

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (formerly 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information.

 X New Submission Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Black Montana's Heritage Places

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

- I. African Americans and the Montana Region Before 1865
- II. Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West, ca. 1862-1877
- III. The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s
- IV. A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent & Endurance in Montana's Black Community, ca. 1910s-1940
- V. World War II and After

C. Form Prepared by:

name/title Delia Hagen, PhD
organization Hagen Historical Consulting
street & number 1701 Cyprus Court
city or town Missoula state Montana zip code 59801
e-mail deliahagen@yahoo.com
telephone (406) 360-0120 date 2022

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation.

Signature of certifying official

MT State Historic Preservation Officer
Title

10/17/2022
Date

MT State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Create a Table of Contents and list the page numbers for each of these sections in the space below.

Provide narrative explanations for each of these sections on continuation sheets. In the header of each section, cite the letter, page number, and name of the multiple property listing. Refer to *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* for additional guidance.

Page Numbers

E. Statement of Historic Contexts

(If more than one historic context is documented, present them in sequential order.)

I.	African Americans and the Montana Region Before 1865	12
II.	Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West, ca. 1862-1877	16
III.	The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s	40
IV.	A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent & Endurance in Montana's Black Community, ca. 1910s-1940	166
V.	World War II and After	197

F. Associated Property Types

217

(Provide description, significance, and registration requirements.)

Residential
Commercial and Economic
Institutions (Social, Cultural, Political and Religious)
Rural (mining, ag, etc.)
Exploration, Fur Trade and Military sites
Racism and Civil Rights

G. Geographical Data

233

The geographic area is encompassed by the boundaries of the State of Montana.

H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

233

(Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.)

I. Major Bibliographical References

236

(List major written works and primary location of additional documentation: State Historic Preservation Office, other State agency, Federal agency, local government, university, or other, specifying repository.)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1: 60-100 hours (generally existing multiple property submissions by paid consultants and by Maine State Historic Preservation staff for in-house, individual nomination preparation)
- Tier 2: 120 hours (generally individual nominations by paid consultants)
- Tier 3: 230 hours (generally new district nominations by paid consultants)
- Tier 4: 280 hours (generally newly proposed MPS cover documents by paid consultants).

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting reports. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Section E: Statement of Historic Contexts

Contents (Statement of Historic Contexts)

<u>Introduction</u>	7
<u>I. African Americans and the Montana Region before 1865</u>	12
<u>The Montana Region Before 1862</u>	12
<u>The Gold Rush and the Advent of Montana Territory</u>	14
<u>II. Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West</u>	16
<u>Civil War and Southern Reconstruction</u>	16
<u>African American Migration to Montana After the Civil War</u>	17
<u>Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West</u>	21
<u>Helena's Early African American Community, ca. 1862-1877</u>	22
<u>The Black Communities of Early Virginia City, Fort Benton, and Bozeman</u>	25
<u>Virginia City</u>	25
<u>Fort Benton</u>	29
<u>Bozeman</u>	32
<u>Race Relations in Montana Territory</u>	35
<u>III. The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s</u>	40
<u>African American Settlement in Montana after 1877</u>	40
<u>Forts and Black Soldiers: American Military Occupation of the Montana Region, 1876-1910s</u>	42
<u>After the 1876 Battle of the Greasy Grass/Battle of the Little Bighorn</u>	42
<u>After 1898: Forts Assiniboine, Harrison, Missoula, and Yellowstone</u>	45
<u>Helena: Heart of Black Montana in its Heyday</u>	46
<u>Helena's Black Business Sector and Economy</u>	50
<u>African American Community Institutions in Helena</u>	56
<u>Montana's Shifting Black Community, 1877-1910s</u>	64
<u>Virginia City</u>	65
<u>Fort Benton</u>	65
<u>Black Montana's Second City: Community Development around Butte</u>	69
<u>Butte</u>	69
<u>Anaconda</u>	80
<u>Bozeman and Miles City, Secondary Core Communities</u>	86
<u>Bozeman</u>	86
<u>Miles City</u>	88
<u>Black Montana by 1890: Two New Core Communities in Great Falls and Missoula</u>	92

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

<u>Great Falls</u>	93
<u>Missoula</u>	103
<u>Black Montana by 1900: Primary Cores Develop in Billings and Havre, Secondary Communities in Kalispell and Lewistown</u>	105
<u>Billings</u>	105
<u>Havre</u>	110
<u>Kalispell and Lewistown, Secondary Core Communities</u>	113
<u>Other Localities</u>	116
<u>Gilt Edge and Maiden</u>	117
<u>Yogo, Utica and Moore</u>	118
<u>White Sulphur Springs</u>	121
<u>Belt</u>	123
<u>St. Peter's Mission and Cascade</u>	125
<u>Virginia City</u>	126
<u>Other Towns in Eastern, Central, and Western Montana</u>	130
<u>Government Institutions</u>	138
<u>Rural Sites</u>	139
<u>Mining Operations</u>	139
<u>Ranches</u>	141
<u>Homesteads and Other Small Farms</u>	146
<u>"Come down and give us some Jim Crow": Turn-of-the-Century Race Relations in Montana and the West</u>	156
<u>IV. A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent and Endurance in Montana's African American Community, ca. 1910s-1940</u>	166
<u>Black Montana in the Interwar Years</u>	166
<u>Helena</u>	168
<u>Butte and Anaconda</u>	170
<u>Great Falls</u>	175
<u>Billings</u>	177
<u>Beyond the Four Cores</u>	179
<u>Missoula and Havre</u>	179
<u>Bozeman, Miles City, Lewistown and Kalispell</u>	182
<u>Other Towns and Rural Areas</u>	188
<u>Black Montana's Community Institutions in the Interwar Years</u>	192
<u>Confronting Rising Racism</u>	194
<u>V. World War II and After</u>	197

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Postwar Great Falls	198
Postwar Billings	204
Butte and Anaconda in the Postwar Period	208
Helena after 1940	211
The Montana Black Community, 1940s-1970s	213
Conclusion: 1972-present	215

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Introduction

This context maps Black Montana from the early 19th century into the 1970s. Its mapping of Black lives, of Black presence and places, shows that African Americans are an integral and prominent part of Montana history, and have been so across both space and time. It reveals how, in crucial ways, Montana is a fundamentally Black place. By the same token, Montana history is a significant component of African American history.

Montana's Black past encompasses the entire state—all major cities, every county—and it extends from at least the early 19th century into the late 20th century. Mapping Black Montana also documents the critical, ubiquitous context of White supremacy and structural racism, as well as the African American community's multitudinous struggles against them.

Mapping Montana's Black past shows not only the geographic extent of the Black community in the region, but also its specific shape and its many constituent places. Like their counterparts across the West, from the start Black Montanans clustered especially in the state's major settlements. In some cities, they suffered strict residential segregation. In others, neighborhoods were more integrated. But in each of the state's major cities African Americans built autonomous local communities.

These urban clusters, however, were more than just local communities: they functioned as cores and anchors of a widespread, interconnected *statewide* community that encompassed many smaller towns and rural sites as well. For much of the historic period, these dispersed places, oft elided in histories of the Black West, could be found in every county in Montana. In some of these places Black people were among the earliest non-Indian residents, and in quite a few they became pillars of the community, or ranked among the most prominent people in town. Locales across Montana thus became Black places in different ways.

In documenting these varied and far-flung places, this context shows as well the economic breadth and diversity of Black Montana. Historically, African American people worked in all of the state's primary industries. As was common across the country during most of the historic period, Black people in Montana were especially concentrated in low-paid, often physically demanding jobs, with many laborers, porters, servants, laundresses etc. But this context details how they worked as well in mining, ranching, farming; in freighting and railroading, construction and hospitality; how they acquired and developed homesteads and houses, businesses and even public utilities like the water company; how they made a living as musicians and minstrels and boxers and jockeys; ran boarding houses and restaurants, bars and brothels, barber shops and shoeshine parlors; crafted hats and dresses and suits as milliners, seamstresses and tailors; served as soldiers and interpreters, constables and cops, dog catchers and custodians, coaches, teachers, plumbers, electricians, mailmen, and smeltermen. They labored in local, state and federal government jobs; they practiced as nurses and doctors, dentists and clerks, lawyers and librarians, photographers, bookkeepers, publishers and pastors. They worked raising crops, and livestock, and children.

As this expansive portrait suggests, Black Montana also encompassed the state's many social and demographic sectors. Although at times the population was disproportionately male and adult—especially in early periods and when segregated African American army units were stationed in the region—in general, from the early 1860s onward, Black Montana included as well women and children, infants and the elderly. Its many, diverse members lived in countless household and family arrangements, ranging from lone, unmarried individuals in urban downtown lodging rooms to extended intergenerational clans comprising multiple households on clustered prairie homesteads forming small rural Black colonies.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

A significant portion of these households were interracial, with both Black women and, significantly, Black men marrying White spouses, as well as, sometimes, indigenous or Hispanic people. Some Black Montanans cohabited with Chinese immigrants. Others formed enduring relationships of various types with Jewish residents. Still others spent their lives in and with the state's tribal reservation communities. There they sometimes spoke indigenous languages. Other Black Montanans spoke Spanish, or French, as well as English. As their language-speaking abilities varied, so, too, did their education and English literacy. Some African American residents reported little formal schooling, and could neither read nor write. Others, even in the 19th century, were college graduates or held master's degrees. As a whole, Black Montanans tended to be relatively well-educated, with literacy rates that often surpassed their White peers.

As with the area in general, of course, Black Montana varied across space and time. From the 1860s into the 1970s, the dynamic community continually shifted both geographically and demographically. Some Montana places had sizeable Black populations for decades, others boasted Black residents only briefly. In some places Black populations peaked early, in others they developed later, and in still others they rose and fell repeatedly. But all the while this fluctuating community cohered around a stable, enduring core composed of multi-generational families that stayed in the state, and stayed in each of Black Montana's primary communities.

The state's Black community was thus characterized by continuity in conjunction with continual flux and social and geographic reconfiguration, by deep rootedness as well as by incessant movement. Together, these qualities not only defined Black Montana but also connected it to other places across the West and across the country. As people moved into, through, and from Montana, they tied Montana's Black past to Western history, African American history, and American history writ large. Continuity also defined the history of Black Montana more broadly in terms of the critical, ubiquitous, constant context of White supremacy and structural racism, and the community's endless struggles against them, both individually and collectively. If Montana is Black at the roots, it is also White supremacist and anti-Black at the roots.

In some ways, conversely, this fact contributed to the disproportionate prominence of Black people in Montana in the historic period. Despite never being more than a small fraction of the state's population, from the time of Montana Territory's first legislature African Americans were a significant focus of politicians and the White populace. The relative prominence of Black people in Montana also stemmed from other sources. African Americans were consistently more prominent than their population proportion in part due to the highly visible nature of their work in transportation and hospitality—they staffed the steamboats and trains and hotels and restaurants through which society flowed—as well as due to their prominent roles as entertainers and athletes. Their disproportionate prominence also stemmed from their clustering in urban areas, and from the accomplished nature of numerous individual Black residents. It flowed as well from the highly-visible large group configuration of others, like cavalry regiments and railroad construction crews and Civilian Conservation Corps camps.

While they are underrepresented in the histories we tell and the written record we rely on, African Americans were prominent in Montana historically. And throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, they were part of the definitive stories of the state, from the Lewis and Clark Expedition to the fur trade; from the gold rush to the Battle of the Little Big Horn; from open range ranching to the homestead boom; from railroad building, to town development, to fundamental transformations in the wake of the Second World War. Black Montanans played a significant role in every major state economic sector; in the arts, in sports; and in the political, economic, social and cultural history of every major city, many towns and most counties. In sum, African American history and historic places pervade the state, and the definitive stories of Montana are Black history. At the same time, Montana, for its part, is a significant space and place of African American history writ large.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

This context identifies and documents five different context periods in the history of Black Montana:

- I. African Americans and the Montana Region Before 1865
- II. Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West, ca. 1862-1877
- III. The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s
- IV. A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent & Endurance in Montana's Black Community, ca. 1910s-1940
- V. World War II and After

The first of these maps Montana's Black roots, documenting African American presence and places in the region before 1865. In that period, before the end of the Civil War, most African Americans were enslaved in the American South. Black people were nonetheless significantly associated with key developments and related places in the distant Montana region, both before 1862—when the mass mining and U.S. military invasion of the indigenous Montana region began—and after. In the early 19th century, African American sites included the travel corridors and campsites of the Lewis & Clark expedition and the places and spaces of the fur trade, like Fort Union, Fort Benton, and the Deer Lodge valley ranch of Johnnie Grant (now known as the Grant-Kohrs ranch).

Then, in the 1860s, with the advent of mass non-Indian invasion of the region, Black men, women, and children joined visibly in the migrant flow, traveling up the Missouri River steamboat corridor, prospecting for gold and developing early settlements like Fort Benton and western Montana mining boomtowns like Bannack, Virginia City, and Helena, as well as Bozeman, an emergent agricultural, mercantile, and transportation hub. This first context also maps White supremacy in early Montana Territory: at the territorial capital of Bannack in 1864, the first territorial legislature built anti-Black structures into Montana's legal foundations when legislators "wrote a law prohibiting Black suffrage."

The second context documents the spread of Black people and communities across Montana from the late 1860s through the 1870s. It covers the period between the end of the Civil War and the 1877 end of Reconstruction in the U.S. South. In Montana, too, 1877 marked a major turning point: the region suffered an American troop surge in the wake of indigenous groups' 1876 victory over the U.S. Army at the Battle of the Greasy Grass, commonly known as the Battle of the Little Big Horn. In this period, various African American people forged a nascent Black community in Montana, and became a visible cohesive component of major towns, namely Helena, Virginia City, and Fort Benton.

Concentrated in the Territory's primary settlements, Black people also made homes throughout Montana in this period, including in smaller settlements like Bozeman and in locales in all eleven Montana counties. They did so in the face of consistent anti-Black campaigns and practices that pervaded daily life and extended into core realms like local schools. In this period, such practices included White lynchings of Black men in Helena in 1867 and in Bozeman six years later.

Context three maps Black Montana during its peak population, from the late 19th century into the 1910s. After the 1876 American military defeat on the Little Big Horn River in Montana Territory, and, the following year, the end of Reconstruction in the U.S. South, African American migration to Montana surged. Facilitated by the railroads spreading across the West, Black people flowed into Montana, moving en masse to the many new American military bases in the region and in smaller groups, or individually. They settled in and helped form towns across Big Sky Country.

Beginning in the 1880s, members of "colored" Army units stationed at forts Custer, Missoula, Shaw, Assiniboine, Keogh, Maginnis, Harrison and Yellowstone helped build a diverse, interconnected, organized

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

regional community that continued to be anchored in Helena. With the spread of non-Indians and subsequent economic diversification, Virginia City and Fort Benton declined while other regional Black community centers emerged in major settlements as they developed, cohering first in the Butte-Anaconda area—with smaller substantial clusters in Bozeman and around Miles City—and then, by 1890, in Great Falls and Missoula. By the turn of the century, the Montana Black community also counted Billings and Havre among its core locales, as well as, to a lesser degree, Kalispell and Lewistown. In each of these primary and secondary cores, the community developed commercial, residential, and institutional sectors.

At the same time, Black people also built prominent roles in a score of other communities, and Black places could be found all over the state. Foremost among them were central Montana places like Gilt Edge and Maiden; Yogo, Utica, and Moore; White Sulphur Springs; Belt; and St. Peter's Mission and Cascade, as well as, in southwestern part of the state, Virginia City. The many homes of Black Montana in this period also included towns across the state, in numerous eastern, central, and western locales, where a few significant individuals or large work crews formed a prominent Black presence at different times, or where institutions like the prison at Deer Lodge held a disproportionate number of Black people in its inmate populations.

The Black community inhabited every county in the state in this period, and could be found as well at myriad rural sites, working at mining, ranching, and, especially after 1900, farming and homesteading. Indeed, in many areas, Black homesteading was common, as both men and women took advantage of public land laws and worked to acquire their own property.

African American residents forged this solid, expansive, networked community in the face of and in struggle against ongoing interpersonal discrimination and rising Jim Crow practices, which included not only the 1910 prohibition of interracial marriage by the Montana legislature but also the murder by White mobs of at least two other Black men in lynchings at Sun River and Mondak.

The fourth context documents Montana's shifting Black community from the 1910s through the 1930s. Montana's homestead boom started busting by 1918, a few years after the last of the "colored" military units left the state. In the 1920s, Montana's total population declined—the only state in the nation where it did so—and its Black population in particular declined precipitously. By 1940, the state's African American population was smaller than it had been at any time since statehood.

Within Montana in the 1920s and 30s, community geography contracted, and reconfigured. In some core communities, Black populations declined, while in others they increased, as people moved out of, into, and around Montana. By 1940, Black Montana comprised four roughly co-equal community cores, with Great Falls, Billings and Helena all having about the same number of residents, and Butte having only slightly more (though when considered in conjunction with Anaconda, the Butte area's population exceeded the others by more than a third). Missoula's community shrank and Havre's declined drastically during this period, as did, ultimately, the populations in secondary locales like Bozeman, Miles City, Kalispell and Lewistown.

The internal reconfiguration of Black Montana during this period also meant the disappearance of African American residents in many of the less populous areas of the state. In some rural locales, and in smaller towns like Belt, White Sulphur Springs, Virginia City, and Hamilton, longtime prominent Black residents endured—often until they died—but as counties proliferated and the Black population contracted, by 1920, for the first time, some counties listed no African American residents at all.

At the same time, formal Black community regional organization—in the form of church networks, women's groups, baseball leagues etc.—solidified and expanded. These expanding networks were in part a reflection of

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

the enduring and consequential racism in the region, which seemed to escalate nationwide in this period. In Montana legislators passed a miscegenation code in 1921, and that same year White Montanans organized a state chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. Within a few years the Montana Klan comprised over 40 local affiliates, and in 1926 a White mob in Hardin killed shoemaker James Belden.

The fifth and final context documents Black Montana after the Second World War, when the state's Black population continued to be closely related to regional military developments, as well as to broader postwar production and population shifts. In 1950, only Great Falls and Billings boasted more Black residents than they had ten years earlier. This spatial concentration of the state's African American population in those two cities became more pronounced over the 1950s, when the military base that had been established in Great Falls during WWII was re-named Malmstrom, and began conversion from an air base to a missile base. Thereafter, Great Falls' Black population skyrocketed—more than tripling in the 1950s and doubling again in the '60s.

During the same period, the Black population in Billings remained about the same. In other community cores, it declined. The pace and details of local population shifts varied: Anaconda's population fluctuated over the midcentury period, while Butte and Helena experienced a relatively steady population decline and Missoula's population bottomed out and then stabilized by 1950. But by 1970 only Great Falls and Billings counted more than about 50-60 Black residents, with around 225 in Billings and over 1,000 in Great Falls, more than 700 of whom were at Malmstrom Air Force Base itself.

Black Montana was by then no longer a multi-focal, interconnected statewide community. It had become instead a pair of places —Montana's two largest cities, Great Falls and Billings—with local Black communities centered on the state's two remaining A.M.E. churches, along with a scattering of families and individuals in various other locations.

Critically, however, as populations in locales around the state declined in the postwar decades, many of those who did remain during the midcentury period were integral longtime members of the community. Collectively, they continued their ongoing struggle for racial equality, and that struggle gained steam in the wake of the Second World War. It was carried out individually and through the few community institutions that remained in midcentury, foremost among them the Montana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, which operated until 1972. Their struggles and successes incorporated sites across the state. Among them were the Montana Legislature, which in 1955 passed a civil rights bill prohibiting discrimination in places of public accommodation; city street corridors in Missoula and Billings, where in 1965 civil rights protestors marched in the wake of events in Selma, when Alabama state troopers and local police brutally attacked civil rights protestors; the University of Montana, where in 1968 a Black Studies program was established; Cascade County civic buildings, including the courthouse and the public library, where Alma Smith Jacobs made history as a librarian and civic leader; and the Montana State University Library, where Lucille Smith Thompson, Alma's sister, was a longtime librarian and in 1970—in conjunction with Alma—compiled a bibliography on *The Negro in Montana*.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

African Americans and the Montana Region before 1865

Located in what is now the northwestern United States, Montana's Black history began before the state itself. In the 1850s, the Montana region remained an integrated indigenous society tied to an international economy through the fur trade. At that time, the vast majority of African Americans were enslaved, living and toiling as human property, primarily in the southeastern United States. Disparate events in the early 1860s would transform both the Montana area and the lives of African Americans, and these events together produced Montana's initial Black community.

The Montana Region Before 1862

Beginning in the seventeenth century, contests between European powers for resources and souls in North America created extensive interaction among groups participating in the fur trade. In their quest for currency in the form of glossy beaver pelts and other furs, Indians and Europeans first plied waterways easily accessed from either coast. As they moved inland up innumerable drainages, they relied on and created intercultural relationships spanning great distances. Indian and European trappers, traders and freighters traveled extensively and often intermarried with the Indian groups they encountered. By the late 18th century, fur trade activity combined with long-standing intertribal interactions to create a mixed milieu in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountain areas that would become Montana. In 1783, fur trade businessmen organized the North West Company to compete with the long-dominant Hudson's Bay Company. Competition between these two British Canada-based companies accelerated fur trade activity in the West: a mere ten years later officers of the North West Company, traveling on an Indian trail, penetrated overland as far as the Pacific Ocean.¹

Lewis and Clark's 1805-1806 journeys through the region, during which they traveled with an African American man, York, who was enslaved by Clark, fired American imaginations about the prospect of profit in the Rockies. [Figure 1] Fur companies based in St. Louis and elsewhere looked to extend their operations into



Figure 1: Charles M. Russell, *York*, 1908. Montana Historical Society Museum Collection. X1909.01.01 -York.

Montana watersheds. British interests beat them to it: In 1808-1809, David Thompson and Finan McDonald established North West Company trading posts on the eastern shore of Lake Pend d'Oreille, along the Kootenai River near present-day Libby, and on the Clark Fork River near present-day Thompson Falls. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) moved to claim its share of the western Montana market in 1810, when Joseph Howse established Howse House on the northern shore of Flathead Lake. By the time trappers employed by the American-owned Rocky Mountain Fur Company worked the region in 1828 "they found the Hudson's Bay Company entrenched in the area."² Entrenched it was. An 1821 merger with the North West Company gave HBC control of the many posts its

¹ James McClellan Hamilton, *From Wilderness to Statehood a History of Montana* (Portland, Ore.g.: Binford & Mort, 1957), 60; Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, Revised (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 42; Salish-Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee, Elders Cultural Advisory Council, and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, *The Salish People and the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 82.

² O'Neill and Winthrop, *Fort Connah*, 26-27; Stevensville Historical Society, *The Bitterroot Valley, A Traveler's Guide*, sec. introduction; Chaffin, *The Last Horizon: The Rambling Chaffin Clan Settles in the Bitter Root Valley of Western Montana in 1864 and Helps Develop This Lovely Land*, 76.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

former competitor had by then erected across the North. The HBC ran these in addition to its own chain of posts, which stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific.³

The mixed and mobile fur trade society fostered cultural, as well as economic and social, amalgamation. Although fur trade society was primarily composed of people of indigenous and/or European ancestry, it also included a variety of others. Fur trade posts in the Chicago area, for instance, dated to 1779, and Indians there reported that “the first White man who settled here was a negro.”⁴ Among the trappers who moved through the Montana fur trade region in the first decades of the 19th century were numerous men of African American ancestry, including members of the Pierre Bonga or Bonza family; Baptiste Pointsable; Edward or Edouard Rose; Francois Duchouquette (whose Black mother, Mary Ann Menard, bore 13 children and lived at Prairie du Chien); a man named Thillis or Willis who worked with Ashley’s expedition in the Rockies in the 1820s; a partner or servant of Francois Chardon named Reese; John Brazeau or Brazo; Andrew and Dick Green of Bent’s Fort (along with Dick’s wife Charlotte); Auguste [Janisse?] of Fort Berthold; Joseph and Jasper of Fort Union; Jim Hawkins (who cooked at both Fort Union and Fort Laramie); Manuel Lisa’s assistant George; and Polette Labrosse, among others.⁵

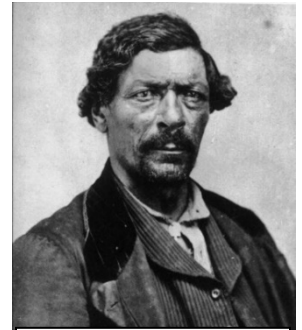


Figure 2: James Beckwourth, pre-1856, public domain image.

These men, some free and some enslaved, worked on Missouri River steamboats, manned trading posts like Fort Benton—where “negro Henry” was listed in the 1854-1856 Journal “that recorded activities of the Upper Missouri Outfit (UMO) of the American Fur Company there,” and where in 1860 the UMO employed “at least four Black men”—and trapped and traded among mixed indigenous bands across the region.⁶ They included many people whose names have been lost to history and a few relatively well-documented men like James Pierson Beckwourth, a free man who arrived in what became Montana in 1825 with William Ashley’s expedition. [Figure 2] Beckwourth became a prominent figure in regional society, and in 1856 published a memoir, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth: Mountaineer, Scout, Pioneer and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians*.⁷

As was common in the fur trade, some of these Black men married into their indigenous host communities, and with their Native wives had Afro-Indigenous families: among the first Black Montanans were these indigenous children. Among them were several children whose fathers worked at Fort Benton. Phil Barnes’ “married a Shoshone woman and had three children,” with eldest daughter Emma Barnes born in ca. 1849-59 in Fort Benton or nearby on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, and a brother and sister following.⁸ Henry Mills—likely the “negro Henry” noted in the 1850s Fort Benton journal, also had children with his Montana-born Indian wife Phillisy, with daughter Mary Mills born in Montana ca. 1853.

³ O’Neill and Winthrop, *Fort Connah*, 137–39.

⁴ Porter, “Negroes and the Fur Trade,” 423.

⁵ Porter, 421–33; Gwaltney, “Black Fur Traders and Frontiersmen.” Many of these men worked in the region that became Montana.

⁶ Ken Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton,” *Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana*, May 4, 2009. <http://Blackamericansmt.blogspot.com/2009/05/on-being-Black-american-in-territorial.html>; Behan, “Forgotten Heritage.”

⁷ Beckwourth and Bonner, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, Mountaineer, Scout, and Pioneer, and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians*; Mumey, *James Pierson Beckwourth, 1856-1866, an Enigmatic Figure of the West*; Wilson, *Jim Beckwourth*.

⁸ Extreme History Project, “Family Matters: Bozeman’s Historic African American Community Walking Tour”; Barkwell, “John ‘Johnny’ Francis Grant (1831-1907).”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

The Gold Rush and the Advent of Montana Territory

When Beckwourth's 1856 memoir came out, the regional fur trade society it reflected was in the midst of a rapid, traumatic decline in the face of settler colonial invasion. Montana's first substantial gold strike at Bannack in 1862 created a headlong rush into the area, and early that year a single boat arriving in Fort Benton carried some 400 miners. By 1864, some 16,000 non-Indians lived in Montana Territory alone.⁹ These newcomers, and others who followed in their wake, transformed the region into a bona fide colony of the United States. This early 1860s influx included people from all over the world—Chinese immigrants, mainly male, accounted for about 10% of them—among them African Americans.¹⁰

As in previous decades, during the early gold rush Black people came to the region in a variety of capacities, some enslaved and traveling with their owners, some free and traveling of their own accord. The first identified African American passenger recorded in the Fort Benton Research Center's "Upper Missouri River Passenger file came to Fort Benton on the steamboat Emilie in June 1862, either as the slave or servant of William Hurlbert."¹¹ African American men also represented among the earliest prospectors plying the many mountain streams in search of mineral riches: in August 1862, "an old man named Hurlburt, and two other [unidentified] men . . . and a negro" found gold on the Prickly Pear, near what is now Helena.¹² That winter (1862-63), a partial list of non-Indian people in what became Montana included three men living at Fort Benton who were identified as "negro," i.e. Phil Barnes, Henry Mills, and Jas. Vanlitburg.¹³ Barnes "an escaped slave from Alabama," died shortly thereafter, "in the early 1860s." His children were subsequently adopted by "Johnny Grant, a cattle man, (part of the Grant-Kohrs Ranch) . . . When Johnny Grant left for Canada he took two of the children, Jack and Annie, and left the oldest behind, which was more than likely Emma."¹⁴



Figure 3: Richard and Mary McDonald House, 308 South Tracy, Bozeman.

Sometime in 1863, Richard and Mary McDonald, former slaves who were living in St. Joseph, Missouri (where Black people were still enslaved), secured "a wagon drawn by six oxen" and, trailing "a herd of cattle," loaded-up their "few possessions and their 6-month-old son Robert" and struck out for the West. As they struggled along the overland trail their baby died, and after burying him they continued on, traveling some five months before reaching Virginia City—a gold camp 70 miles northeast of Bannack that burst into being in late spring 1863. Shortly after arriving in booming Virginia City, Mary Harris Robinson McDonald bore a second son, Eddy, before the family moved in 1864 to the calmer Bozeman City (through which they'd passed on the way). There, they settled, establishing a home from which Richard McDonald worked as a freighter between Bozeman and the booming mines of Virginia City and port of Fort Benton.¹⁵ [Figure 3]

⁹ The territorial census of 1864 listed 15,812 residents in the territory of Montana. West, *The Last Indian War*, 96.

¹⁰ Swartout Jr., "From the Kwangtung to the Big Sky: The Chinese Experience in Frontier Montana," 65.

¹¹ Robison, "Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri."

¹² Henry N. Maguire, *Historical Sketch and Essay on the Resources of Montana: Including a Business Directory of the Metropolis* (Helena, Mont.: Herald Book and Job Printing Office, 1868), 47.

¹³ Thompson, "Inhabitants of Montana During Winter 1862-1863."

¹⁴ Extreme History Project, "Family Matters: Bozeman's Historic African American Community Walking Tour"; Barkwell, "John 'Johnny' Francis Grant (1831-1907)."

¹⁵ Schontzler, "McDonald House Holds History of Freed Slaves Who Helped Settle Bozeman"; Alegria, "Our Historic Neighbors The McDonald Family Let's Get to Know Them."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

By the time the McDonald family settled in Bozeman, Montana's nascent Black population included various individuals in the region's other settlements as well. At Bannack in January 1864, when vigilantes executed Henry Plummer and two alleged accomplices, they reportedly misplaced the rope for hanging them, and sent a Black "boy ... off for some of that ... and the bearer made such good time that some hundreds of feet of hempen neck-tie were on the ground before the arrival of the party at the gallows."¹⁶ Later that year, when the large, extended Patrick Woods family migrated to Montana, they were accompanied by "a former slave, a negro woman, [who] was the cook. They left St. Joseph, Missouri, the early part of May 1864, for Virginia City, Territory of Idaho. When they reached their destination in September 1864, Virginia City was in the Territory of Montana. The United States Congress had formed the new territory while they were enroute."¹⁷ By the time they arrived, Black people composed some of Virginia City's early, prosperous and visible landowners: Thomas White owned main street commercial property with 15 feet of frontage by May 1864, and over the following year expanded his holdings to include two more prominent commercial parcels, one containing a "Shoe Shop" and the other a "barber shop," as well as a log house and lot, with a spring, at the east end of Cover Street.

While the Woods family and the unidentified Black woman working as its cook made its way west, in July of 1864, four prospectors encountered rich deposits in what they named Last Chance Gulch, inaugurating a rush to the valley and surrounding drainages.¹⁸ The new Last Chance discovery was among the most significant of many in the area at the time, and by 1865 gave rise to a bustling camp called Helena, rapidly on its way to being the largest of the region's mining settlements.¹⁹ Preceding discoveries in locales across the Rockies produced similar localized influxes, and these nascent settlements and their occupants became numerous enough to justify creation of Montana Territory, established in May of 1864.

Created by a northern White Congress while Civil War raged in the East and "Indian" wars raged in the West, Montana Territory came into being at a momentous time for American race relations. Questions about race and racialized people, and their place in Montana law, dominated discussion when Congress considered the Organic Act that would create the territory. Foremost among the subjects debated was African American suffrage. According to historian Jim Smurr, Congressmen argued "over striking the word 'White' out of the section on voter requirements," as "the pro-Negro people (and there were many of them) insisted that the Organic Act specify in plain English that Negroes could vote from the first election," while their opponents argued "that the question was academic because there were no Negroes in Montana to worry about." Senator Wilkinson of Minnesota testified in turn that "a friend of his who had moved from St. Paul to Montana . . . told him that there were indeed Negroes in Montana, and that 'one of the more respectable men in the Territory was a negro worth over fifty thousand dollars.'"²⁰ Ultimately, Congress "restricted the vote to U.S. citizens" living in Montana Territory. When the first territorial legislature met in Bannack later that year, legislators "wrote a law prohibiting Black suffrage."²¹

¹⁶ Stout, *Montana, Its Story and Biography; a History of Aboriginal and Territorial Montana and Three Decades of Statehood*, 264.

¹⁷ Rowe, *Mountains and Meadows*, 299.

¹⁸ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 50. William L. Lang, "Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906," *Scratchgravel Hills* 3, no. Summer (1980): 9; Behan, "Forgotten Heritage," 24.

¹⁹ Baumlér, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House."

²⁰ Smurr, J. W., "Jim Crow Out West," in *Historical Essays on Montana and the Northwest*, (Helena, Mont.: The Western Press, Historical Society of Montana, 1957), 157-158. Senator Wilkinson's "informant was Mr. [Nathaniel P.] Langford," who later wrote *Vigilante Days and Ways*.

²¹ Behan, "Forgotten Heritage," 26.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West **Civil War and Southern Reconstruction**

While legislators in the mining camp-cum-territorial-capital of Bannack labored to limit the legal rights of Black people within the fledgling Montana Territory, and built racism into Montana's foundational legal structures, hundreds of thousands of people in the East killed each other in battle over related questions. If the Civil War started in 1861 over a complex tangle of issues, and White people on both sides fought for a host of different reasons, by 1864 the war became nonetheless, one of liberation. Although the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 freed no one—it applied only to slaves in states still in rebellion, i.e., states where the Union couldn't enforce it—it nonetheless helped make the end of slavery the explicit goal of the war. Black people across the South increasingly seized the opportunity to “steal themselves,” converting the rhetorical promise of emancipation into reality. The final defeat of the Confederacy brought freedom to those who remained enslaved, and by late 1865 four million African American people were liberated.²²

Critically, the end of war and the end of slavery did not mean the end of White supremacy. Indeed, the war ultimately may have emboldened it: the Cult of the Lost Cause would be used to advance White supremacy thereafter. Like President Lincoln, many White Americans were simultaneously anti-slavery and anti-Black, committed to Black freedom but not racial equality.²³ White supremacy transcended regional boundaries, and as war gave way to Reconstruction, many Whites across the country fought the extension of rights and opportunities to African American freedpeople. The North professed a rhetorical commitment to help Blacks help themselves, but freedpeople were unwelcome there. In the South, federal policy encouraged freedpeople to work for their former masters, and never pursued wholesale redistribution of land. The South soon settled into an enduring arrangement in which most Black people worked as subservient agricultural labor (share or tenant farmers) controlled through credit, vagrancy laws, Blacklists, and the courts. This oppressive arrangement ensured widespread Black landlessness, poverty and insecurity.²⁴

Widespread oppression, economic and otherwise, was often accompanied by White violence. Reconstruction and its explicit extension of rights to Black people depended on the presence of armed federal troops to enforce the law, and in many places even this proved insufficient. White southern Democrats formed the Ku Klux Klan in December 1865 and proceeded to terrorize African Americans under its auspices until the Civil Rights Act of 1871, a.k.a. the KKK Act, led to the Klan's disappearance. Violent repression of Black people was perhaps most pronounced in border states like Missouri and Kentucky. In studying White terrorism against Blacks during Reconstruction, Christian McMillen concluded that “no other state gave up the institution of slavery so grudgingly” as Kentucky. Enslaved Black people in the state were not liberated until December 7, 1865, “six months after the end of the Civil War and almost two years after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation,” giving Kentucky the distinction of being the last state in nation to free its slaves. After being compelled to do so, Kentucky avoided Radical Reconstruction and White residents inflicted “exceptionally savage” violence on its Black population.²⁵ Kentucky Unionists and Confederates joined in common cause against African American people, terrorizing them with “lynchings executed by roving gangs,” and “excruciatingly brutal accounts of rape.” Freedmen's Bureau officials and Black residents reported “the cruel

²² Litwack, January 23, 2004.

²³ The original source for this saying is said to be the May 12, 1865.

²⁴ Litwack, January 23, 2004; Litwack, January 26, 2004.

²⁵ McMillen, “Border State Terror and The Genesis of the African-American Community in Deer Lodge and Chouteau Counties, Montana, 1870-1890,” 214. Kentucky did not ratify the 13th Amendment, which in 1865 abolished slavery, until 1976. Only Mississippi took longer: it voted to ratify it in 1995, and actually ratified it in 2013.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

spirit of robbery, arson, and murder in Kentucky,” and asked for protection from “the fiendish outrages of White people, who are in many cases banded together under the cognomen of ‘Regulators’ ‘Nigger Killers’ & c.”²⁶

Despite the violence that accompanied the end of slavery, African Americans struggled to exercise their freedom and make emancipation meaningful. They prioritized the basic rights denied them under slavery, pursuing control over their own bodies and lives. They sought the ability to reap the fruit of their own labor, to legally marry and form and maintain their own families, and to move. In an agricultural society, land underpinned this independence, and freedpeople embraced the generalized American desire for land. But they also fought for more than mobility and family and farms, insisting that the proper boundaries of freedom included full citizenship, and recognition of equal humanity, as well as more prosaic things like the right to attend schools, pray in their own churches, and negotiate wages. They sought to put into practice the promise of Reconstruction-era rights legislated by the 1866 Civil Rights Act and subsequent legislation. Before the Civil War, only five northern states allowed Black people to vote, and African American office-holding was virtually unheard of. By 1877, some 2,000 Black people had held federal, state, or local offices, including positions as Congressman, Sheriff, and Justice of the Peace.²⁷

African American Migration to Montana After the Civil War

These successes, however, did not change the fundamental context of life in the Reconstruction South, and many freedpeople sought to escape repressive regimes by moving. Localized mobility, however, often led to similar situations in a different town, and for some, it began to seem that truer freedom lay further afield.²⁸ Pushed by local conditions and pulled by perceived possibilities elsewhere, significant numbers of African Americans—especially those with “the economic means to do so”—began to migrate out of the South in the wake of the Civil War.²⁹ Many of them went to the North, long considered the land of freedom. A significant, if smaller, number headed west, and by 1880 about 10,000 African American people moved to the northwest region comprising the current states of Washington, Idaho, and Montana.³⁰

A substantial portion of Black western migrants moved to Montana: the 1870 and 1880 territorial censuses counted more (and in the case of 1870 Wyoming, the same number of) Black people living in Montana Territory than in any of the adjacent states or territories. In 1870, Montana counted 183 Black residents and in 1880, 346 Black residents. Wyoming, meanwhile, recorded 183 African American residents in 1870 and 298 in 1880. Enumerated Black populations in the Dakotas and Idaho were even smaller: South Dakota and North Dakota counted 1870 populations of 70 and 24, respectively, and 1880 populations of 288 and 113, while Idaho's Black population totaled only 60 in 1870 and 53 in 1880.

Like others who migrated to the West in this period, Black people arrived in Montana from varied places and by varied means. Into the 1870s, most Montana newcomers traveled by steamboat up the Missouri River—some 75% of the prospectors who panned for gold in Montana during the placer boom passed through the riverport of

²⁶ McMillen, 215–16. Quoting a July, 1867 “Petition of Kentucky Black Soldiers to the U.S. Congress,” and a April, 9, 1866 (Louisville) “Letter from Freeman’s Bureau Chief Superintendent for the District of Kentucky to the Headquarters of the Kentucky and Tennessee Freeman’s Bureau.”

²⁷ Litwack, January 28, 2004.

²⁸ Kelley and Lewis, *A History of African Americans Since 1880. Volume Two*, 4.

²⁹ McMillen, “Border State Terror and The Genesis of the African-American Community in Deer Lodge and Chouteau Counties, Montana, 1870-1890,” 215.

³⁰ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 342.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Fort Benton as they came and went—and “many African Americans were working on the boats out of Fort Benton as employees.”³¹ [Figure 4] On the upper Missouri River boats, “Black roustabouts were common,” and the 1880 census of Montana Territory listed a number of African Americans working in the steam-boat sector. Charles and Lucy Chapman, a married couple, worked together on the *Nellie Peck*, “the same boat that carried the Adams sisters to Fort Benton,” where he was a cook and she a domestic. The Chapmans were enumerated that year on the Benton-docked boat, along with four single Black men. Meanwhile, Horace Gray, a barber, worked aboard the *Key West*.³²

An enslaved 11-year-old girl named Clarissa Jane Powell was brought to Montana from Pettis County, Missouri, by her White owners, half-sister Mary (Powell) Evans (whose father Nathan Powell was also Clarissa's father) and her husband Philip E. Evans in April of 1865. Clarissa was en route up the Missouri when she learned of Emancipation, and when she disembarked at Fort Benton she was free. Clarissa's future husband, James Crump, arrived in the territory shortly thereafter. Crump enlisted in the Union Army at the age of 14 and served in the Civil War before striking out for Montana in the fall of 1865. By the late 1860s, in the employ of the Diamond R Overland Freighting Company, Crump made a living hauling freight between nascent Montana settlements and Corinne, Utah, the terminus of the Union Pacific Railroad, where he and Clarissa married in 1869.³³

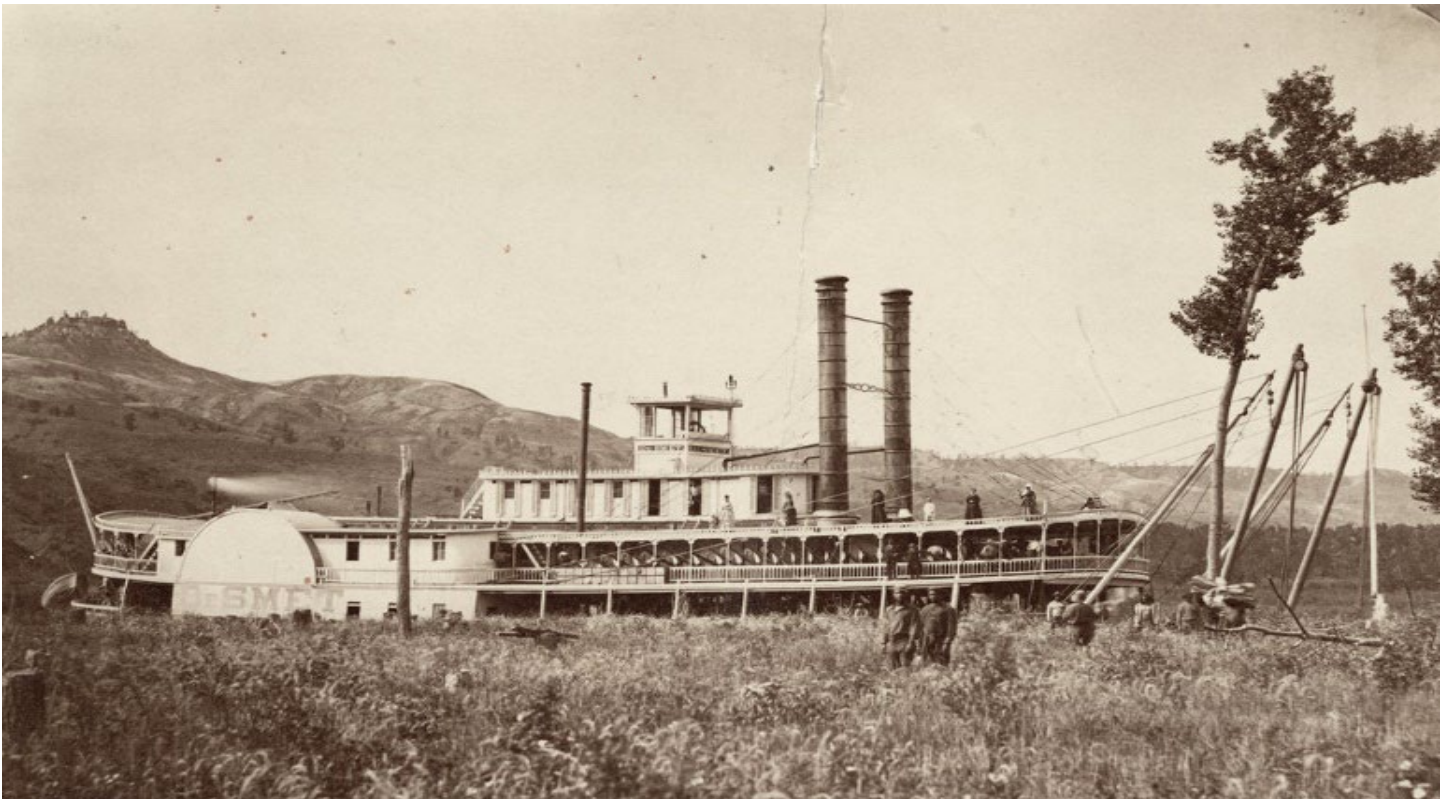


Figure 4: “Steamboat *DeSmet*,” Unknown photographer, c. 1873. Montana Historical Society Research Center, PAc 74-15.5. Two African American men, likely workers on the boat, stand right of center.

³¹Lepley, *Birthplace Of Montana*, 37; Behan, “Forgotten Heritage.”

³² Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 29.

³³ Hagen, “Crump-Howard House.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Clarissa was born in Virginia and her husband James hailed from Missouri. Other early African American immigrants boasted an assortment of origins.³⁴ William Bairpaugh, reportedly the “son of a Cherokee chief and an African American woman, was born in Indian Territory in 1859.” He came to Montana “as a youth . . . and eventually acquired enough ranch land around Black Eagle and Great Falls to earn a reputation as one of the wealthiest African Americans in the northwestern U.S.”³⁵ Samuel Lewis, a barber who settled in Bozeman in 1868, hailed from Haiti. After arriving in Bozeman, he erected “several business buildings and his own home.”³⁶ Traveling with the Louis Howell (or Houles) family, “Smoky” Wilson arrived that same year as a 10-year-old from Missouri. Wilson settled in Helena and then moved to Bozeman where he worked as “a stable boy for a livery man,” before learning to break horses and riding the range for the Nelson Story “outfit.” The Story “range was close to Crow territory,” and “eventually Wilson went to live with the Crow Indians . . . when the Crows came to Fort Ellis, army officers called upon Wilson to act as interpreter.”³⁷ In the 1870s, William ‘Wild Bill’ Haywood and H. Porter Grove, born a slave in Louisiana, arrived in Montana. Grove, who went on to temporary fame and fortune in the Montana mining industry, was born enslaved in Louisiana. Haywood was a cowboy who came to the territory on a cattle drive and settled in Great Falls.³⁸

In 1876, 44-year-old Annie (Agnes) Morgan traveled to the territory as a cook for General Custer. Morgan left Custer's service sometime before the battle of the Little Bighorn and made her way to Philipsburg. While there, she was hired by Granite County Attorney Durfee to “take a liquor-loving uncle who drank too much to a cabin on Rock Creek and care for him.” After Durfee's uncle moved on, Morgan remained in the Rock Creek valley, developing a homestead now listed in the NRHP.³⁹ Others who arrived from distant places in this period included teamster William Taylor; chef John Gordon; sisters Parthenia Snead and Minerva Cogswell, who ran a restaurant in Virginia City; Anna Gordon, who ran a restaurant in White Sulphur Springs; and Mary Fields, who drove stage and held the mail route between Cascade and St. Peter’s Mission.⁴⁰

As these anecdotes suggest, African American migrants to Montana in the post-Civil War period were, like western migrants writ large, a diverse group of travelers. But unlike most migrants, Black people who moved west shared specific experiences that set them apart and shaped their migration and settlement. The most obvious of those group experiences were slavery and emancipation, which gave African American migration a particular meaning. As historian Leon Litwack emphasizes, “freedom permitted them to take their labor elsewhere. For many . . . in fact, this right constituted the very essence of their new status.”⁴¹ If the freedom to move proved particularly meaningful for African Americans due to shared experiences of slavery, moving West was especially alluring due to shared experiences during Reconstruction. As noted earlier, for Black people living in the South, Reconstruction was a violent period. Christian McMillen suggests that we can understand

³⁴ United States Bureau of the Census, “9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana.”

³⁵ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 30. “Bairpaugh reportedly gave away much of his wealth to the Black poor in Great Falls, and he died there in 1928.”

³⁶ Strahn, “Samuel Lewis House.”

³⁷ Thompson, “Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung,” 40.

³⁸ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 29–30.

³⁹ Hagen and Caywood, “Morgan-Case Homestead.”

⁴⁰ Bauml, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House.” Montana State Historic Site Records for the Cogswell cabins and Sarah Bickford’s Hangman’s Building in Virginia City were completed in 2016. Neither Rose Gordon’s Café nor her house are still standing in White Sulphur Springs. Perhaps link to Mary Fields’ essay on Montana’s Women’s History Matters webpage features essays on Mary Fields, Sarah Bickford, and Annie Morgan and Bertie Brown WHM, “Mary Fields”; WHM, “Celebrating Sarah Gammon Bickford”; WHM, “Two Legendary African American Homesteaders.”

⁴¹ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage.” 24 Quoting Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 1979, 291.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

the “attempts of some freedpeople to escape this violence as a crucial link between Reconstruction and westward migration. The particularly hostile and stifling environment for Blacks in the border states of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri may well have been what motivated many to go west during this period.” In Kentucky, as elsewhere, “most Blacks continued to be denied protection from physical violence as well as opportunities for economic or social advancement.”⁴²

African Americans shared certain pull as well as push factors that shaped their westward migration. The so-called frontier, “being a supposed ‘hotbed of economic opportunity,’ may have been especially attractive to Blacks of the poverty-stricken South.” The West seemed to offer other opportunities as well. A noted earlier, “the importance of re-forming kinship ties and strengthening familial relationships among freedpeople during Reconstruction,” may have seemed most possible in the West. There, “along with the *freedom from* violence would come a *freedom to* create families and communities in which they could thrive.” In Montana, Black settlement thus connected African American history with the history of the frontier, reflecting “both an escape from the violence of Kentucky as well as an effort to build a democratic community in which not only their survival was guaranteed but in which they could,” ideally, “flourish.”⁴³

The Southern repression and poverty that motivated Black westward migration also molded its character. In large part because of geography—i.e., adjacency to the Missouri River travel corridor—and in part because of history, including the centrality of St. Louis in the fur trade, the state of Missouri accounted for a large share of Montana migrants during the territorial period. Indeed, its dominance in the origins of early Montana immigrants proved so profound that one historian called the territory and its Fort Benton port “practically an appendage of the state of Missouri.” The overrepresentation of Missouri in Montana Territory’s population stood even more pronounced among African Americans, 41% of whom were born in Missouri and Kentucky. Virginia and West Virginia also produced large portions of Montana’s Black populace. As Christian McMillen persuasively argues, that may have been due in part to the intense post-war violence against freedpeople in border states.⁴⁴

But if repression drove migration from the South to the West, it also limited it. Deeply impoverished, many Black people could ill-afford the expense of relocating to the West. Doing so was in fact an option mainly for the more fortunate. By and large, “African Americans who migrated west were relatively well educated and skilled.” This was definitely the case in Montana: in 1870, a time when the literacy rate for the nation’s Black people was about 20 percent, “at least half and possibly as many as 75 percent of African Americans . . . in Montana were literate.”⁴⁵ Their relative good-fortune is also reflected in their widespread political participation, suggesting a populace determined to exercise and assert their new civil rights: in 1867, the United States Territorial Suffrage Act gave Black men in western territories the right to vote, and that year they cast 200 ballots in the Montana territorial election (a number that exceeds the total number of African American people—183—enumerated in the territory in the 1870 census).⁴⁶

⁴² McMillen, “Border State Terror and The Genesis of the African-American Community in Deer Lodge and Chouteau Counties, Montana, 1870-1890,” 212.

⁴³ McMillen, 213.

⁴⁴ McMillen, “Border State Terror and The Genesis of the African-American Community in Deer Lodge and Chouteau Counties, Montana, 1870-1890.” Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 24. Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 160.

⁴⁵ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 32.

⁴⁶ Heath, “Viewpoint: Buildings as Cultural Narratives: Interpreting African American Lifeways in a Montana Gold Mining Camp,” 6.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West

As with migration, the specificities of African Americans' situation produced distinctive patterns of western settlement. Intent on living their lives on their own terms to the extent possible, Black people settled primarily in cities and towns. There, where numbers provided relative security, they created "the core of Afro-American community life in the region." Seattle and Portland soon boasted identifiable Black communities, as did smaller inland urban areas like Butte and Helena in Montana. Once in the cities, when their population was sufficient, they organized community institutions to establish social roots in a new and unfamiliar setting. Black residents "established churches and fraternal orders. Newspapers and other business enterprises were founded to serve a Black clientele, and ... began to respond in an organized manner to infringement of their civil rights."⁴⁷ Crucially, "Black churches, clubs, and fraternal organizations mirrored those in the dominant society *in form* but served distinct purposes for a Black population whose 'core value' was self-determination within White society."⁴⁸

Organized around shared institutions, these early African American communities were further bound together by the common impediment of systemic, structural racism, especially in the realm of employment. Cities provided job opportunities, but most Black people found themselves relegated to a limited number of low-wage positions. Common occupations included "domestic service, unskilled labor, and some skilled trades."⁴⁹ Many of these African American wage workers were women, who, "out of economic necessity, have [historically] been two to three times more likely than White women to work outside the home." Like Black men, "Black women held proportionately more unskilled jobs than White women, mostly as servants, cooks, and laundresses. . . . in the eyes of many employers, their activities were logical extensions of the roles of enslaved women."⁵⁰

Shared values and commitments reinforced the internal institutional and economic ties in African American communities. They included a "commitment to education, respectability, and social justice," as well as an emphasis on "kinship ties." This last represented a particularly potent element of African American experience across the country. There existed "a general but deep-seated desire among African American families after emancipation for the woman to stay home to raise the children and care for the elderly." The community cohesiveness promoted by shared values was itself also a priority of Black people in this period. In western places like Montana, this was demonstrated by "a strong tendency among individuals who acquired any level of wealth—whether through entrepreneurship, strict saving, or even illegal enterprises—to share it with those less advantaged in their communities."⁵¹

The territorial census of 1870 listed 183 people categorized as "Black" or "mulatto," with most of them living in the territory's larger settlements, clustered in Virginia City (20), Fort Benton (18), Bozeman (12), and, especially, Helena (66).

Most of these people came from elsewhere in the territorial U.S., especially Missouri and Kentucky. Some had been born in Montana—all either young children (whose mothers had recently immigrated) or members of families of indigenous descent (i.e., families like the Birds, Barnes, and Mills). A few were born in other countries, listing birthplaces including Canada, Nova Scotia, Haiti, Bermuda, Jamaica, and England. But for the most part, the Black people who lived in Montana in 1870 were relatively recent arrivals from other states,

⁴⁷ Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 342.

⁴⁸ Behan, "Forgotten Heritage," 35–36.

⁴⁹ Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 342.

⁵⁰ Behan, "Forgotten Heritage," 31.

⁵¹ Behan, 31, 35.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

mainly Missouri and Kentucky but also from other border and southern states (including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) as well as from northern states (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania), the Midwest (Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska, Ohio), and the District of Columbia.

Although many of 183 African American residents enumerated in the territory's 1870 census were adult males (88), women and children made up significant portions of the population: enumerators listed 50 Black woman, as well as 25 females, and 20 males, under the age of 18. Many of these people lived in family units and other group arrangements, in both Black and interracial households.

Many of the adult men listed a specific occupation, with about one in six working as barbers (22 of 128). Barbering had long been a primary trade for Black men—in the free state of Ohio the census for 1850 noted, “the first to show occupations, recorded that nearly 90 percent of Ohio’s barbers were black”—and it continued to be in the 1860s-70s, when, “as one of the few professions open to African American men after the Civil War, barbering was a popular field, well respected in the Black community, highly mobile, and much needed in western mining, military, and ranching towns.”⁵² Other common occupations included laborers (25 men used this term, some specifying “farm laborer” or “day laborer,” while another five used some version of worker, i.e. ranch or farm worker); domestics, servants or domestic servants (14); and cooks (17). Some men worked in “gulch mining” (six men listed this occupation, and another 2 listed “mining”), while three were waiters and three were teamsters. One man listed himself as a bell ringer, one a messenger, one a launderer, and one a wood chopper. A few in the skilled trades or in professional positions (there was one sluice box maker and one clerk), and one man, a saloon keeper, owned his own business.⁵³

Of the 59 Black females in the territory, 34 were 18 or older. Most of these women (19) stayed at home “keeping house” but women and girls also frequently (14) worked “as servants of White families, some in remote places miles away from towns.”⁵⁴ Two other women did washing and one—Lizzie Williams—listed herself as a “restaurant keeper” in Bozeman.

Helena's Early African American Community, ca. 1862-1877

Nearly one-third of the African American people in Montana in this period lived in Helena, with others in adjacent areas like the Prickly Pear Valley and elsewhere. Over 55% (104 of 187) listed Helena as their postal address.⁵⁵ Helena was by far the most significant Black community in the Territory. It was also one of the most significant in a much larger region. According to historian Quintard Taylor, Helena boasted the second oldest Black community in the Pacific Northwest. As noted earlier, a Black man was among the three prospectors who discovered gold in the area in 1862, making African Americans an integral part of Helena's origin story. Just three years after the major 1864 rush to Last Chance Gulch, Black people in burgeoning Helena were numerous enough to establish and support community institutions. In 1867, “a clergyman named McLaughlin and several Black families organized a church society that prospered through the 1870s.”⁵⁶ At the same time,

⁵² Behan, 29; Bigelow, “Antebellum Ohio’s Black Barbers in the Political Vanguard.”

⁵³ Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House”; Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 29–30.

⁵⁴ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 31. Fourteen women and girls worked in this capacity.

⁵⁵ United States Bureau of the Census, “9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁵⁶ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 51.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Helena's Black community also started the Pioneer Social Club.⁵⁷ This early community core attracted newcomers, and Helena's African American population continued to grow. In subsequent years "many Black cowboys and soldiers," among others, "chose to settle in Helena, if even briefly, because already a vibrant Black community had developed."⁵⁸

Helena had by then grown from a raw mining camp into a surging "Silver City." The lucrative Last Chance Gulch deposit produced about 19 million dollars in its first four years, and frenzied mining activity drove Helena's growth. Residents filled the original 1860s Helena Townsite, which straddled Last Chance Gulch, and speculators soon claimed the surrounding lands. The town boasted hundreds of businesses serving a mixed milieu and many needs of miners, freighters, merchants, etc. Residents represented an array of backgrounds—the town soon had cemeteries for the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faiths—and could choose from Democratic and Republican newspapers. Helena's public school soon counted some hundred students. Frequent stages connected the city to Fort Benton and other important settlements like Salt Lake City and Corinne, Utah (about five days and 550 miles away). After 1866, a new telegraph line linked the Silver City to the United States.⁵⁹ The following year, A. K. McClure visited in the course of writing *Three Thousand Miles Through the Rocky Mountains*. Helena, he wrote:

has all the vim, recklessness, extravagance, and jolly progress of a new camp. It is but little over two years old, but it boasts of a population of seven thousand five hundred, and of more solid men, more capital, more handsome and well-filled stores, more fast boys and frail women, more substance and pretense, more virtue and vice, more preachers and groggeries, and more go-aheadative-ness generally than any other city in the mountain mining regions.⁶⁰

Just after McClure's visit, placer mining played out and Helena's population dropped. But it remained the largest settlement in Montana Territory, with 3,106 of the territory's 20,600 residents listed in the 1870 census. Like most young cities that started from mining, its population was heavily male, with males outnumbering females three to one, and remarkably diverse. Indigenous people continued to form a significant, if under reported, portion of the population, and non-Indian immigrants came from points around the world, representing every American state and many foreign nations. Among the town's numerous ethnic enclaves were significant groups of Irish, Jewish, Chinese, and African American people.⁶¹

According to the census in 1870, Helena's Black community consisted of 66 residents, 35 men and 13 women, with 18 children (i.e., under the age of 18, six boys and 12 girls). These people lived in 33 separate households. Thirteen of these households included two or more Black people, and there were at least six families with children, including surnames Starley, Brown, Robinson, Cooper, William, and Howard (this last a lone mother and her 3-year-old). Although 1870 census records provide no addresses for Helena, no additions to the original townsite had been platted at that point. Black residents likely lived mostly within the confines of the townsite, a

⁵⁷ Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 344. Taylor identifies the Pioneer Social Club as a Helena organization. Other sources indicate that in Virginia City in 1867 residents established a "Pioneer Social Club" that was one of state's first African American organizations. It is unclear whether there were numerous Pioneer Social Clubs or whether one of these authors places the organization incorrectly. Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana*, 84.

⁵⁸ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 51.

⁵⁹ Hagen and Emmons, "Results of a Cultural Resources Inventory of the Montana Department of Transportation's North Montana Avenue Safety Improvement Project, Lewis and Clark County, Montana," 5; Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House."

⁶⁰ McClure, *Three Thousand Miles Through the Rocky Mountains*, 285.

⁶¹ Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House"; Paladin and Baucus, *Helena*, 1983, 28.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

crowded, chaotic cluster of buildings—mainly built of wood and log at first but increasingly of brick after a foundry opened by 1867—set amidst active mining claims.⁶²

Among the Black men who lived in Helena in 1870 were eight barbers. Many, perhaps most, of these men likely ran their own establishments. Two of them possessed substantial assets in “personal [vs. real] estate,” with Peter Lee reporting \$300 and Edward “Dude” Johnson (possibly Helena’s first mayor mentioned below) reporting \$1,000. Most other Black men (12) in Helena in this period worked as laborers, one of whom was a man of some means: William Robinson had \$200 in real estate and \$250 in other assets. Other men made a living as domestic servants (two) or as waiters (three), one man was a messenger and one a “bell ringer.” Two Helena Black men were cooks (including Square Colont or Squire Calvert, who reported real estate and personal assets totaling \$300), while Benjamin Franklin worked as a clerk with a thousand-dollar “personal estate.” Sluice-box maker Joseph Starley owned real estate and other assets worth \$600, and saloon-keeper James Beel had \$1,000 worth of real estate and another \$400 in personal assets, making him the wealthiest of Helena’s African American residents. Most (nine) of the 13 Black women in Helena stayed home “keeping house.” Two women worked as domestic servants (as did two teenaged girls), while the two other women who reported occupations worked as washerwomen. Only one Helena woman reported assets of her own, 40-year-old Lousia Brown, originally of Virginia, lived alone and possessed real estate worth \$200.⁶³

Black people made up just over 2% of Helena’s 1870 population, and the community’s cohesiveness and activism ensured a visibility that exceeded its numbers. When the 15th Amendment to the Constitution—securing African American men the right to vote—was ratified that year, Black Helenans planned a public celebration and published a letter of notification in the *Daily Herald* on April 15th, writing “We, the colored citizens of Helena, feeling desirous of showing our high appreciation of those God-like gifts granted to us by and through the passage of the 15th amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and knowing, as we do, that those rights which have been withheld from us, are now submerged and numbered with the things of the past, now thank God, is written and heralded to the wide world that we are free men and citizens of the United States—shorn of all those stigmatizing qualifications which have made us beasts . . . declare out intentions of celebrating the ratification of the 15th Amendment, on this 15th day of April, by the firing of thirty-two guns, from the hill and to the south of the city. Signed: Benjamin Stone, President; J.R. Johnson, Secretary.”⁶⁴ A “jubilant mass demonstration on Main Street” accompanied the 32-gun salute. The following year, Helena’s Black community organized a political club to continue promoting its agenda. The club campaigned for candidates like Republican William H. Claggett, who ran for territorial delegate.⁶⁵ In 1873, a Black barber originally from Washington D.C. named Edward W. Johnson was elected (unincorporated) Helena’s first mayor.⁶⁶

⁶² Baumler, *Helena, the Town That Gold Built: The First 150 Years*, 13–17.

⁶³ United States Bureau of the Census, “9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁶⁴ Transcribed in Castles, “The West,” 84.

⁶⁵ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 52.

⁶⁶ Bakken et al., *Encyclopedia of Immigration and Migration in the American West*, 300; Baumler, *Helena, the Town That Gold Built: The First 150 Years*, 26. The 1870 census indicates that year, 32-year-old boarder Edward Johnson lived with several other members of the African American community and reported a personal estate worth \$1000.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

The Black Communities of Early Virginia City, Fort Benton, and Bozeman

No other locales in Montana Territory at the time of the 1870 census came close to Helena in terms of total population or the number of Black residents, but several other places tallied between 10-20 Black residents, a number that in some cases made them a proportionally larger part of the local population. Unsurprisingly the communities that boasted the most significant clusters of Black residents were, like Helena, also significant population centers in the young Montana Territory. In 1870, Virginia City was Montana's 3rd most populous locality (and probably its second largest town, with the second most populous locality, the Cedar Creek Mining District, encompassing numerous settlements and drainages), and Virginia City totaled the second largest Black population (20), with Fort Benton, the territory's 13th most populous locality, close behind with 18 Black residents. Meanwhile, Bozeman, boasting the territory's fourth largest Black population, counted 11 Black residents.

These locales with smaller, substantial early African American populations in many ways mirrored the developing community in Helena. This proved especially true of Virginia City and Ft. Benton, where development tied directly to the mining boom.

Virginia City

Virginia City emerged in late spring 1863, when a regional gold rush that began in nearby Grasshopper Creek in 1862 shifted to Alder Gulch, "the richest placer gold strike

in the Rocky Mountains." With the mass influx, U.S. legislators carved the boundaries of a new Montana Territory out of Idaho Territory in May 1864, naming Bannack its first capital before later moving the capital in February 1865 to Virginia City. At the time, the mining town was a peaking bonanza: by mid-1864 "the population of the seven camps along the fourteen-mile, gold-laden gulch exceeded ten thousand, with five thousand people living within Virginia City itself." Just a few years later the population plunged: the staggering inundation swiftly exhausted local prospects, and July 1864 brought the next big gold discovery and new rush (to Last Chance Gulch-Helena). Virginia City continued to form the foundation of settler colonial society in Montana—publication of Montana's first newspaper, the *Montana Post*, began there in August 1864, and the Territory's first public school opened in town in March 1866—but by 1870, just 860 townspeople remained. It nonetheless served as the influential capital of Montana Territory (pop. 20,600) for another five years, until April 1875, when the capital moved to Helena.⁶⁷

Like Helena and other mining camps, Virginia City's population in its boom period was heavily adult, male (males outnumbering females three to one), and ethnically diverse. Indigenous people continued to form a significant, if under reported, portion of the population, and non-Indian immigrants came from points around the world, representing many American states and foreign nations. Among the town's numerous ethnic and racial groups were Jewish and, especially, Chinese people. The 1868 Original Townsite plat shows the Hebrew Cemetery covering an entire block north of Wallace St., across the grand North Park from the planned Capitol Square, and in 1870, the town's 279 Chinese residents constituted about one third of the population.⁶⁸

In his 1916 memoir, territorial editor and attorney Henry Blake noted that in 1866, there were "thirty negroes in Virginia City with a history as slaves," and although the population subsequently plunged with the shifting gold

⁶⁷ "Virginia City, Montana." Heath, "Viewpoint: Buildings as Cultural Narratives: Interpreting African American Lifeways in a Montana Gold Mining Camp," 21; "History of Alder Gulch." ADD 1870 MT census pop cite

⁶⁸ Heath, "Viewpoint: Buildings as Cultural Narratives: Interpreting African American Lifeways in a Montana Gold Mining Camp," 15–16; Corbett, "Virginia City, Montana [Townsite Plat]."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

rush, in 1870 Virginia City still boasted the second largest Black population in the territory.⁶⁹ The town counted 20 African American residents that year, a quarter of whom were children under the age of 12, and three of whom were women. All but one of the 15 adults were literate.⁷⁰

The 1870 Black population occupied 10 different dwellings (as well as the jail, which at census time contained one Black man among its inmates). Four of Virginia City's Black residents appear to have lived alone, while the others lived in shared dwellings. Four of those shared abodes housed only Black residents, while the other two houses were, like the jail, multiracial. Two Black households contained parents and children. One of them, that of Leven and Margaret Hall, accounted for half of the Black females in Virginia City and four out of the five children: Leven and Margaret Hall (both born in Kentucky) had three girls (Mary, Rebecca, and Ninnie) and a boy, Samuel, ages 3 to 11 (the eldest two, Mary and Samuel, born in Missouri and the younger girls born in Montana). In Montana by 1865, when daughter Rebecca was born (having been in Missouri four years earlier when son Samuel was born), the Hall family formed a visible part of Virginia City society, which boasted few families in this early period. The fifth Black child enumerated in Virginia City in 1870 was four-year-old, Montana-born William Westerbrook, who lived with his father Louis Westerbrook, a 27-year-old Kentucky-born cook.⁷¹

Besides Mrs. Margaret Hall (31), who worked "keeping house," the only other Black women enumerated in town in 1870 were 20-year-old Malissa Bruce and 30-year-old Jane Thorp, both from Missouri and, like Hall, literate and working "keeping house." Bruce may have been running a boarding house of sorts: she was enumerated in the same dwelling as two Black men, both barbers, George Cane (30), and the young Thomas White (21).⁷²

Although census records provide no addresses for Virginia City in 1870, no additions to the original townsite had been platted at that point. Black residents likely lived mostly within the confines of the townsite, a crowded, chaotic cluster of buildings—mainly built of wood and log.⁷³

Malissa Bruce's home may have belonged to Thomas White, a native of the District of Columbia who at the time represented the most substantial Black property owner in town. Despite being the youngest, White was prominent among the 13 Black men Virginia City census takers counted in 1870. Of these, six were in their 20s, five in their 30s, and two in their 40s. One of them (Leven Hall, 38) lived with a wife, while two (Hall and Louis Westerbrook) lived with their children. All of the men had been born in the eastern United States, mostly in the South, four in Kentucky, three in Missouri, two in Virginia, and one each in Louisiana, South Carolina, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia. Six of them possessed noteworthy property—real and/or personal—with three owning real estate. Census-identified real property owners included Harrison Mondell, a 48-year-old Virginia-born "laborer" whose estate comprised \$1,000 worth of real estate in addition to \$4,000 in personal property, and James Hawley (47), a Virginia-born teamster whose \$1,300 estate included \$400-worth of real property. Thomas White, for his part, reported \$500 in personal property and \$2,000 in real estate.⁷⁴ His

⁶⁹ Heath, "Viewpoint: Buildings as Cultural Narratives: Interpreting African American Lifeways in a Montana Gold Mining Camp," 15, 26 n60.

⁷⁰ United States Bureau of the Census, "9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷¹ United States Bureau of the Census.

⁷² United States Bureau of the Census.

⁷³ Bauml, *Helena, the Town That Gold Built: The First 150 Years*, 13–17.

⁷⁴ United States Bureau of the Census, "9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

substantial local real estate holdings in this era included an array of properties, including main street commercial properties, residences, and mining claims.⁷⁵

In addition to teamster James Hawley and barbers Thomas White and George Cane, the 13 men counted in Virginia City in 1870 included five who identified themselves as laborers (Hall and Mundell as well as Jack Taylor, Peter Broadhead, and James A. Mack) and four working as cooks (the aforementioned Westerbrook as well as 26-year-old Edward Bryant of South Carolina, 30-year-old John Butter of Pennsylvania, and 32-year-old Augustus Titas of Missouri). Census takers listed no occupation for 30-year-old Evans Simpson of Missouri, the one Black man enumerated while locked in jail.⁷⁶

Black people made up less than 3% of Virginia City's 1870 census population, but they nonetheless composed a prominent part of the community. Their population just a few years earlier stood significantly higher, and it included some of the town's early, prosperous and visible landowners: Thomas White owned main street commercial property with 15 feet of frontage by May 1864, and the following year expanded his holdings to include two more commercial parcels, one containing a "Shoe Shop" and the other a "barber shop," as well as a log house and lot—with a spring—at the east end of Cover Street.⁷⁷ Also prominent in early Virginia City was Union Army veteran Jarred "Jack" Taylor [aka Jarette], who by 1865-1866, "made his way to Virginia City by working for a freighting company," i.e. "the outfit of Majors and Russell," and "he continued freighting on the vital Virginia City-Fort Benton road for the F.R. Merk Company, formerly located in what is now the Pioneer Bar on Wallace Street." Enumerated in the 1870 census as a "laborer," Taylor "began to purchase property early on—the first in 1872. In 1875, as Jarrett Taylor, he filed a "Declaration of Occupancy" on an unsurveyed 160 acres on the South Meadow Creek in Madison County, "about 1 ¼ mi from Edward Gleason's residence." Three years later, as Jarrett Taylor, he sold "West 18 ft, Lot 22, East 4 ft Lot 21, Blk 190." Thus, very early in his life in Virginia City, Taylor established a consistent pattern of buying and selling property throughout the area, most particularly in Virginia City and nearby Nevada City," with the result "over the years, he became a successful businessman with a number of white employees and a good deal of land and livestock."⁷⁸

Another Black man who owned prominent real estate in early Virginia City was Albert Cogswell, who in 1867 purchased a house and lot on the corner of Jackson and Idaho streets, north of main street near the prominent

⁷⁵ Among properties owned by Thomas White (variously listed as Thomas, Thomas A. or Thomas H.) in this period were Virginia City townsite lot #39 (in a block that was renumbered from No. 31 in May 1864 to No. 62 by July 1865 to No. 154 by the time the official May 1868 Townsite plat was completed), which White acquired in two 1864-1865 transactions (purchasing the east 15 feet for \$700 in May 1864 from Joseph Malin and the west ten feet for \$800 in July 1865 from John W. Todd, who "built and occupied [it] for a Shoe Shop") before he and his wife Hattie White sold the whole lot "fronting 25 feet on Wallace Street and running back Northerly one hundred feet to a certain alley," along with all "tenements and appurtenances thereunto belonging...and the rents, issue and profits thereof," to William Douglas for \$1000 in April 1879; a "log house ...on Cover Street. Also the lot running back to the Spring. Thence running up stream 25 feet" purchased for \$100 from Katy O'Neal in February 1865; half-interest in "a certain House and lot situated between J. E. McClurg's store and E. K. Woodbury's old store and now occupied and used as a barber shop being the same barber shop formerly owned and occupied by George W. Turley together with all the fixtures and furniture belonging to the same," purchased for \$800 in Sept 1865 from Theodore Lyons, Harrison McCarty, Frank Hagler, and John Burns; mining claims conveyed by White et al to Wm. Cowan et al in Nov. 1865 ("Claims 3, 4 and 5 on Wells Fargo lode, Summit Dist.") and to D. J. Emery et al in May 1866 [?] ("Claims in Current Gulch"); and portions of lots 4 and 5 (block 193, W 9 ft and E 3 ft, respectively) conveyed by White to Marie Daines in June 1875.

⁷⁶ United States Bureau of the Census, "9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁷ "Deeds."

⁷⁸ Heath, "Viewpoint: Buildings as Cultural Narratives: Interpreting African American Lifeways in a Montana Gold Mining Camp," 15–16; "Cogswell-Taylor Cabins"; "Montana National Register Sign Program. 'Cogswell - Taylor Cabins - Virginia City National Historic Landmark District'; "Minerva Cogswell, Virginia City Restaurateur."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

edifices of the Catholic Church, the town hospital, the Missouri House and the Montana Democrat newspaper office. Cogswell's property was "one of the first lots approached from the "initial discovery" mining claims situated to the south up Alder Gulch." Albert Cogswell died in 1878, with regional newspapers noting the passing of the "well known" man, "one of the old citizens of Virginia City;" the property was subsequently owned by his widow, Mrs. Minerva Cogswell."⁷⁹

Black women like Minerva Cogswell also became visible businesspeople in early Virginia City. Minerva first came to Virginia City in 1863 and was joined there by her younger sister Parthenia Snead. By 1875 she catered special events in town—that year she served "ice cream and suitable refreshments on the Fourth, and in the evening, at the old International Hotel," and two years later, in 1877, "Mrs. Minerva Cogswell and Sister" opened their own main-street business in Virginia City, "a restaurant and bakery adjoining the Express office." From their new location in the heart of the commercial district the sisters sold "bread, pies, cakes, etc," and continued to cater "parties and weddings." By 1879, they relocated to a storefront "five doors below Well Fargo's Exp's office." That year, an advertisement in the *Madisonian* touted their establishment as serving "meals all hours day and night." The following year, the Pacific Coast Directory listed "Cogswell, M. & Sister" as "providing the city of 750 residents with a restaurant," one of several serving the dwindling town.⁸⁰

By then, Virginia City boasted at least one other prominent Black businesswoman, Sarah Gammon Brown. Leaving Tennessee by covered wagon in 1870, Sarah Blair Gammon (a.k.a. Sallie) arrived in Virginia City in January 1871. She "worked briefly as a chambermaid at the Madison Hotel" before marrying Irish-immigrant John Brown (a.k.a. William Thomas Brown), a miner, in 1872. Sara subsequently bore three children—while John beat her and threatened to kill her—losing her two sons to diphtheria before suing for divorce, and custody of surviving daughter Eva, in April 1879 after John abandoned the family. Working first "in the French Canadian household of Adaline Laurin," by 1880 "Mrs. Sallie Brown, Proprietress" had "opened a bakery, restaurant, and lodging house on Wallace Street," i.e., the New City Bakery and Restaurant, located "two doors above the Madison House."⁸¹

Moreover, given the dynamic nature of Montana's Black population—like the other non-Indian populations swarming over the territory—there were more Black people in early Virginia City than the core sources note. For instance, Clarissa Jane Powell lived in Virginia City as a child with her White half-sister and her sister's husband (Mary Powell and Phil E. Evans) after they brought Clarissa to Montana as their slave in April 1865. Union Army veterans John Anderson and James Crump arrived in Virginia City that December via Salt Lake City after being discharged at Fort Leavenworth, and "stayed until May, 1867." During that time they worked as teamsters, "making short trips in and out between Bozeman and Salt Lake, Bozeman and the Black Hills, then down towards the California line." At some point Clarissa Jane Powell may have joined them: in 1869, she and James Crump married in Corinne, Utah. Barber and magician Samuel Lewis (born in Haiti, or possibly Bermuda) also spent some time in Virginia City in 1866, and Hattie Martin Franklin gave birth to her son

⁷⁹ Heath, "Viewpoint: Buildings as Cultural Narratives: Interpreting African American Lifeways in a Montana Gold Mining Camp," 4–8; Bureau of the Census, "10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory."

⁸⁰ Heath, "Viewpoint: Buildings as Cultural Narratives: Interpreting African American Lifeways in a Montana Gold Mining Camp," 7–8.

⁸¹ "Cogswell-Taylor Cabins"; "Sarah Bickford"; Hampton, "Hangman's Building (MT Historic Property Record, #24MA2392)"; Hampton, "Cogswell-Taylor House and Jackson Street Store (MT Historic Property Record, #24MA2396)"; WHM, "Celebrating Sarah Gammon Bickford"; "About Sarah"; "Sarah Gammon Bickford (1855-1931): 'Montana's First Career Woman.'"

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Alexander in Virginia City in 1869 or 1870, though neither she nor her husband Benjamin—nor their infant son Alexander—was enumerated in Virginia City in the 1870 census.⁸²

Fort Benton

Early Fort Benton boasted a similar number of Black residents as Virginia City. The 1870 census enumerated 367 Benton residents, including an African American population of 18 (with another two men living nearby in populated area “below Fort Benton on the Missouri”), although the Black population was likely higher: local historian Ken Robison maintains that “by 1870 Fort Benton’s black community had at least 25 residents.”⁸³ But unlike Virginia City, Fort Benton’s enumerated Black populace included no children: census takers listed 17-year-old Mary Mills, whose father was Black, as “1/2 Ind[ian],” and no other African American children are listed in Fort Benton at census time. Rather, all 20 individuals enumerated in the area in 1870 were between the ages of 21 and 62, including four women and 16 men. At least one of these people lived with a spouse and child: Kentucky-born Henry Mills and his Native Montanan wife and their Afro-Indigenous daughter Mary, seventeen.

The 17 other Black people living in town occupied a total of 10 dwellings. In addition to the two men living downstream “on the Missouri,” seven of Fort Benton’s Black residents (three of whom shared the last name Davis) appear to have lived alone (among them the three women, including two surnamed Davis, who listed “domestic servant” or “house servant” as their occupations). The others—none of whom shared the same surname or otherwise visibly related—roomed together in groups of two or three. M. Dennis, a cook, and John Kelly, a laborer (both 25 and from Missouri) shared a house with 38-year-old Maria Berry, a Tennessee-born domestic servant. Three of Fort Benton’s four Black barbers also shared a dwelling including Alex Clark, 21 (b. Missouri), Richard Lamb, 27 (b. Indiana), and John Ross, 36 (b. South Carolina) lived together at the same address. The fourth barber also had a pair of roommates: Sol Warrick, 52 (b. Virginia) lived with George Johnson, a 31-year-old servant, and John Davis, a 29-year-old laborer (both from Missouri). The last dwelling with more than one Black resident was that shared by Virginia-born James Vandenberg (55, likely the man long noted in Fort Benton fur trade records), and Louisiana-born David H. Dolbec, 62, both domestic servants.⁸⁴

As the details above suggest, Fort Benton’s 1870 Black residents worked most commonly as a “servant” (usually “house” or “domestic”), with eight people—and all four women—listing this as their occupation. In addition to the aforementioned four barbers, three Missouri-born men worked as cooks (M. Dennis, William B. Hawkins and, downriver, Peter Huger), and another three identified themselves as “laborers.” One man, living out of town on the Missouri (25-year-old Jo Harrison of Kentucky), worked as a “wood chopper,” while one (33-year-old John Hughes of Kentucky) was a “teamster.”

Such occupations were shared by many in the teeming port town, but they also suggest something of the specific racialized employment realities of Black Montanans, who concentrated in domestic service and general labor positions as well as in the professions of “cook” and “barber.” A host of race-based practices worked together to limit African American employment, and one’s occupation, thus, didn’t necessarily directly reflect socio-economic status. Most of Fort Benton-area Black residents could read and write (70% of those who lived in town)—a noteworthy number at a time when 80 percent of African Americans were illiterate—and some held

⁸² “Marriage License, Silver Bow County, MT (Franklin-Thompson)”; “Mary Benjamin Powell - Facts”; “Was a Pioneer”; Adams, “The Rosebud Expedition: John Anderson and the Battle of the Little Big Horn”; Adams, “The Negro Who Scalped Sitting Bull Jr. in the Battle of the Little Bighorn.”

⁸³ Robison, “Historical Fort Benton,” July 31, 2005.

⁸⁴ United States Bureau of the Census, “9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

property of note:⁸⁵ Five town residents listed “personal estates” valued at between \$250 and \$2,500, with the wealthiest being 25-year-old domestic servant Julia Davis (b. Missouri). Barbers John Ross and Richard Lamb also accumulated some wealth (with estates of \$1,000 and \$450, respectively), as had cook William Hawkins and Henry Mills, then 62 and working as a laborer.⁸⁶

As in the raw mining camps and boom towns elsewhere in the Territory, Fort Benton in this period was in constant flux, and the 1870 census captured only a moment, an incomplete moment. As noted above, Fort Benton’s local history expert Ken Robison counts an 1870 population 25% larger than that reported in the federal decennial census, and other early Black residents made the area their home at different times. At least two of them died in pivotal period conflicts. On May 25th, 1865, “young James Beery,” a.k.a. James Price, was killed along with nine other laborers in an attack on a work crew at the would-be rival port of Ophir at the confluence of the Missouri and the Marias. The following decade, Edmund Bradley died in the war between the invading United States and bands of the Nez Perce nation who were resisting removal from their territory.⁸⁷

Bradley, “also known as Edmund Richardson,” was “killed at the Cow Creek Canyon fight” in September 1877 after being recruited by “Major Guido Ilges, commander of the military post at Fort Benton . . . to join a force of 50 civilian volunteers sent to reinforce a small detachment of the 7th Infantry Regiment under Sergeant Moelchert assigned to protect a large cache of steamboat freight at Cow Island on the Missouri River.” A “skilled carpenter and house builder,” he’d first “come to Fort Benton in the early 1870s, built a modest house, and married a Gros Ventre woman,” with whom he “had at least two children, a son and a daughter.” Bradley helped build Fort Benton, and after he died in the violence, “Major Ilges ordered his body removed from the Cow Island trail and returned to Fort Benton, [where] the River Press covered the impressive funeral.” Attended by “nearly all the residents of the town, including the Home Guards, commanded by Captain John Evans, the volunteers who participated in the gallant fight at Cow Creek, and the soldiers from the military post” the funeral was preceded by a grand procession of “The coffin . . . covered with black velvet and tastefully trimmed with black fringe and silver mountings.” Commanded by Major Ilges, the procession “line moved off in the following order, to the sound of a muffled drum: Fife and drum. Firing party, consisting of eight soldiers from the military post. Hearse bearing coffin covered with United States flag. Party of fifty citizens, on foot. Volunteers and home Guards, mounted, about forty in number. Six wagons, containing county officials and other invited guests.”⁸⁸

Bradley’s prominent life and death in Fort Benton was followed by another noteworthy event the following year, when “in 1878, Major Ilges sent the remains of Edmund Bradley by the steamboat Colonel Macleod to the mother of the deceased who resided in New Haven, Connecticut. The Major also sent Bradley’s little girl to Bismarck, where the grandmother had come to meet her.” Bradley’s wife and “his young son, Steve, [reportedly] returned to the Gros Ventre people at the insistence of her grandmother.”⁸⁹

Some residents moved through as riverboat passengers bound for overland destinations or, as noted above, often working as crew on the steamers that churned into Fort Benton, “the head of navigation on the Missouri river and the hub for overland freighting into Montana and southern Canada.” Edward D. Simms, for instance, first

⁸⁵ Snyder, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, chap. 1.

⁸⁶ United States Bureau of the Census, “9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁸⁷ Robison, “Historical Fort Benton,” July 31, 2005.

⁸⁸ ; Jim Jenks and Steve Aaberg, *Cow Creek Skirmish Historic District* National Register nomination, NR-listed June 28, 2019, NR #SG100004104 (24BL2497).

⁸⁹ Robison, “Historical Fort Benton,” July 31, 2005; Robison, “Historical Fort Benton,” July 25, 2006; Armstrong, “Author Comes To Willington Public Library.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

came to Montana “in 1873 at the age of 19, serving as assistant steward on a steamboat that came up the Missouri River to Fort Benton.” Simms was born enslaved in “Arkansas in 1853, and after emancipation worked for a time in Texas.” As he later recalled about that first trip upriver to Montana, “the people and the country looked good to me from the first, and I determined to live here.”⁹⁰ He subsequently “got employment on another boat, the Red Cloud ... owned by Howard Conrad and later by the [Fort Benton] firm of Conrad & I. G. Baker,” on which he worked from 1878 to 1880.⁹¹ [See Figure : 1) Steamboat crewman Ed Simms.⁹²

Other early Black Montanans lived in Fort Benton in the course of forging prominent roles in the region. Duke Dutriueille, born on “a ship in the Philadelphia harbor” and a barber who reportedly “shaved three presidents, Buchanan, Lincoln, and Grant,” traveled upriver to Fort Benton in 1870. His arrival inaugurated a 40 year period during which he ran “Duke’s Place” barbershops in towns across Montana. Missouri-native Leah Ward, who became known as Fort Benton’s “‘angel of mercy,’ came up the Missouri River in the 1870s and operated her own Benton Laundry,” closing it in 1879 when she married Black teamster, John C. “Dixie” Ward. By then Leah had accumulated substantial Chouteau County real estate, including “two town lots and \$1255 assessed property.” Missouri-born Dixie Ward, for his part, lived in Montana since 1864, working “as a freighter for many years for the Diamond R Overland Freighting Company” and settled in Fort Benton in the 1870s before marrying local businesswoman and property owner Leah.⁹³



Figure 6: Millie Ringgold, undated.
Montana Historical Society
Research Center, PAc 82-19.F1.

In addition to Leah Ward, Black women in early Fort Benton who attained regional prominence included Millie or Molly Ringold (a.k.a. Ringgold or Ringo). [Figure 6] Millie was born enslaved in the Maryland-Virginia region around 1845, and after being freed by the Civil War made her way to Washington D.C., journeying from there west and “by steamship to Fort Benton, Montana Territory, as a nurse and servant for a U.S. Army general. When the General transferred back east, Millie remained at Fort Benton,” where she opened a boarding house. In “January 1879, Millie moved her boarding house to Front Street, next door to the Montana House. Her success is indicated by the tax list that year that recorded her personal property at about \$1,400. Later in 1879, Millie with many others from Fort Benton stampeded to the Yogo gold strike. She bought a wagon and two condemned army mules, loaded them up with provisions and a barrel of whiskey, and headed for the Little Belt Mountains.”⁹⁴

Millie’s entrepreneurial boldness was mirrored by Mattie Bost Bell, likewise born into slavery (in North Carolina in the 1850s) and freed by the Civil War. After living in St. Louis for ten years, Bell traveled to Fort Benton by steamboat in June 1876, taking two White children whom she’d been hired to bring upriver to their mother. Bell stayed in Fort Benton after delivering her charges: “On arrival at Fort Benton in June, Mattie was hired by John Hunsberger at a salary of \$100 a month to run the laundry at the Overland Hotel.” Within a year she owned her own “successful laundry.” In Fort Benton Mattie also met

⁹⁰ Robison, “Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri”; Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3,” 3.

⁹¹ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

⁹² Robison, “Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri.”

⁹³ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

⁹⁴ Robison; Moser, “Images of the West”; Behan, “Millie Ringold (1845-1906) •”; “Millie Ringgold and ‘Coal Oil Johnny.’”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

John K. Castner, a White freighter “who ran several mule teams from the Missouri River terminus.” Mattie Bost Bell married the Pennsylvania-born Castner in Helena, in 1879.⁹⁵

By the late 1870s, Fort Benton’s burgeoning Black community began developing collective organizations, at least informally. The *Benton Record* reported “services held by black minister, “Preacher” Johnson, at the schoolhouse on one Sunday evening in May 1878.” The newspaper noted that “Flowers were presented to the “eloquent clergyman,” and the congregation had remarkable singing voices.” A few years later, the *River Press* identified Miss Lydia Johnson as having “long been acknowledged to be the bell of Benton in the colored circle,” and reported on Miss Johnson’s 1883 marriage to Lafayette Hall. Mr. Hall lived in the region since at least 1880 (when census takers noted him “working as a servant in the household of an elderly white woman at Fort Assiniboine”) and worked at the Grand Union when it opened in 1882. The newspaper described an “impressive ceremony ... [and] the splendid supper [and] the genuine Philadelphia fish-house punch that was provided in abundance for” a racially mixed group of illustrious guests “at the residence of the bride’s mother, Mrs. Henrietta A. Johnson.”⁹⁶

Bozeman



Figure 7: “Richard and Mary McDonald,” Unknown photographer, n.d.. Printed in Crystal Alegria, “Bozeman’s Historic African American Community,” *Bozeman Magazine*, February 1, 2022.

Of the “civil divisions” enumerated in Montana in the 1870 census, few outside of Helena, Virginia City and Fort Benton counted more than a handful of Black households or individuals before the late 1870s. In this early period, Bozeman boasted the fourth largest cluster of African American inhabitants. The 1870 census counted 11 people occupying half a dozen different dwellings. They included several single adults as well as a family with children—the aforementioned McDonalds, Richard and Mary and son Edward, who after arriving in 1864 built a log cabin on what became South Tracy Street. [Figure 7] Mr. and Mrs. McDonald “worked at Fort Ellis for a time” after it was established in 1867, and in 1870 Richard worked as a “domestic servant” while Mary was “keeping house” at their 308 South Tracy (then Templar Street) property. In 1872, using scrap materials they gathered, they added a second story to their “small cabin, and the rough log

sides were covered with clapboard,” making it the first two-story home in Bozeman. In subsequent years, Mary bore another five children in quick succession: daughters Mary Molly in 1873 and Belle in 1875, son Louis in 1876, daughter Melissa in 1878 and afterward another son, possibly called Arthur.⁹⁷

In Bozeman in 1870, the McDonalds were joined by an array of other African American residents. Among them was one other household with children, that of 18-year-old Missouri-born Emma Foster, who worked as a domestic servant, and her infant son Edwin. Another household with children arrived shortly thereafter. Afro-

⁹⁵ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3”; “Mattie Bost Bell Castner: Booster of Community Spirit (1848-1920)”; Pickett, “Successful Ex-Slave Key in Belt’s Founding, Growth.”

⁹⁶ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

⁹⁷ Schontzler, “McDonald House Holds History of Freed Slaves Who Helped Settle Bozeman”; Alegria, “Our Historic Neighbors The McDonald Family Let’s Get to Know Them”; Wood, “McDonald House (MT Historic Property Record, #24GA1919).”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Indigenous Emma Barnes settled in Bozeman in the early 1870s, possibly as early as 1871, and by the end of 1880 had four children, eldest daughter Lulu (born 1871 either on the Crow Reservation or in Bozeman), and three sons (born ca. 1874, 1876, and 1880). In December 1880, Emma married Eli Rogers, who arrived in town the year before and purchased a house at 518 N. Black. Ten months later Emma gave birth to a daughter, Catherine “Kitty” Rogers.

