold to Anna M. Singer. The building used for the church disappeared between 1912 and 1921. Mrs. Singer sold the land to the City in 1928 for \$100. The present house must date back to 1915 as that is when Solomon Dorsey and his family began living there.”<sup>1</sup>

#### *Ephram Dorsey and Missoula's Northside*

*(From the Northside Missoula Railroad HD Nomination form, section 8, pages 6, 7. Prepared for the National Register of Historic Places)*

“The Northside District is unique in its social context in that it historically acted as a haven for minorities such as the Chinese, the Japanese and African-Americans. Many of the latter had come to Missoula as part of the "Buffalo Soldiers" brigade stationed at Fort Missoula. Perhaps the most significant of these soldiers and Northside residents was Ephram Dorsey. After his marriage in 1885, Ephram joined the army and was assigned to the 25th Infantry Regiment, Company H. He reenlisted at Fort Snelling, Minnesota September 6, 1887, and by the time of his second discharge, he was stationed at Fort Missoula as a musician. He resigned from the service August 6, 1894 in order to take up a trade of shoe-maker. Ephram also participated in the intervention of labor strikes with Federal forces. In 1892, Dorsey and his comrades travelled over to the Coeur d'Alene mining district to arrest striking union men who were battling non-union and company detectives. For a time, the black soldiers took up camp along the Northern Pacific tracks in Missoula.

By 1900, Ephram Dorsey had retired from the army to take up residence at 229 North Second Street West in Missoula, where he also worked as an upholsterer. The Dorseys were a part of a small black enclave, numbering 15, that existed in Missoula at that time. Ephram and Laura were the only married couple. They took in two single black borders named Jim Whealand and John Haines. Both were day laborers in their twenties. Susana Millers, a widow with four children, lived at 205 North Second Street East. The occupations of the remaining nine men counted in the 1900 census included day laborers, dishwashers, porters, farmers and two barbers. It is not known how many of these men had been soldiers at the fort before entering the civilian work force. Nevertheless, the Fort Missoula connection was strong within Missoula's Northside. Alexander Pillow, the post quartermaster who was stationed at the fort from 1894 to 1902 retired in Missoula where he spent the rest of his life. He worked as a yardman for the Northern Pacific Railroad. One of Ephram's comrades, Samuel Lundy, company H, retired from the service and took up residence next to the Dorseys at 231 North Second Street West. Samuel was married and like the Dorsey's, he and his family were Catholics. He became a porter and lived the rest of his life in Missoula. Another ex-soldier, Benjamin Johnson, worked as a laborer and lived in the rear of the Miller's house at 225 North Second Street East.”<sup>2</sup>

#### *Solomon T. Dorsey*

Ephram's brother, Solomon came to Missoula about 1905<sup>3</sup>. Born around 1870 (1868), it is unclear where Solomon lived and worked for the first 35 years of his life, though it appears that he too fought in the Indian Wars of the 1890s<sup>4</sup>. Presumably, Solomon came out to Missoula to work for his brother's carpet cleaning and tailoring businesses. Solomon and his wife Sadie lived in a number houses located downtown and in Missoula's Northside neighborhood. More interestingly, it appears that Solomon's personal life was at the very least, complicated. Sometime prior to the 1910 census, Solomon married a white woman, Sadie C. (maiden name unknown), the

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<sup>1</sup> Missoula Historical Preservation Office, “Dorsey House Historical and Architectural Inventory Form,” on file at Montana State Historic Preservation Office, July, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Allan Matthews, “Northside Missoula Railroad HD Nomination form” on file at Montana State Historic Preservation Office, August 1994, section 8, pages 6, 7.

<sup>3</sup> R.L. Polk & Co, Polk's 1905 Missoula (Missoula County, Mont.) City Director, 87.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census, 1910, (Missoula, Missoula, Montana; Roll: T624\_834; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 0071; FHL microfilm: 1374847) Accessed online at ancestry.com.