Other Black residents in 1870 were single adults. They included Greenbury Chopper, who came to Bozeman in 1866 at the age of 66 after a lifetime in slavery in Kentucky and opened a shoe shine stand. They also included Samuel W. Lewis, who’d been born in the West Indies and arrived in Bozeman in the fall of 1868. Lewis, a barber (and magician and musician) with experience in Western real estate development, quickly established a “tonsorial business” and barber shop on Main Street, and by 1870 was the wealthiest African American town, with a personal estate of \$500. In November 1874 he renovated his business (“always in apple pie order”) and in subsequent years began buying property in Bozeman: by November 1878, he begun “work on building ‘two neat cottages on Templar [now 209 and 211 South Tracy], nearly opposite the residence of Dr. G.W. Monroe.’ Following popular building trends, Lewis’ small but notable cottages were of frame construction and feature Gothic ornamentation...Byron Vreeland—the talented local architect-builder...was eventually employed ‘to finish the new cottages of S.W. Lewis.’...By the summer of 1880, Lewis was in the process of erecting ‘another neat residence on Templar’ which featured the ‘first mansard roof in Bozeman.’”⁹⁸

Black Bozeman residents also included a 33-year-old woman named Elizabeth Williams. Originally from Kentucky, Lizzie, as she was known, had been in Montana since summer 1865, when she and her husband, barber James N. Williams, migrated from Denver to Helena. In September 1868 Lizzie opened the Southern Hotel (with bar and restaurant) in Springville, southeast of Helena near Townsend. A year later she moved to Bozeman (she and James, who left Montana in July 1869, having separated). In January 1870, several months after arriving in Bozeman, industrious Lizzie “purchased a lot and [tavern] building on Main Street for \$2,200” and secured a license “to operate The City Restaurant and Hotel.” By March, she advertised in the local paper for her “CITY RESTAURANT, re-fitted, re-opened, & re-finished” “on the south side of Main Street between Black and Bozeman streets, where the Running Company stands today at 126 E. Main St.” In the “frame block on Main Street . . . for two years, she conducted the restaurant business. She then enlarged and improved the premises, and rented them for general business purposes.”⁹⁹

While running her Main Street business, Lizzie Williams pursued other commercial endeavors, serving as a nurse for Bozeman’s sick (she “worked as a hospital nurse in her early life”) and constructing a separate wood-frame store building on another lot (completed in 1872) that she rented to J.P. Merkle, “who operated a jewelry and clothing shop out of the space.” She also at one point sold Samuel Lewis “a slice of land for his barbershop.” Lizzie’s labors paid off, and during the early 1870s she was able to build substantial assets. Despite being robbed in 1874 of “about \$300 in green backs, gold, and county warrants,” and formally divorcing James several months later, her estate value climbed from \$400 of personal property in 1870 to almost \$4,000 by mid-1875 (when her possessions included “commercial buildings and her home, a horse, cook stove, a good sewing machine, lace curtains, a bed” etc.). That year Lizzie, barely in her 40s, died “after a long

⁹⁸ Strahn, “Samuel Lewis House”; Extreme History Project, “Cemetery Stories – Greenbury Chopper”; United States Bureau of the Census, “9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁹⁹ Extreme History Project, “Cemetery Stories”; Schontzler, “Discovering Lizzie Williams and Bozeman’s Lost Black History”; Alegria, Crystal, “A History Hidden in Plain Sight”; “Lizzie Williams (Obituary).”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

illness.” The Bozeman newspapers eulogized the Main Street businesswoman as “a devoted nurse...ever the friend of the poor and afflicted” whose “loss was deeply and universally deplored in Bozeman.”¹⁰⁰

Lizzie Williams’ publicly-mourned death came several years after the public murder of another of Bozeman’s Black residents. In July 1873, a group of White residents lynched “Jno. W. St. Clair, a negro or mulatto,” accused of having “killed a Chinaman.” Period documents record little of the lynching, and histories have done likewise. The lone reference research has yet produced is the brief, matter-of-fact note in Leeson’s 1885 *History of Montana*, which tells of two men, one of them St. Clair, who in July 1873 “were taken from the Gallatin county jail at Bozeman by a mob and hanged in the slaughterhouse.”¹⁰¹

Even in this early period, the many homes of Black Montana extended over the entire Territory. The 1870 census recorded African Americans across Big Sky Country, in the clusters detailed above as well as in all 11 counties. Of 20 other Black-occupied locales, half boasted more than one Black resident—both Deer Lodge and Fort Shaw counted five (all servants)—while lone African American individuals made their homes in 10 places. The following year, the Montana Territorial Prison was completed at Deer Lodge, and on July 2 received its first nine inmates. The first prisoners comprised a “miner from Wales,” four “white men” (presumably American-born), two “Chinese immigrants,” and two “former slaves.”¹⁰²

As well as being both significant components of several major communities and residing in locales across Montana, Black residents in the region were associated with pivotal events of the period. In 1873 for instance, Walker Browning, who recently moved to Fort Laramie, Wyoming, “joined a government survey preceding the opening of Yellowstone National Park as a cook,” and moved through the region in that critical survey crew capacity.¹⁰³ Several years later a number of African Americans traveled to Montana with the invading U.S. Military, which suffered a spectacular defeat at the hands of an allied indigenous defensive force on the banks of the Little Big Horn River at the Battle of the Greasy Grass. Among those who came to Montana with the U.S. Army was “Knut Nichols, a negro, [who] while just a boy, ran away from General Custer before the massacre in 1876, and somehow came to Helena where he lived with the [Burt J] Monroe family until his death. He gardened and did most of the cooking while he was with them.”¹⁰⁴

Like Nichols, a man who served as “General Custer's Negro valet” also settled in Montana after traveling to the region with the military. He appears to have married a local Native woman named Mary Gardner or Mary Garden, and may have lived with her on her allotment three miles west of Absarokee on the south bank of the Stillwater River. Mary’s allotment ended up in White hands by the 1890s, with later residents recalling that it became the property of either Mr. Frank Hart (who reportedly traded her “his best pinto saddle pony to get her to give up her claim to the acreage.”),¹⁰⁵ or of a Mr. Tyler, who reportedly bought a squatters right and then when he “had lived on his homestead the five years and prepared to “prove up” on it, he discovered that it was the allotment of an Indian woman named Mary Garden. She had been married to a Negro valet of General

¹⁰⁰ Extreme History Project, “Cemetery Stories”; Schontzler, “Discovering Lizzie Williams and Bozeman’s Lost Black History”; Alegria, Crystal, “A History Hidden in Plain Sight”; “Lizzie Williams (Obituary).”

¹⁰¹ Leeson, *History of Montana. 1739-1885*.

¹⁰² “UM Offers New Timeline on African Americans, Montana Justice System.”

¹⁰³ Wood, “Mrs. Browning’s Furnished Rooms (MT Historic Property Record, #24YL2046).”

¹⁰⁴ Rowe, *Mountains and Meadows*, 211.

¹⁰⁵ Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, 3:220–21.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Custer.... Mr. Tyler made several trips to the Agency and to the land office to no avail. Finally he was given title by special act of Congress.”¹⁰⁶

Other Black Montanans who arrived in the region with Custer's army included Annie Morgan and Susan Elizabeth Tinsley Mundy. Susan Elizabeth Tinsley became Custer's cook when she fled slavery during the Civil War and sought refuge at a Union Army camp. She cooked for the Custer family, both in various home bases and in the field during the “Indian Wars,” from 1863 until 1875 (around which time she married Lafayette Mundy “in Old Mexico”). Annie Morgan, meanwhile, reportedly “came to Montana as a cook for General Custer in 1876. Morgan left Custer's service sometime before the battle of the Little Bighorn and made her way to Philipsburg.”¹⁰⁷

So too sisters Mary Adams and Maria Adams (Dutriueille), “born in Kentucky in 1849 and 1852,” respectively, and by 1875 working “for General and Mrs. George Custer at Fort Abraham Lincoln. In June 1876 Mary Adams accompanied Custer as his cook on the Sioux expedition. She was present on June 22 when General Alfred Terry and Custer met for the last time. Mary later swore an affidavit for the Army in 1878 regarding what she heard during that fateful final meeting, quoting General Terry as saying to Custer, “Use your own judgment and do what you think best.” This has become crucial testimony in confirming that Custer in fact had a free hand going into his disastrous last campaign.” After “the death of the General, Elizabeth Custer had to vacate her military quarters and so she released Mary and Maria Adams. The sisters worked for the Army at Fort Keogh, Miles City, before moving on to Bismarck.” There, “in 1878 they heard of the boom days and good wages at Fort Benton, the head of navigation on the Missouri River, so the adventurous young women took passage on the steamboat *Nellie Peck*.”¹⁰⁸

Other Black people also likely arrived in Montana with the United States Army. Among them may have been William Woodcock, who was with the Army at the Battle of the Big Hole in 1877, and subsequently worked as servant to U.S. Marshall Colonel Alexander Botkin.¹⁰⁹

Race Relations in Montana Territory

The successful establishment of Montana's early Black community suggests that the West may indeed have offered relative freedom and security, as many Black migrants surely hoped. But the key word is relative. In Reconstruction-era America, White supremacy knew no regional bounds. As they did elsewhere, African Americans in Montana and the surrounding region faced a spectrum of obstacles and attacks, ranging from daily interpersonal discrimination of all sorts to legal limitations and deadly violence. Montana was “a far less hospitable place for African American than for White migrants,” and “was not regarded by colored people as heaven on earth.”¹¹⁰

Anti-Black racism was the stock-and-trade of territorial public life. Montana newspapers and other media contained “all the stereotypes” of African Americans during that period, “including that old favorite, the genial

¹⁰⁶ Annin, 3:245.

¹⁰⁷ “Grandma Cooked for Custer”; Hagen and Caywood, “Morgan-Case Homestead.”

¹⁰⁸ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

¹⁰⁹ Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 173–175; “The Two Colors of the Chop House Affair,” *The Weekly Miner*, December 20, 1881, 5; Scott, “Archaeological Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn: A Retrospective,” 15; Haines, *Battle of the Big Hole*. *Helena Independent*, December 8, 1883, 5; “Montana News,” *The Daily Enterprise*, December 10, 1883, 4.

¹¹⁰ McMillen, “Border State Terror and The Genesis of the African-American Community in Deer Lodge and Chouteau Counties, Montana, 1870-1890,” 218; Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

but dumb domestic.”¹¹¹ Those same papers “excluded discussion of Black citizens’ activities,” while “territorial business and city directories omitted Black people, organizations, churches, fraternal orders, [and] clubs.” Although some Republican newspapers editorialized in favor of civil rights, they nonetheless frequently printed racist, derogatory depictions of Black people.¹¹² In other instances, the media was more aggressively anti-Black. In the late 1860s, the *Helena Gazette* “editorialized vitriolically against Black suffrage,” while the editor of another Montana paper declaimed the supposed threat of interracial marriage. After recounting a story about a Black man (a “lecherous old African”) in California who wanted to marry a White woman, he asked “if they have no rope in San Francisco strong enough to support the weight of a negro.” In subsequent editions of the newspaper he weighed in on proposed legislation that would forbid “Whites to cohabit with Indians, Chinese, or persons of African descent.” Such interracial relations, he wrote, were “an evil and disgusting violation of natural law,” and the legislation should be adopted, perhaps with an amendment that added “Chinese persons of African descent.”¹¹³

Anti-Black sentiment not only pervaded public discourse but infected territorial government as well. Many early Montanans emigrated from the South, and while the South held no monopoly on White supremacy, its White residents could be vociferous on the subject of Black subordination, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. Historian J.W. Smurr noted that “Montanans were very much like their fellow countrymen on the question of Negro equality,” but their expression of White supremacy had a particular cast.¹¹⁴ Smurr likened Montana “to an antebellum border state in which southern sympathy was strong, but not so powerful as to ‘reproduce a bit of the Old South in the New West.’” In its approach, “Montana Territory passed over the Radical Republican theory of Negro rights and adopted instead the attitude popular in the New South.” In his study of “Reconstruction on the frontier,” Eugene Berwanger described the first territorial legislature as “overwhelmingly pro-southern and Democratic, so much so that the editor of the *Montana Post*, characterized it as ‘a body of secessionists, openly proclaiming to be citizens of Dixie.’”¹¹⁵

Whether it was due to “embittered Southerners” who wrote “their prejudices into the public law” or the result of broadly shared White supremacist convictions, the legislative debates in Montana Territory were rife with anti-Black elements.¹¹⁶ Across the West, Whites “disagreed about Black suffrage, education, and the need for legal segregation; and the conflict was especially polarized and virulent in Montana and Idaho. Confederate sympathizers in those territories, including many from Missouri, contributed to a significant pro-Confederate element in the late 1860s. In Montana, southern supporters clashed fiercely with Republican territorial officials.” In the territory’s legislature, “the first point of the Reconstruction debate was African American suffrage.”¹¹⁷

The debate over suffrage gave way to discussions about segregation, and here Montana legislators were more unified, for “almost universally, Whites in the Far West and elsewhere drew the line at what they termed ‘social

¹¹¹ Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 162.

¹¹² Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 27.

¹¹³ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 52. See *Gazette*, June 15, July 13; for allegations of Blacks as pawns of Repubs see *Rocky Mountain Gazette*, Aug. 6 1873—“Unscrupulous White demagogues” send Black men “to the polls well liquored up to bully and insult White men.”; Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 161.

¹¹⁴ Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 155.

¹¹⁵ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 25.; Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 156.

¹¹⁶ Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 149.

¹¹⁷ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 25.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

equality.”¹¹⁸ Indeed, what became known as “the segregation bill,” was initially introduced in 1872 in the Montana House by a representative originally from New York, Daniel Searles, and “the leading Republican newspaper, the *Herald* of Helena, supported his bill from the first.” When the bill, which provided for segregation of Black schoolchildren, was considered in the Council, Granville Stuart, who had an indigenous wife and children, spearheaded the review. Stuart and “his committee thoroughly amended the House bill but did not alter the section on segregation.” For the most part, debates over the bill reflected the legislators’ shared anti-Black racism, and seemed to center on practical or legal issues rather than moral ones. When it came to legal authority, it was argued that the 14th Amendment (1868) didn’t apply to territories so “a Territory could legislate stringently against non-Whites.”¹¹⁹ But legislating segregation and putting it into consistent practice were two different things. Almost nowhere in the territory was it “financially practical to have two public schools, and there was considerable controversy over whether and how to educate the few African American children in several towns.”¹²⁰

After discussing these details, Montana’s territorial legislators enacted the 1872 school segregation bill. The bill stipulated that “the education of children of African descent shall be provided for in separate schools.”¹²¹ Modeled on a California bill passed two years earlier, the bill allowed Montana “school districts to build separate schools wherever there were more than ten African American children.”¹²² Notably, California’s law codified segregation practices that existed in that state “at least since 1866” while “Montana was depriving Negroes of rights they had formerly enjoyed.”¹²³

The passage of the school segregation law may have dissuaded Black children from attending school even before school districts actively excluded them. In 1873, across the territory, only 17 “colored” children attended school, and of the six counties with “Negro children in residence,” only three “reported any colored boys and girls enrolled.” School officials nonetheless wasted no time trying to purge the few Black children from the classrooms in their jurisdiction. In Deer Lodge, where the previous census enumerated only 15 “colored” residents in the entire county, America Turner soon “receive[d] notice from Granville Stuart & fellow school district directors that her son ‘is not entitled to a place in the public school . . . he will not be admitted.’” Excluding Turner’s son initially ran aground on the teacher’s refusal to eject him: described as “copper color,” the Turner boy attended a school that contained many mixed indigenous children (like Granville Stuart’s), and was “indistinguishable from his classmates.” Ultimately, Stuart and his ilk prevailed in expelling America’s son, but the resistant teacher “had to be coerced.”¹²⁴

Other towns, too, purged Black children from their primary schools. The 1880 census noted one “separate school for colored children” among the 159 public schools in Montana Territory, and Virginia City may have had a “short-lived separate schooling arrangement,” as did Fort Benton. In Fort Benton, “a Black school was reportedly opened in 1878,” but apparently closed by 1882. Thereafter, “a conflict arose over the enrollment of a handful of Black children in the public school for Whites. Four White families withdrew their children when

¹¹⁸ Behan, 27.

¹¹⁹ Smurr, 151, 167-8.

¹²⁰ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 26.

¹²¹ Glenda Rose Spearman Eruteya, “Racial Legislation in Montana: 1864 – 1955,” (Master’s Thesis, Political Science Department, University of Montana, Missoula, 1981), 30; MT SHPO, “African-Americans in Montana Timeline.” See also Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West.”

¹²² Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 26.

¹²³ Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 153.

¹²⁴ Smurr, 169.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

two girls of partial African American descent were admitted to the school.”¹²⁵ The effort to segregate schools under the 1872 legislation, however, reached its fullest expression in Helena, the territorial capital and home of its largest African American community. Helena became ground zero for the early fight over school segregation in Montana Territory.

In 1875, Helena's Black community contained about 19 school-aged children. That year, some of these children's parents attempted to enroll them in the Hill Street School: an education for their children was “something they were anxious to get because of the prejudice against their race.” In response to this attempted enrollment, the Helena School Board reorganized the city's public schools, creating the segregated South Side School for children deemed “colored.” Creating an entire separate school for so few students cost dearly: the South Side School “operated for three months during 1875 . . . [at] an average cost of \$50” per student versus an average of “\$10 for the Whites.”¹²⁶ The Black community immediately began protesting the exclusion of its children. In 1876, 106 Helena Black and White residents submitted “one of many petitions to the Montana legislature to repeal” the school segregation law. School segregation, petitioners argued, was “unnecessary and . . . effectively barred Black children from an education.” The House Education Committee rejected the petition, but community members continued their fight for equal education access, joined by some Republican and other allies, including the editor of the Helena *Daily Herald*, the Territory's Superintendent of Public Instruction Cornelius Hedges and eventually the Governor, Benjamin F. Potts.¹²⁷ Nonetheless, protests of the Black community and its allies fell on deaf ears. The school segregation law, and Helena's segregated South Side School, remained in place.¹²⁸

As much as they may have hoped otherwise, Black people also failed to escape the danger of violent attack by moving West. Albeit reduced, White violence remained a factor of Black life in Montana. Some of this violence was state-sanctioned: public executions of African Americans proliferated in this period. These public state killings made “a visual statement of great social impact,” and “one of the principal effects . . . was to promote racial terror.”¹²⁹ Such may have been the result when in 1875, Lewis and Clark County executed 38-year-old William Stears (a.k.a. “Red” Sterres), a barber who with a White partner, ran a “barber shop on Main Street, at the foot of Broadway.” The County hanged Stears in the Helena jailyard for an alleged murder-robbery.¹³⁰ Stears' sentence was “the first execution for murder, upon the verdict of a jury, that ever occurred in the territory.” He successfully appealed his original guilty verdict, maintaining that he delivered only a non-lethal blow during the three-man robbery attempt that accidentally killed the victim, after which a mob threatened to pull him from his cell and lynch him, but “wiser counsels prevailed.” In a quick second trial—it lasted just 2.5 hours—Stears was again found guilty and sentenced to death. “Forty or fifty” invited guests of the Sheriff, as

¹²⁵ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 26.

¹²⁶ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 51. Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 351. Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 172. The segregated Black school on the south side may have become the Lissner School, constructed in that neighborhood in 1879. “Helena Historic District (Addendum II, Central School Clarification): National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.” Lissner was located on the corner of Pine and South Warren – near the Black neighborhood there. It can be seen here on Paladin and Baucus, *Helena*, 1996, 51. or here: “Helena As She Was - An Open History Resource for Montana's Capital City.” Research failed to identify which school was meant by the “Hill Street School.”

¹²⁷ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 351. Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 51.; Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 26.

¹²⁸ Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 170–71.; Anacker, “Buffalo Soldiers in Montana (1888-1898) | The Black Past.”

¹²⁹ Blum, “Public Executions: Understanding the ‘Cruel and Unusual Punishments’ Clause.”

¹³⁰ “DeathPenaltyUSA, the Database of Executions in the United States.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

well as “an immense number of spectators,” watched him die: the drop failed to break his neck and for nine minutes he convulsed in agony.¹³¹

African Americans in Montana in this period found themselves the victim of assault by the general public as well. For some, violence against Black people was a veritable boyhood pastime: the “millionaire stock plunger of later years, William Boyce Thompson,” fondly recalled “the colored boy in Virginia City whom the gang took delight in trouncing at intervals.”¹³²

If mobs of White boys might repeatedly beat you for being a “colored” boy, mobs of White adults might kill you. In 1867, after the U.S. Congress passed the Territorial Suffrage Act giving Black men in western territories the right to vote, Helena planned city elections in which some of its African American residents intended to cast ballots. At least one Republican candidate courted Black support, but “gangs of Democratic roughs circulated through town warning Negroes from the polls and threatening violence should they attempt to vote.” One of the men in these roving White mobs, “an Irish Democrat” named “Lynch,” came upon “Sammy Hays, a well-known local colored man,” and killed him. When the “Marshal ... tried to jail the assassin [he] had to fight his way through a hostile crowd.” Similar violence “was attempted in the same city in 1875 [and] the Negroes were forced to defend themselves, and this they did.”¹³³

In addition to murdering Sammy Hays at the polls in 1867, and preparing to pull William Stears from his cell so they could kill him in 1875, White people lynched at least one other Black man in this early period in Montana Territory, killing him in public with apparent impunity. Period documents record little of the lynching, and histories likewise. The lone reference research produced is the brief, matter-of-fact note in Leeson's 1885 *History of Montana*, which tells of two men who in July 1873 “were taken from the Gallatin county jail at Bozeman by a mob and hanged in the slaughterhouse.” One of these men was “Jno. W. St. Clair, a negro or mulatto,” who was accused of having “killed a Chinaman.” Other sources hint at additional violence against Black people in this period. The “original boundaries of Missoula,” County for instance, reportedly contained an area known as “[N-word] Prairie” ...so called on account of a negro being murdered there for his money in 1867.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Raffety, “The History and Theory of Capital Punishment in Montana,” 86–108.

¹³² Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 162.

¹³³ Smurr, 162.

¹³⁴ Leeson, *History of Montana. 1739-1885*.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s
African American Settlement in Montana after 1877

Despite the possibility of violence that, even in relatively safe places like Montana Territory, pervaded the Reconstruction era, the 12 or so years after the Civil War were a time of great promise for Black people. But in Montana and the nation at large, in the late 1870s race relations shifted radically. As groups, both American Indians and African Americans faced dark periods. In 1876, a huge intertribal coalition of Northern Plains Indians defeated the U.S. Army at the Battle of the Greasy Grass/Little Big Horn.¹³⁵ Despite their victory, the battle marked the end of indigenous people's mass armed resistance against the United States, and ensuing years brought settler colonial invasion and immeasurable misery to Montana's native groups.¹³⁶ The following year, the U.S. formally abandoned southern Reconstruction with the Hayes-Tilden Compromise, which gave the presidency to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes in return for a commitment to remove federal troops from the South. Sectional reconciliation became the order of the day, and federal troops, stationed in the South to protect Black rights and Black bodies, were withdrawn.¹³⁷ The ensuing period brought "'the nadir' . . . of African American history."¹³⁸

Reconciliation demanded not just the repudiation of Reconstruction—from which the South now needed to be "redeemed"—but the explicit embrace of ideas of innate Black inferiority and of slavery as an unfortunate but benign institution. "Redemption" brought the emergence of a robust new nationalism based on Anglo-Saxon solidarity. Across the South, vicious attacks on Black people, by White people, became frequent. White supremacy issues—focused on various non-White people—manifested in every U.S. region. By 1900, at least 3,011 African Americans had been lynched. In grotesque public spectacles, White people summarily—and with social sanction—hanged, burned, and dismembered Black people for "crimes" like "'insulting Whites' and 'having bad manners.'" While most of these killings occurred in the South, some happened in other regions.¹³⁹ Less violent forms of repression also pervaded, becoming so thoroughgoing that one author described it as "'cradle to grave' segregation . . . In many parts of both the North and South, playgrounds and even cemeteries were segregated."¹⁴⁰

When the dark days of "Redemption" began, fully 90% of the nation's 6.5 million African Americans remained in the South. The vast majority of these (80%) lived in rural areas and worked in agriculture. As federal troops withdrew and Whites reasserted racial subjugation with renewed fervor, and impunity, Black people began emigrating in droves. Longing to escape, and encouraged by outspoken "African American activists who advocated mass Black emigration from the South" and urged Black people to migrate to Africa or move westward, thousands of Southern Black people embarked on the difficult and dangerous journey to the West.

¹³⁵ "The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed." Among those killed at the battle was US Army interpreter Isaiah Dorman, a Black man who had long served with Sully, was married to Indian woman, and was fluent in Lakota. Dorman had lived with Sioux groups in late 1860s. In the wake of the battle, Charles "Smoky" Wilson, an African American, was hired as a Crow language interpreter at Fort Custer. Wilson subsequently served in various capacities at Crow Agency for the rest of his life. Among his later positions was policeman at Crow Agency. See Thompson, "Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung," 40.

¹³⁶ The region's indigenes would fight another major battle against Canadian armed forces in 1885.

¹³⁷ Federal troops wouldn't return to protecting Black bodies/rights until 1957.

¹³⁸ Kelley and Lewis, *A History of African Americans Since 1880. Volume Two*. Quoting Black historian Rayford Logan.

¹³⁹ Berardi and Segady, "The Development of African-American Newspapers in the American West," 99.

¹⁴⁰ Berardi and Segady, 100.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Their migration inspired Sojourner Truth to verse: "the word it has been spoken; the message has been sent. The prison doors have opened, and out the prisoners went."¹⁴¹

As before, migrants were simultaneously pushed from the South and pulled toward other places. The Redemption-era migrations constituted the first "large-scale movement of African Americans to the West," a region of refuge that many "imagined a promised land free of White terrorism."¹⁴² Indeed, historians who study relatively undocumented subcultures argued that "migration West by African Americans during this period was even more prevalent than demographic reports were capable of indicating."¹⁴³ Montana's census-enumerated Black population roughly doubled during the 1870s, and then increased more than four-fold in the 1880s, its period of greatest growth. By the turn of the century, over 1,500 Black people made their homes in the state, and by 1910 the census listed 1,834 Black Montanans.¹⁴⁴ That year, 16 cities in the Pacific Northwest—Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon—included Black populations numbering over 100 people. Of these, six were in Montana, including Helena, Butte, Anaconda, Missoula, Great Falls, and Billings.¹⁴⁵

As with previous migrations, the movement reflected patterns particular to the period. Amidst the decline of steamboats—the last of which docked at Fort Benton in 1890—and the related spread of railroads, river-travel was less salient. In the early 1880s, people like Anna Gordon, who settled in White Sulphur Springs, and Vindia Smith, who with her husband George established a ranch near Flood, traveled by boat, but, increasingly others arrived in different ways.¹⁴⁶ In the 1880s, during the last years of the cattle drive era, "between 8,000 and 9,000 African Americans were employed as cattle drivers," and many of these men remained at the end of the trail.¹⁴⁷ Among them George Jackson, a trail driver, "came from Texas with a herd of longhorn steers," and a few years later worked on the Quarter Circle U Ranch between Cascade and Great Falls, where he was killed in a work accident in 1887. Others, like Maria Adams, who cooked for General Custer, and Samuel Bridgewater, who enlisted in a "colored" Army unit in 1879 at the age of 18, moved overland with the U.S. military.¹⁴⁸ Those who came from railroad points to the east, like members of the extended Maxwell-Johnson-Palmer family, who lived in Bismarck before coming to Helena, likely traveled by train.¹⁴⁹

Siblings Marion Johnson and Alice Johnson Palmer, both born in Kentucky, followed their mother Julie Smith Johnson Maxwell to Helena from North Dakota, and in many ways represented African Americans who migrated to Montana in the decades after the end of Reconstruction. Like migrants throughout American history, Black people moved to Montana in patterns of chain migration, with later immigrants following friends and family members who'd gone, and settled, before.¹⁵⁰ In conjunction with the persistence of particularly

¹⁴¹ Kelley and Lewis, *A History of African Americans Since 1880. Volume Two*, 3-5.

¹⁴² Berardi and Segady, "The Development of African-American Newspapers in the American West," 98–99; Kelley and Lewis, *A History of African Americans Since 1880. Volume Two*, ix.

¹⁴³ Berardi and Segady, "The Development of African-American Newspapers in the American West," 101.

¹⁴⁴ United States Bureau of the Census, "9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana." Census information is based on transcribed spreadsheets of African Americans in Montana's censuses produced by the MT SHPO.

¹⁴⁵ Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 352. ID two, Oregon 1, WA 7

¹⁴⁶ Thompson, "Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung," 41. Behan, "Forgotten Heritage," 29. Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House."

¹⁴⁷ Berardi and Segady, "The Development of African-American Newspapers in the American West," 101.

¹⁴⁸ Thompson, "Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung," 40.

¹⁴⁹ Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House."

¹⁵⁰ Behan, "Forgotten Heritage," 33.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

vicious conditions in their birthplaces, this perpetuated the established demographic character of Montana's Black community. As before, Missouri and Kentucky continued to account for a large portion of the population—people from Kentucky constituted “the bulk of Montana's 1880 Black populous,” and in subsequent decades former “Missouri residents practically formed small colonies within the Black community.”¹⁵¹ So, too, did former Kansas residents, a fact that suggests another way the Maxwell-Johnson-Palmer family was representative, i.e., in migrating west in a series of moves to successive frontiers, a trait Black migrants shared with their White counterparts. Through the 1880s, “nearly three-fourths of new [Black] arrivals came from western states and territories.”¹⁵² Migrants from Missouri, Kansas, and Colorado predominated into the 20th century. Increasingly, they were joined by people from the lower South.¹⁵³

Upon their arrival in Montana, African Americans who migrated in this period settled largely in cities, heading to places with established Black communities or to new urban centers that arose with shifts in economic or military activity. From these bases, Black people sometimes moved to smaller towns in the region, so that the African American community spread in an interconnected web around Montana. By the early twentieth century, Black Montana comprised seven core communities—Helena, Butte, Anaconda, Great Falls, Missoula, Billings, and Havre, as well as a number of secondary communities, including Bozeman, Miles City, Lewistown, and Kalispell. Meanwhile, places with military bases like forts Assiniboine, Missoula, and Keogh (near Miles City) had even larger Black populations for a more limited period, while “colored” companies were stationed there.

Forts and Black Soldiers: American Military Occupation of the Montana Region, 1876-1910s

Indeed, Black military troops' movement into and around Montana in the late 19th and early 20th century was the single biggest factor in the fluorescence of the African American community in this period. Moreover, in numerous Montana's cities—like Missoula, Great Falls, Havre, Lewistown, Billings, and Miles City—troops from nearby forts helped form the core of the local Black community, and became a prominent feature of civic life.

After the 1876 Battle of the Greasy Grass/Battle of the Little Bighorn

In the wake of the intertribal victory at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, the United States escalated its military invasion of Montana Territory, and American Army bases proliferated. Before 1876, American bases in the region were mainly temporary clusters of crude structures erected for immediate purposes, with notable exceptions like Fort Shaw, established 1867, boasting more substantial, sustained establishments. After June 1876, the United States army erected a series of major posts across the Montana region in quick succession, opening in 1876 Fort Keogh (near present-day Miles City) and Fort McKinney (on the Powder River in Wyoming). In 1877, forts Missoula and Custer (near what became Hardin, about 50 miles east of present-day Billings) were opened followed by Fort Washakie (in Wyoming Territory at the existing site of Camp Brown/Auger, est. 1869) 1878. Other forts followed: in 1879, Fort Assiniboine (near what would become Havre, northeast of Fort Benton and present-day Great Falls) and in 1880, Fort Maginnis (near Lewistown/Gilt Edge/Maiden) and Camp Poplar River (two miles north of the Missouri on the south bank of the Poplar River,

¹⁵¹ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 51; McMillen, “Border State Terror and The Genesis of the African-American Community in Deer Lodge and Chouteau Counties, Montana, 1870-1890,” 213.

¹⁵² Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 160.

¹⁵³ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 51.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

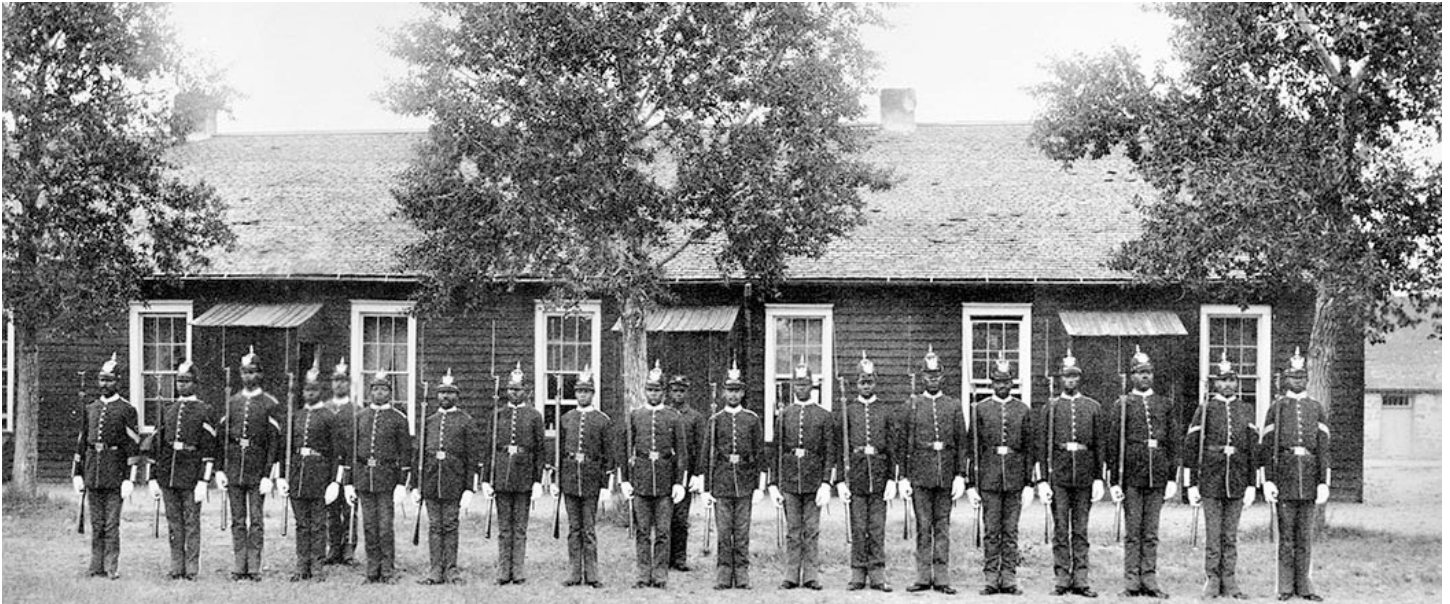


Figure 8: "Infantry at Fort Shaw, Montana," Unknown photographer, 1890. Montana Historical Society Research Center, 947-375.

at the Fort Peck reservation agency/current town of Poplar). These sites, as well as later bases like Fort Harrison (outside of Helena), Fort Yellowstone, and Fort Mackenzie (near Sheridan, Wyoming), all built in the 1890s, subsequently housed various companies of the United States Army's four "colored" units—the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry—comprising hundreds of troops.¹⁵⁴

African American individuals like the aforementioned McDonalds worked at early U.S. Army posts like Fort Ellis in the late 1860s, and enumerated at Fort Shaw in 1870. In subsequent years they also worked as civilians at post-1876 installations like forts Assiniboine, Custer, and Keogh (where sisters Maria and Mary Adams "worked for the Army ...before moving on to Bismarck" and then to Fort Benton aboard the steamboat *Nellie Peck* in 1878).¹⁵⁵ But it wasn't until the late 1880s that "colored" units marched into Montana en masse. In early November 1887, Company H of the 9th Cavalry—whose regimental headquarters moved two years earlier to Fort McKinney (which in 1878 was relocated to what became Buffalo, Wyoming)—traveled north and "fought at the Battle of Crow Agency during the Crow War, at Crow Agency, Montana." That action likely represents the first intrusion of segregated Black units into the Territory. and the following year other segregated "Buffalo Soldier" units arrived for more sustained duties.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Pahnish and Ash, "Fort Keogh"; Briggs, "Fort McKinney"; WyomingHeritage.org and Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, "Fort McKinney"; McDonald and Bick, "Fort Missoula Historic District NRHP Inventory-Nomination Form"; Moodry, "A History of Fort Maginnis, Montana"; Wilson and Hagener, "Fort Assiniboine National Register of Historic Places Registration Form"; Axline, "Fort Harrison Veterans' Hospital Historic District"; Bawden, "The Immortal 15, Fort Yellowstone, and Buffalo Soldiers (Part 1 of 2) - Yellowstone National Park"; Thoroughman, "Fort Shaw Historic District and Cemetery"; Barnhart, "Fort Washakie"; Murray, "Fort McKinney"; Junge, "Fort Mackenzie"; "Hogeland House (Fort Maginnis Bachelor Officer's Quarters)."

¹⁵⁵ Robison, "Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri." Mary Adams died within a year of arriving in Montana: "On arrival at Fort Benton, Mary began working for Mr. Hill, a clerk at the I. G. Baker & Company store, and later went to Fort Shaw to work for Army Dr. Greenleaf. Mary became seriously ill" and is variously reported to have died at Fort Shaw or to have "returned to Fort Benton to live in a house she and Maria owned. Mary Adams passed away at age 30 and was buried in Fort Benton."

¹⁵⁶ "9th Cavalry Regiment (United States)"; Kuchera, "Blacks in Wyoming History," 6-7. The 9th Cavalry was headquartered at Fort McKinney through Dec. 1890, and three companies of the 9th returned to McKinney April 1893 through the 1894 Fort closure. Some companies of the 9th were also garrisoned to Fort Washakie in 1885—together these were the first two Buffalo Soldiers unit posts in

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

In 1888, the “Colored” 25th Infantry was dispatched to Montana, where it headquartered at Fort Missoula. Its 10 companies were distributed between forts Missoula (Troops G, H, I, and K), Custer (Troops A and D) and Shaw (Troops B, C, E and F).¹⁵⁷ [Figure 8] Their arrival marked a major shift in the region’s racial landscape, and was met with an immediate display of the depths of White supremacy in Montana: just weeks after these United States soldiers arrived in the Territory, area Whites accused one of them—Robert Robinson—of “shooting and killing a man. Before he could be tried, masked men entered the jail, demanded the key, took Mr. Robinson from his cell, and brought him to the alley behind Stone’s Store, where a mob lynched him and left his body hanging over the alleyways.” The mob who murdered 25th Infantryman Robinson on June 10, 1888 reportedly consisted of “50 whites from Sun River, Montana.”¹⁵⁸ There is no indication that any of them were ever charged for their crime.

In addition to being stationed at the above-named forts, portions of the 25th Infantry served “temporary duty” at Fort Keogh in 1890-1891, and were also garrisoned to Camp Poplar River in 1891 (with Fort Shaw being abandoned around the same time). That year the regiment’s Lieutenant Carroll A. Devol, “supervised the civilian workers who built Fort Yellowstone,” some five years after the site was established as a temporary base. Although Devol himself was White, he likely was accompanied, and assisted, by soldiers of the 25th Infantry.¹⁵⁹

With the arrival of the 25th Infantry, Black troops became a prominent and defining feature of late-19th century Montana. During a period when, overall, “Buffalo Soldiers comprised 12% of the U.S. Army infantry force and 20% of the cavalry force,” they composed a much larger, highly visible portion of military personnel in the Montana region. And they did so as the American military presence there surged.¹⁶⁰

After the 25th infantry came the 10th Cavalry, which arrived in Spring 1892, transferring from Arizona to “various posts throughout Montana, with regimental headquarters located at Fort Custer until November 1894, when it moved to Fort Assiniboine.”¹⁶¹ In 1892, Tenth Cavalry Troops A & E joined the 25th Infantry at Fort Custer, while Troops C & I staffed Fort Assiniboine and Troop D went to Fort Keogh (parts of the 10th Cavalry and the 25th infantry were also garrisoned that year just over the state line at Fort Buford, North Dakota).¹⁶² That same year, as it continued to consolidate smaller posts, the Army established Fort Harrison (near Helena), with the new post’s first troops coming from Fort Assiniboine.¹⁶³

On October 1, 1895, the army closed Fort Buford, and the fort’s “garrison, consisting of Troops D and H, 10th (Negro) Cavalry, Companies C and E, 25th (Negro) Infantry, and a detachment of the Hospital Corps under command of Major Theodore J. Wint, 10th Cavalry, left on that date by rail for Fort Assiniboine, Montana.”¹⁶⁴ One of the men stationed at Fort Assiniboine, William D. Davis, patented a Military Spring-Seat Riding Saddle shortly thereafter, his invention promising “to render easy and comfortable riding while the horse is in a trot,

Wyoming.

¹⁵⁷ War Department, “Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1888 v. 1,” 506.

¹⁵⁸ Fowler, *The Black Infantry in the West, 1869-1891*, 61; Lanning, *The African-American Soldier*, 69; Equal Justice Initiative, “Lynching in America: Targeting Black Veterans.”

¹⁵⁹ Bawden, “The Immortal 15, Fort Yellowstone, and Buffalo Soldiers (Part 2 of 2) - Yellowstone National Park”; Simmons and Simmons, “Fort Yellowstone.”

¹⁶⁰ “Buffalo Soldier.”

¹⁶¹ Work, “The Fighting Tenth Cavalry: Black Soldiers in the United States Army, 1892-1918,” 21.

¹⁶² War Department, “Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1892 v.1.”

¹⁶³ H-B NRHP

¹⁶⁴ *Courage Enough*, 345.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

however high-spirited the horse may be.” In 1897, 25th infantry companies also moved to Fort Assiniboine after it became a regimental headquarters. By then, “nine of the Tenth's troops were stationed at Assiniboine, with the remaining three at Custer. They remained there until April 1898, at which time the regiment left to fight in the Spanish American War.”¹⁶⁵ From Custer, “Troops A, B, E, and K, Tenth Cavalry and Companies B and D Twenty-fifth Infantry” were first “sent to Fort Harrison near Helena,” and Fort Custer “closed on April 17, 1898 and the buildings were sold and used to build Hardin, Montana.”¹⁶⁶

After 1898: Forts Assiniboine, Harrison, Missoula, and Yellowstone

The bulk of the army's Montana-based Black units left in 1898 to fight in Cuba and the Philippines in the so-called Spanish American War—with units like the Tenth Cavalry fighting with Lt. John “Blackjack” Pershing and Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders at the famed Battle of San Juan Hill. But within a few years members of “colored” units, i.e., the 24th Infantry and the 10th Cavalry, were back in Big Sky Country. In 1900, census takers enumerated ca. 50 Black soldiers at Fort Assiniboine and a similar number at Fort Harrison, and more came to Montana in the years that followed.¹⁶⁷ After returning to the U.S. in September 1898 and manning garrisons at Utah's Fort Douglas and Fort D.A. Russell in Wyoming, portions of the 24th left again in July 1899 for the Philippines to fight “Filipino insurgents resisting the American takeover,” and then after June 1902 portions of the 24th returning from the Philippines were “posted to three bases in Montana. The First Battalion was stationed at Fort Harrison, the Second at Fort Assiniboine and the Third at Fort Missoula.” These units comprised hundreds of men: in August of that year, the Butte *New Age* reported that the units of the 24th at Helena (Harrison) and Havre (Assiniboine) totaled “about 500 colored soldiers.” Over the course of 1902 and 1903, four companies of the 24th returned to Fort Harrison. Around the same time, “in the early 1900s, several companies of the 24th Infantry were stationed at Fort Yellowstone.”¹⁶⁸

The Buffalo soldiers “return to the United States in 1902 began a decade of rotations between the U.S. and the Philippines.” Eventually, in the course of these rotations, Black Army units stationed in Montana left the state for good. In December 1905, Fort Missoula's units of the 24th departed for the Philippines, marking the end of that base's known Buffalo Soldier period. Subsequently, the Army closed Fort Assiniboine in 1911, after “units of the U.S. Army's four negro regiments were almost continually stationed at the fort between the mid-1880s” and the fort's closure. The following year “the last Black troops left Fort Harrison,” bringing an end to the era of segregated “colored” units being stationed in Montana.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Work, “The Fighting Tenth Cavalry: Black Soldiers in the United States Army, 1892-1918,” 21; Davis, *Riding Saddle*.

¹⁶⁶ “Fort Custer (Montana).”

¹⁶⁷ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].”

¹⁶⁸ “24th Infantry Regiment | 25th Infantry Division Association.” Squire III, “The 24th Infantry Regiment and the Racial Debate in the U.S. Army,” 78; “24th Infantry Regiment | 25th Infantry Division Association”; “The Famous 24th Regiment of Infantry”; “Troops Will Leave Next Sunday.” Courchane, “25th Infantry Regiment of Fort Missoula, the Story of Its Service in the West, the Bicycle Corps, and Adventures in Cuba and the Philippines,” 156. National Park Service, “Buffalo Soldiers Study,” 19. “A lasting legacy of the soldiers as park rangers is the Ranger hat (popularly known as the Smokey Bear hat) Although not officially adopted by the Army until 1911, the distinctive hat crease, called a Montana peak, (or pinch) can be seen being worn by several of the Buffalo Soldiers in park photographs dating back to 1899. Soldiers serving in the Spanish-American War began to recreate the Stetson hat with a Montana “pinch” to better shed water from the torrential tropical rains. Many retained that distinctive crease upon their return to the U.S. The park photographs, in all likelihood, show Buffalo Soldiers who were veterans from that 1898 war.” “Buffalo Soldier.”

¹⁶⁹ “24th Infantry Regiment | 25th Infantry Division Association.” Squire III, “The 24th Infantry Regiment and the Racial Debate in the U.S. Army,” 78; “24th Infantry Regiment | 25th Infantry Division Association”; “The Famous 24th Regiment of Infantry”; “Troops Will Leave Next Sunday.” Courchane, “25th Infantry Regiment of Fort Missoula, the Story of Its Service in the West, the Bicycle Corps, and Adventures in Cuba and the Philippines,” 156. National Park Service, “Buffalo Soldiers Study,” 19. Soldiers

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

At the same time, companies of the Tenth Cavalry and the 25th infantry were stationed elsewhere in the region, and from these nearby bases sometimes set up duty stations in Montana. After “undergoing standard quarantine procedures,” the Tenth Cavalry sailed from the Philippines, headed for Wyoming’s new Fort Mackenzie where “by August of 1902, companies G and H of the Tenth Cavalry, known as the Buffalo Soldiers, had arrived.” They were soon joined there by “two units [of the 9th Cavalry who] were garrisoned at Fort Mackenzie in Sheridan” in 1903. Other companies of the 10th were assigned to Wyoming’s Fort Washakie, as well as, farther south, Fort D.A. Russell in Cheyenne. Meanwhile, “the First and Third Squadrons [of the 10th Cavalry] took station at Fort Robinson, Nebraska.” From these regional postings, Black troops sometimes moved into Montana en masse, as in October 1906 when “the Tenth Cavalry's Third Squadron [from Fort Robinson] took position in Montana, where it was to block the Utes' escape to the north.”¹⁷⁰

Black soldiers also flanked Montana on the west. Among them were two battalions of the 25th Infantry, some 600 men stationed at Fort George Wright, in Spokane, Washington, in 1909. The summer of 1910 brought unprecedented wildfires in the mountains to the northern Rockies, and President William Howard Taft “authorized troops to fight the fires. The fort's 25th Infantry soldiers fought fires in Idaho and Montana.” Specifically, in Montana that year “from August 14th the following companies were engaged in fighting forest fires and were stationed as follows: Company E at McDonald...Company H at Dixon, Company K at Essex... Company L at Nyack [and] Company M at Belton.” Subsequently, “Companies L and M of the 25th Infantry were assigned to duty on the Flathead National Forest at Kalispel and Gerry Montana, and on South Fork of the Flathead River.” W. R. Logan, Superintendent of the Fort Belknap Agency, worked with Company K when they were stationed in Essex “fighting fires in Glacier National Park,” and sought commendation for them from the War Department that fall, effusing “I doubt if I can say enough praise of Lieutenant Mapes and his negro troops. The work performed by them could not be improved upon by any class of men. To their lot fell the worst fire in the park and they went at its extinguishment with snap and energy, built roads and trails and miles and miles of fire guard trenches without the least sign of discontent.”¹⁷¹

Helena: Heart of Black Montana in its Heyday

As “colored” soldiers garrisoned regional forts and Black people became integral parts of local places across Montana, Helena continued to house the area’s most significant African American community. In 1880 census takers enumerated ca. 80 Black people in Helena, and by 1890 the community was some 279 strong and accounted for almost 20% of the state’s Black population. Twenty years later, the census listed 415 “Black” or “mulatto” people in Helena, with African Americans constituting some 3-4% of its ca. 12,515 residents. The Helena community was the state’s largest—accounting for about one-quarter of Montana’s total Black population—and also its most important, serving as the heart of an interconnected web of African American people that stretched across Montana and the surrounding region. In a testament to its regional importance, African American newspapers in major cities to the east, like Kansas City and Minneapolis, regularly reported

stationed at Ft. Harrison were noted in the Polk Directories alphabetically by their name, rank, and company of the 24th Infantry Regiment. R.L. Polk & Co., Polk’s 1903 *Helena (Lewis and Clark County, Mont.) City Directory*. Wilson and Hagener, “Fort Assiniboine National Register of Historic Places Registration Form,” sec. 8, p. 2. Lang, “Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906,” 14.H-B NRHP

¹⁷⁰ Work, “The Fighting Tenth Cavalry: Black Soldiers in the United States Army, 1892-1918,” 87–89. cvannoy, “Buffalo Soldiers in Northern Wyoming.”

¹⁷¹ Courchane, “25th Infantry Regiment of Fort Missoula, the Story of Its Service in the West, the Bicycle Corps, and Adventures in Cuba and the Phillipines,” 200, 202-203, 208.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

on affairs in Helena. In the Pacific Northwest, of the 16 cities that boasted 100 or more Black residents in 1910, Helena ranked second in Black population.¹⁷²

Overall, Helena grew by 1910 to four times its 1870 size of 3,100, its growth driven by a series of developments. In 1874, the federal government selected Helena as the site of a federal assay office, furthering Helena's early prominence and eventual permanence. The assay office was one of only six in the nation, the other five in Deadwood, Boise, St. Louis, Charlotte (NC) and New York City. The following year, after a protracted battle, the territorial capital moved from Virginia City to Helena, bringing with it a host of government-associated activity, jobs, and people. Another surge of growth accompanied the 1883 arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad, which cemented the city's status as transportation center. Two other rail lines reached the valley by 1890, and animal-drawn stagecoaches and freight wagons gave way to the locomotives, boxcars, and Pullman coaches of the "iron horse." Although readily accessible placer deposits played out, employment opportunities expanded with the growing industrial sector, which by 1888 included a large smelter facility in East Helena. In 1889, Montana became a state, with Helena its busy center.¹⁷³

Profits from mining and associated activity made Helena the richest city, per capita, in the nation during this early period. The capital's 50-plus millionaires embarked on an "orgy of ornate residential building" in the late 1880s that gained Helena renown for its many mansions and transformed the face of the mining town. By 1890, Helena "claimed six national banks, four daily newspapers, and a population of just under 14,000," over 10,000 more people than in 1880. Two years later, in 1892, Congress authorized a U.S. Army base in Helena, and a private social organization called the Montana Club, in what seemed a promising investment, purchased property at the corner of 6th and Fuller and built a lavish headquarters. Growth screeched to a halt in 1893, with a sharp drop in silver prices and a nationwide depression, but the following year military officials arrived to build Fort Harrison. At the same time, Helena beat Anaconda in the contest for state capital, securing the city's status as Montana's political and government center. Within a few years, the military boasted a significant presence in the Silver City. In 1898, "the First Montana Regiment, billeted in tents on Peosta Avenue, trained in the shadow of Mount Helena" before it sailed to the Philippines to fight the Spanish-American war. Workers laid the cornerstone of the state Capitol on a rise just beyond the residential neighborhoods east of downtown, in 1899, and at a rain-soaked ceremony on July 4, 1902, leaders dedicated the impressive building "to good state government."¹⁷⁴

Although about 250 young African American men moved to the city that same year, as part of four "colored" companies of the 24th Infantry assigned to Fort Harrison, Helena's substantial African American community was by no means an unattached, transient, male enclave.¹⁷⁵ It was, rather, a flourishing group of interconnected families and individuals that built and cohered around a stable foundation of community businesses and institutions. By 1910, women accounted for some 43% of the city's Black population, and about one in five

¹⁷² Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 352. Rosalyn, Washington, was 3.5% Black in 1910. Baumlér, *Helena, the Town That Gold Built: The First 150 Years*, 27; "Helena"; May 2, 1895; "Kansas City Sun. (Kansas City, Mo.) 1908-1924, May 18, 1918, Image 2."

¹⁷³ Paladin and Baucus, *Helena*, 1983, 28; Baumlér, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House"; Hagen and Emmons, "Results of a Cultural Resources Inventory of the Montana Department of Transportation's North Montana Avenue Safety Improvement Project, Lewis and Clark County, Montana," 5.

¹⁷⁴ Paladin, *Valleys of the Prickly Pear*, 51; Hagen and Emmons, "Results of a Cultural Resources Inventory of the Montana Department of Transportation's North Montana Avenue Safety Improvement Project, Lewis and Clark County, Montana"; Paladin and Baucus, *Helena*, 1983, 80-81, 118-19. After Helena stopped growing and began shrinking in 1893, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company stopped mapping it. The company mapped the city in 1892, and then not again until 1930.

¹⁷⁵ Wood, "The Black Sergeants of Hollings Avenue.", 9n21.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

African American residents was under the age of 18 while some 10% was 60 years old or older. Black Helena lived in about 103 households, some 80 of which contained two or more African American residents. About 28 households contained families with children under the age of 18.¹⁷⁶

These Black households could be found in all areas of the city. The Black community in Helena boomed with the city itself as, from 1879 until 1893, real estate developers rushed to plat additions to the original townsite. In both 1883 and 1886 eight additions were completed, and 1887 and 1889 each brought another six additions.¹⁷⁷ Some of these additions failed to attract residents, but those that did usually counted Black people among them. Unlike some other towns in this period, including nearby Great Falls, Helena did not have strict residential segregation. Black people lived throughout the city, even on the edges of its famed mansion district (where some of them worked for wealthy Whites).

But at the same time, African Americans clustered in certain areas, particularly the residential sections around the two Black churches. The Baptist Church, built on the corner of Wilder and Harrison, marked a cluster of Black homes in the Broadwater Addition (on streets like Peosta, Hollins, and Ralph), many that included veterans of the "colored" Army units stationed at nearby Fort Harrison. Black families concentrated even more in the neighborhood around the St. James AME church, located east of downtown on the corner of 5th Avenue and N. Hoback Street. Another noticeably Black neighborhood could be found in the vicinity of where South Main, West Main, State, Warren, Cutler, Clancy, Water, and Wood streets came together, around the southeast section of downtown. Just west of there one could also find the center of Black nightlife. Helena's residential neighborhoods were integrated but "in the case of public amusement and entertainment . . . the situation was decidedly different. Black society and White society in Helena did not mix," except in few, usually Black-managed, saloons or other social spaces.¹⁷⁸ African Americans socialized at activities sponsored by the Black community or at establishments in the Clore Street area, Helena's redlight district at the southern tip of downtown.¹⁷⁹

At work, the occupational profile of African American residents reflected a system of racial subordination that relegated most Black people across the country to a limited number of difficult and low-wage jobs. In 1880, "over half of Black male Montanans (57 percent) worked as laborers, cooks, servants, or porters in the territory's population centers. The remainder included boat workers in Fort Benton, innkeepers and saloonkeepers, farm and ranch hands or teamsters, skilled tradesmen such as a blacksmith, a baker, barbers, and a few paper hangers and whitewashers."¹⁸⁰ Most of the Black people in Montana cities "were employed by the hotels and private clubs as waiters, maids, or doormen in the 1880s."¹⁸¹ At the same time, about 60% of African

¹⁷⁶ A total of 98 households in the 1910 census accounted for 337 of the city's 415 African Americans. Household data for the remainder is unclear.

¹⁷⁷ Hagen and Emmons, "Results of a Cultural Resources Inventory of the Montana Department of Transportation's North Montana Avenue Safety Improvement Project, Lewis and Clark County, Montana," 5; Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House."

¹⁷⁸ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 51.

¹⁷⁹ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 51; Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Sanborn Map Company, "Fire Insurance Maps of Montana: Helena, Lewis and Clark County- 1892."

¹⁸⁰ Behan, "Forgotten Heritage," 29.

¹⁸¹ Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 343.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

American women in the territory “held outside jobs, mostly as laundresses, servants, or cooks; and two women ran boarding houses. The remaining 40% were keeping house.”¹⁸²

Similar employment profiles predominated among Helena’s Black population in this period. As Norman Crump Howard, the grandson of James and Clarissa Crump, recalled, African American people in Helena were limited to “low paying jobs.”¹⁸³ Census data corroborate Howard’s recollections: in 1910 the census listed 236 males in Helena, of whom 196 were 18 or older. Occupations were listed for 186 of these males (including six jobs listed for males under the age of 18). Over half (55%) of those reporting jobs listed just three positions, i.e. “laborer” (51), “porter” (38), and “janitor” (14).¹⁸⁴ Another significant portion worked as coachmen or chauffeurs (eight men, including Nathan Ford, who worked for U.S. Senator Powers), stewards (six), barbers or hairdressers (six), and cooks or chefs (six).¹⁸⁵ Five men listed mining as their profession (four of them specified mining quartz), while others worked as bartenders, caterers, elevator attendants and valets, chimney sweeps, engineers (i.e. operating and maintaining building mechanical plants), servants and “housemen,” house painters and contractors and kalsominers (i.e. whitewashers).¹⁸⁶

The significant number of Helena’s Black men who served as soldiers was not fully reflected in the 1910 census. “Colored” Company A was re-assigned in 1905 (though “colored” units of the 24th paraded that year at the Capitol dedication of the Thomas Meagher statue) and other reassignments further reduced the local Black military ranks.¹⁸⁷ Those veterans who remained in Helena retired or moved on to other occupations. A select few Black men practiced specialized professions. One man was a master brickmaker and one an electrician. One made a living doing “vocal entertainments,” another as a vaudeville actor, and another (Edward Glenn) as a stage manager at the Family Theater. There was a farmer and a federal building “fireman,” a bath house masseuse and a “magnetic healer,” as well as two ministers, and a physician.¹⁸⁸ The Black dentist who’d practiced in town in previous years, Dr. J. Brister, formerly “associated with one of the oldest and best dentists in the city,” was no longer listed.¹⁸⁹ Nor were the Black policemen. After becoming Helena’s first known African American cop in 1888, and working in that capacity whilst moonlighting at the Montana Club, William C. Irvin moved on to other pursuits around 1906, when he opened the firm of Gordon & Irvin.¹⁹⁰ [Figure 9] His successor Ike Hayes, “generally known” as “the champion heavy weigh prize fighter of the northwest” when he “don[ned] a star and a brass buttoned coat”



Figure 9: “William Irvin,” J.P. Ball and Son, photographers, c. 1890. Mr. Irvin in his fraternal uniform. Montana Historical Society Research Center. 957-597.

¹⁸² Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 31.

¹⁸³ Hilander, “Helena Native Has ‘Roots’ Galore”; Baumler, *Helena, the Town That Gold Built : The First 150 Years*, 26–27.

¹⁸⁴ A certain amount of occupational diversity existed within these categories.

¹⁸⁵ Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform].”

¹⁸⁶ Bureau of the Census.

¹⁸⁷ *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana, Vol. VI*, 120; Wood, “The Black Sergeants of Hollings Avenue.”

¹⁸⁸ Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform].”

¹⁸⁹ “Local and Personal: September 3, 1894,” September 3, 1894.

¹⁹⁰ “Local and Personal,” September 3, 1894; Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 52; “Local and Personal: September 3, 1894,” September 3, 1894.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

and became a Helena policeman in 1896, was enumerated four years later renting at 571 E. State St. and worked as a laborer, and moved to Butte shortly thereafter.¹⁹¹

For Black females, the range of occupations proved similarly narrow, and at the lower end of the pay scale. In 1910, 90 women in Helena listed occupations. Forty-two of these made a living as maids or servants of one form or another (doing “housework,” or “housekeeping”), 21 were cooks (mainly for private families), 10 labored as laundresses, and six worked as seamstresses. There was also a vaudeville performer, a music teacher, a milliner (Rosana Glenn), an Army hospital matron (Mamie Bridgwater), a hairdresser and two caterers.¹⁹²

Helena's Black Business Sector and Economy

In addition to these occupations, African Americans in Helena also ran their own businesses. These businesses not only supported numerous households in the city and served the Black population, but served as a focal point of the community. Helena's African American populace was a dynamic entity. As noted above, entrepreneurial activity had been an integral part of the community since the beginning. As the Black population rose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, business activity grew apace.

Predictably, as the community expanded, barbershops continued to be well represented among Black-owned businesses. For some 17 years beginning in the early 1880s, Duke Dutriueille ran a barbershop called “Duke's Place,” and numerous other Black people owned and operated barbershops in the city.¹⁹³ In addition to Duke, in 1894 the *Colored Citizen* noted “Messrs. Phil. Simmons and Jos. E. W. Clark [who had] one of the neatest and



Figure 10: “Barber Joseph E.W. Clark, far right, and others in front of Broadway Fish Market, Helena,” Unknown photographer, Thanksgiving Day, 1889. Montana Historical Society Research Center, 953-137.

¹⁹¹ “Ike Hayes on Duty”; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].”

¹⁹² Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform].”

¹⁹³ “Local and Personal: September 3, 1894,” September 3, 1894.; Thompson, “Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung,” 40. In 1894, the *Colored Citizen* attested to Duke's endurance: “‘Duke’ as he is familiarly known all over the state is one of our most popular pioneer citizens... Mr. Dutriueille still conducts-on the side-one of the best patronized and neatest tonsorial parlors in the city. Such a favorite is ‘Duke’ in his line that lots of old timers think no one except him is ‘in it.’”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

best appointed tonsorial parlors in the city” [Figure 10]; “J. E. Carpenter ... proprietor of the barber shop at the International Hotel”; Lafayette L. Grisson, “formerly proprietor of the Merchants Hotel barber shop,” who was “temporarily located in the upper end of the city . . . on the lookout for an eligible location in the business center and rumor has it that before long he will open the largest and finest tonsorial parlors in the city”; and Mrs. Mollie Millen, “A female barber . . . one of the boasts of Helena,” and “proprietor of one of the nicest and snuggest tonsorial parlors in this city... her haircuts are tasty and fashionable.”¹⁹⁴ The paper also remarked on the hair dressing parlor run by Mrs. Mattie Simmons, which “by care and attention her business has grown from small proportions to a credible volume.”¹⁹⁵ Other Black barbershops included one Grisson ran in partnership with George Irving (at 9 Ball Street), and David H. Harris and Jasper Campbell’s establishment (Harris & Campbell at 132 S. Main, opened ca. 1910).¹⁹⁶



Figure 11: “P. Henry Maxwell’s Business - 108 Cutler,” likely J.P. Ball and Son, photographers, c. 1888. Kennon Baird Collection. <http://helenahistory.org/henry-maxwell-108-cutler-st.htm>

Black-owned businesses over the years provided a range of services and goods to the African American community and to Helena more generally. In 1887, abolitionist and pioneer photographer James Presley Ball, Sr., along with his son, opened a photography studio in Helena that functioned for about 13 years, documenting many of the city’s citizens and significant events.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, Ball likely took the photo that shows another late-

¹⁹⁴ “Local and Personal: September 3, 1894,” September 3, 1894.

¹⁹⁵ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 39n50.

¹⁹⁶ Thompson, “Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung,” 40.

¹⁹⁷ James Presley Ball, Sr. was a well-known abolitionist and a photographer in Cincinnati, Ohio, who lived in several places, including Minneapolis, before moving to Helena. In December 1887 he was nominated as a delegate to a civil rights convention and later ran for several offices on the Republican ticket. He was nominated for Coroner of Lewis and Clark County in 1894, but declined the nomination. He later co-founded the St. James AME Church and became president of Montana's Afro-American Club. The

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

19th century African American business, that of P. Henry Maxwell, at 108 E. Cutler Street (no longer extant), whose establishment advertised “Old Furniture Made New, Painting, Carpets Cleaned, All Kinds of Job Work.”

¹⁹⁸ [Figure 11]

In 1894, the *Colored Citizen* noted a variety of business owners in the Black community. One of the “most enterprising business men,” was Walter Scott, who ran “a good looking express wagon [and] own[ed] a very pretty homestead with ample yard on one of our handsomest streets.”¹⁹⁹ William Woodcock, who as noted above was with the U.S. Army at the 1877 Battle of the Big Hole, owned and operated a “steam carpet cleaning establishment,” with which he provided “employment to a number of hands.”²⁰⁰ By 1896, Black-owned businesses included a grocery store, opened by Walter and Almira Dorsey at 114 N. Rodney Street. Walter previously ran a restaurant at 104 Broadway (in 1892) and then worked several years at the Montana Club. The Dorsey family remained in the grocery business for almost 40 years, moving their business from Rodney to 843 8th Ave. around 1898, and then to the northeast corner of 8th and Hoback (900 8th/401 N. Hoback, 24LC2433) in 1905.



Figure 12: “Walter R. Dorsey's grocery store, Helena, Montana,” Unknown photographer, c. 1904. Montana Historical Society Research Center, Edward M. Reinig Photograph Collection, PAc 74-104.266 GP.

The Waltons (Andrew J. and Mahala Ann) also ran a series of businesses. By 1907, they operated a restaurant at 15 E. State Street (no longer extant), apparently converting it in 1909 to a thrift store called Capital City Second Hand, which became an enduring enterprise. Lewis Meade Walker dealt in “Coal, Wood, Junk, and Hides” nearby, operating out of 206 S. Ewing (no longer extant) from at least 1908 onward. Sarah Morris, meanwhile, ran a bakery at 114 W. Lawrence (no longer extant). Black-owned businesses in this period also included newspapers—J.P. Ball, Jr. published the *Colored Citizen* in the fall of 1894, and Joseph Bass started the more enduring *Plaindealer* in 1906 (17-21 S. Main, 24LC2458) – and at least one saloon, likely owned by “Lloyd V. Graye, who at one point held a majority interest in a cleaning establishment, a shoe shop, and two saloons.”²⁰¹ One of Graye’s saloons was the Zanzibar, opened in 1903 at 127 Clore Street (no longer extant), which he owned in partnership with David Gordon.²⁰²

business block where his studio was no longer stands. He and his son JP Jr left Helena around 1900 for points west, i.e. Seattle and/or Portland, then to Honolulu. There are a variety of photos of him available online, including here: unknown, *James Presley Ball*. The address of Ball’s Helena studio is listed in various sources as 125 Broadway, 129 Broadway, 137 ½ N. Main, and 311 N. Main. See “Langdon’s List of 19th and Early 20th Century Photographers,” <http://www.langdonroad.com/b-to-bal>.

¹⁹⁸ “Helena As She Was - An Open History Resource for Montana’s Capital City.”

¹⁹⁹ “Local and Personal: September 10, 1894.”

²⁰⁰ “Local and Personal: September 10, 1894.”

²⁰¹ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 52. Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 344.

²⁰² Lang, “Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906,” 9.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

As Graye's biography suggests, African American people also invested, sometimes as shareholders in business enterprises and sometimes in real estate. Black business activity therefore exceeded the readily visible. African Americans in Helena seized and created opportunities where they could: as the *Plaindealer* noted, a successful Black businessman "must be a hustler, and most any fair man must admire his pluck and perseverance."²⁰³ Julia Maxwell, for example, had initial success investing in real estate with her husband Henry in Bismarck, but their North Dakota property was sold to pay back-taxes in 1885. They then moved to Helena, where in the 1890s Julia again started investing in property. Her daughter Alice Johnson Palmer followed her resilient mother's model. After being widowed, she raised her six young children in Helena (first at a home she owned at 199 Ralph Street, no longer extant), while homesteading near Lincoln, acquiring property where she eventually built the Palmer Cabins that she rented seasonally to hunters and tourists.²⁰⁴

Other local African American real estate investors in this period included B. F. Hooper, whom the *Colored Citizen* described as "a calciminer by trade" who was "one of our oldest and best known citizens," and "among our largest real estate owners of color," "R. J. Lucas, reputed for his business conservatism and foresight and owner of the 'Lucas Block,'" Miles York, who "always had a strong inclination to accumulate, hence his name has frequently figured in our real estate transfers," John Hooper, who "made some judicious investments," John E. Carpenter, proprietor of the International Hotel barbershop, who "invested quite heavily in Helena real estate," James A. Mack, "owner of valuable improved real estate" (as well as "head mixologist at the Hotel Helena"), and E.G. Coles, who "engaged in the furniture business" and "invested in real estate and other ventures."²⁰⁵ They also included Miss Leila P. Bruce, a seamstress who "made some judicious investments in Helena real estate."²⁰⁶ Ms. Bruce was one of a number of African American women who owned property in Helena during the heyday of the community.

Businesspeople in the African American community tried to help one another by working together. In 1907, residents started the Helena chapter of the National Negro Business League (NNBL). Founded by Booker T. Washington in 1900 "on the self-help principle," the NNBL "promoted the establishment of Black-owned businesses." The Helena NNBL was organized by Joseph Bass, a newspaper publisher, J. L. Ellis, a professional printer, M.O. Arnett and Harry Saulsburg, both tailors, and Harry C. Simmons, president of the Manhattan Club, Helena's private Black social club. It met regularly "to discuss business problems ... provided some financial support for new businesses; and it sent delegates to national conventions."²⁰⁷ Around the same time, local businesspeople incorporated the Afro-American Building Association "for the purpose of buying real estate and erecting buildings." The Association's eight-member Board of Directors included "three women, two of whom operated businesses of their own—a beauty salon and a 'physical culture club' for women." Among the businesses that received support from the Association were "Frank Mitchell's Atlantic Restaurant and Jessie Waggener's Crown Cleaners."²⁰⁸

²⁰³ *Montana Plaindealer*, September 14, 1906.

²⁰⁴ Thompson, "Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung," 40.

²⁰⁵ "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894," September 3, 1894.. Lucas was "an attaché of the U. S. Surveyor General's office."; "Mr. York is connected with one of the tony tonsorial parlors of the city and reaps a steady and handsome income."; "Local and Personal: September 10, 1894."; "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894," September 3, 1894..

²⁰⁶ "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894," September 3, 1894. Bruce was said to be "one of the most successful, skilful and best patronized modistes of this city ... She is up to date in all the styles and fashions and numbers among her customers many of the very best families of this city."

²⁰⁷ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 54; MT SHPO, "African-Americans in Montana Timeline."

²⁰⁸ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 54.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

By 1910, Helena's Black business sector seemed to thrive. Even the incomplete picture painted by census data indicates that a significant portion of the population was self-employed, working for themselves running their own small businesses out of their homes—like Polly D. Lee's sewing at 912 8th Avenue (24LC2447) or Rosana Glenn's millinery at 1020 5th (24LC2451) or other spaces. That year, 42 of the 276 people whose occupations are discussed above listed in census terminology, as working of their "own account."²⁰⁹ Some people ran more substantial operations; the 1910 census listed six African American individuals as owning businesses that employed other people. These included barbers or hairdressers (Joseph E.W. Clarke and Mattie E. Simmons), a caterer (Lucius C. Foreman), physician Fred Shelby and *Plaindealer* publisher Joseph Bass. They also included Miles York, whom the census identified as a "contractor" who did "odd jobs" but other sources indicate ran a "dry-cleaning and tailoring shop" and shoeshine parlor.²¹⁰ [Figure 13]

As Miles York's story suggests, census data failed to capture the full extent of Black business activity. Some employers the census identified, others it did not. For example, enumerators listed the occupation of Harry E. Salsburg as cleaner (clothing). Harry, along with his wife Ada (for whom no occupation was listed), in fact



Figure 13: "Miles York, Clothes Cleaning, Tailoring and Shoe-Shining, an Early African-American Business in Helena," Unknown photographer, c. 1913. Tom Mulvaney Collection. http://helenahistory.org/Miles_York.htm

²⁰⁹ This was especially true of women's work. Women who made a living doing laundry, sewing, millinery etc. worked out of their own homes. In 1894, the *Colored Citizen* noted several seamstress businesses, including those of Miss Edith Millen, and Miss Leila P. Bruce,

²¹⁰ "Helena As She Was - An Open History Resource for Montana's Capital City."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

owned and operated a prominent downtown business, located in the Parchen Block at 108 E. Broadway, called The Broadway Suitatorium. The Salsburgs advertised their business as offering “Cleaning Dyeing and Pressing of Ladies' and Gentlemen's Clothing.”²¹¹

Boarding houses constituted another common Black business, the extent that census data fails to capture.²¹² In the 1910 census, Mamie Myers was listed as the “landlady” of a Wood Street “rooming house” and Elizabeth Mundy was listed as running a “lodging house” on Warren Street South. But boarding houses were also likely run by at least 11 other women (including Mary A. Cole, Sarah Elias, Lizzie Ewing, Grace Emerson, Nettie Marshall, Corine “Kitty” McEvoy, Estelle Reade, Alice Smith, Annie and Thelma Wade, and Nettie Woods), all of whom listed themselves as self-employed, working as “housekeepers” at boarding or rooming houses.²¹³ When one looks closely at the history of particular residential properties, it becomes apparent that taking in boarders was also a widespread practice among Helena’s African American households in general. Of 24 historically-Black Helena homes surveyed in 2016, at least 11 included people who appear to have been renting a room from the primary occupant(s).

Other Helena businesses weren’t owned by African Americans but nonetheless played a significant role in the local Black community, and as such warrant discussion. If Black people commonly occupied a limited number of positions, certain industries hired a disproportionate number of African Americans, and were visibly associated with the local Black community. Prominent among them was the hospitality industry. The Lambs Club, a social club, employed numerous Black men in a variety of capacities, as did the Helena and Grandon hotels. The Broadwater was also a major employer of African Americans.²¹⁴ At one point it hired an entire Black wait staff in one fell swoop— in 1907, Charles Mason and his “crew of first class waiters” from Hot Springs Arkansas arrived to staff the establishment.”²¹⁵ The year before the Helena Hotel, too, “put on a crew of colored waiters.”²¹⁶

²¹¹ R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk's Helena City Directory*, 114; Hagen, “Montana Historic Property Record: 106 E. Broadway, Helena.”

²¹² “Local and Personal: September 10, 1894.” The *Colored Citizen* noted one prominent early boarding house in 1894: “Mrs. V. Taylor is the proprietor of... boarding house No. 116 Jackson street.”

²¹³ Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform].”

²¹⁴ The list of people employed was derived from newspaper notes, censuses, and site histories. Af-Am businesses list The Lambs Club employed Charles Reed, Arthur Palmer, George Williams, Patrick Keys (504 Peosta), Lucius Foreman, etc among others. The Hotel Helena employed George M. Lee, James Mack, Alonzo Leatherberry in 1894, M.O.J. Arnett in 1895, Ed Johnson and his “colored” crew in 1906; the Broadwater employed William C. “Tex” Rose, W.J. Robinson, Sam Henry and Mrs. Henry in 1894.

²¹⁵ “Broadwater is Now Manned by a Colored Crew of Real Waiters,” *Montana Plaindealer*, April 12, 1907, 1. This crew included “Isaac Early Captain, with T.S. Thomas, C.A. Hughey, H. Napor, G. Berry & N.W. Marlow as waiters & Mr. & Mrs. J.H. Lee as Masseurs.”; Bauml, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House.”

²¹⁶ “The Montana Plaindealer, November 2, 1906, (Helena, Mont.) 1906-1911,” 1906. “The Montana Plaindealer, November 2, 1906, (Helena, Mont.) 1906-1911,” 1906. “The Montana Plaindealer, November 2, 1906, (Helena, Mont.) 1906-1911,” 1906. “All Pages,” 1906. “The Montana Plaindealer, November 2, 1906, (Helena, Mont.) 1906-1911,” 1906. *Montana Plaindealer*, November 2, 1906.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Foremost among employers of Helena Black people was the Montana Club. The elite private White social club—which counted among its guests President Theodore Roosevelt and author Mark Twain—for years “employed only Blacks” and seems to have hired a good portion of the African American community at one point or another. Of 24 historically-Black Helena households surveyed in 2016, at least 11 included people who worked for the club. While many of these people worked there only a short time, some were fixtures.²¹⁷ Indeed, perhaps no single person is more associated with the history of the Montana Club than Julian Anderson, a Black man who began bartending there in 1893. Anderson retired from the Montana Club at the age of about 94 in 1953, having served club patrons for 60 years.²¹⁸ [Figure 14] Norman Howard was there almost as long. He started in 1915 and worked there part-time for 50 years. As Howard recalled, “a woman was never allowed on the premises except on New Year’s Eve . . . and never was the help permitted to speak to the members, ‘the money people.’”²¹⁹

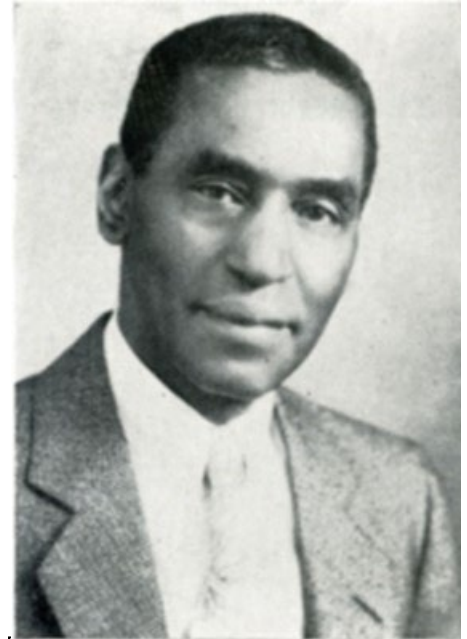


Figure 14: “Julian Anderson,”
Unknown photographer, c. 1943.
Published in *Golden Jubilee Edition:
Recipes by the Master of Mixes as
served by him at the Montana Club,
Helena, Montana, for fifty continuous
years, June 1893 to June 1943.*
Montana Historical Society Research
Center Library Collection.

African American Community Institutions in Helena

As the above description suggests, Black-owned businesses served as the focal point for Black community in Helena in several ways. Places like boarding houses facilitated intermingling and residential clustering, building a Black community by bringing Black people together physically. Workplaces like the Montana Club served as an economic link, a conduit for connecting community members with employment opportunities and connecting them with one another through shared employment. Black-owned businesses offered not only services and sometimes jobs, but also shared Black spaces that supported a variety of community activities, from casual socializing to hosting meetings of political clubs and other organizations, as when the First Ward Colored Club met in P.H. Maxwell’s store (108 E. Cutler) in 1894. In many ways, Black-owned businesses were themselves important community institutions. This was especially the case with Black owned newspapers, like Helena’s *Colored Citizen* and *Plaindealer*.

Across the country, in the decades before and after the turn of the century, African American newspapers flourished. Historians of the subject note that “the reasons for the upsurge in the publication of African American newspapers at this time are manifold,” and included fundamental developments in Black history, including freedom and the right to vote (and associated involvement in the political system and parties) as well

²¹⁷ Hilander, “Helena Native Has ‘Roots’ Galore.” Known MT Club employees include James Collins, Charles Mason (who later was at the Broadwater), C.D. Martin, Mr. Cassway, and many people associated with properties surveyed in 2016 (24LC2429-24LC2453) like Walter Dorsey (NRHP-listed Dorsey Grocery and Residence at 900 8th/401 N Hoback); James Howard, Mark Lowery, Norman Howard, and Maxine Elliot Ladd Howard (NRHP-listed Crump Howard House at 1003 9th Ave.); Julian Anderson and family members (617 Broadway); George M. Lee Jr (912 8th); Jefferson Harrison (534 Hollins); Harry Simmons (514 Hollins); David H. Harris (504 Peosta); William Irvin (212 S Beattie); Arthur S. Harrell (1068 N Ewing); and William Blanks (843 8th).

²¹⁸ Black people were also prominent in the hospitality industry of other Montana towns. For example, in 1882, Fort Benton’s Grand Union hotel opened with an eleven-person staff, nine of whom were Black (incl. barkeeper, cooks, waiters, chambermaid). Ken Robison, “The Jewel in Fort Benton’s Crown: The Grand Union,” *Fort Benton River Press Grand Union Edition*, November 2, 2007.

²¹⁹ Hilander, “Helena Native Has ‘Roots’ Galore.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

as related phenomena, like the spread of organizations (such as religious groups) that published freely, increased spending money, and expanded Black education and literacy. In the 40 years “between 1870 and 1910, the overall literacy rate for African Americans rose from 20% to 70 percent. This sharp rise in literacy in turn resulted in the proliferation of African American newspapers.” Historians have identified almost 2,000 different Black papers published in the 1880-1910 period alone. The rise of the Black press was also part of a broader increase in newspaper publication and circulation more generally at this time.²²⁰

Concurrently, as African American communities developed in the West, many produced newspapers. In their study of the subject, Gayle Berardi and Thomas Segady identified “forty-three African American newspapers” published in the West “between 1880 and 1914.” As noted above, Black people who moved west tended to be educated—“the literacy rate for African Americans approached 90% in the West by 1910, twice the literacy rate for African Americans living in the South during the same period”—and Black papers were an integral part of their lives. Western Black communities and their papers “were unique in several respects.” The numerical “growth of the African American population in this region either paralleled or outpaced the growth in the West generally,” and the surging population of Black westerners contributed to “the rapid development of an African American owned and operated press. This press described African Americans involved in the creation of thriving, culturally distinct communities with social and political concerns that have long been ignored.” For African Americans living in the West during this period, newspapers served as the only mass medium of information exchange.”²²¹

Helena's *Colored Citizen* was likely Montana's second Black newspaper, as well as the third Black newspaper published in the entire Pacific Northwest.²²² Started by J.P. Ball, Jr., in 1894, the paper's immediate *raison d'être* was “to rally support during the election that won Helena's permanent designation as Montana's capital city.”²²³ But despite this specific political goal, shared by many regardless of race, the *Colored Citizen* was an exemplary Black newspaper. Ball made this clear from the paper's beginning, writing from his office at 137 N. Main that “there are no strings on us. We are running a paper devoted to the interests and welfare of our people,” and specifically “the social, moral, and industrial interests” of Montana's African American residents.²²⁴ The paper's masthead unequivocally proclaimed it “devoted to the interests of colored Americans.” At the time, Ball estimated that Montana contained 2,500 “colored people,” of whom 500 lived in Helena.²²⁵ Although published in Helena, his newspaper was read by people throughout the state, and likely elsewhere in the region.

In Ball's estimation, the contest between Anaconda and Helena for designation as the state capital was a race-related issue. He argued that the Anaconda Company was deeply racist, denouncing its “iron claw of corporate infernalism which has always crushed out the Black man from every factory and workshop.”²²⁶ In contrast to the company's eponymous town, Anaconda, Ball promoted Helena as a city that recognized “No Color Line.” He nonetheless adamantly exposed and denounced prejudice wherever he saw it, including in Helena, where he

²²⁰ Berardi and Segady, “The Development of African-American Newspapers in the American West,” 97–98..

²²¹ Berardi and Segady, 103-105.

²²² Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 344. The entire run of the *Colored Citizen* is available on the website *Chronicling America*. Montana's first Black newspaper appears to have been the *The Advocate*, published in 1892 for several months during the election cycle in Great Falls, and discussed in the section on developments in that city.

²²³ Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House.”

²²⁴ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 34.

²²⁵ Myers, “Montana's Negro Newspapers, 1894-1911,” 17. Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House.”

²²⁶ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 52.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

“vigorously criticized local White racists for their attacks on the Black community.” Such people, he suggested, should “be declared un-American.”²²⁷ Ball also sought to work toward specific changes in the city’s racial landscape. “We do not ask for access to your social circles,” he wrote. “We have our own, and it, too, is banded against those who are not acceptable from our standpoint. Our plea is for fair and impartial treatment in places of public accommodation.”²²⁸ The *Colored Citizen* stopped publication after the election that November—Helena won the capital contest—but despite its short duration and specific purpose, it served as a critical institution that reflected, and facilitated, the coalescence of Helena’s African American community while leading its shared struggle for racial justice.

Several other Helena Black newspapers followed in the wake of the *Colored Citizen*. A paper called *The Reporter* was reportedly published in Helena 1899-1901, and in 1902 *the Knocker* was published, presumably by Black soldiers, at Fort Harrison. No copies of either of these papers is known to survive.²²⁹ The *Montana Plaindealer* proved more enduring, serving a similar function to that of the *Colored Citizen*, and other Black newspapers across the nation, for about five years.

Started in the spring of 1906 (its first issue was printed March 16, 1906) out of an office at 17 S. Main Street (24LC2458) by veteran publisher Joseph Bass and his assistant, printer and long-time Helena resident Joseph H. Tucker, the *Plaindealer* stands as Montana’s most enduring African American paper. It followed in the footsteps of not only of the *Advocate*, the *Colored Citizen*, the *Reporter*, and the *Knocker*, but also the *New Age*, published in Butte in 1902-1903 as a “medium to bring the colored people of the state closer together.”²³⁰

Joseph Blackburn Bass was a native of Missouri who’d been a schoolteacher for seven years before joining the staff of the *Topeka Call*, in Kansas, in 1894. He became publisher and editor of the *Call* shortly thereafter, and the paper later changed its name to the *Topeka Plaindealer*. In 1905, Bass moved to Helena to start the *Montana Plaindealer*, and thereby continue in a new location the community struggle to which he’d long been committed.²³¹

From the beginning, Bass was clear and outspoken about the paper’s purpose. The weekly paper would cover local, state, and national “race news”: “our only aim,” wrote Bass, “shall be for the progress and uplifting of a race with which our destiny is forever linked.” The *Plaindealer* would “stand up for right and denounce the wrong,” its mission not “to stir up strife, but rather to pour oil on troubled waters.” To this end above all others would the paper be devoted: although Bass and the *Plaindealer* “unhesitatingly subscribe[d] to the principles of Republicanism,” the paper “did not miss on opportunity to criticize either Republicans or Democrats who attempted to restrict the rights of Montana Blacks.”²³² Fearless, tireless, and forceful, Bass advocated civil rights at local, regional and national levels, and preached a gospel of racial uplift along the lines of Booker T.

²²⁷ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 346.

²²⁸ “We Ask for Justice,” *Colored Citizen*, October 1, 1894, 2; Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 36.

²²⁹ Berardi and Segady, “The Development of African-American Newspapers in the American West,” 111; “List of African-American Newspapers in Montana.”

²³⁰ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 347. “jointly edited by J.W. Duncan, Charles F. Smith and Chris Dorsey.”; Bauml, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House.”

²³¹ “Joseph B. Bass Was Born to Be a Journalist.” Bass moved to Los Angeles, via San Francisco after living in Helena. There, in 1912, he became editor of the *California Eagle*, the largest African American newspaper on the West Coast, with a circulation of 60,000. Bass married Charlotta Amanda Spears, who owned and ran the *Eagle*—she later became the first African American woman vice-presidential candidate (for the Progressive Party). There are many pictures of Joseph and Charlotta Bass available online and in archives.

²³² Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 347.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Washington, maintaining that Black people should “go to work or engage in some legitimate business,” and thereby not only “command greater respect for themselves but ... redound to the credit of the race and community as well.”²³³

Like other African American papers, the *Plaindealer* championed the rights of the area Black community while at the same time building and revealing a community network. “Bass claimed that 75% of African Americans in Helena read the *Plaindealer*, and White subscribers outnumbered Black subscribers three-to-one.”²³⁴ The first page of the paper featured editorials and “national news items of interest,” while subsequent pages were devoted to local matters like “church activities, vital statistics, unusual experiences, awards and honors, gossip.”²³⁵ It simultaneously provided a forum for members of the community to publicly voice their concerns and positions, featuring guest columns by local residents like Fred Spearman, local “waiter and later civil service employee,” who in 1908 wrote an editorial in the paper titled “The Negro a World Force.”²³⁶

With Bass at its helm, the *Plaindealer* enjoyed pride of place among the institutions of Helena's Black community during its heyday. But, as its pages attested, that community also built an impressive range of organizations over the years. All of these institutions reflected and promoted the vitality of the region's African American population. Foremost among them were the town's Black churches, which not only constituted the social center of the community but also fostered numerous other local institutions. Helena's two enduring Black churches both dated to the late 1880s, when African American population growth in the city was at its height. In 1887, Christian residents founded the Second Baptist Church, which served the Black Baptist faithful from a variety of temporary locations (including 343, 417, and 439 N. Main) for over 25 years before constructing a permanent church building in 1913 on the west corner of the intersection of Wilder and Harrison avenues (601 Wilder/1260 Harrison).²³⁷

One year after the Baptist group organized, in 1888, the Reverend James Hubbard of the Kansas Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church formally founded Helena's St. James AME congregation.²³⁸ St. James AME members soon completed a church building (1889) described a few years later as “a well sustained, largely attended, substantially built, eligibly located and pretentious edifice of worship,” as well as an outbuilding (on the south property line), on the southwest corner of 5th Avenue and Hoback Street (849 5th Avenue/24LC2430).²³⁹ Helena's St. James was—along with Butte's AME (founded by 1889) and Portland's Bethel AME (founded in 1889)—one of the earliest AME churches in the Pacific Northwest. In a testament to its early strength and vibrancy, in 1894, just five years after its establishment, St. James hosted the annual convention of the Colorado AME conference. That same year, the church paid off its debt and began “accumulating a fund . . . to build a parsonage.”²⁴⁰ The congregation completed the parsonage, which stood

²³³ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 55..

²³⁴ Lang, “The Montana Plaindealer, Helena (1906-1911) | The Black Past.”

²³⁵ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 53.

²³⁶ Lang, 54.

²³⁷ Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House.” See 1909/1910 comments on this church building effort in *Plaindealer*.

²³⁸ “African M.E. Church,” *Helena Weekly Herald*, September 27, 1888, 7.

²³⁹ “Local and Personal: September 3, 1894,” September 3, 1894.; Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 52.

²⁴⁰ “Local and Personal: October 8, 1894”; “Local and Personal: October 22, 1894.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

south of the church building along the alley, in 1896. This parsonage soon acquired its own address, 112 N. Hoback (no longer extant).²⁴¹

In subsequent years, St. James served as the heart of Black Helena. Its prominence in the city's African American community stemmed not only from the central role the church itself played in people's lives but also from the fact that it fostered a host of other organizations. As one historian stated, "nearly every important social, cultural, political, and self-help organization created by African Americans in Helena had its origin at St. James."²⁴² The church itself boasted "a Sabbath School conducted by trained and earnest Christian teachers," as well as "a choir of trained voices, presided over by an exceptionally fine professor of music and vocal culture."²⁴³

Early on, the church members formed the St. James Literary Society: in 1894 the Polk's City Directory listed Literary Society leaders as Jas. Clark, president, A M Drew, Secretary, and Mrs. Louisa Banks as treasurer.²⁴⁴ In 1906, under the leadership of Reverend W. T. Osborne, Walter Dorsey, Mrs. Eugene Baker, and Joseph Clark, the Society "boast[ed] over 100 participants at its weekly meetings. The society provided Black Helenans with a forum for discussion of community issues, an audience for performing artists, and an opportunity for local poets, playwrights, and essayists to present their work." Prominent among Society activities were formal debates (followed by "furious discussions") on such topics as "Resolved, that the Negroes of the South enjoy more prosperity than in any other section of the U.S." or "Resolved, that slavery was a benefit to the Negro race"; or "Resolved, that woman suffrage is detrimental to the welfare of the nation."²⁴⁵ "The St. James Literary Society reached well beyond the congregation and attracted Whites to some public meetings, including one in 1906 that focused on the Brownsville Affair," at which J.B. Bass led the affirmative side and J.W. Clark the negative on the subject 'Resolved, that the action of Pres. Roosevelt in dishonorably discharging a battalion of the 25th Infantry is not only a grievous wrong against the parties affected, but the race as well."²⁴⁶

The busy church also hosted less serious social events. In September of 1894, St. James held "an ice cream festival and candy pulling" and then "a campaign dinner and bazaar." The St. James choir sang at the Sept. 24th Emancipation Celebration in Anaconda, and then Miss Annie R. Heyward married Mr. Alonzo Leatherberry at the church on the 27th of that month (followed by a reception at the home of the bride, 20 and 21 Ewing St.). The next week, "Misses Crump, Donnell, and [?]arkin gave a very enjoyable entertainment . . . for the benefit of the A.M.E. church," which proceeded to host the annual gathering of the Colorado A.M.E. conference, "composed of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico" the week thereafter. The AME Conference featured "an interesting programme for each day" from October 11-15th, and was "photographed by J.P. Ball, the main street photographer."²⁴⁷

Other church events included holiday celebrations like a "big thanksgiving dinner" in 1906 for which the church planned to sell 300 tickets," or the 1907 holiday "exhibition by the Busy Bees "of the most beautiful assortments of handmade Christmas presents you ever witnessed" and the Christmastime spectacle of costumed

²⁴¹ Hagen, "Montana Historic Property Record Form: 114 N. Hoback."

²⁴² "Saint James AME Church, Helena, Montana (1888-) | The Black Past."

²⁴³ "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894," September 3, 1894.

²⁴⁴ R.L. Polk & Co., *Polk's Helena City Directory* (Helena, Mont.: R.L. Polk & Co., 1894), 78.

²⁴⁵ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 55.

²⁴⁶ "Saint James AME Church, Helena, Montana (1888-) | The Black Past."; *Montana Plaindealer*, November 6, 1906.

²⁴⁷ "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894," September 3, 1894.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

locals performing “the Japanese Parasol drill”); educational activities (like the statewide Ministers Institute & Young Peoples Meeting of the AME or visiting lectures like that by Rabbi Klein at a literary meeting in June 1908); plays (like the 1907 drama “The Slave’s Return,” that played to “a packed house,” or the children’s production of “Jack & the Beanstalk that July); and assorted other entertainments, like a “fair with articles made by the Sewing Circle (with “all kinds of needlework, from the simplest to the most difficult drawnwork & Battenburg.”), or the Bright Star Club social.²⁴⁸



Figure 15: “Unidentified Man Wearing Grand United Order of Odd Fellows,” J.P. Ball and Son, photographers, c. 1890s. Montana Historical Society Research Center, 657-606.

The Literary Society, led by Walter Dorsey and others, in 1894, joined a host of other African American institutions in the city. That same year, the *Colored Citizen* documented many of them in its pages, revealing a vibrant and diverse Black cultural life. With the capital-city contest raging, political clubs were active. In September 1894, the Afro-American Republican Club held its “large and enthusiastic” first meeting, where “Prof. Cole’s excellent band enlivened the proceedings with patriotic airs. President J.P. Ball, Sr., delivered his inaugural address . . . [and] interesting addresses were also made by Jas. Crump, B. F. Hooper, W. P. Hough, Mr. Wheaton of Livingston, and others.”²⁴⁹ It joined existing clubs organized by voting districts, like the First Ward Colored Club that met in October of that year in P.H. Maxwell’s 108 E. Cutler place of business (“George Mitchell presided, with J. Brooks acting as secretary. Speeches were made by Geo. Mitchell, Geo. Warfield, J. Carpenter, W. Hulbert, A.G. Green and A. Frazier.”).²⁵⁰ At the time, J.P. Ball and G. W. Alexander head[ed] their respective delegations from the Fourth and Seventh wards. These wards contain many of our best, most influential and respected citizens.”²⁵¹ The African American “ladies of [the] city,” meanwhile, “organized into Helena-for-the-capital clubs.”²⁵²

Fraternal organizations, and associated women’s auxiliaries, functioned alongside overtly political ones, as did a spectrum of social clubs, women’s clubs, and various organizations devoted to enrichment, entertainment, and recreation. In 1894, Black Helena supported a Masonic Lodge (H.L. Warfield, Worshipful Master) with a “flourishing

Ladies’ Court,” [i.e. Order of the Eastern Star] that met at the “Colored” Masonic Temple at 14 ½ S. Main.²⁵³ Helena’s African American community also sustained a strong Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (the Golden City Lodge, which, with visiting lodges from other cities in the state, on occasion “paraded [Helena’s] principal

²⁴⁸ *Montana Plaindealer*, November 16, 1906; *Montana Plaindealer*, December 13, 1907; *Montana Plaindealer*, April 26, 1907; *Montana Plaindealer*, June 26, 1908; *Montana Plaindealer*, May 10, 1907; *Montana Plaindealer*, July 26, 1907; *Montana Plaindealer*, August 10, 1906; *Montana Plaindealer*, March 27, 1908.

²⁴⁹ “Local and Personal: September 3, 1894,” September 3, 1894. Elected as “colored delegates . . . by the recent ward primaries to attend the Republican county convention in 1894 were “Messrs. P.T. Simmons, Geo. Mitchell, G.W. Alexander, and J.P. Ball,” and as “colored alternate delegates” were “W.J. Robinson, Ed. Richardson, M.O.J. Arnett, W.J. Burnett and B.F. Hooper.”

²⁵⁰ “Helena As She Was - An Open History Resource for Montana’s Capital City.”

²⁵¹ “Local and Personal: September 3, 1894,” September 3, 1894.

²⁵² “Local and Personal: October 15, 1894.”

²⁵³ This was the temple address in 1898. As revealed by a search of Helena Polk’s for the term “col’d.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

streets" with a uniformed band) and the connected women's group the Household of Ruth, as well as "two flourishing councils of the American Order of Home Protection, about 300 strong. . . this order is similar to the A. O.U.W." [Ancient Order of United Workmen]. One of these was the Washington Lodge No. 1 A.O.H.P., George M. Lee, Chief Councilor.²⁵⁴ [Figure 15]

Two social clubs served the men of the African American community that year, both reportedly with "well-regulated and eminently respectable club rooms, provided with simple and harmless amusements and with periodicals from all sections of the country."²⁵⁵ The more prominent of the two men's clubs was the Manhattan Club (the other was the Silver Leaf Club run by Richardson and Wilson), managed that year by "the urbane W. J. Burnett."²⁵⁶ At its Main Street quarters, the Manhattan Social Club—"easily the most sophisticated club in town"—offered not only its well-stocked reading room, but also a "billiard parlor and ping pong room, private dining facilities, and a bar."²⁵⁷

Additional socializing centered around community institutions like baseball clubs (a Helena team traveled to Anaconda on Sept. 24th, 1894 to play one of Butte's Black ball teams) and Cole's Colored Band, "one of the leading musical organizations of the city." Cole's band played frequently—its gigs in a two-month period in the fall of 1894 included several meetings of the Afro-American Republican Club, the September 24th Emancipation Celebration in Anaconda (where the band was "sixteen strong"), a marching performance down Main Street ("with their becoming uniforms and headed by their gandy drum major"), an Odd Fellows parade on Helena's "principal streets," as well as "a concert and street parade."²⁵⁸ Other musical events supplemented the local band scene: in March 1894, in an event that made it into the pages of one of Indianapolis' Black newspapers, "after a lecture 'at the auditorium . . . R. Lucas, Al Marshall and Phil T. Simmons rendered 'Sebastopool' [sic] on three guitars and were encored."²⁵⁹

These 1894 institutions illustrate a few of those that functioned in Helena during the heyday of the city's African American community. Others spanned a similar spectrum. At one point fraternal organizations included two Black Masonic Lodges (the R.J. Fletcher Lodge, AF & AM and the Unity Lodge No. 101) as well as a chapter of the "International Benevolent and Protective Order of Elk of the World, the Afro-American Elks organization." Community members organized the Helena Elks in December 1906 with "more than 35 charter members." By 1910 the Black Elks boasted a "hall on Main Street" with a "spacious auditorium."²⁶⁰ Numerous

²⁵⁴ "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894," September 3, 1894. Lee also a Mason. List the secret societies that the colored citizen reported on for benefit of local community?

²⁵⁵ "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894."

²⁵⁶ "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894."

²⁵⁷ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 52. Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 345. Manhattan Club records at MHS, in existence in at least 1894-1895, 1903-1912. TELL MHS re: 1894 In 1906 the club was located at 16 ½ Main Street and was managed by G.F. and F.R. Anderson. *Montana Plaindealer*, September 21, 1906. In 1909 it moved into "new quarters" at 17 S. Main St.

²⁵⁸ "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894," September 3, 1894. In 1907 Helena appears to have had at least two Black baseball teams: that May the Luzon Bees played "the Fort Harrison team." *Montana Plaindealer*, May 10, 1907. In the same period (1908) Anaconda's Black ball team was the "Brownies."

²⁵⁹ Abbott and Seroff, *Out of Sight*, 339., appears in Chapter 6: 1894. Orig. source is March 24 *Indianapolis Freeman*.

²⁶⁰ *Montana Plaindealer*, November 23, 1906; *Montana Plaindealer*, December 9, 1910. In 1907, "the colored fraternal orders" incl. odd fellows, Naomi Lodge/household of ruth, Fletcher lodge masons/eastern star) "Made the preliminary steps toward building a joint home for their own lodge purposes. The lot on Breckenridge St. front in the A.P. Curtin Co. has been purchased." *Montana Plaindealer*, November 29, 1907. organized "The Afro American Benevolent Association for the purpose of building a home of their own." "All Pages," December 13, 1907.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

women's benevolent societies served the community at different times, too. These included the Busy Bees and the Willen Workers, as well as what was referred to in 1906 as simply the "Women's Club," which took as the subject of one of its meetings that year "The Proper Training of Children." Black woman also organized several social clubs, including the Summer Outing Club and the Autumn Leaf Social Club, established 1906, which organized events like "Buck and Wing" dance contests, as well as mandolin concerts.²⁶¹ Other groups active in the community included the "Afro-American Benevolent Association, a Masonic group devoted to building a hall . . . and the Afro-American Council . . . focused on defending local people from discrimination and protesting lynchings in the American South."²⁶²

Establishing the duration of different clubs is difficult, but evidence indicates that community organizations were varied and abundant throughout the period. In 1879, 20 Helena residents formed "the Afro-American lodge" of the Independent Order of Good Templars.²⁶³ Associated Black temperance lodges remained strong in the state for years: in 1894, Corporal J.P. Dundee visited Helena from Fort Custer in Miles City, where he was "one of the leading lights of the Soldiers' Home Lodge of that place, which boasts an active membership of 150."²⁶⁴

After the turn of the century, African American organizations continued to reflect the preoccupations of the period. In 1906, the Civic League hosted a lecture by Professor Booker T. Washington, the nation's most prominent Black leader, and the Lincoln Day Club held "a smoker at 19 South Main."²⁶⁵ The following year, people like the Rev. J.D. Pettigrew tried to organize a Helena chapter of the Colored Co-operative League.²⁶⁶ In 1908, "the new Helena Colored Band . . . formed a permanent organization & elected the following officers; D.H. Harris conductor, J.B. Bass business mgr, Eugene Clark secretary, Harry Saulsburg Treas."²⁶⁷ At the same time, "the colored republicans of Helena [had] the honor of forming the first Taft club in the entire west," and L.V. Graye was reportedly planning on organizing a Bryan club.²⁶⁸ In 1909, Henry J. Baker, J.E.W. Clark, Arnett, Bass "and others created the Afro-American Protective League to bring political pressure in defense of Black rights." With "Bass spearhead[ing] [it] the Afro-American Protective League [became] an ambitious statewide organization that meant to defend African Americans in Montana from racism."²⁶⁹

²⁶¹ "All Pages," 1906. Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 52. "The club is making arrangements to give their first entertainment on next Thurs evening at Electric Hall & all look forward to a delightful time." "A. Palmer, Pres; James Howard, Sec; Gus Mason, Treas." "All Pages," 1906. The club held a "ball on Nov 16th at Germania Hall." *Montana Plaindealer*, October 26, 1906. Germania Hall appears numerous times, located at 12-14 N. Park. *Montana Plaindealer*, January 27, 1911.

²⁶² "Saint James AME Church, Helena, Montana (1888-) | The Black Past."

²⁶³ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 51.

²⁶⁴ "Local and Personal: October 15, 1894."

²⁶⁵ *Montana Plaindealer*, August 3, 1906; *Montana Plaindealer*, October 12, 1906.

²⁶⁶ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 54.

²⁶⁷ "March 27, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, March 27, 1908; "September 11, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, September 11, 1908, 11. "March 27, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, March 27, 1908; "September 11, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, September 11, 1908, 11. "March 27, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, March 27, 1908; "September 11, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, September 11, 1908, 11. "March 27, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, March 27, 1908; "September 11, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, September 11, 1908, 11. "All Pages," March 27, 1908; "All Pages," September 11, 1908, 11. "March 27, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, March 27, 1908; "September 11, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, September 11, 1908, 11. *Montana Plaindealer*, March 27, 1908; *Montana Plaindealer*, September 11, 1908. (band roster in 6/17/1908)

²⁶⁸ *Montana Plaindealer*, September 11, 1908. Lists folks who founded Taft Club.

²⁶⁹ "Bass, Joseph Blackburn (1863-1934) | The Black Past."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

In 1910, Helena's Last Chance Club "organized for the social improvement of its members, literary & dramatic entertainments & benevolent work among those in need of assistance." It joined the existing "Jake Goodman club for colored people," leading the local Black paper to proclaim that the "race will be well-supplied with resorts."²⁷⁰ Upon its founding in September 1911, the Colored Progressive League "had over 60 active members," "pledged itself to expel Black pimps, prostitutes, and hustlers from the city and to defend Afro-Americans unjustly harassed by racist authorities."²⁷¹ That year there was "a new [social] club in vogue named the Capital Club located at the upper end of Main Street," and "the colored citizens of Helena . . . elected officers and also a committee of 5" in a meeting to organize a Good Citizens Movement to "condemn immorality . . . to the end that the community should be riddled of" what it called "vagrant pimps macques & secretaries." The organizational "meeting met at the Masonic hall at the foot of Broadway and was called to order by B.F. Hooper," as 1st vice president. Additional officers included A.J. Walton (2nd vice president), H.J. Baker (president) and J.F. Clark (secretary), and "over 50 names were enrolled as members." The group conducted "work all along the line of racial progress" in the moral and financial realms, avowing that "the most important after the moral issue is the business outlook."²⁷²

Montana's Shifting Black Community, 1877-1910s

Outside of Helena, geography of Montana's Black community shifted and expanded in the years after 1876. With the waning of the initial gold rushes, the two other early community cores, Virginia City and Fort Benton, lost most of their residents. Like their White counterparts, Black people in these 1860s boomtowns moved on as the local booms busted and other settlements surged. Many of them relocated nearby, to new boomtowns as they developed, creating new core communities of Black Montana. By 1880, the Butte-Anaconda area emerged as a new primary core locale, and secondary communities developed in Bozeman and Miles City. Over the next ten years, infused by the arrival of Black American military units, Great Falls and Missoula joined the Helena and Butte areas as primary core communities. Billings and Havre followed in the 1890s, as did two more secondary core locales, Kalispell in western Montana and Lewistown at the center of the state. In each of these primary cores, the community developed fully, establishing Black churches and other institutions, and in all Black Montana's cores enduring, extended families anchored the local, and regional, Black community.

At the same time, Black people also played prominent roles in a score of other communities, and Black places could be found all over Montana. Foremost among them was a constellation of central Montana towns around Lewistown and Great Falls. These included Gilt Edge and Maiden northeast of Lewistown (in the Judith Mountains) and just to the southwest, Moore, Utica, and Yogo. Farther southwest, on the other side of the Little Belt Mountains, White Sulphur Springs also boasted prominent Black residents, as did the town of Belt to the north, near Great Falls. On the other side of Great Falls, up the Missouri River to the southwest, Black people were especially prominent in the Cascade/St. Peter's Mission area. Farther south and west, Black individuals were enduring pillars of the community in Virginia City and Madison County.

The many homes of Black Montana included sites across the state. In some towns, a few significant individuals or large work crews formed a prominent Black presence at different times. In other settlements, state institutions like the prison at Deer Lodge or the Insane Asylum at Warm Springs held a disproportionate number of Black people in their inmate populations. Black people could also be found at myriad rural sites in western, central, and eastern Montana, working at mining, ranching, and, especially after 1900, farming and homesteading.

²⁷⁰ *Montana Plaindealer*, December 9, 1910.

²⁷¹ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 57.

²⁷² *Montana Plaindealer*, September 8, 1911; *Montana Plaindealer*, April 28, 1911.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Concentrated in six to seven primary locales, as well as four secondary settlements and a handful of military forts, and dispersed throughout other area of the state, in this period, the Black community inhabited every county in Montana.

Virginia City

By the late 19th century, Virginia City no longer boasted one of the Montana's most substantial Black populations. This fact largely reflected the town's general decline: by 1880 Virginia City was five years past the end of its time as Territorial Capital, and a shadow of its boomtime self. Its mid-1860s peak population of over 5,000 people (10,000 including the surrounding gulch settlements) plummeted in subsequent years, and in 1880 only some 624 residents remained. Virginia City continued to shrink thereafter. By 1900, its population dropped to 568, and by 1910 to 467, and it fell even faster in the years that followed. The local Black population shrank apace, with the 1880 census recording only six African American residents in the town itself and another dozen elsewhere in Madison County, nine of whom were members of the Leven and Margaret Hall family, by then living on a farm in the Fish Creek area.²⁷³

By 1900, Virginia City proper counted ten Black residents, an increase mainly attributable to Sarah Blair Gammon Brown Bickford. After losing nine-year-old daughter Eva Brown to pneumonia in 1881, Sarah Brown remarried, and then bore another four children. Sarah and her White second husband Stephen Bickford welcomed son Stephen Elmer and daughter Harriet Virginia in the 1880s, and then daughters Helena and Elizabeth Mabel in the early 1890s, before Mr. Bickford died March 22, 1900. When the census was taken in April that year, newly widowed Sarah and her four children were listed on Wallace Street (next door to longtime local resident Jarrett "Jack" Taylor). In 1910, they were enumerated on Harrison Street, and represented one of only two Black households in town, the other being that of Jack Taylor, then living on Jackson Street in the former Cogswell House, which he'd purchased in 1895.

Fort Benton

Fort Benton, like Virginia City, owed its 1860s-1870s incarnation to mining-related developments, but in the capacity of a major regional transportation hub rather than a mining boomtown. Into the 1880s, its fortunes therefore reflected the overall Northern Rockies upward trajectory of mining, rather than a declining local one, as well as regional influx more generally. Like Virginia City, its decline was swift, but it came only after the arrival of railroads in the region rendered river transport obsolete in the 1880s.

The 1880 census reported "some 76 blacks resided in Fort Benton," making it, proportionally, the Blackest town in Montana Territory.²⁷⁴ The population would have been even higher had not at least two community members died some months before enumeration, including Private William McMurphy, a 30-year-old "stock groomer" who succumbed to "convulsions" in September 1879 and 50-year-old Mr. Ryan, a "wood chopper" who died of "gunshot wounds" in August.²⁷⁵ Fort Benton's relatively large 1880 Black population—four times its 1870 size—reflected that "by 1878 the boom building period of Fort Benton had begun, and the word had spread downriver that there were jobs and good times at the head of navigation." Henry and Henrietta Johnson were among those who steamed up the Missouri that year, as were the Adams sisters, Mary and Maria, who

²⁷³ Bureau of the Census, "10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory"; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

²⁷⁴ Robison, "Historical Fort Benton," July 31, 2005. Choteau Co. also had highest % Black population.

²⁷⁵ Healy, "1880 Mortality Census (Fort Benton, Chouteau Co., MT)."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

went to Bismarck from Fort Keogh, and from there “took passage on the steamboat *Nellie Peck*.”²⁷⁶ In Fort Benton they joined a burgeoning, dynamic community, anchored by a prominent resident Black population, through which many African Americans in the area regularly passed.

Some Black people stayed in Fort Benton only as long as the steamboats upon which they worked. The 1880 census, for instance—taken in early June during the Missouri River’s navigable highwater season—included crew of two different steamboats docked at the levee, with a total of seven Black employees. Among the 41 workers crewing the *Key West*, which “brought about 270 passengers to Fort Benton from Bismarck including 200 North West Mounted Police,” were “young Kate Murphy, age 20 from Kentucky, working as laundress; Frank Thomas, age 24 from Virginia, a rooster; and David Homes, age 33 from New York, a rooster.” The *Nellie Peck*, meanwhile, “was manned by a crew of 39 with eleven foreign born” and four African Americans, including 30-year-old servant Lucy Chapman, from Missouri, 20-year-old cook Henry Randoff, from Tennessee, and two men working as waiters, Bush Glenn, 18 and George Stockwell, 25, from Kentucky and Virginia, respectively. The census reflected that Black crew members staffed many boats on the busy Upper Missouri during the river port’s heyday. Among them Wesley McClellan, a 20-year-old deckhand from Nashville who in June 1882 “fell overboard off the *Helena* enroute Fort Benton ... and was presumed drowned.”²⁷⁷

Other transportation-related industries also brought Black workers to and through Fort Benton. Black teamsters, for instance, included not only town residents like those mentioned above but also men based elsewhere, like the Helena-based crews of “wagon boss” Bob Chestnut, who reportedly “was partial to Negro drivers when he was freighting.”²⁷⁸ For others, Fort Benton served as a more sustained waystation. When the sisters Mary and Maria Adams debarked in 1878, “Mary began working for Mr. Hill, a clerk at the I. G. Baker & Company store,” before traveling on “to Fort Shaw to work for Army Dr. Greenleaf.” Within a year, at just 30 years old, Mary Adams sickened and died, and was buried in Fort Benton (where she and her sister Maria reportedly owned a house). Maria Adams initially moved on from Fort Benton as well, as did earlier Fort Benton resident Duke Dutriueille: they were in Helena when they married in 1880, and subsequently moved to Marysville.²⁷⁹

After a year in Marysville, Duke and Maria Adams Dutriueille returned to Fort Benton, where they joined a growing Black business- and professional-sector on the town’s main street. Maria was “a leader in the black social and religious community in Fort Benton” while Duke “was active in Republican Party politics” while running his barbering business from “his “elegant” shop in the Grand Union Hotel that opened on the levee in November 1882 as “the finest hotel between St. Louis and Seattle.” There he worked among numerous Black employees of the hotel, the shiny new crown jewel of Fort Benton, whose staff was almost exclusively Black. Led by Chef de Cuisine Alexander A. Martin, the Grand Union crew of 11 included only two White people—the clerk and the lead housekeeper—along with “Edward S. Smith, barkeeper; Lafayette Hall, porter; Alex Martin, chief chef; Jerry Flowers, second cook; Samuel Jones, third cook; Henry Courtney, head waiter; Frank Martin, waiter; Charles Carroll, waiter; and Mrs. Henrietta Johnson, chambermaid.”²⁸⁰ Black people prominently staffed the hotel from the beginning, putting on an opening ball and banquet—at which they served

²⁷⁶ Robison, “Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri.”

²⁷⁷ Robison, “Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri.”

²⁷⁸ Rowe, *Mountains and Meadows*, 126.

²⁷⁹ Robison, “Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri.” Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

²⁸⁰ Robison, “Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri.”; Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3”; “History.”; Robison, “Historical Fort Benton,” July 31, 2005.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

“chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese”—that drew “over 300 guests, including some of the most prominent men and women in Montana history,” and became “the biggest party the town and Territory had ever seen.”²⁸¹

Other Black residents owned businesses that flanked the Grand Union along the bustling river levee. During the early 1880s, according to Ken Robison, at least six individuals “owned their own businesses, and in two cases blacks and whites co-owned businesses. Among the black businesses, some were located in prime real estate on Front Street.” County property tax records showed “several black male and female entrepreneurs ... with substantial accumulations of property.” Prominent among the businesses by February 1883 was Alexander Martin’s “bar and restaurant opposite the Court House on Main Street.” Opened in partnership with George Washington Bullett, the establishment—Bullett & Martin’s Grand Central—advertised “Tasteful Elegance, superior Appointments, and a Cuisine unsurpassed by any in the city.” Later that year, Martin, “acknowledged to be the only first-class cook in town,” became “head chef at the Chateau House.”²⁸²

Not far from the Chateau House, the Grand Central, and the Grand Union stood Dixie’s Saloon. Opened on Main Street by freighter John C. “Dixie” Ward, Dixie’s “proved a popular ‘watering hole’ in a town famous for its saloons. By mid-1881, the *River Press* reported that ‘J. C. Ward, or ‘Dixie’ as he is known through all Chouteau County, is just ‘tearing the bone out’ with his excellent supply of wines, liquors and cigars. His business is so good that he is enlarging his saloon to meet his increasing customers.’” The paper urged its readers “to go there or to Johnny Lilly’s across the street—but nowhere else.” Ward’s business apparently thrived, and by the time the 1881 tax list was drafted “his property was valued at almost \$4,000.” When Dixie became ill and died the following year, his widow Leah Ward—herself experienced in business and real estate investment—“earned a living by taking in the poor and caring for the sick for the county.” She was known as Fort Benton’s “angel of mercy” until becoming ill herself in 1887, and dying at St Claire Hospital in 1891, whereupon she was “buried in an unmarked grave at Riverside cemetery.”²⁸³



Figure 16: “Steamboat Red Cloud,” Unknown photographer, c. 1875. Public domain image.

Other Black residents of Fort Benton also worked in prominent positions in the booming regional hub. After years of intermittent steamboat work, Edward “Ed” D. Simms crewed the *Red Cloud* when he “quit the boat on August 15, 1880, and went to work for Joseph A. Baker and after that ... for Charles Price, both of them living in Fort Benton... as cook and general handy man about the home.” [Figure 16] Simms then “worked in the dining room of the Chateau house at Fort Benton for Jerry Sullivan.” He subsequently went “to Fort Shaw to work for Mr. McKnight,” the post trader, in 1882.²⁸⁴ Shortly after Simms left Benton, “barber and saloon keeper, William Foster, owner of Foster’s Tonsorial Palace on Front Street and later the Eagle Bird Saloon, saw a fire start in his saloon in January 1883 and spread to the old Court House burning it ... to the ground.” Foster, a

²⁸¹ “History.”

²⁸² Robison, “Historical Fort Benton,” July 31, 2005. Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

²⁸³ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

²⁸⁴ Robison, “Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri.”; Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Black man, subsequently left town, “only to be murdered a year later at End of Track on the Canadian Pacific Railroad.” Around this same time, Black businessman “Lee Isabell owned the Break of Day House and the Star Bakery on Main Street in partnership with white businessman, John H. Gamble.”²⁸⁵

Despite the entrepreneurial success and local renown of Fort Benton’s Black residents, the town’s peak was short-lived. The winter of 1883-1884 brought a brutal, abrupt end to the buffalo herds and with them the fort’s foundational fur trade, while at the same time the arrival of railroads spelled the demise of river transport and the town’s role as the primary regional port. Within a year of the Grand Union’s triumphant opening, “the hotel’s fortunes declined. The completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad to Helena in June 1883 and the Canadian Pacific Railroad to Calgary in August 1883 dealt a mortal blow to Fort Benton ... The Helena railroad ended the long supremacy of the Benton Road as the Territory’s most important highway. The Canadian railroad more abruptly ended the importance of the Northern roads into Alberta and Saskatchewan from Fort Benton. In early 1884, the hotel failed and was sold at a Sheriff’s sale in May.”²⁸⁶

With the attendant decline in transportation- and accommodations-related industries, the Black community continued to make a living where it could. Former Grand Union employee “Fayette Hall made a modest living, serving as janitor at the city hall” for several years before moving elsewhere: “by 1887, he had a small ranch on the Teton River near Government coulee, and by 1890 he had moved his family to Great Falls.” Meanwhile, “Henry Courtney, head waiter at the Grand Union, stampeded to the Little Rockies in 1884, only to return to Fort Benton with “two dollars and a half and a dog, the result of one year’s mining.” A few years later, Courtney and his wife Mamie also moved to the new town of Great Falls. Meanwhile, Courtney’s one-time colleague “Jerry Flowers, former second cook at the Grand Union, became a boxer who gained statewide success.”²⁸⁷

Around this time Fort Benton’s Black community also included Gibson Finn, of whom “there is record of his acceptance as a full member of the Methodist Church” in Fort Benton, as well as his wife Tennie Finn.²⁸⁸ In town too was John Francis Gordon, a cook who was enumerated in Fort Benton in the 1880 census before marrying Mary Anne Goodlow/Goodloe in Illinois that December. Newlyweds John and Mary “Annie” Gordon returned to Fort Benton and then “moved on to the Barker mines and other camps before settling in White Sulphur Springs” by 1883. Brothers, and Civil War Veterans, Joseph and Charles Meek also spent time in town in this period.²⁸⁹ The community included as well less illustrious individuals. One man, “James Ogleby, alias Beauregard,” appeared in the local historical record when charged with being a horse thief. Meanwhile, a woman known as ““Old Rachel” Gibbs, “died alone in Fort Benton of alcoholism.”²⁹⁰ Other Black lives, and deaths, in the community, were even less well documented. For instance, a man whom the Sisters of Charity of Providence described only as “a negro, who was a fallen-away Catholic,” died in 1889 after coming in for care at their Fort Benton “hospital.” When he sought medical help, “the priest was absent. Recourse was had to prayer and the next day a missionary came unexpectedly, heard his confession and prepared him for death.”²⁹¹

²⁸⁵ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

²⁸⁶ “History.”

²⁸⁷ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

²⁸⁸ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

²⁸⁹ Robison; Bureau of the Census, “10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory”; “Gordon-Goodloe [Illinois, U.S., Marriage Index, 1860-1920].”

²⁹⁰ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

²⁹¹ La Porte, FCSP, “Sisters of Charity of Providence in Fort Benton, Montana,” 76.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

By 1890, with the rise of railroads in the region and the end of steamboat transport, once-bustling Fort Benton's grew quiet. That year, census takers counted only 18 Black people in the whole of Chouteau County.²⁹² As Fort Benton, the county seat, declined, "many black Americans moved on to greater opportunities in the growing towns." A number of people moved on to successive central Montana mining booms, or to bustling new cities like nearby Great Falls. Others went to more distant Montana locales, like Butte, where Maria Adams and Duke Dutriueille moved "during the mid 1880s."²⁹³

Black Montana's Second City: Community Development around Butte

Duke and Maria Adams Dutriueille's move to Butte City in the mid-1880s was part of a massive flow of people to what would soon be known as "the richest hill on earth." A relatively modest gold mining camp in 1870—when Helena and Virginia City teemed—Butte began to boom as a copper mine, in conjunction with the global spread of electrification, in 1883. The rise of Butte, America marked a fundamental shift in the region. Among indigenous groups 1883-1884 brought the "Starvation Winter," as people died in droves when annihilation of the buffalo suddenly eliminated not only an important food source but also a mainstay of the market economy of many Northern Plains tribes. In the Piegan Band of Blackfeet alone some 600 people starved to death. The Gros Ventre and Assiniboiné suffered similar losses, as the demise of historical lifeways was compounded by the failure of the United States to provide even the barest of necessities.²⁹⁴

Through this devastated native land flowed thousands of people from all over the world bound for Butte, which from 1880 to 1890 grew from 3,363 to 10,723, and in the early 20th century reached a reported peak of some 100,000 residents. Butte soon became known as the richest hill on earth, and the scale of mining at Butte was staggering. Associated industrial operations were likewise massive, and required armies of workers. When Copper King Marcus Daly established a smelter for processing ores some 20 miles outside of Butte proper in 1883, it spawned a whole new city called Anaconda. The smelter town became a distinct community while at the same time remaining deeply entwined with its Butte progenitor.

Butte

The rise of Butte produced the second enduring primary core of the regional Black community, as African Americans moved in the stream of migrants that flowed to what became Silver Bow County. In 1870, according to the census, the area's Black population comprised a single man, John B. Moon, a miner in Butte, and one married couple, Bermuda-born barber John K. Trow and his Virginia-born wife Mary, living in Silver Bow. That population grew to 48 in the 1880 census, and more than tripled to 150 in 1890 before reaching 252 by 1900.²⁹⁵ In 1910, when just 16 cities in the Pacific Northwest, boasted more than 100 Black residents, Butte was prominent among them (and was joined by five other Montana locales).²⁹⁶ Indeed, Butte's community was

²⁹² Census Office, "Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Part I & Part II)."

²⁹³ Robison, "On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3."

²⁹⁴ Peter Nabokov, ed. *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-2000* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1999), 184; Frederick Hoxie, *Parading Through History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 115; Foster, "*We Know Who We Are*," 310; ARCIA (1884), 35; Robert Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 229; Ewers, *Ethnological Report on the Chippewa Cree*, 106.

²⁹⁵ Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for Large Cities and Other Urban Place in the United States," fig. Table 27: Montana. U.S. Census Bureau, "1900 Census," 664 (Table 24).

²⁹⁶ Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 352.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

likely even more substantial at times: prominent longtime community member Armeta Duncan estimated that its ca. 1905 population “approached fifteen hundred.”²⁹⁷

As their numbers grew, Butte's Black residents built a collective community replete with shared residential and economic sectors, as well as social, cultural, and political institutions. And, like Helena, this Butte community endured as a core of Montana's interconnected regional community for decades.

Butte's Black population was significant even before the copper boom, during the settlement's more modest silver mining days, and included an array of residents. Duke Dutriueille, not yet married to Maria, was himself in Butte in 1880 when the census was enumerated that year, living on S. Main St. and working as a barber. The 1880 census listed some 19 African American households, six occupied by families with children. These families had between 20 children ages eight months to 16 years (including those of John and Rebecca Brown; Charlie and Melissa Broose/Bruce; Joseph and Teresa Johnson; A.D. and Sarah McAlfrey; Thomas and Hattie White; and F.W. Johnston and her Chilean-born husband Joseph R. Johnston). All of these families had been in Montana some time—with the exception of the McAlfreys' children (ages three, five and eight) and Rebecca Brown's 16-year-old daughter Sallie Dozier, all of Butte's enumerated Black youth had been born in Montana.

Butte's 1880 Black population also included a married couple (Lucy Robinson and her husband Mr. Robinson) and two married men whose wives lived elsewhere, Henry Woodson, a “cook for workmen,” and teamster G. A. Washington (enumerated in a boarding house on Broadway St.). Enumerators listed only one unmarried Black woman, 29-year-old divorcee Maggie Steward from Kentucky, who ran a boarding house on S. Main Street. Single men, predictably, were more numerous, and included eight men in addition to Duke Dutriueille. Two of these men roomed together—cook Moses Bonner and laborer Thomas Jefferson, both in their mid-20s, lived in the same Main St. dwelling—while a third, 22-year-old saloon worker William Allen—roomed in Maggie Steward's boardinghouse. Other single men in Butte included 20-year-old porter Lewis Cooper, cook Walter Firs, wood chopper Adam Fillmore, and California-born gambler Fred Robinson, as well as early Bozeman resident Greenbury Chopper, then 68 and working as a laborer.

The occupational profile of early Black Butte paralleled that in Helena and elsewhere in the region, with people generally concentrated in low-waged positions, like laborer or porter, and in a few specific professions like cooking and barbering. There was also an emerging business sector, some of which can be discerned in the census. Among men in 1880, five were listed as laborers, and four as cooks (two of whom cooked in hotels, John Brown and Moses Bonner). Three men were barbers, while other individuals listed their occupations as teamster, wood chopper, porter and gambler, or noted just that they worked in a saloon. Among women, meanwhile, in addition to Maggie Steward, the census listed “keeps boarders” as the occupation of Rebecca Brown and her 16-year-old daughter Sallie Dozier as well, while the remaining four mothers with children were listed as “keeping house.”

In the ensuing boom-years the Butte area's Black community expanded, as people moved through and to the busy mining city and its neighbor Anaconda, the associated smelter town established about 20 miles to the northwest in 1883. Like Duke Dutriueille and Greenbury Chopper previously, in the late-19th century some African American people came to Butte from other Montana locales. For instance, Parthenia Snead, former proprietor—with her sister Minerva Coggsell—of a restaurant in Virginia City, married Ennis Bell in 1888. Mrs. Parthenia Bell lived in Butte by 1894, when her sister died, and in 1900 she worked as a hairdresser when she was enumerated at 208 W. Broadway, in a home she rented with her husband, a hotel porter.²⁹⁸ Other

²⁹⁷ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 68.

²⁹⁸ Hampton, “Coggsell-Taylor House and Jackson Street Store (MT Historic Property Record, #24MA2396).”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

residents came from elsewhere in the West, including Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California. Barber John W. Duncan, from "Texas Indian territory. ... arrived in Butte, Montana in early 1899, and the following year African American residents included people born in Canada and Mexico and Indian Territory, as well as many from the Midwest, northeast, and southeast United States."²⁹⁹

By 1900, Black Butte occupied about 125 dwellings in all eight wards of the city (as well as in South Butte). It included a spectrum of households ranging from single individuals to nuclear families with one or two parents (often with lodgers or boarders) to extended multi-generational family groups. The former included people like divorced day-laborer Josephine Jacobs and her 12-year-old Wyoming-born son Harry, who lived in a home Ms. Jacobs rented at 220 S. Idaho with "roomer" Charles F. Jones (a "mine operator"), or Josiah Lee from Washington, D.C., who lived with his wife Francis (of Haitian and Spanish parentage) and their two children—son Charles, three, and infant daughter Margaret—at a home they owned at 10 E. Park Alley. Among the latter were people like widowed Rebecca Brown and her daughter Sadie E. Smith, granddaughter Stella Brown, and "foster son" Lancy Cass, who lived in a rental at 415 Park Street; or Mrs. E. H. Johnson, a 38-year-old widow who lived in a home she owned at 1231 W. Granite along with her seven-year-old "adopted daughter," her 23-year-old sister Henrietta Fagan, her 75-year-old mother Sarah Fagan, and her 17-year-old nephew William Brown; or that of early Virginia City resident Mary A. Hall Phelps, also widowed, who lived in a home she owned at 678 W. Granite with her two children Clara, six, and George, four, her sister-in-law Mary B. Phelps, and her Montana-born younger brother, Ira L. Hall.³⁰⁰

Households in 1900 included newlyweds like teamster Robert Jefferson and his wife Mary, who owned a house in South Butte, and other married couples with no children in the house, like the Brices—James (a hod carrier) and Louisa—who rented a dwelling behind 620 Colorado. They included boardinghouses like the one at 104 S. Wyoming in which lived 10 adult Black lodgers, among them a long-married couple, or the one run by widowed dressmaker M. E. Davis, who hosted seven African American lodgers—one a married woman the others single men—at the house she rented at 222 S. Arizona. A few individuals also lived on their own, like 41-year-old Eliza Stewart, a widow whose three children had died, who rented a home at 116 W. Broadway and made a living as a "laundry woman," or James J. Ross, 49, a single man who worked as a porter in a saloon and rented at 18 S. Main Street. Other people lived at their place of employment, usually as domestic labor such as cooks, or "servants" like Sara While, who lived in her employer's home at 205 W. Broadway. Meanwhile divorcee Annie Stoward lived with her business "partner," running a boarding house with, and sharing the 206 W. Broadway rental of, a married man named Lee Phillips. Black people were also enumerated in the Butte City and Silver Bow County jails, at 20 E. Park St. and 93 W. Quartz, respectively, where during the 1900 census some seven Black people were imprisoned.³⁰¹

Although Black Butte in this period inhabited all eight wards of the city (as well as South Butte), several identifiable Black residential enclaves also developed. The most substantial Black neighborhood clustered around Bethel Baptist Church and Shaffer's Chapel, both Black congregations that after 1901 occupied properties on South Idaho Street. Another residential cluster developed in the lower income "Emma Mine neighborhood near Montana Avenue and South Main on Gold, Porphyry, and Mercury Streets."³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Wood, "Jon and Armeta Duncan Residence (MT Historic Property Record, #24SB0990)."

³⁰⁰ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

³⁰¹ Bureau of the Census.

³⁰² "Mapping Historic Neighborhoods."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

As the Butte community took shape, employment continued to reflect the same limitations discussed above. Black men most commonly worked as porters, laborers, and janitors. In 1900, porter was the single most common occupation, with 24 Butte men so employed in saloons, hotels, barbershops and cigar stores, as well as with the railroad. Another 11 men worked as day laborers, and one man worked as a farm laborer, while nine men listed janitor as their occupation, some in banks and hotels. Others worked in a variety of lower skilled jobs, including three servants, three scavengers, a steward, a wood chopper, a night watchman, a messenger boy and a horse tender. Two men worked as teamsters (William Walker in addition to the aforementioned Robert Jefferson), and individuals listed an assortment of other jobs, including "bath house," "driver," and "boot black." Only two Black men enumerated in 1900 worked directly in mining-related capacities: Henry Ross described himself as a copper miner, while Reuben Thomas (who rented at 48 ½ W. Granite St.) was a "fly man cpr hous." Wallace Brown, was a stationary engineer, and may have worked in that capacity in the mining industry. Meanwhile, one man, R. Pearl, made a living as a farmer.³⁰³

Barbering and cooking represented common African American occupations in turn-of-the-century Butte. In 1880, at least three Black barbers served the community, including Duke Dutriueille and Thomas White, and in 1900 some twelve men were employed as barbers, among them Benjamin B. Adams, who owned a home at 1037 Iowa Avenue, and Osburn Fentner. Another 10 men worked as cooks, at least one of them in a restaurant, while William Woods worked as a "table waiter." A few Black men in Butte worked in the building trades: James McDonald (lodging at 222 S. Arizona) was a bricklayer, and four men worked as hod carriers. Willis Rhoads, renting at 116 E. Silver St., was a stonecutter, and William Lewis, who rented at 9 W Porphyry, a painter. Another two men worked as plasterers.³⁰⁴

Several men made a living in other professional capacities. Guss Floris, who rented at 1022 Delaware, was a civil engineer, and Thomas McFarland, who owned a home in South Butte, a surveyor. George Rideout, meanwhile, worked as a salesman. A handful of men were professional entertainers, including "show man" James Mesley, minstrels (and roommates) Albert Williams and Richard Straight, and musicians Henry C. Parsons and John M. Tate.³⁰⁵

Black women worked in a variety of paid capacities as well, but were confined to a narrower spectrum of occupations. Many women worked in domestic service or related fields, with more women listing "servant" than any other occupation. In addition to the 10 servants, in 1900, there were six laundresses, three women who did "housework" or "house cleaning" and three chambermaids. Four other women described their jobs simply as "day laborer." In the heavily male mining city, a significant number of Black women worked as prostitutes: this was the second most common occupation after servant, with the nine women so identified, all living near one another in the first block or two of E. Galena or the alleys of E. Park and Pleasant.³⁰⁶

Similar to men, cooking represented a relatively common job for Black women. The 1900 census enumerated five women working as "cooks," and another "cook & washer." In contrast to male cooks, however, all of these women seem to have lived in the homes where they worked, cooking as domestic labor. Meanwhile, Canadian-born Henrietta Williams lived with a White family (which also employed a live-in butler and servant) working

³⁰³ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

³⁰⁴ Bureau of the Census, "10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory"; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

³⁰⁵ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

³⁰⁶ Bureau of the Census.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

as a “nurse.” One woman, widow Mrs. F.M. Lucas, worked as a waitress, likely in the restaurant run by her brother George Willis, with whom she lived at 8 N. Academy Street.³⁰⁷

A number of men and women operated businesses of their own. Among the businesswomen were some of the four “dressmakers” and two “hair dressers” (incl. George A Vass) enumerated in the 1900 census. These women plied their trades in various capacities, including independently, “on their own account.” As in Helena and elsewhere, Black women often ran various types of boardinghouse businesses. In Butte in 1900 at least four women did so. “Lodging house keeper” Alice Sager, divorced, rented a residence at 16 W Broadway where she rented to 14 White lodgers, both male and female. Babe Simington too, who lived with her three children and “roomer” Wallace Brown (a Stationary Engineer), made a living keeping “Boarders & roomers.” Widowed Rebecca Brown also kept a “lodging house,” possibly separate from the home she rented for her family at 415 Park. The aforementioned Annie Stoward also kept a “boarding house” but lived elsewhere (in a separate dwelling with her business partner Lee Phillips). Men also ran boardinghouses, not only Lee Phillips but also John D. French, a “lodging house keeper” who rented a residence at 212 W. Mercury. At least one man operated a restaurant in Butte in 1900, i.e., George Willis, who lived in a rental at 8 N. Academy.³⁰⁸

Other bars and restaurants weren’t operated by Black residents but were nonetheless important components of the community’s economic life. Primary among them was the elite White private Silver Bow Club, founded in 1882 (with copper king W.A. Clark serving as first president). There, “like the Montana Club in Helena, African Americans often made up a significant part of the staff.” Louis Ridley, for example, who came to Montana in 1889 to work at Marcus Daly’s Montana Hotel in Anaconda, moved to Butte in 1903 when he “accepted a position as steward of the Silver Bow Club.”³⁰⁹ There he joined, among other Black staff, “a son of [Henry c.] Parsons,” whom newspapers noted worked there in 1902, as well as William H. Jones, who worked at the Silver Bow in this period as a porter and/or waiter.³¹⁰ In 1909, C. D. Martin joined the staff of the Silver Bow Club, moving to Butte from Helena, where he worked at the Montana Club.

Butte’s Black business sector grew with the local community. Boarding houses and mining-related ventures dominated early business endeavors in the area. As noted above, Rebecca Brown and two other women ran boarding houses in Butte in 1880, and shortly thereafter several Black men began working in the early development mining properties on Homestake Pass in an area that became known as Camp Caroline. Among the men that mined around Camp Caroline were George Lowery, Charles Flagg, Wallace Brown, and Richard Brown, as well as T.F. Morgan, R. Bentley, Fred Jones, and Peter Bronson. In 1888, Lowery built a “miners rooming and boarding house” in Homestake, which by then boasted a population of some 400 people. In 1890, the Brown family purchased the boarding house business, subsequently run by Mrs. Inez Brown³¹¹ [Figure 17] Charles Flagg also was a builder at Camp Caroline, working as a carpenter doing projects like the cabins he built for Caroline Van Horne “close to her mill.” Richard Brown, meanwhile, supplemented his “work as a hoisting engineer for Augustus Heinze at the Mountain Chief mine at Camp Caroline” by acquiring land, “homesteading on a 160 acre section in the area.”³¹²

³⁰⁷ Bureau of the Census.

³⁰⁸ Bureau of the Census.

³⁰⁹ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 17–18; MT SHPO, “African-Americans in Montana Timeline.”

³¹⁰ “African-American Mining Companies in Montana”; “Colored Shoemaker Found Dead on Floor.”

³¹¹ Teal, “Shaffer’s Chapel A.M.E. Church.”

³¹² Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 25-27.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
 Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
 State

Like boardinghouses, mining ventures continued among the significant Black businesses in Butte in subsequent years. In 1900, Charles Fisk Jones, renowned for his oratory, worked as a “mine operator”—Jones “mined claims near the Parrot on Butte’s Southern Belt”—and in 1903 he began organizing a larger company. In May 1906, he incorporated, and served as president of the Afro-American Mining & Milling Co. Several other Black men joined Jones in establishing the Afro-American Mining & Milling company, among them Andrew J. Henson, William H. Jones, and John W. Duncan (as well as Thomas S.P. Miller, a graduate of Howard Medical school and a physician in New York). Initially capitalized at \$200,000, the company’s “holdings included eight claims northwest of Butte near the Big Bonanza & Goldsmith mines” —said to “have very good gold ore”—as well as properties in Madison County. The company set up offices in a “fine suite of rooms in the Silver Bow Block,” No. 65, and by 1908 the *Copper Handbook* reported that Afro-American Mining & Milling Co. property had grown to 18 claims. This total included those northwest of Butte, as well as five in Madison County and five in Lewis and Clark County, one substantially developed, boasting a 100’ shaft, and “its assayed copper, silver & gold ore was of fair value.” By then Mrs. J.W. Brown was one of the corporation’s officers, whom Butte newspapers described as “...one of Butte’s charming matrons...prominently identified in the mining industry having leased & developed several claims with the Afro-American Mining & Milling Co.”³¹³ [Figure 18]

As the Afro-American Mining & Milling Co. expanded, “another group of Black investors filed articles of incorporation for the Bernice-Red Rock Mining Co. with capital stock amount of \$1 million.” Established in 1908, the company’s officers included “Henry Fagan...[who] worked as one of Butte’s many black porters,” as well as porter and janitor Samuel Jones, 59, and “Nathaniel B. Lewis, a 33-year-old single man” from Mississippi,” who worked as a steward. The Bernice-Red Rock Mining Co. listed assets that “included land, 12 claims, a mill site & water rights about 3 miles north of Bernice (which you pass just southwest of Basin) on Red Rock Creek in Jefferson Co. The mine’s tunnels totaled 400’ with a 15’ vein with 4’ paystreak. The assays averaged 4.4% copper, 21.2% lead, 9.8 oz silver & [?] cents gold per ton.” Within two years, the assets also likely included a residence: in 1910 Samuel Jones and his wife moved to the corporation’s claims.³¹⁴

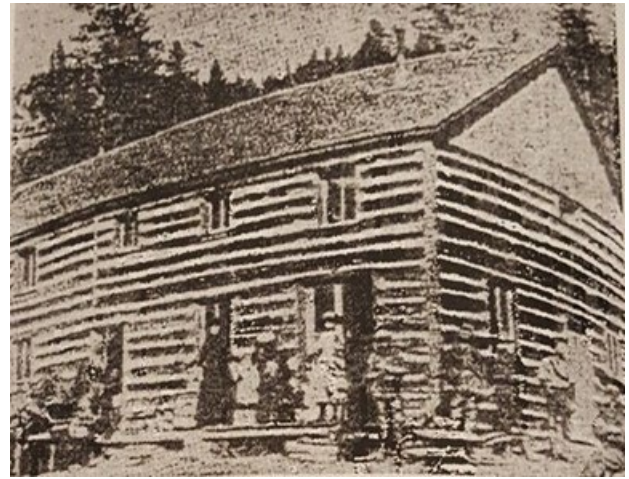


Figure 17: “Brown Family Boarding House at Camp Caroline,” Published in “Mining City History: Flagg among the first Blacks in Montana.” *Montana Standard*, July 1, 2019, and courtesy of the Jefferson County Museum.

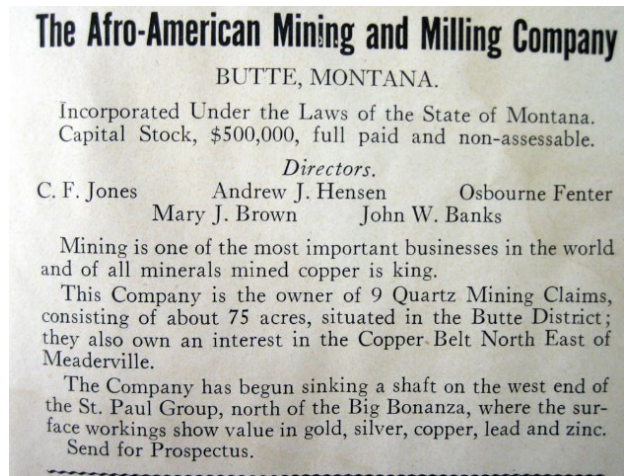


Figure 18: “The Afro-American Mining and Milling Company,” Advertisement from 1923 *Montana Federation of Negro Women's Clubs Proceedings*, on file at MT SHPO.

³¹³ “African-American Mining Companies in Montana.”

³¹⁴ “African-American Mining Companies in Montana.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Bars and restaurants were less spectacular but more common Black businesses. Decennial censuses rarely document such establishments—in 1900 enumerators noted only George Willis' restaurant—but other sources suggest their ubiquity, as well as the frequent criminalization of them by White authorities. By the early 1890s, numerous such businesses served Butte, some them clustered in particular neighborhoods. In July 1894, "Wm. Jeffreys, a Pinkerton detective from Great Falls," claimed to have been robbed of \$240 after he "wandered into one of the colored dives in East Galena Street."³¹⁵ Two years later, residents incorporated "the Afro-American Club of Butte City, a private social club, ... 'to conduct and manage and carry on the business of a social club and club house . . . to engage in musical, literary & scientific pursuits.'"³¹⁶ Other such businesses included the Four Jacks Club on Broadway Street, run for "many years" by Mrs. Annie White before she died in 1902. The Four Jacks employed other members of the Black community as well. Miss Armeta Smith, for example, worked there as a waitress when she came to Butte in 1905.³¹⁷

Black bar and restaurant businesses also included many other establishments. Among them, the Working Men's Colored Club, "where Samuel Jones was secretary"; the Silver Bow saloon, which Osborne Fentner opened upon arriving in town from Colorado in 1899; "the Silver Tip saloon, a colored resort in the red light district"; and "the Silver City Club, a black-owned gentlemen's club" located in "a saloon in the back section of a building at 38 East Park Street."³¹⁸ Prizefighter and former Helena policeman Ike Hayes also ran similar businesses at different times: in 1910 he was noted conducting "the billiard and poolroom at 49 E. Galena St." where he sometimes hosted special events for the Black community, like boxing matches "between colored men" which "all the colored people of the city [were] invited to attend."³¹⁹

Like the Zanzibar and other establishments in Helena, these Black social spaces welcomed an interracial clientele, and like the Zanzibar they, too, were targeted by White authorities. The Silver City was a prime target of local police for years, and in 1913, when it was run by Nathaniel Lewis, the Club suffered a particularly high-profile police raid. Also targeted by police in this period were the Silver Tip saloon and the Autumn Leaf Club, where in 1909 police jailed seven Black men for disrupting the peace, accusing them of "playing piano too loudly."³²⁰ Subsequent police raids at the Autumn Leaf, located at 28 ½ W. Mercury, prompted the Black community to call for the removal of one of the Butte's policemen, notorious for his racist aggression.³²¹

Around this time, the Black business sector featured several food service establishments. From the home she shared with her husband George at 1036 Iowa Avenue, Mrs. Ida Willis, for example, "ran a catering service ... which offered provisions for railroad travelers." Meanwhile Mrs. Leanna Shannon "managed the Little Cottage Dining Room at 26 East Silver Street," and Charles Bullits, who rented a home at 18 S. Wyoming Street, ran a restaurant, and staff, of his own.³²²

³¹⁵ "Parson Link Gross' Wife 'Pedee.'"

³¹⁶ Af-Am in MT Timeline.

³¹⁷ "Local Notes."; Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 68.; Duncan, Mrs. Armeta Duncan of Butte, Montana, Oral History.

³¹⁸ "African-American Mining Companies in Montana."; "Negro Spills Blood."; Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 52.

³¹⁹ "Will Box Tonight."

³²⁰ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 111–13; "Colored Gamblers Caught in Raid at Silver Tip Saloon"; "Arraignments on Gambling Charges."

³²¹ "Negroes Demand That Cop Be Bounced."

³²² Davenport and Eva, 20, 44.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State



Figure 19: “J. Fagan Boot and Shoe Repairing Shop,” *The New Age*, June 20, 1902.

As the business sector expanded in the early 20th century, Butte’s African American residents operated a variety of other commercial enterprises. Aaron Baxter opened his own barbershop by 1910, as did Abe Warwick and John W. Duncan (who previously managed Lawrence’s Barber Shop at 114 S. Wyoming St.). Around the same time, Adelaide Birthright ran her own hair-dressing business (perhaps operating out of the home she and her husband, steamboat chef William M. Birthright, owned at 829 W. Copper Street). For years, shoemaker John Fagan operated his own shop at 438 S. Arizona Street, where he employed other Black cobblers as well. Among them Henry Parsons, who died suddenly in the shop in 1902 [Figure 19] Mr. H. Palmer, meanwhile, “operated a local shoe shine parlor at 11 West Park Street.”³²³

Black businesses included as well the arts and entertainment sector. Among them, “an all black band” that “played for church openings and political rallies through the city” and also traveled for gigs, like the political rally Augustus Heinze held in the fall of 1904 in Twin Bridges campaigning against Frank Linderman, Republican legislative candidate.³²⁴ In the 1890s, after taking “voice lessons from the director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir” while he worked as a porter on the Union Pacific Railroad’s Butte to Salt Lake line, Butte resident and “all male chorus” member Robert Canada Logan became a well-known singer. In 1896, Logan “won second place at the Welsh International Eisteddfod vocal contest” in Denver, “singing before 30,000 people.” He subsequently “became part of a dramatic minstrel company traveling to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.” Later, Logan went to work as custodian at the Miners Bank, and married in 1907. His wife Elizabeth, who studied music in college in Ohio, herself made a living as a musician and music teacher. She “played the organ at many of Butte’s social activities and taught music,” likely giving lessons in the home they owned ca. 1910 at 112 S. Idaho Street.³²⁵ Their neighbors on the next block also worked in what might be termed the entertainment business: former Helena policeman Ike Hayes, who lived with his wife and four sons in a rental at 210 S. Idaho, worked as a porter in a hotel but long supplemented his income, and gained fame, as a prizefighter.³²⁶

In Butte, as elsewhere, Black-owned businesses were in many ways important community institutions. In Butte, as elsewhere, perhaps no business was more so than the Black owned newspaper. In 1902, Chris Dorsey and John W. Duncan, both of whom barbered in Butte, began publishing a newspaper called the *New Age*, likely the first full-fledged Black newspaper in Montana, and one of the first in the region. Intended as a “medium to bring the colored people of the state closer together,” the *New Age* reflected and nurtured an interconnected regional Black community.³²⁷ As with the later Helena *Plaindealer*, the Butte *New Age* was read by people throughout the state, and likely elsewhere in the region, and reported on—and documented—that expansive

³²³ Davenport and Eva, 20, 64; “Colored Shoemaker Found Dead on Floor.”

³²⁴ Davenport and Eva, 20, 32.

³²⁵ MT SHPO, “African-Americans in Montana Timeline”; Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 147–49. Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform].”

³²⁶ “Ike Hayes, Old-Time Boxer, Succumbs at Home in Butte, 67 Yrs”; “King Lies Down to Ike Hayes.”

³²⁷ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 347. “jointly edited by J.W. Duncan, Charles F. Smith and Chris Dorsey.”; Bauml, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

regional Black community as well as fostering it. With editing by Charles F. Smith, the *New Age* billed itself as the “leading race journal of Montana, Utah, Idaho and the Northwest.”³²⁸

During its period of publication—it stopped in February 1903—the *New Age* lived up to its billing. Like regional Black newspapers everywhere, it explicitly “defended the rights of Afro-Americans and constantly exposed the injustices directed against blacks at both the local and national level.” Specifically, it “defended the Butte Afro-American community against racial slurs and biased reporting by the Butte *Inter-Mountain*, the city’s leading white newspaper,” that “continually referred to Negro criminals as the ‘King of Darktown’ or ‘King of the Colored’ and insisted on reporting attendant interviews or testimony in what the *New Age* called ‘negro dialect.’” The *New Age* also called attention to the “the lack of black voter recognition by the local Democrats,” as well as by state politicians in general. The paper “was instrumental in organizing the Colored Democratic Club in Butte” and “advocated formation of a state Afro-American league, modeled after the national organization, to defend the political and civil rights” of Montana’s Black population. Noting that “instead of being given a few janitorships here and there in the legislature, the intelligent colored men of the state acting as a unit can demand and receive something higher,” the editors suggested “a state convention in Butte or Helena to present a ‘united force’ in the form of an Afro-American State League.”³²⁹

By the time the *New Age* began publication, Butte’s Black community enjoyed a solid institutional foundation for well over a decade. Black Butte organized its core institution—an African Methodist Episcopal church—in the 1880s: by “the waning of 1889” the congregation, led by Rev. James H. Hubbard, purchased property on the corner of W. Mercury and N. Idaho, where the city directory listed it the following year (under the pastorage of Rev. Warren J. Tolliver).³³⁰

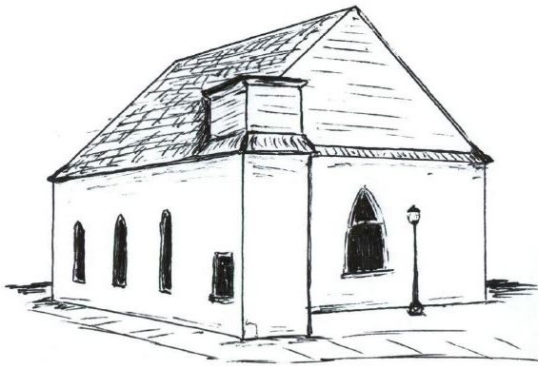


Figure 20: “Shaffer’s Chapel,” Pen and ink drawing by Anthony Wood, 2016.

In July 1892, the congregation began building a new church on the site, the cornerstone laid in a grand ceremony that featured national A.M.E. leaders, local White officials, the Butte Silver City Colored Masonic Lodge No. 9 and the Excelsior Cornet Band marching from “the Masonic Hall on West Broadway Street to the building site.” Eli Symmington presided over the ceremony as grand chaplain, and Charles Flagg laid the cornerstone. Church pastor Charles Cushingberry closed the ceremonies with a request for building contributions, upon which, the *Anaconda Standard* reported, “a stream of silver began to fall.” Plans for the church called for a first floor pastorage, with the chapel on the second floor featuring “seating for 300” and a third floor meeting space “to be used by various colored societies and lodges.”³³¹ By 1900, the property at 219 W. Mercury contained the A.M.E. Church with an attached parsonage on its east side at 217 W Mercury.³³²

³²⁸ Myers, “Montana’s Negro Newspapers, 1894-1911,” 19.

³²⁹ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 345-348; Myers, “Montana’s Negro Newspapers, 1894-1911,” 18-19.

³³⁰ “African Methodist Episcopal Church”; R.L. Polk & Co, *R.L. Polk & Co.’s Butte City Directory*.

³³¹ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 77-78; “African Methodist Episcopal Church.”

³³² Sanborn Map Company, “Fire Insurance Maps of Montana: Butte, Silver Bow County.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

On June 9, 1901, after raising some \$5000, the congregation laid the cornerstone of a new A.M.E. church building four blocks away, on the corner of Idaho and Platinum streets. [Figure 20; Shaffer's Chapel, NR Reference #100003199] The Rev. Jordan Allen led the congregation during the construction of the church, named Shaffer's Chapel, and "secured the stone for the foundation from the quarry where he worked." Reverend Cornelius Thaddeus Shaffer, former Bishop of the national A.M.E., "gave the dedication speech at the Butte A.M.E. on Sunday August 31, 1902. By then the property also contained a parsonage behind the church, completed by Pastor Allen the previous month."³³³

While the A.M.E. church expanded and planned a new building, the Black community also organized a second, Baptist, congregation. Bethel Baptist Church was established by 1901, and subsequently moved into the 219 W. Mercury property built, and vacated, by the A.M.E. congregation. By summer 1902, there were active "Bethel Baptist ladies auxiliaries" making "a strong effort to bring themselves to the public" and the congregation thereafter became well established at the corner of Mercury and Idaho, where it occupied both the church and the parsonage next door, at 217 W. Mercury.³³⁴ Sometime later, another Black church organization was also prominent in Butte. In 1912, the *Butte Miner* reported on the substantial efforts of the Rev. G. W. Washington, who at his mission at St. Mark's Church of the Firstborn at 220 or 229 W. Park promised to "feed every hungry man in Butte," and was soon reported to have fed "over 500 destitute."³³⁵

These church pillars of the Black community nurtured an array of other community organizations and institutions, some as old as the churches themselves. In 1884, newspapers reported that Butte had "a colored republican club with nearly one hundred active members." The Silver City Colored Masonic Lodge No. 9 formed in this same period, and was well established by 1892, when it helped lay the cornerstone of the AME church. Others developed as the community grew. In 1896, the community organized "the Afro-American Club of Butte City," with Smith St. Clair serving as president. The "private social club" was both an early Black "business of a social club and club house" and a place where the community could also "engage in musical, literary & scientific pursuits."³³⁶ In 1896, the community boasted a "Colored Literary Society." Later, during fall 1902, "the Butte Silver Bow Literary Society held their meetings at Schaffer's Chapel." That same year the Colored Democratic Club made the news, with its October meeting "held at the Hamilton Block on West Broadway Street" Around the same time, Mrs. Armenta Jones organized the Afro-American Women's Club. The club's "first president was Miss Melvina Williams, who attended the national convention in Wilberforce, Ohio. Club members then changed their name to the Sojourner Truth Club." These early iterations of a Black women's club were precursors to the Pearl Club, a more enduring club founded in 1918.³³⁷

Over the years, the Butte community developed other organizations as well. By 1906, the Butte Elks organization was going strong, and "the only Black lodge in Montana" planned and completed expansion into Helena that year.³³⁸ In the "Gibraltar of Unionism," community organizations also included at least one "all black union, the Porters' and Boot Blacks' Protective Union." Active ca. 1907, the union held "regular meetings twice a month. F.S. Shannon, porter, served as president, and shoeshine parlor operator H. Palmer was business

³³³ Teal, "Shaffer's Chapel A.M.E. Church"; Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 81–82.

³³⁴ Af-Am in MT Timeline; Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 83–84.

³³⁵ "Negro Minister Is Ready for Hungry"; "Negro Mission Feeds Over 500 Destitute."

³³⁶ Af-Am in MT Timeline; Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 85; "Montana Mention."

³³⁷ Davenport and Eva, 33–34, 88. Af-Am in MT Timeline.

³³⁸ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900–1912," 56. *The Montana Plaindealer*, February 1, 1907, 1; Ibid. *The Montana Plaindealer*, May 15, 1908, 1; "No Jim Crow Laws for Montana," *The Montana Plaindealer*, July 31, 1908, 1; *The Montana Plaindealer*, December 18, 1908, 4.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

agent.” Several years later Butte boasted a Colored Progressive League, which in 1913 gave Booker T. Washington “a tour of Butte,” when he spoke in the city. Washington “and his staff’s overnight accommodations were at the Thornton Hotel,” known for hosting leaders like Theodore Roosevelt, and attended a banquet at Shaffer’s AME after Washington’s public address.³³⁹

As Washington’s calendar suggests, the Butte community also hosted special events and participated prominently in local civic and social affairs. Special events might feature nationally-known acts. In the early 1880s the Jubilee Singers from Nashville’s Black Fisk University performed in town in the course of a multi-stop Montana tour.³⁴⁰ In 1902, Vaudeville stars Bert Williams and George Walker played a three-night stand at Sutton’s New Grand theater. Williams “was the most popular African American entertainer of his era,” and the Williams & Walker team is widely credited with developing post-minstrelsy humor. The community hosted a dinner in their honor, and newspapers reported enthusiastic attendance of their shows by both White audiences and “colored society.”³⁴¹

While major stars stopped briefly in Butte on national tours, local residents like Robert Canada Logan performed repeatedly at a variety of occasions over the years. For his part, Logan performed on his own and as a member of Butte’s all male chorus, and represented the community at major regional events like Denver’s 1896 Welsh International Eisteddfod vocal contest, where he won second place after singing to 30,000 people.³⁴² Logan’s contemporary, Charles J. Fiske, was renown in Butte for his public oratory: Fiske’s passion and conviction earned him the nickname “Give A Damn” Jones. Among his many public appearances was a 1903 meeting with President Theodore Roosevelt, at which “the Afro-American citizens of Butte” presented Roosevelt with “a pair of balance scales of most exquisite pattern, made by the Butte jewelers and entirely composed of Montana mineral products,” including copper, gold, silver, and sapphires.³⁴³ Other Black residents of Butte built community by contributing columns to city newspapers. In July 1914, for instance, the Rev. John Adams, then pastor of Shaffer Chapel, published an extended profile of one of his parishioners, “old John Anderson,” a longtime Bozeman resident, whom he lauded as “the Negro who scalped Sitting Bull Jr. in the Battle of the Little Big Horn.”³⁴⁴

Community events and special occasions included athletic contests and exhibitions. As noted above, famed prizefighter Ike Hayes made his permanent home in Butte for decades, and Hayes fought in, and then hosted, numerous major boxing events. The combination poolroom and athletic training and competition facility he opened ca. 1910 functioned not only as a business but also as an institution of and for the Black community as well as the people of Butte more broadly. The community developed other athletic organizations, too, baseball teams foremost among them. Indeed, baseball teams were prominent Black organizations early on: by 1894, Butte boasted more than one Black ball team. That year, one of Butte’s ball teams traveled to Anaconda for a September 24th event hosted by the Black community in the smelter city, located just 20 or so miles to the northwest.³⁴⁵

³³⁹ Davenport and Eva, 20, 57-58.

³⁴⁰ Af-Am in MT Timeline.

³⁴¹ “Local News,” May 30, 1902.

³⁴² Af-Am in MT Timeline.

³⁴³ “Beautiful Gift for Roosevelt.” Af-Am in MT Timeline; “African-American Mining Companies in Montana.”

³⁴⁴ Adams, “The Negro Who Scalped Sitting Bull Jr. in the Battle of the Little Bighorn.”

³⁴⁵ “Local and Personal: September 3, 1894,” September 3, 1894. In 1907 Helena appears to have had at least two Black baseball teams: that May the Luzon Bees played “the Fort Harrison team.” *Montana Plaindealer*, May 10, 1907. In the same period (1908)

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Anaconda

Copper King Marcus Daly established the smelter city of Anaconda in 1883. As Anaconda developed, so, too, did a significant Black population that subsequently grew with the town itself. In 1889, Daly “brought in 12 [African Americans] to work as waiters and porters in his new Montana Hotel and a few years later two or three more to work in his private railroad car.”³⁴⁶ Among these imported workers was Louis Ridley, who “came west because of Marcus Daly’s need for a head waiter...at his newly built Montana Hotel.” There, Ridley began “serving millionaires, watching mining interests develop, and helping to place bets on the next horse race.”³⁴⁷ He and his Montana Hotel colleagues were joined by folks like Lee Pleasant Driver, discharged from the “colored” 25th Infantry in Missoula in 1891, and, after operating a bar there, moved to Anaconda a couple years later.³⁴⁸ In 1890, the federal census enumerated 37 Black people in Anaconda—by then one of the new state’s six cities (i.e., places with a population of 2,500 or more).³⁴⁹ Six years later, an Anaconda city directory—likely listing only adults—contained information for 86 “colored” residents, and in 1900, the census counted a Black population of 135, making it the third largest African American community in the state.³⁵⁰

Notably, the smelter city’s overall population in this early period was disproportionately male, and this held true of the Black population as well. The population by that time nonetheless included a diverse array of people in a variety of family and household arrangements. As with other groups in Anaconda and elsewhere in this period, many African Americans lived in downtown lodging houses or hotels. Indeed, the prevalence of boarding in the central downtown area created what one historian called an “identifiable ethnic enclave” of the Black population that “occupied the south end of West Commercial Avenue” from ca. 1884-1898, “at which time most of their enclave, along with the adjacent thriving red-light district, were moved into the Northern Addition, platted in 1897. ‘Mainville,’ as the Northern Addition neighborhood came to be known, encompassed a small area northwest of the Original Townsite across the railroad tracks.”³⁵¹

Among the people living around West Commercial was Lee Driver, who by ca. 1895 could be found rooming at 120 W. Commercial, where he ran a “lunch counter.” Mr. Driver lived on the premises with his sister Lizzie Driver as well as a number of other lodgers, among them the African American Johnsons (Nellie along with Harry B. and Edwin, who were both cooks). Lee Driver’s lunch counter was prominently located near Commercial Avenue’s intersection with Main Street, just off the busy railroad tracks that anchored Anaconda’s downtown commercial district. It quickly became a substantial business that employed other people besides its proprietor, including by ca. 1895 at least one other Black man, King Johnson, who worked there as a cook.³⁵²

In 1900, musician Clarence Banks, along with his mother Annie and wife Grace, could also be found on West Commercial, living in a rental residence at number 3 W. Commercial. Meanwhile, single musician C.J. Croonis roomed across the street at 2 W. Commercial, where he lived with at least eight other Black lodgers. Other downtown lodging houses with multiple Black inhabitants included 403 E. Front (where in 1895 some 19 Black people lived) and 12 East Park (where in 1900 six Black people were enumerated). The Montana Hotel also

Anaconda’s Black ball team was the “Brownies.”

³⁴⁶ Morris, *Anaconda, Montana : Copper Smelting Boom Town on the Western Frontier*, 290.

³⁴⁷ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 17–18.

³⁴⁸ Hagen, “Driver’s Saloon and Cafe.”

³⁴⁹ Census Office, “Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Part I & Part II),” 467.

³⁵⁰ Louis J. Pierce comp, *Anaconda City Directory, 1896 ...*; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].”

³⁵¹ Morrison, “Historical and Architectural Properties of Anaconda, Montana.”

³⁵² Hagen, “Driver’s Saloon and Cafe.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

housed many of its Black staff—the 1900 census showed 11 Black men, one a porter in the bar and the rest waiters, living at 200 Main. Among them were prominent community members like L.R. Ridley, Henry Brown, and Alonzo Leatherberry.³⁵³

Other people lived in dispersed locales outside of the commercial district, as “most blacks remained scattered throughout town.” Some additional residential clusters developed, around the Northern Addition or a “few blocks north of the railroad tracks on Pennsylvania avenue,” but even by 1895, Black households occupied numerous areas, comprising 26 different addresses on 10 different streets, with the only pronounced cluster being five households on the first block of Oak.³⁵⁴ By 1900, African Americans occupied some 60 different addresses, their households ranging from single individuals to various nuclear and extended family groups, including a number headed by single women. That year, at least one of these households owned their home: Virginia-born smelter laborer George Ellis, 40, lived with his 29-year-old White wife Lizzie (who’d immigrated from England as a child) and their three young children (enumerated as “White”) in a home they owned in Township 5.³⁵⁵ Within a few years at least one other Black household also owned their home: by 1905, Frank Walker, who “worked as a laborer for the Anaconda Company’s Reduction Works,” owned a small wood frame house at 516 Spruce.³⁵⁶

As in other emerging Montana communities, Black people in Anaconda worked in a variety of capacities but notably concentrated in several occupations or workplaces. But Anaconda was unusual due to the local dominance of the smelter: many men, African American men among them, worked at the town’s foundational industry. In 1896, of the 51 Black men whose occupations were listed in the city directory, 20 worked at either the Upper or Lower Works—seven as laborers and 13 as smeltermen—making it by far the largest single employer.³⁵⁷ According to local histories of the Washoe Smelter, “one of the most dangerous places on the smelter was the tram railway that carried the red-hot calcine from the roaster to the reverb. This was one of the departments where the few blacks who worked at the smelter were assigned.”³⁵⁸

Other Black men in the smelter city worked in associated industrial or building trades capacities. Five men listed their occupation as laborer (one of whom specified his employer as the Standard Fire Brick Company) and another, Andrew J. Walton, as a brick molder (at the Standard Fire Brick Company). Meanwhile, John Q. Anderson made a living as a bricklayer, while Edward Andre and George W. Mayse, who lived together at 606 W. Park Avenue, worked as machinists for Tuttle Manufacturing and Supply.³⁵⁹

Black men in the 1890s also worked serving the many needs of this major industrial workforce. The second largest employer of African Americans in this period was the Montana Hotel, where Louis Ridley joined at least five other male waiters. Another two men were waiters elsewhere (one at the O.K. Restaurant), while seven men worked as cooks. As in other Montana towns, Black men also worked as porters, with three Anaconda residents doing so at three different businesses. The 1896 directory listed one “colored” barber, Charles C. Charlton, who lived with his wife Ida (a domestic) at 219 W. Park Avenue; a musician, Daniel Lewis; and a

³⁵³ Louis J. Pierce comp, *Anaconda City Directory, 1896 ...*; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].”

³⁵⁴ Morris, *Anaconda, Montana : Copper Smelting Boom Town on the Western Frontier*, 290; Louis J. Pierce comp, *Anaconda City Directory, 1896 ...*

³⁵⁵ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].”

³⁵⁶ Wood, “Frank & Sarah Q. Walker Residence (MT Historic Property Record, #24DL0822).”

³⁵⁷ Louis J. Pierce comp, *Anaconda City Directory, 1896 ...*

³⁵⁸ Morris, *Anaconda, Montana : Copper Smelting Boom Town on the Western Frontier*, 187.

³⁵⁹ Louis J. Pierce comp, *Anaconda City Directory, 1896 ...*

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

horsetrainer Henry Williams. And, as noted above, it listed one man, Lee Driver, operating his own restaurant, i.e., a lunch counter at 120 W. Commercial, where he also employed King Johnson (who lived with musician Daniel Lewis at 201 E. Front). Among Black women, few in the 1896 directory listed an occupation. In addition to Ida Charlton, who worked as a domestic, only two other women specified employment. They were Anna Jefferson, also a domestic, and Carrie Lindsey, a cook who lived at 112 W. Commercial.³⁶⁰

In subsequent years female employment expanded, as did male. The 1900 census recorded employment for some 20 Black women in Anaconda. Ten of these women lived in what appear to be brothels—female group lodgings in close proximity to one another in the Northern Addition, where the red-light district had been re-located—and their occupation listed as “roomers,” likely a euphemism for sex workers. Two other women shared a household with one of the “roomers,” one described as a servant and the other, Corina Howard, as a landlady. Another two women labored as live-in domestic help in White households (describing themselves as a “servant” who did “housework”), and five were laundresses—three of whom, Leona Bates, Hattie Mitchell, and Hattie’s sister Ella Walker, took in “washing [and] ironing.” At the rental home they shared at 609 E. Front, where their next-door neighbors at 611 E. Front were day laborer Henry Smith and his wife Susan.³⁶¹

Three women likely ran boarding houses that year, making that enterprise a cornerstone of the economy in Anaconda, as it was throughout Black Montana. Molly Russell, who lived alone at 110 W. Commercial, listed “boarders” as her occupation, as did her neighbor P. Gross, a widow who lived with her four-year-old daughter and boarders (including two Black smeltermen) at the place she rented at 2 W. Commercial. Eliza Garvey, meanwhile, ran a boarding house (perhaps in her rental residence at 422 E. Park, where she lived with two Black boarders, both 19-year-old men who worked as laborers). One woman was a farmer east of town: divorced Elizabeth Nuson, 35, raised her nine--year-old son Robert (b. Montana 1891) and farmed her rented property with the help of a 69-year-old widowed Black man, who boarded with her and worked as a farm laborer.³⁶²

Male labor in the smelter town at the turn of the century continued to include much industrial work. Numerous men worked at the smelter itself, as both smeltermen and laborers, and many worked as laborers in various unspecified capacities (among them were Frank C. Cassels and Samuel Jones, as well as William Jones, who lived at 115 Main Street alongside at least four other Black residents, including Lee Driver). Men also worked as a moulder, a teamster, a carpenter (John L. White), and a stationary engineer (Henry Kelley who lived with his wife Mary along with 38-year-old widow Frankie Wilson and her two children as well as boarder Charles Pettet, all Black). Walter Harrison was the lone man enumerated as a machinist. Harrison lived at 611 Cedar in a rental he shared with his Bozeman-raised wife Lulu Barnes Mayo Harrison, and six-year-old daughter Viola, along with newly-wed boarders—Lulu’s brother William Barnes and his Mississippi-born wife Mary.³⁶³

³⁶⁰ Louis J. Pierce comp.

³⁶¹ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].”

³⁶² Bureau of the Census.

³⁶³ Bureau of the Census.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State



Figure 21: "Alonzo Leatherbury," *Montana Plaindealer*, December 18, 1908.

Other men worked in the kinds of jobs common to most Black Montana locales. There were in 1900 several porters (one of whom specified his workplace as a bar), as well as a janitor, James Mack. Mack, formerly of Virginia City and Helena, lived with his wife of 11 years, Jennie Jackson Mack, and four-year-old daughter Hebe at 16 Main Street. Many men in the community continued to work in various bar and restaurant capacities, with 10 listing "waiter" as their profession and four "cook." In Anaconda, as in Helena and Butte, the foremost social space of the White elite, the Montana Hotel, continued to be the primary employer of those who worked this sector, and was a recognized component of the regional Black economy. As such, it made the pages of newspapers like the *Helena Plaindealer*, which in 1906 reported that "Headwaiter W.W. Richards of the Montana Hotel at Anaconda says that he has the finest crew of waiters in the entire west. The crew is mostly from Kansas City, the roster being as follows... S.E. Ridge, R. Tate, F. Webb., A. Ross, S. Pope, W.A. Carr, F. Ford, J. Schaefer & Geo. Branch." Two years later the *Plaindealer's* Anaconda Notes column focused on Alonzo Leatherbury "one of our very best citizens of Montana, who ... For many years he has presided over the destiny of the dining room of the Montana Hotel of Anaconda. He has given eminent satisfaction in that position, & frequently has under him more than a score of waiters. He is a favorite in & around Helena, being a member of the AF & AM & also of the GUO of OF. He takes an active part in all movements for the uplift of the races, & is at all times is ready to aid & assist all movements looking to the progress of the race."³⁶⁴ [Figure 21]

The 1900 census identified several Black business and professional men. These included two musicians, C.J. Croonis and Clarence Banks. as well as a barber Montana-born, Henry Trahant, twenty-two. Milly L. Fisher, who lived with his wife Cora at 114 W. Commercial, made a living as a manager of "club rooms," while Everett Jamison, who rented at 407 Chestnut, worked as a "local preacher." Last but not least was Deputy Sheriff Joseph A. Roy. Roy lived in a rental at 201 Front with his widowed mother Julia and his wife Lilly and their two young sons—all of whom were identified as Black. Roy himself was also enumerated as Black that year, as he was in the 1920 and 1930 censuses. Born in Minnesota or Canada, Roy's perceived racial identity proved somewhat fluid: the 1910 and 1940 censuses listed him as White, and his death certificate listed his "color or race" as "French-Canadian."³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ "All Pages," May 17, 1907; "All Pages," December 18, 1908.

³⁶⁵ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana"; "Joseph A. Roy, State of Utah Certificate of Death."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

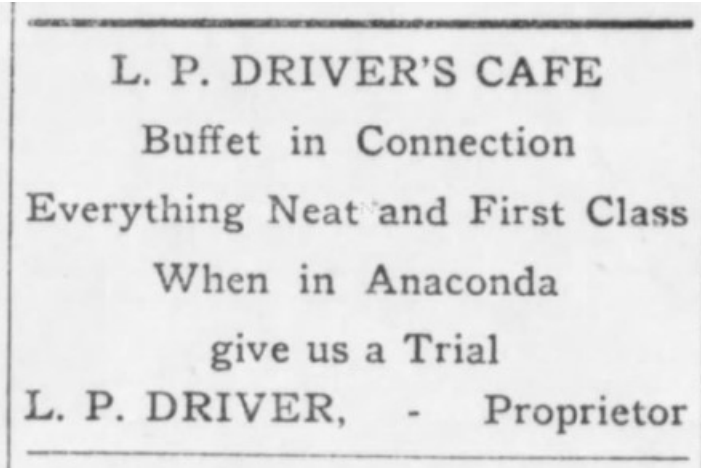


Figure 22: Newspaper advertisement, *Montana Plaindealer* (Helena), October 10, 1910.

As the Anaconda community grew and diversified, a visible Black business sector developed apace. Around 1898, 28-year-old Frank A. Yamer came to town, and thereafter “operated a racing stable.”³⁶⁶ Lee Driver, meanwhile, continued to run bar and restaurant businesses around the central downtown intersection of Commercial and Main. In 1902, a newspaper article described him as “proprietor of colored club on Front Street,” and the Polk’s directory that year listed his “club rooms” business at 15 Main (around the corner from Front), in a brick two-part commercial block where he was also rooming. The following year a newspaper article referred to his enterprise as Driver’s Saloon, and in 1905 it was listed—in the “saloons” section of the city directory—at 12 Main Street. Driver sold his

“Choice Line of Wines, Liquors and Cigars,” until ca. 1909, when he moved back to the block across the street (on the east side of Main), this time around the corner to the Starr Block (built by Jewish merchant Wolfe Copinus), another brick two-part commercial block, at 104-106 E. Commercial. There he lived upstairs with his toddler son and his wife Pearl Payne Driver, whom he married in 1907, and on the main floor operated both a saloon and a restaurant, L. P. Driver’s Café [Figure 22]. In late 1911, Driver purchased a one-story commercial building, comprising two storefronts, at 112 E. Commercial (two lots southeast of his bar and restaurant). and he and his family moved into second floor lodgings at 114 E. Commercial, next door to their store building.³⁶⁷

Other entrepreneurs joined Driver downtown. By 1902, Mr. C. P. Smith opened the Garrone Restaurant, and that same year the Butte *New Age* reported in its “Anaconda News” column that “Rev. Jenneson and Woodson have opened a nice restaurant on Commercial Street.”³⁶⁸ By 1910, Lem Lindsay opened a barber shop at 106 W. Commercial, and Lizzie Newsome operated a “lodging house” at 304 W. Commercial.³⁶⁹ Marie Reynolds, meanwhile, ran “the Vogue clothing boutique at 209 Main Street ... as well as working as a Milliner for Dr. McCrea’s Clothing Store. Reynolds, who moved from Illinois around 1906, lived at 304 Third Street with her husband Claude M., a loader at the copper smelter, and her three children, sons Roxborough (14) and Edward B. (3) and daughter Marian (6).³⁷⁰ Six years later, in November 1916, Edwin “Checkers” Shears secured city council approval of “a clubhouse for ‘colored’ people,” the Atlantic Club, that he opened at 114 W. Commercial.³⁷¹

As elsewhere, in Anaconda Black-owned businesses like clubs and cafes served as a focal point for the community, providing not only services and jobs, but also shared Black spaces that supported a variety of collective activities, from casual socializing to hosting meetings of political groups and other organizations. Black-owned businesses were themselves important institutions in Anaconda and the broader Montana Black

³⁶⁶ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 116–17.

³⁶⁷ Hagen, “Driver’s Saloon and Cafe.”

³⁶⁸ “Anaconda Notes,” January 20, 1902. “Anaconda News.”

³⁶⁹ Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform].”

³⁷⁰ “Anaconda.”

³⁷¹ Haffey and Rosien, *Anaconda’s Foundation: People and Landmarks*, 10–11.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

community of which it was a part. Other organized aspects of early Black Anaconda developed in conjunction with the broader community as well. In 1894, Anaconda held a major emancipation celebration comprising a variety of events, including inter-city baseball games: a Helena team traveled to Anaconda on September 24th, 1894, to play one of Butte's black ball teams.³⁷² The emancipation celebration included as well a performance by the choir from Helena's St. James A.M.E., where three days later Anaconda's Alonzo Leatherberry married Miss Annie R. Heyward.³⁷³

Within a few years, the Anaconda community organized a church of its own, likely beginning with informal meetings in people's residences and developing more formally from there. Historians researching Great Falls Union Bethel A.M.E. church report that Anaconda's AME congregation was established during the 1890s and, as noted above, by 1900 Everett Jamison was employed as a local preacher.³⁷⁴ Around 1901 a Church Building League began fundraising actively, and two years later, the League helped pay for the erection of Allen Chapel A.M.E. on the southwest corner of West Commercial and Locust (305 W. Commercial).³⁷⁵ On June 8, 1903, Reverend Jordan Allen, of Butte's Shaffer Chapel, laid the cornerstone for the Anaconda church, where the congregation planned to move a building that had until recently been the Carroll schoolhouse. A few days later residents began the laborious process of dismantling and moving the schoolhouse building that become the core of their local community. Once operational, Reverend Allen served as the pastor in Anaconda in addition to Butte until departing for Denver in 1904, and then settled in Helena, as pastor of St. James AME, in 1906.³⁷⁶ That same year, Allen Chapel welcomed Rev. Baker as its new AME pastor in Anaconda.³⁷⁷

By then, the Black community began to build an array of active local organizations. In its October 12, 1906 issue, the *Plaindealer* reported that an Anaconda Black Masons group met twice a month, and soon the Copper City Social Club made the news. The *Plaindealer* reported in 1908 that the group was "speaking of giving a grand Cake Walk soon," the *Anaconda Standard* noted its plans to hold a May Day ball at 12 Main Street that same year. The Social Club again made the news in 1909, when the *Butte Daily Post* covered its reception and dance in the hall adjoining the Empire Theater following a performance, at the Margaret Theater, by the Black Patti traveling troupe.³⁷⁸ In 1908 "the Negroes of Anaconda" also organized Copper City Lodge No. 7885 of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows. The following year the Copper City Lodge celebrated its first anniversary with a special service at Allen Chapel. Alonzo Leatherbury served as master of ceremonies, which included a sermon by Rev. William Gaillard, an address by Charles A. Young, and a financial report by L. P. Driver, which showed the lodge to be "in a most prosperous position."³⁷⁹

Black community organizations in Anaconda ranged from formal to informal, and encompassed economic, religious, social, recreational, and political realms. In 1908, men in town organized the Anaconda Browns baseball team. The "Brownies" played other teams in the region, competing in front of crowds in cities across Montana. Newspapers covered the teams' play, with one *Plaindealer* report in 1909 describing the Brownie's

³⁷² "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894," September 3, 1894. In 1907 Helena appears to have had at least two black baseball teams: that May the Luzon Bees played "the Fort Harrison team." *Montana Plaindealer*, May 10, 1907. In the same period (1908) Anaconda's black ball team was the "Brownies."

³⁷³ "Local and Personal: September 3, 1894," September 3, 1894.

³⁷⁴ Teal, "Shaffer's Chapel A.M.E. Church"; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

³⁷⁵ MT SHPO, "African-Americans in Montana Timeline."

³⁷⁶ "Allen Chapel, AME."

³⁷⁷ "All Pages," October 19, 1906.

³⁷⁸ "Anaconda Notes," October 12, 1906; "All Pages," May 29, 1908; "[Copper City Social Club]"; "Reception to Singer."

³⁷⁹ "New Lodge of Colored Men"; "Grand United Odd Fellows."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

victory in a Sunday game against “the cracker-jack team of Butte,” in which “the score was 11 to 6 in favor of Anaconda.” That year “the colored population of Anaconda” also made the news at Christmastime, when it celebrated the holiday with a community dance at the Odd Fellows Hall. “Under the direction of the arrangement committee,” refreshments for the celebration were “served at L.P. Driver’s colored club.” In 1910, residents established a local Negro Republican Club, with its headquarters at 104 E. Commercial, in the Starr Block, home of L. P. and Pearl Driver as well as Driver’s Saloon and Café.³⁸⁰

Bozeman and Miles City, Secondary Core Communities

By 1880, while the Butte-Anaconda area joined Helena as a primary core of Black Montana, secondary community cores developed in Bozeman, and in the new settlement of Miles City, far to the east on the Great Plains.

Bozeman

When census takers set to work in 1880, Bozeman, an emerging agricultural and mercantile center, boasted 11 Black households containing at least 22 people. Among them were two sizeable families, with four kids each that included farmer Richard McDonald and his wife Mary, and the family of Afro-Indigenous laundress Emma Barnes. Residents also included three co-habiting married couples, including farmer John Anderson, who fought at the battle of the Little Big Horn, and his wife Lucy; young David Rodgers, a common laborer, and his 17-year-old wife May; and teamster George Woodson and his wife Fannie. The towns six other enumerated Black individuals included a 12-year-old boy named Tom Walker, a servant in the house of White attorney Ira Pierce and his wife Carrie; a widowed cook named Julia Love and four men, among them barber Samuel Lewis (as well as waiter Spencer Smith, laborer George Harrison, and Harry Kelly, a hostler who lived with his employer, a horse breeder).³⁸¹

In subsequent years, Bozeman’s community grew substantially. The United States military decommissioned the nearby army base, Fort Ellis in 1886, shortly before segregated Black units transferred to Montana, so no troop surge bolstered its Black community. Rather, immigrants came individually or in small groups. Elizabeth Tinsley Mundy, for instance, arrived in Bozeman in 1882, before moving on to Helena. Mundy previously worked as “cook and companion” for U.S. cavalry commander George Armstrong Custer and his wife Libby.³⁸² Adeline Hoffman, meanwhile, traveled to Bozeman from Missouri in 1886 with her White employers, and former owners, the Hoffman-Skaggs family, “when they heard of the fertile valley of the Gallatin River.” Adeline served “the Skaggs family for the rest of her life as cook, housekeeper, and nurse,” living with them in the Bozeman area for the next decade.³⁸³ Four years after her arrival, the 1890 census counted 43 African American people in Gallatin County, and in 1900 the Black population of Bozeman proper stood at 33, where it remained 10 years later. By then, Bozeman was one of Montana’s eight settlements with over 2,500 people.³⁸⁴

In this late 19th and early 20th century period, Bozeman’s Black community was anchored by three enduring families. The McDonald family remained at 308 S. Templar in the wake of Richard’s 1898 death, and expanded when eldest daughter Mary Molly wed Butte-resident Charles H. Ward in Bozeman in March of 1900. In 1910, the extended McDonald-Ward family in Bozeman included Mary McDonald and her three grown daughters,

³⁸⁰ “Baseball Team Organized”; “All Pages,” August 27, 1909; “Colored Celebration”; “[Negro Republican Club].”

³⁸¹ Bureau of the Census, “10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory.”

³⁸² “Grandma Cooked for Custer.”

³⁸³ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” January 30, 2015.

³⁸⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, “1900 Census,” 664 (Table 24).

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Melissa and Belle McDonald and Molly Ward, as well as divorced Molly's young son and daughter, Richard and Belle.³⁸⁵

Montana-born Emma Barnes and her family also continued to live in Bozeman in this period. In 1900, Eli and Emma Barnes Rogers and seven of their children, ranging in age from three to 17, owned their home at 439 N. Black Avenue. The Barnes-Rodgers clan expanded when daughter Catherine "Kitty" Rodgers wed 30-year-old Kentucky born teamster Milton McCowan in Bozeman later that year. Emma Barnes Rogers died of Bright's disease in 1901, and widowed Eli remained: in 1910 he lived with four of their children and two lodgers at 502 N. Black Ave., which he also owned. Emma's older children remained in the area after her death, with both son William Barnes and daughter Lulu Barnes Mayo Harrison living there in 1910. Lulu and her husband, foundryman J. Walter Harrison, whom she wed in the Rogers' home in 1899, lived in a rental at 316 N. Bozeman, a few blocks from the Rogers place. William Barnes, meanwhile, lived with his wife Mary in a home they owned at 611 N. Black, near his siblings and stepfather. In 1913, Emma and Eli's son Fred Rogers married, wedding Julia Watterson. The couple first settled near Fred's family at 606 N. Black. Four years later, they moved to 541 N. Bozeman, previously the home of Matt Walker, African American proprietor of the Art shoeshine parlor, who in 1917 died of pneumonia.³⁸⁶

The surviving family of Samuel Lewis formed the third enduring pillar of Black Bozeman in this period. In 1900, the census enumerated his Missouri-born widow Malissa Bruce Lewis (nee Ralilia), whom he married in 1883, living with their 12-year-old son Samuel and two of Malissa's five elder children, Montana-born sons Walter and Charles Bruce, aged 28 and 19, respectively. The Lewis-Bruce family, like the Rogers and the McDonalds, owned their home, which Samuel Lewis first started building in 1881. By 1900 that "handsome and commodious" 2-story brick Queen Anne home at 308 (or 310) S. Bozeman, with its "beautiful lawn and shade trees" was "one of the most delightful homes in the city." Its occupants likely counted among the town's socio-economic elite; Leeson's 1885 *History of Montana* featured a full-page five-part illustration of the "Property of Samuel W. Lewis" that included a Main Street store, four rentals houses, and a residence accompanied by a substantial profile of Lewis that noted his many ventures that occurred in San Francisco, Idaho, and Montana before settling in Bozeman. The book also related his financial support and guidance for the education of his sister, world-famous sculptress Edmonia Lewis. When he died in 1896, Samuel Lewis' estate was valued \$25,000, a small fortune at the time.³⁸⁷ In 1904, the extended Lewis-Bruce family expanded to include the fourth enduring local Black family, the Woodsons. That year, Charles Bruce wed Clara Woodson McLeaveland, who fours earlier as a married 17-year-old lived in Bozeman with her widowed mother Fanny Woodson, her father George Woodson having by then died.³⁸⁸

Other longtime residents also helped constitute the core of Black Bozeman in this period. Greenbury Chopper purchased property (Lot 12 Block F of Black's Addition) from L.M. Black in 1883 and in 1900, at the age of 88, Chopper worked again as a "bootblack," and lived in a rental at 310 S. Templar. He remained in Bozeman

³⁸⁵ Wood, "McDonald House (MT Historic Property Record, #24GA1919)"; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Schontzler, "McDonald House Holds History of Freed Slaves Who Helped Settle Bozeman"; Alegria, "Our Historic Neighbors The McDonald Family Let's Get to Know Them."