## Montana Historic Property Record Form

Property Name: Dorsey House

Smithsonian Number: 24MO1681

daughter of Irish immigrants<sup>5</sup>. Sadly, Montana passed strict anti-miscegenation laws in 1909. These laws would have rendered the Dorsey's married null, and highly illegal, presenting the threat of fines and jail time. While there is no clear record that suggests legality played a part in their divorce, Solomon and Sadie were separated soon after the spring of 1910. To further complicate matters, Solomon was married again just months later, in June of 1910, to a young black-Spanish woman named Jamesie<sup>6</sup>. In 1915, Solomon and Jamesie built a small home at 817 Wolf Avenue, a few blocks northwest of Missoula's black enclave<sup>7</sup>. The Dorseys rented the land and home from Anna Singer until 1928, at which point she sold the lot to the city, which then sold it to the Dorseys<sup>8</sup>. Missoula city directories show that Solomon worked for his brother Ephram for some time before becoming a janitor for many shops, hotels, and businesses across Missoula<sup>9</sup>. He would work until his death at the age of 69, on May 4, 1937<sup>10</sup>. Jamesie would continue to live at Wolf Avenue for five more years until she passed away in 1942, at the age of 72<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census, 1910, (*Missoula, Missoula, Montana*; Roll: T624\_834; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 0071; FHL microfilm: 1374847) Accessed online at ancestry.com.

<sup>6</sup> "Marriage Certificate for Solomon Dorsey and Jamsie Dorsey," June, 1910. Accessed online at ancestry.com

<sup>7</sup> R.L. Polk & Co, Polk's 1915 *Missoula (Missoula County, Mont.) City Directory*, 95.

<sup>8</sup> Missoula Historical Preservation Office, "Dorsey House Historical and Architectural Inventory Form," on file at Montana State Historic Preservation Office, July, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> R.L. Polk & Co, Polk's *Missoula (Missoula County, Mont.) City Directories, multiple year searches for "Solomon Dorsey."*

<sup>10</sup> "Solomon Dorsey," Find-A-Grave Index, Accessed online at ancestry.com.

<sup>11</sup> "Jamsie Dorsey," Find-A-Grave Index, Accessed online at ancestry.com.

## Montana Historic Property Record Form

Property Name: Dorsey House

Smithsonian Number: 24MO1681

### Information Sources/Bibliography

Ancestry.com. Searches for Solomon T. Dorsey. Results included: U.S. Find-A-Grave-Index; Marriage Certificate for Solomon Dorsey and Jamsie Dorsey, 6-1910; U.S. Census, 1910, 1920, 1930 and 1940. Accessed online at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).

Matthews, Allen. "Northside Missoula Railroad HD Nomination form" on file at Montana State Historic Preservation Office. August 1994.

Missoula Historical Preservation Office. "Dorsey House Historical and Architectural Inventory Form." on file at Montana SHPO. July, 1993.

R.L. Polk & Co. *Polk's Missoula (Missoula County, Mont.) City Directory*, Salt Lake City, UT: R.L. Polk & Co., 1905, 1910, 1915, 1937 and 1942.

## Montana Historic Property Record Form

Property Name: Dorsey House

Smithsonian Number: 24MO1681

### Statement of Significance

The Dorsey House at 817 Wolf Avenue is listed as a noncontributing structure within the Northside Missoula Railroad Historic District. However, the Northside district gains part of its own historical significance from the presence of Missoula's small African American community in the Northside neighborhood. Therefore, the Dorsey house gains further significance for both its association with Missoula's prominent black citizens as well as its location near the black enclave that existed in the early 1900s. The structure is one of the very few remaining single family homes of African Americans in Missoula during this time. Furthermore, the home gains significance for its association with the Dorsey family. Solomon's brother Ephram was a buffalo soldier and prominent Missoula businessman, and a pillar of the African American community.