³⁸⁶ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; "Milton McCowan- Catharine Rodgers [Gallatin County, Montana, 1900 Marriages]"; Extreme History Project, "Family Matters: Bozeman's Historic African American Community Walking Tour"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

³⁸⁷ Joaquin Miller, *An Illustrated History of the State of Montana*, 374–76; Leeson, *History of Montana. 1739-1885*; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Strahn, "Samuel Lewis House"; "Biography of the 'Bozeman Barber.'"

³⁸⁸ "Bruce-Woodson Marriage License (State of Montana, County of Gallatin)"; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

until he died, at the county poor farm, in 1906.³⁸⁹ John Anderson, meanwhile, lived with his second wife Julia (whom he married in 1884) in a home they owned at 340 S. Church, where they still lived at the time of the 1910 census. John Anderson's first wife Lucy remained in Bozeman until she died, under suspicious circumstances, in 1890. She and John separated ca. 1880, and in 1881 she married Greenbury Chopper (from whom she later separated).³⁹⁰

Miles City

In 1880, Bozeman's enduring Black community was becoming established in the fertile Gallatin Valley as a secondary component of a developing regional network. Centered in Helena that network then included Fort Benton, and, progressively, Butte. At the time, only one other locale in Montana counted more than a handful of Black households, the raw Northern Plains settlement of Miles City.

After the U.S. Army erected Fort Keogh at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Tongue rivers in 1876, merchants established Miles City nearby. The eastern Montana town soon became a major stock shipping point when the Northern Pacific Railway tracks arrived and the open range cattle industry boomed. Black people, like the aforementioned Adams sisters, were among the settlement's first residents, primary among them Sadie Butler, who worked as a maid for U.S. Army officer N.A. Miles and came with him when he established Fort Keogh in 1876. Four years later, as the U.S. Military settled in and the railroad approached, the town and the fort together counted some 20 African American inhabitants. Four single women and two men lived at the fort itself, where they worked as domestic servants. The 14 people living in town, meanwhile, included a mix of people in various residential arrangements. Three households, all headed by single mothers in their 20s, had young children, including those of Annie Turner and her next-door neighbors Caroline Maze and Jane Mercer (a widow). The seven other adults in town included two married women, three single women, and two single men. Three of these women may have lived together: Sadie Butler and Louisa Thompson were enumerated in the same building as married Lizzie Kelley and her White husband Richard. Meanwhile, married Lotta Kelley, whose husband wasn't enumerated, lived with Caroline Maze and her two-year-old son William.³⁹¹

In the wake of the 1880 census, as Miles City boomed with the approach of the Northern Pacific, droves of people passed through the town, living and working there for a period before moving on. Among them were numerous African American people, like Walker B. Browning. Browning lived in Miles City, where he worked in Thomas Deckert's barber shop, in 1881-1882, after almost a decade living elsewhere in the region. During his Miles City tenure, Walker's wife Ruth and children remained at a previous home in Deadwood, Dakota Territory, and in December 1883, Walker Browning moved west to Billings.³⁹²

³⁸⁹ Humanities, "Real Estate Transfers"; Extreme History Project, "Cemetery Stories – Greenbury Chopper"; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

³⁹⁰ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Extreme History Project, "Family Matters: Bozeman's Historic African American Community Walking Tour"; Extreme History Project, "Cemetery Stories – Greenbury Chopper."

³⁹¹ Kemmick, "Racing Time to Tell Bill's Story"; Bureau of the Census, "10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory."

³⁹² *Western Heritage Center*; "Walker Browning, Billings Pioneer, Summoned by Death."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Around the time Walker Browning arrived in town, Sadie Butler gave birth to a boy named William Broviaur Thomas. Her child was the son of Vernon B. Thomas, who became her husband in 1882. Vernon was a White cavalryman whom Sadie met in 1877 when he came to Fort Keogh, and by 1890 Sadie and Vernon had at least five more children, including Annie, Vernon, David, Frank, and George. By that time, the area Black community had changed notably: Black army units began serving at Fort Custer in 1888 bringing droves of soldiers into the area. In 1890, when Miles City proper counted a total of 956 residents, Custer County—which included Miles City and Fort Custer (some 100 miles to the southwest on the Little Big Horn River near present-day Hardin) contained a Black population of 114, and in 1890-1891, several units of the 25th from forts



Figure 23: “African-American Soldiers and Families Ice Harvesting on the Yellowstone River (Miles City),” Unknown photographer, c. 1890. Montana Historical Society Research Center, PAC 95-70 Box 17.

Shaw and Missoula served “temporary duty” at Fort Keogh. [Figure 23] The following year troops of the “colored” 10th Cavalry joined the 25th Infantry at Fort Custer, and also came to Fort Keogh itself.³⁹³

The segregated Black units left Montana to fight in the Cuba in 1898, and Fort Custer closed permanently that year, but the Fort’s 10-year presence in Custer County in the late 19th century made the region a substantially Black area that decade. The soldiers’ years in the area also invigorated the existing Black community in Miles City. Families and associates of some soldiers invariably settled near troops at their different bases—further swelling the Black population in surrounding areas—and some of them stayed on, as did some soldiers once they’d been discharged. Suzy Alice Smith (nee Hunter, b. 1878), for instance, the Texas-born daughter of 24th Infantry veteran Moses Hunter and Mary E. Stoon (a.k.a. Stone), likely came to Miles City with her first

³⁹³ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Kemmick, “Racing Time to Tell Bill’s Story”; War Department, “Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1888 v. 1”; War Department, “Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1890/91 v. 1”; War Department, “Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1891 v.1”; Census Office, “Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Part I & Part II)”; War Department, “Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1892 v.1.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

husband, a soldier whose surname was Smith, and in 1900 she lived there still, staying in the Pacific Avenue rental of her mother Mary Elizabeth, whose surname was by then Nickens (also in the house was six-year-old Ethel Dixon, Nickens' granddaughter).³⁹⁴

That year, the census listed some 54 African Americans living in Miles City (including Sadie Butler Thomas and eight of her children, who were enumerated as White). The population comprised a variety of families and individuals, some with longtime ties to the area. Primary among them was the large Butler Thomas family (which by 1900, included nine children, eight of them living with their parents). In 1907, eldest son William Broviaur Thomas married Susie A. Hunter Smith, a widow. Three years later, shortly after the 1910 census was taken, William and Susie Thomas had a son, George B. Thomas. George B. joined an extended Miles City family that included his parents as well as his grandparents, Vernon and Sadie Thomas, and eight of their 10 living children, ranging in age from five to 26, who still lived with them.³⁹⁵

Elizabeth Kelley was also a longtime part of the Miles City Black community. Mrs. Kelley was enumerated there in both 1880 and 1900, and when the 1900 census was taken, Elizabeth remained married to her White husband of 23 years, Richard. They lived in a residence on Main Street with him and his brother and three other Black people that included her married sister Ellen Boyer along with her "nephew" and "niece" Harry and Eugenia E. Harrison, a newlywed couple in their 20s.³⁹⁶

The Simpson family was likewise, long a part of the Miles City community in this period. Married in Seattle in 1890, the Simpsons family included Levi, a Black man born in 1851 in Missouri, and Mary Graven, a White woman born in 1859 in Norway. By 1900 they lived next door to the Nickens-Smith household, in a home they owned on Pacific Avenue with their five children, ages two, four, six, eight and 10, the oldest and youngest born when the family lived in Montana. The other children were born in Washington state. The Simpsons remained in Miles City in 1910, living with their five children in their 308 Pacific Avenue home.³⁹⁷

Black homeowners in Miles City by that time included the Simpsons' former neighbor, the widowed Elizabeth Stone Hunter Nickens. By 1910, Nickens owned the home she occupied at 307 Pleasant Street (or possibly 307 Main), where she was flanked by another five or so Black households. Teamster James Perrington, who like Nickens rented in town in 1900, was also listed as a homeowner in 1910, living at 112 Pleasant Street (or possibly 112 5th Street). More recent arrivals also owned their own homes. Tennessee-born janitor John Williams, a single man, owned his 1612 Fort Street home free and clear, while Dan and Belle Hurt, who moved to Miles City ca. 1905, had a mortgage on their home at 408 [400] Atlantic Avenue. There they lived with their young daughter Clara, as well as five male "roomers," four of whom were Black. Dan worked as a cook at a restaurant or hotel, and the Hurt family was enumerated at Dan's employer as well as at their own home.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁴ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," February 22, 2015; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

³⁹⁵ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," February 22, 2015; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]." In the 1910 census, William B. Thomas was enumerated at his parents' household as well as his own.

³⁹⁶ Bureau of the Census, "10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory"; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

³⁹⁷ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; "Simpson-Graven Marriage Certificate [Washington, U.S., Marriage Records, 1854-2013]."

³⁹⁸ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Wood, "Dan Hurt Residence (MT Historic Property Record, #24CR1340)."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

When the Hurts arrived in the eastern Montana town, the Black community in the Custer County seat was well established, and integrated with the regional community spread across locales to the West. With the homestead boom accelerating in eastern Montana, it seemed on the verge of further growth, and the regional Minister's Alliance of the A.M.E. church, targeted it in 1909 when "sending the different ministers to the different cities to start churches." Three towns were so targeted, with the group sending "Rev. Abbot to Lewistown & Livingston & Rev. Cate to Miles City."³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ "All Pages," April 23, 1909.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Black Montana by 1890: Two New Core Communities in Great Falls and Missoula



Figure 24: "25th Infantry Troops at Fort Missoula," Morton J. Elrod, photographer, 1902. University of Montana Photograph Archives, Morton J. Elrod Collection, B.I.j.001.

The influx of African American soldiers that shaped Custer County from 1888 to 1898, and expanded the population of Miles City, its county seat, thereafter, also drove the growth of two new core Black Montana communities. In both Missoula and Great Falls, which by 1890 boasted substantial local Black populations, growth flowed heavily from the influx of the 25th Infantry and 10th Cavalry troops. In the trade and agricultural settlement of Missoula, which developed with Montana's early non-Indian influx in the 1860s, the United States constructed a namesake fort just outside of town in 1877. In 1888, when the "Colored" 25th Infantry was first stationed in Montana, it headquartered at Fort Missoula, and the adjacent town's Black community was born. [Figure 24] Meanwhile, railroad and townsite developers platted Great Falls in 1883 as an industrial city to be powered by hydroelectricity. They sited it along the Missouri, about 30 miles upriver from Fort Benton, and by 1887 completed a railroad connection to the area. Many people in the area followed the accompanying economic shift from Fort Benton to Great Falls, and the town's earliest Black residents came largely from the waning river port. Soon, this was flanked by "colored" military units at two different U.S. Army forts: upon the 25th Infantry regiment's arrival in Missoula, Troops B, C, E and F were sent to Fort Shaw [NR Reference

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

#85000065], situated about 24 miles west of Great Falls. The 10th Cavalry followed, arriving in Spring 1892 at Fort Assiniboine, about 100 miles to the northeast.⁴⁰⁰

Great Falls

Situated at some distance from these two forts, Great Falls Black population was fed in a less immediate fashion than Missoula's by the presence of "colored" military units. But the town, incorporated in 1887, was just getting started when the Buffalo Soldiers moved into Montana, and it was orbited by not one but two Army bases as well as by the early Black community of Fort Benton. Thus, by 1890—the first time enumerators listed the infant town—its population was Blacker, proportionally, than any of the other five cities (more than 2,500 inhabitants) in Montana. This included the larger, older Black communities of Helena, and Butte as well as the other urban settlements of Anaconda, Livingston, and Missoula.⁴⁰¹

The 1890 census counted some 85 African American people in Great Falls, composing 2.1% of the population of the Cascade County seat, with another 206 people enumerated elsewhere in the county, which included Fort Shaw. By 1900, Great Falls grew to almost 15,000 residents, and the census that year identified some 128 of them as Black.⁴⁰² There were, moreover, many more African Americans associated with Great Falls in this period not reflected in that single-moment census figure: the army shuttered Fort Shaw in 1891, but local historian Ken Robison identified "more than 1,100 Black residents" in the Great Falls area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁴⁰³

As in other emerging regional centers, Black people came to Great Falls from locales near and far, some traveling from earlier Montana homes or nearby military bases where they were discharged, and others coming from elsewhere in the United States, and beyond. Early arrival Ed Simms came in 1886 from Fort Shaw, where he worked for the post trader for four years, since leaving his previous Fort Benton abode (where he worked briefly for Jerry Sullivan after arriving from Arkansas as a steamboat steward).⁴⁰⁴ His new bride Elizabeth Miller joined him that summer, traveling up from St. Louis, and the following year bore their first child, Gertrude.⁴⁰⁵ In 1887, Charles Meek also arrived, having come from Fort Benton via the gold rushes in Barker and Yogo. Others arrived from regional settlements in subsequent years, like Henry and Henriette Johnson, Tennie Finn, and Fayette Hall, who came to Great Falls around 1889 after having been in Fort Benton. Charles Lawson arrived that year from Sun River, where he "operated a barbershop and a saloon."⁴⁰⁶

Albert W. Ray moved to town after being "discharged from the 25th Infantry ("Colored") Regiment at Fort Shaw" in 1890, by which time William Morgan, who'd been in the Sun River valley as early as 1881, had also

⁴⁰⁰ War Department, "Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1888 v. 1," 506; War Department, "Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1892 v.1."

⁴⁰¹ Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 - 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 - 1990, for Large Cities and Other Urban Place in the United States," Table 27: Montana. U.S. Census Bureau, "1900 Census," 664 Table 24.

⁴⁰² Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 - 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 - 1990, for Large Cities and Other Urban Place in the United States," Table 27: Montana. U.S. Census Bureau, "1900 Census," 664 Table 24.

⁴⁰³ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁴⁰⁴ Robison, "On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3."; Robison, "Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri."

⁴⁰⁵ Robison, "Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri."

⁴⁰⁶ Robison, "On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3." Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

settled in Great Falls and built a house on the southside.⁴⁰⁷ After hearing about possible opportunities in the young railroad town, the extended Knott family traveled from Memphis in 1892, journeying by train to Denver and Helena, where they caught a stagecoach.⁴⁰⁸ John A. Taylor, originally from Virginia, came to Great Falls in 1902 working for the Great Northern Railway.⁴⁰⁹ In 1911, Mattie Bell Byers, grand-niece of her namesake Mattie Bost Bell Castner, moved to Great Falls from nearby Belt, where she'd been raised by her great-aunt and uncle after coming from North Carolina and subsequently married her White husband John Novotny, with whom she bore a total of 22 children. Mattie and John may have homesteaded in the interim: a John L. Novotny patented 160 acres in Judith Basin County in 1910. Several years later, Gertrude Fannie Wilson Alexander came to Great Falls from St. Paul, Minnesota, and returned upon her marriage to John A. Taylor in 1919 after a stint in Thermopolis, Wyoming.⁴¹⁰

Great Falls' Black community by 1900 included a diverse array of households, mainly clustered on the city's southside. There were numerous families with minor children, as well as extended family households, including those of John W. and Lida Robinson (daughter of Henry and Henrietta Essex Johnson), who lived at 1111 6th Ave. South, and Ed and Lizzie Simms, who lived in a home they owned at 519 6th Ave. South along with seven members of their extended family, including their sons and daughters, a niece, and both their widowed mothers. David A. and Katie Knott likewise lived with their five young children and two older widowed women—one of them Katie's mother. David Knott, who worked "as a janitor for the Montana Power Company ... built the one and half story folk Victorian home" at 711 8th Avenue South, that housed the extended family along with Katie Knott's seamstress business.⁴¹¹ [Figure 25]



Figure 25: "David and Katie Knott House, 711 8th Avenue South, Great Falls," Pen and ink drawing by Anthony Wood, 2016.

Clara Bigbee, 59, lived with her four Bigbee children, including son John, 32, who owned the Great Falls farm property where they lived, as well as Edward, 19, and daughters, Maggie and Emma, 16 and 14, respectively. Widowed Mary White rented at 215 4th Ave S., where she raised her six children ages four to 13 and ran a boarding house. Other Great Falls families in 1900 included William and Susie Banks and their 10 children (who rented at 409 5th St. SW), Eli and Susan Perkins and their five children (who rented at 213 4th Ave S.), James and Nellie Linsey and their five children (who rented on Smelter Ave.) and Stephen and Mary Williams and their four children (who owned their home at 1000 6th Avenue S.).⁴¹²

A spectrum of other Black households joined these families. Moses and Agnes Williams, married 30 years, owned their home at 1000 7th Ave. So., perhaps built by Moses, a house framer, while widowed Tennie Morgan owned a home several blocks away at 504 7th Avenue South, where she lived with her 25-year-old niece

⁴⁰⁷ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁴⁰⁸ Knott, interview; Wood, "David and Katie Knott Residence (MT Historic Property Record, # 24CA1747)."

⁴⁰⁹ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁴¹⁰ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁴¹¹ Wood, "David and Katie Knott Residence (MT Historic Property Record, # 24CA1747)"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

⁴¹² Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Florance. Meanwhile, widowed James White, a dressmaker, rented at 217 ½ 4th Ave. South, where she kept three boarders, all single Black men. Black households also included single women and men, people like Josephine Bearpaugh, a 27-year-old cook who lived in the home of her employer at 703 4th Ave. North, and Lee Mills, from Texas, who owned his home at 407 2nd St. South.⁴¹³

In a pattern less apparent in other Black Montana cores, the geography mapped by the community's homes reflected generalized residential segregation in Great Falls. With notable exceptions, among them domestic servants of different stripes living in the homes of those they served, few Black people lived on the town's northside. Specifically, Black people in Great Falls lived chiefly on the ethnically mixed, working-class southside of town, "from 2nd Street to 14th Street South and from 1st Avenue to 10th Avenue South."⁴¹⁴ Indeed, this area, or a part of it, was known to some as "the negro quarter."⁴¹⁵ Housing in this area ranged from comfortable and sufficient to substandard: in 1916-17 Thomas Bailey, for example, was noted "living in Great Falls in a shack on Sixth Avenue South between Second and Third Streets."⁴¹⁶ In addition to broad concentration on the southside, Black residential geography in Great Falls reflected the presence of railroad company camps, or other railroad employee housing arrangements, where a significant number of African American men lived at different times.⁴¹⁷

As they established a local community in Great Falls, Black people sustained themselves much as they did in other locales in the state, combining the broadly common jobs like laborer, laundress, servant, porter, janitor, and cook with occupations that predominated in the industrial and agricultural shipping town, like railroad and farm work. In the Great Falls area, Black agricultural workers included not only farm laborers and general farmers but more specialized occupations, like chicken farmer William Doll, who lost all his chickens and his home "near the Sun River bridge at Great Falls" in a fire in 1908, or Christopher Mannard, shepherd for sheepmen Reeder and Gillett of Cascade prior to 1906.

Like they did in other Montana towns, Black workers concentrated at particular employers. They often worked not only as domestic servants in elite White homes but in places that tended to hire African American staff, like the Cascade County Courthouse, or elite White hotels or clubs like Rainbow Club (a.k.a. Electric City Club), where Ed Sims was a longtime steward and the Park Hotel or, after its construction in 1911, the Rainbow Hotel, where John A. Taylor worked as head porter from the time it opened. Black social clubs—"the Lime Kiln, Maple Leaf, Porters' Quarters, Rainbow Colored, Manhattan, and the most successful, the Ozark"—also regularly employed Black staff. In addition, in Great Falls, many people worked for the railroad, especially the Great Northern. The Great Northern Railway was key in establishing and developing Great Falls, and the railroad was an especially significant employer of Black people thereafter. In addition to employing numerous members of the Black community, it housed a significant number of Black men in the "Great Northern Boarding Camp in Great Falls" and other facilities like "the Great Northern Commissary near the Station."⁴¹⁸

Some Black men worked in the building trades. They included contractor John A Paul, who around 1913-1919, "owned apartments at 320 Fourth Avenue South," and bricklayer Earnest Smith, hod carriers James Linsey and

⁴¹³ Bureau of the Census.

⁴¹⁴ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁴¹⁵ "Policeman E. J. Brooks"; "Fired Shots to Stop Him"; "Negro Is Sentence on Robbery Charge."

⁴¹⁶ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁴¹⁷ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

⁴¹⁸ Robison, "Breaking Racial Barriers: 'Everyone's Welcome' at the Ozark Club Great Falls, Montana's African American Nightclub," 47; Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Daniel Robinson—who was employed in 1899 by George Rantzau or Rantzanor. Mortar mixers, like John Ferguson or Ernest Simons, worked for Kraatz and Ringer, as well as carpenters, like William A. Nelson and Moses Smith, a “carpenter and poultry breeder” who around 1901-1903, “resided at the south end of Ninth Street.” Albert J. Walton, meanwhile, manufactured building materials in his work as a brick moulder.⁴¹⁹

Other Great Falls men worked as blacksmiths. In 1901, Robert Lee worked in the smithy of George H. Smith at 113 Fourth Street South, as did Robert Byles ca. 1901-1903. Some were teamsters, like William ‘Blondy’ Anderson in 1908. Meanwhile William Utley Payne, who owned the Big Bee Ranch southwest of Great Falls, worked “for the Nilson-Smith Company (general contractors and fuel dealers) until his death,” at the age of 40, in 1914. There were horse trainers, like Moses Williams, and tailors, like George Schoot, who in 1915 worked for Twin City Tailoring Company. William Knott, who “left high school and became a call boy for the Great Northern Railroad around 1912. ... left the railroad soon after and opened his own tailor shop,” following in the heels of his mother Katie Knott, a seamstress. Several women worked as dressmakers, and a few others made a living as sex workers.⁴²⁰

More rarely, Black people in Great Falls worked in official positions like city policeman or constable, or U.S. postman. Others worked in professional realms like law and accounting, or as professionals in another capacity, such as newspaper editors or church pastors, among them the Rev. George Smith, a Baptist preacher who in 1900 lived at 1000 5th Avenue South with his new wife Mary.⁴²¹

As elsewhere, barbering and boot-blackening represented primary Black businesses in town, and so, too, running saloons, restaurants, and boarding houses. The 1900 census enumerated five barbers, all men. But barbers, and barbershops, in Great Falls, varied: Ken Robison identified numerous others in his inventory, including several women. Some of these barbers stayed but briefly, others remained and were prominent locals who endured for decades. Peter W. Anderson, for instance, was a barber in town for at least 27 years, opening his shop by 1900 or earlier. So, too, did bootblacks and shine parlors, and the proprietors of other Black-run establishments like saloons, restaurants, boarding houses, and other businesses.⁴²²

The life stories of the 1000-plus people limned by Ken Robison in 2009 reflect these economic endeavors. Ed Simms, for instance, first “worked as chef at the Cascade Hotel” and “hired as janitor at the Cascade County Court House,” and then “through most of the 1890s ... served as steward at the Rainbow Club, later called the Electric City Club.” Over the years, Simms’ eyesight began to fail, and he lost it completely by 1906, when he “opened the Electric Shoe Shining Parlors on Third Street South. The shop moved several times until locating in 1916 in the new Dunn-Brown block on Central Avenue.” It remained there in August 1918, when “Ed retired from his business and turned his shoe shining shop over to his daughter, Mrs. Gertrude Clay.” Among the African American bootblacks who worked at Ed Simm’s shine parlor were Ed’s son Edward Garrett Simms, who worked there from 1908-1916, as well as George Morton (there ca. 1911), Robert M. Hayes (ca. 1915), and son-in-law Shelby Clay (in 1918).⁴²³

⁴¹⁹ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴²⁰ Wood, “David and Katie Knott Residence (MT Historic Property Record, # 24CA1747)”; Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴²¹ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴²² Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴²³ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

William Morgan too, “received an appointment as janitor at the courthouse,” where he worked in 1892, and “operated also a small business cleaning houses.” He “later ranched along the Missouri River [“in the vicinity of Box Elder Park”] and drove the Great Falls to Millegan stagecoach” before dying “at his home on 504 Seventh Avenue South.” Morgan’s contemporary Charles Lawson also worked in Great Falls after coming from Sun River, and returned to agricultural work before moving between Great Falls and other locales. Lawson, who operated a barbershop as well as a saloon in Sun River in 1888, “opened a barbershop at 117 Central Avenue in Great Falls in 1889.” There he employed other Black barbers like E. E. Reid in 1895. Several months after marrying Josephine Edrington in Butte in September 1891, Lawson filed on 80 acres in Township 20 North Range 5 East. A few years later he filed on an additional 160 acres in the same area, and succeeded in patenting both claims. Josephine Edrington Lawson, meanwhile, operated a saloon on Great Falls’ southside in 1896, and moved the following year to Lewistown. In 1898, Mr. Lawson “rented his barbershop in Great Falls to George Anderson and joined Manuel Reed in a barbershop in Belt. Within a year, Lawson was back in Great Falls operating his shop at 15 Third Street South.”⁴²⁴

John E. Little followed a similar path, “working as janitor at the courthouse” in 1888 and subsequently, ca. 1890, as a barber at the Park Hotel Barber Shop. In 1896 he proved up on his homestead claim in Section 22, Township 20 North Range 3 East. Charles Meek, meanwhile, worked as a porter in Great Falls after coming to town from Fort Benton via the Barker and Yogo mining districts in 1887, and then farmed nearby “for several years” before leaving with Moses Williston or Wilson in January 1898 “to join the stampede to the Klondike gold rush. After two or three years in the Yukon, Charles moved on to mine” in Idaho.⁴²⁵

Critically, members of Great Falls Black community also worked in more official or professional positions, and this was true from the town’s first days. From the ca. 1890 founding of the African Methodist Episcopal church, the church’s pastor was consistently a prominent professional in the local community. In 1892, community professionals included newspaper editors. J.H. Lynch and J.R. Henderson reportedly moved to Great Falls from the Midwest to publish *The Advocate*, a black newspaper “funded by the Cascade County Democrats during the 1892 election campaign.” Lynch and Henderson edited the paper through the November election, and then departed. Around that time, in 1892 and 1893, George Williams “served on the fledgling Great Falls police.” Williams reportedly patrolled the mostly White north side of town, and lived there as well.⁴²⁶

In 1894, in the local elections, Republicans nominated William M. Morgan “as one of their two candidates for constable. Morgan went to bed one evening in early November 1894 after working that day as janitor at the Cascade County courthouse. The next day, he received 503 votes to defeat two Democratic Party opponents and win election as one of two constables for Great Falls.” Morgan’s election to public office was among the earliest such successes for Black candidates in Montana: another Black resident, John E. Little, lost the race for Great Falls constable in 1892, when he was the Democratic nominee. His service on the Great Falls police force was, like George Williams’, path-breaking.⁴²⁷ Morgan finished his two-year constable term in 1896, and two years later another local resident integrated a different realm of Montana law. As reported that June in the *Great Falls Leader*, G. B. Aldrich “a colored man from Great Falls [was] an applicant for admission to the bar.” The

⁴²⁴ Robison, “Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri.”

⁴²⁵ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴²⁶ Behan, Robison, and Sievert, “Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Smithsonian #24CA0970)”;

Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴²⁷ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

newspaper concluded that “in the verbal examination he made a very favorable impression, as well at the written examination, [and] a colored man will soon be practicing law in this state.”⁴²⁸

Several Great Falls residents also worked in federal postal positions or railroad mail services. In 1904, for example, Texas-born Lee Mills, one-time steward at the Electric City Club, worked “as a mail carrier at the post office” while two years later D.D. Ganey was “a mail clerk on the Great Falls to Butte route.” of the Great Northern. Clarence Daley also “worked as a clerk at the Railway Mail Service,” doing so ca. 1910. Great Falls professional occupations of the Black community encompassed the accounting realm as well: after moving from Helena ca. 1913, Ward D. Cole pursued various occupations before becoming a bookkeeper for J.W. Robinson’s trucking firm.⁴²⁹

As elsewhere in Black Montana, Great Falls residents worked as professional musicians. Charlie Gordon “played piano at the Mascot Theater” around 1894, and later piano players included Will Small (ca. 1898) as well as John E. Hase (ca. 1901), “a piano player at one of the houses in the Tenderloin district.” Around 1904 Mack Donnell made a living as a pianist, as did, later, Mr. and Mrs. Fed Anderson, who in 1910 moved from Helena. Meanwhile, piano player William Baker, with his wife Grace, lived in Great Falls and Helena during 1910-11, while he “played at night clubs.” Black women, too, could be found working in what might be termed white collar positions in this period. Among them was Gertrude Fanny Wilson Alexander, who after arriving from St. Paul in 1914, “was employed by General Mills for several years demonstrating pancake mix throughout the state.”⁴³⁰

The Black community’s economic activities included a range of Black businesses as well. In addition to the barber shops and shoeshine parlors noted in the biographies above, Black businesses comprised those of Henry Courtney, who’d been “head waiter on the original staff of the Grand Union Hotel upon its opening” in 1882 in Fort Benton, and had stampeded to the Little Rockies mines in 1884” before returning to Fort Benton for a few years then moving to Great Falls in early 1887. By May of that year, Courtney ran “an ice cream making and delivery operation, and in the spring of 1888 he opened the Bay Laundry near Taylor’s Boat House.” Then “in June he opened Courtney & Goodwin’s Lunch Counter in the rear of the Park Theatre.” Several years later, “in late 1891, Courtney paid \$1,000 for lot 4, block 419 in Great Falls. By 1892, he operated a barbershop on 1st Ave. So. Between Park Drive and 2nd Street.”⁴³¹

In the same period, Black businesspeople operated prominent establishments in an array of industries. By ca. 1889 there was the “horse training stable” that Moses Williams built “on Tenth Street and Seventh Avenue South,” where he lived in the rear, and the following year Mrs. Tennie Bigbee Finn Hagen “ran a grocery and lived at 713 7th Avenue South.” In 1892, Charles David or Davis, “a blind black man ... made his living by peddling lead pencils,” and around the same time Ed Simms, Charles F. Smith, and John Willis ran restaurants. In 1893, Black businesses included a confectionary operated by Samuel B. Porter in the home at 110 Third Street South, where he also lived with his wife Emma, who worked for the nearby H.B. Rose Laundry at 312 Third Street South. Porter later moved to rural Cascade County and took up ranching, becoming known as “a pioneer ranchman near Portage.” Other Black enterprises included saloons. From 1899 to 1917, enduring Eli Shelby was “proprietor of the Fashion Saloon on Second Street between Second and Third Avenue South,” (313

⁴²⁸ “A Colored Man From Great Falls Is an Applicant for Admission to the Bar.”

⁴²⁹ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴³⁰ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴³¹ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Second Street South), where he also resided. Among his fellow saloonkeepers over the years were Abe Walton and Bud Mills, whose namesake saloon operated at 218 Third Avenue South in 1901.⁴³²

After 1900, Black businesses included still other enterprises. James Lindsey came with the army to Fort Assiniboine, where he was discharged, and then went to work as a hod carrier in the 1890s before operating “a stable on Eight Avenue South between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets.” Around 1908-1909, John W. Robinson ran a “coal and wood company from his home at 1111 Sixth Avenue South,” and later became “proprietor of a contracting and trucking firm, John W. Robinson & Son.” The Robinson firm subsequently employed many Black staff. In 1910, “after working the railroad for several years, John [Taylor] bought his own wagon and made a living as an express man,” and in January of the following year M.M. Nelson arrived from Helena “to launch a lunch business.” A few years later, in 1914, Kentucky-born William Jackson, who lived at 812 Eight Street South, “owned the Rainbow Club and ...worked as a barber at the Maple Leaf Club.” In 1915, Ray Walker and Ward D. Cole “managed a billiard hall at 315 Second Avenue South,” and at the same time Walker and musician William R. Holland owned the Manhattan Club, a Black social club. These Black businesses were also key components of the community economy as employers, frequently hiring Black workers.⁴³³

Like its counterparts across Montana and the West, the Black community in Great Falls also built an array of institutions. Similar to Black communities around the West, foremost among these were churches. In 1890, the Great Falls African Methodist Episcopal (AME) “organized as a congregation and began meeting in the city’s first fire station on 2nd Avenue South.” The following year the “old fire house on Second Avenue South” hosted A.M.E. congregation activities as well as other Black community occasions—Laura J. Ferguson, formerly of Maiden, and John Ferguson, former Fort Shaw 24th Infantry soldier, married there in 1890 “with the Rev. Mr. White of the Presbyterian Church officiating.” At the same time the A.M.E. congregation acquired a lot from Paris Gibson and his townsite company “in a low, swampy area of the southside surrounded by the working-class neighborhood where the town’s black population lived.” The congregation quickly completed “the original one-story wood frame church,” and “Ministers from the mainline Presbyterian and Methodist churches participated in cornerstone laying ceremonies.” Soon “a parsonage adjoined the south side of the building.” The new Union Bethel A.M.E. church at 916 Fifth Avenue South was led by Reverend Joel H. Childress, and many of the town’s prominent Black residents were active in its establishment and early development. Among them were trustees Ed Simms, William M. Morgan and A.W. Ray, as well as Mrs. Elizabeth Simms, Henry and Mamie Courtney, Mrs. Tennie Finn Hagen, and, after her 1892 arrival, Mrs. Katie Knott.⁴³⁴

The church quickly became the cornerstone of the community, nurturing the Black enclave where it stood, both spiritually and substantively. It also helped build regional community organization: Rev. Warren L.N. Baker, Great Falls’ A. M. E. pastor at the dawn of the 1900s, “served also as non-resident minister for the A. M. E. congregation in Havre and helped build the church building there in 1902,” before accepting “the pastorate of the A. M. E. Church in Billings.” As pastors passed through Union Bethel, the church continued to serve as the community religious foundation, as well as its social center. In addition to fostering other community institutions, it hosted events like “frequent dinners and other fundraising activities.” These events ranged from celebrations like that on Emancipation Day 1910, when the regionally renown Methodist circuit rider Brother

⁴³² Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴³³ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴³⁴ Robison; Behan, Robison, and Sievert, “Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopalian Church (Smithsonian #24CA0970).” Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009. Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.” Wood, “David and Katie Knott Residence (MT Historic Property Record, # 24CA1747).”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State



Figure 26: Union Bethel AME Church, Great Falls, Kate Hampton photographer, 2013. On file at MT SHPO.

Van Orsdel spoke, to concerts “for the benefit of the church fund,” like the two-night 1917 performance when church member and local Black vocalist Gertrude Barber sang a series of solos.⁴³⁵

Barber’s benefit concerts for the church fund supported a major construction project: in July 1917, the congregation completed a new church. Two pastors, the Rev. W. H. Prince and then the Rev. George Edward Horsey, assigned to Union Bethel in 1916, along with Horsey’s wife Lily E., spearheaded the project to replace the original 1891 church. Beginning in 1915, they “raised money, arranged financing, received architectural designs, and began building a new Church” in April 1917. Several months later, a substantial brick-veneered church with a steep gable stood at 916 5th Avenue South, a prominent marker, and sturdy base, of Great Falls enduring Black community.⁴³⁶ [Figure 26]

Over time, other community institutions consolidated around this steady Union Bethel core. An early Black Baptist congregation had organized at some level by 1900 when the Reverend George Smith, the Baptist preacher, lived with his wife Mary at 1000 5th Avenue South. In 1918, the Emmanuel Baptist mission held prayer services in the home of Arthur and Sarah Ellis Ross, at 915 8th Ave. So., and the following year the *Great Falls Tribune* noted visiting Butte pastor Rev. E.B. Reed preaching to the congregation “at the temporary quarters at 1005 Seventh Avenue South.” A church building was likely under construction at the time—H. C. Chase “served as

financial clerk for the church building fund”—and by 1919 local newspapers carried regular announcements of Emmanuel Baptist activities like services and Women’s Missionary Society meetings at the 1005 7th Avenue South site, noting the pastor D. L. McGriff’s residence on or very near the property (possibly at 1004 7th Avenue South). By the time Reverend McGriff moved from to Helena in October 1922, having been appointed “general pastor at large by the Montana Baptist state board,” ground for a “new Emmanuel Baptist church was purchased and the building erected” on the corner of 5th Avenue South and 12th Street, at 1125 5th Avenue South.⁴³⁷

Black churches were joined by fraternal orders, social clubs, political organizations, women’s clubs, baseball teams, and various other organizations and special events in the collective life of the community. Organized community life began early, as Great Falls first developed. In February 1888, for example, Mary Hutton “sang at Minot’s hall for the black community,” and in August 1890 a group of residents organized a community “dinner at Dunn Hall.” Residents formed the Lime Kiln Club, in September 1889, and other social clubs

⁴³⁵ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009; Behan, Robison, and Sievert, “Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Smithsonian #24CA0970).”

⁴³⁶ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009; Behan, Robison, and Sievert, “Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Smithsonian #24CA0970).”

⁴³⁷ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; “Emmanuel Baptist”; “Rev. E. B. Reed, of Butte”; “Rev. McGriff Leaves Local Church Pulpit to Be General Pastor”; “Baptist Missionary Society Will Meet”; “The Emmanuel Baptist Church”; Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

followed. They included the Maple Leaf, Porters' Quarters, Rainbow Colored, Manhattan, and the most successful, the Ozark," first opened in 1909 and located in 1919 at 323 Second Avenue South.⁴³⁸

Organizations that focused more specifically on politics followed the 1889 founding of the Lime Kiln Club. In October 1890, residents held an "organizational meeting of a black Republican political Club at Minot Hall," and the community organized an array of prominent political events and associations in subsequent years. On New Year's Day 1892, "residents of Great Falls, black and white in equal numbers, joined as one to celebrate" "the 29th anniversary of the day the Emancipation Proclamation took effect." The "grand ball and banquet" brought some 200 people to Cory Hall." Later that year officers of the "colored Republican club," helped form a "black Republican 'Harrison' club." Oliver Williams, secretary of the Republican club, was elected vice president of the Harrison club and James Hazelwood, who came to Great Falls the month before "following the horse racing Circuit," was elected secretary.⁴³⁹

Many "male leaders in the black community were active in Republican Party politics," and in addition to establishing their own organizations, community members played leadership roles in larger local political groups. Charles Meek "was elected delegate from the First Ward to Cascade County Republican conventions" in 1889, 1891, and 1894, at least, and Ed Simms also "was elected delegate" to local Republican conventions "for many years." Local Black Republican leadership extended to prominent ceremonial roles as well: in October 1890, the Rev. Ingraham "was named to a Republican committee to greet Col. Wilbur Fisk Sanders on his arrival in Great Falls." Four years later, in 1894, Claude Moore led the local Lincoln Republican League as its president, and, as noted above, that fall Great Falls "Republicans nominated a pillar in the black community, William M. Morgan, as one of their two candidates for constable." Morgan won his election and went on to serve as one of Great Falls' two constables."⁴⁴⁰

Some members of the African American community worked with local Democratic organizations. As Dr. Quintard Taylor notes, "Negro Republican clubs were organized in virtually every major black community," but Black Democratic activism, in contrast, was rare: Dr. Taylor identified just "one Pacific Northwest community, Butte, [that] had a sizeable Democratic association."⁴⁴¹ In Great Falls, in 1892, the local Democratic party named John E. Little, a "black candidate[,] to their party's general election ballot." Mr. Little, was "one of two Democrat candidates for Great Falls townsite constable (both of whom were defeated in the election)."⁴⁴²

In that same election, a second local "Democrat initiative led to the publication of a black weekly newspaper, *The Advocate*, during the fall of 1892." For the duration of the election campaign, the weekly *Advocate* "was funded by Cascade County Democrats," and functioned as a prominent Black institution, "devoted to the interests of the colored people of the country in general . . . [with] especial attention to those residing" in Great Falls. Two experienced Black newspaper editors—J.H. Lynch and J.R. Henderson, formerly of Chicago—published the paper. They "apparently departed after the November election." No extant copies of their paper—possibly "the first black newspaper to be published in the state of Montana"—are known to exist.⁴⁴³ As Dr. Taylor says Given the policies and practices of national Democrat organizations in this period, the editors' party

⁴³⁸ Robison, "Breaking Racial Barriers: 'Everyone's Welcome' at the Ozark Club Great Falls, Montana's African American Nightclub," 47; Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁴³⁹ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁴⁴⁰ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁴⁴¹ Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 348.

⁴⁴² Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁴⁴³ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

affiliation surely “reflected local political conditions and expediencies...rather than any ideological commitment to the national Democratic party.”⁴⁴⁴

Around the same time, in June 1894, a group of Black men formed a new local fraternal organization, the Great Falls “colored Masons” lodge, Sunset Lodge No. 12 A. M. & F.M. William Bairpaugh, William Morgan and J.H. Redd were among the ca. 10 men who helped found the local Sunset masons, and subsequently served as lodge leaders. That October, male members of the community formed “a black lodge of the I. O. O. F. (Odd Fellows) for Great Falls,” with William Morgan, J. H. Redd, and Ed Simms leading its establishment. The fraternal organizations became institutional mainstays of the Black community, nurturing and reflecting its growth. They did so through both member activities and by sponsoring prominent events for the broader public, such as the May 1904 Colored Masonic Hard Times Ball.⁴⁴⁵

Black women also formed a variety of clubs and organizations. Union Bethel in this period boasted both “a Ladies’ Aid society and a missionary group.” One women’s organization “of the A.M.E. church [was the] Fortnightly Excelsior club,” of which Mrs. Gertrude Barber served as president in 1919. Another women’s organization in the Great Falls community at that time was “the Booker T. Washington Auxiliary, a charitable group,” of which Katie Knott was chairwoman. Mrs. Knott and the group “spent a great deal of time making and donating clothes for underprivileged children of the community.”⁴⁴⁶ By 1920, organizations in Great Falls also included the Dunbar Art and Study Club in Great Falls, a “negro women’s club.”



Figure 27: “Edward D. Simms,” *Great Falls Tribune*, December 17, 1911, p. 20.

Black community activities extended as well into more purely recreational realms. Sometimes such activities were special occasion, one-time events, while other times they were part of more sustained recreational organizations. In February 1904, for instance, local Black businesspeople, like barber J.T. Dowell, sponsored a “cake walk for the black community on the dance floor at Luther’s Hall.” That same year, in October, Mr. Williams, “a young black man, [who] was a well known boxer in Great Falls,” fought “‘Starlight,’ a black man, [who] was a boxer from the West side of Great Falls” in a bout “at Thorson’s Hall in Little Chicago.” The 1904 fight, won by Mr. Williams, was one of many in this period in Great Falls, where Black boxers like Charles Mitchell, “Blackjack” Dempsey, and Pearl Black (with his trainer Ed Rowles) fought in the late 1880s and 1890s. Other boxers in the community at the time included “prizefighter” John “Kid” Sawyer, who lived in Great Falls, having come from Havre, when he was “adjudged insane in June 1906 and sent to Warm Springs.”⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 348.

⁴⁴⁵ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁴⁴⁶ Wood, “David and Katie Knott Residence (MT Historic Property Record, # 24CA1747).”

⁴⁴⁷ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Throughout Black Montana, baseball was the most sustained, significant organized community sports activity. Great Falls boasted a variety of Black baseball teams over the years, and these teams played others from the immediate surrounds and farther afield. Among Great Falls teams were the Mohawks, ca. 1908, and the Rainbow Club team, organized and managed by barber, and Rainbow Club owner (and later Maple Leaf Club president), William M. Jackson in 1914. Team members included Roy Wilburn, who in 1915 “played shortstop on the Rainbow Colored Club baseball team.” Baseball games were popular community activities for spectators as well players. Ed Simms, for one, was famous for “his love of baseball, which even as a blind man he was able to follow at Black Eagle Park.”⁴⁴⁸ [Figure 27]

Missoula

While Buffalo Soldiers stationed at nearby forts contributed substantially to Great Falls' early Black population, the growth of the Black community in Missoula tied even more directly to the presence of soldiers, namely the 25th infantry, whose post-1887 headquarters at Fort Missoula was adjacent to the city. Before the 25th arrived, the 1880 census counted only three Black people in Missoula, two men and one woman, all single. The surrounding Missoula County noted only one additional African American resident, a 50-year-old widow working as a servant in the Bitterroot Valley. After the “colored” troops arrived in the late 1880s, Missoula's Black population numbered in the hundreds: the 1890 census enumerated 56 residents within city limits, and within the county—including Fort Missoula—it counted 314. This number plunged after troops left to fight in the Spanish-American War in 1898, with the 1900 census reporting only 34 Black residents of Missoula proper, and just another 20 in the surrounding county (including about 10 at Fort Missoula). Troops returned to the Fort around 1902, and stayed until December 1905 and a significant number of those discharged in the interim settled in town. In 1910, census enumerators listed 136 people in the Missoula Black community.⁴⁴⁹

By that time, the community comprised residential and commercial sectors, and had organized a number of community institutions. When the 1900 census occurred, Missoula's Black residents lived in a variety of households in different areas of the city. Black residents mainly concentrated in the downtown area, with most of them (34) living on East 1st, 2nd or 3rd, or on Front, Main, Pine or Higgins. Those living downtown included numerous single individuals, among them William Waller, who rented at 233 E. First Street, as well as two women whose occupation was listed as “ill fame” living on West Front Street. They also included families, like upholsterer Ephraim Dorsey, his wife Laura, and their 3-year-old son James, who rented at 229 E. 2nd, or Samuel and Etta Lundy, who lived with their three young children in a rental at 231 E. First Street. Only a few other addresses were noted in the census that year, showing several single individuals living on Missoula's Northside and in its southwest residential district, rooming on N. 5th St., renting at 506 S. 5th St., or staying with a White family, as their servant, on S. 3rd Street.⁴⁵⁰

By 1910, as the Missoula Black community became more established, two other residential clusters in addition to downtown emerged, i.e., the residential Northside and Westside neighborhoods, north and west of downtown, respectively. All of the Northside residents appeared to rent their homes that year (among them Isaiah Robinson at 139 N. 2nd) but five Westside properties were owned by their Black occupants. Widowed Mary Clark, 37, owned her home at 937 Cooper, where she lived with her brother, a hotel porter. John Williams and his White

⁴⁴⁸ Robison; “Ed Simms Tells How Blind Man Follows Ball Game”; “Baseball Sunday.”

⁴⁴⁹ Bureau of the Census, “10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory”; Census Office, “Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Part I & Part II)”; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform]”; Martin, “Remembering Samuel Lundy and Missoula's 25th Infantry Veterans”; “Direct From Philipines”; “The Seventh Infantry Regiment Will Arrive Upon Going-Away Day.”

⁴⁵⁰ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

wife Annie owned 1204 Cooper. Williams family holdings included other properties as well: when John's brother George Williams married Rebecca Palmer (Arthur Palmer's sister) of Helena at the Cooper Street house in January 1909, "the groom's father presented the happy couple with a 5 room cottage." One block west of John and Annie, William and Hanna Coldwell, with their teenage daughter Brunette, owned a home down the street at 1301 Cooper, having recently moved from Virginia City. Robert and Martha Lucas owned their home at 1206 Howell, several blocks north of Cooper Street, where they lived with their divorced 19-year-old daughter Carrie Johnson, and Kallilis J. Johnson owned at home at 1109 Howell, where he lived with his White wife (an immigrant from Hungary) of 21 years and their 10-year-old daughter.

A few Black households were located in other areas of town. These included the large families of Samuel and Sarah Freeman, who owned their home at 125 Monroe, and retired soldier Augustus Slotin and his wife Carla, who owned and occupied 224 Woodford. They included three owner-occupied households on the Southside, those of William H. and Henrietta Evans (1921 S. 4th St. W.), William H. and Gertrude Johnson and their daughter and son (at 1906 S. 5th St. West), and Chester and Lily McNorton and their three daughters (at 1508 S. 6th Street West).⁴⁵¹

From the beginning, Missoula's Black community developed a small business sector, a portion visible in period sources. According to liquor license records, Lee Pleasant Driver ran a bar around 1892-1893, after his discharge from the army at Fort Missoula, and his 25th Infantry colleague Ephraim Dorsey worked as a shoemaker after his own 1894 discharge. In 1899, newspapers noted a Black woman named Liela King running a "dive on Front Street."⁴⁵² A few years later, around 1902, the community established the Hawthorne Club, a black social club listed in the city directory in 1903 and located at 234 W. Main (presided over by "President, J.C. Johnston; Secretary, R. Lindsay; Treasurer, John Haynes"). By 1908, the Hawthorne Club moved one street over to W. Front, and represented by George Brewer, C.W. Baker along with proprietors George Johnson [and] George Lucas, all "colored men," working on expanding its operations in the Front Street building (owned by Dr. Joseph Oettinger).⁴⁵³

In 1909, when Lee Phillips visited Missoula and reported on his trip, Helena's *Plaindealer* noted another Black business, "Ye Old Inn Café ...on Front Street," where "the furnishings are rich & the service unexcelled," calling it "unquestionably the finest café in all Montana." Proprietor Frank J. Pierce, Phillips wrote, "one of Missoula's leading business men who at all times stands for the progress of Missoula & is ready to aid & assist any laudable undertaking for the uplift of the people." Other business enterprises in this period included Hattie Elliot's lodging house, substantial enough that she employed staff (possibly in the same place she lived downtown, at 245 W. Main Street), as well as a hotel run by William Hamlin. Joseph C. Johnson was enumerated as the proprietor of a "club house" in that period, when he lived at 1106 Cooper. Meanwhile, Ephraim Dorsey, then living at 515 W. Main, ran his own furniture upholstery business and Benjamin Johnson operated a chimney sweeping service. Dolly H. Guthrie ran a laundry service from her home at 333 East Second Street, while Mrs. Willie Hamlin (not to be confused with William Hamlin, who was not her husband) was self-employed as a "professional nurse." Black businesses in the Missoula area also included at least one farm: in

⁴⁵¹ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; "Missoula Man Takes Unto Himself a Wife."

⁴⁵² "Quarter Ending Nov 30 (Liquor License)"; Wood, "Dorsey House (MT Historic Property Record, #24MO1681)"; "Verdict of Not Guilty."

⁴⁵³ R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk's Missoula (Missoula County, Mont.) City Directory*; "Case of Goldbergs Awaits Decision."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

1900, Isaac VanPlatt (whose father and mother were born in "France" and "Africa" respectively) farmed a place that he owned west of town, near Frenchtown.⁴⁵⁴

In addition to residential neighborhoods and commercial enterprises, Missoula's Black community built institutions. An A.M.E. minister led a local congregation by April 1909. That year, after the Reverend S.E. Bailey "held his first services at the Adventist Church," newspapers noted the congregation's efforts to build a church, and within a year the A.M.E. group negotiated an agreement with the Missoula School Board to purchase the recently-vacated, original wood-frame Lowell School building. A new stone school was constructed in 1909 on the school property on the 1200 block of Phillips, and the original building was then moved to the 1400 block of Phillips, possibly to the lot the congregation was in the process of acquiring at 1427 Phillips. By June 1910, St. Paul's A.M.E. held regular services, and the congregation took title to the 1427 Phillips property, with the schoolhouse-cum-church, in 1911.⁴⁵⁵

As it invariably did in western Black communities, the church fostered broader community cohesion and organizing. In 1913, "St. Paul A.M.E. Rev. C. N. Douglass led the formation of a "Negro Citizens' Alliance" in response to undescribed racially-offensive signs that were posted at the ticket counter of the Empress theater and Pigg's tamale parlors," and in 1915, when the church "formally celebrated its establishment," it did so "with an all-day event" attended by "the Puget Sound 5th District A.M.E. Bishop H.B. Parks [and]... Missoula's mayor and pastors of the white Methodist Episcopal church as well. The day included a barbecue, the dedication ceremony, and a program inside the church that related the history of St Paul A.M.E. was given by member Gladys Dorsey. There was also an evening program with an address by Bishop Parks as well as the pastor from the Helena A.M.E. Church."⁴⁵⁶ The Black community based at St. Paul A.M.E. worked together with the regional community through other organizations. In 1911, the "delegation of colored men from this state to attend the National [Negro] Educational convention" in Denver, appointed by the Governor, included Missoula resident Edward Miller along with representatives from Helena, Bozeman, Great Falls, and Billings.⁴⁵⁷

Black Montana by 1900: Primary Cores Develop in Billings and Havre, Secondary Communities in Kalispell and Lewistown

Billings

While Ed Miller represented Missoula at the 1911 Negro Education Convention, Charles Browning and Henry Canola served as delegates from the Black community in Billings. As with other Black Montana cores established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, community growth in Billings flowed in part from the Montana influx of troops of 25th Infantry and 10th Cavalry. In the railroad, agricultural and industrial town of Billings, located some 50 miles from Fort Custer and 145 miles from Fort Keogh, this growth pattern roughly paralleled that of Great Falls with population growth fed in a less immediate fashion than Missoula's by the presence of "colored" military units. The new town incorporated in the 1880s and was just getting started when the Buffalo Soldiers moved into Montana; the town was orbited by not one but three U.S. Army bases, with Fort Mackenzie 124 miles to the southeast at Sheridan, Wyoming, also a Buffalo Soldiers base. Billings grew slower than early Great Falls, however, with both its total and Black populations well behind the Electric City. By 1890, Billings population totaled slightly over 800, only a few of whom were Black: extant census data from that year contain no information on the town's African American population, but that year enumerators listed

⁴⁵⁴ "Ye Old Inn At Missoula"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

⁴⁵⁵ "Colored Preacher Founds New Church"; Martin, "Hiding in Plain Sight"; "Lowell School History."

⁴⁵⁶ Martin, "Hiding in Plain Sight."

⁴⁵⁷ "We Are Thankful."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

only 14 Black residents in all of Yellowstone County (est. 1887), of which Billings was the seat. In subsequent years, Billings' Black population boomed. It grew about twice as fast as the city itself over the next decade, and in 1900 enumerators counted 89 Black residents. Ten years later they listed a community population of 144.⁴⁵⁸

Foremost among Billings' early Black residents was the Browning family, with Walker B. Browning—who arrived in December 1882—among the inhabitants of the settlement from its first months. Mr. Browning lived previously in Miles City for a year or two, was joined six months later by his wife Ruth Merriweather Browning and their three young children (baby Claudia among them), who traveled via stagecoach from the family's earlier home in Dakota Territory. The Brownings lived in the region for years. They married in Omaha and together moved to Fort Laramie, Wyoming in 1873, whereupon Walker Browning joined the United States government's Yellowstone National Park survey expedition as a cook. They subsequently moved to Deadwood during the Black Hills gold rush, and ca. 1881, leaving Ruth and their children in Dakota, "Walker followed the Great Northern line to Miles City" before settling in Billings. By 1884, the family owned and occupied a home Walker Browning built at 106 South 25th Street.⁴⁵⁹

Other early Black residents included people like Charles Hardick, who in 1883 served as a cook "at the Tivoli beer hall and lunch house," and later, men from the "colored" army units stationed nearby.⁴⁶⁰ Among such soldiers was decorated marksman Charles Bivins, who with the Tenth Cavalry was sent to Fort Custer, and while there spent time in Billings, where he met Claudia Browning before being deployed to fight in the Spanish American War.⁴⁶¹ By 1894, the community included "Mr. R.B. Brook, one of the leading colored citizens of Billings."⁴⁶² The following year Walker and Ruth Browning's eldest child, Wyoming-born daughter Lulu, married another of the city's early Black residents, Mr. Harry M. Smith, a barber born in the West Indies.⁴⁶³

By 1900, census enumerators counted some 89 Black people in Billings, and the community included a diversity of households situated in two residential clusters that flanked the Northern Pacific Railroad tracks and Billings' adjacent downtown commercial district. The north residential cluster was located in the first five blocks north of the tracks from 25th Street North to 33rd Street North, including that stretch of Montana Avenue. The southside cluster occupied the first four blocks south of the tracks from 25th Street South to 29th Street South, including that stretch of Minnesota Avenue. Several Black households in both these neighborhoods owned their homes. On the north side, barber Jeff Davis and his wife Molly owned their home at 305 N. 25th St., as did their neighbors at 321 N. 25th St., Lewis P. and Pauline Somerville, who lived with Pauline's adult son, Peter Johnson, and a pair of boarders (a married Black couple). The Somervilles may have owned rural property as well: Lewis P. Somerville patented a 160-acre Yellowstone County homestead, in Township 1 South Range 25 East, in 1895. Also owning a home north of the tracks were janitor William Scott and his wife Jennie, an immigrant from Spain, whose home at 103 N. 33rd Street was shared with three "roomers" (including a married Black couple and a White man from England).⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁸ Census Office, "Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Part I & Part II)"; U.S. Census Bureau, "1900 Census"; U.S. Census Bureau, "1910 Census."

⁴⁵⁹ *Western Heritage Center*; "Walker Browning, Billings Pioneer, Summoned by Death." Wood, "Mrs. Browning's Furnished Rooms (MT Historic Property Record, #24YL2046)."

⁴⁶⁰ "Local News," April 9, 1883.

⁴⁶¹ "Horace Bivins."

⁴⁶² "Local and Personal: September 17, 1894."

⁴⁶³ *Western Heritage Center*; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

⁴⁶⁴ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

On the southside, the Black homes clustered around Walker and Ruth Browning, who lived with their 20-year-old son Charles H. and 19-year-old daughter Claudia M, as well as brother-in law John Lee, 52, at their enduring 106 S. 25th Street home. Other southside homeowners included the Brownings' daughter Lulu Smith, who lived across the street with her husband Harry and their two young sons, Clarence W. and Roy A., in a home they owned at 107 S. 25th Street. A block away were other Black homeowners, including the Saunders and Belle Robinson family, at 21 S. 26th St., and widowed laundress Berchie Armstrong, who owned 202 S. 26th St., where she lived with her 14-year-old son Luke Bryant, a porter, At least three other southside households also owned homes that year, including Robert B. Brooke and his wife Edith, who owned the house they shared with their four children at 104 S. 27th St., as well as their next door neighbor, a 42-year-old widowed nurse named Rowena Roth, who lived alone. One block over was Mexico-born laundress Sarah James, 39, who lived along in a home she owned near the 2700 Block of Minnesota Avenue.⁴⁶⁵

Ten years later, the census population remained roughly the same, but that apparent stability masked significant movement in and out of the community as well as significant growth in home ownership, which doubled over the decade. People moved into and out of Billings for a variety of reasons. In October 1908, former local Joseph Thomas wrote to resident Mr. B. Adams from the Art Academy in Cincinnati Ohio, where he'd gone to study after being one of the first Black students admitted to the Academy. Horace Bivins, who after service in the Philippines was posted to Fort Missoula, married Claudia Browning in Billings in 1904, and the family thereafter moved repeatedly through their Billings family base. Claudia traveled with her husband back to Missoula and then Philippines when he was re-deployed there in 1906, returning to her parents' home in 1909 to give birth to her first child, a daughter named Ruth. At the same time Claudia's brother Charles Browning moved in and out of Billings, attending State Normal School from 1905-1907 and then after graduation returning to Billings, where he married a woman named Mary, "a widow from Washington DC," in 1907 and rented a house near his parents at 110 S. 25th Street. Claudia Browning's sister Lulu meanwhile remarried, wedding William McCabe around 1908, and subsequently lived with him and their blended extended family at 513 S. 34th Street. Walker Browning's brother George also was in and out of Billings in this period, and by 1910, with his new wife Isabelle, owned a home that he built at 121 26th Street South.⁴⁶⁶

That year, the census identified some 18 Black households owning their homes, on the southside—around the extended Browning family core—and in the enduring residential cluster north of the tracks. In addition to Walker and Ruth Browning, southside home owners continued to include at least one other family still in the home they'd occupied in 1900: Edith Brooke, divorced from Robert, continued to own and occupy 106 S. 27th Street. Other southside Black-owned homes in 1910 included those of Mexico-born Charles Rhodes and his wife Lula on South 23rd St., Mrs. Sarah C. Artillo on South 24th St., and barber Louis J. Covington on Minnesota Ave., as well as Thomas Simms at 110 S. 23rd St., Sanford Smith at 332 S. 25th St., Charles Lee at 14 S. 26th St., Louis P. Hart at 511 S. 26th St., and Anna May at 242 S. 28th Street.⁴⁶⁷ Louis P. Hart also patented a Yellowstone County homestead in 1916, securing 145 acres in Township 1 South Range 27 East.

On the northside, the Somervilles endured in their 321 N. 25th St. home, while other Black households owned property on N. 34th and N. 19th streets. On the second block of North 34th were the owner-occupied homes of James and Harriett Baltimore (at 113 N. 34th) and, next door, Benjamin B. and Leetta Adams, who lived at 109 N. 34th with their 18-year-old daughter Myrtle. Another four Black-owned homes were located on North 19th

⁴⁶⁵ Bureau of the Census.

⁴⁶⁶ *Western Heritage Center*; "Horace Bivins"; "Billings Notes," October 30, 1908; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

⁴⁶⁷ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Street, where Elijah and Selestine Jackson owned 18 N. 19th and John W. and Mary Moore owned 24 N. 19th, with William Henry Chandler and his wife Amelia up the street at 205 N. 19th and Australia-born Charles Johnson and his Tennessee-born wife Josephine two blocks farther north, at 401 N. 19th Street.⁴⁶⁸ William Chandler also acquired rural property, patenting 240 acres in Township 1 South Range 27 East, near Louis P. Hart, in 1915. Charles Johnson may have done the same: a man by that name patented a homestead in 1915, one township to the north.

The Billings community's level of homeownership was high for Black Montana, and it inspired notice and celebration in the pages of the *Plaindealer*. In October 1908, the paper's editors made their "first trip . . . of any duration" to Billings—whose Black population they put at around 300—and found themselves "agreeably surprised at the thrift and progress of the population thereof, and especially so of the thrift and prosperity of its colored citizenship . . . We are prepared to say that after careful inquiry and personal investigation that our people in Billings, Mont. own more real estate than the colored people of any other city in Montana and their real estate holdings aggregate close onto \$250,000. There is not a colored family in the town who does not own or are buying their own home. . . There are not to exceed 300 colored citizens in the city which makes the above accomplishment all the more remarkable."⁴⁶⁹ Black ownership of rural properties in the area reportedly surged in this period as well, especially after 1909 when new federal homestead legislation with "extra benefits for Spanish-American War veterans," facilitated homesteading by former Buffalo Soldiers in the region.⁴⁷⁰



Figure 28: "Mrs. Browning's Furnished Rooms," Pen and Ink by Anthony Wood, 24YL2046. On file at MT SHPO.

Like other local cores of Black Montana, the community in Billings developed a small but substantial business sector. The business sector, like the Black neighborhoods, started with some of the earliest residents. While her husband Walker worked various jobs, Ruth Browning "managed significant real estate holdings," and together the Brownings also operated "Billings' first ice cream truck."⁴⁷¹ [Figure 28] Other early Black businesses included Thomas Simms' restaurant (in 1900 his wife Susie worked as a cook at 2505 Montana, which may have been his establishment). Simms was a business "proprietor" in 1910 as well. Joining Simms in the restaurant business was Louis Somerville, with the 1901 city directory listing his restaurant at 2602 Minnesota Avenue. Around the same time, John Lee may have operated a saloon: the 1900 census listed his occupation as "bar keeper," and the following year the city directory noted him tending bar at 2622 Minnesota Avenue. That same source listed at least three Black barbershops in Billings: Louis Covington was proprietor of a

shop at 2704 Minnesota Ave, as was R.B. Brooke at 2712 ½ Minnesota Ave (where William Gardners also worked), and Jeff Davis, on the other side of the railroad tracks, at The Main, "under Radenmaker's Saloon" at 14 N. 27th Street.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ Bureau of the Census.

⁴⁶⁹ "Billings Progress and Push Plaindealer Main on the Scene This Week."

⁴⁷⁰ *Western Heritage Center*.

⁴⁷¹ *Western Heritage Center*.

⁴⁷² *Billings City Directory, 1900-1901: A Complete Alphabetical List of Business Firms and Private Citizens, with Much Other Valuable and Miscellaneous Information*; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Barberhops continued as a cornerstone commercial enterprise in 1910. That year, barbers Jeff Davis and Louis Covington endured at 14 N. 27th St. and 2704 Minnesota Ave., respectively, and Benjamin B. Adams was proprietor of a barbershop at 2714 Minnesota. The business sector included at least two enterprises large enough to be employers: A.J. Davis operated a coal mine that employed additional workers, and inn keeper Anna May employed staff at her "resort." More often, residents ran one-person business operations. In 1910, Mrs. Gracie Carroll worked as a seamstress from her home on Montana Avenue, as did Mrs. Frances Darkins, a dressmaker at 107 2nd Ave South. Anna Stewart and Maggie Thomas also had home-based businesses, as embroiderer and washerwoman, respectively, while William Henry Chandler was self-employed as a teamster, and Louis Sommerville as a drayman.⁴⁷³ Two years later, Belle Robinson Brown became a prominent businesswoman in the community after her husband, Walker Browning's younger brother George, died. In the wake of his December 1911 death, Belle opened a boarding house in the large two-story wood-frame home George had built, after their 1908 marriage, at 121 South 26th Street.⁴⁷⁴ Her boarding house stood at the center of a community that seemed to be booming, and inspired active boosterism: in 1909, "a colored minister of the gospel" in Billings published a pamphlet titled, "The Progress of the Negro in Eastern Montana," that he sought "to induce colored men from other sections of the country to come hither and locate."⁴⁷⁵

Alongside its neighborhoods and businesses, the busy Billings community built institutions. As in the other Black Montana cores, first and foremost among community institutions was the church. According to descendants, early Black residents founded an A.M.E. congregation in Billings around 1896.⁴⁷⁶ Within a short time the congregation had a church on the northwest corner of 3rd Avenue North and North 24th Street (302 N. 24th). The A.M.E. remained at that location until ca. 1915-1916, when the congregation moved the church building to an undeveloped lot on Billings southside, on the southwest corner of 4th Avenue South and S. 25th Street. By 1923, Wayman Chapel A.M.E. at 402 S. 25th also boasted an associated pastorage, located to the rear of the church at 404 S. 25th Street.⁴⁷⁷

Billings residents established social and fraternal institutions, along with political groups, women's clubs, and recreational organizations. In its "BILLINGS NOTES" of April 24, 1909, the *Plaindealer* noted the town's "Afro-American club" ("Officers...are L. Somerville, Pres. J.W. Moore, Vice Pres, B. Chandler, Sec/treasurer, B.B. Adams, Charles Overman"), and the following month the paper covered a visit to Helena by a delegation from Billings' Masonic Lodge: "They were met at the station by brothers Wheeler, Arnett & Smith of Unity Lodge No. 101 & taken to the home of Mrs. Cole," at 22 Breckenridge, where they lodged during their stay. Among other men active in the Billings lodge was Walker Browning, who served as "master of the Colored Mason lodge no. 32."⁴⁷⁸

The Browning family led political as well as social organizations in the community. In 1908, Charles Browning helped "form the Taft-Sherman Club to organize younger Black male voters and serve[d] as the first president."

⁴⁷³ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

⁴⁷⁴ *Western Heritage Center*.

⁴⁷⁵ "No Colored Colonies Wanted in Montana."

⁴⁷⁶ Susan Olp, "'Ups and Downs and Struggles' Wayman Chapel Still Going Strong after 120 Years on Billings' South Side," *Billings Gazette*, June 6, 2015, Section D, 1.

⁴⁷⁷ Sanborn Map Company, "Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Billings, Yellowstone County, Montana,," December 1903; Sanborn Map Company, "Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Billings, Yellowstone County, Montana,," 1912; Sanborn Map Company, "Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Billings, Yellowstone County, Montana,," 1923; R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk's Billings (Yellowstone County, Mont.) City Directory, Including Laurel and Yellowstone County*.

⁴⁷⁸ "Billings Notes," April 24, 1909; "Helena Is Highly Praised by the Masonic Visitors"; Wood, "Mrs. Browning's Furnished Rooms (MT Historic Property Record, #24YL2046)."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

In doing so, Charles followed in his father's footsteps: Walker Browning, like other Black men in Billings, was a leading member of Republican groups, and "was twice appointed as a delegate for the Republican primaries, and city conventions."⁴⁷⁹ In 1908, Billings Republicans "sent to the State Convention a colored delegate," and the following year a state senator from Billings hired in his office "a young colored man, Mr. William Jefferson, who [thereby became] an employee of the Senate."⁴⁸⁰ In 1911, members of the Billings community also led regional participation in the National Negro Educational convention, with Montana Governor Norris selecting Charles Browning and Henry Canola to represent Billings in the state delegation to the Denver convention, where W.E.B. DuBois was "the keynote speaker."⁴⁸¹

Ruth Browning accompanied her son Charles to the national educational convention, taking an active role in political life as well as in religious, social, and economic spheres. Other Black women were also active in community political and institutional life, and in September 1914 Billings residents formed a women's club. In 1920, this group developed into the Phyllis Wheatly Club, charter member of the Montana Federation of Negro Women's Clubs.⁴⁸² Prominent among the members of these organizations was Claudia Browning Bivins, who with her family settled in Billings after her husband Horace Bivins retired from active duty. Horace Bivins himself became a community leader in multiple realms, among them education. In 1907, the Parmley Billings Library held an exhibit of his "collection of unusual animal, plant, & shell specimens," and after retirement Bivins "was closely involved in developing and writing for a history of his unit. *Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry* traced the history of the African-Americans in military service during the period of 1866-1899."⁴⁸³

Havre

The town of Havre, on the Great Northern railroad near Fort Assiniboine, was incorporated in 1893, and became the seventh, and last, primary core of Black Montana in this period. At the time of its establishment, hundreds of Black soldiers staffed the neighboring Army base, just six miles to the southwest. Havre, thus, boasted a significant Black population from the beginning. Among these early residents was the family of Thomas Allsup, a 1st Sergeant who'd been stationed at Fort Assiniboine since 1892 and discharged five years later. In 1895, Thomas and wife Sadie welcomed their third child—son, Thomas Allsup Jr., who joined older sisters, Ethel, seven, and Marguerite, five—and in 1897 their family expanded again with the birth of another girl, Ina.⁴⁸⁴ The Allsup family formed a prominent part of the early population in the notoriously rowdy town, as did other Black residents. From the town's first years, African American people were prominent in the town's business and social life: local histories from 1894 recount Havre's Bucket of Blood saloon where "A Negro named 'Skinny' was pounding away on a piano on a platform at one end of the room," and "a bar on the west and east sides was partly partitioned off for a restaurant." This restaurant was run by a Black man named O.R.D. Wellbourne, and "had the reputation of being the best in the Northwest for steaks."⁴⁸⁵ By 1900, Havre's Black population was about 140 (counting the 50 or so people at Fort Assiniboine), and had coalesced into a community replete with families, homeowners, businesspeople, and autonomous institutions.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁷⁹ Wood, "Mrs. Browning's Furnished Rooms (MT Historic Property Record, #24YL2046)." *Western Heritage Center*.

⁴⁸⁰ "All Pages," January 15, 1909.

⁴⁸¹ "We Are Thankful."

⁴⁸² *Western Heritage Center*.

⁴⁸³ "Horace Bivins." *Western Heritage Center*.

⁴⁸⁴ Wood, "Allsup Family Home (MT Historic Property Record, #24HL1623)."

⁴⁸⁵ Hill County Bicentennial Commission, *Grit, Guts, and Gusto*, 290.

⁴⁸⁶ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Havre's 1900 population included a number of families with children, among them several that owned the homes they occupied. Among homeowners, along with Thomas and Sadie Allsup were Patrick and Minnie Shelton, on farms, Sam and Georgia Spaulding, and Mary Conley, whose husband Paschal was at the time stationed in Cuba serving in the Spanish American War. The community in Havre comprised various couples and individuals, several of whom also owned their homes. Twenty-nine-year-old widowed farmer Mrs. Carrie Mason owned a farm near the Conleys, and restaurateur O. R. D. Wellbourne owned a home in town. In August, 1907, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Reston were "building for themselves a modern house on their plots on 3rd Ave & 5th Street," and by 1910, the Daniel and Maggie Johnson family also owned a home in Havre, located on Third Street as did William H. Barnes, at 700 1st Street.⁴⁸⁷



Figure 29: "Alice 'Ma Plaz' Pleasant," Unknown photographer, c. 1910-1920. Montana Historical Society Research Center, 944-366.

Several of these residents operated prominent businesses in Havre, and had since the town's earliest days. As noted above, in 1894 Osbourne R. D. Wellbourne ran a restaurant in the Bucket of Blood Saloon, where "a bar on the west and east sides was partly partitioned off" for his enterprise.⁴⁸⁸ Alice Pleasant, whom sources frequently referred to as "Ma Plaz," also began operating a prominent restaurant in Havre in the 1890s. It was reportedly "first located in the rear of Bailey's and Purnell's saloon" and subsequently "in the Montana National Bank ... She gained fame for her chicken dinners, quick wit, and generosity." Both Mrs. Pleasant and Mr. Wellbourne continued to operate restaurants in town for years, with the *Plaindealer* noting in July 1907 that "O.R.D. Welborne has opened the finest café in the city on First Street next to Hotel Havre," while Mrs. Pleasant's Home Café on the corner of First Street and Second Avenue became a Havre institution.⁴⁸⁹ [Figure 29] Mrs. Pleasant also ran an associated boarding house at times, including in 1900, when the census noted her doing so. That year, at least three Black women in town were self-employed as dressmakers, and another two women were self-employed milliners (Ella Hawkins, Julia Black, and Lela Darling, and Frances Anderson and Pauline Johnson, respectively). Others who may have run their own businesses in

1900 include two musicians (Lorena Spaulding and William A. Tunth) and laundress Lottie Brown, miner William Atle, and brickmakers Harry Johnson and Andrew Walton.⁴⁹⁰

A number of other Havre residents also likely ran their own businesses. As noted above, around 1900, a number of people resided on farms they owned, and these agricultural operations may have been homesteaded. Homesteading proved a critical part of the local economy, with numerous Black community members patenting nearby claims. Samuel Spaulding patented land in T 32N R15E in 1901, as did his daughter Lorena Spaulding in 1911. Caroline Mason patented land in the same area in 1903, and the following year Paschal Conley did likewise, securing patent to 138 acres. In 1910, Margaret Conley patented 320 acres elsewhere in Hill County.⁴⁹¹ The original Conley place was just outside of town, and in July 1907 the *Plaindealer* reported in its Havre Notes column that "Mrs. M.J. Conley has established a dairy on the ranch, two miles from the city, & now

⁴⁸⁷ Bureau of the Census; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; "Havre Notes," August 30, 1907.

⁴⁸⁸ Hill County Bicentennial Commission, *Grit, Guts, and Gusto*, 290.

⁴⁸⁹ Wilson, *Honky-Tonk Town*, 4; "[Alice Pleasant]"; Hill County Bicentennial Commission, *Grit, Guts, and Gusto*, 306-7; "Historic and Architecturally Significant Resources of Downtown Havre, Montana, 1889-1959"; "Havre Notes," August 30, 1907.

⁴⁹⁰ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

⁴⁹¹ "General Land Office Records."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

supplies a large number of Havreites with the best milk, cream & buttermilk.” Also operating a profitable business that year in Havre was Mrs. Lawson, who hired Mrs. S. Payne of Great Falls to come stay in Havre and assist “at her dress-making parlors.”⁴⁹²

By that time, Havre’s community established a formal institutional foundation, having organized an A.M.E. congregation ca. 1902. By July of that year, under the guidance of the Reverend Baker of Great Falls A.M.E., the Havre congregation “bought a lot and paid \$100 cash and got the deed and bought a building 18’x40’. The building cost \$75.”⁴⁹³ This early site was possibly “on the North side,” and served as a base for the A.M. E. group, which formally incorporated as “a Religious Corporation, not for profit, under and by virtue of the law of the State of Montana” on November 14, 1903.⁴⁹⁴ Less than four years later, the congregation of St. Stephens A.M.E. upgraded its Havre facilities, with the *Plaindealer* reporting in its July 12, 1907 edition that “At last after many trials & tribulations the Afro-Americans have a church in which they can seat themselves with pride.” The new church, purchased after a visit by “The Rev. Redd & wife,” comprised “a fine corner lot with a building on it at the corner of Third St. & Sixth Ave in the east part of town.” The congregation “remodeled the building, papered & painted the inside, & put in the electric lights & an organ,” by the time of the paper’s publication. By October 1907, when the Rev. J.H. Redd “was appointed pastor of the AME church,” an associated parsonage was also under construction (with pastor Redd “working hard” on it).⁴⁹⁵

Early trustees of the church included Thomas Allsup and Charles Lawson, along with secretary C. A. Albernathy and president William Jackson. Reverend W. B. Williams “served as their first pastor.... In later years Reverend Simon J. Holley pastored both the church in Havre and the Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Great Falls.” Under their leadership “The Havre church served the spiritual needs of not only” local residents and “Great Northern railway employees, but the Negroes who had to lay over in Havre between trains.”⁴⁹⁶ It also served as a foundation for broader Black community building, both locally and throughout the region. In Havre, other community organizations that coalesced around the church at this time included the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Literary Society, which in October 1907 “finished paying for the wiring of the church,” where the group met every Thursday night.⁴⁹⁷

As is fostered further community cohesion in Havre, the church simultaneously strengthened the town’s connection to Black Montana, as local leaders and members collaborated with A.M.E. representatives throughout the region. In August 1907 such collaboration included a three-day visit from “the presiding elder Hubbard ... also Rev & Mrs. Redd,” then of Great Falls Union Bethel A.M.E. church. Two years later, the “Rev. S.E. Bailey of Havre, Montana, assisted Rev. Greenlea in his quarterly Meeting” one February Sabbath in Helena. The integration of the local community with the regional community was reflected too, in secular spheres at this time, with *Plaindealer* editor and community leader J. B. Bass not only featuring a regular “Havre Notes” column in the paper but also, in August 1906, spending “the week in Havre in the interest of The Plaindealer.” Bass also toured surrounding Chouteau County “with laudatory profiles of white Republican candidates in local elections.”⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹² “Havre Notes,” August 30, 1907; “Havre Notes,” July 12, 1907.

⁴⁹³ “Great Falls News Notes.”

⁴⁹⁴ Hill County Bicentennial Commission, *Grit, Guts, and Gusto*, 335–36.

⁴⁹⁵ “Havre Notes,” July 12, 1907; “Havre Notes,” October 18, 1907.

⁴⁹⁶ Hill County Bicentennial Commission, *Grit, Guts, and Gusto*, 335–36; “June, 2013.”

⁴⁹⁷ “Havre Notes,” October 18, 1907.

⁴⁹⁸ “Havre Notes,” August 30, 1907; “Locals,” February 12, 1909; “All Pages,” August 24, 1906.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Kalispell and Lewistown, Secondary Core Communities

While in the course of the 1890s Billings and Havre joined Black Montana's handful of primary core communities, two other towns, Kalispell and Lewistown, emerged as secondary cores. The two towns grew in different ways, but by the 1900 census, both boasted area populations of about 30. Thereafter, Kalispell's Black population remained relatively steady. The Black community in Lewistown, on the other hand, boomed after the turn of the century, when homesteading spread through central and eastern Montana and contributed to intense local population growth.

Kalispell was founded and platted in 1891 by the Great Northern Railway, then under construction, as a division point along its line west of the Rockies.⁴⁹⁹ As they were in Havre—Great Northern's base on the east side of the mountains—Black people were prominent among the town's earliest residents. Even before the railroad arrived, the local deputy sheriff documented Black presence in Kalispell's precursor, a nearby settlement called Demersville, when he reported having in his "full jail" prisoners accused of a varied crimes, including two men charged with stealing a Black prostitute's "bed and selling it to buy whiskey."⁵⁰⁰ Recalling Kalispell of the 1893-94 period, one man described how around that time "Jerry Phillips in his saloon had two Negro minstrels who played their banjos, sang and danced jigs. They performed every night in the week, and were good performers, popular with their audiences."⁵⁰¹ In this early period, Kalispell's Black population included a variety of people, families and children among them: in January of 1895, William Allen, who later lived in Great Falls and bartended at the Maple Leaf Club, was born in Kalispell.⁵⁰²

In subsequent years, Kalispell continued to sustain a small local Black community. Like other Montana locales, that community was anchored in Kalispell by several extended families. Primary among these was the White family: John Wilkerson White, born enslaved in North or South Carolina ca. 1854, was in the area by 1894, and two years later was hired by the Kalispell School Board as a janitor at Central School, where he worked for 38 years. By 1900, John White lived with his second wife Helen, along with his three children from his first wife Josephine (Ella, Joseph, and Frederick) in a rental at 310 2nd Street.⁵⁰³

That year, the White family was the largest Black family in town, which then counted some 28 African American residents. Eight of the other residents enumerated by census takers were men who worked as train porters and enumerated in a trackside boardinghouse at 17 1st Avenue West. The remainder were women, men, and children in varied occupations and an assortment of households. They included at least one other school-age child, 11-year-old Clyde Jones (a student boarder) and four married couples. Two of these couples owned their homes. Barber Henry Lamb and his wife Agnes owned their property, a "farm" where they lived with one boarder, a White woodchopper born in Sweden. The Lambs' place was likely a homestead that Henry patented in 1898 in Township 28 North Range 21 West. Farmer Thomas Parnell and his wife Charity shared their 102 3rd Avenue West home with their niece, hairdresser Emma Burnette. The other two married couples—Thomas and Lena Stapleton (a "laborer" and servant," respectively) and "dancer singer" Henry Anderson and his wife Delilah—rented their homes.⁵⁰⁴

⁴⁹⁹ McKay, "Historic and Architectural Properties of Kalispell, Montana."

⁵⁰⁰ Johns, *The Pioneers*, 9:23.

⁵⁰¹ Elwood, *Kalispell, Montana and the Upper Flathead Valley*, 107.

⁵⁰² Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁵⁰³ "Negro Who Was One Time Slave, Succumbs at Home in Kalispell"; Logan, "Obituary: John W. White"; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

⁵⁰⁴ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

In 1910, Kalispell's enumerated population dropped to 23, but homeownership among the community spread noticeably. The Whites were among homeowners by then, and owned their home at 304 7th Avenue West free and clear, living there with their two young children, John and Sarah, as well as John Sr.'s 19-year-old son Joseph. Also owning her home by then was widow Lena Stapleton, residing at 704 6th Avenue East. As they had previously, the Lambs owned their residence, now located at 703 8th Avenue West, where they lived with an adult niece and young nephew, Clifford Busch. So too did Edward and Minnie Cooper (644 3rd Ave. E.), Martina and Mary McCoy (30 1st Ave. E), and John and Anna Rice (904 6th Ave. E). That year, several of the town's Black residents ran their own businesses. Mrs. Stapleton ran a laundry business from her home, as did Mrs. Anna Rice from hers. Hairdresser Mrs. Mary McCoy likewise ran a home-based business. Among men, Martin McCoy was listed that year working as a barbershop porter, but soon he, too, operated his own business; a 1913 newspaper report identified him as a "colored proprietor of a well-known shining parlor."⁵⁰⁵

In Lewistown, Black population totals varied more broadly, as the surrounding agricultural region boomed after 1900 and the established Métis settlement in the Judith Basin surged with the influx of non-Indians. Fergus County (established 1885), of which Lewistown became the county seat, witnessed earlier mineral rushes that spawned settlements like Gilt Edge, Maiden, Yogo, and Utica, but in 1890 enumerators listed only 17 Black residents in the whole of the county. By 1900, a year after the formal incorporation of Lewistown, this number totaled 30, and by 1910 it totaled 64, with 54 enumerated that year in the county seat itself.⁵⁰⁶

African American people counted among Lewistown's residents even before the town's 1899 incorporation. Alex Branson, a Civil War veteran from Massachusetts, came to Montana in 1872 and lived for some time in Helena before moving to the Judith Basin, where he engaged in stockraising, in 1881. When Lewistown began to grow he moved into town and "started a barber shop and later was engaged in the saloon business."⁵⁰⁷ Josephine Edrington Lawson, meanwhile, operated a saloon on Great Falls' southside in 1896, and moved to Lewistown the following year.⁵⁰⁸ Bertie Brown also came to the Fergus County area around that time, and "when Gilt Edge was booming ... resided there and later she resided in the Valentine area [some 50 miles to the northeast] for five years," before she "settled on Brickyard Creek near Black Butte in the early 1900's," about midway between Valentine and Gilt Edge.⁵⁰⁹ From her rural homestead, that she patented in 1913, Brown became a prominent member of the Lewistown area community. Details on Brown's business or agricultural operation on her homestead in this period remain vague. In 1900, census takers listed her occupation as "snake farmer."⁵¹⁰

By that year, the Black community living in Lewistown proper included a variety of other households in addition to those of Branson—who boarded with a Black couple, Alexander and Georgia McCoy, when he was enumerated—and Josephine Lawson. Lawson, for her part, appeared to be running a brothel, and was listed as the head of a household that included herself and three other Black women, all working as "prostitutes," as well as a White man who was a "musician."⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁵ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; "Charge of White Slavery Against Kalispell Negro."

⁵⁰⁶ Census Office, "Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Part I & Part II)"; U.S. Census Bureau, "1900 Census"; U.S. Census Bureau, "1910 Census"; Hagen, "Northern Plains Borders and the People in Between, 1860-1940."

⁵⁰⁷ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," December 26, 2012.

⁵⁰⁸ Robison, "Black American Steamboatmen on the Upper Missouri."

⁵⁰⁹ Roy History Committee, *Homestead Shacks over Buffalo Tracks*, 71.

⁵¹⁰ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; "General Land Office Records."

⁵¹¹ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Besides Mrs. McCoy and the seven women described as prostitutes, enumerators listed several other Black females in Lewistown in the 1900 census. They included “washer woman” Mrs. Laura Ferguson—whose mother Fanny Ferguson still lived in nearby Maiden—as well as her eight-year-old daughter Ada, a student, both living with Laura’s husband John Ferguson. The only other female enumerated was Emma Richardson, a “house maid” who lived in the home of her employers. Black men in Lewistown included the aforementioned as well as other married and single individuals, several of whom worked as laborers. The Black community in Fergus County worked in other occupations elsewhere. Mrs. Emma Orr made a living as a dressmaker in a home she owned, and occupied with her toddler son Jack, in Gilt Edge, where Adeline Hoffman also lived, with the Skaggs family, for whom she worked as a “cook.” Black men, meanwhile, could be found in Denton, where Willis Carter was a cook on the Evers sheep ranch, and in the Utica area. Also in the Utica area lived barber Thomas H. White, formerly of Virginia City and Butte and enumerated living at Frank and Emily Samb’s hotel, as well as, nearby, shepherd Jeff Whaley on the Simeon Hobson ranch.⁵¹²

Lewistown’s Black population more than doubled over the next 10 years, as rural residents in the area moved to the growing burg and other people moved to Fergus County from elsewhere. By 1909, the Black community in the county seat grew so much that at that year’s convention the regional Minister’s Alliance of the A.M.E. church targeted it when “sending the different ministers to the different cities to start churches.” Three towns were so targeted, with the group sending “Rev. Abbot to Lewistown & Livingston & Rev. Cate to Miles City.” The 1910 census showed over 50 African American people in Lewistown, some of them longtime townsfolk, others previously-rural residents who moved to town, joining the earlier residents, and still others new Fergus County residents.⁵¹³

Chief among longtime residents in 1910 was Alexander Branson, living at 104 Main, who by then operated his own barber shop. Mrs. Georgia McCoy, widowed, owned her home and was self-employed as a seamstress. Willis Carter still working as a cook and moved from the Evers Ranch to the outskirts of Lewistown, where he lived with two other Black men as well as a man from China. Newer arrivals joined this venerable trio, and included a number of businesspeople and property owners. At least three women in town, Mamie Jacobs, Dinah Brooks and Viola Moore (all single), ran lodging houses. Notably, all three occupied rented buildings on the 200 Block of 2nd Avenue, where a number of other Black people (as well as at least one Chinese immigrant) lived, suggesting something of an enclave. Another four women had laundry businesses, among them Viola Moore’s “roomer” Anna Brooks. In addition to Branson’s barber shop, the most prominent Black-owned business in this period may have been the Temple Café. Owned originally by Lucien Gray, a former Helena resident, the café “in the basement of the Masonic Temple” was run by William Holland by March 1911, when Miss Vera Simmons from Helena went to work there as cashier.⁵¹⁴

Most other Black adults were employed as cooks, laborers, and housekeepers in various places around town, with several working in less common capacities or especially prominent properties. John Tandy, who roomed at the Bright Hotel, worked as a machinist, and musicians Ed Buckner, Bill Holland and Frank Lofton made a living playing piano. Buckner lived with his wife Daisy on the aforementioned 200 Block of 2nd Avenue and Holland, formerly of Helena, lived with his wife Alice at 223 Janeaux. Meanwhile, single Frank Lofton roomed in Hattie Dunn’s lodging house along with Mrs. Lizzie Anderson, who worked as a cook for a private family. James Reid, who lived with his wife Mollie in a rental at 102 Boulevard Street, tended bar in a “club room,” and Hartzell Ball worked as janitor at the Power Mercantile Company. Mr. Ball and his wife Ida lived with their son

⁵¹² Bureau of the Census.

⁵¹³ “All Pages,” April 23, 1909; U.S. Census Bureau, “1910 Census”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform].”

⁵¹⁴ Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform]”; “Locals,” March 24, 1911.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

and their aunt, as well as with a roomer—a 71-year-old man from China named Toy Mow—in a house they rented at 500 Main Street. With the exception of Hartzell Ball himself, all of the adults in the household worked as restaurant cooks.⁵¹⁵



Figure 30: "Ruins of Bertie Brown's Cabin," Ghost Ranches series by Jane Stanfel, artist. Oil on canvas, c. 2010. Courtesy Jane Stanfel.

As these specifics suggest, Lewistown's Black populace resided for the most part in a variety of rental housing. Besides George McCoy, in 1910 enumerators listed only one other Black-owned residence in town, that of I. Melton, an 18-year-old man who owned his home at 107 Main Street. In addition to townsfolk, some Lewistown community members living in rural Fergus County owned their homes. In 1910, Charles and Minnie Reed owned the School District No. 1 farm—which they may have homesteaded and patented that year—where they lived with their two young sons. Meanwhile, Bertie Brown, who was enumerated in School District No. 24 living with her White business "partner" Rosie Day, owned the property she occupied, probably the homestead on Black Butte Road that she patented in 1913 [Figure 30]. Census

takers listed Ms. Brown as a self-employed "housekeeper" working in the "boarding" industry, but it is unclear what this entailed, or where she worked.⁵¹⁶

Lewistown continued to boom after census takers completed their work in 1910, and the local Black community welcomed a variety of members in these years. Many of them came from other places in Montana, their movement reflecting and reinforcing the regional community of which Lewistown was a substantial component. Anthony J. Young moved to Lewistown in 1909 from Virginia City, where he lived since moving from Helena two years earlier. Around 1915, a Black man by the name of Miles who'd been living at the mouth of Blood Creek near Teigen, "packed up and moved to Lewistown ... with everything he owned." Mr. Miles reportedly made the move in haste after neighbors stored the corpse of a drowning victim in his cabin when he wasn't home.⁵¹⁷ Also in 1915, after marrying earlier that year in Butte, newlyweds Martin Luther and Emma Riley Harris Smith moved to Lewistown with their infant daughter Madeline. Mr. Smith was a cook for the Milwaukee Railroad in Butte, and continued working for the railway in Lewistown, where in November 1916, he and Emma had a second daughter, Alma Victoria Smith.⁵¹⁸

Other Localities

Between them, the primary and secondary core locales established in this period housed the vast majority of Black Montana. Together, the residents of Helena, Butte, Anaconda, Great Falls, Missoula, Billings, and Havre, as well as Bozeman, Miles City, Kalispell and Lewistown accounted for over 75% of the state's Black population in 1910. At the same time, however, Black people built prominent roles in a score of other communities, and Black places could be found all over Montana. Foremost among them was a constellation of central Montana towns around Lewistown and Great Falls. These included Gilt Edge and Maiden northeast of Lewistown (in the Judith Mountains) and, just to the southwest of the Fergus County seat, Moore, Utica, and

⁵¹⁵ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

⁵¹⁶ Bureau of the Census; "General Land Office Records."

⁵¹⁷ *Pages of Time*, 577.

⁵¹⁸ "M. L. Smith Dies; Rites Are Pending."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Yogo. Farther southwest, on the other side of the Little Belt Mountains, White Sulphur Springs boasted especially prominent Black residents, as did the town of Belt to the north, near Great Falls. On the other side of Great Falls, up the Missouri River to the southwest, Black people played prominent roles in the Cascade/St. Peter's Mission area. Still farther south and west, Black individuals were particularly prominent and enduring in Virginia City and the surrounding Madison County area.

The many homes of Black Montana also included towns scattered across the state. In some places, a few significant individuals, or sometimes large work crews, formed a prominent Black presence at different times. In others, state institutions—like the prison at Deer Lodge or the Insane Asylum at Warm Springs—held a disproportionate number of Black people in their inmate populations. Overall, in this period the Black community inhabited every county in the state, and could be found at myriad rural sites in western, central, and eastern Montana. In these dispersed locales, people worked at mining, ranching, and, especially after 1900, farming and homesteading.

Gilt Edge and Maiden

Gilt Edge and Maiden burst into being in the early 1880s, when a gold rush “in the Judith mountains near Lewistown boomed as the Gold Reef and Whisky Gulch diggings brought rich strikes.” Like such rushes across the West, the Judith Mountains mining boom pulled people from near and far, some of them African American people who became permanent, prominent residents of the region. In 1896, Bozeman's Adeline Hoffman arrived in the Judiths with the Skaggs family as they joined the rush to Gilt Edge. Adeline had by then been in the Gallatin Valley for some 10 years, and when she moved to the Judith goldfields she quickly established herself as a local pillar

became the community nurse, often caring for the patients of Dr. William J. Lakey who operated the Miners' Union Hospital in Gilt Edge. She was known as “Doc” to the early miners. In addition to helping with the birth of the eight Skaggs children, Adeline was present as midwife at the birth of many of the children of the surrounding communities. By the time the ore ran out and the mines closed down, Adeline's capable hands had brought scores of children into the world in central Montana in the days when it was a week's ride to the nearest doctor... Among those whose children Adeline ushered into the world were “Teddy Blue” Abbott of “We Pointed Them North” fame and Bill Burnett, who trailed north with three Texas herds, captained the first big Montana roundup, and led the Vigilantes who knew the outlaw Kid Curry...Adeline's activities didn't stop with the children. She mothered cowpunchers and miners, gamblers and touts, and no one was turned down. ...Governor Roy E. Ayers knew her and State Historical Librarian John B. Rich, once a cowpuncher, was her friend.⁵¹⁹

After “Gilt Edge became a ghost town,” Adeline Hoffman remained prominent in the area, moving with the Skaggs family “to a ranch near by and then, a few years later, to a ranch location near the Judith Mountain Divide where the Skaggs brothers operated the largest coal mine in the district,” and lived in “the big, two-story stone Skaggs ranch house in the coulee on the east slope of the Judith mountains, near Lewistown, Mont.”⁵²⁰ While serving the Skaggs family and the Gilt Edge community in these crucial ways, Hoffman also worked to acquire her own property, claiming a homestead a few miles east of Gilt Edge. She succeeded in patenting it in 1911, gaining title to T16 N R 21 East. Hoffman was enumerated in Park County in 1920, but for the most part

⁵¹⁹ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” January 30, 2015.

⁵²⁰ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” January 30, 2015.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

remained in Fergus County, perhaps the most enduring member of the Lewistown area Black community, until her death, at the age of 93, in 1941.⁵²¹

Other African American people joined Adeline Hoffman in the Gilt Edge region gold rush. Longtime Fergus County resident Bertie Brown, noted above, first came to the area "when Gilt Edge was booming ... resided there and later she resided in the Valentine area [some 50 miles to the northeast] for five years," before she settling in the 1890s "on Brickyard Creek near Black Butte," about midway between Valentine and Gilt Edge.⁵²² Black women were also prominent in Maiden, just a few miles from Gilt Edge, on the west slope of the mountains at the head of Warm Spring Creek. Among them Mrs. Frances M. "Fanny" Ferguson and her teenage daughter Laura. Born into slavery in Missouri, Fanny brought her daughter to Montana in the early 1880s with a White family whose children she'd been hired to care for, traveling "by train to Bismarck and then overland by ox train to Fort Maginnis, Montana Territory." From there Fanny and Laura "moved on to the mining town of Maiden," where "they rented a cabin, made and sold ice cream, and did laundry," while also homesteading: Fanny Ferguson patented her 148-acre claim in Township 16 North Range 19 East in 1899. Laura Ferguson moved to Great Falls by 1890, but Mrs. Fanny Ferguson remained in Maiden well into the next century, with local directories noting her still there in 1914. Along with her ice cream shop, she "was a very capable nurse, and served as a doctor in the community. She made medicines from roots and herbs and was known to everyone."⁵²³

Yogo, Utica and Moore

Like Adeline Hoffman and Bertie Brown, Millie Ringold settled in and helped develop more than one Montana town. An early resident of Fort Benton, Millie was one of the many who moved on from Benton to various other locales in the region as opportunities arose. After having "cooked at Fort Benton and also for an army officer's family at Fort Shaw," she developed businesses in early Belt by 1880, and also in Yogo City, some 60 miles southeast of Belt, where she likely first went in 1878 or '79 and where she became for decades, the most enduring and prominent resident. Millie traveled to Yogo Gulch with the gold rush, which brought as many as 1,200-1,500 people. There she invested her substantial savings, variously reported at \$1,600 and \$3,600, and with this capital built cabins, "established a hotel, restaurant and saloon and located several mining claims, one the James A. Garfield and one the Martha Washington. She worked the claims and hired a Negro man to work for her." She quickly became locally renown, known not only for owning the community's main business and social center but also "as being very musical, using whatever she had – mouthharp, hand saw, washboard, dish-pans. The miners bragged that she could make more music with an empty five-gallon can, than most people could playing a piano."⁵²⁴ By 1886, she was already being written about in regional papers as "the celebrated African prospector...the bonanza queen."⁵²⁵

⁵²¹ "General Land Office Records"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; "Adeline Hoffman (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)."

⁵²² Roy History Committee, *Homestead Shacks over Buffalo Tracks*, 71.

⁵²³ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; "General Land Office Records."

⁵²⁴ Ken Robison, "Millie Ringgold's Fascinating Story," *Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana* (blog), December 31, 2009, <http://blackamericansmt.blogspot.com/2009/12/millie-ringolds-fascinating-story.html>; Robison, "On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3"; "Yogo Gulch, Lewistown Montana (Ghost Town)," Travel MT, accessed January 12, 2022, http://www.travelmt.com/mt_sites_6795_Yogo+Gulch.html; Moser, "Images of the West"; Behan, "Millie Ringold (1845-1906) •"; "Millie Ringgold and 'Coal Oil Johnny.'"

⁵²⁵ "The Gordons and White Sulphur Springs."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State



Figure 31: "Mille Ringold at Yogo," Unknown photographer, 1904. Montana Historical Society Research Center, 944-585.

When the Yogo gold boom went bust within a few years and almost everyone left, Millie Ringold stayed. [Figure 31] In the ensuing years she worked a growing number of claims, which she "bought...from departing miners"—some of them in Barker, where in 1900 she was enumerated working as a prospector and laundress and living in a home she owned—and continued running a boarding house in Yogo City. At different times, she worked for people in the area, often in Utica, where in the early 1880s she "cooked for [one local] family in such busy times as lambing, shearing and haying," or in White Sulphur Springs, about 50 miles southwest of Yogo, where she lived in February 1886, "earning a livelihood by washing." Later in life she "made a precarious living by washing for prospectors, raising a few chickens and turkeys, and occasionally cooking or nursing" until she died in 1906 in Yogo. In a testament to her local stature, "the supervisor of the English-owned Yogo sapphire mine personally drove the mine wagon team to take Millie's body to Utica Cemetery for burial."⁵²⁶ When famed artist Charlie Russell painted "A Quiet Day in Utica," the following year, "as a tribute to Millie, he placed her standing once again on the boardwalk in front of Lehman's General Store, along with other recognized locals. They're all watching a bucking horse, spooked by a dog darting across the dusty street. Both horse and dog are terrified by the clanging and drumming of cans tied to the dog's tail, prominent among them, Millie's empty five-gallon coal oil can."⁵²⁷ [Figure 32]

⁵²⁶ Robison, "On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3."

⁵²⁷ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," December 31, 2009; Robison, "On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3"; "Yogo Gulch, Lewistown Montana (Ghost Town)"; Moser, "Images of the West"; Behan, "Millie

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Also in the Utica area in this period were the Sabbingtons, i.e. Henry and Patsy. After marrying in Great Falls in 1889, the Sabbingtons patented a homestead claim near Yogo, in T13N R12E, in 1898. Henry left for the gold fields in Alaska shortly thereafter, and in 1900 Patsy lived alone in a rented home in Utica, working as a laundress. She stayed until at least 1904—directories that year listed her among Utica-area farmers—and by 1910 moved to Great Falls, where she lived with her adopted daughter Lucy until she died in 1913. The first bequest she listed in her will was to the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Utica. Also enumerated in Utica in 1900 was barber Thomas H. White, formerly of Virginia City, Helena, and Butte, now widowed and boarding at the Samb hotel, as well as Arthur Jamison (a cook who lodged with saloon keeper William Johnson) and Jeff Whaley (a shepherd on the Simeon Hobson ranch). Thomas White remained in the Utica-Moore vicinity, working as a barber, until shortly before his death in 1909. That March, White took sick while visiting in Belt, and died after being transported to Columbus Hospital in Great Falls. His body returned to Belt for funeral services at the Catholic Church and burial in Pleasant View Cemetery.⁵²⁸



Figure 32: *A Quiet Day in Utica*, originally called *Tinning a Dog*, Oil, 1907. C.M. Russell, Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, TX.

Ringold (1845-1906) •”; “Millie Ringold and ‘Coal Oil Johnny.’”

⁵²⁸ “General Land Office Records”; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform]”; “Mrs. Patsie Sabbington (State of MT, Certificate of Death)”; “Patsy Sabbington (Will)”; “Did Not Regain Consciousness”; “Cabin Boy for Admiral Perry.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

White Sulphur Springs

As these biographical sketches attest, many Black Montanans in this period were prominent figures in more than one community. Millie Ringold, for instance, was not only memorialized around Utica by Charlie Russell but was also well remembered by many elsewhere, among them members of Montana's African American community, like Rose Gordon. Rose Gordon's parents John Francis Gordon and Mary Anna "Anna" Goodall originally arrived in Montana via Fort Benton around the same time as Millie, and Mr. Gordon's work as a cook took them from Fort Benton to a series of mining camps and then to White Sulphur Springs. By then they had two young children, a son, Robert, born in 1881 in Illinois, and a daughter, Rose, who came into the world in 1883 in Barker, Montana, a silver-mining camp in the Little Belt Mountains, some 60 miles northeast of White Sulphur Springs: in a reflection of the dominant White/Indian racial dichotomy in Montana at the time, Rose Gordon was known as "the first "White" child born in White Sulphur Springs."⁵²⁹ Rose's family likely knew Millie in Benton and Barker as well as White Sulphur, and Rose recalled being enthralled as a child when Millie came to stay at the Gordon home. In adulthood, she cherished "a photograph of Millie given to her brother," George Gordon. She still lived in White Sulphur at that time. Like their old friend Millie Ringold, the Gordon family settled early in the area and became prominent longtime residents of the region.⁵³⁰

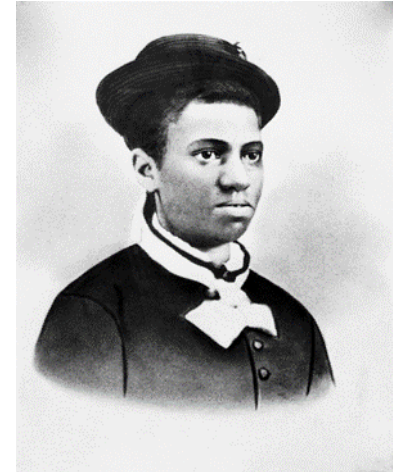


Figure 33: "Mary Anna 'Anna' Gordon," Unknown photographer, n.d.. Montana Historical Society Research Center, 951-714.

After arriving in White Sulphur around 1883, John and Anna Gordon established a home and set to work to support and raise their growing family, with four more boys born over the next decade—John Jr. (a.k.a. Sam, b. 1885), George Washington. (b. 1888), Arthur (b. 1890) and Taylor (b. 1893). The family originally came to town so John could take "a job offer ... to become chef at the Higgins House resort hotel," and subsequently his "work as a cook often took him away from his family."⁵³¹ Anna Gordon stayed with their children, writing her husband letters when he was away—two from 1889, when John worked "in the nearby mining camp of Castle," are extant—and the family remained in White Sulphur after John Gordon died in a train accident on a Canadian railroad, where he was "working as a chef," in 1893.⁵³² [Figure 33]

In White Sulphur the Gordon family was part of a small but substantial local Black population that formed an enduring component of the larger Montana African American community. When John Gordon died, Anna was seven months pregnant (with youngest son Taylor) with four young children, having lost son Arthur to whooping cough in October 1891, when he was one year old. Thereafter "always hard pressed for money to keep her family going," Anna toiled endlessly. She "took in washing and ironing and worked for the wealthy people of the town." She raised chickens and eggs for sale and often "assisted at private dinners and parties, eventually establishing a successful catering business," and becoming "the primary caterer for home parties, weddings, balls, and various events held at the town's auditorium." Anna, with Rose, "attended almost every event that took place in the auditorium, sometimes as members of the audience or as guests, but more often in

⁵²⁹ Behan, "Forgotten Heritage," 36.

⁵³⁰ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," December 31, 2009; Johnson, "Anna Gordon's Quest for Equality: Family, Labor, and Black Community in White Sulphur Springs, 1883-1924," 4.

⁵³¹ Behan, "Forgotten Heritage," 32.

⁵³² Johnson, "Anna Gordon's Quest for Equality: Family, Labor, and Black Community in White Sulphur Springs, 1883-1924," 4, 10.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Anna's capacity as caterer. Anna Gordon served the first supper given in the facility [in 1892] ... as well as the New Year's Eve ball celebrating the arrival of the twentieth century." By 1903, Anna opened "the Gordon Restaurant and Notion Store on Main Street." All along she also worked "in all the older homes in the town, where in many instances she ministered in sickness." It was believed that Anna "had a marvelous occult sense," and she also worked "as a fortune teller, sold folk remedies and insights into the future...she earned lots of money at that."⁵³³

The Gordon children went to school and worked with Anna and became integral to the community in their own right. The boys hunted and fished and "helped haul the water and helped saw the wood" for hot water for laundering and Rose helped with laundry and catering and in the café. With Anna, they attended the brick Methodist Episcopal church every Sunday, and were active in church and school performances, and when Rose Gordon graduated from high school she did so as valedictorian of her class. Robert played on different local baseball teams (among them the 1904 "Springs"), competed in bowling leagues and won Fourth of July footraces. The two older Gordon children also "took part in the Monday Evening Club [a.k.a. White Sulphur Springs Literary Society], a literary society that held popular and entertaining weekly meetings," and Rose and younger brother George gave public singing performances together. The children also worked elsewhere in the community— George and Taylor Gordon "did odd jobs for the town's sex workers, carrying messages for them and supplying them with drinking water—and Taylor was for a time a "page" at one of the town's brothels, "Big Maude's Palace of Joy." Rose worked as a babysitter, cook, and domestic servant, and labored beside her mother in the various iterations of Anna's café over the years. As he grew, eldest son Robert became "an automobile mechanic" and ran "a tire repair shop" in town.⁵³⁴



Figure 34: "Woodson & Smith Advertisement," *Rocky Mountain Husbandman*, April 5, 1883.

Other prominent residents of White Sulphur by the late 1880s included not only the steadfast Gordons and, more occasionally, Millie Ringold, but also a man named Wash Madison, a visible part of the Main Street commercial district, where he "worked as a coachman at the Higgins House hotel." Its unclear how long Madison lived in White Sulphur, but some of his contemporaries, like the Meek family, remained for decades. The Meek brothers had been in early Fort Benton and in area mining rushes thereafter: Civil War veteran Joseph Meek reportedly, "discovered the silver mine at Barker," and afterward lived, with his wife Laura, in White Sulphur "in a little house north of town on a hill top." Laura Meek was a nurse and a midwife who "nursed for many families in town" and assisted "Drs. Kumpe and McKay." The Meeks lived in White Sulphur the rest of their lives: when Joseph W. Meek died in 1912, he was buried "in Lot 28 at Mayn Cemetery" under a headstone that marked him as a veteran of "Co. E. 54 Mass. Inf." Laura Meek lived another ten years, dying in Helena in 1922.⁵³⁵

Also prominent in White Sulphur Springs was blacksmith Irvin Smith. Smith came to Montana from Missouri in 1880, and by 1883 operated with a partner, a blacksmith shop called Woodson & Smith. [Figure 34] He subsequently "owned and operated his own blacksmith shops in the Springs ... until at least 1900, and his work at the forge quite literally helped build the

⁵³³ Johnson, "Anna Gordon's Quest for Equality: Family, Labor, and Black Community in White Sulphur Springs, 1883-1924"; "About the Gordon Family."

⁵³⁴ Johnson, "Anna Gordon's Quest for Equality: Family, Labor, and Black Community in White Sulphur Springs, 1883-1924."

⁵³⁵ Johnson, 4-6; "The Gordons and White Sulphur Springs"; "Mrs. Laura Meeks (State of MT, Certificate of Death)."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

town of White Sulphur Springs. He was highly successful, as evidenced by occasional notices in the newspapers of his business transactions, or of his ranch, or of his stock of horses.” His central role in the community prompted a laudatory column in the *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* for his 65th birthday, in October 1897. The paper proclaimed that “the veteran knight of the forge has probably served more constant years at his trade than any other man in the state. For fifty-one years he has stood by the flaming forge and pounded red-hot iron, and though well advanced in years his strong and sinewy arms still ply with wonderful force, and the merry ring of his anvil, as with dexterity he plies the hammer, is music to the neighborhood.” In the course of his epic career, Smith employed other members of the Black community, among them George Mason. Mason was “a journeyman at Irvin Smith’s shop for several years,” and later “formed a partnership with another man and opened his own smithy” in White Sulphur.⁵³⁶

Together with other local residents, and in conjunction with the larger regional Black community of which they were a part, the Gordons, the Meeks, and Irvin Smith carved a place for themselves, as well as significant Black cultural space and a role in public life in the town. The *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* reported regularly on the town’s African American citizens, documenting its local significance. In 1885, “Jubilee Singers from Nashville’s Black Fisk University performed their classical arrangements of ‘plantation melodies’ in White Sulphur Springs skating rink,” and around the same time the McKanlass Colored Specialty Company brought their “musical combination” to town. After they “played to the largest house ever assembled to witness a performance of any kind” in White Sulphur, they returned for another performance in 1888.⁵³⁷

In subsequent years, cultural life in town featured members of local Black community. In September 1889, the town’s “colored” brass marching band debuted “on Main street and play[ed] several tunes after which they visited the houses of the colored people in town.” Other iterations of local Black music groups followed. In 1892 the newspaper noted both the formation of a “colored folks’ cornet band” and the numerous performances of a much-praised “colored quartette” “that specialized in singing spirituals.” Sometimes bands—in which Robert Langhorn often played cornet and Irvin Smith played bass drum—were “carried through the town’s streets on a wagon that the town’s African American blacksmith Irvin Smith helped build.” White Sulphur’s African American residents also organized “a ‘troupe of colored artists’—”under the management of Irvin Smith”—that put on minstrel shows in the region, among them performances in Helena and White Sulphur in 1892 and 1893. Black residents played prominent roles in other existing local organizations as well. In 1898, for instance, Joseph Meek served as “standard bearer for a small group of local veterans” in the main street Memorial Day parade.⁵³⁸

Belt

Seventy miles north of White Sulphur Springs stands the town of Belt, where African American people were not only numerous but also among the first and most prominent of the town’s residents. As with many central Montana settlements, Belt’s founding population came from Fort Benton: when Mattie Belle Bost Castner left Benton ca. 1879 with her White husband John Castner, they moved to a coal claim at New Pittsburg that John located several years earlier and began developing the Castner Coal Company Mine site. The mining camp, which the 1880 census called Coal Bank, was the nucleus of what became Belt. There, “at one of the territory’s first commercial coal mines,” they developed a sizeable coal mining and coking operation, freighting their

⁵³⁶ “The Gordons and White Sulphur Springs.”

⁵³⁷ Af-Am in MT Timeline.

⁵³⁸ Johnson, “Anna Gordon’s Quest for Equality: Family, Labor, and Black Community in White Sulphur Springs, 1883-1924,” 6, 12; “The Gordons and White Sulphur Springs.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

product to Benton, and “built a log cabin near the coal site. They soon expanded the cabin into a hotel featuring Mattie’s exceptional cooking and hospitality. Mattie raised a large vegetable garden, using some at the hotel and hauling other produce by night to Fort Benton to market.”⁵³⁹

The Castner Coal camp grew into a small settlement with other businesses operating in space leased from the Castners, and in 1885, their hotel property became a stage station on the Great Falls-Lewistown road. The settlement gained a post office that same year, and with it a new official name, “Belt.” In 1894, by which time the Castner settlement included 17 buildings, the Castners formally platted the town of Belt along the stage road, which constituted its main street, dubbed Castner Street. At the same time, Marcus Daly’s Anaconda Copper Mine company purchased much of the Castners’ mining property and acquired other claims in the area, “and the town of Belt boomed. John and Mattie Castner became revered as the “father” and “mother” of Belt.” The town thereafter became a critical component of regional industry, as “coal mined there was sold to the Great Northern Railway, households in surrounding communities, and to the Boston & Montana Refinery in Great Falls.” By 1900, Belt’s population grew to almost 3,000 people, and the Castners continued to be major property owners in the area as well as running some of the cornerstone businesses in the bustling Castner Street commercial district.⁵⁴⁰

The presence and prominence of the Castner family helped entice other African Americans to the area. In 1897 the Castner family itself grew to include grandniece Mattie Bell Byers, who arrived from North Carolina as a teenager, and later included, after her 1890 marriage, Mattie’s children—In 1880, the fledgling Castner Coal camp boasted several Black households, including Lucy Howard (wife of Harrison Howard) and her three-month old daughter; Bettie Rou (Mrs. Herbert B. Rou) and her young son and daughter; James M. Rosier, a single barber; and single Millie Ringold, who ran a hotel.⁵⁴¹ In the 1890s, during the coal boom that followed the arrival of the Anaconda Company, former Fort Benton residents (and Helena and Marysville and Butte residents) John “Duke” and Maria Adams Dutriueille and their two children also joined the Castners in Belt.⁵⁴² Duke, a barber, became a local figure—known for his “keen intelligence and grasp of public affairs” and the fact that “he was always an interesting talker and had a fund of anecdotes gleaned from a more than usually adventurous career”—and the Dutriueille family lived there until Duke died in January 1911.⁵⁴³ Maria Adams Dutriueille and their adult children Frank A. and Marie subsequently moved to Great Falls, where Maria became a prominent active part of civic life.⁵⁴⁴

In 1900, Black residents of Belt included at least one other barber, Winston Eberson, as well as several other adults. Hogan Byres and Mrs. Mary M. Griffin roomed at the Castner Hotel, where they both worked, he as a porter and she as a cook. Brothers Bright and Thomas Watts were also part of the Belt community in this period. Bright Watts filed on a homestead in T19N R7E just northeast of Belt, in November 1904, and patented

⁵³⁹ McMillen, “Border State Terror and The Genesis of the African-American Community in Deer Lodge and Chouteau Counties, Montana, 1870-1890”; Riley, “Women of the Great Falls African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1870-1910.”; Jon Axline, “Belt Commercial Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form,” (Helena, MT: Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 2003). Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

⁵⁴⁰ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3”; Axline, “Belt Commercial Historic District.”

⁵⁴¹ Bureau of the Census, “10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory.”

⁵⁴² Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

⁵⁴³ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

⁵⁴⁴ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

his claim in 1911. By 1910—when Bright Watts was enumerated in the Belt census district—his brother Thomas lived next door on a farm of his own.⁵⁴⁵

St. Peter's Mission and Cascade

The Belt area lay some 20 miles southeast of Great Falls. Twenty-five miles to the southwest, another Black woman forged a life for herself as a legendary figure in the community of Cascade. Mary Fields, born enslaved around 1832, traveled upriver to Montana Territory in 1885 to work for the Ursuline Convent and Girls Boarding school that just opened in conjunction with the Jesuit St. Peter's Mission. St. Peter's had been run intermittently at locations in the Rocky Mountain Front area since 1859. At the time of Fields' arrival "there were about 150 people living at the mission," located since 1881 on Birch Creek about 11 Miles west of the Missouri River town of Dodge (which became Cascade in 1887 when the Montana Central Railroad arrived).⁵⁴⁶ [Figure 35]



Figure 35: "Mary Fields,"
Unknown photographer, c.
1870-1885 Montana
Historical Society Research
Center, PAc 2021-02.1.

There Mary lived on site and did much of the hard labor that operating a rural institution in 1880s Montana Territory entailed: she "handled the stage that brought visitors from the train station, where she would often spend the night waiting for her passengers. She also hauled critical supplies for the convent.... washed clothes and sacristy linen, cared for as many as 400 chickens," and "managing the kitchen, and maintaining the convent garden and grounds . . . By cultivating a large garden and hunting game." Mary, already in her 50s, "worked to ensure that all staff and students were fed." She also labored as the personal servant of Mother Mary Amadeus (Sarah Therese Dunne). Dunne may have been "related by marriage to the family that had enslaved" Fields until she was freed by the Civil War. At St. Peter's Mary nursed Dunne when she was ill and served her in other ways, such as "when the sisters moved from their log cabins to a new stone building, [and] Fields personally moved the possessions of Mother Superior Amadeus, hauling them in a wheelbarrow." Despite her 11 years of devoted toil at St. Peter's, around 1894 "Bishop Brondell, the first Catholic bishop in Montana," fired and evicted Mary Fields. Fields, in her 60s, moved to Cascade, where she remained until her death in 1914.⁵⁴⁷

In Cascade, where she was already well-known for over a decade, Mary became a cornerstone of the community, remaining so for another 20 years until she died. In 1895, she competed successfully for the United States Postal Service contract to deliver mail on its Star Route between Cascade and St. Peter's. Fields reportedly won the "star route contract in large part because she hitched a team of six horses more quickly than any other applicant," and her work thereafter continued to impress. Driving a horse-drawn wagon when the road to the mission was passable, and donning snowshoes and delivering the mail on foot for the 30-plus mile round trip when it wasn't, Fields "earned the nickname 'Stagecoach Mary' for her reliability and speed."⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁵ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; "General Land Office Records."

⁵⁴⁶ DeHaas, Jr. and Warner, "St. Peter's Mission Church and Cemetery"; Everett, "Mary Fields, A Rough and Tough Black Female Pioneer"; WHM, "Mary Fields"; "Mary Fields (U.S. National Park Service)."

⁵⁴⁷ Everett, "Mary Fields, A Rough and Tough Black Female Pioneer"; WHM, "Mary Fields"; "Mary Fields (U.S. National Park Service)"; Cooper, "Stagecoach Mary."

⁵⁴⁸ "African-American Transportation History"; Cooper, "Stagecoach Mary"; Everett, "Mary Fields, A Rough and Tough Black

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Virginia City

In this period African American individuals were also prominent in southwest Montana, especially in the Virginia City area. Although the old Territorial Capital had long ago ceased being a core component of Black Montana, or of Montana more broadly, the few Black people who remained in Virginia City were among the most prominent and substantial residents in town. Foremost among them were Jack Taylor and Sarah Blair Gammon Brown Bickford, both of whom, after their arrival during the towns' frenzied first years (circa 1865-1866 and 1871, respectively), remained in Virginia City for the rest of their lives, enduring into the late 1920s-early 1930s.

After bearing three children and losing her two young sons to diphtheria in the 1870s, Sarah Gammon Brown in 1880 divorced her abusive husband John Brown (who apparently abandoned her and their seven-year-old daughter Eva) and started her own business. By April 1880, "Mrs. Sallie Brown, Proprietress" had "opened a bakery, restaurant, and lodging house on Wallace Street" (the New City Bakery and Restaurant), "near the Wells Fargo Company offices, in the heart of the town's business district." A month later, she relocated to a different Wallace Street location "two doors above the Madison House." [Figure 36] That August, the *Madisonian* reported that she had "fitted up the housing adjoining her restaurant with first-class beds and is now prepared to furnish guests with the best board and lodging to be found in the city."⁵⁴⁹

The following year, in June 1881, Eva fell ill with pneumonia and died. Sarah, still in her early 20s, carried on in Virginia City alone, and in 1883 she remarried, wedding a White miner named Stephen Bickford who'd lived in Virginia City since 1863. The couple lived in a cabin near Stephen's mining claims on Granite Creek during the early years of their marriage, and over the course of the next decade Sarah bore four children, with son Stephen Elmer born in 1884 and daughter Harriet Virginia following in 1887, and then daughters Helena and Elizabeth Mabel born in 1890 and 1892, respectively. As their family grew the couple moved back to town: Stephen purchased the Virginia City Water Company in 1888, and five years later, in 1893, he acquired a residence and farm of some 14 acres in Fisher's Garden off the east end of main street.⁵⁵⁰ There Sarah raised their children and "continued to take in laundry, cater social events, and sell the surplus from her extensive gardens" while she and Stephen ran the water company.⁵⁵¹



Figure 36: "New City Bakery and Restaurant Advertisement," *Madisonian*, July 3, 1880.

In the course of this work, Sarah Bickford became a prominent presence in Virginia City, not only as mother of a large family in a shrinking town but as an active part of community life in various capacities, including a

Female Pioneer"; WHM, "Mary Fields"; "Mary Fields (U.S. National Park Service)."

⁵⁴⁹ Laura J. Arata, *Race and the Wild West: Sarah Bickford, the Montana Vigilantes, and the Tourism of Decline, 1870-1930*, First edition..., *Race and Culture in the American West*; v. 17 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020), p. 84; "Coggsell-Taylor Cabins"; "Sarah Bickford"; Hampton, "Hangman's Building (MT Historic Property Record, #24MA2392)"; Hampton, "Coggsell-Taylor House and Jackson Street Store (MT Historic Property Record, #24MA2396)"; WHM, "Celebrating Sarah Gammon Bickford"; "About Sarah"; "Sarah Gammon Bickford (1855-1931): 'Montana's First Career Woman'"; "New City Bakery and Restaurant [Advertisement]"; "Generalities," August 14, 1880.

⁵⁵⁰ "Warranty Deed, Baker to Bickford."

⁵⁵¹ Arata, *Race and the Wild West*, 122.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

critical role in providing the settlement's food and water. In addition to her work with the water company, she ran a small diversified farm in the old Fisher's Garden/Romey's Garden area, "growing 'vegetable gardens and small fruits,' and raising 'cows, chickens, and ducks,'" and selling her produce as well as "milk, cream, butter, eggs, and poultry." This farm production was geared specifically to the local market: Sarah "raised ducks to sell to her Chinese neighbors." As she helped feed the community and manage the water company—taking an increasing role as Stephen's health failed—Sarah's prominence was reinforced in less critical realms as well, like the Fourth of July picnic at the annual meeting of the local Pioneer Association where Sarah "supplied ice cream to the ninety-six men who had gathered."⁵⁵²

On March 22, 1900, Sarah's second husband Stephen Bickford died. Upon his death, Sarah Gammon Brown Bickford assumed majority ownership of the Virginia City Water Company (a partner by then owned 1/3 of the company). In doing so, she became perhaps the first Black woman to own a utility in the United States. Sarah owned and managed the town's water company until she died in 1931. Her son Elmer and daughter Vergie worked with her at different times—Elmer was "adept at working on the water lines" even as a teenager, and Virgie "helped with keeping the books"—and in 1915 Sarah acquired the remaining 1/3 of the company to become sole owner and manager, overseeing everything from maintaining, repairing, expanding, and modernizing the water system (a challenge in high, cold Virginia City) to negotiating utility rates and regulations to collecting payments from the town residents who relied on her water service. This last she did in person, on foot, every month, visiting "each of sixty individual residences, several stores, the school and the courthouse."⁵⁵³

In 1914, Sarah further expanded and professionalized the company when she rented "a rundown building" on main street and established the Virginia City Water offices there. By 1922, Sarah owned the office building, which she also developed as a tourist attraction. After the 1915 advent of auto tourism in Yellowstone National Park, residents of Virginia City—economically depressed and declining—undertook a concerted effort to market the town as a part of a "Wild West" historic route to the park dubbed the "Vigilante Trail." Sarah's roadside building boasted the most sensational connection to that notorious history: it was from a beam in her building that the vigilantes hanged five men. Sarah's marketed the water company office as "the Hangman's Building," helping lay the foundation of Virginia City's preservation as an historic site, and forging its future as a heritage tourism destination. Sarah's Hangman's Building tourist attraction also made her prominent in yet another core realm of town life: for many tourists who stopped to see the infamous gallows in her office building, or who came to use "the restroom for the ladies" she opened for travelers in 1920, Sarah Bickford became the face of Virginia City.⁵⁵⁴

Bickford's neighbor and friend Jack Taylor, who for decades drove freight teams from town to town in the area, was also a longtime pillar of Virginia City. Freighters were prominent in early Montana settlements due to the inherently visible nature of their job—their outfits were a frequent conspicuous sight on roadways and main streets across the region—and because settlements relied on them for basic necessities. After arriving in Virginia City ca. 1865-66, Taylor owned a livery stable, and ran a freight line into the 20th century.⁵⁵⁵ He was by then one of the most enduring and recognized local residents.

⁵⁵² Arata, *Race and the Wild West*, 131, 135.

⁵⁵³ Arata, *Race and the Wild West*, 136-139, 147, 159, 171-172.

⁵⁵⁴ Arata, *Race and the Wild West*, 172, 182-186; Arata, chap. 6.

⁵⁵⁵ "'Jack' Taylor Dead"; Arata, *Race and the Wild West*, 60.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

His work and longevity ensured that he was well known not only to the local community—where the newspaper regularly reported on his freight line's movements—but also throughout the area. People in towns like Sheridan or transportation hubs like Point of Rocks Stage Station recalled his regular freighting trips, while folks working at more remote locations like Sage Creek depended on Jack's occasional mail deliveries, which constituted some people's primary contact with the outside world. Although not always the largest freighting outfit in the area, Taylor's business was substantial enough that he hired a number of employees at different times: "he routinely employed white men in his operations." Among them was John "Jack" Huber, who "came to Madison County in the late 1870s or early 1880s...[and] freighted for an old negro named Jack Taylor, from Dillon to Virginia City, Montana." As Huber's son later recalled, "Jack Taylor drove a jerk line team and my father drove an eight-horse team pulling two wagons. Jack Taylor showed me where my father turned his outfit around in the street in front of Jack Taylor's house."⁵⁵⁶

Taylor was a significant figure in other regional economic sectors as well, including both real estate and ranching. Since acquiring his first Madison County real estate ca. 1872, he'd bought and sold a number of urban, mining, and agricultural properties, and by 1880 he owned "several properties" in addition to his livery stable and freighting business. He was also a substantial rancher who ran stock on the "Madison divide" range, where he registered brands for both horses and cows. From at least the 1880s into the 1900s, he publicized and protected his livestock assets by advertising his brands and home range in the *Madisonian* newspaper. Through these various enterprises, Taylor accumulated significant assets, and on more than one occasion loaned substantial sums to local White merchants. He also actively defended his financial interests in court, where he prevailed on multiple occasions.⁵⁵⁷

One of the properties Taylor purchased over the years was that of Minerva Cogswell, who was a third prominent longtime Black resident of Virginia City in this period, remaining so until her death in 1894. After opening a main street restaurant with her sister in 1877, by which time she'd already been in the area almost 15 years, Minerva was widowed in 1878. She thereafter became the sole owner of the Jackson Street property she and her husband Albert Cogswell purchased in 1867. When the Cogswells originally purchased the property, on the "main road to the diggings" as it entered the town's commercial district, it boasted only a small crude log cabin. In the 1870s, they added a larger wood frame component in front of the cabin, and upgraded their home with amenities like windows and a brick chimney. They also at some point added another substantial building next door, on the north side, facing Jackson Street.⁵⁵⁸

Within a few years of Albert's death, Minerva moved her restaurant operation to her property, where she also operated—with her sister Parthenia Snead—a laundry business as well as a boarding house. Among her boarders over the years was Jack Taylor, who in 1880 was enumerated, along with Minerva and Parthenia, at the Cogswell house on Jackson Street. Around 1888, Parthenia married Ennis Bell and moved to Butte, but Minerva continued her various business endeavors into the 1890s. She weathered troubles that included an 1881 robbery, an 1883 house fire ("quenched in its incipency"), and, after several years of sickness with "the dread

⁵⁵⁶ Madison County History Association (Mont.), *Pioneer Trails and Trials ; Madison County 1863-1920*, 333, 628; Arata, *Race and the Wild West*, 86.

⁵⁵⁷ Arata, *Race and the Wild West*, 60; Hampton, "Cogswell-Taylor House and Jackson Street Store (MT Historic Property Record, #24MA2396)"; "General Land Office Records"; "Deeds."

⁵⁵⁸ Heath, "Viewpoint: Buildings as Cultural Narratives: Interpreting African American Lifeways in a Montana Gold Mining Camp," 7–8; "Mrs. Minerva Cogswell and Sister"; "Territorial News."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

malady” of breast cancer, an 1891 mastectomy. When she died in 1894, she owned a substantial estate, including an assortment of personal property as well as her home and business on Jackson Street.⁵⁵⁹

Jack Taylor acquired Minerva Cogswell’s Jackson Street property from her estate, and seems to have lived on site thereafter. Although the 1900 census enumerated him on Wallace Street, next door to Sarah Bickford, the listing may reflect a workplace rather than a residence, or perhaps census error. That census listed only 10 Black residents in Virginia City, i.e., only four others in addition to Taylor and the Bickford family. But its tiny reported total belies a larger population associated with the old territorial capital in this period, a population that swirled around the steadfast Bickford-Taylor-Cogswell triumvirate. Indeed, the enduring prominence of that trinity ensured that, despite its small resident population, Virginia City remained a recognized node in the regional Black community, with the *Plainedealer* featuring a “Virginia City Notes” column.⁵⁶⁰

Anchored by the three long prominent “pioneer” residents, the other Black Montanans who lived in Virginia City in this period varied, as does information about them. Thomas White, barber and early main street property owner, continued to live in town periodically (between stints in Butte, Helena, Utica, Moore, and Great Falls as well): in 1886 the *Madisonian* reported that he “moved his shop to a new location within Virginia City,” and in 1888 the newspaper noted him available “for first-class barbering” at the Castner Hotel, a Virginia City establishment that often “employed African American cooks and porters.” Others also worked in the main street commercial district during their time in town. A “colored boy” named Sid worked at the OK livery stable—where in 1878 he hurt himself “riding a high spirited horse with only a halter to guide him by”—and in 1880 Alexander Clark, a cook, could be found at the Rogers House. The following year, “opened his own restaurant ...near a popular saloon,” while a man named Albert Smith could also be found in the town’s business establishments, one of which he was accused of robbing. Smith was at the same time charged with stealing from Sarah Bickford as well as from Minerva Cogswell and Parthenia Snead.⁵⁶¹

In 1900, in addition to Taylor and the five Bickford family members, enumerated African American residents included three men and a 17-year-old boy. Teenager Edward W. Rivers, born in Montana in 1882, worked as a sheep herder and lived with his employer. Of the men, George Hale, 45, worked as a stock herder while Richard E. Dennie, who rented a home on Jackson Street, was a music teacher. Meanwhile Charles Bsair, 45, worked as “wood chopper” and owned the house he lived in. By 1910 Mr. Bsair, or Blair, was living in nearby Adobetown, and chopping wood at “the head of Granite Creek.” The 1920 census found George Hale working on a farm at the “head of Stone Creek.”⁵⁶² Others, too, lived in the Virginia City area in this period. All four of Sarah Bickford’s children graduated high school before moving away in the early 1900s, with Elmer relocating to Butte temporarily in 1907 and the three Bickford daughters subsequently leaving for good. Virginia and Helena left after marrying, in 1910 and 1913, respectively—“when Helena married on September 3, 1913, the ceremony took place at Sarah’s home”—and “Mabel left shortly thereafter to attend Howard University.” Elmer Bickford returned and “settled into work” for the water company by 1910, and thereafter was a prominent part of the Virginia City and Madison County community for decades.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ Bureau of the Census, “10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory”; “Jail-Birds Jugged”; “An Alarm of Fire”; “Dr. J. H. Miller”; “Minerva Cogswell.”

⁵⁶⁰ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; “Virginia City Note.”

⁵⁶¹ Arata, *Race and the Wild West*, 81, 83; Bureau of the Census, “10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory”; “Generalities,” July 13, 1878; “Jail-Birds Jugged.”

⁵⁶² Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform]”; Madison County History Association (Mont.), *Pioneer Trails and Trials ; Madison County 1863-1920*.

⁵⁶³ Arata, *Race and the Wild West*, chap. 5.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Some of the other Black Montanans in the area during these years are identified in the *Plaindealer's* periodic reports on Virginia City. Among them was Joseph Stark, charged with grand larceny and "disappeared" before his trial, scheduled for July 1907 in the district court at Virginia City. That same year, Mr. A. J. Young moved to town from Helena after accepting "a position as steward at the club." In February 1908, Mr. Young wrote the *Plaindealer* to report that "another [Black] family has come to Virginia City to live and that it is not so lonesome as it were." These new arrivals may have been the family of William and Hannah Caldwell, who that December held a 15th birthday party for their daughter Brunette in their Virginia City home. The Caldwells moved to Missoula soon thereafter, and in 1909 A.J. Young moved too, relocating to Lewistown, where he was enumerated, as Anthony Young, in 1910.

Some months later, a woman named E. Davis, a "prominent chef" in Helena, "bought out a restaurant at Virginia City." Davis made plans to relocate, as did Mrs. Helen Dodell, also of Helena, who announced her intention to move to Virginia City to "work for a Mrs. E. Davis." Also in town from Helena around the same time was Vera Simmons, apparently there on an extended visit.⁵⁶⁴ Sometime thereafter, a woman named Mrs. Annie Seals moved to town. By October 1918 she purchased property on the west end of Wallace Street, with some 35 feet of street frontage and several "buildings and improvements," for \$300. By the time the 1920 census was enumerated, Seals, a divorced 45-year-old woman (born ca. 1875 in Alabama), who could read but not write, owned her main street property free and clear and operated a laundry business on site.⁵⁶⁵

Other Towns in Eastern, Central, and Western Montana

In addition to these especially noteworthy locales in central and southwestern Montana in this period, Black residents comprised prominent numbers of the local populace in towns across the state. These included towns in mountainous western and central Montana—near established Black places as well as elsewhere—and in the eastern, Great Plains part of the state, especially the far northeast corner. In western Montana, communities like Sheridan, Twin Bridges, and Dillon to the south in Madison and Beaverhead counties, and places to the north like Hamilton, Philipsburg, Radersburg, and Townsend, featured significant Black residents. So too did places farther north like Thompson Falls and Libby. East of the Rocky Mountain front, in the central section of the state, places like Conrad and Cut Bank, and the railroad towns of Livingston, Harlowton, and Roundup housed noteworthy African American inhabitants. Great Plains towns in the eastern half of the state boasted prominent Black residents, too, places in the southeast section like Glendive, downstream from Miles City on the Yellowstone, and places to the north in the Missouri River country. In the Richland/Roosevelt/Sheridan counties region, near the earlier Buffalo soldier sites of Fort Buford and Camp Poplar River, Black people formed a noteworthy part of towns like Poplar, Java, and Mondak.

The Northeast Corner

In northeastern Montana, near where both Camp Poplar and Fort Buford previously housed Buffalo Soldiers, and Fort Union earlier hosted a mixed fur trade community, notable Black residents could be found in numerous places. This was especially true in the town of Poplar, where a Black man named Richard "Dick" V. Wilson ran a main street hotel and restaurant that was a local landmark. Wilson first settled in the area in 1880, and thereafter became an integral part of the regional community, especially the indigenous community of the Fort Peck reservation, with its agency at Poplar. By the time Mrs. A. L. Desonia, a White woman, arrived in Poplar in April 1902, Dick Wilson's hotel—"a one story building made of logs, with mud as plaster to fill the

⁵⁶⁴ "July 30, 1909," *The Montana Plaindealer*, July 30, 1909; "September 24, 1909," *The Montana Plaindealer*, September 24, 1909.

⁵⁶⁵ "Deed, Lots in Blk 193 (Julius Kohls to Mrs. A. Seals)"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

cracks”—was the primary lodging in town, and served as a port of entry for many area newcomers. Mrs. Desonia stayed there three days before “the supply wagons were loaded and [her party] left for Henry Kirn's ranch about twenty miles or so from Poplar.” During that time she made her first Montana acquaintances, and was impressed that “at the breakfast table, [she] sat beside a full blooded Indian.” A labeled 1908 photograph of downtown Poplar showed just four business establishments, with Dick's restaurant the only eatery identified. Wilson's restaurant may have been associated with Dan Mitchel, who around this same time was proprietor of pool room and restaurant, at which Dick cooked.⁵⁶⁶

In 1909, the tribal council of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation adopted Dick into the tribe, giving him 320 acres of land. Mr. Wilson had married into the indigenous community, and during the adoption proceedings tribal members spoke of his long association with them and his kindness and generosity in always feeding anyone who was hungry. Over the years, Dick, and/or his namesake Afro-indigenous son, patented several homestead parcels in Roosevelt County, where four different patents were issued to either Richard V. or Richard Vaughn Wilson. He died in 1922, in the Plentywood home of his daughter Jennie Wilson.⁵⁶⁷ His Afro-indigenous children lived on in their tribal territory, as did at least one of Dick's houses: in 1923, Tony and Mary Leland of Richland County, whose home had burned down, “purchased a shack from Pat Burmingham,” that “was originally owned” by Dick Wilson. They “had Joe Hart with his Mogel tractor pull it from its location one-half mile south of Tony's homestead to the present headquarters. ... They later added an old granary structure to the west side of the house. The building is still used as a temporary bunkhouse and storage building.”⁵⁶⁸

Around the same time that Dick Wilson operated a hotel and restaurant in Poplar, “a negro by the name of Brown had a barber shop in Java,” in Richland County near Mondak on the Montana-North Dakota border. There, as locals recalled, “one could get a haircut for 35 cents and a shave for 25 cents.” Mr. Brown reportedly “lived on his homestead not far from Java to the west,” and “had another negro working for him and also did what farming there was to do.” Residents of the area also remembered among their neighbors “a negro, who as a boy grew up in a Norwegian community in Wisconsin, learned to talk, read and write Norwegian as well as the rest of the school children. After he grew up, he went to Williston, North Dakota and worked for the railroad. Several of the immigrants who came through Williston on their way to the Mondak area and who were unable to speak the English language met this Negro who would walk over to them and say, “Snakker, du Norsk?” They would say, “Ja”. and he would start a conversation with them and help them with whatever they needed to know.”⁵⁶⁹ Indeed there may have been more than one Black man in northeastern Montana who spoke Norwegian: when Mary and Lars Hammar settled near Scobey ca. 1916, Mary cooked for a threshing crew, and one day while she was cooking, a big negro person walked in and began talking Norwegian to her. She was quite surprised that he could speak it so well.”⁵⁷⁰

While a few notable enduring Black individuals forged lives in northeastern Montana, the region also briefly boasted a much larger Black population. This population came with the enormous work crews that inhabited the area during construction of two railroad bridges, as well as the grade and track, for the Montana Eastern Railway (a Great Northern affiliate), completed in 1913. One of the bridges crossed the Yellowstone River a

⁵⁶⁶ Aasheim and Sheridan County Historical Association, *Sheridan's Daybreak; a Story of Sheridan County and Its Pioneers.*, 497–98; Hoyer and Roosevelt County Bicentennial Committee, *Roosevelt County's "Treasured Years,"* 618, 629–30; “Kindly Old Negro Hears Last Call.”

⁵⁶⁷ “Poplar Items”; “Adopted”; “Kindly Old Negro Hears Last Call”; “General Land Office Records.”

⁵⁶⁸ *Courage Enough*, 213.

⁵⁶⁹ *Courage Enough*, 349–50.

⁵⁷⁰ Daniels County Bicentennial Committee, *Daniels County History*, 732.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

few miles from the Montana line in North Dakota. The other, just 10 miles away, crossed the Missouri between Richland and Roosevelt counties in Montana. That bridge, the Snowden Bridge, “was two years in building” and brought hundreds of workers, many of them Black, to the Mondak vicinity. As one White resident recalled, “in connection with this construction, there were 500 Negroes in a work camp on the north side of the river. I can remember going for a Sunday ride with my folks and seeing the shack town and the steel work for the bridge, all laid out on the north side of the river. The steam engines were puffing and men going and coming like ants.”⁵⁷¹ Building the Snowden Bridge over the powerful and moody Missouri was difficult, dangerous work, and several men died in the course of its construction. Locals later told stories “of the deaths of workers who fell from the span into open, swirling waters of the Missouri and drowned in spite of rescue attempts,” and “at least one worker is reported to have fallen into the wet concrete in one of the piers which were sunk 80 ft. into bedrock. Since there was no chance to get him out, his body remained in the pier.”⁵⁷²

For Black men, working on the bridge was also dangerous because it brought them to a remote area where White people predominated, at the height of Jim Crow and associated White violence against Black people. In 1913, that violence proved fatal when a White lynch mob murdered construction worker J.C. Collins. Reported details of the White mob’s lynching of Collins vary, but it seems that it followed events that began when authorities went to the construction camp to arrest Collins. A warrant had been issued for Collins—possibly as a result of an altercation over the “house and property” of another Black worker named Clay Beal or Neal Clay (with whom Collins was boarding) that was sold “to another negro named Patterson”—and on April 4 the new Sheridan County sheriff Thomas Courtney and undersheriff Richard H. Burmeister traveled to the work camp to arrest him. [Figure 37]

They deputized a local man named E. P. Wilson along the way, and at the camp Wilson encountered Collins first. Collins was able to get Wilson’s gun from him and used it to shoot Courtney and Burmeister, killing

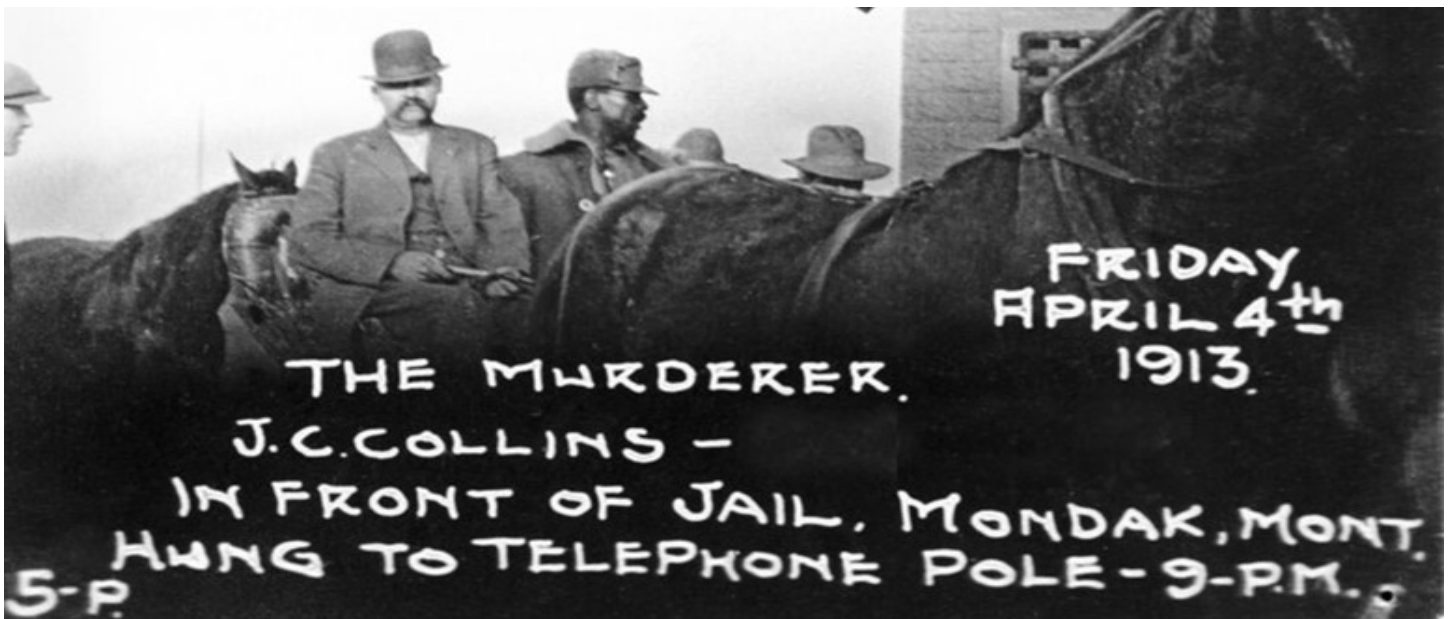


Figure 37: J.C. Collins, hours before he was murdered, i.e., lynched by a White mob. Unknown photographer, April 4, 1913. Montana Historical Society Research Center, PAc 75-78.37

⁵⁷¹ Hoye and Roosevelt County Bicentennial Committee, *Roosevelt County's "Treasured Years,"* 193.

⁵⁷² Hoye and Roosevelt County Bicentennial Committee, 85.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Courtney. Mr. Collins fled “into the brush,” a mob pursued, and he gave himself up, whereupon authorities locked him in the Mondak jail. That night, Burmeister died at the hospital in Williston, North Dakota. A White mob stormed the jail, assaulted Collins, and dragged him to a nearby telephone pole. There, the lynch mob hanged Collins, while reportedly also shooting him multiple times and setting him on fire. Most reports say the mob later threw Collins’ body in the Missouri River, although at least one source claims that “a body of a colored man, whether Collins or someone else, hung on the bridge most of the summer.” Multiple sources report that the Black “laborers at the construction camp deserted Snowden within hours after the hanging.”⁵⁷³

Eastern Montana

The same year a White mob killed J.C. Collins in Mondak, a prominent longtime eastern Montana resident named Bob Leavitt died. Leavitt warrants discussion here because many historians believe him to have been a member of the Black community. Census and death records for this man indicate that he was White, but he was widely known as “[N-word] Bob,” and this nickname—for which there are various explanations—created confusion at the time and continues to confuse people today. White sources from central and eastern Montana in this period often identify Black men by using the N-word paired with a first name, rather than granting them the respect of using their proper surname, and this racist linguistic erasure plagues research efforts. Confusion about individual identity is further compounded in this case by the fact that one of the Montana men called “[N-word] Bob” in this period was apparently White. This man, Bob Leavitt, reportedly worked for the N-Bar Ranch after coming to Miles City in 1891, and owned a saloon in Jordan ca. 1905 (and later one in nearby Ismay, which is sometimes mistaken for a Black business enterprise. Although a well-known business owner and rancher in the Jordan-Ismay-Miles City area, Bob Leavitt was not a prominent *Black* businessman/rancher. [Figure 37]

But other Black men named Bob were prominent in the region at the time, and even back then were confused with Bob Leavitt. Sources report a Black man whom some Whites called “[N-word] Bob” working on the N-Bar-N ranch in the late 19th and/or early 20th century; a “[N-word]” Bob Shannon who was one of the “top cowboys” in the Wolf Point area ca. 1910, and a “[N-word] Bob” who was “one of the wagon bosses” for the CK Cattle Company ca. 1913-15.”⁵⁷⁴ Bob Leavitt, for his part, resided in Jordan when he died in Miles City in 1913. Four years after his death, the local paper in Glasgow, directly north of Jordan and Miles City reported that “‘Ni**er Bob’ Leavitt” worked on the spring horse roundup for the N-Bar-N Ranch, which “started from Nashua and is working between Cherry creek and the Porcupine.”⁵⁷⁵

There were also Black men in the town of Jordan during Bob Leavitt’s time, and in other towns in eastern Montana. One notable Jordan resident was liveryman James Lewis, who ran his own stable and owned a home in the district. To the southeast in Glendive, the 1900 census recorded two Black households located next door to one another. James Saunders, a cook for the railroad, and his wife Florence occupied one of them, and owned their home. In Roundup, north of Billings, residents recall “a negro mammy” who lived with, and served, the Steen family. The Steens, owners of a quarry, resided in a “a large stone house on 7th St. West” that they built in 1912.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷³ “Sheriff Killed and Negro Lynched”; “Negro Slays Officers Is Lynched at Mondak.” *Courage Enough*, 358;Hoye and Roosevelt County Bicentennial Committee, *Roosevelt County’s “Treasured Years,”* 85, 519;Aasheim and Sheridan County Historical Association, *Sheridan’s Daybreak; a Story of Sheridan County and Its Pioneers.*, 9, 35, 442-43.

⁵⁷⁴ Brockway Homemakers Club, *As It Was Yesterday.*, 280. Lund, “The Homesteaders and Birth of a City.”

⁵⁷⁵ “Bob Leavitt of Jordan”; “Len Morrow, Wagon Boss for the N-N.”

⁵⁷⁶ Hougardy, *Horizons o’er the Musselshell*, 66; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Central Montana

In Harlowton, west of Roundup, the Black population surged ca. 1908, when “the McQuitty Brothers and their Negro crews” graded the right of way for the Milwaukee Railroad. Dick and I. S. McQuitty reportedly “had 200 Missouri mules with negro drivers operating a huge elevator to excavate the dirt. The dirt was hauled in mule drawn dump wagon to build the grade.” For the most part, the construction crews were “confined to their camp across the Musselshell,” but some workers were nonetheless able to build an enduring connection to Harlowton. Primary among them was John Lewis, who “came to Montana in 1906 as a mule skinner with a construction crew of which the McQuitty Brothers were the contractors. The contract called for the grading of the right of way for the Milwaukee railroad. When the work was completed in 1908, instead of moving on as the rest of the crew did, John stayed in Harlowton. He made his living as a handy man about town. ... He was born in 1870 somewhere in the deep South and his mother was a slave. He died in 1945 and is buried in the Harlowton Cemetery.”⁵⁷⁷ In 1910, Lewis was one of 16 Black people whom census enumerators listed in Harlowton: three of whom owned their homes and ran businesses, among them a boarding house that employed not only owner Carrie Lawson but additional staff as well.⁵⁷⁸

Southwest of Harlowton in Livingston, a Northern Pacific Railroad town between Billings and Bozeman, the census counted 21 Black residents in 1890, and 16 in 1910. Numerous Black railroad workers also regularly spent time in Livingston, which was midway between Minneapolis and Seattle and the location of an engine maintenance facility for the Northern Pacific railway. For the most part the Black population in Livingston comprised individual adults. But it also included at least one family with children, that of Maud Healy, a widow who in 1900 lived with her three young children in a house she owned at 331 South D Street. By 1910 Maude's eldest child, daughter Margaret, was no longer in the household, but Mrs. Healy and her two teenaged sons continued to own and occupy their D Street home. By then, Kentucky-born George W. Waite and his wife Stella, also owned a home—at 318 South L. Street (or possibly at 315 South K)—where they lived with their young son. So, too, did Mr. Monroe B. Queener, a 75-year-old man who long lived in the vicinity (in 1900 he was working as a cook in Gardner). By 1910 Mr. Queener, whose father was a German immigrant, lived with two lodgers in a home he owned at 318 South K Street. Livingston's Black community was substantial enough in this period that at its 1909 convention, the regional Minister's Alliance of the A.M.E. church targeted the town when “sending the different ministers to the different cities to start churches.” Three towns were so targeted, with the group sending “Rev. Abbot to Lewistown & Livingston & Rev. Cate to Miles City.”⁵⁷⁹

Elsewhere in central Montana Black residents were sometimes prominent in the high-line towns of Conrad and Cut Bank, among other places. In Conrad, one Black man was especially well-known in the brick industry that boomed briefly during the town's early 1900s establishment. Brick makers reportedly arrived in the area in August 1906, and “H. Barr found the clay of Pondera coulee was satisfactory; and from the kiln beautiful terra cotta bricks, of a quality with everything desired, were produced. The force consisted of F. H. Pings, the contractor, and a Negro gentleman who . . . was said to be the champion brick maker of seventeen states, and three other men. A two story building put up by the Conrad Investment company, on the corner of 4th and Front street was built of this brick and is still in use.”⁵⁸⁰ Around the same time, not far to the north, the town of Cut

⁵⁷⁷ Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*. (Harlowton, Mont.: Harlowton Woman's Club, 1972), 55, 159, 330.

⁵⁷⁸ Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform].”

⁵⁷⁹ Census Office, “Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Part I & Part II)”; U.S. Census Bureau, “1910 Census”; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform]”; “All Pages,” April 23, 1909.

⁵⁸⁰ Pondera History Association, *Pondera*, 157.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Bank, on the Great Northern rail line, also boomed with the rush of homesteaders to the region. Many of these newcomers likely encountered a Black woman as they arrived by train, and a number of them may have later relied on her when giving birth: the depot agent's wife was an African American woman "who was also a midwife." The Sonnemaker family, for instance, "moved by rail to Cut Bank" in 1911 with "their earthly possessions" and their one child. Soon thereafter their second child was born with the assistance of the depot agent's wife."⁵⁸¹

Western Montana

Black Montanans also forged prominent roles in communities throughout western Montana. Places African American people were particularly prominent included Libby, Thompson Falls, Hamilton, Philipsburg, Radersburg, Townsend, Twin Bridges, Sheridan and Dillon. In the northwest part of the state, John D. Posten, "Montana's first Black attorney," was a well-known resident of Libby by 1893 when appointed U.S. Commissioner to the District Court.⁵⁸² In subsequent censuses in 1900 and 1910, Posten, who was single, lived in a home he owned in Libby, where he continued to work as an attorney with his own private practice. Posten also patented a public domain General Land Office cash entry parcel in Lincoln County in 1908.⁵⁸³

South of Libby in the Sanders County seat of Thompson Falls, William McNorton became "important and influential ... one of the largest taxpayers" during the same period McNorton settled near Thompson Falls by the late 1880s—the road to his place was marked on the original 1890 plat of the area—and by the 1890s was lauded in the *Sanders County Ledger* as "one of our best ranchers." McNorton patented a homestead in 1900, and on his ranch raised stock and many tons of hay for market and sold timber to logging contractors. He also acquired numerous substantial mining claims, and stock in a sizeable Spokane-based mining company with which he partnered to mine them. McNorton also worked at engineering and fabrication, patenting railroad-related inventions in 1917 and 1918—including a rail clamp, a rail fastener, and a railway tie—designed to "to provide an economical rail joint which is adapted to be used in connection with wooden ties already in the road bed." Over the years, McNorton was twice married, in 1900 (to a White woman) and 1909, and both his weddings made the local paper, which often mentioned him and his various endeavors.⁵⁸⁴

In 1910, the McNorton household on the ranch between Deer Creek and Blue Slide included William's second wife India, just 16, as well as India's mother and brother along with three Greek miners who boarded with them. The family by then anchored a small cluster of Black residents in Thompson Township that totaled 14 in the 1910 census (with 19 enumerated in Sanders County as a whole). Over the next 10 years, McNorton divorced, and in 1920, he lived alone and worked as a "prospector," making a living mining his mineral properties. That year, only two other Black people were enumerated in Thompson Township, with one man a cook at a logging camp and another a section laborer for the railroad. McNorton endured in Thompson Falls for another 18 years until several months before he died in 1938.⁵⁸⁵

To the southeast of Thompson Falls, in the Bitterroot Valley on the south side of Missoula, the Hamilton area, too, housed notable Black residents. These included several people who ran or worked in prominent Hamilton

⁵⁸¹ Prairie Homemakers Home Extension Club and Jayhawker Ridge Home Extension Club, *Echoes from the Prairies*, 587.

⁵⁸² Af-Am in MT Timeline.

⁵⁸³ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; "General Land Office Records."

⁵⁸⁴ Martin, "Call Him William [McNortons in Montana, Pt. 1]"; "General Land Office Records."

⁵⁸⁵ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; "William McNorton (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

businesses, as well as numerous jockeys at the racehorse ranch of Copper King Marcus Daly nearby. As in many settlements, the finest hotel and restaurant in Hamilton, the Ravalli Hotel, was a major employer of the Black community. Among those who worked at the Ravalli Hotel were waiters Jacob Bardwell, John Burgess, Chris Smith, and P. R. Triplett. Triplett made news in the region in 1897, after he was targeted while in Missoula on his way to Anaconda to reportedly marry a White woman, Miss Adams a barber in Hamilton.⁵⁸⁶

Also in the area was a Black farmer who grew vegetables for local businesses, possibly Samuel Ferguson, who in 1900 lived with his White wife and step daughters on a farm he owned, as well as a woman called “Mammy Smith” who “operated a house of questionable reputation.” “Mammy” may have been Clara Smith, who lived in Hamilton for many years and in 1900 hosted boarders in her house among them Nora Mentzel, who a few years later was tried for prostitution and murder in Helena.

Missouri-born Tish Nevins was also in Hamilton at the time. Nevins arrived in 1899 as a servant of the Smithey family, and in 1908 opened a boarding house in a rented “two story house that had originally been a brothel.” Known as “a fabulous cook,” Ms. Nevins earned an “international reputation”: her “guests varied in background from mill hands to scientists, bankers, educators and statesmen,” like William Jennings Bryan, “who later wrote her a note saying that the meal was one of the delights of his life.” Tish Nevins likely also fed workers from Copper King Marcus Daly’s 26,000-acre Bitter Root Stock Farm, a racehorse breeding and training facility just east of town. Daly’s large staff included a number of Black men, among them Kentucky-born jockeys like James Hawkins, James Hicks, Arthur Lewis, Samuel Johnson, as well as a Mr. Freeman. Freeman’s son Lawrence went on to become a notable horseman in his own right—he “practically grew up on a horse” at the Stock Farm—and recalled Daly’s “building a castle for a winning horse,” i.e., Tammany’s Castle.⁵⁸⁷ [Figure 38]



Figure 38: “Aunt Tish” Nevins. Unknown photographer, no date. Glenn Chaffin, “Aunt Tish: Beloved Gourmet of the Bitterroot,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Autumn 1971, p. 67.

East of Hamilton, on the other side of Skalkaho Pass in neighboring Granite County, Black people were well-known residents of Philipsburg, a mining town and county seat. Widowed Hannah Bulger owned and operated a lodging house there ca. 1900, and by 1910 operated a “hospital,” with four “inmates” in addition to one “lodger.” Bulger died, and was buried, in Philipsburg in 1917. In the same period, Mrs. Mary Dinsmore lived alone in a Philipsburg home that she too, owned free and clear.⁵⁸⁸

Some distance northeast of Philipsburg, beyond Butte and Helena in the eastern foothills of the Elkhorn Mountains, the town of Radersburg likewise developed around mining—and became, for a time, a county seat—and it, too, boasted noteworthy Black residents during this period. So too did nearby settlements like Toston, Canton and Townsend, which became the county seat of Broadwater County when it was created in 1897. Radersburg residents included not only the aforementioned onetime mining millionaire Charles Porter

⁵⁸⁶ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; “Will Marry at Anaconda.”

⁵⁸⁷ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Chaffin, “Aunt Tish”; “Aunt Tish Nevins Closes Her Popular Hamilton Boarding House”; “‘Aunt’ Tish of Bitter Root Is Taken by Death”; “The Real ‘Aunt Tish’”; Freeman, Freeman, Lawrence Oral History.

⁵⁸⁸ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana”; “Hannah Bulger (State of MT, Certificate of Death).”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Grove but also W.R. Arthur, a doctor who lived in Radersburg in December of 1893 when he became the “first colored M.D.” to apply for a license from the Montana Board of Medical Examiners.⁵⁸⁹

George and Lulu Christian and their children farmed in neighboring Toston around the same time, and by 1910 lived in their own home in Canton, where George ran a blacksmith shop. Other Canton residents included the Weeden family, headed by Richard Weeden, a gardener. Former slave and Civil War veteran Richard Weeden lived in Canton since at least 1896, when he married Eliza “Lily” Jackson of White Sulphur Springs, and the Weedens owned their home in Canton in 1900. Richard was killed by lightning in 1907, and Eliza buried him in Centerville Cemetery in Townsend. By 1910, Eliza Jackson Weeden owned her home there (probably on Lot 19, Block 49, named in Richard’s estate), raising her two daughters, Helen Bernice and Lillian Henrietta, and making a living running a laundry business. She remarried the following year, wedding Townsend resident Lewis Miles.⁵⁹⁰

Eliza Miles and her daughters continued to live in Townsend for at least another decade before moving to Billings, where Eliza died in 1923. During that time, several of their longtime neighbors were also Black. Laura and Albert Sidney moved to Townsend ca. 1896, after arriving in Montana via steamboat to Fort Benton in the late 1860s and living in Sun River and then, after 1878, in Helena. Albert died in 1900, but Laura lived in Townsend another 40 years, in a home she owned on Front Street, until she died there, at the age of about 90, in May 1940. In a testament to the enduring bonds within the Broadwater County Black community, her obituary listed Mrs. Lulu Christian, then living in Helena, among the close friends who attended her funeral service.⁵⁹¹ Also in Townsend in 1900 were Mrs. L.C. Langhorne and her daughter Cora—likely relatives of Robert Langhorn, noted cornet player in White Sulphur Springs bands (and resident of Libby in 1900 and Saltese in 1904), as well as Anthony J. Young, who later lived in Helena, Virginia City, and Lewistown. The Langhornes lived in the home of a Black man named J. R. Oglesby, who ran a restaurant. They worked for Oglesby as well, Mrs. Langhorne as a cook and Cora as a “waiter girl.”⁵⁹²

Widowed Carrie Smith lived in the area by 1910, when she worked as a live-in servant at the farm of White widower George Wilson in the Mountain Glen district. By 1920, she owned her own home on Pine Street in Townsend. So too Mexico-born Horace Richardson, who lived in Park County in 1900 and by 1910 was enumerated in the Confederate Gulch-Diamond City area of Broadwater County. The area was long past its 1866-1869 heyday as Montana’s richest gold district and biggest settlement (when Diamond City was the county seat of Meagher County, established 1867), when Richardson lived, and worked as a laborer, on the farm of a White man named Royal Noble, one of only 13 households that remained in the district. Richardson still lived in the Townsend area in 1920, when he lived on the Oak Street farm of Jim and Nora Marks, where he was the “hired-hand.” He died in 1937, at Montana State Hospital in Warm Springs, and was buried in the

⁵⁸⁹ “Montana Board of Medical Examiners, Vol. 1,” 13, line 405.

⁵⁹⁰ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform]”; “Richard Weeden (State of MT, Certificate of Death)”; “Richard Weeden Probate Case File (Case No. 140, 1907) Montana, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1866-1965”; “Weeden-Miles Marriage License (Montana, U.S., County Marriages, 1865-1987).”

⁵⁹¹ “Heart Trouble Fatal to Mrs. N.E. Weeden”; “Laura Sidney, Who Saw History in Its Making, Passes”; “Last Rites Held for Former Slave”; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁵⁹² Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

hospital cemetery Grave #883 C-5. His death certificate listed Mrs. Christian of Helena as “informant,” or close associate.⁵⁹³

Farther south, Black people became well known in the Madison and Beaverhead county towns of Sheridan, Twin Bridges, and Dillon. Charlie MacIntyre was in the region by 1900, and lived in rural areas and in Twin Bridges before homesteading in Georgia Gulch outside of Sheridan in the 1910s. Major D. Brockman and his son Daniel homesteaded between Dillon and Twin Bridges before Daniel Brockman left temporarily to serve in the army in 1917, with the regional papers reporting him shipped with “all selected colored men” to Camp Lewis, Washington for training before heading overseas to fight in the World War. Daniel Brockman continued to live in the area after his dad died at the Beaverhead County Poor Farm in Dillon in 1932. Around the time Daniel Brockman left for war, Henry Goode started living and working as the “hired man” on the Sidney and Daisy Baker ranch on Spring Creek near Sheridan, where he would remain until he died decades later. Another Black man, George Hale, worked on numerous ranches in Madison and Beaverhead Counties, and was long associated with the upper Stone Creek area. He died in 1922, while living at “Mahelich Ranch near Dillon” in Stone Creek Township, Madison County, and was buried in Dillon’s Mountain View Cemetery.⁵⁹⁴

The cemetery in Dillon likely contained other Black graves: in 1890, census enumerators counted 34 Black residents of Beaverhead County. In 1900, residents in the county seat of Dillon included “hotel waiter” R.T. Triplett and his wife Ella, likely the same man who’d been waiting tables at the Ravalli Hotel in Hamilton several years earlier, as well as their neighbor or housemate John Davis, also a “hotel waiter.” They also included Mrs. Emma Rivers and her three children, with the youngest two attending school. In 1910, several Black Dillonites could be found living on North Montana street, where two women—both prostitutes—lived in one “rooming house,” while Sam and Minnie McCarthy—a “musician” and “servant” in a “house of prostitution,” respectively—lived a few doors down. That year, Beaverhead County also housed a notable Black population on Horse Prairie. There, Henry Freeman, who 10 years earlier worked on a local ranch, owned and operated a quartz mine, while eight other Black men, and one Black woman (cook Pearl Woods) lived and worked in a railroad tie camp. Fred Kelly, too, worked for the railroad in other capacities, and rented a Horse Prairie home with his wife Lena.⁵⁹⁵

Government Institutions

As some of the biographies sketched above suggest, at different points in their lives some Black Montanans found themselves confined to government institutions like the Montana State Hospital at Warm Springs, the Beaverhead County poor farm, or the Butte City jail. The state of Montana established institutions including a prison, reform school, insane asylum, deaf and dumb asylum, orphanage, tuberculosis sanitarium, veterans’ home, and home for the aged in this period, and city and county jails, hospitals, poor farms proliferated at the same time (as did, occasionally, similar institutions run by churches or fraternal orders like the Masons). Many of these places, too, became significant sites in the history of Black Montana. Every time census takers fanned out across the state of Montana, they found Black residents confined in such places, and other sources note

⁵⁹³ “Horace Richardson (State of MT, Certificate of Death)”; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁵⁹⁴ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; “General Land Office Records”; “Official Acts of Military Board”; “[Major] Daniel Brockman (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)”; “Aged Colored Man Passes at Laurin”; “George Hale (State of MT, Certificate of Death).”

⁵⁹⁵ Census Office, “Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Part I & Part II)”; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform].”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Black people being sent to them, and in some often dying in them and being buried on site. They included especially state, county, and city penal institutions, where both Black adults and youth were incarcerated. Foremost among them was the Montana State Prison at Deer Lodge which, as noted above, contained a disproportionate number of Black prisoners from the first. Thereafter, Deer Lodge imprisoned hundreds of Black Montanans. From 1909 to 1919 alone, over 150 Black men and women served sentences behind bars in the grey stone prison.⁵⁹⁶

Other Black Montanans were confined in institutions like the state reform school, opened in Miles City in 1894, where in 1900 three Black boys were "inmates," among them Ulysses Pleasant, just 12 years old. The State Orphan's Home in Twin Bridges opened the same year as the reform school: in 1910 eight Black children were "inmates" there. Black adults were confined not only in the State Prison but also in the Montana State Insane Asylum (est. 1877), where eight Black men and women were "patients" when the census was taken in 1900 and three were "inmates" in 1910. Other Montana state institutions where census enumerators listed Black occupants included the Soldier's Home (in Columbia Falls), where Black veterans sometimes lived, and the Montana Industrial School, where two Black boys were "inmates" in 1910.⁵⁹⁷

Other institutions to which Black residents were confined were administered by cities, counties, or non-governmental organizations. City and county jails in numerous Montana towns imprisoned Black people: during census time in 1900 and 1910 alone, the jails of Cascade, Chouteau, Lewis and Clark, Missoula, Park, and Silver Bow counties held Black people, as did the city jails of Butte, Great Falls, Helena, and Miles City. African Americans also were among the "inmates" at county poor farms and almshouses (e.g. Chouteau County and Lewis and Clark County in 1910), as well patients at hospitals run by counties (like Silver Bow, or Lewis and Clark) or religious organizations (like those affiliated with the Catholic Church).⁵⁹⁸

Rural Sites

In addition to the state institutions where hundreds of African Americans spent a portion of their lives, and the many towns where Black individuals were prominent and enduring residents, and the 10 or so core communities of Black Montana, Black places in this period included a host of rural sites scattered across Big Sky Country. On mountain slopes and in valley bottoms, in conifer forests, graveled gulches, and rolling grasslands, African American people mined and logged and ranched and farmed. Their rural geography, thus, maps not only the many homes of Black Montana, but also African Americans' commonplace participation in the state's defining economic sectors.

Mining Operations

The numerous Black people in different mining towns during shifting booms mentioned above are but a few of the African American individuals who worked in Montana's mining industry. Sources suggest an array of Black people at mining sites scattered across the region's mountain ranges in this period. The 1880 census listed Robert Isom, of Helena, working as a miner, and in adjacent Jefferson County, three Black prospectors lived and worked together as partners along the Boulder River, in the "vicinity of Boulder-Butte stage road." Two years later, when the Kid Mine flourished in the Madison Valley ca. 1882, it "used about fifty men," among them a Black cook who froze to death after a Christmas celebration: "The men buried him where they found

⁵⁹⁶ "Montana State Prison Records."

⁵⁹⁷ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

⁵⁹⁸ Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

him, at an elevation of about 9,000 ft., $\frac{3}{4}$ mile northeast of McKelvey Lake along Kid Mountain.”⁵⁹⁹ In the island mountain ranges to the northeast, the 1884 gold rush in the Little Rockies, which drew “about 2,000 people,” among them several Fort Benton residents noted above: “the heaviest gold find was at the mouth of Alder Gulch, on the high rim, by [N-word] Shelby, and quite a quantity of ore was taken out.”⁶⁰⁰

In 1900, census takers counted numerous Black people working as prospectors and miners. Abraham Carter was a miner in Barker, and owned his property next to that of Millie Ringold. In White Sulphur that year, Joseph Meeks mined lead ore. Gustaf Thornton and William Johnson were mining partners in Ophir, where they lived in a home they owned. Among their Ophir neighbors was laundress Mrs. Lizzie Jones, who also owned her home. Isaac Campbell, of Fort Benton, made a living as a coal miner and Frederick Wiley worked as a miner in Miles City, where he lived with his White wife Estelle. In Jefferson County, the Camp Caroline area (i.e., township 7) contained not only the extended Brown mining family but also quartz miners Elias Sammington and Turner Colliet: Colliet lived with butcher Henry F. Jackson, who owned the home they occupied. Numerous men in Butte and Helena worked as miners—coal miners and placer miners and copper miners among them—and Helena residents M. H. Bennett and Lew Walker were enumerated as “mine owners,” while Butte’s Charles Jones was a “mine operator.”⁶⁰¹

Also mining at this time was Charles Porter Grove. Grove, born enslaved in 1851, arrived in Montana in the 1870s.⁶⁰² By 1880 he boarded at “a white-owned dairy farm near Deep Creek,” that of the Daniel Carpenter family, and prospecting in the area: later that year the *Helena Weekly Herald* heralded his “Colored Man’s Bonanza,” noting that “among MT miners quite a number of colored men have been successful in the discovery & working of gold placers & in securing title to gold & silver quartz properties. Of these enterprising men Chas. P. Grove is one who has several promising mineral prospects on Deep Creek...one of which carrying gold & silver is called the Mountain Chief Mine. He has also located on the same stream 2 acres of placer ground & has applied for US patent to cover the same.”⁶⁰³

In 1893, Grove incorporated the Montana-Illinois Gold Mining Co. The company’s articles incorporation specified that “[...]the object of said company shall be to carry on a general mining business in MT & IL,” to buy & sell mines, ores, concentrate & “to carry on a general merchandise business,” and to “develop the following mines” Bluebird, Sunrise, Edith Hope, Burlington & Prutus (est.) “in the Dog-Town Mining District”, Jefferson County & The Capital situated in Helena.” Grove subsequently went to “Radersburg & there located several mining claims, Winston & Toston area mines,” and contemplated establishing a town to be called Grove City. He “went East to sell mining stocks to others of his races,” an endeavor so successful that he became a millionaire.”⁶⁰⁴

Newspapers reported on the affairs of this prominent, prosperous businessman—on one occasion, “Grove assembled some of his larger stockholders, chartered a special train & brought his bride & colored stockholders to MT”—and they soon documented a reversal of fortune. By 1906, Grove ran a barbershop in Toston and he

⁵⁹⁹ Madison County History Association, *Progressive Years*, 902.

⁶⁰⁰ Stout, *Montana, Its Story and Biography; a History of Aboriginal and Territorial Montana and Three Decades of Statehood*, 915–16.

⁶⁰¹ Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform].”

⁶⁰² Thompson, “Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung,” 41. “His wealth faded when the mines failed to produce and he had blown his stockholders’ money.” When he died in 1911 the *Helena IR* headline read “H. Porter Grove Dies A Pauper One Time Millionaire, Negro Frozen to Death Near Radersburg.”

⁶⁰³ “African American Miners.”

⁶⁰⁴ Thompson, “Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung,” 41.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

“spent a period in the county hospital in spring 1909 before escaping,” reportedly planning to “go up in the hills above Winston to dig away in his prospect hole.” His Kentucky-born wife Hattie P. Grove, “who had been supporting herself and their four children,” divorced him the following year, and 54-year-old Porter “Grove returned to Radersburg where his frozen body was found in Johnny’s Gulch just after New Year’s in 1911”⁶⁰⁵

Ranches

While mining booms and busts pulled people between Montana’s mountain valleys, ranches spread over the state’s pastures and plains, as did cowboys and other livestock industry workers. Black cowboys, cooks, and other ranch hands staffed stock outfits from east to west across Montana in this period. Some of them arrived with the cattle herds, others came to Montana for other reasons, or grew up in Big Sky County, and began working ranches later.

George Jackson, a trail driver, “came from Texas with a herd of longhorn steers,” and a few years later worked on the Quarter Circle U Ranch between Cascade and Great Falls. [Figure 39] George was living on the Quarter Circle U in 1887, along with his pregnant wife, when he “was killed in a fall from a pole bridge that the ranchmen were building over a deep ravine” that bisected the property. The widowed Mrs. Jackson, who came to Montana from Oklahoma “with a Quaker family,” stayed on at the Quarter Circle U, and three months later, on October 2nd 1887, gave birth there to a son she named Walter. Walter Jackson “grew up around the corrals,” and after his mom died ca. 1900, “learned to break wild horses brought to the Circle U ranch from the wild, rough country of the Missouri River and the Pryor mountains. From the time he was old enough to handle a horse until he drifted into Wyoming about 1913, Jackson broke range mustangs for use as cattle ponies and freight teams.” In the course of doing so, he got to know notable Montanans like artist Charlie Russell and missionary Brother Van, and became regionally renown himself. A well-known working cowboy, he also competed in public bronc-riding spectacles: he “never rode in an organized rodeo...competition was always keen enough outside livery stables and saloons in towns like” Great Falls. There and in other settlements, as Jackson put it, “there was always a bunch who’d like to see someone ride a hard bucking horse with a reputation.”⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁵ Af-Am in MT Timeline; Thompson, 41; “H. Porter Grove Dies A Pauper One Time Millionaire, Negro Frozen to Death Near Radersburg”; “African American Miners.”

⁶⁰⁶ Roberta Carkeek Cheney, “Cowboys, Killers,” *Billings Gazette*, 74 1973; Joseph Wheelan, “Recollections of a Bronc Buster’s Life,” *Wyoming State Tribune*, September 8, 1975; Roberta C. Cheney, “Great Falls’ First Black Cowboy,” *True West*, 1975; Wheelan, “Recollections of a Bronc Buster’s Life.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State



Figure 39: "D.J. O'Malley (eastern MT range cowboy and cook, with arms crossed) with an African-American cowboy, possibly George Jackson, in the Forsyth, MT area," Unknown photographer, c. 1880s. Montana Historical Society Research Center, PAc 85-33 F5.

A few of the other Black ranch hands working in central Montana while Walter grew up on the Circle U Ranch also made it into the documentary record, as both ranch cooks and cowboys. When Walter Jackson was a young child, chef John Francis Gordon, who was based in White Sulphur Springs with wife Anna Gordon, sometimes worked for ranches, like when "Judge Gaddis of Fort Logan and some of the big ranchers wanted him to cook for them on the roundup." John then "joined a cattle drive from Fort Logan to Livingston."⁶⁰⁷ Forty miles northeast of Cascade, on the other side of Great Falls, Ira A. King worked "at a ranch near Portage, MT," when his mother Mrs. Georgia Crockett, "came to Montana probably from Denver in 1912 to join her son."⁶⁰⁸

Black people lived and worked in eastern Montana ranch country as well. Around 1900, "at Wild Horse and War Horse Lakes, north of Teigen," an African American man named "George Sercie, worked at the Earl Basset Ranch. He tended the flume in the ditch" on one of the area's early irrigation systems, and by 1920 was ranch manager.⁶⁰⁹ Farther east, numerous Black men worked in Powder River country. After the Hard Winter of 1886-87 ruined open range outfits like the Powder River Ranches, the reconfigured ranch industry included "the Bitter Creek Ranch ... a breeding ranch for mules" that employed, among others, a "Negro cook" who drove the chuck wagon.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁷ Johnson, "Anna Gordon's Quest for Equality: Family, Labor, and Black Community in White Sulphur Springs, 1883-1924," 10.

⁶⁰⁸ Robison, "Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana," May 2, 2009.

⁶⁰⁹ Deal and McDonald, *The Heritage Book of the Original Fergus County Area*, 642.

⁶¹⁰ Toman and Powder River County Extension Homemakers Council, *Echoing Footsteps*, 597.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Around the 1890s, the famed XIT in the Miles City area also “had a colored cook on the Hatchet Ranch.” The unidentified cook was reportedly killed in an argument with a White man named Long Henry Thompson, who shot the cook from his saddle in the streets of Fallon: “he was buried where Hank Gaub's hay field” was later located (ca. 1974).⁶¹¹ Nearby, a “little valley, a tributary of Lay creek which runs into the Tongue river... bears the title of “[N-word] Dick Coulee.” The man named Dick whose name marks the valley is supposed to have been “a black man named Richard Dixon” who in 1897 reportedly shot and killed someone there, a crime for which he was sentenced to 10 years in the “pen.”⁶¹² Another “old Negro” cooked for the Payne’s ranch, while also doctoring ranch workers as needed. At least one cowboy credited him with saving his life when, after his hand became gangrenous from a wolf-bite he sustained while trapping, the unidentified Black cook “looked at it and said, “Boy that is bad! I will fix it up though.” He had poultices on it for several days and it finally healed. I think he saved my life.”⁶¹³

Around 1900, a Black man named Ike worked for the JAL Ranch on Middle Creek in the Powder River country directly to the south.⁶¹⁴ [Figure 40] Newt Clendennon worked in region as well: by 1917 he was one of the leading cowboys affiliated with the Powder River Brand Association, which that May appointed him along with two White cowboys to inspect the brands of “2500 three-year-old steers” that “the Diamond A gathered ... off



Figure 40: “Dinner at the JAL Roundup Wagon on Middle Creek,” Unknown photographer, 1904. *Echoing Footsteps*, p. 670. A Black cowboy named Ike is pictured at far left.

⁶¹¹ Prairie County Historical Society, *Wheels across Montana's Prairie*, 112.

⁶¹² Rosebud County Bicentennial Committee, *They Came and Stayed*, 5–6.

⁶¹³ Toman and Powder River County Extension Homemakers Council, *Echoing Footsteps*, 433.

⁶¹⁴ Toman and Powder River County Extension Homemakers Council, 670.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

their range...They counted them between Timber Creek and Stump Creek.”⁶¹⁵ Also nearby in the early 1900s was “a negro cowboy named Joe H. Proctor.” Proctor worked with the Teddy Blue Abbott and others at the FUF Ranch, where he was “one of the most respected and trusted of all.” Born in Burnett, Texas, Proctor “helped trail a Matt Murphy herd to Wyoming soon after the Custer Massacre. He and a friend returned to Texas to accompany a larger Murphy trail herd to Wyoming and Montana. ‘Proc’ was one of the top hands with the Murphy Cattle Company on the Crow Reservation, staying with the outfit until it was sold to Charlie Hysham, who ran the Flying E brand. Then he worked for Hysham. In 1901 Joe Proctor married Elizabeth McHarg, who came to Montana with the Terretts.” The couple soon had two daughters, Martha and Sarah Jane, and the family continued to live in the Forsyth area, ranching on Reservation Creek and patenting Rosebud County homesteads in 1913 and 1916 and subsequently living “just east of Sarpy Creek,” for most of the next century: Joseph Proctor died in 1938 and Elizabeth in 1967, while Martha Proctor Sprague died in 1986, and Sarah Jane Beebe lived until 1999. They were all buried in the Forsyth cemetery.”⁶¹⁶ [Figure 41]



Figure 41: “Joseph H. Proctor,” Unknown photographer, n.d. *Tales of Treasure County*, p. 33.



Figure 42: “[N-word] Bob,” Unknown photographer, c. 1900. *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, p. 335.

Black cowboys like Joe Proctor worked alongside the cooks who kept ranch hands fed. White sources often identified these men only by racial epithets, paired with their first name. Among those men so identified were at least two cowboys named Bob, i.e., Bob Shannon and a man mistakenly called Bob Leavitt (noted above working a roundup years after the White man called “[N-word] Bob” Leavitt died). Bob Shannon was recalled by one longtime resident of the Wolf Point area as one of the “top cowboys ‘bronc busters’ working” in the region around 1910.⁶¹⁷ The Black man who was oft-confused with the White Bob Leavitt may have been the same Bob who was photographed around 1900 while cowboying for the N-Bar Ranch⁶¹⁸ [Figure 42] A White cowboy who worked at the N Bar N in the 1880s and 1890s, and later for a variety of other ranches including the L U Bar, wrote of a cowboy he called “[N-

word] Bob” in his letters, and a man sources refer to in the same way “was one of the wagon bosses” for the CK Cattle Company ca. 1913-1915.”⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁵ Jones, *Custer County Area History, as We Recall*, 446.

⁶¹⁶ Carrington and Treasure County Bicentennial Commission, *Tales of Treasure County*, 33.

⁶¹⁷ Lund, “The Homesteaders and Birth of a City.”

⁶¹⁸ Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*., 335.

⁶¹⁹ Brockway Homemakers Club, 20, 280.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

At the other end of the state, African American people worked on ranches in the valley bottoms of western Montana. Cowboy William Haywood worked on “a ranch twelve miles from Helena,” before moving to Great Falls in August 1901.⁶²⁰ By 1910, Haywood worked as a “hired man” on the Chouteau County sheep ranch of Edward and Olima Reichelt and in 1914 he patented his own Chouteau County homestead, 320 acres in Township 26 North Range 5 East. In the southwest section of the state, Charles “Charley” MacIntyre became “somewhat of a legend around Sheridan.” MacIntyre settled in the Ruby Valley, where he “worked as a ranch hand on many ranches” before homesteading “about four miles north of Sheridan, on Wisconsin Creek.” There, for the rest of his life, “Charley lived alone with his dog and horse,” while remaining a part of both the regional Black community and the local Sheridan community: “He had visitors of his own race from time to time. He had a real sense of harmony and rhythm and played the accordion by ear, for the entertainment of his friends.”⁶²¹ [Figure 43]



Figure 43: “Charley MacIntyre,”
Unknown photographer, n.d.
Pioneer Trails and Trials, p.

Some cowboys and ranchhands, like Proctor and Haywood and MacIntyre, were eventually able to get their own places after working for others in the livestock industry, and Black Montana included various other ranchers as well.

The most well-known of them may have been Cascade County resident William Bairpaugh, reportedly the “son of a Cherokee chief and an African American woman, was born in Indian Territory in 1859.” Bairpaugh came to Montana “as a youth . . . and eventually acquired enough ranch land around Black Eagle and Great Falls to earn a reputation as one of the wealthiest African Americans in the northwestern U.S.”⁶²² But while Bairpaugh was perhaps an unusually successful rancher, he was not alone in the livestock industry. Period census documents identify a number of other ranchers and stockmen, as well as “cowboys” and “herd boys,” “cow herders” and “stock tenders,” “sheep shearers” and shepherds, scattered across the state. In 1880, for example, “ranchman” Alexander Cole lived in Mitchell Gulch with the African American Cooper family: he was also apparently a partner in Mr. S. Cooper’s saloon business there. In 1910, Samuel Jones and his wife Armenta lived on their own place in Township 6 of Jefferson County, where they worked in both the mining and livestock industries.⁶²³

Many other people had their own mixed agricultural operations that included livestock but were described as “farms,” or worked in the livestock industry for wages, sometimes while they ran their own operations as well. Peter Broadhead, who lived in the Madison County area since at least 1870 (when he lived in Virginia City), was enumerated as a “stock herder” in the Ruby Valley in 1880, one year after he filed final homestead entry on his own land there. The improvements on Broadhead’s homestead included a slough, which on modern maps still bears his name. Lawrence Patrick came to the Chinook area in 1890, and lived there until he died in 1944. He was remembered as having “worked on the Blackwood Ranch around Clear Creek for more than half a century,” but during that time he also acquired his own land—patenting four different Blaine County parcels

⁶²⁰ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009.

⁶²¹ Madison County History Association (Mont.), *Pioneer Trails and Trials*; *Madison County 1863-1920*, 501; “General Land Office Records.”

⁶²² Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 30. “Bairpaugh reportedly gave away much of his wealth to the Black poor in Great Falls, and he died there in 1928.”

⁶²³ Bureau of the Census, “10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory”; Bureau of the Census, “12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]”; Bureau of the Census, “13th Census, 1910 [Microform].”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

between 1915 and 1923—and in 1920 he identified himself as a “stockman” working for himself. That year a “mulatto” woman named Lizzie (whose surname seems to have been something similar to “Daghe”) ran a ranch and hay operation around Miles City that was large enough to be an employer. In Fergus County, meanwhile, brothers-in-law Albert Latty and James Yancey had their own ranches. Both Latty and Yancey—whose wives were sisters—patented land around Lewistown several years previously, in 1916 and 1918, respectively, as did Latty’s wife, Esther Collins Latty, in 1919. The two couples shared a home in Lewistown as well as operating their Fergus County ranches.⁶²⁴

Homesteads and Other Small Farms

Ranchers and cowboys often take center stage in popular histories of rural Montana, and this may be the case with Black Montana as well, but careful attention to sources reveals an extensive African American presence on small farms and homesteads in the region as well.