## Montana Historic Property Record Form

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

The structure at 817 Wolf Avenue exhibits poor integrity. While the location and setting within Missoula's historic black neighborhood remain unchanged, the feeling of the neighborhood and surrounding houses no longer represents the historical setting. Modern mobile homes occupy the lot across the street, and only the adjacent building to the north is of the same general age and period. Likewise, many of the original materials have been replaced with newer products, evident in the windows, doors, and siding. The original design of the building appears to be a cross gable, but has since been altered to include two shed roof extension sections on either side of the cross gable. However, it is unclear if this addition occurred during the period of significance between construction in 1915, and 1942. That being said, the general feel of the home as a place of significance to the African American community in Missoula remains intact.

**Montana Historic Property Record Form**

Property Name: Dorsey House

Smithsonian Number: 24MO1681

**Photographs**



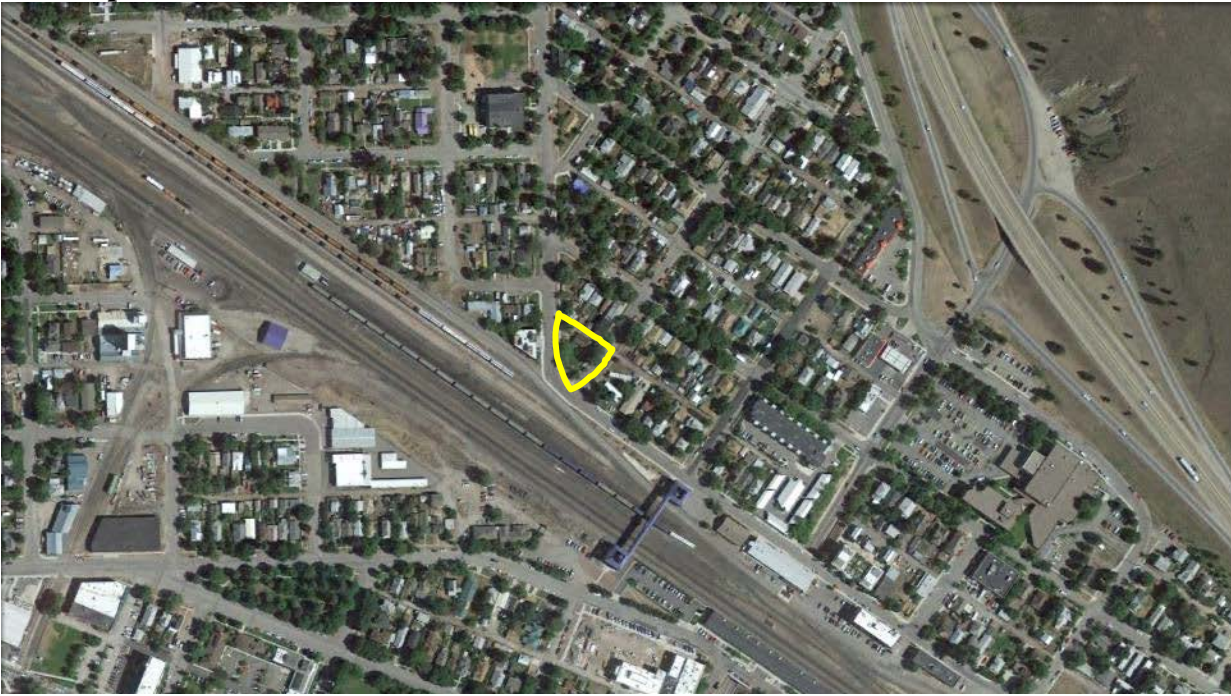
Dorsey House  
Southeast Façade, facing northwest  
8/13/15, (Google Earth Photo)