Farming in the state developed first along travel corridors and near settlements in the mining areas, in relatively-well watered western Montana, and some of these early farmers were African American. In later decades, Black farmers spread across the region alongside White farmers. Like other farms, early Black farms were generally located near population centers, in valleys and along rivers in western and central regions, until the homestead boom of the early 20th century, which pulled populations onto the dry, sparsely populated grasslands of the Northern Plains. At that time parts of Montana seemed to hold special promise for Black farming: in 1904, newspapers in the state “reported that Booker T. Washington was ‘behind a scheme to buy land’ ... to build a Negro colony ... in the ‘broad valleys of the mountain state, where they might obtain a foothold and where race prejudiced was not so virulent.’” Washington and his colleagues reportedly proposed “to obtain a tract of several thousand acres . . . to be subdivided into forty acre plots for use as family farms.”⁶²⁵ The plan never came to fruition, but the small scale Black farming nonetheless spread throughout Montana.



Figure 44: “Entering [N-word] Hollow Canyon Past Balancing Rock, Going West,” Unknown photographer, n.d. *Headwaters Heritage History*, p. 245.

In some areas Montana’s rural Black presence is marked by little more than racist place names that endured long after unidentified inhabitants were gone. In the Milligan Canyon Area, “twelve to twenty miles west of Three Forks,” is a “crooked, steep and rocky canyon” that many local White inhabitants (who homesteaded the locality beginning about 1909) long called “[N-word] Hollow” or “[N-word] Holler.” Tradition holds that in the late 19th century “a negro ... lived near the head of the canyon near a spring. Freight trains using oxen and mule teams hauled loads from the Missouri River Head of Navigation at Fort Benton, through it on the way to various settlements. The negro used the water from the spring in gardening during the summers. His fresh vegetables were a delight to the freighters and stage passengers passing through, until “One spring, after an exceptionally severe winter, [he]... was found dead in his cabin.”⁶²⁶ [Figure 44]

⁶²⁴ “Negro Ranch Worker Succumbs at Havre”; “General Land Office Records”; United States Bureau of the Census, “9th Census of the United States, 1870: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory”; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁶²⁵ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 50–51; “A Colony of Negroes May Come to Montana.”

⁶²⁶ Three Forks Area Historical Society, *Headwaters Heritage History*, 244, 245. “No one is known to have seen the negro or known anyone who did. But a short distance from the old stage route near a creek bed are the tumbledown remains of an old cabin. About a hundred yards from the ruins is a leveled area that looks as if it might have been cultivated at one time. Running from the creek bed to

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Not far away, in this same period, lived a Black woman named Holly: by 1883, a woman identified only as “Negro Holly” died after reportedly owning land in the area. At least one Madison County ranch, the G.W. Blaine Ranch on Blaine Spring Creek, was part “of the Negro Holley estate,” and local White children in later years recalled roaming the area “between the Madison River and Spring Creek... seeking the elusive firefly, Negro Holly's ghost, always searching for mysterious things..”⁶²⁷ Nearby, a White man, who as a boy at the turn of the century lived in the Sheridan area, recounted an evening when “a large Negro” man “came and asked if he could have something to eat.” Noting that “this was not unusual—many men came to Alder Gulch to get rich and ended up asking for handouts,” the boy remembered “while Mama fixed him fried potatoes and fried eggs, the boys hid behind the door, peeking out at him. When he got up to leave, he took a knife from his belt and left it by his plate to pay for his meal.”⁶²⁸

Early Black presence in rural western Montana is also marked on some older maps of the Flathead Valley, which show “[N-word] Prairie” at the north end of Flathead Lake (northeast of Bigfork and southeast of Echo “about five miles east of Holt”). This name is said to date to about 1885, when Frank Bird Linderman came to Montana with “Sam Curtis, a friend, and the Curtis family coachman,” a Black man. According to Linderman, “Ni**er Prairie was what we called a park in the heavy timber. The Indian trail that led through it forked not far from my cabin, one branch leading to the Big Fork (Sweathouse) River and the Swan Lake country, and the other crossing the high mountains through Aeneas pass (named for Big-knife, the then Kootenai chief whom the Jesuits had named), to the south fork of the Flathead River.”⁶²⁹

Other extant references to early rural African American residents in western Montana are likewise fleeting, with Black people mentioned in passing in various memoirs and reminiscences. In Beaverhead County, Alma Bridwell White arrived “to teach school at Bannack in 1882.” Later, she taught “on the upper Rattlesnake,” where there “stood a new log schoolhouse” called Willowview School. There, she recalled an African American child among her pupils: “Montana was her name. ... she proved to be a most unforgettable little figure, with a lightness of step, in a pink dress, a pearl grey sweater, a big bow of black ribbon on her kinky head and shiny black patent leather shoes trimmed in white kid on her restless little feet.”⁶³⁰

Elsewhere in Beaverhead County in this period was “a Negro by the name of George Hale.” Hale lived on George Staudahar’s Pearl Spring Ranch (the core of which was originally homesteaded December 30, 1882, by Henry R. Johnson), and stayed on the place after Staudahar sold it in 1903.⁶³¹ Hale may have been in the process of homesteading in the county: in 1905, one of the two George Hales in the region (there was a White man of the same name around at the time) patented land in Beaverhead County in Township 13 South, Range 4 West. Black George Hale was long associated with the region. After having been enumerated in Fort Benton in 1880, he was enumerated in southwest Montana, in Madison County, in the 1900 census, living and working as a “stock herder” on the Thomas Winsett ranch. Twenty years later, census takers encountered him in Madison County at the “Head of Stone Creek,” east of Dillon. He lived at the “Mahelick Ranch near Dillon,” in Stone Creek Township, two years later, when he died and was buried in Dillon’s Mountain View Cemetery. He may

the level area, is a shallow ditch that may have carried water to irrigate the garden.”

⁶²⁷ Madison County History Association, *Progressive Years*, 838; Madison County History Association (Mont.), *Pioneer Trails and Trials ; Madison County 1863-1920*, 128.

⁶²⁸ Madison County History Association (Mont.), *Pioneer Trails and Trials ; Madison County 1863-1920*, 782.

⁶²⁹ Elwood, 258–59, 262.

⁶³⁰ Beaverhead County Museum Association, *More History of Beaverhead County Montana*, 912.

⁶³¹ Stauffer, *History of Beaverhead County Montana*, 356.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

have maintained ties to the Stone Creek locality for many years: in 1904 one of the two local George Hales conveyed 320 acres on Stone Creek to Matt Johnson et al.⁶³²

A number of other Black farmers and homesteaders joined Hale in southwest Montana. Noted above were Peter Broadhead and Charley MacIntyre. Broadhead patented his Ruby Valley claim in 1883 after several years of bureaucratic wrangling, and MacIntyre patented claims in 1916 and 1917 not too far away, in Georgia Gulch/the Wisconsin Creek area about four miles outside of Sheridan, also in Madison County. [see Figure 42] Just over the county line, in neighboring Beaverhead County, Major Daniel Brockman and his son Dan, formerly of Glendive, homesteaded around the same time, patenting their claim in 1920. From there, Dan attended Centerville School, in Madison County.⁶³³

Among the more well-known and enduring residents of the area around the time the Brockman family arrived was another Black family, that of Levin and Margaret Hall. The Halls were among the early arrivals when first Virginia City boomed 1863-64, and by 1880 they'd left Virginia City and settled on a Madison County farm in the Waterloo/Fish Creek area. Levin and Margaret remained there for the rest of their lives. During that time they appear to have rented their farm, perhaps at more than one location: in 1910, census takers described it as being on Beall Creek Road. Levin, a member of the local Society of Pioneers, became an "admired Silver Star resident," and when Margaret died in 1912 the *Butte Miner* declared that "with the death of this loved colored woman, the entire state has lost one of her splendid pioneer women, as she came to Montana in '64 and with her husband settled in the Madison valley in the early '70s." The newspaper noted that one of their daughters, Mrs. Mary Phelps, lived in Butte, and that "the entire community attended the funeral" before she was buried at Fish Creek cemetery, "in the valley where she reared her children."⁶³⁴ Leven followed his wife in death in 1915. In addition to daughter Mary Hall Phelps, sons Ira and Emery Hall survived their parents, and in 1920 lived on a farm owned by Ira on Doris Road in Jefferson Township (i.e., the Waterloo area).⁶³⁵

While Margaret and Levin Hall raised a large family on their Waterloo farm, some 45 miles to the northwest, near Gregson (between Butte and Anaconda), Lee Pleasant and Pearly Payne Driver and their seven children farmed and ranched the land they patented in 1923. Nearby, by 1920, Thomas Waite also owned a Gregson-area farm.⁶³⁶

Another 50ish miles northwest, Annie Morgan laid claim to "an abandoned fox farm" on Rock Creek, outside of Philipsburg, Morgan, who was born enslaved, first "came to Montana as a cook for General Custer in 1876. Morgan left Custer's service sometime before the battle of the Little Bighorn and made her way to Philipsburg," arriving there sometime before 1894, by which time she was homesteading a streamside parcel in nearby Rock Creek valley. Morgan was still fighting to patent her homestead when she died 20 years later, in 1914, after which her White common-law husband, Joseph "Fisher Jack" Case, eventually received patent on the property. By the time of Annie Morgan's death, she and Jack had developed her claim into a substantial home and

⁶³² "Instruments Filed"; "General Land Office Records"; Bureau of the Census, "10th Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedules: Montana Territory"; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; "George Hale (State of MT, Certificate of Death)."

⁶³³ O'Donnel, "Dan Brockman"; "General Land Office Records."

⁶³⁴ Madison County History Association (Mont.), *Pioneer Trails and Trials; Madison County 1863-1920*, 13; *North Flint Creek Valley Family Histories*, 159; "Mrs. Margaret Hall Is in Her Final Repose."

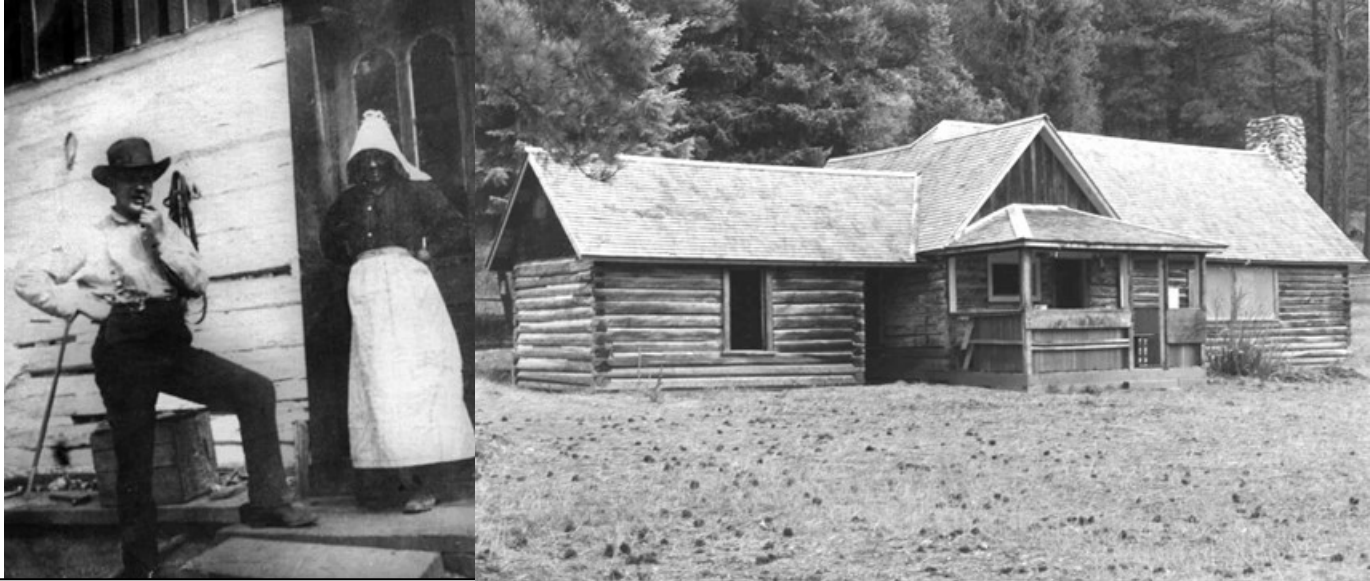
⁶³⁵ "Loomont New Notes (Leven Hall)"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁶³⁶ Hagen, "Driver's Saloon and Cafe"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

farmstead, featuring a 14' x 24' log residence and a 14' x 19' log bunkhouse, as well as two chicken houses.⁶³⁷ During this period, Morgan's Rock Creek neighbors included among them a Black couple, John R. and Annie Smith Sutcliff Wright, who married in Philipsburg in 1909 and in 1910 owned a farm in the drainage. The Wrights lived in the area for decades, and John was still living in Philipsburg in 1930, ten years after he buried Annie in the cemetery there.⁶³⁸ [Figures 45 and 46]



Figures 45 (left) and 46 (right): "Annie Morgan and unidentified man," Unknown photographer, c. 1900; and "Morgan-Case Homestead House," Milo McLeod, 2004. NRHP Photo, on file at MT SHPO.

As Morgan and Case developed their Granite County homestead in Rock Creek, near the Wright farm, at least three Black men successfully homesteaded in Sanders County, to the northwest. As noted above, William H. McNorton, prominent Thompson Falls resident, patented 167 acres in Township 23 North, Range 30 West, in the Blue Slide vicinity, in 1900, and eight years later his younger brother Burman McNorton followed suit, patenting 160 acres in Township 22 North, Range 30 West. William McNorton raised cattle and pigs as well as substantial hay crops, much of which he sold, and also leased logging rights on his land. His ranch became well known locally, and the twice-divorced "prosperous Blue Slide ranchman" sold it in 1910 for the substantial sum of \$12,000. Not too far downriver from Thompson Falls, along the Clark Fork at the mouth of the Vermillion River, a man named Guy J. S. and Victoria Gleaves homesteaded at the same time. Guy and Victoria and members of their extended family worked together to develop their "Vermillion Creek" claim, and by the summer 1907 they'd built a house and some outbuildings, begun clearing land, and put in an orchard. They steadily expanded their operation thereafter, raising hay and "small fruit such as berries" and "a large amount of garden truck." They may have also built a second dwelling on the property: in 1910 a second Black household was enumerated next door, home to "coal heaver" George W. Green, his wife Leola, and their two young children. Four years later, the Gleaves completed final proof on their homestead, and Guy received patent to 110 riverfront acres in Township 24 North Range 31 West.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁷ "Grandma Cooked for Custer"; Hagen and Caywood, "Morgan-Case Homestead."

⁶³⁸ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁶³⁹ "Gleaves, Guy J. S. (Land Entry Case File, Montana, No. 430683)"; Martin, "Call Him William [McNortons in Montana, Pt. 1]";

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Black residents claimed homesteads northeast of Morgan and Case at the same time. Alice Johnson Palmer, prominent among them, patenting 40 acres around the Lewis and Clark County town of Lincoln, in Township 14 North Range 9 West in 1919, and another 40 acres in 1928. Palmer started going to high, remote Lincoln from her Helena homebase around 1905, and with her son Arthur Palmer she built a home and cabins—completing 22 of them—that she rented out to hunters and tourists. The Palmer Cabins property formed the nucleus of what later became the Palmer Subdivision in the town of Lincoln.⁶⁴⁰

Like other early agriculturalists, before 1900 Black homesteaders were noted more often in the mountainous and watered western part of Montana. As homesteaders proliferated, expanding through other parts of the state, African Americans spread among them. Outside of Cascade, in the Castner Falls area, for instance, “in the late 1800's and the early 1900's there were homesteaders on approximately every quarter section.” Some of these people stayed but briefly, but others “lived in the community the balance of their lives. Of these, one was a Negro, Francis Griffin,” whom White locals remembered as an enduring part of the community who “was accepted by everyone as one of us.”⁶⁴¹

Notably, the Castner Falls area was named for the same John Castner who married Mattie Belle Bost and became the father of four Black children, and of the town of Belt. The area's association with the Black community continued after its Castner christening. Francis Griffin patented his claim near Truly, about seven miles southwest of Great Falls in Township 19 North Range 2 East, in 1913, by which time at least 10 African American homesteaders already patented land in Cascade County. Many of these people were leaders of the community in Great Falls. Among the earliest was John E. Little, who by 1889 proved up on land in Township 20 North Ranges 4 and 5 East. In 1890, George Hagin patented land in Township 19 North Range 3 East, in the Watson/Truly vicinity, and the following year, William Morgan and Francis Griffin's brother Martin Griffin patented claims there as well. At the same time, John H. Bigbee patented land in the next township over, i.e., Township 20 North Range 3 East. In 1892, John's widowed sister, Mrs. Tennessee Bigbee Finn, patented land nearby, in Township 19 North Range 3 East. A few miles away, George Smith (husband of Vindia) patented a parcel in Township 19 North Range 8 East near Flood in 1897, securing a second parcel in 1899. Samuel Porter proved up on his place not far away, in Township 19 North Range 6 East, in 1897 as well, and the following year Emanuel Reed patented land in Township 20 North Range 5 East.⁶⁴²

Many of these early homesteaders patented additional parcels after their first—both John Little and Martin Griffin did so in 1897—and others homesteaded in Cascade County after the turn of the century, including William Bairpaugh in 1902. Bairpaugh first settled on his claim in Township 17 North Range 5 East in April 1895, and there built a log house, log barn, outbuildings, sheds, and fence that became the foundation of his substantial ranch. The 1910 census enumerated him there, in the Houskin district, living with his second wife, Mary C., and her two children. In 1911, Mary C. patented her own homestead, as Mrs. Mary Moore Cavarro “on land adjoining and west of [Bairpaugh] near the East Fork of Sand Coulee Creek.” William Bairpaugh and Mary Cavarro separated sometime thereafter, and in 1916 Bairpaugh married Rosa A. Talbert, of Chicago, in Great Falls. Mr. Bright Watts of Belt also patented in a homestead in 1911, after first filing on his land in Township 19 North Range 7 East in November 1904. By May of 1910, Watts had some 60 acres under cultivation—growing hay, wheat, and vegetables—and had built 1 ¼ mile “fence around [his] ranch” along with

“General Land Office Records.”

⁶⁴⁰ “Helena As She Was - An Open History Resource for Montana's Capital City.”; Thompson, “Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung,” 40; “General Land Office Records.”

⁶⁴¹ Rowe, *Mountains and Meadows*, 231.

⁶⁴² “General Land Office Records.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

a 12' x 24' house, a stable, and a granary. Not too far away from Mr. Watts could be found Mr. Ashley Kirkendall, who in 1917 proved up on his own homestead in Township 16 North Range 6 East.⁶⁴³

By 1910 William Haywood worked as a "hired man" on the Chouteau County sheep ranch of Edward and Olima Reichelt and in 1914 he patented his own Chouteau County homestead, 320 acres in Township 26 North Range 5 East. In adjacent Hill County, numerous Black community members patented claims. Samuel Spaulding patented land in T 32N R15E in 1901, as did his daughter Lorena Spaulding in 1911. Caroline Mason patented land in the same area in 1903, and the following year Paschal Conley did likewise, securing patent to 138 acres in T32 N R15 E. In 1910 Margaret Conley also patented 320 acres elsewhere in Hill County, in T34N R10E. Four Walls family siblings patented homesteads near one another, with Elba Walls and Mamie Walls patenting claims in 1915-1916, in T30N 11E and T31N R12E and William Walls and Frances Elizabeth Walls patenting parcels adjacent to Mamie's. Other Hill County Black homesteaders included Silas Jones (1906, T32 N R16 E), Harford C. Newman (1914, T32N R15E), Mary Francis Gordon (1918, T34N R16 E), Daniel Johnson and his son Arthur Johnson (in 1916 and 1919, both in T35N R15 E), and Marshall A. Crump (1919, T37 N R13 E).⁶⁴⁴

In neighboring Blaine County was Lawrence Patrick, who came to the Chinook area in 1890, and lived there until he died in 1944. He was remembered as having "worked on the Blackwood Ranch around Clear Creek for more than half a century," but during that time he also acquired his own land—patenting four different Blaine County parcels between 1915 and 1923.⁶⁴⁵

To the west, on the other side of Havre, James Washington patented a homestead in Toole County in 1928, after George H. Lowery homesteaded in Liberty County south of Joplin. Lowery patented his claim to 320 acres in Township 31 North Range 8 East in 1914, and was remembered as one of the "colorful characters" in the area when it boomed. So, too, the aforementioned Black man named Miles who moved to Lewistown in 1915 from his cabin "at the mouth of Blood Creek" near Teigen (on the Fergus County-Petroleum County line). He likely abandoned his homestead before proving up on it when he made the move to Lewistown, in haste, after neighbors stored the corpse of a drowning victim in his cabin when he wasn't home. Not far from Mr. Miles, in Petroleum County, Romen Walker was more successful, patenting his homestead in 1917.⁶⁴⁶

Numerous other Black homesteaders claimed land within Fergus County proper. Alexander Branson patented a claim in Township 14 North Range 17 East in 1892, and Fanny Ferguson patented her 148-acre claim in Township 16 North Range 19 East in 1899. Adaline Hoffman patented 160 acres in Township 16 North Range 21 East in 1911, and two years later, Bertie Brown patent a homestead in Township 16 North Range 21 East "on Brickyard Creek near Black Butte," about midway between Valentine and Gilt Edge.⁶⁴⁷ In 1917, another Black woman, Emma Alexander, patented 328 acres in T18N R25 E. The extended Collins-Bradford-Latty-Yancey family also homesteaded, locating their properties in a cluster—between Alexander's claim and those of Hoffman and Brown—that constituted a small colony. Joseph and Mattie Collins patented a homestead in 17N 23E Fergus County near Roy in 1916, and that same year Mattie's daughter Esther and her second husband Albert Latty patented a parcel in Township 17 North Range 22 East. In 1919, daughter Esther Latty patented a

⁶⁴³ "Bairpough, William A. (Land Entry Case File, Montana, No. 004506)"; "Watts, Bright (Land Entry Case File, Montana, No. 173165)"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; "General Land Office Records."

⁶⁴⁴ "General Land Office Records."

⁶⁴⁵ "Negro Ranch Worker Succumbs at Havre"; "General Land Office Records."

⁶⁴⁶ Liberty County Museum, *Our Heritage in Liberty* (Chester, Mont.: Liberty County Museum, 1976), 210; "General Land Office Records," U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, n.d., <https://glorerecords.blm.gov>; *Pages of Time*, 577.

⁶⁴⁷ Roy History Committee, *Homestead Shacks over Buffalo Tracks*, 71.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

second parcel in her own name in that same township, where Esther's sister Ada and her husband James Yancey also patented a homestead, in 1918. So, too, did Mattie Collins' son Louis Bradford and his wife, who patented some 240 acres in 1919.

South of Fergus County, in neighboring Wheatland County, John Lewis, who came to Harlowton with the Milwaukee railroad construction crews, lived on the H Bun Myers place, northwest of Harlowton in Township 8 North Range 14 East, during the homestead boom period of the 1910s. If Lewis homesteaded in the area he never received patent to his claim, which does not appear in General Land Office patent records for Wheatland County.⁶⁴⁸

Like the White population, Black people spread across the grasslands of eastern Montana with the homestead boom that accompanied the newest transcontinental railroad. Indeed, as noted above, in numerous cases Black residents arrived with the railroad itself. This included not only construction crews and, later, railway employees, but others as well. For example, as the Milwaukee road built across Montana in 1913, "some of the Rockefellers and Jack Phelan arrived with a work train" in Geraldine to visit the railroad land agent Mr. Welch, who was staying "in the only house that was here then at the Brady Collins sheep ranch." The elite White group "brought a Negro cook with them and two cars of food, including watermelon which was greatly appreciated by these folks."⁶⁴⁹

As would-be farmers spread across the more eastern areas of the state in the wake of railroads, sources increasingly noted Black presence in the Northern Plains countryside. Some of these references are brief, and suggest little beyond Black presence and White prejudice. Famed photographer Evelyn Cameron, for instance, lived near the town of Terry, about 40 miles down the Yellowstone River from Miles City. She kept a diary, in which we learn that on a November day in 1911, when she rode her black horse—whom she called "N*g"—into town with her friend Janet, who brought lunch and "two hens in a sack," they "sold Janet's 2 hens to a mulatto for \$1.20."⁶⁵⁰ Around the same time, about 140 miles to the northeast in the Homestead area, one evening after supper on a farm along the tracks ("the railroad cut the farm in half") where "hobos ... used to come and beg for eats [and] sleep in their haystacks... three well-dressed Negroes came." According to the farmers' daughter, Mabel, when "the Negroes went to the barn" to bed down the family "walked to our nearest neighbors, the Jensvens. Mother and I stayed there and my dad and Mr. Jensven got some more neighbors and took guns and went back and chased them off."⁶⁵¹

But some sources also suggest more, and allow us to limn the early 20th century spread of African American farming and homesteading through eastern Montana. In Yellowstone County, around Billings, Lewis P. Somerville patented a 160-acre homestead, in Township 1 South Range 25 East, in 1895. In 1915, William Henry Chandler also patented a Yellowstone County homestead, 240 acres in Township 1 South Range 27 East,

⁶⁴⁸ Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers.*, 190.

⁶⁴⁹ Armstrong and Anderson, *Spokes, Spurs, and Cockleburs*, 41.

⁶⁵⁰ Cameron, "Diary of Evelyn J. Cameron." <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll11/id/4871/rec/15>. NB: she likes to whip Nig! "At 8:50 we were off again. Got a stick for Nig on Fallon Creek. Are our lunch. Janet had brought me 2 cookies & 2 honey sandwiches. Arrived about 1:10 or 1:00. Children playing around the school house. Saw Miller Sutcliffe amongst them. Left Janet at Sherman's (dentist). I bought a whip, Nig went beautifully after. To Mrs. Hamlin's son. She sent Mr H to enquire from a Chinaman what he would give, want 6 at \$.50. Tried several places to get \$.60. Sold Janet's 2 hens to a mulatto for \$1.20. Got \$.50 each for the 50 lot. Mrs. Steve Joubert paid me \$17.28 for photos sold. Got \$8.40 bill goods Roylee, fine box (50 lbs) apples, \$2.25. Passed Mamie & Mrs. Bright. Mail at [Written in red: Fallon & fed team hay. Got mail. Left Janet at her home with goods & chattles, big box for cats, apples, onions.] Moonlight. I got home 10:45. Ate. To bed in E's bed."

⁶⁵¹ Aasheim and Sheridan County Historical Association, *Sheridan's Daybreak; a Story of Sheridan County and Its Pioneers.*, 321.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

and Louis P. Hart patented a 145-acre homestead in the same township the following year. Black Billings resident Charles Johnson may have done the same: a man by that name patented homestead in 1915 one township to the north. Other Yellowstone County Black homesteaders included Alfred T. Thompson (1916-1919, T2N R28E), John Hobson (1919, T5N R28E), Frank Titus (1923, T6N R28E), and, in 1944, William E. Royster (T3 N R28E). In adjacent Big Horn County, Charles Smoky Wilson patented a home in 1920, and in Rosebud County, on Big Horn's northeast side, Joe Proctor patented claims in 1913 and 1916. In Custer County, Rosebud's neighbor to the east, Levi Simpson patented homestead parcels in 1909 and 1922, as did John H. Jackson in 1917.⁶⁵²

Farther onto the Plains, according to Sheridan County's 1970 history of local settlements and "pioneers":

Mamie King filed on a claim about two miles east of the present town of Homestead in 1907.

Miss King was a mulatto. Her claim was on the west side of the old stage road (Highway 16), across the road from Nels Paulson. The land is now part of the Gronlie farm. Mamie donated a

small tract of land on which to build the first schoolhouse in the pioneer community. The school was named the King School. ... Mamie King enjoyed taking in the programs at the King School, attending house parties, and in turn invited neighbors to her home for a party. The early settlers often celebrated the Norwegian Fourth of July, known as the "Syttende Mai Fest". They usually had a parade and Miss King accompanied by her pet pig, was seen marching along with the Norwegians on this, their special day. The story was told that when Miss King became seriously ill, she called on a banker from Medicine Lake to make out a will. Instead of making out a will he made out a deed, deeding the land over to himself. In checking the records, it was found that he had purchased the land for a ridiculously low price. Miss King left Homestead shortly after this illness and word was received a short time later that she had passed away.⁶⁵³



Figure 47: "Mamie King," Unknown photographer, n.d. *Sheridan's Daybreak*, Vol 1, p. 344.

General Land Office records indicate that Mamie King successfully patented a 320-acre parcel in Sheridan County, Township 31 North Range 55 East, in 1915.⁶⁵⁴ [Figure 47]

⁶⁵² "General Land Office Records."

⁶⁵³ Aasheim and Sheridan County Historical Association, *Sheridan's Daybreak; a Story of Sheridan County and Its Pioneers.*, 344.

⁶⁵⁴ "General Land Office Records."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State



Figures 48 and 49: "John Wilson," and
"John Wilson and Little Friends,"
Unknown photographer, c. 1915.
Sheridan's Daybreak, Vol I, p. 896.



A number of Black homesteaders joined Mamie King in northeastern Montana. As with other areas of the state, most of them likely remain unknown to us but sources mention several. These include not only the aforementioned Richard "Dick" Wilson, who married into the indigenous community there, and the Java barber, Mr. Brown. Also in Sheridan County was John Wilson, recalled by neighbors as:

a Negro, [who] deserves a chapter in the history of the pioneers. ... He was born in Wilmington, North Carolina. His parents were slaves and he used to tell that after a big fight at a meeting place one night where razors could be seen in the dark, flashing everyplace, he started to run and never did go back. John was very young ... From North Carolina, he went to Bryant, South Dakota, and then in 1915, came to Dagmar, Montana to the Lawrence Larson and Chris Madsen homes. He worked and stayed with these people for the summer, returning to Viborg, South Dakota for a short time, coming back to Dagmar in 1916 and again to the same families. Here he worked and made his home until 1919 when he came to the reservation with Otto Andersen and homesteaded fifteen miles west of Reserve. John built a house, barn, coalshed and planted a grove of Caragana trees one-half mile south of Otto Andersen's place," and patented his claim to 80 acres in Township 33 North Range 53 East in 1929. Throughout "John and Otto were very close neighbors and friends. They worked together and shared many things. Since John had no education and could not read or write, he depended on Otto and Grace to help him with his business and correspondence. John was very good to the Andersen children, who thought of him as a grandpa and used to spend much time on his lap. Many times we carried down cake, cookies, or other baked goods mother made for him. Sometimes we ate with him as a party by ourselves. John would trap rabbits and often bring them up for mother to stew, for he liked rabbit meat. After supper, he would sit and listen to the radio, for at this time he didn't have one. "Gangbusters" and "Amos and Andy" were his favorite programs - but sometimes these programs were scary and John wasn't too keen on walking home afterward, for he was sorta afraid of the dark, but nevertheless he always had to stay and hear the stories. John was a good

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

singer and at all the parties in the neighborhood he always sang for us and everyone enjoyed him very much. ... He was known as the black Dane ... He was a very good cook and served many a meal to others. John was never married and lived alone on the homestead, except for awhile when Fred Cameron, another colored man, stayed with him. But in 1934, John's health became poor, and he decided that he could no longer live alone. He went back to the Dagmar community and lived and worked what he was able to at the Carl Lyson home. On June 17, 1937 he suddenly passed away and was buried in the Dagmar cemetery. ... Out on the reservation the grove of caraganas still stands in memory of a wonderful, kind colored man who had many friends and who will be remembered kindly by those who were children when he lived among us.⁶⁵⁵[Figures 48 and 49]

In neighboring Roosevelt County, northwest of Bainville, residents recall among their homestead-boom neighbors "a Negro man named Jackson,"⁶⁵⁶ and in this same vicinity, about 15 miles due north of Bainville some two miles from the Huso School, "a Negro lady, Mamie Ryles," a.k.a. Mary A. Ryles.⁶⁵⁷ Mamie may have been the wife of Robert E. Ryles, a married Black man who in 1910 was enumerated in Bainville, where he boarded with a Swedish immigrant family and worked as a blacksmith. Robert E. Ryles married in 1905, and before that was enumerated in 1900 working as a blacksmith in the Craig district of Lewis and Clark County. Mary A. Ryles ultimately patented a parcel in Township 32 North Range 34 East in 1915. In Daniels County, adjoining Roosevelt County on the north, around 1910 "a black woman and her two brothers" filed "on a homestead 10 miles southwest from Scobey with a coulee running through the land." The siblings reportedly gave up their claim, in Township 34 North Range 48 East, and it was subsequently homesteaded by Joe and Frieda Erickson, who patented it in 1923 and called it "[N-word] Coulee." Other Black homesteaders in Daniels County were more successful: Garfield Skinner patented a homestead in T 34 N R 47 E in 1918, as did his sister Nebajoth Skinner. Their brother Ezekial Skinner patented his own homestead in the same area the following year. In neighboring Valley County, Charles Ewan patented a homestead in 1915.⁶⁵⁸

Not far to the southeast, locals recall that in 1913, Mr. and Mrs. Herman Allen, a Black couple, "came from Texas to Mondak when the Nohly [Snowden] bridge was being built across the Missouri River... They settled on the Missouri River on a place known as Stone Point. Herman made his living by raising garden produce and potatoes. He also worked on threshing crews and cut diamond willow fence posts to sell. In later years they moved to Fairview where his wife passed away. When asked how old she was, she would tell you she was born in the second year of freedom. Herman passed away at the home for the aged in Sidney a number of years later."⁶⁵⁹ This local recollection is inaccurate in some particulars, but reflects a real historic Black homesteading presence: Herman Allen patented 160 acres in Roosevelt County, Township 30 North Range 58 East, in January 1914, and patented another 166 acres on the Missouri River, in Richland County, in 1922. In 1926, he married divorcee and Roosevelt County homesteader Mary A./Maymie Ryles.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁵ Aasheim and Sheridan County Historical Association, *Sheridan's Daybreak; a Story of Sheridan County and Its Pioneers.*, 896; Aasheim and Sheridan County Historical Association, 838–39.

⁶⁵⁶ Hoyer and Roosevelt County Bicentennial Committee, *Roosevelt County's "Treasured Years,"* 225.

⁶⁵⁷ Hoyer and Roosevelt County Bicentennial Committee, 224.

⁶⁵⁸ Daniels County Bicentennial Committee, *Daniels County History*, 218, 719; Bureau of the Census, "12th Census of Population, 1900 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; "General Land Office Records."

⁶⁵⁹ *Courage Enough*, 30.

⁶⁶⁰ "General Land Office Records."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

**"Come down and give us some Jim Crow":
Turn-of-the-Century Race Relations in Montana and the West**

Of the half dozen Black newspapers published in Montana, the earliest of which extant copies are known to exist is the *Colored Citizen*. The brief 1894 run of the *Colored Citizen* reflected and documented a strong Black community in Montana and its Helena heart. The paper engendered much support, as well as significant backlash. As one letter to the editor put it, "a lot of us Democrats have ordered your paper stopped. Why don't you come down and give us some Jim Crow?" Signed "Bourbon Democrat," the letter reflected the enduring White supremacy that is a critical context for appreciating the history of Helena's African American community in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Indeed, the organized and activist nature of the region's Black community—where so much energy focused on fighting prejudice and oppression in its infinite forms—in many ways directly reflected the deep and consequential structural racism and interpersonal discrimination that characterized life in the country and the region.

The White violence and repression that marked the period drove many Black people from the South, but the ideologies that undergirded the South's racial system were not limited to that region. Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan illustrated this during his 1908 campaign, explaining that "the White man in the South has disfranchised the negro in self-protection and there is not a Republican in the north who would not have done the same thing under the circumstances."⁶⁶¹

As during the Reconstruction era, the West continued to offer only relative relief from the racial system of the South. In an early article on Helena's African American community, William Lang wrote that "Race wars, lynchings, violent abuse, and other atrocities were unknown in Helena . . . Helena's racism . . . consisted of what W.E.B. Du Bois called 'those petty little meannesses.'"⁶⁶² Other historians have suggested that "friendly contempt was the prevalent attitude toward Negroes [in Helena], and doubtless elsewhere."⁶⁶³ While these statements may contain kernels of truth, they beg qualification. For one, most of Montana's Black population had spent part of their lives elsewhere, and stayed abreast of national "race news" even when confined to the state itself: the community's experience with racial oppression was not limited to what they encountered in and around Helena and elsewhere in Montana. Moreover, outright violence against Black people was not unknown in the region, as we've seen: by 1888, White mobs murdered at least three Black men in Montana, including not only in Bozeman and Sun River but in Helena itself. And, crucially, those acts that might be called "petty meannesses" were part of a structural system of racial oppression that was profoundly consequential, and itself a form a violence, damaging Black psyches and bodies by making life difficult at every turn.

As gleaned from the vitriol of the "Bourbon Democrat," America's legal system of racial subordination in the post-Reconstruction era that endured through 1965, hinged on thoroughgoing racial segregation, known as Jim Crow. Jim Crow was designed to keep Blacks separate, impoverished, and unequal. In its 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court sanctioned segregation, and its ruling "marked the capstone of the 'Let Alone' policy. It is in light of these factors that the beginnings of the exodus to the West can be best understood." In the West, Jim Crow laws and practices tended to be more piecemeal than in the South, but they were common and consequential, as historians Gayle Berardi and Thomas Segady explain:

...there is little evidence, on the part of African Americans, that a change in geographic location brought the promise of increased political freedom and economic opportunity. There is also little

⁶⁶¹ Smurr, "Jim Crow Out West," 187.

⁶⁶² Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 51.

⁶⁶³ Smurr, "Jim Crow Out West," 163.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

evidence that they perceived Horace Greeley's famous shibboleth "Go West Young Man," to be intended for them. The response on the part of White settlers for the most part took one of two forms: either to deny African Americans their rights . . . or to deny African Americans entrance into the newly-developing communities in the West entirely.⁶⁶⁴

As in earlier years, Montana segregationist efforts tended to focus on the realm of the social, with its perceived potential for physical intimacy. As the *Helena Independent* opined in 1882:

...were all race distinctions abolished, amalgamation would inevitably result in the end. It would begin first among the poorer Whites, who would intermarry with the wealthier Negroes, and would afterwards extend among all classes. We believe that the Caucasian race is superior to the African, and that such amalgamation would have a tendency to degrade our nation to a level with the Mexican and South American races. In fact, the Mongrel-Mulatto breed, which results from amalgamation, is inferior to both the Black and White races.⁶⁶⁵

Almost thirty years later, in a January 1910 editorial, the *Missoulian* was more succinct: "When a white man desires to marry a negro woman — or when the shades are reversed — there should be such action taken as will prevent the step, not only here but anywhere."

The specter of "social integration" haunted the minds of many Montana Whites, and White officials harassed and persecuted individuals and institutions for interracial intimacy, especially where it involved White women. In Missoula in 1897, for instance, police, newspapers, and the broader community targeted at least two Black men for being in interracial relationships. That May newspapers reported that P.R. Triplett and a Miss Adams, of Hamilton, intended to marry and were headed to Anaconda to do so, overnighting in Missoula, where at the Rankin House hotel "rooms were refused them." Later that year, police hunted "a colored man who is reported to have run away with a white girl from a Missouri town," with newspapers alerting the public about, and therefore enlisting them in, the hunt for the Black bridegroom, a former Missoula resident. A few days later they arrested Joseph Johnson on charges of having eloped with Katie Neal. White persecution succeeded in severing the couple, and Neal headed back to Missouri, with authorities averring that "if the girl gets home all right," Johnson "will probably be released."⁶⁶⁶

In Butte, as in Helena, meanwhile, authorities perpetually harassed Black spaces of interracial interaction, like the Autumn Leaf Club and the Silver City Club.⁶⁶⁷ In 1922-1923, as newspapers ran headlines like "White Girls Found at Colored Club," authorities closed completely at least one Black club, first Abe and Ethel Warwick's Missouri Club at 12 W. Galena and issued an injunction against Frank Yamer's Silver City Club on South Main that "gained notoriety by permitting young white girls to mingle and associate with negroes in that place." At the Missouri Club, the district court judge ordered the furnishings sold, "with the sheriff directed to sell the building also if the bids for the furniture do not cover the cost" "of removal and sale." Lest their assault on the Black places and people permitting interracial socializing be insufficient, in 1923, after 15 White women "were found dancing with negroes to the jazz music of a colored orchestra at the Silver City Club," Sheriff Jack Duggan "announced his intention of promptly placing under arrest any white woman and escort, regardless of

⁶⁶⁴ Berardi and Segady, "The Development of African-American Newspapers in the American West," 100.

⁶⁶⁵ "Colored Children in Public Schools," *Helena Independent*, February 4, 1882, 2; Smurr, "Jim Crow Out West," 182.

⁶⁶⁶ "Will Marry at Anaconda"; "Eloped with a Negro"; "She Was in Missoula."

⁶⁶⁷ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 111-13; "Colored Gamblers Caught in Raid at Silver Tip Saloon," *Butte Evening News*, November 2, 1909; "Arraignments on Gambling Charges," *Butte Miner*, March 9, 1910; "Negroes Demand That Cop Be Bounced."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

prestige or position, if caught within the hall of the colored club.” His threat was not an idle one: the year before police arrested Rhoda St. Amour, a White woman, “on a charge of disturbance” when she tried to attend “a Halloween party given by a colored club at a local dance hall,” to which she’d been invited.⁶⁶⁸ Other women were arrested for being in Butte “colored clubs” in the subsequent years.⁶⁶⁹

If Montana segregationists, like their counterparts across the country, were most passionate about social integration, evidence of Jim Crow could nonetheless be found in multiple other realms as well. In the post-Reconstruction period, segregation of schools continued to be one of the primary Jim Crow issues in Montana. Over some White parents’ protests, in 1881, the Ft. Benton school board “granted permission for a colored boy to attend the public school.” Subsequently, “the Whites began to withdraw their children from school,” and petitioned the board to reverse itself, asking that “a separate school be started for colored children.” The Territorial superintendent and the attorney-general advised that “under the statute Negroes could not be admitted into the public school,” but they were apparently “ignored, for the progress of the Negro children in school was being described some weeks later.”⁶⁷⁰

In 1880, some 18 African American people resided in Meagher County, including four children registered in the county school system. The following December, in the county seat of White Sulphur Springs, a Black child sought to enroll in the public school. In response, “nearly one-third of the good Aryans of that city threatened to withdraw their children,” after which the school board persuaded the African American boy to withdraw while “the other three ‘Africans’ in town were held at arm’s length.”⁶⁷¹

In Helena, meanwhile, Black children continued to be confined to the segregated South Side School. Opened in 1875, Helena’s separate “colored” school still functioned in 1878-79, when it was maintained “for only nine pupils.”⁶⁷² African American residents kept fighting the segregation of their children, and in 1882, succeeded in securing a local referendum on the issue. Voters rejected school segregation 195 to 115, an outcome “attributed to a lower voter turnout, reluctance to continue the high taxes caused by the system, and a heavy turnout of Black voters.”⁶⁷³ The following year, Montana’s legislature “passed a bill prohibiting racial segregation in schools.”⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁶⁸ “White Woman Wanted to Attend Halloween Party of Colored Club”; “Butte”; “Colored Club Ordered Closed for One Year”; “Asks Abatement of Local Colored Club”; “White Girls Found at Colored Club”; “Attempt Made to Quell Indignation.”

⁶⁶⁹ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 119–20.

⁶⁷⁰ Smurr, 176–77, 182.

⁶⁷¹ Smurr, 179.

⁶⁷² Smurr, 173. Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 26.

⁶⁷³ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 351. Quoting Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 181-83; Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 51.

⁶⁷⁴ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 351.; Dale Tash indicates this event occurred in 1883 (“The Development of the Montana Common School System: 1864-1884,” Dissertation, Montana State University, March 1968, 138) while Smurr, “Jim Crow Out West,” 155.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Although segregation of Montana schools ended in 1883, segregation and other racist structures and practices continued to characterize life in the territory. It defined varied aspects of society in places around the region. In 1879, the founding of a chapter of the Good Templars in Helena reflected segregation in the city's community organizations: the temperance-focused fraternal order was originally integrated, but began having segregated locals in 1875.⁶⁷⁵

Two years later, in 1881, William Woodcock, who had been with the U.S. Army at the Battle of the Big Hole in 1877, was in Butte in his capacity as servant to U.S. Marshall Colonel Alexander Botkin. On September 9, 1881, he sat down at the Virginia Chop House, where the proprietor "compelled [him] to leave." Woodcock sued the restaurant under the 1875 Civil Rights Act. From this:

...emerged a legal contest that came close to making constitutional history in Montana and perhaps in the nation . . . Woodcock won his case, and with it an award of \$500 (the minimum sum under the Civil Rights Act),. . . [but] the press failed to drive home the significance of the decision. . . the only paper to point out the importance of the decision was the Republican *New North-West*, whose editor showed that the Singleton case (recently decided) had failed to determine whether the Civil Rights Act was in force in the Territories or not. . . . The judge who rendered the Woodcock opinion apparently held that it was in force.⁶⁷⁶ [Figure 50]

Woodcock's 1883 victory notwithstanding, discrimination in Montana continued to take both legal and illegal forms. Racism in the workplace relegated Black people to low-waged, demanding jobs, and kept them from, and in, certain industries. One of the largest employers in Montana was the Anaconda Company, which began in the mid-1880s and "came to dominate Montana's mining industry until well into the 20th century."

From its beginnings, the company "did not hire Black workers," and the mining industry as a whole largely followed suit: "in Butte, where Irish miners controlled unions, miners of color were kept out."⁶⁷⁷ During the 1894 capital fight, the *Colored Citizen* claimed that while the Anaconda Co. gave "employment to thousands of men, not a single colored citizen can be found among them. Yea, even more, we learn that 'No ni**ers allowed in our works,' is the unanimous sentiment of those who control the company as well as those who are employed by the company."⁶⁷⁸

Newspapers that wanted the town of Anaconda to be the capital, meanwhile, "flayed Helena as a sink of racial prejudice," and not without cause.⁶⁷⁹ Although the town's Black boosters during the capital fight emphasized racism in other places, Helena had its share of Jim Crowism. Several Black people wrote into the *Colored*



Figure 50: "William Woodcock and Alexander Botkin," Unknown photographer, c. 1883. Montana Historical Society Research Center, 941-192.

⁶⁷⁵ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 51.

⁶⁷⁶ Smurr, "Jim Crow Out West," 173-175; "The Two Colors of the Chop House Affair," *The Weekly Miner*, December 20, 1881, 5; Scott, "Archaeological Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn: A Retrospective," 15; Haines, *Battle of the Big Hole. Helena Independent*, December 8, 1883, 5; "Montana News," *The Daily Enterprise*, December 10, 1883, 4.

⁶⁷⁷ Behan, "Forgotten Heritage," 30.

⁶⁷⁸ *The Colored Citizen*, September 24, 1894, 1; Quoted in Myers, "Montana's Negro Newspapers, 1894-1911," 18.

⁶⁷⁹ Smurr, "Jim Crow Out West," 183.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Citizen in 1894 complaining of, and exposing, Helena restaurants' refusal to serve them.⁶⁸⁰ Three years later, when famed Black musician W.C. Handy, the "Father of the Blues," passed through Helena, where he recorded "an Edison cylinder of 'Cotton Blossoms'" with his band, the Mahara Minstrels, he was subjected to "an incident in a music hall in Helena" that was significant enough that it stuck with him, a telling feat for a Black man familiar with towns—and their racist practices—all over the country.⁶⁸¹ As Helena-native Norman Crump Howard recalled, "racism thrived" in this period. "Blacks faced tougher discrimination problems than Indians. They were excluded from nearly every restaurant in town and held low-paying jobs. 'And you better not go in a bar to drink.'"⁶⁸²

Such racism was no secret. In July 1908, the *Plaindealer* reported that "Up at the head of Wall St. on Main is a little old cheap dirty restaurant which has the nerve to put up a sign 'NO COLORED TRADE SOLICITED.'" The *Plaindealer* identified the restaurant as "a cheap dirty joint" in which the clientele was "not fit to associate with hogs . . . the den as it looks in passing reminds one of a refuge for vultures who feast on carrion & it is a stench in the nostrils of any man who essay to be anything at all in the natural event of things a place to be shunned."⁶⁸³ But its practices proliferated. By autumn, the newspaper reported that "the cheap places on upper Main St. where the colored man who happened to be hungry could buy & eat are one by one being closed against him & the sign posted 'No Colored Trade Solicited.'" It seemed that "unless a change [was] made," all "these public eating houses" would ban Black people.⁶⁸⁴

As discussed, authorities and local White leaders responded harshly when people violated prohibitions on social integration, and in doing so attested to the multiple ways racial discrimination operated on the ground. In the Spring of 1906, two criminal trials in Helena revealed much about the racial landscape of Montana and its capital city. Both involved Black women charged with murder. First tried was Nora Mentzel, who "killed William F. Cyrus, a Black soldier from Fort Harrison." Mentzel was allegedly "a Clore Street prostitute who frequented the Zanzibar," a saloon owned by Black businessmen Graye and Gordon. She claimed she shot Cyrus with a revolver in self-defense "in the course of an argument," but authorities charged her with premeditated murder.⁶⁸⁵ A second trial began shortly thereafter whereby Julia King, "the daughter of a respected Helena Black family," was accused of murdering her husband following an argument in December 1905. "It was the second marriage for Julia, then eighteen years old, and her husband, William King, was generally considered a 'dandy,' a man who had many paramours including White women."⁶⁸⁶

Both trials provided a platform for Lewis and Clark County Attorney and prosecutor Leon Lacroix to propound about race in Helena and Black people generally. Lacroix attacked the city's interracial red light district, and

⁶⁸⁰ Cf. The report of W.N. Easton, of Butte, regarding Helena's Capital restaurant in "Local and Personal: October 1, 1894."

⁶⁸¹ Tim Brooks and Richard Keith Spottswood, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (University of Illinois Press, 2004); Nick Tosches, *Where Dead Voices Gather* (Little, Brown, 2009); Smurr, "Jim Crow Out West," 163.

⁶⁸² Hilander, "Helena Native Has 'Roots' Galore."

⁶⁸³ "The Montana Plaindealer, July 17, 1908, (Helena, Mont.) 1906-1911," 1908. "The Montana Plaindealer, July 17, 1908, (Helena, Mont.) 1906-1911," 1908. "The Montana Plaindealer, July 17, 1908, (Helena, Mont.) 1906-1911," 1908. "The Montana Plaindealer, July 17, 1908, (Helena, Mont.) 1906-1911," 1908. "All Pages," 1908. "The Montana Plaindealer, July 17, 1908, (Helena, Mont.) 1906-1911," 1908. *Montana Plaindealer*, July 17, 1908.

⁶⁸⁴ "All Pages," December 18, 1908. "All Pages," December 18, 1908. "December 18, 1908," *The Montana Plaindealer*, December 18, 1908. *Montana Plaindealer*, December 18, 1908; Myers, "Montana's Negro Newspapers, 1894-1911," 21. Quoting Dec. Plaindealer. Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 347.

⁶⁸⁵ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 55. Lang, "Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906," 10-11.

⁶⁸⁶ Lang, "Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906," 11.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

linked events there to supposed larger problems with African Americans. According to Lacroix, "Mentzel had lured Cyrus into her Clore Street house after hustling him at the Zanzibar . . . he emphasized her profession and the immorality that," in his telling, "seemed to breed on Clore Street." Subsequently, Lacroix charged, "Black barber L.L. Grisson had conspired to bribe witnesses and . . . Nora herself had committed perjury." He concluded by reporting that he'd been personally harassed by local African American residents, several of whom, "had jeered him in public." Just a few weeks later, in early April, the trial of Julia King "was a near repeat of the previous month's courtroom drama. Lacroix prosecuted and Spaulding defended," with the prosecutor dwelling on "Clore Street's degenerate influences spawned such crimes as hers." As Lacroix instructed jurors and the people of Helena, the problem was one of race: "it is time that the respectable White people of this community rise in their might and assert their rights."⁶⁸⁷

Helena's White government officials and local leaders concurred. In June, "the new city council, believing it was following a public mandate, went after . . . Graye and Gordon's Zanzibar Saloon." Throughout, the town's daily newspapers like the *Helena Independent* and the *Montana Daily Record* "dwelt on lurid details and the antics and opinions of Leon Lacroix, the prosecutor and county attorney." The daily papers shared the county attorney's antipathy for Black people as well as for interracial socializing and the spaces that permitted it. The editor of the *Independent Record*, "long a critic of the Zanzibar," proclaimed the club, "'the vilest, the most insolent, the most degenerate and the most anomalous warren of salacity and sin that Montana ever knew.'" The Zanzibar was "an atrocious, . . . illegal, destructive, and insulting thing . . . It was the dirtiest and most repulsive scar on the body politic. The negroes who conducted it were hated for the management of a villainous dive. The White outcasts who patronized it were anathematized for their association with Black and degenerate criminals . . . It was an Ethiopian saturnalia devised for Caucasian libertines."⁶⁸⁸ Moreover, according to the *Helena Independent Record*, the Black community writ large was to be condemned. "The average Negro likes pork chops better than work," the paper proclaimed, adding that "repose is the natural attitude of the Negro," a people who "have a genius for self-maintenance without working."⁶⁸⁹

In a pattern repeated in innumerable places across the country in this period, Helena Whites especially targeted noticeably successful Black individuals: "as much as anything, it was the behavior of one of the Zanzibar's proprietors that angered them." Lloyd V. Graye came to town in 1903 from Denver, and "he invested his money in two small businesses in the Black community and then purchased the saloon on Clore Street in partnership with David Gordon, former co-owner of the Manhattan Club on Main Street. The Zanzibar flourished under Graye's management." Alderman James Lissner—who "owned a saloon a short distance from the Zanzibar on Main Street"—condemned Graye to the city council. "This man," he testified, "disgusts everybody in the city with his pompous actions. He calls himself 'King of the Blackbirds,' and he struts about the city as though he owned every colored person in town."⁶⁹⁰

Helena's Black weekly paper spoke out against the racist words and deeds of Helena's local media and government officials. *Plaindealer* editor Bass "charged that the issue boiled down to racism and greed. It was racist because the saloon owners were Black, and it was avaricious because Alderman Lissner wanted to limit competition. For Bass it was just one more example of what happened when Blacks competed successfully

⁶⁸⁷ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 55. Lang, "Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906," 10-11.

⁶⁸⁸ Lang, 11-13, 55.

⁶⁸⁹ *Independent Record*, June 1, 1906; Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 56.

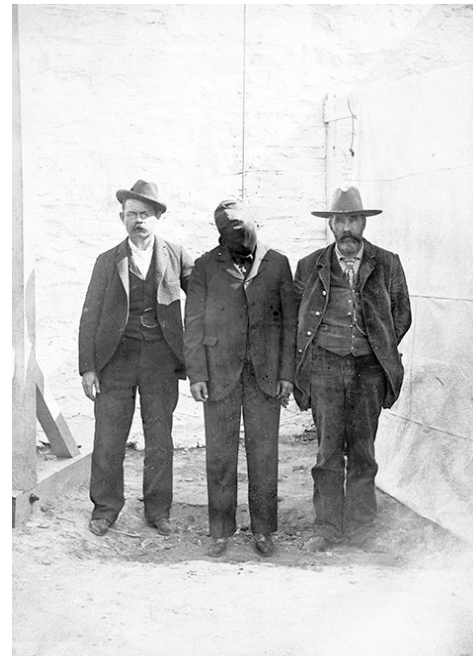
⁶⁹⁰ Lang, "Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906," 12.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

with Whites. . . . 'the Independent has certainly gone daffy on Zanzibar,' Bass wrote; 'their objections are not from a standpoint of public good, but from antipathy, personal feelings, and caste.'⁶⁹¹ The *Independent's* statements, Bass continued, were "dull, stupid, and disingenuous": go to the South "and any 12 years old school child can tell you who furnishes the labor that puts on the market the great productions of the South." In his estimation, the editor of the *Independent Record* was worse than "the notorious southern racist 'Pitchfork' Ben Tillman," a South Carolina politician known for his passionate efforts to create a White supremacist society.⁶⁹² Bass called out Lewis and Clark County attorney Lacroix in similar terms for his "racism in a closing address during the trial . . . such sentiments 'would only be expected from Ben Tillman . . . in the jungles of the Southland.'⁶⁹³

As the 1906 trials and their aftermath suggest, everyday racist practices had their parallels in Montana's legal realm. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as has broadly been the case since, the state legal system disproportionately punished no-White people.⁶⁹⁴ In the years between 1877 and 1910, Montana executed 43 men. At least nine of these men were non-White, including at least two Black men. In April of 1896, Lewis and



Figures 51 and 52: "John Biggerstaff portrait," and "John Biggerstaff Prior to Hanging," Henry Jurgens, photographer, Helena, April 1896. Montana Historical Society Research Center, 957-612 and 957-613.

Clark County hanged John Biggerstaff for the murder of Dick Johnson, pugilist and native of nearby Unionville [Figures 51 and 52]. Three years later, Yellowstone County hanged William Brooks, a handyman, also for

⁶⁹¹ Lang, 13–14.

⁶⁹² Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 56. Palmer, "The Design of White Supremacy: Review of Kantrowitz, Stephen, Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy." Tillman worked toward "White male authority in every sphere from the individual household to national politics" (2).

⁶⁹³ Myers, "Montana's Negro Newspapers, 1894-1911," 19.

⁶⁹⁴ Blum, "Public Executions: Understanding the 'Cruel and Unusual Punishments' Clause."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

murder. In the context of the racial landscape of the period, these executions underscored the subjugation of African Americans.⁶⁹⁵ So too did the 1917 execution of three Black men in White Sulphur Springs in what is “believed to be the only legal triple hanging in Montana history.”⁶⁹⁶



Figure 53: “Wm J. Holland,”
Montana Plaindealer,
December 18, 1908, p. 4.

In Montana, Jim Crow laws attended prejudicial enforcement in the service of inequality. In 1897, legislators passed a voting rights residency statute that kept many Black soldiers stationed in Montana from voting. According to the law’s provisions, “any person living on an Indian or military reservation”—unless that person had acquired a residence in the state—was excluded from voting. Montana officials also enacted other laws that targeted African American people. In 1906, “the Butte Elks, the only Black lodge in Montana, proposed expansion.” The (White) Elks Lodge in Helena recoiled, “warn[ing] other White fraternal orders that a Black invasion was in the offing,”⁶⁹⁷ and the following year the legislature unanimously passed S.B. 7, a bill “to prevent colored men in this state from wearing the insignia of their fraternal order, the Elks.”⁶⁹⁸ At the behest of “local White Elks members,” the Helena police subsequently arrested William R. Holland, “who played ragtime piano in a Clore Street brothel” and was a member of the newly established local African American Elks lodge, for wearing “a diamond-studded Elks pin inscribed with the legend ‘B.P.O.E.’” Holland fought the charges but was convicted by a jury and fined \$100 by the judge, who cited Holland’s “impudence.” With his attorney Charles Spaulding, Holland appealed to the state supreme court on the grounds that “the legislation violated the 14th amendment and constituted a poorly disguised effort to discriminate against Blacks.” The court agreed, and threw out the statute.⁶⁹⁹ [Figure 53]

Montana towns had their own Jim Crow laws. As elsewhere in the country, vagrancy laws were among the most common such regulations, wielded regularly to harass, persecute, imprison, and expel Black citizens. In Great Falls, for instance, authorities charged Charles Thoren with vagrancy several times before ordering him to leave town in 1904, while in Butte people charged with vagrancy including John Brady, who was convicted therefore in 1896, as well as Frank Cassels, who became a Butte City policeman in 1911. In Whitefish, meanwhile, police arrested railroad porter I.W. Ogwin and “held him on the charge of being a slacker” because there was “no present way of holding him on a more serious charge.” Officers “rounded up” Ogwin in 1917 after claims he’d made “improper advances to a couple of lady passengers” on the train.⁷⁰⁰

Orwin’s mistreatment by Whitefish police was perhaps relatively mild: in 1908, when Policeman E. J. Brooks claimed he saw “a negro trying to gain an entrance to E. H. Snyder’s drugstore,” the officer shot his gun at the

⁶⁹⁵ Blum. Black people represented about 5% of Montana’s executions, while never exceeding 1% of the Montana population.

⁶⁹⁶ Montana Heritage Commission, “Gallows Barn [Interpretive Sign].”

⁶⁹⁷ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 56.

⁶⁹⁸ *The Montana Plaindealer*, February 1, 1907, 1.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid. *The Montana Plaindealer*, May 15, 1908, 1; “No Jim Crow Laws for Montana,” *The Montana Plaindealer*, July 31, 1908, 1; *The Montana Plaindealer*, December 18, 1908, 4.

⁷⁰⁰ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 2, 2009; Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 105, 109; “Negro Is Held as a Slacker.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

man's back when he ran. Officers in Great Falls were known to shoot at fleeing Black men as well. In 1911, for instance, "in the negro quarter on Third Street South between Third and Fourth Avenues," Officer Tim Moran shot at Joe Wright when Wright supposedly fled after asking if Moran had warrant and stating "that he would not go along without one." The police eventually arrested Wright, charging him with "drunkenness and disorderly conduct" and describing him as "a half breed negro [who] is also said to be married to a white wife." They then set about "looking for Wright's alleged wife." In Livingston a few years later, the police not only shot at, but shot, a Black man named Ike Lane when he was allegedly "caught in the act of robbing a hardware store." Policeman Charles Wilson shot Lane in the hip before arresting him, and the injured man was subsequently sentenced to "five to 10 years in the state penitentiary at Deer Lodge."⁷⁰¹

The general White populace joined police in enforcing Jim Crow policies and practices around Montana. In Missoula, for instance, when the Black community tried to find a church home on the Westside for its developing African Methodist Episcopal congregation, Whites in the neighborhood exploded, vowing to take "all lawful ways and means at our command to prevent the colonization of the west side by negroes." Realtors refused to sell to the congregation, and after White buyers were able to purchase a property on behalf of the Black community, the White neighborhood group tried to buy the them out. When this failed, the Fourth Ward Improvement Club, protesting that "a colored population . . . is never a desirable population in a white community," plotted "to pressure real estate agents and landlords to refrain from selling or renting to Black residents. 'In case the dealers and owners of real estate refuse to dispose of the negro element on the west side, a boycott will be instituted against them, but there is little doubt but that they will accede to the request of the west side tenants, as those already spoken to have agreed to do everything in their power to help the white people.'"⁷⁰²

White residents of Butte likewise worked to inflict Jim Crow segregation on the local Black community in various venues. In 1911, a White man named Barber, who was in the betting ring at the race track, "called . . . to task" a Black man who was also there betting on the horses. Sheriff O'Keefe expelled the Black bettor, telling him "the place for you is on the outside...you go, and go now, and if I catch you in here again I'll take you to jail."⁷⁰³ By the 1920s in Butte, "blacks were being denied membership to the YMCA and were refused service at the Finlen Hotel restaurant."⁷⁰⁴ In Billings, meanwhile, when the city announced plans to build a new public swimming pool in 1914, White residents began making "violent threats . . . against any Black residents who use the pool" and circulate petitions demanding their exclusion. The Park Board subsequently forbade Black people from swimming there, voting to "exclude all negroes" and open "the new municipal natatorium...to white people only."⁷⁰⁵ Such discrimination endured, and extended to other Billings public places as well: residents recalled that "well into the 1940s, Black residents weren't allowed to try on clothing in downtown stores, sit anywhere in movie theaters or swim in city pools unless the water would be cleaned the next day," and there was a "practice of discouraging minorities from buying property beyond certain areas of town."⁷⁰⁶

Local Jim Crow laws could be especially dangerous for African Americans. According to sociologist James Loewen, "several Montana towns passed . . . Ordinances" that created so-called sundown towns where people or

⁷⁰¹ "Policeman E. J. Brooks"; "Fired Shots to Stop Him"; "Negro Is Sentence on Robbery Charge."

⁷⁰² Martin, "Hiding in Plain Sight."

⁷⁰³ "Given a Floater."

⁷⁰⁴ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 142.

⁷⁰⁵ *Western Heritage Center*; "Negroes May Not Use Pool."

⁷⁰⁶ Pickett, "Black Women's Group Alters Treatment of Minorities in Billings."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

other targeted groups were prohibited after dark.⁷⁰⁷ In 1909, in an article titled “No Colored Colonies Wanted in Montana,” the *Laurel Outlook* praised these Montana sundown towns as “the most fortunate communit[ies].”⁷⁰⁸ Among them may have been the town of Chester, which two years later advertised in the newspaper that it had “no Chinks or Negroes within her borders.”⁷⁰⁹ In 1915, Glendive’s *Independent* newspaper boasted of its long-time “sundown town” status: “for many years there has been a saying that ‘the sun is never allowed to set on any Ni**er in Glendive.’”⁷¹⁰ That “saying” was a legitimate threat of attack. Glendive was known to take violent action against Black people and interracial intimacy: in 1893 “on their wedding night in Glendive, Emma Wall and her White groom, John Orr, were forcibly ‘alabastined’ and ebonized, respectively, by a mob of 200 men and given 24-hour notice ‘to pack up and leave town.’”⁷¹¹

In the context of public murders of Black people by lynch mobs across the country, as well as very recent lynch mob murders in the state the potential for deadly mob violence was a serious threat to Black people in Montana.⁷¹² Just the year before, in 1892, activist and journalist Ida Wells reported four lynchings in Montana, and while the state’s 1892 lynching victims did not, that we know of, include any African Americans, at least three Black men had been lynched in Montana in previous years, including, in Sun River, the aforementioned Robert Robinson, a U.S. Army 25th Infantry soldier. Robinson’s 1888 murder was one of two known lynchings of Black men in Montana in this period, the other victim, in Mondak in 1913, the aforementioned J.C. Collins, who was in the state helping to build the railroad bridge over the Missouri at Snowden.

As the story of Glendive’s violent attack on a newlywed couple reminds us, White supremacists focused great ardor on interracial intimacy or, as it was oft coded, “miscegenation.” Jim Crow legislation in Montana climaxed in 1910 with a bill that prohibited interracial marriage. Marriage “between White Persons, Negroes, Persons of Negro Blood, and between White Persons, Chinese and Japanese,” remained illegal in the state for more than 40 years thereafter. First introduced in 1907 by State Senator Charles S. Muffly, Democrat of Winston, the bill initially failed. Undeterred, Muffly reintroduced it in 1909 when it narrowly passed.⁷¹³ Newspapers around the state followed the vote, and “editorial reaction from the state’s daily press indicated general support.”⁷¹⁴ Helena’s *Plaindealer*, meanwhile, decried the measure. “Montana has joined the Jim Crow Colony alongside of Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Arkansas.” “God help us!”⁷¹⁵

⁷⁰⁷ Loewen, *Sundown Towns*; Loewen, “Possible Sundown Towns in MT.” Loewen’s list of possible Montana sundown towns or jurisdictions includes Choteau, Miles City, Round-up, and Lincoln County.

⁷⁰⁸ “No Colored Colonies Wanted in Montana.”

⁷⁰⁹ Langel, *Chester Country*, 611.

⁷¹⁰ “Color Line Is Drawn In Glendive,” *Glendive Independent*, February 9, 1915.

⁷¹¹ This was reported in the *Glendive Independent* and later, on May 2, 1895, in the *Kansas City Gazette*. It is also noted in Alexander Russell Webb’s contemporary writings (see Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*. and in secondary sources (e.g. Garceau-Hagen et al., *Portraits of Women in the American West*.

⁷¹² Wells, “Lynch Law.” Surrounding states also lynched people during this period, with 1892 lynchings in North Dakota (1), Wyoming (9), and Idaho (8). Wyoming and Idaho had more lynchings than any other states outside of the South.

⁷¹³ Senate Bill 71, 1907 S. J. 140.; 1909 Laws C. 49.; Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 56.. For an excellent recounting of the Legislative debates regarding the bill, see Eruteya, “Racial Legislation in Montana: 1864 – 1955,” 40-58.

⁷¹⁴ Myers, “Montana’s Negro Newspapers, 1894-1911,” 21.

⁷¹⁵ Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912,” 57.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent and Endurance in Montana's African American Community, ca. 1910s-1940

In the decades after Montana “joined the Jim Crow Colony,” the Black community in Montana shifted significantly. The state’s homestead boom started busting by 1918, a few years after the last of the “colored” military units left. As Montana’s total population declined in the 1920s—the only state in the nation where it did so—its Black population declined more precipitously. By 1940, the Montana’s Black population was smaller than it had been at any time since statehood.

Black Montana in the Interwar Years

Despite the determination to dig in and fight for racial justice and equality evinced by the Black community at the turn-of-the-century, subsequent years brought rapid demographic decline, both to Black Montana generally and to its Helena heart in particular. In 1909, Lloyd Graye “went on to better opportunities in Seattle.”⁷¹⁶ Many Black Montanans did likewise thereafter. As Dr. Quintard Taylor noted, in the northwestern United States, until 1910, “a number of communities [in the region] were roughly equal in both size and influence over the entire area,” among them the core localities of Black Montana.⁷¹⁷ In subsequent years “some cities—notably Seattle and Portland—became much more significant as centers of Afro-American life in the Pacific Northwest while others, such as Roslyn, Butte, and Helena, became secondary or declined to only nominal importance.”⁷¹⁸



Figure 54: “Arthur C. Ford,”
Unknown photographer, c. 1916.
Montana Historical Society
Research Center, PAc 2002-
36.14.

Black Montana’s overall population decline was unusual for the region in this period—Dr. Taylor suggested it “may be the only western state for which this was true”—and was in large part due to closure or reduction of military bases built for a very different context, i.e., during American military invasion of the region.⁷¹⁹ Helena and other military-base towns like Missoula and Havre suffered significant sudden Black population loss when the army transferred “colored” units out of Montana for good beginning in 1905. In 1912 “the last Black troops left Fort Harrison . . . and with them went many patrons of Helena’s Black businesses.”⁷²⁰

Many of these migrants went west: while Helena and Butte Black populations dwindled, “in places like Spokane, Yakima, Pocatello they were just starting.”⁷²¹ Other African American Montanans moved in various directions for a variety of reasons. Some people moved east. In 1916, Arthur C. Ford, son of Nathaniel Ford, graduated from Montana State College with a mechanical engineering degree. Ford went on to become president of New York City’s Department of Water Supply, Gas & Electricity. “When he was

named to that post in January 1954 by Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Mr. Ford became the first Black to be appointed commissioner of a city agency.”⁷²² [Figure 54] Taylor Gordon of White Sulphur Springs joined him

⁷¹⁶ Lang, “Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906,” 14.

⁷¹⁷ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 351.

⁷¹⁸ Taylor, 351.

⁷¹⁹ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 37.

⁷²⁰ Lang, “Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906,” 14.

⁷²¹ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 342. Roslyn’s “disappeared.”

⁷²² Montana State College, *Bulletin of the Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, Twenty-Second Annual Catalog, 1914-1915*, (Bozeman: Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, Vol. 12, No. 4, May 1915), 125, 168;

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

in New York. In 1927, Gordon, by then an accomplished tenor, forged a singing partnership with J. Rosamond Johnson, often performing spirituals, including a well-received concert at Carnegie Hall. He “later wr[ote] a best-selling memoir, *Born to Be*, about his Montana boyhood, the Harlem Renaissance, and advancing critical appreciation of the spiritual as an art form.”⁷²³ James Dorsey of Missoula ultimately moved east as well, though not as far. In 1922, Dorsey, son of a 25th Infantry veteran, became the “first African American to graduate from the University of Montana.” Five years later, he became the first known to graduate from law school there as well, whereupon he moved to Milwaukee, where he practiced law for 40 years.⁷²⁴

With an aging population, death further reduced the ranks being decimated by migration, taking foundations of the local and regional community, like ubiquitous barbers Thomas White and Duke Dutrieuille, both of whom died in Belt, in 1909 and 1911, respectively. Belt founders John and Mattie Castner soon followed them, dying in 1915 and 1920, respectively. Mrs. Castner “was honored with two funeral services. At the first, Reverend Almon Taylor, the white Methodist minister of Belt, officiated at a service held at the Belt High School auditorium. ‘Mother Castner’s body then was taken to the W H. George Chapel in Great Falls for a service jointly conducted by the Great Falls African Methodist Episcopal Union Bethel Church pastor, Reverend A. W. Johnson, and by Reverend Taylor. Mattie’s exceptional will distributed more than \$30,000 of the substantial estate to friends and charitable causes, including \$5,000 to the poor in Belt and Great Falls to be administered by the two churches.’”⁷²⁵

Just south of Belt, in White Sulphur Springs, Joseph Meek died in 1912, and Anna Gordon in 1924. Community after community lost its Black pillars in this period, as the founding generation of Black Montana’s core settlements and smaller towns passed on. Helena lost residents like Susan Elizabeth Tinsley Mundy (also of Bozeman) in 1921, and Alice Palmer (also of Lincoln) in 1936. In Virginia City, Jack Taylor passed in 1926, and Sarah Blair Gammon Brown Bickford in 1931, and in rural Madison County Margaret Hall died at her Waterloo farm in 1912. Hall’s husband Leven followed in 1915, and was interred beside his wife and children in Fish Creek Cemetery. Not far away, in the Butte-Anaconda area, Sarah Walker died in 1912, Jimmy Wilson died in 1923, and Lee Pleasant Driver died in 1935. Meanwhile, Bozeman lost Fanny Woodson in 1920, and Eli Rogers five years later. Many miles to the east, in the Great Plains town of Miles City, founding mother Sadie Butler Thomas died in 1909.

Great Falls pillars who passed in this period included William Bairpaugh in 1928. Elsewhere in Cascade County, in 1914, Mary Fields died in Cascade.⁷²⁶ In the ensuing period death took pillars of the community in Havre (Alice “Ma Plaz” Pleasant, 1934), and Billings (Walker Browning, 1925), Lewistown (Alexander Branson about 1924 and Bertie Brown in 1933), and Kalispell (the Lambs and the Whites, 1916-1934). From far eastern towns like Plentywood (Richard “Dick” Wilson, 1922) to far western towns like Thompson Falls

“Arthur Ford, 93, Dies; Led City Water Board,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1985.

⁷²³ Behan, “Forgotten Heritage,” 36.; Gordon’s sister, Rose Taylor, “wrote in an autobiographical sketch that she was the first ‘White’ child born in White Sulphur Springs.” See also Taylor Gordon, *Born to Be*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

⁷²⁴ “Legal Pioneer: the Legacy of UM Law’s First African American Graduate,” *Barrister* (Fall 2015), 26-27; Robert Bruce Slater, “The First Black Graduates of the Nation’s 50 Flagship State Universities,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 13 (Autumn 1996): 80-81.

In 1963 Dorsey received a Distinguished Service Award from his Alma Mater.

⁷²⁵ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3”; “John K. Castner (State of MT, Certificate of Death)”; “‘Mother of Belt’ Is Dead; Was Born a Slave in the South”; “Cabin Boy for Admiral Perry”; “‘The Duke’ Who Had Shaved Three Presidents, Is Dead”; “Dutrieuille Dead, Known as The Duke.”

⁷²⁶ Robison, “On Being a Black American in Territorial Fort Benton—Part 3.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

(William McNorton, 1938, after being committed to the insane asylum at Warm Springs), in the many homes of Black Montana the founding generation passed on.

By 1920, the state's African American population fell some 10% since 1910, to 1,658, and over the next 10 years it dropped to 1,256. Helena still boasted one of Montana's largest populations, but it fell faster than in the state as a whole, plummeting from 415 in 1910 to 220 in 1920.⁷²⁷ When one considers that the Black population may have in fact peaked ca. 1912, the demographic decline becomes even more drastic.

Within Montana in this period, community geography contracted, and reconfigured. In some core communities, the Black population declined while in others it increased, as people moved out of, into, and around Montana. By 1930, the census listed only 133 Black people—just over 10% of Montana's total—in Helena. Helena's African American community had by then been eclipsed by both Billings' (141) and Great Falls' (208). By 1940, Black Montana comprised four roughly equal community cores, with Great Falls, Billings and Helena all having the same number of residents, and Butte having slightly more (though when considered in conjunction with Anaconda, the Butte area's population exceeded the others by more than a third). At the same time, Missoula's community shrank and Havre's declined drastically, as did, ultimately, the populations in secondary localities like Bozeman, Miles City, Lewistown and Kalispell.⁷²⁸

The internal reconfiguration of Black Montana during this period also brought the disappearance of African American residents in many of the more rural areas of the state. In some smaller towns like White Sulphur Springs, Virginia City, and Lincoln, longtime prominent Black residents endured, often until death took them in the interwar years. But as counties proliferated, the Black population contracted. In the 1920 census for the first time, some Montana counties listed no African American residents at all. Other rural locales, meanwhile, became Black places but briefly, when a prominent resident lived there for a period—like Homestead's Black doctor ca. 1929—or when Black CCC camps brought almost 1,000 African American men to the Troy-Libby area in 1933-1934. As community geography shifted, and Montana's overall Black population declined, the community changed qualitatively as well. With the departure of "colored" military units, the population became more female, or more proportional in terms of sex ratios.⁷²⁹

Helena

As Black Helena shrank, it remained a group of interconnected families but one in which working-age adults were less common as they sought opportunities elsewhere. Average household size dropped noticeably (to about 2.7 people per household) but most people in the community still lived in family groups, with 50 households accounting for all of the town's African American residents. By 1930, 66 women constituted 50% of the city's Black population, a quarter of under the age of 18 and almost one in five 60 years old or older.⁷³⁰

As it long had, the occupational profile of these families reflected a system of structural racism that relegated most Black people to a limited number of low-waged jobs. It also reflected the deep decline in the Helena African American community that now worked in such positions almost exclusively and was no longer sufficient to support a spectrum of independent Black businesses.

⁷²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, "1910 Census"; Bureau, "1920 Census"; Bureau, "1930 Census."

⁷²⁸ Bureau, "1930 Census"; United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940*.

⁷²⁹ Aasheim and Sheridan County Historical Association, *Sheridan's Daybreak; a Story of Sheridan County and Its Pioneers.*, 317; Bureau, "1920 Census"; *May the Work I've Done Speak for Me: African American CCC Enrollees in MT, 1933-34*.

⁷³⁰ A total of ninety-eight households in the 1910 census accounted for 337 of the city's 415 African Americans. Household data for the remainder is unclear.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

According to the 1930 census, 67 African American males lived in Helena that year, of whom 52 were 18 or older. The census listed occupations for 43 of them (none for males under the age of 18). Over 60% of those reporting jobs listed just three positions, i.e. "laborer" (five, one of whom specified "mining" labor)[plus one "workman, smelter"], "porter" (seven—five of whom worked at hotels), and "janitor" (14).⁷³¹ One man worked as a chauffeur, one as a barber, and two as cooks at hotels. There was one concrete worker, and one hod carrier, one waiter (dining car) and one elevator attendant, one engineer (at a life insurance company building), and one farm laborer, as well as a "fireman, bakery." Two men listed their occupation as "gardener," (and one of the laborers specified "gardening" labor) and one as "painter, paint shop." The sole professional position listed was "minister, Negro church," and the sole businessman listed was a "proprietor, second hand store." Besides this proprietor, Andrew J. Walton, only the enduring barber, Joseph W. Clarke, and mining laborer, George Howard, worked for themselves.⁷³²

The limited range of occupations for females also narrowed. By 1930, 21 of the Black females still living in Helena listed occupations (none of them was over 18). Eight of these women made a living doing "cleaning" or "housekeeping" (of the three doing "housework" one had her own business while the other two worked for private families), five were cooks (two at hotels, two at restaurants, and one for a private family), three labored as laundresses (one of whom had her own business and one of whom worked for a private family), and one worked for herself as a seamstress (Lela Ward of 20 Wood Street, no longer extant). There was also a "missionary, Negro church," an "operator, beauty parlor," a "stock girl, department store," and a "proprietress, groceries," i.e., Almira Dorsey. By that time, Almira ran the Dorsey grocery herself, Walter having died in 1907. She continued to operate it through 1932, when she sold it.⁷³³ By then the store had long been one of the last vestiges of the African American business sector, and of the African American community that undergirded it, which had been so vigorous around the turn of the century.

Like the Dorsey family, many of those who remained during Black Helena's decline were longtime pillars of the community. Some families endured into the 1920s. The family of Miles York, for instance, ran a laundry business in Helena in the 1910s and then moved to Big Sandy before returning to Helena, where Miles died in 1925.⁷³⁴ In the same neighborhood, Edward and Rosana Glenn (1020 Fifth Avenue/24LC2451) stayed until ca. 1921, when they moved to Butte. Not far away, Annie Marshall lived at 918 Breckenridge (24LC2449) until her 1925 death (at which time one of her three sons remained in Helena, with the other two in Butte and Spokane). The Blanks family could also be found nearby into the 1920s (first at 843 8th then at 506 Leslie), as could Andrew and Sarah Green and Annie Gordon (413 N. Raleigh/24LC2434). Other Black families clustered on the lower west side of town into the 1920s. Retired Sgt. Henry Robinson (25th U.S. Infantry) retained 504 Peosta (24LC2435) until 1919, when he left. His Black Bridgewater neighbors, an Army veteran's family who lived at 502 Peosta (24LC2272), remained. One block away, on Hollins Avenue, one could find the families of neighbors, and veterans, Jefferson Harrison (at 534) until 1922, Nathan Walker (at 520) until 1924, and Charles Mathews (at 522) until 1927.⁷³⁵

⁷³¹ A certain amount of occupational diversity existed within these categories.

⁷³² Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷³³ Hagen, "Dorsey Grocery and Residence"; Bureau, "1930 Census."

⁷³⁴ Bauml, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House." The Yorks always lived in the same neighborhood i.e. 5th, 6th and 8th Aves. and 712 & 515 Idaho.

⁷³⁵ Histories of some enduring African American households are contained in Montana Historic Property Record Nos. 24LC2429 through 24LC2453. Robinson is identified as a veteran in "March 16, 1906, *Montana Plaindealer*, March 1906.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Others stayed longer, remaining in Helena during the Great Depression and beyond.⁷³⁶ The George and Polly D. Lee family owned and occupied 912 8th Avenue (24LC2447) into 1930, while members of the Ingram and Dutriueille families kept 835 5th (24LC2445) into 1940.

The African American people who remained in the Helena and the surrounding region during the community's decline continued to excel where they could despite the contraction of Black businesses, professions, and associated opportunities. In 1921, Missouri native Henry J. Baker was appointed to the position of postmaster at the State Capitol, reportedly becoming the first Black Montana state official.⁷³⁷ Octavia Bridgwater left Montana to get a nursing degree and returned to Helena as an RN in 1930, only to discover that hospitals in the state wouldn't hire Black nurses. Of necessity, Nurse Bridgwater turned to private nursing and did housework and laundry.⁷³⁸

Although these individuals managed to find professional success, opportunities for doing so proved few and far between. After 1910, as the Black population in Helena and other core settlements shrank, it became increasingly difficult for the community to support a spectrum of diverse, autonomous institutions and spaces. In 1910, the *Plaindealer* "switched from a weekly to a monthly," and in September of 1911 Joseph Blackburn Bass published his last Helena issue. Bass decamped for San Francisco and then Los Angeles, where he married Carlotta Spear and with her ran the *California Eagle*.⁷³⁹ Helena's Black churches, the heart of the city's Black community still functioned, but even they withered with each passing year. In 1915, the "colored" Ebenezer Baptist Mission moved into the "old Second Baptist Church," and five years later Ebenezer Baptist Church reported a membership of 30. The congregation was still active in 1930, when it hosted a discussion with former Governor Stewart, but there is no evidence of activity in subsequent years. Thereafter, St. James endured alone.⁷⁴⁰

As in Helena specifically, many of those who remained in the state during Black Montana's overall decline were longtime pillars of the community. This was true in core places that boasted relatively stable—or even sometimes growing—populations in this period, like Butte and Anaconda, Billings, and Great Falls. It was also true in places where populations plummeted, like the Army-base towns of Missoula and Havre, and secondary clusters like Miles City and Bozeman, Lewistown, and Kalispell.

Butte and Anaconda

While Helena's population declined sharply after its 1910s peak, Black Montana's second-city—Butte—experienced a more moderate drop. Less tightly tied to a military post and its Black soldiers, and in keeping with the industries that anchored the mining and smelting centers, the Black community in Butte and Anaconda even enjoyed periods of growth in the interwar years. The 1910 census enumerated 364 Black residents in the two towns, with 240 in Butte and 164 in Anaconda; ten years later that total decreased to 306 (214 Butte, 94 Anaconda). In 1930, Anaconda's enumerated population increased a bit—to 101—but further decline in Butte's population translated into a total Black population of 274 in the two towns. The 1940 census showed the Butte

⁷³⁶ "Helena As She Was - An Open History Resource for Montana's Capital City."

⁷³⁷ *Anaconda Standard*, July 3, 1921.

⁷³⁸ Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House."

⁷³⁹ Myers, "Montana's Negro Newspapers, 1894-1911," 22. Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912," 57. Carlotta Spear Bass became a major figure in African American history.

⁷⁴⁰ Hagen, "Montana Historic Property Record Form: 114 N. Hoback"; "The Ebenezer Baptist Mission"; "Colored Citizens Hear Gov. Stewart."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

population to be about the same as in 1930—162 African American residents enumerated—and the Anaconda population significantly reduced, so that together the towns counted 238 African American residents.⁷⁴¹

Throughout, the Butte-Anaconda community continued to be anchored by a number of enduring interconnected families, but other demographic and economic changes nonetheless attended population decline. Both Butte and Anaconda continued to boast mixed Black populations that included men and women and boys and girls living in assorted arrangements in a variety of residences. In Butte, Black people continued to live in all or most of the city's eight wards, but were especially concentrated in several areas. Throughout Butte and its environs in this period, families and individuals both owned and rented dwellings. Property ownership expanded after 1910, when Silver Bow County boasted about 15 Black owned properties, all houses in Butte. In 1920 enumerators identified some 20 Black-owned properties in the county, including five farms outside of the city.⁷⁴²

People of varied means owned their homes. They included people like hotel waiter Arthur Chappell and his wife Mary (217 N. Emmitt Street); barber John W. Duncan and his wife Armeta (who lived at 711 E. Broadway with their three young children), electric company janitor Hiram C. Dunn and his wife Ida (who lived with their five children (304 W. Aluminum), and electric company janitor Henry Fagan and his wife Ruth and 92-year-old mother Sarah (114 E. 2nd Street). They included as well widowed shoemaker John Fagan (212 W. Galena), masseur William Freeman and his wife Mamie (who lived with their four teenaged and adult children at 530 W. Mercury), depot porter Frank L. Lewis (12 Aluminum Street), and Robert and Elizabeth Logan, a janitor and music teacher, respectively (112 S. Idaho). Widower Edward Middleton, a teamster for a "junk business," owned his home at 647 Aluminum, and club house porter Charles Poaque and his wife Ella, who lived with their 20-year-old niece, owned their home at 417 Dakota. So, too, hotel porter Walter Scott and his wife Nellie (who lived with their son Wallace at 714 Dakota); divorced Elizabeth Simington, matron at a dry goods store (who shared the home she owned at 1037 Iowa home with her daughter Birdie Fortune and her family); single plasterer Ivar Walker (2640 Placer); and Silver Bow Club waiter Dudley Walton and his wife Dora, a caterer (at 522 S. Idaho).⁷⁴³

Other homeowners could be found on the urban fringe. Widower Frank Black and his 15-year-old son William, both hotel porters, owned a home on Princeton Street in Floral Park (on the east edge of town), and railroad section man Charles Saxton and his wife Pinkie, owned a place on S. Arizona Street in the town's southwest section, which the census enumerator called Williamsburg. Other Butte community members lived farther afield: Richard Brown and his wife Jennette (along with five sons and a daughter) continued to live on, and work, their Jefferson County mining claim in Camp Caroline at the top of Homestake Pass east of town, but as metal prices, and mining income, fluctuated, Richard hired on as a janitor for the *Butte Daily Post* ca. 1909. Richard's brother Stephen W. Brown, an unmarried Stationary Engineer, owned and occupied another Camp Caroline property, neighboring Richard and Jennette's place.⁷⁴⁴

The community in Butte also included farmers working nearby farms. Louis Cooper and his White wife Minnie owned a farm in the Silver Bow locality, as did Gilbert Evans and Frank C. Lewis, whose Silver Bow farms were near Visalia Station. Farther west, near Gregson (some 15 miles west of Butte and 10 miles east of

⁷⁴¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "1910 Census"; Bureau, "1920 Census"; Bureau, "1930 Census"; United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940*.

⁷⁴² Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁴³ Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁴⁴ "Richard A. Brown Taken by Death"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Anaconda), Lee Pleasant and Pearl Payne Driver and their seven children farmed and ranched the land they patented in 1923. Nearby, Thomas Waite also owned a Gregson-area farm.⁷⁴⁵

On the other side of Gregson, property ownership also expanded in Anaconda. There, the 1910 census identified only one Black-owned home—that of Frank and Sarah Walker at 516 Spruce—while the 1920 census counted five such properties, three owned by the families of married men who worked for the Anaconda Company, while two belonged to widowed women. They included the Walker property (which by then contained two owner-occupied homes, each housing a married couple with the Walker surname) and, next door, the Andrew and Minnie Brown family home at 518 Spruce. The widow Rose Lane owned her home at 214 W. Commercial (which she shared with her widowed nephew and his two teenage daughters), as did the widow Allie Wallace, a bank janitress who shared her 712 E. Park St. home with her adult son Arthur, a mail clerk for the railroad.⁷⁴⁶

But while home ownership expanded, the number of Black businesses in Butte and Anaconda declined, as overall population decline translated into fewer community-sustained commercial enterprises. In 1910, census enumerators counted 25 Black businesses in Butte—four that employed additional staff—and nine in Anaconda, with one—Driver's Saloon and Cafe—employing others. In 1920, census takers counted not a single Black employer in either town: Black businesses comprised about 19 self-employed individuals in Butte and about six in Anaconda. Among them that year in Butte were Harry Robinson's "pool hall" and at least three barbershops—including those run by John W. Duncan, C. Ortego, and A.M. Baxter—and another three shoe-shine, or boot black, shops, including Robert Fields', Bert Smith's, and William Randolph's. "Shoe maker" John Fagan ran his own business ("in store") and Jesse Henry did upholstery. Ivar Walker was self-employed in the building trades as a plasterer. Two men—George Armstrong and William Green—were self-employed barbershop porters.⁷⁴⁷

Black women also ran a number of Butte businesses identified in the 1920 census. Two women, Tillie Smith and Surana Greenley operated home laundry enterprises, and another two—Alicia Moore and Charity Williams—were self-employed masseuses. Gertrude Smith also worked on her own account, in a "vanity store" in some capacity, as did Louise Albright, a "nurse" in private homes. Mrs. Elizabeth Logan continued to make a living teaching music.⁷⁴⁸

Anaconda's six Black businesspeople enumerated in 1920 included two women and four men. Molly Hightower ran a lodging house, while Hattie Mudd worked as a self-employed "washerwoman." Walter Scott, meanwhile, worked on his own account as a masseur at a "steam bath parlor." Two barbers had their own shops, i.e., C.J. Wyatt and Haiti-born Horace Streat. Edmund "Checkers" Shears continued to run his "pool hall," the Atlantic Club.⁷⁴⁹

Among those who worked as employees in the businesses, industries, and homes of the Butte-Anaconda area, low-wage service jobs still predominated. Women worked most often as servants, maids, laundresses, and cooks. They frequently did so for private families but sometimes they worked elsewhere, like boarding houses

⁷⁴⁵ Hagen, "Driver's Saloon and Cafe"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁴⁶ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁴⁷ Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁴⁸ Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁴⁹ Bureau of the Census.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

or, more rarely, in higher-status places like banks: recall Allie Wallace, who in 1920 worked as an Anaconda bank “janitress.” In Butte that year enumerators noted two women who were store “matrons,” Elizabeth Simington and Harriet Foreman; one who worked as a rooming house “landlady,” Lottie Lenox; and one who worked as a hairdresser, Zeld Hightower. Lillian Crisp, meanwhile, worked as an assistant in a dental office.⁷⁵⁰

Most Black men in Butte in 1920 worked in one of three common positions, i.e., janitor, porter, or laborer. A few worked as cooks, and a few as waiters—Dudley Walton and Louis Ridley, at least, were thus employed at the Silver Bow Club. Just two Black men, James Job and Roman Walker, worked as miners in the city’s famed copper mines, and two others worked in skilled trades as a machinist and an electrical engineer. The only two Black men who listed professional positions were leaders of Black community organizations: Charles Elliot pastored the A.M.E. church and Rufus Houston managed a “colored club.”⁷⁵¹

In Anaconda, where a new smelter—one of the world’s largest—was completed in 1918, Black men’s employment continued to differ significantly from the service work that predominated in Butte and other Montana cities. Lee Pleasant Driver, among others, helped build the smelter, and of the roughly 40 men listed in the 1920 census, some 29 worked for the Anaconda Company there. They worked primarily as laborers and switchmen, but also as janitors, drivers, teamsters, engineers, and smeltermen. Several other men in Anaconda worked as switchmen for the railroad, and one as a railroad mail clerk. A few also worked in the types of positions common across Black Montana—enumerators listed three men working as janitors, and one as a porter. William Hanlen, meanwhile, cooked at a hotel, and 78-year-old Ben Bolt worked at a barn, as a hostler.⁷⁵²

In the 1930s and 1940, much of the residential and economic demography of the Butte-Anaconda area persisted. In Butte some 19 Black households owned their home in 1930—though none were on farms—and they continued to include members of the Duncan, Chappell, Fagan, Poague, Lewis, Scott and Brown families as well as, on the southwest fringe, the Sextons. The biggest property owner in town was George Armstrong, whose recently-acquired apartment building at 604 W. Park was valued at \$12,000. John Duncan also acquired property. Duncan, by then a doctor specializing in podiatry, held real estate assets that totaled \$6,000 that included the home he and Armeta lived in with their children at 715 W. Park as well as their previous home at 711 W. Broadway, then used as a rental. Other 1930 property owners included John F. Davis, M.E. Davis, Charles Fortune, Samuel Le Grant, John Palmer, Louis R. Ridley, Grace Serena, Hugh G. Vaughn, and Rance Ware. In 1940, at the tail end of the Great Depression—which brought general decline in Butte—enumerators counted only eight Black homeowners, including members of the Duncan family and Brown families as well as Robert Logan, then 81 and widowed, who worked as a janitor and lived in the home he owned on Idaho Street. That year, John E Balmer, John W Brouwer, Jessie Edward, Gurley Fenter, Mina Hafey, and Lottie Williams also owned their homes.⁷⁵³

In Anaconda in the 1930 census, Black homeowners increased to about eight. In a testament to the instability attending the Great Depression, none of them had the same surname as 1920 owners or were otherwise identifiably related to previous owners. Those who owned their homes that year included Bryant and Leola Barker and their son (at 112 N. Maple), Ora and Carrie Dennis and their two sons (114 N. Maple), Reece and Edora Evans and their seven children (305 Front Street), James and Anna Harris and their seven children (113

⁷⁵⁰ Bureau of the Census.