Montana Historic Property Record Form

Property Name: Dorsey House

Smithsonian Number: 24MO1681

Site Map/Aerial Photo



Dorsey House  
817 Wolf Ave,  
Missoula, MT  
Google Earth Satellite Image 2015

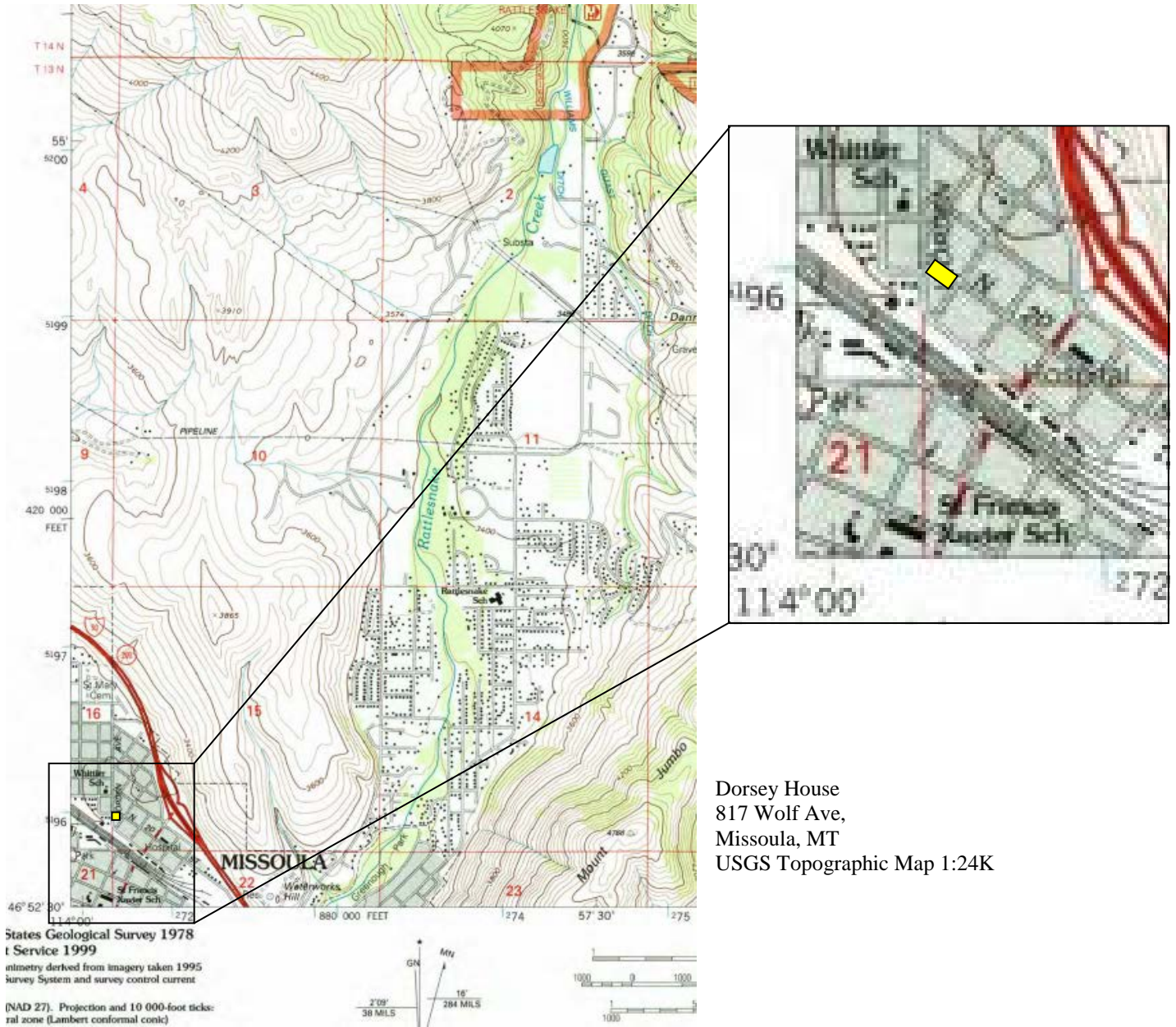


# Montana Historic Property Record Form

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Smithsonian Number: 24MO1681

## Topographic Map



Dorsey House  
817 Wolf Ave,  
Missoula, MT  
USGS Topographic Map 1:24K