⁷⁵¹ Bureau of the Census.

⁷⁵² Bureau of the Census.

⁷⁵³ Bureau of the Census, “16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

N. Elm), William and Ethel Johnson and their daughter (115 ½ N. Maple), Peril and Susie Stovall and their adopted son (at 416 West Pennsylvania), and Ms. Birdie Ward and her two nephews. In 1940, enumerators listed 10 Black homeowners in Anaconda. Several of these were families that owned Anaconda residences previously, including members of the Barker, Dennis, Evans, Harris and Johnson families as well as member of the Driver family. Lee Pleasant and Pearl Payne's son William S. Driver that year owned a home at 4 Birch Street that he shared with his wife Mattie and mother-in-law Stella White. Anaconda homeowners in 1940 included William T. Brown (85 N. Maple), widowed Elizabeth Ellis and her adult son George (113 N. Elm, rear), Ophelia Felder (7 Hickory), and Earl and Nelda Rodgers and their three children (316 Pennsylvania Avenue).⁷⁵⁴

The Black business sector, meanwhile, continued to contract. By 1930, the number of self-employed individuals in Butte dropped to about 14, and 10 years later enumerators counted just six Butte residents working on their own account. In Anaconda that number dropped to three in 1930, and in 1940 census enumerators listed not one Black resident running a business or working on their own account. Primary among Butte's Black businesses in this period was the chiropodist practice of Dr. John Duncan, who left Butte—and his barbershop—in 1919-1920 to attend the University of Massachusetts School of Podiatry and Orthopedics at Emerson College. Duncan “completed the two year program in one year, and returned to Butte,” where in 1923 he opened his own clinic at 315 Phoenix Avenue. In 1932, he was joined there by his son Walter, who attended the NYU-affiliated First Institute of Podiatry after graduating from the Butte School of Mines, and like his father returned to Butte a chiropodist. The doctors Duncan maintained their clinic for decades.⁷⁵⁵

Other Butte businesses in this period proved less enduring. In 1930 they included a barbershop run by Abe Warwick—whose Missouri Club was closed by authorities in 1922—and also possibly Aaron Baxter, a 79-year-old barber working on his own account who died the following year. They also included several shoeshine parlors or bootblack businesses. In 1930, Curtis Burnett and James R. Grant ran their own shoeshine parlors, and Major Vince and James Green worked on their own account as bootblacks in barber shops.⁷⁵⁶

Black boarding or lodging houses also continued to be an important business in Butte, as did laundry businesses, for women especially. Marie Snyder and Josephine A. Henley both ran boarding houses in 1930, and Mary Smith and Grace Serena both worked from their homes as self-employed laundresses. Mrs. Serena also kept a number of Black lodgers in her home, among them widowed “machinist” Richard Brown. Rental real estate likewise remained a critical component of the Black economy: George Armstrong made a living as a “landlord”—of his apartment building—in 1930, and 10 years later Lottie Williams did the same as a “landlady” who rented out “houses.” Members of the Black community in Butte also continued to engage in mining enterprises. In 1930, mining industry stalwart Charles F. Jones worked on his own account as a “prospector,” and in 1940 brothers Richard A. and Joseph D. Brown—enumerated that year with two other brothers and their mother Jeanette in their sister Hiawatha Brown's rented home at 216 S. Idaho—both made a living mining in “gold mines,” likely their own.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁴ Bureau of the Census, “15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁷⁵⁵ “Dr. J.W. Duncan, Chiropodist, Succumbs Here”; “Retired Podiatrist Recalls Prejudices Growing up in Butte in Early 1920s”; Wood, “Jon and Armeta Duncan Residence (MT Historic Property Record, #24SB0990).”

⁷⁵⁶ “Orders Were Issued”; Bureau of the Census, “15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁷⁵⁷ Bureau of the Census, “16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census; Wood, “Armstrong Apartments (MT Historic Property Record, #24SB1053).”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

A few other individuals made a living in more unusual ways in this period, working as self employed brass band musicians—liked Harold Hatsell in 1930—or writers, like Herbert Brown in 1940. In Anaconda, enumerators in this period identified only three individuals working on their own account, all in 1930. They included Walter and Blanche Scott, a masseur and masseuse, respectively, as well as second-generation businesswoman/millener Marian Reynolds. Reynolds was enumerated that year living with her widowed father Claude in his rented home at 420 Cherry, along with her adult brothers Edward and Rox, and running her own retail hat shop. Her millener mother Marie Reynolds had died the year before.⁷⁵⁸

Great Falls

As in the Butte-Anaconda area, the population in Great Falls in this period fluctuated, and indeed the Electric City was the only one of Montana's core Black communities that reported a population increase in both the 1920 and 1930 censuses. In 1920 census takers counted 202 African American people, up from 116 in 1910, and in 1930 the census population stood at 209. By the 1940 census, that total dropped over 25%, to 150. Through this period, the population continued to comprise a range of ages and family/household arrangements, and continued to include a significant number of homeowners: census enumerators identified 21 Black owner-occupied dwellings in 1920, and in 1930 and 1940 they listed 19 and 14, respectively.⁷⁵⁹

Most of the people who owned their homes in 1920 were longtime Great Falls-area property owners. Indeed, around 75% of them owned property in 1910 or before. In the city proper, where they lived overwhelming in the 3rd Ward, these included David and Kate Knott, Joseph and Susie McCracken, John W. and Lida Robinson [or Robertson], and John A. Taylor (with his new wife Fannie). They also included widow Emma Porter and widower Ed Sims as well as divorced Henry White, Agnes Williams, and Thomas Stephan (or Stephan Thomas) Williams. Among them were a number of homeowners on the outskirts of Great Falls proper. Moses Williams lived just north of the river, in Black Eagle, while Charles and Coralle Bigbee, along with their nephew John P. Connell (son of Charles' sister Charlotte Glovina Bigbee Connell Smith), and Martin R. Griffin lived on their farms just south of town. Martin's brother, Francis T. Griffin, farmed a little farther south, in the Ferguson area.⁷⁶⁰

Also owning Great Falls homes in 1920 were other longtime area residents, like Theodor A. and Marie H. Dutrieuille Ellis, who lived with their three children and Marie's mother, Maria Dutrieuille, and brother, Frank Dutrieuille, at 605 8th Avenue South. Several blocks away lived George and Vina Smith, who shared their home at 415 9th Avenue South with Vina's adult son Henry E. Connell along with his wife Alice Comer Connell and son Henry J. Connell Junior. Mattie Byers Novotney and her family, meanwhile, owned a home at 513 S. 13th Street. Additional homeowners in 1920 included Daniel Briley who in 1915 operated his own restaurant at 313 2nd Avenue South, and his wife Augusta and their three young children, who lived at 612 13th Street South, as well 81-year-old widow Jane Johnson, who owned and occupied 812 5th Street South with her adult son William. Another three Black-owned homes could be found nearby on 7th Avenue South. Harry C. and Ella Johnson owned and occupied 607 7th Avenue South, where they lived with Harry's brother Theodore at 607 7th Avenue South, while up the street were William H. and Susie Dotson at 715 7th Avenue South, and Oscar and

⁷⁵⁸ Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁵⁹ Bureau, "1920 Census"; Bureau, "1930 Census"; United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940.*; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁶⁰ Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Lillian McFarlin at 1218 7th Avenue South. Bert A. and Alice Williams, meanwhile, owned a farm just north of the Missouri in Black Eagle, near long-resident Moses Williams.⁷⁶¹

Some of these 1920 homeowners remained at the same location, or owned other properties, in subsequent censuses. Among the approximate 19 property owners in 1930 were Katie Knott, Emma Porter, and Marie Dutriueille Ellis, all widowed, as well as George and Vina Smith, and William and Susan Dotson. Joseph McCracken still lived at 605 9th Avenue South, with new wife Melvina, and John Taylor was still at 708 8th Avenue south, with his 4th wife Gertrude. Of the farms on the outskirts of town, Francis Griffin, at least, remained in the Ferguson area.⁷⁶²

Other 1930 homeowners were longtime residents of the broader Great Falls region, and longtime members of the city's Black community. Laura Ferguson, who grew up in the Fergus County mining town of Maiden with her mother Fannie Ferguson and married John Ferguson in Great Falls in 1890, owned 1214 7th Ave. South, a property she long lived on or adjacent to. That year she shared her home with adult daughter Francis and Francis' husband Henry White. Other former Fergus County residents owned homes nearby, including Jerry and Sally Reed, who married in Lewistown in 1909, and Martin and Emma Smith and their five children, who'd lived in Lewistown for several years after marrying in Butte in 1915, and Mose and Lizzie Smith Flagg, who married in Lewistown in 1923. Alida Gainey owned 305 6th Avenue South, as she had in 1910, and James and Lizzie Kilbert, who in 1920 lodged with Emma Porter, also owned a home.⁷⁶³

The long-prominent Bairpaugh family also owned property in Great Falls. Indeed, after William died in 1928 his widow Rose Talbert Bairpaugh held the most substantial real estate assets in the local Black community, with her property in 1930 valued at more than twice that of any other homeowner. Rose lived with her daughter, also named Rose, at their 1221 Sixth Ave. South home. Meanwhile, Charles H. Conley, from Havre, owned his home at 214 S. 32nd Street. Conley had been widowed in 1922 when he lost his wife Julia Palmer, daughter of Alice Johnson Palmer. He shared his 1930 home with his new wife, Daisy. Fellow former Havre resident Roy Winburn and his wife Molly owned and occupied another southside home, at 519 6th Ave. South. Also owning Electric City homes in 1930 were Robert and Ruth Minor, and William and Mamie Watkins, as well as William Jackson, who lived in his 812 8th St. South until he died there in 1942. Chris Peterson, a "negro" man born in Denmark, along his wife Christine, whose father was born in Holland, and Christine's widowed adult daughter Elizabeth Coleman Webb, and eight-year-old grand-daughter Jacqueline Webb also lived in the area. Mrs. Elizabeth Coleman Webb, who moved to Great Falls from South Dakota in 1921, was a cousin of prominent members of Helena's Black community, including Mrs. Norman (Maxine) Howard and Charles Ladd.⁷⁶⁴

Ten years later, in 1940, Katie Knott remained at her longtime home, as did Vina Smith, by then widowed, and John A. and Gertrude Taylor. Several of their 3rd Ward neighbors from 1930 were also still in their homes: that year Jerry and Sallie Reid owned and occupied 907 8th Ave South, and Martin and Emma Smith and their two teenage sons owned and occupied 709 7th Ave. South. Vina Bigbee Connell Smith's son Henry Edward Connell and his wife Alice Comer owned a farm just outside of town in the Flood area. Henry E. and Alice Connell and their three children lived sometimes at their farm and sometimes at Vina Smith's 415 9th Avenue South home. Longtime area residents Joe and Olean Green also owned a Great Falls home in 1940, at 1214 7th Ave. South, as

⁷⁶¹ Bureau of the Census.

⁷⁶² Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁶³ Bureau of the Census.

⁷⁶⁴ "Elizabeth Hill [Obituary]"; "William Jackson (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

did Lem Lucas, who shared his 1219 7th Ave. S. home with 73-year-old “housekeeper” Laura Ferguson and her teenage granddaughter Catherine Kirby. So too did Mattie Byers Novotny Welsh, divorced from John Novotny and subsequently widowed by second husband, tailor Joseph M. Welsh, who lived at 1303 6th Avenue South. Other 1940 homeowners may have been relative newcomers to the area. These included Ella Thomas (who had lived in her home since at least 1935) and Florence Bowers (who lived with lodger Edward Bowers), and Beatrice and Agnes Parker and their four children (at 618 4th Ave South).⁷⁶⁵

Community growth into the 1930s helped support a variety of Black businesses in Great Falls. In 1920, census enumerators identified at least two Black employers in town, with John Robertson’s trucking business, and Ray H. Walker’s café both employing not only their proprietors but also staff. Other members of the Black community ran smaller businesses. Peter Anderson continued to operate his barbershop, and both Mr. and Mrs. N.T. and Mamie Granberry ran their own businesses—he a “tailor shop” and she a “cigar store.” Geneva Hollowell and Beatrice Jackson worked from home as hairdressers, as did Mrs. Lillian Stewart, a barber. So, too, did dressmaker Emma Wynn, who boarded with Beatrice Jackson at the Philip and Mary Chadwell residence at 300 5th Ave South. Sadie White also ran her own business (though exactly what it was is unclear).⁷⁶⁶

In the 1930 census, widowed Mrs. Elizabeth Coleman Webb, who lived with her mother and stepfather, Christine and Chris Peterson, ran a massage parlor where she employed other people. So did Mr. Eugene Moore, who lodged in the home of a White widow and acted as a proprietor of a restaurant. Rose Bairpaugh also ran a substantial “beauty shop” at which she employed staff, while Beatrice Jackson was enumerated as proprietress of a “rooming house” that was also large enough to be an employer. Mrs. Ruby Robinson likewise ran a rooming house, albeit one that employed just herself. Other self-employed people in the community included Walter H. Gizan, who worked as a “promoter.” At least two men managed other businesses as well: enumerators listed Philip J. Chadwell as manager of a café, and William Knott as manager of a social club.⁷⁶⁷

The temporary period of Black population decline that arrived with the Great Depression eroded the Black business base in Great Falls. In 1940, the Electric City’s African American population totaled just 75% of what it had 10 years earlier, and the census listed no Black employers in town. That year, it counted just four people who worked for themselves. Foremost among them was Elizabeth Webb, still working as a masseuse. Roy Smittie ran his own shoeshine shop, and Andrew Johnson made a living as a junk collector. Robert Watson, enumerated in the Great Falls city jail, worked on his “own account” as a laborer.⁷⁶⁸

Billings

If Great Falls’ population rose and then fell during the interwar period, and populations in Helena declined sharply while populations in Butte and Anaconda declined more moderately, the city of Billings followed a different trajectory: the 1910 census enumerated 144 Black residents, populations listed in the 1920, 1930, and 1940 censuses remained relatively stable, with between 130-150 people enumerated each decade. Thus, by 1940, having taken different demographic paths, the four primary populations centers of Helena, Butte, Great Falls, and Billings all developed roughly coequal Black communities. That year, according to the census, each of these cores boasted some 150-160 Black residents. At 162 residents, Butte boasted the highest total of the

⁷⁶⁵ Bureau of the Census, “16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁷⁶⁶ Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁷⁶⁷ Bureau of the Census, “15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁷⁶⁸ Bureau of the Census, “16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

four, more so when considered in conjunction with Anaconda, home to another 76 people. These four local populations constituted the four roughly comparable cores of Black Montana as the 1940s dawned.⁷⁶⁹

Billings' relatively stable census population numbers attended an ongoing pattern of significant homeownership among the Black community, as well as an enduring confinement to two primary neighborhoods flanking the railroad tracks. Like the 1910 census, the 1920 census showed some 20 home owners, at least five of whom owned homes at both enumerations. The Browning family remained at its 106 S. 25th Street home and the Adams family remained at 109 N. 34 or 35th. Near the Brownings could be found James Baltimore: in 1920 Baltimore owned and occupied 24 S. 24th Street with his second wife Lulu Walker Baltimore, having moved from his previous home at 113 N 34th after his first wife, Harriet, died in 1911. William H. Chandler also widowed, moved in the interim. Chandler remained north of the tracks, however, moving from 205 N. 19th in 1910 to 124 N. 14th in 1920. William E. and Mattie Royster, along with daughter Gladys, moved as well, leaving the farm they'd owned in 1910 for a house in town at 305 N. 18th Street.⁷⁷⁰

Over the next decade, homeownership in Billings Black community increased significantly, growing by 40% to some 28 enumerated homeowners. Among them were four of the five families that owned homes since at least 1910. William Chandler died in Billings in 1922, leaving no local descendants, but the Browning, Adams, Baltimore and Royster families still owned and occupied their homes in 1930. Ruth Browning died in 1922 and Walker Browning followed in 1925: their longtime home at 106 S. 25th subsequently housed daughter Claudia Browning Bivins and her family. Daughter Lulu Browning Smith McCabe by then owned a home nearby, living with her second husband William McCabe and teenage sons Roy and Horace Smith at 417 S. 26th Street. Meanwhile, Lulu Baltimore, widowed in 1927, still owned her home a few blocks from the Brownings, while both the Adams and the Roysters remained on their northside properties. Other homeowners were less venerable but still longstanding, living in the same homes they'd owned and occupied 10 years earlier. Among those who remained in their 1920 locations included, on the southside, former Sheridan, Wyoming residents William and Nellie Best and seven of their children, as well as daughter Bertha Best Arias' son David at 102 S. 22nd Street, and Emmanuel and Mary Reed and son Fred W. at 612 S. 26th Street. North of the tracks, Wernal C. and Rosa Brown still owned and occupied their home at 310 N 17th, where they lived with Wernal's brother Ernest, as did Samuel and Lizzie Epperson (323 N 17th), Andrew and Pearl Stradwick (123 N 19th), and David and Delsie Kenoly (517 N. 25th St.). Notable among other 1930 homeowners were Lewis and Della Starkey. The Starkeys' 735 Terry Avenue home stood in the city's Third Ward, outside of the two railroad neighborhoods to which Billings' Black community had long been confined. It thus constituted an early important step in integrating Billings residential areas.⁷⁷¹

The Great Depression wreaked havoc on Black homeownership in Billings. In 1940, census takers enumerated only 18 homeowners in the city, the lowest number since 1900. Billings' most venerable Black families composed a significant portion of them. The Browning-Bivins family owned and occupied their South 25th Street home and William and Lulu Browning McCabe, along with Lulu's adult son Horace Smith, remained in their South 26th St. home. Nellie Best, by then a widow, continued to own her South 22nd Street home, sharing it with eight of her children as well as their spouses and children: a total of 25 people were enumerated in the home that year. Nellie Best's daughter Hazel and her husband Calvin White were also enumerated at a home they owned, according to a neighbor, at 1103 South 29th Street and daughter Bertha and her husband Ecequial

⁷⁶⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, "1910 Census"; Bureau, "1920 Census"; Bureau, "1930 Census"; United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940*.

⁷⁷⁰ Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁷¹ Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Joseph Arias and their children were likewise enumerated elsewhere as well, in a home they owned one block down from the Best residence at 204 S. 22nd Street. Samuel and Lizzie Epperson remained at their longtime northside home, as did Pearl Stradwick and Delsie Kenoly, both widows. Other homeowners who endured through the 1930s included Berry and Beatrice Milton at 302 N. 17th and, on the southside, Robert and Candice Emmons and their son and daughter Ray and Bernice (401 S. 24th). Charles H. Bell lived at 209 S. 26th St., and Grace Williams, whose husband Oliver died in 1938, lived at 504 S. 26th Street. Walter Chase, who in 1920 married his sister-in-law Angie Smith White after they'd both been widowed, lived at 511 S 27th. In the city's northwest section, Lewis and Della Starkey remained in their 3rd Ward home.⁷⁷²

The business community in Billings in this period comprised a number of enduring operations as well as a variety of shorter-lived enterprises. The 1920 census listed two Black-owned businesses big enough to be employers, those of janitor/contractor Andrew Stradwick's and teamster Walter Battey. Among smaller businesses in 1920, Ben Adams, Robert B. Brookes, and David H. Harris Sr. all ran their own barbershops. Adams continued to do so in 1930, when Frank L. Gordon also had a barbershop. That year, Adams employed others at his substantial shop, and Andrew Stradwick continued to do the same as a house painting contractor. Meanwhile, Lewis P. Somerville ran his own enterprise, making a living with his own express wagon or drayman/transfer business in both 1920 and 1930. So too Gus Holt, who was enumerated first as proprietor of a club and then, in 1930, as a self-employed soft drink merchant. Other community members who operated small businesses in this period included, in 1920, hairdresser Marie Stroyle, gardener Jerry Miller (who operated a truck farm), and Florence Corman (who ran a boarding house). Ten years later, horticulturalist Horace Bivins operated a "plant culture" business and junkman William Davis made a living as a junk collector. Eliza Adams, for her part, had a home-based laundry business, and Lenna Brooks ran a rooming house. Barry Milton ran his own café.⁷⁷³

The 1930s impacted the community's business sector much as it did homeownership, and census takers noted few Black businesses in Billings in 1940. That year, they found not one Black employer, and only nine self-employed individuals. Of these nine individuals, five were women, all identified as self-employed "prostitutes." Among men, Horace Bivins continued to operate his own business, and other self-employed individuals included pugilist Harlan Rippetoe, "minister of the gospel" David A. Someville, and Guy Wells, a "game keeper"—likely running a poker game or similar enterprise—in a saloon.⁷⁷⁴

Beyond the Four Cores

Missoula and Havre

As the populations of Helena, Butte, Great Falls, and Billings converged in this period—producing, by 1940, four roughly equal primary cores of Black Montana—the two other earlier community cores, Missoula and Havre, waned. Their Black populations were, like Helena's, more tightly tied to "colored" troop populations at adjacent forts: they fluctuated, and ultimately declined, dramatically in the interwar period. By 1940, both cities' Black populations were but a fraction of their former peaks in the ca. 1895-1905 period, when forts

⁷⁷² Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁷³ Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁷⁴ Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Missoula and Assiniboine sometimes housed hundreds of African American soldiers. The 1940 census counted 63 Black residents in Missoula, and in Havre, just seventeen.⁷⁷⁵

The relatively small clusters that remained in 1940 reflected significant fluctuation in preceding decades. In Missoula, the 1910 census population of 120 people fell to 92 in 1920, before rising again in 1930 to 110, and then dropping sharply by 1940. Havre's population too, rose and fell before hitting its 1940 low: the 1910 census counted just 35 Black residents in the railroad town, a figure that climbed to 59 in 1920, before falling by more than half, to 26, in 1930 and to just 17 10 years later.⁷⁷⁶

Missoula

In both former community cores, a significant number of these residents owned homes at different times. In 1920, when the total community population stood at just 92, Missoula boasted about 18 Black-owned households, and in 1930 some 20 Black families owned the homes they occupied. Ten years later, when Missoula's enumerated Black population totaled 63, the census listed some 13 owner-occupied dwellings. Throughout, Black residents continued to be clustered in Missoula's Northside, Westside, and southwest residential neighborhoods, with a few downtown and in other areas as well.⁷⁷⁷

In each of these neighborhoods, several longtime homeowners anchored larger community clusters. On the Westside, for instance, in the vicinity of the Missoula's Howell-street AME church, the Robert and Martha Lucas and Kallilis Johnson families remained in their Howell-street homes into the 1930s, as did Mary Clark on Cooper Street. Early owner-occupants also continued to anchor the southwest Missoula neighborhood, where in 1940 widowed Henrietta Evans occupied her S. 4th St. West home while William and Gertrude Johnson lived in their homes at 1914 S. 5th W then 1801 S. 5th West, and Chester and Lily McNorton endured at 1520 S. 6th West. Other stalwarts of the southwest neighborhood included Samuel and Josephine Duffy, who owned and occupied 1938 S. 4th W. in 1920 and 1514 S. 6th W. in 1930, and their neighbors Robert and Irene Mudd, who lived at 1932 S. 5th W. from at least 1920 through 1940. Blount and Bertha Tulloss, meanwhile, owned a home at 1533 S. 4th St. W in 1920, 1837 S. 5th W in 1930, and 1751 S. 5th W. in 1940. Florence Johnson Mundy also anchored the neighborhood for many years. In 1930, newlywed Florence owned her childhood home at 1914 S. 5th W. with her husband Michael Mundy, and 10 years later, as a divorced single mother of four, she owned and occupied 2104 S. 4th St. West. So too, widowed Cora C. Smith, who owned 747 Mount in 1930 and a home on the 1500 block of S. 14th St. West in 1940.⁷⁷⁸

Other longtime homeowners in Missoula were located elsewhere, including in the Northside and downtown areas. Downtown, Williams and Christine Moore owned and occupied 737 E. Front from at least 1920 into the 1930s, before buying a home in the southwest section of town at 1816 S. 5th Street West. James Johnson owned a place several blocks west at 275 West Front, living there with his Black 1st wife Arcella in 1930 and his indigenous second wife Alice in 1940 (when Arcella Johnson herself owned a house on the Northside, at 4288 N. 2nd East). A divorced man by the name of Edward N. Leroy owned his home up Pattee Canyon for many

⁷⁷⁵ United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940*.

⁷⁷⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, "1910 Census"; Bureau, "1920 Census"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940*.

⁷⁷⁷ Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁷⁸ Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

years living there from at least 1920 into the 1930s. In the early years, he had Black neighbors on either side of him: in 1930 Isaiah and Dorothy Miller rented on one side and Ed Haynes and his indigenous wife and stepson, Etta and Frank Fiddler, owning their home on the other side.⁷⁷⁹

A number of these longtime anchors of the Missoula community operated their own businesses as well as owning real estate. Among the eight or so Black residents operating their own businesses in 1920 was Henrietta Evans, who had a laundry service, and Chester McNorton, a self-employed upholsterer. McNorton continued in a similar line of work in 1930, when he represented one of just four Black-run businesses enumerated in the census. That year, in addition to McNorton's rug cleaning business, two men, Lawrence Freeman and Elmer Henderson, had shoeshine shops, and Elnora Cook ran a hotel. Other Black businesses in this period included Mrs. Connie Mack's hotel and widowed Mary Gird's rooming house, both operating in 1920. Mrs. Susan Crain's truck farm, which she likely maintained on the property she owned and occupied—along with her truck farm "helper" Herbert Mingo—lived at 1527 Stoddard Street. Widowed Annie Atkins also ran a business at her residence, working on her own account as a laundress in her Northside rental. In 1940, widowed Gertrude Johnson did the same from her home at 1801 S. 5th West. That year, the four other Black-operated businesses in Missoula included one large enough to be an employer, i.e., that of Edward Harrison Joiner, who lodged in Irene Burger's rooming house at 221 West Front and operated a saloon—the Hawthorne Club—on the same block, at 265 W. Front. Although not identified in earlier censuses, Joiner had in fact operated a similar business in that location for some time: in the 1920s, he ran The Pullman Pool Hall and cigar store at the same address.⁷⁸⁰

Havre

Havre's Black population fell farther and faster than Missoula's in this period, but nonetheless rested on a firm foundation of several enduring families, a number of whom owned homes there for decades. The Alsup family continued to own and occupy a Havre home throughout this period, first on 2nd Street and then, beginning in the late 1920s, at 731 4th Street, where Thomas Alsup Jr. and his family remained for years. So too did William and Jennie Barnes, who by 1930 purchased 617 Montana Avenue. Daniel and Maggie Johnson and some of their eight children owned and occupied their 3rd St. home into the 1920s. Daniel died in 1927, after which several of the Johnson children lived elsewhere in Havre. Nancy Powell and William B. and Edith Williams also owned homes in Havre in 1920. Powell's home at 731 4th, where neighbors Sherman and Sadie Jackson were also Black, became the Alsups' residence after she died in 1928. The 1930 census listed three Black owned homes, among them in addition to the Alsups' and the Barnes' was that of George Golf, a widowed 67-year-old laborer who lived by himself at 297 2nd Street West. By 1940, only the Barnes and Alsup residences remained in Black ownership.⁷⁸¹

Numerous Black businesses operated in and around Havre as the population fluctuated with troop movements. Census enumerators in 1920 noted William B. Williams operating a barber shop and Morto Mitchel running a "shine parlor," as well Stella Aldries, who lived with her two White boarders, working on her "own account"

⁷⁷⁹ Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁸⁰ "Eddie Harrison Joiner (Crest & Seal Poker Chips)"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁸¹ Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

doing housework. Mary Gordon and Marshall Crump, both of whom patented homesteads in previous years, operated farms. Mary Gordon owned her farm in the Lohman area, on the other side Havre from her homestead, while Marshall Crump was recorded as renting his around Havre. In 1930, census takers identified Ms. Minnie Walton as proprietor of a bathhouse—Frieda Burke lived with Ms. Walton as her “servant”—while Charles Brisco was self-employed as a shoe shiner in a barber shop. Two Walls family households (those of brothers Ernest as well as Elba and his wife Irene) owned and operated Hill County farms in the Lonesome Prairie area (west of Box Elder), while a third Walls household, that of Mamie Walls Heublein and her White second husband Fred, farmed not far over the Blaine County border (around Harlem). Siblings Elba and Mamie Walls patented homestead claims in the same section of Hill County in 1915-1916, when William Walls and Frances Elizabeth Walls also patented homesteads adjacent to Mamie's. As with Mary Gordon and Marshall Crump, they may have sold their homesteads after patenting them and used the proceeds to establish agricultural operations elsewhere.⁷⁸²

Bozeman, Miles City, Lewistown and Kalispell

Bozeman

By the 1910s, a small but significant Black population had made Bozeman home for some 50 years, since the Richard and Mary McDonald family settled there around 1864. From then on, Bozeman Black community comprised mainly members of a number of enduring extended families, namely the McDonald-Ward, Barnes-Rogers-Harrison and Lewis-Bruce-Woodson clans. During the interwar period, as the city's census population dropped from around 40 to fewer than 20 Black residents, members of those same families continued to form the core of the local community.⁷⁸³

Malissa Bruce Lewis, who came to Montana in the 1860s and lived in Virginia City in 1870 and then Butte in 1880 before coming to Bozeman, remained in the 308 S. Bozeman home built by her deceased second husband Samuel Lewis, until she died in 1927. A resilient pillar of the community, Malissa outlived her two husbands and her six children, all of whom she buried in Bozeman. The family of Malissa's former daughter-in-law, Clara Woodson (who'd been married to son Charles Bruce ca. 1904-1907) continued to live in Bozeman as well. Clara and her mother Fanny Woodson owned the home they occupied at 21 E. Mendenhall when the census was taken in 1920, before Fannie died in August of that year. Some time later, Clara moved to Los Angeles.⁷⁸⁴

Malissa Bruce Lewis' neighbors, the McDonald family, endured for decades thereafter. Mary McDonald, who also came to Montana via Virginia City in the 1860s, likewise remained at the home her deceased husband built, at 308 S. Tracy, until she died, in 1941. Thereafter, her three daughters lived in the family home until they too, died, Belle McDonald in 1950, Mollie McDonald Ward Gross in 1958, and Melissa McDonald in 1967. In subsequent decades, granddaughter Belle Ward Fisher stayed in the McDonald family home, where she'd lived during every decennial census since she was a small child in 1910, despite having married Richard Fisher in

⁷⁸² “General Land Office Records”; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁷⁸³ Bureau, “1920 Census”; United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940*.

⁷⁸⁴ “Well-Known Mammy Passes at Bozeman”; “Melissa Lewis (State of MT, Certificate of Death)”; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Bozeman in 1925. Like her mother, aunts, and grandmother before her, Mrs. Fisher lived in the home until she died, in the year 2000.⁷⁸⁵

The enduring Afro-indigenous Barnes-Rogers-Harrison clan composed an important component of Bozeman's Black community in the interwar years as well. Walter and Lulu Barnes Harrison, married in Bozeman, Lulu's hometown, in 1899 before living in Anaconda in 1900 and returning to Bozeman by 1910. They remained in Bozeman for the rest of their lives. By 1920, they lived at 621 N. Bozeman, which by 1930 they owned. Lulu Barnes Harrison died at home in 1939, 68 years after her Bozeman birth. Walter Harrison lived in the home almost another 20 years, and was buried beside Lulu in 1958.⁷⁸⁶

Lulu's stepfather Eli Rogers also lived out his days in Bozeman. In 1920, he remained in the longtime Rogers-Barnes family home at 502/518 N. Black, living with Samuel and Laura Heard who that year may have owned the home (members of the Heard family appeared in association with the address since at least 1914, and were likely relatives). Several of Eli's children and their families continued to live nearby. His daughter-in-law Jewel Rogers, widow of son Fred, still lived in Bozeman in 1920, when she shared her rental at 264 Montana Street with roomer Columbus Joseph, a Black man who worked as a pool hall porter. Jewel married Columbus Joseph that March, but what became of her is unclear: Joseph remarried in Bozeman in 1926 and by 1930 lived in Livingston. By then, Eli Rogers' daughter Katherine Rogers McGowan Roberts Fish had returned to Bozeman after a stint in Seattle, and she lived thereafter in a home she and third husband Benjamin Fish owned at 304 N. Grand. Katherine and Benjamin Fish remained on Grand until their deaths, with Mr. Fish dying first and Katherine Rogers Fish following her husband in 1951. Katherine's brother Henry Rogers and brother-in-law Walter Harrison survived her in Bozeman. Her sister Mabel Rogers O'Banyoun Marley remained in Butte, where she died in 1964.⁷⁸⁷

Several other enduring Black households joined this longtime Bozeman community core in this period. Montana native George W. Gordon, born to John and Anna Gordon in White Sulphur Springs ca. 1888, came to Bozeman in 1919 "to attend an Elks convention and remained to become a steward at the organization's club, a position he held until his death" in 1948. Four siblings survived him, including Robert and Rose Gordon in White Sulphur, and younger brother Emmanuel Taylor Gordon, a singing star of the Harlem renaissance still living in New York City. Newlyweds Oswald and Ada Smith arrived in Bozeman around the same time. The Smiths settled in Bozeman by 1918, and within a few years had two sons and owned their home at 503 N. Bozeman Avenue. By 1930 the Smith home held another two sons and a daughter, Lucille. The entire family remained there into the 1940s, and after the children grew Ada and Oswald stayed on Bozeman Avenue until Oswald died in 1968. Thereafter, Ada endured at the family home, where she'd lived some 50 years.⁷⁸⁸

Miles City

In contrast to Bozeman, in Miles City the total Black population, after falling by half between 1910 and 1920, remained relatively stable in the interwar years. But like Bozeman, the community in this period coalesced around several longtime families. Among the six or so Black-owned residences in town in 1920 were those of

⁷⁸⁵ Schontzler, "McDonald House Holds History of Freed Slaves Who Helped Settle Bozeman"; Schontzler, "Lives of Quiet Resilience": McDonald Sisters Worked Quietly to Better Lives of Black Montanans"; Alegria, "Our Historic Neighbors The McDonald Family Let's Get to Know Them."

⁷⁸⁶ "Lulu Harrison (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁸⁷ "Mrs. Katherine Fish"; "Mabel O'Banyoun Marley (State of MT, Certificate of Death)."

⁷⁸⁸ "George W. Gordon"; "Oswald W. Smith (State of MT, Certificate of Death)."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Levi Simpson and his Norwegian immigrant wife Mary Simpson, who lived at 413 Pacific Avenue with two of their adult sons. The Simpsons had patented a homestead in Custer County in 1909, and patented a second parcel in 1922. When Levi Simpson died that year newspapers lauded him as a “Miles City Pioneer,” noting that he was “for 40 years a resident” and “for years carried the mails from the depot to the post office.” The Simpsons subsequently moved to Seattle before some of the family returned to Montana and settled in Billings. James Perrington also owned a home by 1920 at 322 Yellowstone, as did Dan and Belle Palmer Ottmuller Hurt at 400 Atlantic, where they lived with Belle’s daughter Marguerite Ottmuller. The Hurts remained on Atlantic until Dan died in 1932, and thereafter, Belle lived in the home with her daughter Marguerite. Perrington lived in Miles City through 1945, and died the following year at Warm Springs State Hospital, where he was buried in Grave No. 230 C-6 in the “institution cemetery.”⁷⁸⁹

Town founders Vernon and Sadie Butler Thomas both died before 1920 (she in 1909 and he in 1918), but at least four of their 11 children remained in Miles City thereafter. The Butler-Thomas clan owned a number of houses over the years. In 1920, son Vernon Thomas and his (second) White wife Clara owned and occupied the Butler-Thomas family home at 604 Missouri Avenue. After Vernon died in 1929, the Missouri Ave. home remained in the family—Vernon’s younger brother Frank Thomas and his White wife Minnie moved from their 1930 rentals on the outskirts of town and owned and occupied it in 1940. That year, another brother, David Thomas, and his White wife Grace lived one block over in a home they owned at 607 Mississippi Ave. Sadie Butler and Vernon Thomas’ oldest child, William B., also stayed on in Miles City. By 1930, William and his wife Susie Hunter Smith Thomas owned their home at 307 Yellowstone Avenue, sharing it with Susie’s 87-year-old father Moses Hunter and their 20-year-old son George, along with his wife and 1-year-old son William B. Thomas Jr. By 1940, their son George and his wife Helen owned and occupied the home next to his parents and 100-year-old grandfather at 307 ½ Yellowstone. George and Helen Thomas by then had three children, two boys—William and George—and a girl, called Frances, part of a fourth generation of the Miles City Butler-Thomas family.⁷⁹⁰

Tenth Cavalry veteran John H. Jackson and his second wife Maggie Goines Jackson, both widowed when they married in Miles City in 1912, were also longtime homeowners in Miles City. The Jacksons resided on their farm near Signal Butte in 1920 and after John died Maggie moved to town, where in 1930 she owned and occupied 315 Missouri in 1930. During the same period, Ethel Bourne/Bowen owned her home at 405 Eagle Avenue, while William and Sarah Connor owned and occupied 312 S. 4th from at least 1930 until Sarah’s death in 1947.⁷⁹¹

Lewistown

In contrast to Miles City, the Black population of Lewistown rose before it fell in this period, rolling with the central Montana mining and homesteading tides. Many people flowed into and out of the region from the

⁷⁸⁹ “Miles City Pioneer Dead”; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana”; “General Land Office Records”; “Daniel Hurt (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)”; “James Perrington (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death).”

⁷⁹⁰ “Sadie M. Thomas (State of MT, Certificate of Death)”; “Vernon B. Thomas (Custer County Cemetery Grave Index)”; “Vernon B. Thomas (Montana, U.S., State Deaths, 1907-2018)”; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁷⁹¹ “Sarah Conner (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)”; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

1910s-1940s, and Lewistown's Black population rose from 54 in 1910 to 77 in 1920 before falling to around 15 in 1930/1940.⁷⁹²

As elsewhere, this fluctuating Fergus County Black community cohered around several abiding families. Among its pillars were a number of early residents who endured in the interwar years. Homesteader and barber Alexander Branson remained in Lewistown until leaving in 1924 to spend his "remaining days" with figure family back east, and by 1920 owned his home at 302 1st Ave North. Widowed Georgia McCoy, with whom Branson once boarded, also endured. Having first arrived around 1903, she remarried in 1924 and with her new husband William Freeman continued to live in the home she long owned at 616 Washington Street. There she remained until dying, at the age of 96, in 1957. For much of that time her community included homesteader Adeline Hoffman, who first came to central Montana with the Skaggs family around 1896 after a decade in the Bozeman area, and in 1930 was enumerated living in Lewistown at the Skaggs' 714 Evelyn Street home. Hoffman remained in the area, often with the Skaggs family, until her death, at the age of 93, in 1941.⁷⁹³

Various other early residents also remained in Lewistown in the 1920s and 1930s. James and Molly Reed lived in several rental houses over the years, and in 1920 resided at 1123 Washington Avenue. Meanwhile, James' brother Charles Reed and his wife Minnie rented a farm in rural Fergus County, near Brooks, before buying a house at 906 4th Avenue South in Lewistown, where they lived in 1930. The Reeds likely remained there for many years: in 1938 Charles Reed was sent to the state hospital at Warm Springs, where he died in 1943, with burial in Lewistown. Hartzell and Ida Ball joined the extended Reed family in the enduring local Black community. The Balls rented 208 5th Avenue for many years, raising their son Arthur Ball there before moving to California ca. 1941. Arthur was by then an adult and a prominent citizen of Lewistown in his own right, and although he too moved to California in the 1940s, he remained deeply attached to his Montana home: when he died in 1992, his remains were "returned to Montana for private burial in the Monarch cemetery."⁷⁹⁴

The extended Collins-Bradford-Latty family was likewise a multi-generational core of the area community. Joseph and Mattie Collins patented a homestead in Fergus County near Roy in 1916, and Mattie's son Lewis Bradford and his wife Myrtle patented a homestead in the same area in 1919. The Collins remained on their place into the 1930s (possibly until they died), and Lewis Bradford stayed on his ranch, after being widowed, into the 1940s. Mattie Collins' daughters Ada and Esther, and son Furman, meanwhile, made their home in Lewistown. Ada married her husband James Yancey there in 1913, and Esther married her second husband, Albert Latty, there in 1917 (Albert's mother was also a Collins from Illinois, and likely a relative of Esther's stepfather Joseph Collins). In 1920 the sisters and their husbands shared a rental home at 116 E. Broadway, around the corner from their brother Furman Collins and his wife Edna. Albert Latty's brother James Merritt Latty and his wife Myrtle were also longtime Lewistown residents, living there, in various rentals, from at least 1920 into the 1950s. In addition to their Lewistown residence, brothers-in-law Albert Latty and James Yancey

⁷⁹² U.S. Census Bureau, "1910 Census"; Bureau, "1920 Census"; United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940*.

⁷⁹³ "Was the First to Enlist in the 54th Mass. Volunteers"; "Georgia Freeman (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Adeline Hoffman (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁹⁴ "Charles Reed, 75, Will Be Buried at Lewistown"; "Arthur J. Ball (Obituary)"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

had their own Fergus County ranches, likely on land they patented in 1916 and 1918, respectively, as well as on land patented by Latty's wife, Esther Collins Latty, in 1919.⁷⁹⁵

Later arrivals joined these abiding clans in making Lewistown their longtime home. Joseph and Lizzie McWilliams, for instance, lived many years in Lewistown, as did George Green from at least 1930 to 1940. Longtime residents in outlying areas also continued to compose a prominent part of the local Black community. Bertie Brown, who first came to Fergus County in the 1890s, was enumerated working as a chambermaid in Miles City in 1920, but she lived most of the time on her Fergus County homestead. There, during prohibition, she became a well-known bootlegger until dying, in an explosion at her still, in 1933. At that time, John J. Hemphill still owned and operated a restaurant/boarding house in the small Fergus County town of Denton, as he had since around 1912. Hemphill owned and occupied his Denton property until his death, at the age of 86, in 1946.⁷⁹⁶

Kalispell

Like that of Lewistown, Kalispell's Black population rose between 1910 and 1920, when enumerators counted 37 individuals. But in Kalispell, community size plateaued thereafter, with 36 people enumerated in 1930 and 35 in 1940. This numerical stabilization reflected a relatively stationary population: several families from earlier years remained in 1920, and stayed thereafter. Among the six households who owned their homes in 1910, three were still there in 1920.⁷⁹⁷

Homesteader and longtime property owner Alice Lamb, widowed when Henry Lamb died in 1916, stayed in her 707 8th Ave West home, with nephew Clifford Busch, before she died in 1926. Lena Stapleton, meanwhile, continued to live in her home at 708 6th Avenue East after she remarried in 1912. She and husband Roland Mills remained there until they died, she in 1937 and he—at the age of 91—in 1967. John and Helen White owned and occupied 304 7th Avenue West until they died, Helen in 1928 and John in 1934. The home stayed in the White family thereafter: John White Jr. and his wife Christine and their 11-year-old son Joseph lived there with John Sr. in 1930, and in 1940 they owned and occupied the White family home with a lodger, Bradley Bryant. By 1930, John Sr. and Helen's daughter Sarah also owned a home in Kalispell at 342 6th Avenue West, where she lived with her Kentucky-born husband Thomas Bradford, a stationary engineer. So too did John Sr.'s daughter, with first wife Josephine, Christine Adelia. By 1920, after moving from Texas, Christine lived nearby at 340 7th Avenue West with her husband Fred Griffin, whom she married about 1909. The Griffins shared their home with two of Christina's young relatives, including niece Josephine White. Christine Adelia Griffin died at the Griffin family home in 1941, and Fred Griffin followed in 1946.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁵ "General Land Office Records"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana"; "17th Census of the United States, 1950: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁹⁶ "John Hemphill (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; "Birdie Brown (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; WHM, "Two Legendary African American Homesteaders"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, "1910 Census"; Bureau, "1920 Census"; Bureau, "1930 Census"; United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940.*; Bureau of the Census, "13th Census, 1910 [Microform]"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁹⁸ "Agnus Lamb (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Lena Mills (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; "Roland Mills (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Helen White (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; Logan, "Obituary: John W. White"; "Negro

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

The Parnell family formed another multi-generational pillar of the Kalispell community. Barber Thomas P. Parnell and his wife Charity settled in Kalispell by ca. 1892, and after they died in 1904 and 1905, respectively, their niece Emma Parnell Burnette, who'd been living with them, stayed on. By 1930 she owned 316 1st Street West where she lived with Thomas and Charity's adult son Rush Parnell. Rush, a "well-known colored musician" died in 1938, having lived in Kalispell 46 of his 50 years, and Emma remained in the home until she herself died in 1953. Havre-born Walter Purnell, possibly a relative, also lived in Kalispell for a time. After growing up east of the mountains, Walter moved to Kalispell by 1919, when he married Clara Miller Jackson there. In 1920, Walter and Clara and her two young sons rented at 131 3rd Street, not far from Annie Miller, possibly a relative. The Annie Miller family, too, counted multiple generations in Kalispell. Mrs. Susan Annie Rhodes Miller was in Missoula when she gave birth to her son Ray in 1891, and she continued to raise her four sons there in 1910, after losing her husband. But by 1917, both Annie and Ray Miller lived in Kalispell at 327 2nd Avenue West. Ray Miller still lived in Kalispell when he married Ida Mae Ray Johnson in 1935, and he continued to live there until he died, in 1969.⁷⁹⁹

When the Millers first moved to Kalispell, their neighbors still included members of the Lanton family, residents since at least 1910. Rosa Lanton died in 1915, but her widowed husband Major Lanton thereafter owned a home at 936 6th Ave. East, where he lived in 1920 with his "servant" Luella Wallace—also widowed—and where he died in 1924. Luella Wallace subsequently acquired Lanton's home, and lived there until she died in 1947. Charles Evans likewise endured from the 1910 period, when he'd been single, renting a home and working as a porter. He married Mary Brown in Kalispell in 1920, and 10 years later Charles and Mary owned their home at 111 4th Avenue West. Charles died in 1937, and Mary Brown Evans continued to own and occupy the home on her own into the 1940s.⁸⁰⁰

Numerous later arrivals also made Kalispell their longtime home in this period. After marrying and starting their family in Illinois, Robert and Elizabeth Smith moved to Kalispell between 1910 and 1920, and continued to live there into the 1950s. John Thompson arrived in Kalispell in 1923, and five years later married Clemme Taylor Gibbs. By 1930 John and Clemme Gibbs Thompson rented at 102 3rd Avenue West with their young son Willard, John's two older children, and Clemmie's four older Gibbs children. They remained in the same home (or a neighboring one) in 1940, renting 114 3rd Avenue West, with their three young children, John's older daughter, three of Clemme's older children, and Clemme's mother Lizzie Taylor. That year, Clemme's eldest son Howard Gibbs lived next door at 124 3rd Avenue West with his second wife Leona, whom he married in 1939 after a brief marriage to Josephine White. John Thompson's elder son Charles Morrell Thompson also lived nearby, as he did in 1930, at 533 6th Ave. West. By 1940, Charles and his wife Artie and sons Morrell and Sylvester owned their home. John and Clemme Thompson still lived in Kalispell when John died in 1963, as did sons Charles Thompson and Howard Gibbs. Howard Gibbs remained in Kalispell until moving to Spokane in 1971, and Charles Morrell Thompson stayed until he died in 1982.⁸⁰¹

Who Was One Time Slave, Succumbs at Home in Kalispell"; "Christina Griffin (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; "Fred Henry Griffin (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁷⁹⁹ "T.P. Parnell (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Charity Parnell (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Rush Parnell"; "Mrs. Emma Burnett Is Taken by Death"; "Emma Burnett (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Funeral Is Saturday for Raymond Miller."

⁸⁰⁰ "Rosa B. Lanton (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Major Lanton (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Lou Ella Wallace (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; "Charles Lewis Evans (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)."

⁸⁰¹ "John Thompson Taken by Death"; "John Wesley Thompson (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Charles Thompson"; "Howard Lee Gibbs."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Other Towns and Rural Areas

As Black Montana contracted and reconfigured from the 1910s into the 1940s, many of the people who had earlier built prominent lives outside the community's primary and secondary cores, in smaller towns and rural areas, died or moved away. Across the state, settlements and hinterlands that had been Black places lost their African American residents, and no longer played a significant part of the regional community. Some of these places, like the late 19th-century mining-towns of Gilt Edge, Maiden, Yogo City, and Radersburg, or the myriad eastern Montana towns that boomed and busted with homesteading in the early 1900s, disappeared entirely. Others, like Moore and Cascade, continued as communities, but without a substantial Black population. A few outlying communities and rural areas, however, like White Sulphur Springs and Belt and Virginia City, continued to be significant Black places, as prominent residents, and/or their descendants, remained. A handful of other locales *became* Black places in this period, usually just briefly, as notable Black individuals or groups arrived and departed in the space of a few months or years.

The End of the Black Community in Locales Across the State

Among the places that lost prominent Black residents—and where significant associations with African American history ended in this period—were central and western Montana locales like Moore-Utica, Cascade, Townsend, Livingston, Lincoln, Philipsburg, Thompson Falls, and Libby. Tom White, longtime barber in the Moore-Utica area, died in 1909 and Mary Fields, Cascade's renowned resident, died in 1914; census returns between 1920-1940 listed not a single Black resident in those localities. By the 1930 census, Libby too, counted no Black residents: farmer, lawyer and "U.S. commissioner" John D. Posten appeared in the 1922 city directory with an office at 215 Mineral Ave. and a residence that he owned at 1304 Utah Ave., but Posten moved away, or died, in subsequent years. Philipsburg's Black associations lasted a little longer. John R. and Annie Smith Sutcliff Wright, who married in Phillipsburg in 1909 and in 1910 owned a farm in the drainage. John still lived in Philipsburg in 1930, 10 years after he buried Annie in the cemetery there, when he owned a home at 111 Broadway (rear). He likely lived there until his death and burial in Philipsburg in 1943, his name recorded as Jess Wright on his death certificate. In Livingston, the 1930 census counted just one Black resident, a laborer named Guy F. Bosley who did odd jobs and lodged at the Seattle Rooms. Bosley remained in Livingston, living in various rentals, into the 1940s.⁸⁰²

In the Townsend area, Laura Sidney along with Horace and Marie Christian endured into the 1930s, and into the 1920s their neighbors included Eliza Miles, Bernice and Lillian Weeden, Carrie Smith, and Horace Richardson. But by 1940 census enumerators counted only one Black man, an unmarried laborer, in Broadwater County. That year, not a single African American person was enumerated in Sanders County, which lost its most prominent and enduring Black resident in 1938: William McNorton remained in the Thompson Falls area until early that year, when a Sanders County judge sent him to Warm Springs State Hospital, where he died two months later.⁸⁰³

In Lincoln, meanwhile, not a single Black resident was enumerated from 1920-1940. It is unclear whether this marked the end of the settlement's significant African American associations: Arthur Palmer or other Palmer

⁸⁰² "Annie Wright (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Jess Wright (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁸⁰³ "William McNorton (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

descendants may have owned property there after Arthur's mother Alice Johnson Palmer, who patented parcels in 1919 and died in 1936. Alice had always been enumerated in Helena while she acquired and developed her Lincoln property, and Alice's daughter or niece, Mrs. Page Anderson, lived in Lincoln in 1964. That year, she loaned a quilt made by her grandmother, Julia Johnson Maxwell, for display in Helena during the Montana Territory centennial celebration.⁸⁰⁴ [Figure 55]

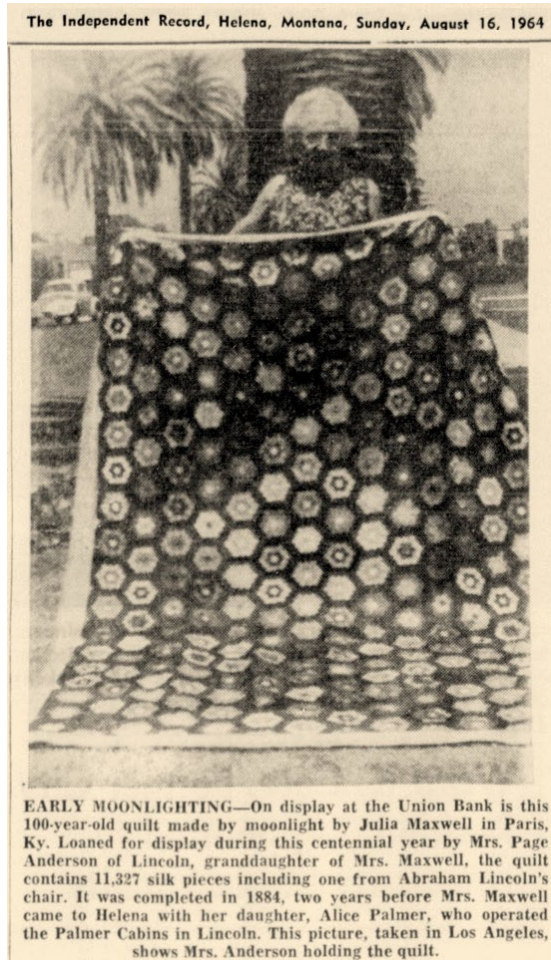


Figure 55: "Mrs. Page Anderson with Julia Maxwell Quilt," *Independent Record*, August 16, 1964.

Enduring in Belt, White Sulphur Springs, Virginia City, etc.

Other localities that had been significant Black places in earlier periods continued to be so into the 1940s, defined by one or several steadfast individuals or families. Sometimes these families were among the most enduring non-Indian residents. In Belt, for example, town founder Mattie Castner remained until she died in 1920, and the census that year noted as well a laborer, James Watts, along with two Black barbers, one of whom—Robert Robinson—owned his own shop, where he employed others. Robinson also owned his home, where he lived with his wife Bertha. Outside of town Mattie Castner's "distant relation," Thomas Watts, continued to farm until he died, and buried in Belt in 1940. He was by then the only enumerated Black resident of the area.⁸⁰⁵ Due south of Belt in White Sulphur Springs, siblings Robert and Rose Gordon remained prominent pillars of the community until their deaths, in 1962 and 1968, respectively. Younger brother and renowned singer Taylor Gordon joined them there in 1959, and lived in his hometown the rest of his life, dying in 1971. All three Gordon siblings owned property—including the two-part commercial Wellman Block on Main Street—and ran businesses; Rose in later life, became a physical therapist and regular columnist in the local paper.⁸⁰⁶ Not far from White Sulphur, John Lewis lived out his life in Harlowton, and was buried there in 1945.⁸⁰⁷

In Madison County, too, founding families remained prominent throughout the interwar years and beyond, playing integral roles in Virginia City, Sheridan, and Twin Bridges as well as the surrounding countryside. After brother Ira Hall's death in 1928, Emery Hall was the only surviving child of Leven and Margaret

Hall, who arrived in Virginia City during the town's first months in 1863 and thereafter farmed in rural Madison County. Emery farmed and ranched in the area until he died in 1963, 100 years after his parents first settled

⁸⁰⁴ "Early Moonlighting."

⁸⁰⁵ "Thomas Watt, Belt Negro Who Died, Had Slave Brand on Back."

⁸⁰⁶ Jiusto, "Wellman Block [White Sulphur Springs]"; Ferguson, "Born to Be Published: Ivan Doig and Taylor Gordon"; Johnson, "Anna Gordon's Quest for Equality: Family, Labor, and Black Community in White Sulphur Springs, 1883-1924"; "About the Gordon Family."

⁸⁰⁷ "John Lewis (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

there.⁸⁰⁸ His contemporary Elmer Eben Bickford, son of Virginia City cornerstone Sarah Blair Gammon Brown Bickford, could be found in Madison county's towns. Elmer, a tinsmith and plumber who grew up maintaining Virginia City's water works owned by his mother, took over management of the utility when Sarah Bickford died in 1931. He lived in both Virginia City and Sheridan—his Main Street plumbing shop there served as a polling place in 1932—until leaving the area during the Second World War. He then moved to Seattle “where he eventually established a plumbing firm and had as many as 10 plumbers on his staff at one time,” visiting Virginia City for the last time in September 1954 before dying in 1959.⁸⁰⁹

Several other longtime residents could also be found in southwest Montana in this period. Henry Goode lived on the S. W. Baker Ranch near Robbers' Roost until he died in 1943, whereupon he was buried in Sheridan. Charlie MacIntyre was buried beside him 10 years later, living out his life on his Wisconsin Creek homestead. Fellow homesteader Daniel Brockman, meanwhile, remained in the Twin Bridges area after his father, Major D. Brockman, died at the Beaverhead County Poor Farm, and was buried in Dillon, in 1932. Dan Brockman served in both the first and second World Wars, and led the Twin Bridges American Legion Post for decades. He donated land for the town's legion hall in the post-war era—ultimately constructed as a combination Legion Hall/Community Hall/Public Library/Fire Department—and after he died at the Montana State Veteran's Home in 1972 the Twin Bridges American Legion Post #31 was renamed in his honor.⁸¹⁰ Beyond these longtime residents, few other Black people lived in southwest Montana in this period. The 1920 census counted only 14 African Americans in the whole of Beaverhead County—an area larger than the state of Connecticut—and by 1940 that number dropped to just five. Most of those lived in the county seat of Dillon. Asphalt layer Frank John Morton and his wife Pearl owned a house at 544 Pacific in 1920 and at 332 N. Washington in 1940 (after returning from a stint in Kansas). Among their longtime Dillon neighbors were Andrew and Lena Snell, who rented for many years on N. Idaho Street before moving next door to the Mortons, at 340 N. Washington, by 1940. Also notable in the region was another Black railroad work crew, comprising about a half dozen men, located in 1920 around Lima.⁸¹¹

Northwest of Madison and Beaverhead counties, several other locales retained a variety of Black residents from earlier periods or welcomed new arrivals who stayed on to become longtime local residents. In the Bitterroot Valley, Hamilton housed Tish Nevins and Henry and Clara Smith for the rest of their lives. Nevins, “the well-known old-time boardinghouse keeper,” operated her business at various locations over the years, including at 115 N. 6th St. around 1920 and 107 N. 4th about 1940, and died in Hamilton in 1942. She was buried there at Riverview Cemetery. Clara Smith, who lived in Hamilton since 1891, preceded her in death, succumbing in 1936. By that time, she and husband Henry moved from their farm into town, where they owned their home and ran a rooming house. Veteran Buffalo Soldier Henry Smith, who'd been stationed at Fort Missoula, lived until 1943, and was buried beside Clara at Riverview Cemetery when he died that year. Among his neighbors in his final years was Havre native Walter Parnell, formerly of Kalispell.⁸¹²

⁸⁰⁸ “Aged Negro Native Found with Frozen Feet Monday”; “Aged Pioneer Suffers Frozen Feet”; “Poor Fund.”

⁸⁰⁹ “Commissioners Name Seventy-Four Judges to Serve at Primary”; “Elmer Bickford, 77, Dies in New York.”

⁸¹⁰ O'Donnel, “Dan Brockman”; “[Major] Daniel Brockman (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)”; “General Land Office Records.”

⁸¹¹ Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana.”

⁸¹² “‘Mammy’ Smith Dies”; “Henry Smith (State of MT, Standard Certificate of Death)”; “Aunt Tish Nevins Closes Her Popular Hamilton Boarding House”; “‘Aunt’ Tish of Bitter Root Is Taken by Death”; Bureau of the Census, “14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana”; Bureau of the Census, “15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules:

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Rural Residents

As both small farms and the state's Black population dwindled in the 1920s and 1930s, many—or most—rural Black places ceased, as such. But a number of Black-owned or run farm and ranches endured, as did a few rural mining operations. Such enduring operations concentrated in central Montana, like the aforementioned rural stalwarts in the Belt and Lewistown/Fergus County areas, but could also be found elsewhere. In the western part of the state, several rural households carried on in Jefferson County, between Butte and Helena. There, after marrying in Butte in 1915, Cyrus Frank Cassels and his wife Viola Coleman Cassels lived in the Boulder/Basin area by 1920, and in 1924 and 1931 patented homesteads. They appear to have lived in there until they died, he in 1958 and she in 1975. Also in Jefferson County was the extended Brown family, members of which continued to work their mining and homestead claims at Camp Caroline on Homestake pass between Butte and Whitehall.⁸¹³

To the north, in central Montana, Francis Griffin and the Bigbee-Connell family continued to farm in the Ferguson/Truly/Flood/Watson area of Cascade County throughout this period, with Francis Griffin dying in 1943. In the Fergus County-Judith Basin County area, in addition to the extended Collins-Bradford-Latty-Yancey homesteading family and others mentioned above, Mamie Alves and her White husband Louis lived in various rural locales, as well as Lewistown, from at least 1918 until their deaths, in 1951 and 1964, respectively. They may have homesteaded in Judith Basin County—a Louis Alves patented 40 acres there in 1917—and around 1930 they farmed in Windham (near Utica). By 1940, they farmed in the Roy vicinity, not far from Lewis Bradford.⁸¹⁴

Farther north and east, too, some Black households endured in rural areas. In Toole County, Mr. Washington continued to work as a blacksmith. Members of the extended Walls-Heublein homesteading clan farmed several properties in the Harlem area (in what became Blaine County) throughout this period. In adjacent Phillips County could be found George Bird, and in Richland County near the Missouri River Mr. Allen, while south in the Yellowstone River watershed was the Proctor family, in Rosebud County.⁸¹⁵

Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁸¹³ "Cyrus Cassels Is Summoned; Was Policeman"; "Viola Watley Cassels (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Homestake!"

⁸¹⁴ "Francis T. Griffin, Ulm Farmer, Dies"; "Mamie Alves (State of MT, Certificate of Death)."

⁸¹⁵ Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "15th Census of the United States, 1930: Population Schedules: Montana"; Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Black Montana's Community Institutions in the Interwar Years

As community geography shifted, and Montana's overall Black population declined, formal regional community organization—in the form of church networks, women's groups, baseball leagues etc.—solidified and expanded. These expanding networks reflected in part the need for more regional connection in light of community decline in some localities and in part reflected that many of those who remained were longtime Montana residents, and community pillars long devoted to the work of uplifting Black Montana. They also reflected enduring and consequential racism in the region, which seemed to escalate nationwide in this period. In Montana legislators passed a miscegenation code in 1921, and that same year White Montanans organized a state chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. Within a few years the Montana Klan comprised over 40 local affiliates, and in 1926 a White mob in Hardin killed a shoemaker James Belden.

In the seven core Black Montana local communities that developed in the late 19th and early 20th century, the church served as one of the primary regional community institutions. In Montana, the A.M.E. church network boasted a bevy of new church properties at the start of the 1920s (including those erected in Havre in 1909, Missoula in 1914, Billings in around 1916, and Great Falls in 1917), but the church-building boom period waned. Around 1910, it seemed to A.M.E. ministers that churches might be started in Lewistown, Livingston, and Miles City.⁸¹⁶ By the 1920s and 30s, however, not only did those prospects evaporate but other Montana A.M.E. congregations quickly shrank, and Missoula's A.M.E. closed for good in 1938. The Black Baptist church that had been established in Helena also appears to have closed during the 1930s: Ebenezer Baptist in Helena operated until at least 1930 but closed sometime thereafter, leaving Emmanuel Baptist in Great Falls and Butte's Bethel Baptist the two remaining Black Baptist congregations.⁸¹⁷ As local Montana churches shrank, they continued to collaborate, working together to support the state's African American community. They also connected to a broader regional network. In this period, both the Black Baptist and A.M.E. churches hosted "regional gatherings that included the four Pacific Northwest states."⁸¹⁸

As the state's population declined and centers of African American community growth shifted to different Montana cities, other Black institutions and individuals relied increasingly on the regional community. Since their beginnings, the enduring local communities—linked by kinship, friendship and shared histories and activities—formed a regional African American network, one that Booker T. Washington partially traced in 1913 when he lectured in Billings, Bozeman, Butte, and Helena.⁸¹⁹ Black Montanans in this way kept up on developments across the state, and these events became shared experiences of the African American community. When Butte's Socialist mayor, and Unitarian minister, Lewis J. Duncan appointed African American Cyrus Frank Cassels to the police force in 1911, with a Main Street from Park to Granite patrol beat, Helena residents read about it in the *Plaindealer*.⁸²⁰ It likewise would have been news in Helena when, in 1914, five Great Falls residents formed the Afro-American Investment Co. to invest in real estate, or when, in 1935, Butte's Black baseball team, the Colored Giants, won the championship of the first half of the Montana State

⁸¹⁶ *Montana Plaindealer*, May 28, 1909, 1; R.L. Polk & Co., *Polk's Missoula City Directory*, (Missoula, Mont.: R.L. Polk & Co., 1911), 16.

⁸¹⁷ "Colored Citizens Hear Gov. Stewart"; Martin, "Hiding in Plain Sight."

⁸¹⁸ Taylor, "The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest," 345.

⁸¹⁹ *Billings Daily Gazette*, March 4-5, 1913; *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, March 4, 6-7, 1913; *Anaconda Standard*, March 6-7, 1913; *Butte Miner*, March 6-7, 1913; *Helena Daily Independent*, March 8, 1913.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Baseball League season.⁸²¹ Residents of those cities would in turn have been aware of community activities in Helena, like the rally held in 1930 by the “Colored Walsh-for-Senator Club” that promoted the re-election of (White Democrat) U.S. Senator Thomas Walsh.⁸²²

Although many of the state’s autonomous Black clubs and social spaces disappeared after 1910, several places continued to nurture Black, and interracial, social life in subsequent decades. Foremost among them were the jazz clubs that flourished in Great Falls, Billings, Butte and Missoula, i.e. the Ozark Club, the Maple Leaf Club, the Silver City Club, and the Hawthorne Club, respectively.⁸²³ The Helena area may have hosted a less enduring Black Jazz club: located in East Helena, The Casino, circa 1940, advertised its house band as “The Best Colored Jazz Band in the West.” Led by “the master of the sax,” the band promised “the snappiest tunes, with more rhythm, more variations, and more novelty stunts than any other band that has ever played in or around Helena.”⁸²⁴

In addition to the many informal links between Black communities in different cities, residents of the region connected to one another formally through regional organizations. In 1920, for instance, the African American Grand Masonic Lodge of Washington included 35 lodges, among them lodges in Montana and Idaho.⁸²⁵ Other lodges in the state affiliated with the masonic “jurisdiction of Missouri,” like Havre’s Delta Lodge No. 61, presided over Thomas Allsup, Jr. and William H. Barnes (among others), which met ca. 1925 in the town’s Chestnut Hall.⁸²⁶ Also in 1920, Black baseball players across the nation organized the Negro National League, “and played their first game.” The Butte community may have organized one of the league’s early teams: “by 1920 the Mining City had their own semi-pro all black baseball team, the Colored Giants.” Under the sponsorship of Frank Yamer and “a Jewish community leader, Louis Frank,” the team played frequently, in front of large crowds, at towns throughout the region during the 1920s and ‘30s.⁸²⁷ In 1922, residents of Great Falls affiliated with another national organization, establishing a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (founded in New York in 1909).⁸²⁸

African American women long stood at the center of community activities in Montana, as in the nation as a whole, and the most important of the state’s Black community institutions in this period were women’s clubs. As noted in the local community histories above, Black women across the state established “Colored Women’s Clubs” in the 1910s and early 1920s, uniting in 1921 into a nationally-affiliated statewide federation. In Helena, women like Mamie Bridgwater founded the Pleasant Hour Club in 1916, and in 1921 created a second organization called the Mary B. Talbert Art Club. By then Montana counted at least eight other Black women’s clubs (including Kalispell’s Mutual Improvement Club, est. 1913, Butte’s Pearl Club, est. 1918, Billings’ Phyllis Wheatley Club and Great Falls’ Dunbar Art and Study Club, both est. 1920, and three clubs established in 1921, i.e., Bozeman’s Sweet Pea Study Club, Butte’s Clover Leaf Club, and Anaconda’s Good Word Literary

⁸²¹ Ibid; John Mihelich, “‘Baseball Was Our Life’ Amateur Baseball in Butte Montana 1920-1960,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 59, no. 2 (2009): 62–96.

⁸²² “Colored Voters Hold Rally for Walsh and Pledge Him Support,” *Helena Independent*, November 2 1930, 6.

⁸²³ “Gleim Building, 265 W. Front (Downtown Historic Walking Tour)”;

Babcock, “Gleim Building [Missoula]”; “Eddie Harrison Joiner (Crest & Seal Poker Chips)”;

Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*; “Notice of Application for Transfer of Retail Liquor License”; “Black Billings”; “Colorful Old Maple Leaf Club to Be Demolished”; Robison, “Breaking Racial Barriers: ‘Everyone’s Welcome’ at the Ozark Club Great Falls, Montana’s African American Nightclub.”

⁸²⁴ “Casino, East Helena [Advertisement].”

⁸²⁵ Taylor, “The Emergence of Black Communities in The Pacific Northwest,” 345.

⁸²⁶ “A.F. and A.M. Delta Lodge No. 61 Jurisdiction of Missouri”; “A.F. and A.M. No. 61 Installs Officers.”

⁸²⁷ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 134-136.

⁸²⁸ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Naacp Annual Report*.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Club, as well as Missoula's Margaret Washington Club). In 1921, at a joint meeting at Shaffer's Chapel AME in Butte, these clubs formed the Montana Federation of Negro Women's Clubs, an affiliate of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. By 1926, the federation added its first junior club, in Butte, "which met at times "at the local YMCA."⁸²⁹

These clubs immediately began a sustained, creative, and powerful effort to improve the lives of Black people. Clubwomen worked on a local, individual level, doing varied volunteer work like providing niceties to "bringing flowers to hospital patients . . . adding works by African American authors to local libraries," and sponsoring a "scholarship fund for Black students." They worked in the realm of formal politics as well—Governor Joseph M. Dixon delivered the welcome address at their second annual convention in Helena in 1922—"advancing the cause of civil rights in Montana" and beyond. Club "members also concentrated on racial politics, raising funds for the NAACP and taking positions on abolishing the poll tax and upholding anti-lynch laws." They consistently "lobbied for civil rights legislation in the state legislature," supporting bills like that proposed in 1937 "relating to discrimination between citizens in regard to certain services & employment."⁸³⁰

Confronting Rising Racism

As with earlier efforts by Montana's African American institutions, the ongoing work by Montana's, "Colored Women's Clubs" reflected enduring and consequential racism in the region. Indeed, rather than improve, racism seemed to escalate nationwide in this period, and was likely a factor in encouraging Black people to move to areas outside of Montana, where they weren't so outnumbered and where Jim Crow was not as enshrined in state law.

In 1915, the second Ku Klux Klan was founded, after a 40-plus year period when the organization was essentially nonexistent. In the wake of voluminous immigration from southern Europe that began ca. 1880, this new Klan added anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish components to its anti-Black foundation. That same year, as the new medium of moving pictures spread across the country, the White supremacist film *Birth of a Nation* was released to critical acclaim. Wildly popular among both the White masses and elites—the White House hosted the premier—the film became the first big box office smash in the history of movies. As such, it both reflected and propelled the nation's growing antipathy toward Black people. It popularized a new image of Blacks, replacing earlier minstrel-stage images of grinning and obsequious Jim Crows with one of the "negro" as dangerous oppressor. Based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Klansman*, the movie *Birth of a Nation* assailed integration, and Black rights more generally, raising the specter of miscegenation and suggesting that Blacks were unworthy of the franchise and that only the KKK could save the Anglo-Saxon nation. In 1916, *Birth of a Nation* played in Montana movie theatres. Although residents of Helena and Butte protested the screenings in their cities, they could not stem the rising tide of racism with which the film was associated.⁸³¹ Soon thereafter, the end of the Great War invigorated racial hysteria.

⁸²⁹ Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House."; Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 91.

⁸³⁰ Montana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, "Montana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs Records, 1921-1978," MC 281, Box 2, Folder 4, Montana Historical Society; MT SHPO; "African Americans in Montana Timeline."; Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House." The bill was killed in committee. WHM, "'Lifting as We Climb.'" Ms. Joan Duncan's interview, located at MHS, has some excellent material regarding the civic values espoused by the Women's Clubs.

⁸³¹ *Anaconda Standard*, January 26, 1916; *Helena Independent*, February 22 and 25, 1916; MT SHPO, "African Americans in Montana Timeline."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

The rise of White supremacy in this period manifested at local and national levels in various ways. Federal legislation, like the 1924 National Origins Act, sought to protect American Whiteness writ large while state legislation, like the 1921 Montana miscegenation code, targeted individual interracial interaction, nullifying the marriages of interracial Montana couples who wed in jurisdictions that permitted such unions.⁸³² White Montanans also took matters into their own hands. In 1913, a lynch mob in Mondak, on the North Dakota border, killed J.C. Collins, a worker in a railway bridge construction camp. Collins was accused of killing the county sheriff and his deputy while they attempted to arrest him for allegedly assaulting the wife of a fellow (Black) worker.⁸³³ Collins' killers went unpunished. Shortly after the Mondak lynching, Black men were executed in public spectacles elsewhere in the state. In February 1917, Meagher County hanged three Black men in White Sulphur Springs. Henry Hall, Harrison Gibson, and Leslie Fahley (a.k.a. Foley), all railroad workers, were charged with robbing and killing a White transient laborer.⁸³⁴ Four other men also implicated in the crime were sentenced to prison for terms ranging from 10 years to life. The following January, Silver Bow County also hanged a Black man, Sherman Powell.⁸³⁵ In Billings, meanwhile, Policeman Thad Pound shot and killed a "Negro while serving as deputy sheriff," executing him before he could be charged and tried for his alleged crimes.⁸³⁶

With rising racism and a re-established Ku Klux Klan, mass public displays of anti-Black sentiment became common around the nation. White Montanans organized a state chapter of the Klan in 1921, within a few years it comprised over 40 local affiliates. Locals formed large Klaverns in Butte, Livingston, Whitehall, Roundup, and other towns, including Helena.⁸³⁷ By the mid-20s over 5,000 men paid membership dues to the Montana Klan, which also had an active women's auxiliary. Among these men and women were many of the state's leading lights. State-level leadership "included five lawyers, three doctors, an assistant high school principal, a pharmacist, a state superintendent of the Montana Children's Home Society, and at least ten ministers," as well as many White Masons. Grand Dragon Lewis Terwilliger was mayor of Livingston from 1919 to 1923, and "among the leading educators of Montana."⁸³⁸ Numerous other notable Montanans could be found in the rank-and-file, including candidates for the U.S. Congress: in the 1924 Senate race, the Klan funded and promoted the campaign of Frank Linderman, whom Terwilliger identified as "a present or former Klansman."⁸³⁹

The Montana Klan held huge public events—parades 400-strong down the streets of Livingston, lectures in Billings that drew 1,300 people—and choreographed flamboyant displays of strength. In 1923, the *Billings Gazette* described one impressive Klan event held during the 1923 Midland Empire Fair, where "thousands of

⁸³² Phil Cousineau, "Crimes of Love," Website, Jameson Law Library Blog (Missoula, Mont.: University of Montana Law Library), February 21, 2012. Accessed November 4, 2016, <https://jamesonlawlibrary.wordpress.com/2012/02/21/crimes-of-love/>.

⁸³³ *Poplar Standard*, April 10, 1913; *Culbertson Searchlight*, April 11, 1913.

⁸³⁴ "DeathPenaltyUSA, the Database of Executions in the United States."

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.* Powell, a Pullman porter, was accused of murder. At least one other Black man was executed in Montana in this period: 38 year-old laborer George Griner, hanged by Custer County in Miles City in January 1935 for murder.

⁸³⁶ Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers.*, 207.

⁸³⁷ WHM, "Montana Women of the Ku Klux Klan." On January 29, 1923 the Helena *Independent* reported on a public event of the Helena Klan local. Erickson to Hagen, "Klan Chapter in Helena in 1920s?," February 13, 2017.

⁸³⁸ Erickson, "Kluxer Blues," 49.; Sturdevant, "White Hoods Under the Big Sky: Montanans Embrace the Ku Klux Klan, 1920s," 316. Through its entire existence, the Grand Dragon of the MT KKK was Lewis Terwilliger, a teacher who arrived from Michigan in 1895 and was a principal in Butte, Townsend and then Livingston (from 1903-1913) and who also had a ranch and real estate/abstract business. Terwilliger was a strong Methodist, Republican, and Mason. He served as mayor of Livingston from 1919-1923. A Klan member since its mid-teens revival, Terwilliger earned a salary of \$1150 as Grand Dragon (vs. ave. American annual wage \$680).

⁸³⁹ Sturdevant, "White Hoods Under the Big Sky: Montanans Embrace the Ku Klux Klan, 1920s," 320.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

visitors were treated . . . to a spectacle not advertised on the Governor's Day program. At 10:00 p.m. sharp, the city was aroused by a continuous bursting of air bombs over the high rimrocks that surround the northern part of the city. This was followed a little later by the bursting into flames of a cross nearly 50 feet in height, the 'fiery cross of the K.K. K.' As the cross blazed, lighting the entire top of the hills for miles around, hundreds of red flares were touched off. And on the edge of the hills 300 yards above the city, marched hundreds of White-robed members of the organization, carrying red and green flaming torches." Some 2,000 members were said to have participated.⁸⁴⁰ The following year in Butte, on St. Patrick's Day, "crosses were burned on the Continental Divide and Big Butte." In 1925, Klansman in Missoula "set off sudden explosions" one April evening, and "three burning crosses lit up Missoula Valley that night, one on Mount Jumbo, one on Waterworks Hill, and one just south of the fairgrounds."⁸⁴¹

The participation of these multitudes reflected a commitment to Klan principles—foremost among them "White supremacy"—that fostered violence toward Montana's Black residents. The Klan engaged in active intimidation at the AME church in Missoula—where multiple times in the 1920s be-robed Klansman barged into the church during religious services. Violent threats—like those received in 1923 by Anaconda residents like Mrs. Clements, the wife of Anaconda's AME pastor—accompanied violent attacks.⁸⁴² Montana Klan violence climaxed with the 1926 killing in Hardin of James Belden, a Crow Agency resident (recently of Butte) who "repaired shoes and did odd jobs around the community."⁸⁴³ Belden "was riddled with bullets from upwards of a hundred guns" after he shot—possibly in self-defense—Big Horn County Sheriff, and Klan member, Robert P. Gilmore.⁸⁴⁴

The mob killing of James Belden marked the nadir, but not the end, of anti-Black activity in Montana in this period. The Klan itself existed until 1928, and as elsewhere in the country in the years before the Second World War, Black people in the state faced an overtly hostile society, one bent in large part on systematically repressing them. The 1943 execution of railroad worker Philip "Slim" Coleman, Jr., reflected this fundamental fact. In the last execution by hanging in the state (and the last execution by any method until 1995), authorities killed Coleman, 24, "in record time for Montana," hanging him September 10, 1943, just 47 days after the alleged murder-robbery of which he was convicted. Coleman was the 71st, and last, person (all men) to be executed during the historic period. The State of Montana had by then executed nine Black men, representing almost 13% of people executed in a state where the Black population never exceeded 2% of the total."⁸⁴⁵

⁸⁴⁰ Sturdevant, 312.

⁸⁴¹ Martin, "Hiding in Plain Sight."

⁸⁴² Sturdevant, "White Hoods Under the Big Sky: Montanans Embrace the Ku Klux Klan, 1920s"; Walter, Axline, and Foley, *Speaking Ill of the Dead*, 317. The KKK's Feb. 6 letter to the AME pastor's wife read "Mrs. Clements: Your tongue has trapped you with your race and the White race. You had better leave town or we will tar and feather you. Beware."

⁸⁴³ Sturdevant, "White Hoods Under the Big Sky: Montanans Embrace the Ku Klux Klan, 1920s," 317–18.

⁸⁴⁴ Sturdevant, 318–19.

⁸⁴⁵ "DeathPenaltyUSA, the Database of Executions in the United States."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

World War II and After

Coleman's execution occurred at a turning point in global, national, and state racial history. The Second World War transformed society in countless ways, not least in the realm of racism and race relations. Change touched all levels of society, and manifested in the life stories of the multitudes. In Helena, trained Registered Nurse Octavia Bridgwater, who had been reduced to working as a housekeeper and laundress since her 1930 hometown return, enlisted in the Army Nursing Corps. Octavia's service was a noteworthy achievement, as was oft the case with individuals from well-educated western Black communities: in the course of the war, only 160 Black nurses served in United States' Army Nurse Corps.⁸⁴⁶ Octavia, now a veteran, returned to Helena in 1945. This time, in contrast to her earlier return, Montana hospitals would hire a Black nurse, and she took a position in St. Peter's maternity ward.⁸⁴⁷

Bridgwater was one among many African Americans who capitalized on new opportunities in the WWII period. But most people found these opportunities elsewhere, as "lucrative industry and armed services jobs [drew] many African Americans away from Montana."⁸⁴⁸ In 1940, Montana's population stood at 559,456, of which only 1,120 identified in the census as Black (136 fewer than in 1930). Three years of further population decline followed, and although sheer numbers of Black people grew some thereafter, their overall proportion of Montana's population continued to be tiny: just two-tenths of a percent in 1940. It has not climbed even a tenth of a percent since.⁸⁴⁹

But even as the state population became less Black proportionally, the number of Black residents began to climb in the post-war period. In 1950, census enumerators counted 1,232 African American people in Montana, and 10 years later they listed 1,467, a number that climbed to 1,873 in 1970. As it long had, the evolution of Black Montana after WWII continued to be closely related to regional military developments as well as broader postwar production and population shifts. In 1950, only Great Falls and Billings boasted more Black residents than they had ten years previously, and this spatial concentration of the state's population became more pronounced over the 1950s, when Great Falls' WWII military base was re-named Malmstrom and began conversion from an air base to a missile base. Thereafter, Great Falls Black population skyrocketed—more than tripling in the 1950s and doubling again in the 1960s—while remaining about the same in Billings and declining elsewhere. The pace and details of local population shifts varied. Missoula's population bottomed out by 1950, while Helena and Butte experienced a relatively steady population decline and Anaconda's population fluctuated over the midcentury period. But by 1970 only Great Falls and Billings counted more than about 50-60 African American residents, with about 225 in Billings and over 1,000 in Great Falls (more than 700 of whom were at Malmstrom AFB itself).⁸⁵⁰

As in previous eras, some localities became Black places for briefer periods when groups of African Americans came for specific purposes—the 1960 census, for instance, showed significant clusters in Glasgow and Opheim related to military installations that opened in those areas in the 1950s, and about 1966 Job Corps camps near

⁸⁴⁶ Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House."

⁸⁴⁷ Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton. Ms. Bridgwater worked at St. Peter's maternity ward until her retirement in 1960s.

⁸⁴⁸ WHM, "'Lifting as We Climb.'"

⁸⁴⁹ Bureau of the Census, "16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana, Lewis and Clark County" (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1940); Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States," Population Division, Working Paper No. 76, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005), Table 27.

⁸⁵⁰ Bureau, "1950 Census of Population"; Bureau, "1960 Census"; Bureau, "1970 Census of Population."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Anaconda and Hamilton were majority Black.⁸⁵¹ But for the most part, by the 1970s Black Montana was no longer a multi-focal, interconnected statewide community, but rather a pair of places with Black communities—the state's two largest cities, Great Falls and Billings—centered on the state's two remaining A.M.E. churches, and a scattering of families and individuals in various other locations.

Postwar Great Falls

In 1950, Great Falls' total enumerated Black population remained the same as it had in 1940, with census takers counting about 150 African American residents. Another 70 or so people lived outside of Great Falls in Cascade County, and this number likely reflected some Black soldiers stationed at Gore Field air base and the Great Falls Army Air Base, both established on the outskirts of the city in 1942. According to local historian Ken Robison, "by early 1943, several hundred black soldiers had arrived at the bases." After 1950, Great Falls Black population skyrocketed, largely due to expansion of the city's military base (the operation at Gore Field having been consolidated into the GFAAB in 1945). As the Cold War heated up in subsequent years, operations at the base expanded dramatically. In the 1950s, the army began converting the Great Falls site from an air base to a missile base. It was officially renamed Malmstrom Air Force Base on October 1, 1955, and by 1962 Malmstrom gained the distinction of being the first Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missile site in the United States. As soldiers streamed into the mushrooming base, the city's Black population swelled. In 1960, enumerators counted 517 Black residents—more than three times the 1950 total—and 10 years later 1,067, with over 700 of them located on Malmstrom AFB itself.⁸⁵²

These numbers reflected dramatic change in the Black community, but outside of Malmstrom, within the city itself, they also reflected continuity, with newcomers joining longtime locals who clustered around the Great Falls' enduring, foundational institution, the Black church. The brick-clad Union Bethel A.M.E. church was still going strong at 916 5th Avenue South, and two blocks away, at 1127 5th Ave. South, Immanuel Baptist also continued on. Immanuel Baptist may have closed around 1958: the church incorporated with new trustees in 1957 (its original trustees all having died) but subsequently disappeared from local newspaper church reports.⁸⁵³

Other community institutions also carried on from earlier eras, primary among them the Ozark Club. Originally incorporated in 1909 as the Ozark Colored Club, the Ozark closed around 1922 before incorporating anew in 1933 by Leo Lamar, an Afro-Chinese man who came to Great Falls in 1920 as a Pullman car porter and pugilist. Located since 1935 on the second floor of 116-118 3rd St. South, the Ozark boomed with the Black influx in the postwar period, when "black soldiers were not welcome at Great Falls night clubs, restaurants, or even the new downtown United Service Organizations (USO) Club." In 1948, the Ozark joined the national jazz scene when renowned Kansas City saxophonist Robert Mabane, Jr. arrived to take over and lead the Ozark Boys, the club's house band. It subsequently became "a major stop on the northern 'Chitlin Circuit.'" Lamar and his second wife Beatrice, whose sister and brother-in-law owned the Silver City Club in Butte, expanded their operation into the street level of the building, where "they opened the Ozark Café, featuring ribs and fried chicken," and in 1948 they purchased the Thompson Hotel at 304 ½ 1st Avenue South, around the corner from the Ozark. The Lamars renamed the property, and moved into the LaMar Hotel and Doyle Apartments, where they also housed club staff and traveling acts as well as a brothel run by Bea Lamar. The family's enterprises thrived for years

⁸⁵¹ "Helena As She Was - An Open History Resource for Montana's Capital City"; Bureau, "1960 Census."

⁸⁵² United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940*; Bureau, "1950 Census of Population"; Bureau, "1960 Census"; Bureau, "1970 Census of Population"; Robison, "Breaking Racial Barriers: 'Everyone's Welcome' at the Ozark Club Great Falls, Montana's African American Nightclub," 51.

⁸⁵³ "Falls Church Incorporates, Five Other Groups Organize."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

thereafter until ending suddenly in 1962. That June, Leo Lamar Sr. died of a heart attack. Three weeks later, in the middle of a busy evening, the Ozark burned to the ground.⁸⁵⁴ Beyond the storied walls of the Ozark Club, the Black community also hosted special events that brought mixed crowds to celebrate and enjoy Black music. Among them shows by Louis Armstrong, who played the Electric City in 1943 and 1951.⁸⁵⁵

Enduring organizations likewise anchored the Great Falls Black community in the postwar period, and residents established new community organizations as well. The local Negro Women's Club, the Dunbar Art and Study, stayed active in a host of realms. Led by women like Viola Bowers, Molly Lamar, Gertrude Taylor, and Emma Riley Smith and her daughter Alma Smith Jacobs, the club hosted social functions—like Thanksgiving parties and dances in the 1950s at the USO at 205 Central Ave.—as well as music and arts exhibitions and educational programs and speakers, often at the Y.W.C.A., in addition to regular meetings at Union Bethel Church.⁸⁵⁶ The Dunbar Club also worked actively on local civil rights issues, “In 1945, for example, Dunbar Club members wrote letters supporting civil rights legislation to President Harry Truman and Montana congressmen and joined the mayor, unions, and the NAACP in opposing discrimination against young black figure skaters by a Southern-born instructor of the Great Falls Skating Club. In 1948, they successfully protested a local theater's refusal to sell tickets to blacks. In 1950, after the integration of U.S. armed forces, Dunbar Club members served on an interracial committee to open access to local establishments for black airmen stationed at Malmstrom Air Force Base.”⁸⁵⁷

In many of these activities the Dunbar Club was joined by the Great Falls chapter of the NAACP. First established in the city in 1922, the local chapter may have disbanded around 1930, but organized again by the postwar period, when it appears to have existed intermittently. During 1944, the group held regular public pinochle parties at the Y.W.C.A. and sponsored an Emancipation Day program at the A.M.E. church. In 1968, a regional field representative for the NAACP arrived in town and “installed officers of the new Great Falls NAACP branch at a meeting at the College of Great Falls. Local branch leadership included the Rev. Hardy White, Lucius Williams, Sherry Francetich, Carol Foster, and Geraldine Travis. Chapter representatives spoke on panel discussions on world peace held in 1968 in “the friendship room of the Great Falls Federal Savings and Loan Building, 2425 10th Ave. S.,” gave guest lectures in Sister Providencia Tolan's college classes, and worked on various civil rights issues at regular meetings at locations like the College of Great Falls and St. Francis Episcopal Church at 100 44th St. South. By August 1969 the Great Falls NAACP Chapter—“the only one in a five state area—Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, North and South Dakota”—boasted 100 members.⁸⁵⁸ Other organizations active intermittently in this period included the Masons, with members, at different times, like second-generation resident William Knott and 1958 arrival Eddie Reed.⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁴ Robison, “Breaking Racial Barriers: ‘Everyone’s Welcome’ at the Ozark Club Great Falls, Montana’s African American Nightclub”; Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 4, 2009.

⁸⁵⁵ “Louis Armstrong and His ‘All-Stars’ (Civic Center Theater Ad)”; “Come In and See ‘Satchmo’ (Kops Piano House Ad)”; Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” April 25, 2011.

⁸⁵⁶ “Thanksgiving Party”; “USO Schedules Open House”; “To Present Recital”; “Dr. R. Casey to Speak to Falls Club”; “Federation Will Hear Study Club”; “Calendar of Club Activities.”

⁸⁵⁷ Robison, “Breaking Racial Barriers: ‘Everyone’s Welcome’ at the Ozark Club Great Falls, Montana’s African American Nightclub,” 56–58.

⁸⁵⁸ “Black Civil Rights Organizations Discussed by Local NAACP Group”; “Public Notice: The Great Falls Branch of the N.A.A.C.P.”; “Public Notice: Emancipation Day Program”; “NAACP Rep Installs Officers”; “Youths Speak for World Peace, Topic”; “Nun Speaks to Teachers on Students and Racism”; “Field Director of NAACP to Speak Here”; “NAACP Speaker Assails Officials at Malmstrom”; “Fellowship to Discuss NAACP Tonight.”

⁸⁵⁹ Wood, “David and Katie Knott Residence (MT Historic Property Record, # 24CA1747)”; Wood, “Taylor-Reed House (MT

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Their activities testified to ongoing Jim Crow practices in the Electric City and elsewhere in Montana, but signs of some progress could also be found. Residential segregation in Great Falls—long among the most segregated cities in Montana—remained profound into the 1960s and beyond, but Black people made headway integrating other realms. Lewistown-born sisters Alma and Lucille Smith, who moved to Great Falls with their parents Martin and Emma Riley Smith in 1922, attended Talladega College in Alabama after graduating from Great Falls High School. The sisters both went on to earn degrees in library science—Alma at Columbia and Lucille at the University of Washington—and then marry in 1945, with Lucille wedding Kalispell-native Morrell Thompson and Alma marrying Marcus Jacobs of Alabama. Alma Smith Jacobs returned to Great Falls and in 1946 began working as a librarian at the public library, where she was promoted to head librarian eight years later, “at a time when the city was strictly segregated.”⁸⁶⁰

Jacobs subsequently spearheaded a campaign for a sorely-needed larger library. She persevered despite voter rejections of “bond requests for the needed funds in 1959 and again in 1963,” ultimately securing funding for “construction of Montana’s first modern library.” Opened in 1967, “It became known as ‘the house that Alma built.’” In the course of her work, Alma Smith Jacobs won such honors as Great Falls Woman of the Year in 1957, Montana Librarian of the Year in 1968, and the Montana Education Association Golden Apple in 1971. She served as “President of the Montana Library Association, President of the Pacific Northwest Library Association, and on the Executive Board of the American Library Association,” and in 1973 was appointed Montana’s State Librarian. A “tireless activist,” throughout her career, she worked “to advance civil rights and racial justice,” speaking out “against segregation in Great Falls at a time when it was unpopular to do so.” She was president of the Montana Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, served on the Great Falls Interracial Council, and sat on the Montana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. In 1970, Alma published one of the first works on the history of Black Montana, *The Negro in Montana, 1800-1945: A Selective Bibliography*, with her sister, Lucille Smith Thompson. Lucille, for her part, was by then also a pathbreaking librarian in the state, known for “her devotion to social justice and education.” She created and worked in libraries in Montana and Idaho before becoming, in 1964, reference librarian and head of reference at Montana State University. Like her sister Alma, Lucille Smith Thompson served as well as the president of the Montana Library Association.⁸⁶¹

Other Black Great Falls residents were remarkable pathbreakers in integrating sports and entertainment realms. In June of 1967, an up-and-coming singer named Charley Frank Pride—a former Missoula minor-league baseball player and 1956 Negro League all-star with a smooth baritone—moved to Great Falls. Pride, his wife Rozene, and three children moved from Helena, where they lived since 1960—the two youngest children were born there—and where Pride began performing regularly for the first time. There, he opened ballgames with the national anthem for his East Helena smelter workplace team, the Smelterites, for whom he pitched. After ballgames he played music “with a quartet called the Night Hawks at local clubs” like “East Helena’s Hugheys—later called the Korner Bar—the U&I Club, Helena’s Main Tavern and the White Mill Bar. Soon Pride was “performing at honky-tonks, churches and nightclubs in the Helena, Anaconda and Great Falls areas.” His Great Falls gigs were “often at bars on 10th Avenue South,” like the Flamingo and the Ranch, but included as well events like the “annual bowling banquet at the then-Ranch on 25th street and 10th Avenue South. They had a

Historic Property Record, #24CA1748).”

⁸⁶⁰ Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 4, 2009; WHM, “Alma Smith Jacobs”; “Lucille Smith Thompson - PCOSUW | Montana State University”; Nix, “Library History Buff Blog.”

⁸⁶¹ WHM, “Alma Smith Jacobs”; Robison, “Historical Black Americans in Northern Montana,” May 4, 2009; Nix, “Library History Buff Blog”; “Lucille Smith Thompson - PCOSUW | Montana State University”; Thompson, Jacobs, and Montana State Library, *The Negro in Montana, 1800-1945; a Selective Bibliography*,.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

new act starting that night and had us clear tables early. We stayed to listen to him. The song I was most familiar with was 'Snakes Crawl At Night.' He became a favorite." Soon, Pride's "reputation spread across the state." In 1965, he recorded two singles in Nashville – "The Snakes Crawl At Night" and "Atlantic Coastal Line" – "during a split studio session with top-notch session players," and the following year:

Chet Atkins, the legendary guitarist and a rising executive at RCA Records, decided to trust his ears and with his backing RCA signed Charley. Atkins took Charley under his wing, nurtured his talent and spearheaded a shrewd promotional campaign that addressed the racial challenges of mid 1960s America. Charley's first two singles, "The Snakes Crawl At Night" and "Before I Met You", set the groundwork for "Just Between You and Me", which caught fire in 1967, breaking into the Top-10 Country chart and garnering Charley his first GRAMMY nomination.

Pride's "career took off. His records were selling, his songs were on the radio, and he was booking shows all across the country. So that led to a move to Great Falls, for easier access to the airport."⁸⁶²

From Great Falls, Pride recalled, he "was doing shows every weekend. Fly out Thursday, perform Friday and Saturday and come back to Montana on Sunday." Rozene stayed in Great Falls with the children—"Kraig, 9, Dion, 5, and Angela, 2"—in the family's "house near Pinski Park on the east end of town." The couple and their kids became active members of the Great Falls community—when asked about herself with Charley on the road frequently, Rozene responded "I sew, I cook, I bowl,"—and in 1969 Charley served as state chairman of the Montana Easter Seals fund-raising campaign.⁸⁶³ Charley also developed close relationships within the local music industry. Foremost among them was his friendship with "local businessman Louis Allen "Al" Donohue, who owned radio stations, including KMON, the first stations to play Pride's records in Montana." Donohue and Pride had by then worked together for some time. In 1966, when the Prides still lived in Helena, Charley performed along with Johnny Paycheck at the KMON radio showcase event called "Great Country Sounds of '66," held at the College of Great Falls recreation center. In 1969, despite their close ties to the community, the Pride family left Great Falls and moved to Dallas. As Pride put it, "My wife and I both loved Montana and our two youngest kids were born there. But my career got to a point where we had to go someplace."⁸⁶⁴

Charley Pride's remarkable trajectory during his Montana tenure is remembered for integrating country music, but his Big Sky story also speaks to progress in more prosaic realms. The Prides' Great Falls home near Pinski Park, while still in south Great Falls, lay outside of the core southside neighborhood to which local Black families had long been restricted, and as such was a step toward de-segregating residential Great Falls. Charley's time as a baseball player in Missoula also reflected slow but significant integration. Jackie Robinson integrated major league baseball in 1947 and, although some league games continued through 1958, the Negro League played its last full season in 1951. The following year, the minor-league Great Falls Electrics, a Dodgers affiliate, boasted an integrated team, with Afro-Cuban Armando Suarez on the pitcher's mound and Jimmy "Seabiscuit" Wilkes briefly in the outfield. [Figure 56]

In 1953 catcher John Roseboro, who went on to Major League fame, joined the team and in 1958, Alabama-native and former Negro League player "Fast Eddie" Reed joined the Electrics, playing on the team for the last

⁸⁶² "Charley Pride"; Kidston, "A History of Pride"; Ecke, "In the Footsteps of Country Star Charley Pride"; Peterson, "The (Charley) Pride of Montana."

⁸⁶³ "Mrs. Pride--The Wife's Point of View"; "Easter Seal Fund Campaign Starts with Singer Charley Pride as Head"; Ecke, "In the Footsteps of Country Star Charley Pride."

⁸⁶⁴ Ecke, "In the Footsteps of Country Star Charley Pride"; "Country Music Legend Charley Pride Still a Montanan at Heart"; "Helena Singer Charley Pride to Appear on Country Music Show Here at CGF"; "Charley Pride."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

four seasons of his career before retiring from baseball in 1962. Reed remained in Great Falls the rest of his life, living with his family at the longtime home of the Taylor family. [Figure 57] The Reeds roomed with widowed Gertrude Taylor for six years before she died in 1964, after which they acquired the home that John Taylor built at 708 8th Ave. South. Their daughter, Kathy Reed, became a local school teacher, and in adulthood purchased the Knott family home, located across the street from her parents at 711 8th Avenue South.⁸⁶⁵



Figure 56: “Great Falls Electrics, 1953,” Unknown photographer, c. 1953. Montana Historical Society Research Center, 947-828. Pitcher Armando Suarez at center of photograph.

As the Reeds’ story suggests, although most Black people in the Great Falls area in the postwar period were military personnel stationed at Malmstrom, some of the newer residents stayed and dug in, joining longtime locals in anchoring the Black community. Enduring midcentury residents included not only the aforementioned Knotts and Gertrude Taylor but people like Elizabeth Coleman Webb—who married again in 1953, wedding Burris Hill, and continued to own and operate her massage parlor, Salon of Health and Beauty, until about 1978—as well as the extended Bigbee-Connell clan. Charlotte Glovina Bigbee Connell Smith’s son Henry Edward Connell Sr. and Alice Comer Connell divorced in the 1920s, and by 1940 Henry had married a White

⁸⁶⁵ Wood, “Taylor-Reed House (MT Historic Property Record, #24CA1748)”;

Wood, “David and Katie Knott Residence (MT Historic Property Record, # 24CA1747)”;

“Armando Suarez Minor League Baseball Statistics on StatsCrew.Com”;

admin, “Jimmy Wilkes – Society for American Baseball Research”;

“John Roseboro, 1953 Great Falls Electrics.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State



Figure 57: Eddie Reed, wearing his Great Falls Electrics uniform, c. 1958. Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, "eMuseum," <https://nlbemuseum.com/history/players/reed.html>.

woman from the Simms area, Clara Tessman. With his new wife, Henry Connell Sr. lived in Great Falls until he died. He was buried in the city's Highland Cemetery in 1980. At that time, his sons Henry Jr. and Pat survived him there, as did his daughter, Frances Kim Connell Williams. Williams, a cheerleader at Great Falls High School around the late 1940s, "grew up south of Great Falls on a farm where horses were raised," and "was a jazz singer who toured with the legendary big bands of Stan Kenton and Nelson Riddle." She spent "many years as a professional singer and actress. She traveled with big bands and appeared in movies & television." Subsequently, "in her middle years, she returned home to care for her ailing father" in Great Falls. After Henry Connell Sr. died, Williams "took over the care of the ancestral ranch. She also enjoyed an active role in the family horse racing business," and "owned and raced horses and was a member of the State Fair Board."⁸⁶⁶

Some postwar arrivals joined these longtime residents in nurturing the Black community in Great Falls, taking active leadership roles and sometimes putting down deep roots in the Electric City. As noted above, the Reeds stayed after Eddie's baseball career ended, and became enduring community pillars. So too, families like the Ghees. Frank and Mary Ghee, married in 1959, moved to Great Falls in the early 1970s when Frank transferred to Malmstrom—the final stop on his long Air Force career. The Ghees stayed on in Great Falls after Frank retired, raising their four daughters at their 4611 7th Ave. South home, and were among the most active members of the Black community, credited with, among other things, " 'saving' their A. M. E. church," Union Bethel. As Mary Ghee's obituary put it in

2015, when she died in Great Falls, she was a woman of "extraordinary energies...if there was something that needed to be done, she managed to be involved in it."⁸⁶⁷

Other midcentury arrivals who became community leaders included especially Geraldine Washington Travis. Travis moved to Great Falls in 1967 when her husband William transferred to Malmstrom, and quickly "became active in local civil rights and Democratic Party political activities." As noted above, in 1968 she helped found and lead the reincarnated Great Falls branch of the NAACP, and "she was also a founder of the Montana Chapter of National Council of Negro Women and the Montana Women's Political Caucus. She served as president of the Cascade County Women's Political Caucus in the late 1960s." She also worked on the 1972 "Shirley Chisholm presidential campaign and served as president of the Great Falls Shirley Chisholm for President Club. Later that year she was one of twenty Montana delegates at the Democratic National Convention in Miami, Florida." Travis served as well on "the fifteen-member Montana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission," and in 1974 she ran for the Montana House of Representatives in House District 43, which encompassed Malmstrom AFB. Geraldine Travis won that election, and in doing so became the first—and to date only—African American to serve in the Montana legislature.⁸⁶⁸

⁸⁶⁶ "Elizabeth Hill [Obituary]"; "Clara Connell [Obituary]"; "Elita Frances Connell Obituary (1933 - 2019)"; Ecke, "Great City, but Fix Fair Grandstand, Williams Says."

⁸⁶⁷ "Mary Ghee [Obituary]"; "Frank F. Ghee Jr. [Obituary]"; "Celebrations: Frank and Mary Ghee [50th Wedding Anniversary]"; Robison, "The Magnificent Ghees."

⁸⁶⁸ Robison, "Geraldine Washington Travis (1931-) •."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Postwar Billings

Postwar Billings followed a different growth trajectory than Great Falls. Without a burgeoning military base driving major Black population growth, Billings boasted a Black community characterized by more modest gains. There, census-takers counted 188 Black people in 1950—up some from 150 in 1940—and in 1960 235, a figure that remained about the same 10 years later.⁸⁶⁹ As in Great Falls, this growth sustained the activities of Billings's Black church, Wayman Chapel A.M.E., which continued to anchor the community, from its 402 S. 25th Street location, throughout the postwar period. Indeed, this period was marked by unprecedented stability in church leadership: "Not until the hiring of Rev Robert Freeman in 1957, would the church have a steady pastor." Freeman presided over the congregation until his death 40 years later.⁸⁷⁰

Community growth also sustained the Phyllis Wheatly Club, the Billings "colored women's club" active in various incarnations since 1914. The club remained active through at least 1972, disbanding around that time. Led by women like "charter member and activist" Edna Epperson Brown and her daughter Edna Brown Best, the club nurtured Black life in social, educational and political realms. As Edna Brown Best put it, "my mother was determined to do away with prejudice." But "when she passed away in 1955 the newspapers were still printing headlines like 'Prominent Negress Dies.'" It would be another 10 years before civil rights events in Selma, Alabama pushed a swelling civil rights movement. That March 15—the same day President Johnson delivered a draft Voting Rights Act to congress—religious leaders from many Billings congregations held a memorial service for Casper, Wyoming native Rev. James Reebe—murdered in Alabama by white



Figure 58: "'Billings Prayer Walk,' *Billings Gazette*, March 15, 1965.

⁸⁶⁹ United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940.*; Bureau, "1950 Census of Population"; Bureau, "1960 Census"; Bureau, "1970 Census of Population."

⁸⁷⁰ Wood, "Wayman Chapel (MT Historic Property Record, #24YL2047)."

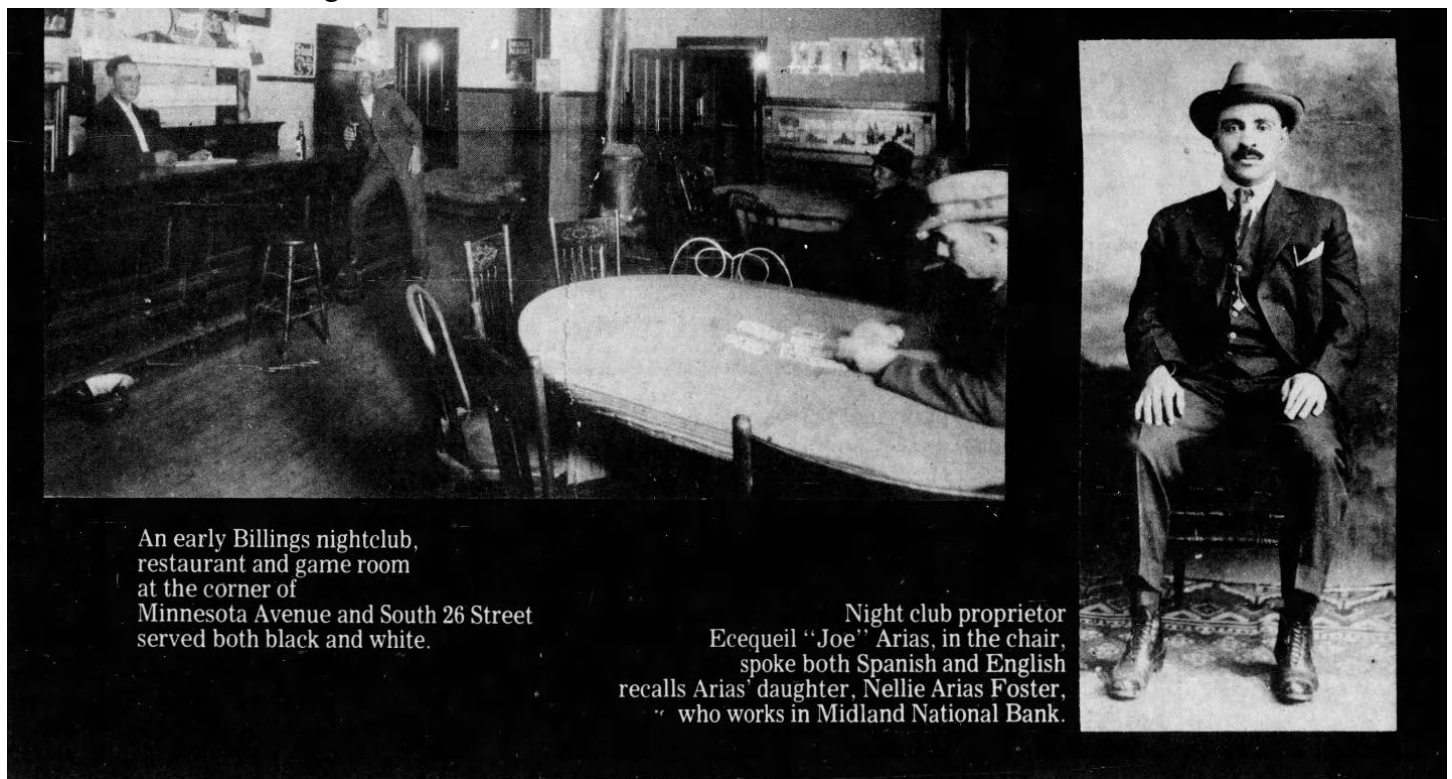
Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

supremacists—at Wayman Chapel A.M. E. After the service, the ministers and the packed-to-capacity crowd marched “in support of the voter registration drive in Selma,” walking in silence up Broadway to the Fox Theater, where they held a community prayer service, followed by a “special noon mass at St. Patrick’s” attended by some 150 people.⁸⁷¹ [Figure 58]

Like the Phyllis Wheatly Club, the local jazz club, the Maple Leaf, also endured as a core community institution. The Maple Leaf, first incorporated in 1897, lasted almost as long as Great Falls’ Ozark Club, closing around 1958. In 1961, the city condemned the building on the corner of Minnesota Ave and S. 26th Street (16 S. 26th) where the club had been located since at least the early 1930s, and possibly decades earlier. Ecequiel “Joe” Arias ran the club for much of this time. Afro-Hispanic Arias, born in Mexico in 1895, first came to Billings in 1925, and the following year he married Bertha Best, oldest of William and Nellie Best’s seven children (who composed one of Billings’ largest Black families). Like many Mexican immigrants to the area in this era, Arias worked periodically in the beet fields, but he was foremost a “night club proprietor.” Arias, who “spoke Spanish and English,” operated the Maple Leaf “nightclub, restaurant, and game room” as a space that welcomed an interracial clientele. As community member Mamie Lacey recalled, “it was a pretty classy place.”⁸⁷² [Figure 59]

Throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, Black Billings continued to be anchored by longtime families, like the extended Best clan, as well as notable newcomers, among them members of the Black Montana community who moved from other locales in the state. William and Nellie Best and their six children settled in Billings around 1919 after moving from Sheridan, where William was stationed at Fort Mackenzie with his “colored”



An early Billings nightclub, restaurant and game room at the corner of Minnesota Avenue and South 26 Street served both black and white.

Night club proprietor Ecequiel “Joe” Arias, in the chair, spoke both Spanish and English recalls Arias’ daughter, Nellie Arias Foster, “ who works in Midland National Bank.

Figure 59: “Joe Arias and the Maple Leaf Club,” *Billings Gazette*, October 5, 1975.

⁸⁷¹ “Billings Services, March Quiet”; “Black Billings.”

⁸⁷² “Black Billings”; “Colorful Old Maple Leaf Club to Be Demolished.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

cavalry unit. William Best died in 1931, by which time the couple had seven children, the youngest just five, and Nellie stayed and raised her large family in Billings, where it formed a foundation of the Black community. When Nellie died in 1967, son James R. was living with her at the family home at 102 S. 22nd, while son Eugene and his family lived next door at 106 S. 22nd and daughter Mrs. Bertha Best Arias and her family lived one block down at 204 S. 22nd. Daughters Mrs. Evelyn Best Lucero and Mrs. Dorothy Best Morris lived at 220 S. 23rd and 111 S. 24th, respectively. Son Eugene Best, with his wife Edna Brown Best, also raised seven children, and lived the rest of his life, in Billings. Eugene Best died there in 2012. His widow Edna Brown Best, who was born in Billings in 1936, lived another nine years, dying in her lifelong hometown in 2021, at the age of 76. Edna Brown Best, the daughter of Ray and Edna Epperson Brown, was herself at least a third generation Billings resident, whose grandparents Samuel and Lizzie Epperson arrived in Billings by 1920; by the time she died, her family had been in Billings over a hundred years.⁸⁷³

Eugene and Edna Brown Best's daughter Stephanie was among a fourth generation of the Best-Brown family to live out her days in Billings. Stephanie Best married James Howard Prince Jr., a Montana native and 1952 graduate of Billing Senior High whose family had come to Billings in 1949 from Anaconda. After a brief marriage, to an indigenous woman, that ended in 1971, James Prince married Stephanie Best. When he died in Billings in 1999 the couple lived at 109 S. 24th Street, two blocks from the family home of Stephanie Best Prince's grandparents William and Nellie Best. Stephanie Best Prince still lived on the Southside when she died in 2010.⁸⁷⁴ Stephanie's cousin Nellie Arias, daughter of Bertha Best Arias, lived out her life in Billings alongside Stephanie. She married new arrival Arthur Marsh in Billings in 1958, and after he died in 1967—when they lived at 202 S. 22nd Street—Nellie wed another new arrival, L.D. Foster, in 1970. Her mother Bertha died there that same year (while living at 204 S. 22nd), and when L.D. Foster died in 2011, Nellie Arias Marsh Foster survived him at their family home at 1204 Glencoe Drive. So too did a daughter, two stepsons, three granddaughters, and one great-granddaughter. Nellie's sister Delores Arias Boyd died in Billings two years later, as did another sister, Dorothy Arias Abril, in 2017. In 2022, Nellie Arias Foster herself died in the town of her birth.⁸⁷⁵

Other members of the extended Best family who endured in Billings in this period included at least four of William and Nellie's seven children in addition to Eugene and Bertha, as well as their descendants. Son William H. Best died in Billings, at the age of 53, in 1963 (when he lived at 102 S. 22nd), and son James Russell Best died in Billings in 1987, at the age of 74. Daughter Evelyn Best Lucero there until 1999, when she died at the age of 78. Daughter Dorothy Best Morris followed in 2002, at the age of 94.⁸⁷⁶

Like the William and Nellie Best family, the Walter Chase family also came to Billings from Wyoming, via Harlowton, Montana, around 1919, and remained there for decades. After having lived in Cheyenne, in 1910 and Harlowton around 1919, the family was in Billings by 1920, when Walter Chase and his sister-in-law Angeline Smith White (daughter of 1890s White Sulphur Springs residents Lee and Julia Walton Smith), both widowed, married there. The Chases lived at 511 S 27th from the time they wed through at least 1962, when Angeline Smith Chase died. Walter subsequently moved near his daughter Naomi Chase Smith in Great Falls,

⁸⁷³ "William Best Rites Are Conducted Here Wednesday Afternoon"; "Mrs. Nellie Best"; "Eugene Richard Best (Montana, U.S., State Deaths, 1907-2018)"; Mayer, "Edna Best"; "Edna Jean Best, 1936-2021"; Bureau of the Census, "14th Census of the United States, 1920: Population Schedules: Montana."

⁸⁷⁴ "Stephanie Gene Best (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "James Howard Prince (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "James H. Prince."

⁸⁷⁵ "Marsh Funeral"; "L.D. (Lee Daniel Jr., 'Badoll') Foster"; "Mrs. Bertha Arias"; "Nellie Foster, December 2, 1937-February 4, 2022"; "Delores Rose Jean Boyd (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Dorothy Eloisa Abril (State of MT, Certificate of Death)."

⁸⁷⁶ "William Best, Billings, Dies"; "James R. 'Jimmy' Best"; "Evelyn Geraldine Lucero"; "Dorothy Vernon Best Morris."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

where he died in 1973, at the age of 92.⁸⁷⁷ James Clayton (J. C.) and Hattie Douglas also came to Billings from Wyoming, arriving from Evanston in 1931, about 10 years after the Chases. James Douglas, who lived at 122 S. 22nd in 1940 and later at 306 S. 24th, “was a laborer and a member of the Hod Carriers local No. 98, A. F. of L.,” and was “working on the Grand hotel addition” when he died in 1950. His widow Hattie continued to live at their S. 24th Street home through at least 1960. The family was long remembered as one of the pillars of the local Black community.⁸⁷⁸

Newlyweds William B. and Mamie Westerbrook Lacey, for their part, moved to Billings after World War II, arriving in 1949 from Santa Barbara, California. William, a mason, may have overlapped briefly with James Douglas in the building industry, in which he worked in Billings for many years. The Laceys initially lodged with a Black woman named Rebekah Thomas at 112 S. 25th, but in the 1950s they settled into their own home across the street at 115 ½ S. 25th Street. In the early 1960s they bought, and moved into, another neighborhood home at 2614 5th Avenue South. The Laceys became integral enduring members of the community, where they lived the rest of their lives. Walter died in 1983, when he was buried at Mountview Cemetery, and Mamie lived almost another 20 years. When she died in 2002 her obituary noted “she was most proud of her work with, and leadership of, many local women’s organizations,” among them the Phylis Wheatly Club, “and their efforts to make Billings a good place for women.”⁸⁷⁹

Later arrivals, too, developed into Billings community pillars. The Rev. Robert Chapin Freeman came to town in 1957 to serve as pastor of Wayman A.M.E., and in 1970 he married Bernice Kimbrough Marsh at the chapel. Freeman led the community church for 40 years, and when he died in 1997 he and his wife still lived in the southside church neighborhood. His widow Bernice Freeman remained at 801 S. 34th, and died in Billings in 2002, when her wake was held at Wayman Chapel A.M.E.. Bernice had by then likely lived in Billings for over four decades. Her son Arthur Marsh, who worked for the city street department, wed Nellie Arias there in 1958, and the couple subsequently lived at 202 S. 22nd St.⁸⁸⁰

Members of the extended Mundy-Driver family of Helena-Anaconda-Butte also lived in Billings at different times in the post war period. William Driver married Mattie Montana Waite there in 1938, and in 1950 lived there in the household of his brother Woodrow and sister-in-law Mary Mundy Driver. Meanwhile, Ruth Mundy and Felix Driver were in Billings in 1949, when they divorced. Ruth was pregnant with their second child at the time, and in 1950 they were enumerated still sharing a home at 621 ½ S. 27th Street, with Felix Driver running his own piano tuning business and Ruth Mundy Driver working as a hotel maid. Felix Driver remarried in Billings twice—wedding a Native American woman named Wilma Hall in 1966 and a White woman named Maureen Schryer in 1983—before dying there in 2004.⁸⁸¹

The Driver-Mundy clan, however, for the most part stayed in the Butte-Anaconda area, where they formed the steady backbone of the fluctuating midcentury Black community.

⁸⁷⁷ “Mrs. Chases Dies at 81”; “W. G. Chase, 91, Dies, Rites Pend.”

⁸⁷⁸ “Local Laborer Dies of Stroke”; Bureau of the Census, “16th Census of the United States, 1940: Population Schedules: Montana”; R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk's Billings (Yellowstone County, Mont.) City Directory, Including Laurel and Yellowstone County.*; “Black Billings.”

⁸⁷⁹ “Mamie Lee Lacey [Obituary]”; “William B. Lacey (U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current)”; R.L. Polk & Co, *Polk's Billings (Yellowstone County, Mont.) City Directory, Including Laurel and Yellowstone County.*

⁸⁸⁰ “Bernice Freeman”; “Robert Chapin Freeman”; Wood, “Wayman Chapel (MT Historic Property Record, #24YL2047).”

⁸⁸¹ “Felix Peter Driver (State of MT, Certificate of Death)”; “17th Census of the United States, 1950: Population Schedules: Montana.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Butte and Anaconda in the Postwar Period

While decennial census populations grew in Great Falls and Billings, the Butte-Anaconda community reflected the more mercurial trends of the mining industry on which those cities depended. The Black population fell and rose in the postwar period, but the overall trajectory from 1940 to 1970 was downward, and substantially so. In 1940, census takers counted 162 Black people in Butte and another 76 in Anaconda, for a total community population of 238. Ten years later—after surging briefly in 1942 when a “battalion of southern black miner-soldiers furloughed to Butte to augment efforts ‘to produce to the full quota of copper for victory’”—Butte’s population was down by almost two-thirds, with just 64 enumerated Black residents. That year, Anaconda’s, at 72, remained about the same as in 1940. The Butte-Anaconda community subsequently grew a bit—in 1960 enumerators counted 80 people in and around Butte and 90 in Anaconda—before falling sharply over the course of the 1960s. By 1970, only about 38 Black residents remained in each of the two cities, which together counted just 78 Black residents.⁸⁸²

Despite its different trajectory, the Butte-Anaconda community, like the expanding communities in Great Falls and Billings, rested on a foundation of several enduring families. Foremost among them was the extended Driver- Mundy- Duncan-Brown clan, composed of four families prominent in the community since the late 19th century. Of Lee Pleasant and Pearl Driver’s seven Anaconda-born children, at least six married members of other enduring Black Montana families, with four of them wedding Butte-Anaconda residents. In 1938, Alyce Driver married Walter Duncan of Butte, and in 1940, Woodrow Driver married Mary Mundy, whose family had ties to Anaconda and Helena. Two years later, Felix Driver married Mary Mundy’s sister Ruth. In 1946, Genevieve Driver married Herbert Brown of Butte. Oldest son Lee Pleasant Driver, Jr. settled, and had a family, in Havre, while his brother William Driver married Park County-born Mattie Waite in Billings.⁸⁸³

Like their Driver kin, the other Mundy siblings too, connected Black Montana through marriage. Thaddeus Mundy came to Helena with his Buffalo Soldier father as a 12 year-old in 1889, and married Radersburg-born White divorcee, and mother of three, Frances Smith Broad there in 1904. Together the Mundys had another six or seven children before Francis Mundy died at their Dry Gulch homestead in 1924. Thad Mundy lived for decades thereafter, dying in 1956, when he was buried in Helena’s Forestvale Cemetery. Of their children, Michael Mundy married Florence Johnson of Missoula in 1929, and oldest child William Mundy married 17-year-old Missoula-born Rozenia Sloti (or Snoten/Snolin, daughter of Augustus Slotin and his wife Clara or Corine) in Hamilton in 1930. Anna Mundy married David Lewis in Anaconda 1937, and in 1939, married a second time, wedding former Cascade County resident Fred Jackson. In 1942, Patricia Mundy married Anaconda-born William George Harris. William’s parents were “early citizens James and Anna Harris [who] lived on North Elm and had four sons,” all of whom served in the Second World War and then returned. William and Patricia Mundy Harris “also lived on North Elm.”⁸⁸⁴

While their brothers married and settled in Anaconda, Havre, and Billings, Driver daughters Alyce and Genevieve married foundational families of Butte, i.e., the Duncans and the Browns. Numerous Browns remained prominent residents of Butte throughout this period, as did the father-and-son doctors Duncan and Walter Duncan Senior’s sister Perdita, who never married but lived her whole life in Butte, dying there in 1985.

⁸⁸² Basso, *Meet Joe Copper*, chap. 6; MT SHPO, “African-Americans in Montana Timeline”; United States and Bureau of the Census, *16th Census, Population, 1940.*; Bureau, “1950 Census of Population”; Bureau, “1960 Census”; Bureau, “1970 Census of Population.”

⁸⁸³ Hagen, “Driver’s Saloon and Cafe.”

⁸⁸⁴ Haffey and Rosien, *Anaconda’s Foundation: People and Landmarks*, 11; “Francis Leona Mundy (State of MT, Certificate of Death);” “Thaddeus S. Mundy.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

In Butte, the Driver-Duncans and the Driver-Browns—along with Pearl Driver herself, who relocated to Butte with several of her children after Lee Pleasant died in 1935—led the community in company with several other enduring families. These included the interracial Simington-Fortune family, the Gurley Fentner or Fenter family, members of the extended Flagg-Brown clan (including a daughter and a son who married White spouses), the Porter farm family, Crystal Wilson Starling, and Frank Yamer, who died in 1958.⁸⁸⁵

Other noteworthy longtime residents in Anaconda in this period were the Reynolds family. Marie and Claude Reynolds settled in Anaconda around 1906, and the family remained there when Marie and then Claude died, in 1929 and 1933, respectively, when daughter Marian Reynolds, at least, still lived at her father's 420 Cherry Street home. Meanwhile, Marian's brother Edward B. Reynolds, who worked intermittently at the smelter while growing up, "complete[d] a journalism degree at Montana State University" with the help of "the wages he earned at the plant," and subsequently went on to a career in journalism. In 1941, Ed Reynolds wrote a short story on smelter work, titled "Anaconda," for the unpublished Federal Writers Project anthology *Men at Work*.⁸⁸⁶ Journalism was by then something of a Reynolds family tradition; Edward's older brother Roxborough "Rox" Reynolds was a well-known humor essayist for newspaper in Seattle and San Francisco. Rox Reynolds, born in 1902, was about four when his parents moved to Anaconda, where he graduated from high school and worked on the *Anaconda Standard* during the summer of 1919 before he matriculated at "the University of Montana and earned a degree from the University of Washington (Seattle) School of Journalism in 1921. He started his newspaper career in Montana," and subsequently "rose to national prominence as a humorist with his columns ... 'Running 'em Ragged,'" which appeared in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*," and "'Toreador,' written while he was a member of the *San Francisco Call-Bulletin's* copy desk staff ... Rox Reynolds died in San Francisco, California on April 18, 1956," and his body was brought back to Anaconda for burial with his parents at Hill Cemetery.⁸⁸⁷ Marian, for her part, met and married Ray Richardson while working in Deer Lodge around 1942, and subsequently moved with him to Cheyenne, Wyoming and then California.

These families and the community that cohered around them sustained many of the institutions and organizations founded during its heyday, and developed others as well. Butte's Bethel Baptist church at 217 W. Mercury seems to have lasted a little longer than Great Falls' Emmanuel Baptist, and was the state's last Black Baptist church when it closed sometime after 1956. Anaconda's A. M. E. church had by then been closed about 10 years. Together, the Butte-Anaconda community kept Butte's Shaffer Chapel A.M.E. open for a while longer. By the time it closed in 1964, only Great Falls and Billings still boasted Black churches.⁸⁸⁸

⁸⁸⁵ "Perdita E. Duncan (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Frank A. Yamer (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*.

⁸⁸⁶ Reynolds, "Anaconda, A Short Story"; "Mrs. Marie R. Reynolds (State of MT, Certificate of Death)"; "Claude Reynolds Called by Death." See also Edward Reynolds' six essays for *America Eats*.

⁸⁸⁷ Reynolds, "Rox Reynolds Papers, circa 1919-1930"; "Reynolds Honored at Press Banquet."

⁸⁸⁸ "Church Services in Butte Sunday: Bethel Baptist"; Teal, "Shaffer's Chapel A.M.E. Church."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

The local Black women's club, the Pearl Club, also remained active in Butte in the postwar period. The Pearl Club still functioned in 1971, and likely dissolved the following year when the Montana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, formed at a meeting in Butte's Shaffer Chapel in 1921, disbanded after 50 years of collective work. Sometimes the group nurtured the Black community by hosting events that showcased accomplished



Figure 60: Alyce Marjorie Driver Duncan, Courtesy of the Driver Family, on file at MT SHPO.

African Americans. In 1953, the Pearl Club brought contralto Marian Anderson to the mining city, where she drew over 2,000 people to the Civic Center. However, the bulk of their work focused on the legal arena, and with the Pearl Club member's dedicated efforts, "the MFCWC's legislative committee became especially active after WWII."⁸⁸⁹ Pearl Club leaders also formed and/or led other organizations in the community. In 1949, for example, the "Interracial Club" held its inaugural meeting at the "home of Mrs. Phoebe Lundwall, 2047 Oregon." Led by Lundwall, Laura Kelley, and Alyce Driver Duncan, the club hoped "to establish better understanding between groups."⁸⁹⁰ [Figure 60] Pearl Club member Janettia Flagg Brown was "a member of the Shaffer's Chapel A.M.E. church and Janettia and Richard Brown's daughter, Lena Brown, also an A.M.E. parishioner, became active in benevolent endeavors and civil rights actions as a member of, and office holder, in the Pearl Club, the Montana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which all regularly met at Shaffer's Chapel A.M.E. Church"⁸⁹¹

By 1949, Butte also boasted an active NAACP chapter, which that year held monthly meetings "at the hall, 217 W. Mercury Street," i.e., the third floor of the Bethel Baptist Church.⁸⁹² In 1952, the NAACP group, which in Butte "included Jews and Irish, in addition to blacks," conducted a survey of local Jim Crow practices and asked business entities to sign a simple pledge to serve, rather than prohibit, the city's Black residents. The survey committee—composed of Ophelia and Gurley Fenter, Margaret Driggs, Laura Kelley, Lena Brown Slauson, and George Lowery—reported that "the Arizona, Towey and Tait hotels welcomed blacks," as did the Acoma Lounge, while the Chequamegon Café "would serve blacks only with a takeout order" and "Green's and the Moxom ... would serve only black men in uniform." Morgan's Café, the Grand-Silver, Burr's Department Store, Harrington's Ice Cream Store, The Creamery Café, and the S and L Ice Cream Store all signed the pledge, while Woolworth's signed but specified that "this only included purchase of goods, blacks were not allowed to eat at the snack counter." The YMCA refused to sign on the grounds that it needed to respect "the Y contributors who demanded no black membership." In a similar vein, "the manager of the Finlen Hotel made the 'familiar excuse that he was forced to discriminate because of the demands of his patrons.'"⁸⁹³

Midcentury Black Butte, like Billings and Great Falls, also continued to maintain its institutions and social space in the form of an enduring nightclub, the Silver City Club. When Frank Yamer died in 1958, he'd been

⁸⁸⁹ WHM, "'Lifting as We Climb'"; "Neighbor Night Draws Visitors." In 1948 the- MT Federation of Negro Women's Clubs changed it name to MT State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs.

⁸⁹⁰ "Interracial Club Formed in Butte."

⁸⁹¹ Teal, "Shaffer's Chapel A.M.E. Church."

⁸⁹² "Butte News in Brief."

⁸⁹³ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 62–63.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

“the president and owner of the Silver City Club on 235 South Main Street for forty-two years,” and the Silver City Club subsequently lived on, moving to a new location at 325 S. Main Street around 1964.⁸⁹⁴

Community organizations and institutions also endured in Anaconda early in this period, but few survived longer than the Harlem Club, still going strong at 317 E. Commercial Ave. when it was “badly damaged in a stubborn blaze” in July 1952.” Five years later, in June 1957, proprietor Percy Harris was shot and killed by a White man “as he stood in front of his Harlem Club, where a fistfight between whites and Negroes had occurred shortly before.”⁸⁹⁵ After her husband’s murder, Harris’ “wife Jackie ran the club through the 1960s.”⁸⁹⁶ Anaconda’s Good Word Literary Club was active through at least 1947, when it reported to the Montana Federation of Women’s Clubs, “We have held bazaars & dinners. We donated \$18.50 to the church for doors, \$2.50 to the Cancer drive, \$2.50 to the rescue fund for diving equipment ... We are few in number but with the present increase of the population we hope to gain more members in the near future.” Allen Chapel A.M.E. was likewise still active in the 1940s—in 1944 Sunday evening services included “the full gospel assembly” presided over by “the evangelist M. J. Muldrow”—and in 1947 served as the polling place for Ward 2 in the Anaconda city election. The building at 305 W. Commercial again served as the Ward 2 polling place in 1952, but it was by then no longer home to Allen Chapel A.M.E., which closed in the interim.⁸⁹⁷

In the absence of full-scale institutions after the postwar end of Allen Chapel, the Good Word Club, and the Harlem Club, special events also reflected and reinforced the Anaconda Black community, and kept it connected to Black Montana more broadly. In the 1960s, for example, while touring throughout western Montana during his years living in Helena and then Great Falls, Charley Pride “played at Ed’s Corner Bar, Porter’s Corner, the Walker’s Club, etc.” He also played at the Wonder Bar when it was in the Ida Block at 23 Main.⁸⁹⁸

Helena after 1940

In Helena, when Octavia Bridgwater returned from serving in the Army Nursing Corps in the Second World War, the once thriving African American community that was her birthplace was but a shadow of what it had been. By 1970, the city—much larger than it had been in 1910—counted only 45 Black residents.⁸⁹⁹ As the town’s total Black population declined with each decennial census, Black migration to Helena did as well, and the Helena community increasingly consisted of remaining members of long-resident families.

The house at 663 N. Ewing (24LC2441) stayed in the Hooper-Harrison family and was occupied by family members until 1945. Descendents of William Irvin and his wife Georgia Donnell Irvin (nee Lewis) lived at 212 S. Beattie (24LC2431) into the 1950s and Logan Smith remained at 1459 Wilder (24LC2453) until he died in 1957. Julian Anderson’s family owned and occupied 617 Broadway (24LC2440) until 1974. The Harrell family members kept their houses at 1068 and 1072 N. Ewing even later. Mary Emma Bridgwater Harrell owned those houses until 1976, when she conveyed them to the Sannes, who may have been relatives; widowed daughter-in-

⁸⁹⁴ “Notice of Application for Transfer of Retail Liquor License”; Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 116.

⁸⁹⁵ “Embers of Harlem Club Extinguished”; “Negro Killed; Two Others Hurt in Anaconda Shooting”; “Anaconda Smelter Worker May Face Charge of Murder After Negro-White Street Brawl”; “Defendant to Plead on Wednesday to Murder Charge.”

⁸⁹⁶ Haffey and Rosien, *Anaconda’s Foundation: People and Landmarks*, 10–11.

⁸⁹⁷ “Reports from Chapters, Anaconda”; “Anaconda Churches: Allen M. E. Chapel”; “Anaconda City Election Set”; “Anaconda Salary Election Feb. 25.”

⁸⁹⁸ Haffey and Rosien, *Anaconda’s Foundation: People and Landmarks*, 12, 42.

⁸⁹⁹ Bauml, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

law Mary Alice Harrell lived at 1072 N. Ewing until at least 1993. Other Harrell family members also were among the town's most enduring Black residents. Mary Alice Harrell's brother-in-law Cornelius "Connie" Harrell, and his wife Mildred, acquired 913 Cannon (24LC2448) from the heirs of family friends Nathan and Sarah Ford in 1955, and owned it until 1978. Cornelius' Aunt Octavia Bridgwater, meanwhile, continued to live at the Bridgwater family home at 502 Peosta (24LC2272). A few months before she died in 1985, Octavia deeded the property to Mary Alice Harrell, the widow of her late nephew, Charles Harrell, Jr.⁹⁰⁰ Mary Alice owned 502 Peosta until 1987. Five years later, members of the extended James and Clarissa Crump family sold the family home at 1003 9th Avenue (24LC2450), ending 107 years of Crump history at the property.

Those that remained in Helena in the post-war period were for the most part, integral longtime members of the community, and their children. They were people like Mamie Bridgwater, who died in 1950 at the age of 77, or like Julian Anderson, who retired in 1953 after 60 years as bartender at the Montana Club.⁹⁰¹ They included Joan Duncan, daughter of Dr. Walter E. and Alyce Driver Duncan of Butte-Anaconda, who in the 1960s was Assistant Dean of Women at Carroll College. They included Janet Harrell, who in 1969, while a student at Helena Catholic Central high, was elected Governor of Montana Girls State, making headlines in regional newspapers.⁹⁰²

The remaining Black community in Helena rarely boasted new members, but at least one especially notable family moved to town in the postwar period. As noted above, in 1960, a minor-league baseball player with a smooth baritone singing voice named Charley Pride moved to Helena along with his wife Rozene. Pride, a pitcher, had been released after a three-game stint playing for the Cincinnati Reds-affiliated Missoula Timberjacks. The Prides lived for a while in a residence at 638 Peosta and Charley went to work at the East Helena smelter so he could play baseball for the semi-pro Smelterites. East Helena was "where he started singing. The Smelterites manager, Kes Rigler, would pay Pride \$10 dollars to sing the national anthem before games. After games, he'd play with a quartet called the Night Hawks at local clubs and soon everyone in town took note of his voice. 'We'd go over and play at a club called the Main Tavern in Helena there,' Pride said 'It was a white male bar. I rented me a guitar and I played there. That's my first place of playing. That's the way I got started.' His reputation spread across the state," in part because, as Pride put it, "'They put my voice with white skin ... Once they heard me singing they didn't care whether I was green or purple. When we'd have ads for shows we didn't send out photos and I shocked some people. But we let the record and music speak for itself.' Pride's career took off. His records were selling, his songs were on the radio, and he was booking shows all across the country. So that led to a move to Great Falls, for easier access to the airport," in 1967.⁹⁰³ [Figure 61]



Figure 61: Charley Pride, in his Smelterites uniform, plays music in East Helena with his son down in front, circa 1963.

⁹⁰⁰ Bauml, Hampton, and Boughton.

⁹⁰¹ "Mamie Bridgewater [sic], Respected Helena Matron, Dies Today," *Helena Independent Record*, April 28, 1950, 3; "Julian Anderson to be Honored by Montana Club," *Helena Independent Record*, June 18, 1953, 12; Ibid.; MT SHPO, "African Americans in Montana Timeline."

⁹⁰² "The Odds Were Great, but Janet Reached the Top."

⁹⁰³ Kidston, "A History of Pride"; "Charley Pride"; Peterson, "The (Charley) Pride of Montana"; Ecke, "In the Footsteps of Country

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

The Montana Black Community, 1940s-1970s

Despite the endurance of a small, stable community in these core locales, demographic decline among Montana's African Americans in most of the community's historic cores passed a tipping point in the post war period. During World War II, "the declining population left many of the local clubs struggling to maintain membership," and the resultant struggle to sustain Black community infrastructure in the state likely drove further emigration while discouraging immigration.⁹⁰⁴ The king of Montana's Black jazz clubs, "Great Falls long-lived Ozark Club, renowned for its integrated jazz bands and inter-racial clientele," burned to the ground in 1962.⁹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, most of the remaining Black churches in the state closed shortly after the war, with the AME churches in both Havre and Anaconda closing by around 1947, around the same time as St. James AME in Helena.⁹⁰⁶ Butte's Shaffer Chapel, which after 1947 served the population of Anaconda as well, lasted a while longer, closing in 1964. Only the AME churches in Billings and Great Falls remained, sustained by—and perhaps contributing to—overall growth in their local Black populations. In the post-war period, most African Americans seemed to prefer locales with viable communities and community institutions, institutions that continued to play a central role in their daily lives and their ongoing struggle for racial equality.

That struggle gained steam in the wake of the Second World War. Many of those who remained in locales around the state in the post-war period were for the most part, integral longtime members of the community. Collectively, they continued their ongoing struggle for racial equality, carried on individually and through the few remaining community institutions, foremost among them the Montana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, which operated until 1972. Their struggles and successes incorporated sites across the state.



Figure 62: "Bridgewater Home, 502 Peosta, Helena," 1967. Photo courtesy of the Harrell-Bridgewater Family.

Like the community itself, the state women's federation was much diminished numerically. Before WWII, as many as 15 locals were active in Montana, but by 1949 only five remained. Among them was Helena's Pleasant Hour Club, which met in the homes of members like Octavia Bridgewater into the 1970s.⁹⁰⁷[NR Reference #14000080; Figure 62]. Although they toiled in smaller groups and greater isolation, the state's Black women's clubs became, if anything, more active than ever in their quest for racial equality. Sometimes they did this by hosting events that showcased accomplished African Americans. In 1951, Louis Armstrong played to large crowds at the Fox Theater in Butte and the civic center auditorium in Great Falls, and in 1953, when Butte's Pearl Club brought contralto Marian Anderson to the mining city, she drew over 2,000 people to the mining city's Civic Center.⁹⁰⁸ But the bulk of their work focused on the legal arena, and "the MFCWC's legislative committee became especially active after WWII."⁹⁰⁹

Star Charley Pride"; "Country Music Legend Charley Pride Still a Montanan at Heart."

⁹⁰⁴ WHM, "Lifting as We Climb."

⁹⁰⁵ Af-Am in MT Timeline.

⁹⁰⁶ Hill County Bicentennial Commission, *Grit, Guts, and Gusto*, 335–36.

⁹⁰⁷ Baumler, Hampton, and Boughton, "Haight-Bridgewater House." Robison, 4)

⁹⁰⁸ "Louis Armstrong and His 'All-Stars' (Fox Theater Ad)"; "Louis Armstrong and His 'All-Stars' (Civic Center Theater Ad)"; "Marian Anderson Here Friday"; "Marian Anderson Thrills Crowd."

⁹⁰⁹ WHM, "Lifting as We Climb." In 1948 the- MT Federation of Negro Women's Clubs changed it name to MT State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

By 1950, Great Falls replaced Butte as Montana's largest city and became the state's most significant African American community.⁹¹⁰ Activity in the MFCWC shifted accordingly, and the legislative "committee's main support came from the MFCWC delegates of Cascade County, who saw the discrimination faced by African American airmen stationed at the Great Falls base." Led by women in Great Falls and elsewhere, through the 1950s the women's clubs "campaign[ed] to pass civil rights legislation in Montana."⁹¹¹ For much of this time they fought for passage of a bill to "guarantee the full & equal enjoyment of all places of public accommodation & amusement" "to all people, regardless of race, creed, or color." Initially introduced in 1951, the bill was opposed by some legislators on the grounds that it would apply to "Indians" or "Mexicans" and by others who claimed it would pull Black people to Montana and drive down property values. The MFCWC ultimately prevailed: a version of the bill—stripped of any penalties for violation—passed in 1955.⁹¹²

Other victories accompanied passage of the Montana civil rights bill. Some Montana communities established local chapters of the NAACP: in Butte, the local chapter, with community leaders like Dr. John Duncan at the fore, "championed the cause of equality in the city."⁹¹³ In Great Falls, the African American community persuaded the 1952 Cascade County Community Council to create the Inter-racial Committee "to study the matter of racial discrimination . . . with particular concern for the colored airmen at the Base & the question of their admittance to establishments in the city."⁹¹⁴ The following year, the state legislature repealed the miscegenation law of 1910: "marriage between a White person & a negro" was again legal in Montana.⁹¹⁵

Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court considered arguments about racial segregation in the United States. In 1954, it issued the landmark *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision, which ruled that "separate facilities are inherently unequal," overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and outlawing school segregation. Ten years later, the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. The 1964 Act, expedited by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana,

prohibit[ed] discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Provisions of this civil rights act forbade discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as, race in hiring, promoting, and firing. The Act prohibited discrimination in public accommodations and federally funded programs. It also strengthened the enforcement of voting rights and the desegregation of schools. . . . Passage of the Act ended the application of "Jim Crow" laws, which had been upheld by the Supreme Court in the 1896 case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in which the Court held that racial segregation purported to be "separate but equal" was constitutional.

It was, for all intents and purposes, identical to the Civil Rights Act passed at the end of the Civil War, almost 100 years earlier.⁹¹⁶

⁹¹⁰ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States," Population Division, Working Paper No. 76, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005), Table 27; MT SHPO, "African Americans in Montana Timeline."

⁹¹¹ WHM, "Lifting as We Climb."

⁹¹² WHM; MT SHPO, "African-Americans in Montana Timeline."

⁹¹³ Davenport and Eva, *A Journey toward Sovereignty and Security*, 150–52.

⁹¹⁴ Carla W. Garner, "Jacobs, Alma s., 1916-1997," Website, Blackpast.org, Accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.Blackpast.org/aaw/jacobs-alma-s-1916-1997>; MT SHPO, "African Americans in Montana Timeline."

⁹¹⁵ "Relating to Miscegenous Marriages within the State of Montana," Ch. 4 1953 Mont. Laws 4; Ibid.

⁹¹⁶ "Legal Highlight: The Civil Rights Act of 1964." Don Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield: The Extraordinary Life of a Great American Statesman and Diplomat*, in Chapter 9: "Johnson 1: Years of Escalation," (Smithsonian Books, 2003).

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Clearly, progress toward racial equality was slow, and these important victories were accompanied by continuing, even revived, racism in the United States and the West. A third iteration of the Ku Klux Klan appeared with the spread of the Civil Rights Movement, and African American and other activists met violent reprisal. In 1965—after brutal attacks on civil rights marchers in Selma—Black and White Montana residents marched in Billings and Missoula and held ecumenical prayer services lamenting a “nationwide failure to love one another,” but many Montanans scorned their anti-racist sentiments.⁹¹⁷ Around the same time, as Charley Pride was becoming a popular Montana musician, Charley’s wife Rozene recalled that “she and her husband were refused service in a Helena restaurant and a real estate agent refused to show them a house.”⁹¹⁸

Conclusion: 1972-present

The Montana Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs lasted until 1972, when it disbanded.⁹¹⁹ With it went one of the two remaining institutional vestiges of the Black community that once thrived in the state, with only the A.M.E. churches in Great Falls and Billings remaining.⁹²⁰ As discussed, individual African American residents continued to make their mark on Montana history—Alma Smith Jacobs was appointed State Librarian in 1973, a year after she co-founded the Montana Committee for the Humanities, and Geraldine Travis became the first Black state legislator in 1974—but one could no longer speak of a Montana Black community in a collective sense. It became an artifact of history.

This moment in Montana coincided with a broader burgeoning interest in social history, and in the 1970s several people began documenting the state’s historic African American community, among them community members. In 1970, Alma Smith Jacobs, then librarian and Great Falls Public Library, and her sister Lucille Smith Thompson, longtime librarian at Montana State University, compiled a select bibliography of resources associated with the African American experience in Montana titled *The Negro in Montana 1800-1945*. Two years later, Mrs. Thompson also published an article based on her research, “Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung.”⁹²¹ Around the same time, the Billings community held Black History events that led to newspaper coverage of local Black history in the *Billings Gazette*.⁹²²

Other community members documented Black Montana by giving oral histories. In 1968, White Sulphur Springs residents Rose Gordon and Taylor Gordon gave extended interviews to renown novelist Ivan Doig, who like the Gordons, was born in White Sulphur.⁹²³ At the same time historian Quintard Taylor, along with colleagues Charles Ramsay and John Dawkins from the Black Studies Department at Washington State University, conducted a series of interviews with African American “Northwest pioneers” and their descendants, nine Montana couples among them. This work became the basis for a 1975 documentary, filmed in part in Virginia City with 88-year-old Montana-born cowboy Walter Jackson (then living in Sheridan, WY), as

⁹¹⁷ “97 March in Protest”; “Billings Services, March Quiet.”

⁹¹⁸ “Helena As She Was - An Open History Resource for Montana’s Capital City.”

⁹¹⁹ Bauml, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House.” The MFCWC gave its remaining scholarship funds to UM to provide a scholarship commemorating MFCWC.

⁹²⁰ In 1968, Ulysses Doss and several students founded a Black Studies Department at the University of Montana. This was one of the early Black Studies departments in the nation, but its emergence does not seem to be associated with the historic African American community in the state.

⁹²¹ Thompson, Jacobs, and Montana State Library, *The Negro in Montana, 1800-1945; a Selective Bibliography*; Thompson, “Early Montana Negro Pioneers: Sung & Unsung.”

⁹²² “Black Billings.”

⁹²³ Ferguson, “Born to Be Published: Ivan Doig and Taylor Gordon.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

well as Taylor's 1979 doctoral dissertation, "A History of Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1970."⁹²⁴ Montana-based scholars, too, turned to the subject. In 1973, Rex C. Meyers wrote a history of "Montana's Negro Newspapers" from 1894 to 1911.⁹²⁵ Historian William Lang researched and wrote a pair of articles on Helena's Black community, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks of Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912" and "Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT, 1906."⁹²⁶

Other oral histories, articles, and books relating to the African American experience in Montana followed. They included 1980s-1990s oral history interviews of Black Montanans living in Butte and Miles City; Christian McMillen's "Border State Terror & the Genesis of the African American Community in Deer Lodge & Chouteau Counties, Montana, 1870-1890," and Peggy Riley's "Women of the Great Falls African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1870-1910."⁹²⁷ These scholarly works documented an historic Black Montana community that no longer existed as such. By the 21st century, Montana was not the White-est state in the nation, but it had become the least Black.⁹²⁸

⁹²⁴ "Black Oral History Interviews, 1972-1974"; Taylor, "A History of Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1970"; "Black Cowboy in Film Series." See bibliography for a full list of these interviews.

⁹²⁵ Myers, "Montana's Negro Newspapers, 1894-1911."

⁹²⁶ Lang, "The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900-1912"; Lang, "Tempest on Clore Street: Race & Politics in Helena, MT 1906."

⁹²⁷ McMillen, "Border State Terror and The Genesis of the African-American Community in Deer Lodge and Chouteau Counties, Montana, 1870-1890"; Riley, "Women of the Great Falls African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1870-1910."

⁹²⁸ Chaney, "Martin Luther King Jr. Day."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Section F: Associated Property Types and Registration Requirements

There are six primary property types in Montana associated with the state's Black history. Collectively, they encompass much of that community's activities, its life, labors, passions and priorities in the period from the early 19th century into the 1970s. That era encompassed five distinct periods of development that frame the historic contexts identified in this MPD: 1) African Americans and the Montana Region Before 1865; 2) Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West, ca. 1862-1877; 3) The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s; 4) A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent & Endurance in Montana's Black Community, ca. 1910s-1940; and 5) World War II and After. The living and working conditions, and the activities and associations, of the Black community discussed in these contexts are the basis of the six property types outlined below, i.e., properties associated with African American organizations or institutions; properties associated with the commercial or economic lives of the Black community; residential properties that housed community members; rural properties where Black people lived and ranched and farmed and mined etc.; exploration, fur trade and military sites; and racism and civil rights properties associated with particular aspects of anti-Black policies or practices and/or the struggle against racial discrimination. Criterion A is the primary relevant criterion for most of the properties in these six categories.

Together, these six property types provide a physical foundation for understanding the history of Black Montana. Although these broad categories encompass most resources historically associated with the community, extant resources are rare and do not tell the full story of Montana's African-American community and its architectural development. Many individual resources have been lost, and entire neighborhoods associated with urban Black communities have been razed, including, for instance, large sections of downtown commercial districts in places like Helena and Billings, combined commercial-residential districts like Helena's Clore Street (also the center of Black nightlife), and nearby residential neighborhoods like those around State Street in Helena. These lost areas were where much of Black life happened, and/or were associated with significant themes in the history of Black Montana. So too was their demolition itself associated with a significant theme in that history; in Montana, as elsewhere in the United States, African American resources were the specific focus of urban renewal demolition programs that destroyed many of the community's historic sites, spaces, and places.

Integrity Considerations

Under Criteria A, resources related to Montana's African American history may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places due to their association with historic contexts. The applicable area of significance for these resources is Black Ethnic Heritage. In addition to the area of significance, properties must retain sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register.

Extant African American historical properties in Montana are rare. This fact is crucial to keep in mind when evaluating a property's eligibility for registration in the NRHP. It is especially important to take it into account when evaluating integrity. For rare resources like the property types associated with Montana's Black history, physical characteristics should ideally be sufficiently intact to convey the property's historic associations, but the seven specific aspects of integrity—location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association—should be assessed in the context of other surviving resources related to the history of the state's Black community. Few, if any, of these rare historic resources remain unmodified.

Integrity of location is usually essential, and that is true in the case of African American heritage properties in Montana. However, some of the resources identified in the context, such as the Dorsey Grocery and Residence on the corner of N. Hoback and 8th Avenue in Helena or Anaconda's Allen Chapel, are still extant after having

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

been moved. In the Dorsey Grocery case, the move occurred at the behest of the Dorsey family when they purchased the vacant property: installation at the site marks the beginning of the property's association with the Black community and the beginning of its associated historic significance. So too, Allen Chapel, which formerly served as Carroll schoolhouse. Integrity of location is thus not always a necessary prerequisite for eligibility among these resources, and must be evaluated on an individual basis.

Design, or consciously created elements like form, plan, style, and proportion which, in combination, determine a property's basic appearance, is also an important aspect of integrity of these rare properties. Design is present in buildings both modest and grand, and in eligible properties design should be sufficiently intact to convey essential historic appearance, i.e., ideally, properties should retain basic form, roof, fenestration patterns, and major features such as porches. Many of these properties, however, were modified in the course of time and changing use, as needs dictated and resources allowed. Modifications to design that occurred during the period of significance reflect those evolving uses and associations, and do not necessarily irredeemably compromise the integrity of the resource.

Setting is an aspect of integrity that is also not always intact for African American historic resources in Montana. Since the historic period, the historic Black neighborhoods of the community's primary urban cores have in many cases been heavily modified, with numerous areas razed during urban renewal. Moreover, many of these core cities have undergone dramatic growth since the historic period, and thus many local settings are substantially altered. In contrast, many rural places and fur trade/military sites have been transformed by depopulation or total abandonment. Integrity of setting remains relevant in evaluating these resources but, even where it has been extensively altered, should not in itself render a property ineligible.

Materials must be given less weight in evaluating African American historical resources in Montana than other aspects of integrity, especially in relation to residential structures. A substantial portion of surviving historic-period properties appear to have been re-sided with a variety of materials. Changes in cladding alone are insufficient to render these resources ineligible. Likewise, the installation of new sashes or doors in original fenestration patterns does not, on its own, render a resource ineligible. Modifications may cover original materials that remain extant, and/or may themselves date to the period of significance. Even where materials have been substantially modified, properties may convey their essential historic character and significance. The rarity of this entire class of resources and the altered condition of most extant properties are critical considerations for assessing integrity of materials and the implications thereof for eligibility.

Workmanship, the physical evidence of the craftwork of a culture or group, is generally not a critical aspect of integrity for this group of resources. A few resources may have been built to community specifications, and/or have been built by community members. Montana's Black population included people who worked in the building trades, like mason William Westerbrook and hod-carrier J. C. Douglas in midcentury Billings, or carpenters like Camp Caroline's builder Charlie Flagg or Edward Bradley, who built a house in Fort Benton before being killed in the Cow Creek conflict in 1877. There may be extant resources that they and others in the community worked on, i.e., that reflect or embody the workmanship of African American people. It would, of course, contribute to a property's significance if it contained buildings or features constructed in whole or part by Black carpenters, masons, or other tradespeople.

Feeling relates to the ability of a property as a whole to convey a sense of its historic self. Feeling is a significant aspect of integrity for Montana's African American resources, and should be carefully considered when evaluating them for NRHP eligibility. One way of assessing integrity of feeling is by asking whether the historic resident of a house, or member of a church congregation, or a business person or employee, or civil rights demonstrator (or discrimination victim) would recognize the property if they saw it in its current

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

condition. If a property is eligible, the answer to this question should be yes. If the answer is no, the property may be ineligible. A property's historic function, such as a residence, and the continuity of that function into the modern period also factor into and contribute to a property's integrity of feeling, i.e., the property's "expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time."⁹²⁹

Integrity of association refers to the link between a property and significant historic events or people. As with feeling, integrity of association requires that a property be sufficiently intact to convey its historic character. The close-knit nature of Montana's Black community, and the multitude of functions a particular property may have served, provides a strong associative meaning to these places. Here, physical changes, unless rendering the property utterly unrecognizable, do not necessarily diminish its associative meaning. If a property is eligible, it should be able to convey its historic associations. If it cannot, the property is probably ineligible.

When assessing each of these seven aspects of integrity, it is important to keep in mind that changes over time often reflect the evolution of the Black community in Montana. As the associated contexts make clear, Montana's African American residents often worked in low-waged occupations, and lived on limited incomes. Thus, modifications to existing buildings were often needed to accommodate changing situations. These included removal and reconstruction of outbuildings, construction of additions, enclosure of porches, replacement of siding materials, etc. Historical practice produced alterations of building design and materials over time.

Organizations and Institutions (Social, Cultural, Political and Religious) Property Type

Description

Community institution properties in Montana are those whose buildings provided space for group activities of the African American community. They were generally relatively large buildings, often churches or halls or clubs, with ample meeting space for various group events. These buildings offered important independent group spaces for African Americans living in an oft-hostile environment. They were mainly located in the primary and secondary core communities of Black Montana, i.e., Helena, Butte, Anaconda, Great Falls, Missoula, Havre, and Billings as well as, to a lesser extent, Fort Benton, Virginia City, Bozeman, Miles City, Lewistown, and Kalispell.

Some communal buildings were constructed according to the needs of Montana's African American population. As in other places, Black residents of the state first occupied residential properties and then, as the population grew, they developed sites like churches and clubs to provide space for group meetings and activities. Such was the case in Montana with churches in the seven primary core communities—Helena, Butte, Anaconda, Great Falls, Missoula, Havre and Billings—as well social spaces like Lee Pleasant Driver's Saloon and Café in Anaconda (operated in the Starr Block at 104-106 E. Commercial Avenue from 1909-1915 and nominated for individual listing in the NRHP in conjunction with this MPD).

Some buildings, especially churches, were built for African American community purposes, but more frequently, African American community groups gathered in existing buildings that primarily served other purposes, like people's homes or commercial buildings. A few buildings of this property type may have been downtown commercial blocks that rented space to African American groups or individuals—research for this project indicates, for instance, that the Helena Second Baptist Church occupied a variety of temporary locations (including 343, 417, and 439 N. Main) for over 25 years before constructing a permanent church building in

⁹²⁹ Quaide, "Section VIII."

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

1913 on the west corner of the intersection of Wilder and Harrison avenues (601 Wilder/1260 Harrison).⁹³⁰ Specific address, construction and ownership details of many of these properties are at this point unknown, as is their current status. Other properties were built to serve the needs of groups of White Montana residents and became associated with the African American population when Black organizations used them. Such was the case with the Anaconda Odd Fellows Hall, where “the colored population of Anaconda” also held events during its heyday. It is at this point unknown where exactly the Anaconda Odd Fellows Hall was located, or whether it still stands.

For several reasons, the physical appearance and evolution of many properties of this type remains unknown. In some instances, African American associated institutions met in rotating venues. In such cases a property's association with an organization isn't always evident. At other times, the address or property most associated with African American institutions was not recorded in the sources reviewed for this project. In other instances, the location of institutional spaces was only generally identified. Finally, many of those addresses that are recorded in project documentation refer to properties that are no longer extant, and whose historical appearance and attributes we cannot ascertain.

Known extant historic-period buildings within this property type include most of the A. M. E. churches in the seven primary Black Montana core communities, among them the NRHP-listed Union Bethel in Great Falls and Shaffer's Chapel in Butte. Wayman Chapel in Billings also still stands (and until recently continued in its original A.M. E. church capacity) as does Allen Chapel in Anaconda, St. James in Helena, and, perhaps, St. Stephens in Havre. They are, in the main, modest but substantial wood-frame buildings on corner lots in historic Black residential neighborhoods. Most were built by Black groups to serve the needs of the community, and retain a degree of integrity. Other historic Black Montana institutional properties may also be extant. Further research and survey work may reveal the exact location of these institutional buildings, and whether they still stand.

Significance

Institutional or organizational properties are locally significant under Ethnic Heritage for their association with one of the five African American history contexts identified in this MPD: 1) African Americans and the Montana Region Before 1865; 2) Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West, ca. 1862-1877; 3) The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s; 4) A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent & Endurance in Montana's Black Community, ca. 1910s-1940; and 5) World War II and After. The majority of these property types should thus be considered for listing under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A. Most known, extant institutional resources date to the third context period.

Areas of significance for Criteria A vary within limits. Properties of this type are all associated with African American community institutions, be they social, cultural, recreational or religious. Particular areas of significance for properties of the institutional type thus depend on the use of the particular building, as well as its history and the history of the group or groups associated with it. Numerous buildings—the churches and social clubs especially—housed several African American community institutions at different times, and therefore fall into overlapping subtypes within this property type.

African American institutions—social, cultural, recreational, political, religious—formed the core of the Black community that developed in Montana. In many ways, the African American community was defined by the

⁹³⁰ Baumlner, Hampton, and Boughton, “Haight-Bridgewater House.” See 1909/1910 comments on this church building effort in Plaindealer.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

institutions it created and maintained, as well as the activities it conducted in and through them. Indeed, in Montana as elsewhere, the presence of institutions like Black churches, social clubs, baseball teams, and women's organizations marked the development and endurance of a Black community, a collective presence and purpose that cohered and reflected an autonomous local population. Institutions subsequently served as the social, recreational, religious and political backbone of the community, vessels for community members' many, varied activities.

The primacy of community institutions is also reflected in the spatial character of the community: for much of the historic period, churches, as well as clubs like Lee Pleasant Driver's Saloon, formed the physical center of the Black community. Churches and social clubs and women's groups, and the many activities they hosted, bound the Black community together, and at the same time they often connected it to African Americans elsewhere, undergirding a web of relations that stretched from Seattle to Missouri. African American community institutions were central in the lives of many Black individuals and also a key platform for local leaders, many of whom played leadership roles in multiple community organizations and numerous other sectors simultaneously. Purpose-built institutional buildings, like Black churches, also symbolized the achievement and respectability of the Black community in a state, and a nation, that oft sought to deny it both.

Religious properties were among the most important community institutions. Their significance derives not only from their primary church capacity but from the larger role they played in the development of Black Montana, serving as the heart of regional African American life even after segregation eased. Institutional properties provided community spaces where Black people could freely go to spend time and join forces with friends and associates, places that were relatively safe from prejudice and oppression. Buildings that hosted group activities are important physical testaments to the presence of a distinct African American community and to the determination of its members to create a collective existence. They attest to the collective character of the African American experience during the establishment, entrenchment, and subsequent dispersal (and proportional decline) of Montana's Black community, from the 1860s into the 1970s. Crucially, they also are an important reflection of the context of that community's existence. Most, if not all, of the Black community's organizations and institutions focused on "racial uplift" and combatting racism in its many forms. All Black institutions were, thus, in some sense political, even if all they did was offer a forum that encouraged and welcomed Black public life.

Registration Requirements

To qualify for listing in the NRHP, community institution properties must be associated with the history of African American organizations in Montana, with group activities of local Black communities, or with institutional entities involved in Black issues. Organizations of this sort include religious congregations, social and recreational organizations (like musical groups and baseball teams), fraternal orders (like the African American Masons and Elks), civic and neighborhood groups (like the Great Falls Interracial Council), state and federal agencies and institutions (like the Montana legislature), local or regional chapters of national organizations (like the USO or the NAACP), union locals (namely Butte's Porters' and Boot Blacks' Protective Union), self-help groups and business organizations (like the Afro-American Building Association), educational institutions (like Helena's South Side School and the University of Montana), and political organizations (which, in the context of profound and systemic racism, included most if not all African American-associated institutions). Sites of informal community group activities, like restaurants and nightclubs that welcomed Black customers, are also a type of community institution property.

Some properties of this type are also representative of other property types, and may be eligible in multiple categories. Most obviously, political organizations were also civil rights entities. But there are other

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

possibilities for overlapping eligibility as well. For example, the Lee Pleasant Driver's Saloon was both a community institution and a Black-owned business entity (and other Black-owned businesses functioned as informal community institutions). Some properties might also be eligible in multiple categories because they contained a series of African American associated endeavors over time. The Starr Block, home of Driver's Saloon, for instance, was also the Driver family residence before the family moved to other quarters a few doors down. It was simultaneously associated with civil rights in multiple ways. Conversely, many community group meetings and activities also occurred in people's homes, which as a result may qualify as institutional properties as well residential properties. Fur trade sites and military bases were often institutional, economic, and residential sites, simultaneously, for Black occupants, as were agricultural and mining properties.

Institutional properties may be associated with the lives of people, like newspaper editor Joseph Blackburn Bass or librarian Alma Smith Jacobs, who are significant in the African American history of Montana and/or beyond (Criterion B). Some properties may also be eligible for architectural reasons (Criterion C).

Commercial and Economic Property Type

Description

Commercial and economic properties in Montana are those whose buildings were associated with businesses owned or operated by African American people or more rarely, that housed businesses that commonly employed Black workers and/or welcomed Black patrons. They were both commercial and residential buildings, and could range in size, materials and stature from rough, humble dwellings from which people conducted businesses (sometimes in detached outbuildings or attached additions and sometimes right in their homes—like Virginia City's Cogswell-Taylor House) to multi-story, brick, main street commercial blocks like the several locations of Driver's Saloon, prominently situated near Anaconda's primary downtown intersection for over 20 years. They were located in the primary and secondary core communities of Black Montana, i.e., Helena, Butte, Anaconda, Great Falls, Missoula, Havre, and Billings as well as Fort Benton, Virginia City, Bozeman, Miles City, Lewistown, and Kalispell. They could be found as well at rural and urban locales across the state, where Black people established, ran, and/or worked prominently in a spectrum of Montana businesses. Some of these sites may be linear, including steamboat and railroad corridors on which Black people worked, or stage or mail routes they staffed, or bicycle corps journeys they undertook as Buffalo Soldiers.

Some commercial buildings were constructed according to the needs of African American owners and businesspeople. These buildings reflect the success of Black business owners and the specific requirements of the businesses. Few of these are known to exist. One extant example identified in the course of this study is the NRHP-listed Dorsey Grocery, which was developed in Helena for the family's business and residence. More frequently, African American entrepreneurs purchased or rented space in existing buildings, or ran their businesses from makeshift locations wherever they could establish them.

White-owned properties and businesses were associated with the history of Montana's African-American population as well. Numerous businesses in Helena and Butte and Anaconda, for example, commonly hired Black employees, especially those involved in the hospitality industry, like the Montana Club, the Silver Bow Club, the Montana Hotel. These properties housed businesses that were important to the economy of the African American population, and were themselves significantly associated with that population. Some commercial properties—like certain businesses surveyed in Butte by the NAACP in 1952—catered to a Black clientele, and are thus also associated with Montana's African American history.

The historic physical location, appearance and evolution of many properties of this type remains unknown, as

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

does their current status. It is clear that they represented properties across a physical spectrum—often in modest buildings but sometimes in more substantial quarters. They also represented a range of historical associations, mostly small owner-operated businesses but occasionally more substantial Black-owned enterprises or, rarely, properties owned by White, Jewish, or Chinese-American people.

In many cases a property's association with Montana's African American commercial and economic history isn't readily evident. All too often, the address or property most associated with a given African American business was not recorded in the sources reviewed for this project. In still other instances, the location of commercial spaces was only generally identified. Finally, many of those addresses that are recorded in project documentation refer to properties that no longer remain, and whose historical appearance and attributes cannot be ascertained.

There are a few known extant properties of this type, including Lee Pleasant Driver's Saloon and Café in Anaconda that is being individually listed in the NRHP in conjunction with this MPD. The NRHP-listed Grand Union Hotel in Fort Benton, Wellman Block in White Sulphur Springs, and the Gleim Building in Missoula are also known to be extant. NRHP-listed commercial Historic Districts in Anaconda, Belt, Billings, Bozeman, Deer Lodge, Great Falls, Helena, Livingston, Miles City, and Missoula may contain additional extant African American commercial and economic resources, as may many other heretofore unsurveyed districts and sites. The Virginia City NHL and the Fort Benton NHL are also known to contain several extant commercial resources, as is the Butte-Anaconda NHL (in which Driver's Saloon stands).

Significance

Commercial and economic properties are locally significant under Ethnic Heritage for their association with one of the five African American history contexts identified in this MPD: 1) African Americans and the Montana Region Before 1865; 2) Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West, ca. 1862-1877; 3) The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s; 4) A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent & Endurance in Montana's Black Community, ca. 1910s-1940; and 5) World War II and After. The majority of these property types should, thus, be considered for listing under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A. Most known, extant commercial and economic resources date to the third context period.

African-American commercial and economic properties were often visibly associated with the Black community. A Black business sector thrived during the heyday of that community, serving both that community and Montana's population more broadly. The Black business sector also functioned as a focal point of the Black community, an exemplar of Black achievement and a space run by, and supportive of, African-American residents. The community cohered around Black-owned businesses concentrated in industries that met the day to day needs of the community, i.e., food service and hospitality, hair salons, residential rentals, etc. Black workers also concentrated in certain other industries, like hospitality, and prominent businesses therein.

Commercial and economic properties, thus, reveal much about the occupational and economic conditions confronted and created by Montana's African American community, and how those conditions evolved over time. Some businesses were based in Black people's homes, or provided dwellings to African-American people, and thereby reveal multiple aspects of the community's past. They also indicate much about the skills, background, and activities of community members, as well as their simple presence. Black businesses thrived when Montana's Black population was sufficient to sustain an independent African-American community, and withered when that community itself dwindled.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Several White-owned or Asian-owned properties and businesses were associated with the history of Montana's African-American population as well. Numerous businesses in core communities, especially those involved in the hospitality industry, commonly hired Black employees. These properties housed businesses important to the economy of the African American population, and were themselves significantly associated with that population. Likewise, some commercial properties owned by other groups, such as certain saloons, catered to a Black clientele, and are, thus, also associated with Montana's African American history. Businesses that commonly hired Black employees, or welcomed Black patrons, were important to the economy and the dignity of the African American population, and were themselves significantly associated with that population.

Registration Requirements

To qualify for listing in the NRHP, commercial and economic properties must be associated with the history of African American business enterprises in Montana, or with the economy of the state's Black community either as workers or consumers. Enterprises of this sort include Black-owned or operated businesses like barber shops, clubs and restaurants. These enterprises were sometimes situated on Black-owned properties. They also include businesses that regularly employed Black workers, or that employed prominent members of the African American community. They include as well properties that were a component of community members' economic efforts, like rental or investment properties. Finally, businesses that catered to the Black community could be included in this property type.

Some properties of this type are also representative of other property types, and may be eligible in multiple categories. For example, as noted above Driver's Saloon was both a community institution and a Black-owned business entity (and other Black-owned businesses functioned as informal community institutions). Some properties might also be eligible in multiple categories because they contained a series of African American associated endeavors over time. Many businesses were home-based and like boardinghouses or residential rental properties, may qualify as both commercial and residential properties. Commercial properties often contained living spaces as well as spaces for businesses and sometimes group activities of the Black community. For Black occupants, fur trade sites and military bases were often institutional, economic, and residential sites simultaneously, as were agricultural and mining properties.

Commercial and economic properties may be associated with the lives of people, like *Plaindealer* editor Joseph Blackburn Bass or the doctors Duncan in Butte, who are significant in the African American history of Montana and/or beyond (Criterion B). Some residential properties may also be eligible for architectural reasons (Criterion C).

Residential Property Type

Description

Residential buildings associated with African Americans are an important element in the evolution and growth of Montana's Black community. Residential buildings were generally one to two stories and constructed of wood. The buildings used or built by African Americans resemble other houses built in Montana between around 1862-1970. They reflect broader building trends, methods and materials of the period. In some times and places, home ownership was quite common among established Black families, some of whom contracted for the construction of their own homes, while others purchased existing dwellings. Black families and individuals also rented or leased homes, sometimes from Black owners, other times from White, Jewish, or Chinese owners. Many Black individuals lived for periods of time in group residences, like boarding houses, or in the homes of other members of the Black community who rented out rooms or took in boarders. Residential

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

buildings were located en masse in the primary and secondary core communities of Black Montana, i.e., Helena, Butte, Anaconda, Great Falls, Missoula, Havre, and Billings as well as Fort Benton, Virginia City, Bozeman, Miles City, Lewistown, and Kalispell, and could be found as well at rural and urban locales across the state. Black people resided in every county in Montana during the historical period.

The houses inhabited by African Americans and the neighborhoods where they lived provide important information on residential patterns in Montana and similar western states of the period. In Helena and Butte, in a pattern that reflects the relative integration that sometimes characterized western settlements, Black people's homes could be found in almost every neighborhood, scattered throughout the city. Some of them were among the more impressive homes in a neighborhood, architectural testaments to the prosperity some local Black families achieved. Helena's Crump-Howard Residence (1003 9th Avenue) and Bozeman's Lewis-Bruce Residence, both listed in the NRHP, are such residences. In other Montana cities, the vicious stricter segregation and discrimination in housing that plagued many communities across the nation defined residential patterns. In Great Falls and Billings, for instance, until the 1960s Black dwellings were permitted almost exclusively in only one or two working-class neighborhoods.

Some African American-associated dwellings that remain in Montana represent the entrenchment and gradual rise of certain families, as the owners and their kin prospered economically and moved from one property to another or expanded their real estate holdings and ultimately found enduring residential stability. The NRHP-listed Dorsey Grocery and Residence was the third, and most impressive, iteration of a combined Dorsey business/dwelling property. Not far away, the Harrell family eventually owned three adjacent houses on N. Ewing Street. Other residential properties, like those belonging to owners who took in boarders or ran larger, more established boarding houses (like Mrs. Browning's Furnished Rooms in Billings), are indicative of the housing patterns of, and options available to, shorter term residents and/or Black individuals, as well as the economic strategies and business opportunities availed by Montana's African American population. Some properties represent both of these housing patterns. Still others are modest houses rented by Black people, often in extended family units, while they lived in different places for varying periods of time.

There are numerous known extant properties of this type, including four NRHP-listed properties in Helena the Haight-Bridgwater House (listed 2014), the Crump-Howard House (listed 2017), the Dorsey Grocery and Residence (listed 2017), and the Lyman-Neel Residence (listed 2019)—as well as the NRHP-listed Samuel Lewis House in Bozeman (listed 1999) and the Morgan-Case Homestead on Rock Creek near Philipsburg (listed 2005). Moreover, when this project began, over 500 resources in cities and towns, most of them residential, had been identified and mapped on historic Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps by the *Montana African American Heritage* project. These included about 99 in Anaconda, 60 in Billings, 13 in Bozeman, 103 in Butte, 71 in Great Falls, 139 in Helena, 11 in Miles City, and 43 in Missoula. Subsequent remote reconnaissance survey of many of these resources suggests that up to 149 may still remain (including 17 in Anaconda, 17 in Billings, nine in Bozeman, 22 in Butte, 17 in Great Falls, 40 in Helena, eight in Miles City, and 19 in Missoula), along with some five properties in Havre and three properties in Livingston. A portion of these are documented on Montana State Historic Property Record forms. They include at least two sites each in Anaconda, Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, and Missoula as well as three each in Butte, Havre, and Miles City. Some 26 site forms for African American historic properties in Helena, most of them residential, have been completed.

Further research and survey promises to identify more historic Black residential properties in Montana, in part because of the opening of the post-war decennial U.S. Census information for research. The most recent household census information fully available to the public is 1940, and thus pre-dates the fifth and final context, when the Black population in Montana shifted dramatically. Per the "72-year Rule," the National Archives

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

couldn't release the 1950 census until April 2022. This census contains information about race and residential address for each individual enumerated. It will be invaluable in documenting the postwar history of the Montana's Black community and its historic sites, especially historic African American residences. When used in conjunction with other sources, the 1950 census will also facilitate documentation of the earlier history of the Black community and its historic residences and other sites. For many historic Black residences, this information, in combination with future survey work, will reveal the exact location of these and associated historic buildings, and whether they still stand.

Significance

Residential properties are locally significant under Ethnic Heritage for their association with one of the five African American history contexts identified in this MPD: 1) African Americans and the Montana Region Before 1865; 2) Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West, ca. 1862-1877; 3) The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s; 4) A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent & Endurance in Montana's Black Community, ca. 1910s-1940; and 5) World War II and After. The majority of these property types should, thus, be considered for listing under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A. Known, extant residential resources date to the second through fifth context periods.

Residential properties represent these significant historic themes in a number of specific ways. They reveal significant integrated residential patterns in which African American homes clustered in particular neighborhoods (especially those near Black churches) but could also be found in almost all areas of some cities, and they also reveal strict segregation in other towns. The histories of their occupants limn the contours of Black migration to Montana as well as the state's African American occupational and economic conditions. In addition to serving as residences for people who worked elsewhere, houses sometimes functioned as home-based businesses, and thereby reveal multiple aspects of the community's past. Residential properties likewise suggest much about the way the Black community lived more broadly, with households often composed of interconnected multigenerational extended families as well as boarders.

Occupants' group activities, sometimes conducted in residential properties, demonstrate that Montana's African-American population 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 combating racism in its many forms. Some residential properties may be specifically associated with these community institutions. For instance, pastors of the AME church, the most critical community institution in Black Montana's seven primary core communities, lived in a variety of residential properties, including on-site parsonages that existed for many decades near several of the church buildings themselves.

Residential properties may be associated with the lives of people who are significant in the African-American history of Montana and/or the West (Criterion B). Some residential properties may also be eligible for architectural reasons (Criterion C).

Registration Requirements

To qualify for NRHP registration as a residential property, a building should have housed African American residents during one of the five context periods identified in this MPD.

Properties may have been built, owned, or rented by African-American families or individuals. Some properties may have served as boarding houses, state institutions, or military bases that contained African-American residents.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Some properties of this type are also representative of other property types, and may be eligible in multiple categories. For example, many businesses were home-based, and like boarding house enterprises may qualify as both commercial and residential properties. Commercial blocks often contained living spaces as well as spaces for businesses and, sometimes, group activities of the Black community. Residences that housed leaders of local institutions, like Black ministers or pastors, might be considered both residential and institutional properties. For black occupants, fur trade sites and military bases were often institutional, economic, and residential sites simultaneously, as were agricultural and mining properties.

Rural Property Type (including mining and agriculture)

Description

Rural properties associated with African Americans are an important element in the evolution and growth of Montana's Black community. Rural properties ranged from homesteads across the state to small farming operations near large communities, from substantial ranches to lone log cabins, from mining operations of various sizes to blacksmith shops, boarding houses and tourist camps. Few rural Black properties have been surveyed, but the buildings used or built by African Americans on their mining, agricultural, and other rural properties resemble those generally built in rural Montana between around 1862-1970. They reflect broader building trends, methods and materials of the period.

Homesteading and rural land ownership was quite widespread, and especially common in certain localities, and on most of these properties Black families and individuals built or contracted for the construction of their own homes, outbuildings, and other infrastructure. A few likely purchased or acquired extant rural resources. Black families and individuals also rented or leased farms, ranches, and other rural sites. Many Black individuals lived and worked on others' mining or agricultural operations, sometimes for decades. Rural properties were often located near the primary and secondary core communities of Black Montana, i.e., Helena, Butte, Anaconda, Great Falls, Missoula, Havre, and Billings as well as Fort Benton, Virginia City, Bozeman, Miles City, Lewistown, and Kalispell, but could be found as well at locales across the state. Black people resided in every county in Montana during the historical period, and many of those residences were on rural properties where they lived and worked.

The rural properties inhabited by African Americans, and the locations where they lived, provide important information on Black history in Montana and similar western states of the period. Crucially, they document extensive Black participation not only in ranching, which has been somewhat covered in studies of Black cowboys, but also in small-scale mining operations, subsistence and commercial farming, and, especially, homesteading. In Montana, Black people patented homesteads in every region of the state, starting by the 1870s or earlier and extending into the 1930s. Both Black men and women embraced the opportunity to acquire property under the nation's homestead laws, and they did so with vigor, with successful homesteaders varying not only by gender but also age, occupation, and family status. Successful Black homesteaders ranged from lone men and women, young and old, on isolated parcels to large extended multi-generational families who homesteaded near one another in clusters akin to colonies. As with Montana homesteads more broadly, infrastructure varied widely on these homesteads, depended on production focus, industriousness, ability, circumstance, etc.

Some African American-associated rural properties in Montana represent the entrenchment of certain families, like the Browns at Camp Caroline or the Halls in Madison County or the Proctors in eastern Montana, as the owners and their kin endured in particular rural locales. Other rural properties are indicative of the more transient patterns of rural development in Montana, in which mines boomed and busted or droves of

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

homesteaders fled the drought and depression that plagued the Plains in the interwar period, depopulating rural areas across the state. All rural properties are also indicative of the economic strategies and business opportunities availed by Montana's African American population, for they were invariably put to productive purposes.

There are few known extant properties of this type. Prominent among them is the NRHP-listed Morgan-Case Homestead on Rock Creek in western Montana. Less well-preserved is the NRHP-listed St. Peter's Mission, where Mary Fields worked from around 1883-1894 and which she subsequently provided with postal service in her capacity as USPS contractor to deliver mail on its 11-mile Star Route between Cascade and St. Peter's. Also possibly extant, though much deteriorated, is Bertie Brown's homestead/bootlegging operation in Fergus County, as well as farm laborer Elmer Hall's log cabin dwelling in Madison County. Peter Broadhead's 1870s homestead also stood in Madison County, its location marked on modern maps by an extant homestead feature, the Broadhead Slough.

Further research and survey work may identify other extant historic Black rural properties in Montana. This MPD identified dozens of heretofore unknown rural properties, especially homesteads. Although most are likely gone or deeply deteriorated, reconnaissance survey may reveal some that survive.

Significance

Rural properties are locally significant under Ethnic Heritage for their association with one of the five African American history contexts identified in this MPD: 1) African Americans and the Montana Region Before 1865; 2) Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West, ca. 1862-1877; 3) The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s; 4) A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent & Endurance in Montana's Black Community, ca. 1910s-1940; and 5) World War II and After. The majority of these property types should thus be considered for listing under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A. Known rural resources date to the second through fifth context periods.

Rural properties represent these significant historic themes in a number of specific ways. The rural properties inhabited by African Americans, and the locations where they lived, provide important information on Black history in Montana and similar western states of the period. Crucially, they document extensive Black rural habitation in every region of the state, and participation in ranching, small-scale mining, subsistence farming, and, especially, homesteading. In Montana, Black people patented homesteads in every region of the state, starting in the 1870s or earlier and extending into the 1930s. The histories of rural residents indicate the contours of Black migration to and within Montana as well as the state's African American occupational and economic conditions. They map widespread Black participation in the state's foundational industries, and map how both Black men and women embraced the opportunity to acquire property under the nation's homestead laws, doing so with vigor and, often, success.

Rural properties may be associated with the lives of people who are significant in the African-American history of Montana and/or the West (Criterion B). Some rural properties may also be eligible for architectural reasons (Criterion C).

Registration Requirements

To qualify for NRHP registration as a rural property, a property should have housed, employed, or been otherwise occupied by African American residents, in an area outside of towns and cities, during one of the four post-1862 context periods identified in this MPD. Properties (i.e., after the advent of towns and cities with the onset of settler colonial invasion in 1862).

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Rural properties like homestead, farming, and mining sites are more likely than others to have been built, and/or owned by African-American families or individuals. Other rural properties may have been rented by Black occupants, or may have been both the employer and living quarters of employees on rural operations. Some properties may have served as boarding houses operated by or housing African-American residents, or other rural Black-operated businesses, like blacksmith shops.

Exploration, Fur Trade and Military Property Type

Description

Exploration, fur trade and military sites associated with African Americans are the narrowest of the property types detailed herein, but are nonetheless a crucial element in the evolution and growth of Montana's Black community and the history of Black Montana. Exploration and fur trade sites are among the earliest resources associated with the region's Black population. That population included York, who was with the Lewis and Clark expedition as Clark's slave, as well as Black people associated with the deeply mixed fur trade, in which they represent one of many diverse groups that lived and worked together in the sprawling regional fur trade of the early and mid-19th century—i.e., the antebellum period when most Black people were enslaved. Military service was the single biggest factor driving Black population growth during the community's late-19th and early 20th century heyday. Both these kinds of sites are invariably components of broader historical trends, and associated architecture, as well—they are not sites used or built exclusively for or by African American individuals or groups per se but sites that became associated with Black Montana in the course of their operation and in the course of Buffalo Soldier units' assignments. They reflect the specific, period fur trade and military building trends, methods and materials of the North American West.

Exploration, fur trade and military sites provide important information on the history of Black Montana and the North American West. Exploration and fur trade sites reflect Black people's early presence in the region, before large scale non-Indian immigration and before the end of slavery. They reflect Black people's participation in the defining foundational events, and industry, of much of the American West, as well as their integration with and into indigenous communities. They also reflect the antebellum economic strategies and opportunities availed by Montana's African American population. Military sites, meanwhile, date to the later 19th century, and reflect the transformative developments of the post-Civil War period in both African American history and the history of the Montana region. Exploration, fur trade, and military sites are all significantly associated with western American settler colonialism, and these African American sites, thus, also map the associations between Black history and that fundamental historic process.

Although these sites are by their nature limited, the identity and locations of a large number of exploration, fur trade, and military sites are known. There are, moreover, numerous known *extant* properties of this type, often NRHP-listed. These include the NHL exploration sites associated with the Lewis and Clark expedition, i.e., Camp Disappointment, Traveller's Rest, Pompey's Pillar, Three Forks, and Great Falls Portage, as well as three NHL fur trade sites, i.e., Fort Union, Fort Benton, and the Grant-Kohrs ranch in Deer Lodge. Documented military sites include the National Historic Landmark site of Fort Yellowstone (from where Buffalo Soldiers guarded the National Park), four military fort NRHP-listed Historic Districts (i.e., forts Assiniboine, Harrison, Missoula, and Shaw), and one fort, Keogh, listed in the NRHP as an individual property. The NRHP documented Glacier National Park also contains military sites, where Buffalo Soldiers fought wildfires during the historic fires of 1910, as does Yellowstone, which the Buffalo Soldier bicycle corps famously traversed. Also notable among these sites is the route of the 1873 Yellowstone National Park survey expedition, on which Walker Browning worked as a cook.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Significance

Fur trade and military properties are locally significant under Ethnic Heritage for their association with one of the five African American history contexts identified in this MPD: 1) African Americans and the Montana Region Before 1865; 2) Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West, ca. 1862-1877; 3) The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s; 4) A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent & Endurance in Montana's Black Community, ca. 1910s-1940; and 5) World War II and After. The majority of these property types should thus be considered for listing under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A. Known, extant resources date to the first, second, third, and fifth context periods—excluding only the interwar period after Buffalo Soldiers units left Montana for good ca. 1912 and before the post WWII military build-up that transformed the Great Falls area and with it the state's Black community.

Fur Trade and Military properties represent these significant historic themes in a number of specific ways. Fur trade sites reveal Black people's early presence in the region, before large scale non-Indian immigration and before the end of slavery. They document their participation in the defining foundational industry of much of the American West, as well as Black people's integration with and into the indigenous communities at the time. They also reflect the antebellum economic strategies and opportunities availed by the African American population of the United States. Military sites do the same for the period after the Civil War and the end of slavery, dating to the later 19th century and reflecting the major historical developments of the post-Civil War period in both African American history and the history of the Montana region. These sites document not only the primary role of Black people in the American military conquest of the indigenous West and indigenous Montana, but also the specific importance of the Buffalo Soldier in Black history broadly and in the history of Black Montana especially.

Fur Trade and Military properties may be associated with the lives of people who are significant in the African American history of Montana and/or the West (Criterion B). Some fur trade and military properties may also be eligible for architectural reasons (Criterion C).

Registration Requirements

To qualify for NRHP registration as a fur trade or military site, a property should be associated with the fur trade of the pre-1870 period or should be an American military base or associated camp or site. The sites should have housed or otherwise featured African American people during one of the five context periods identified in this MPD.

Some properties of this type are also representative of other property types, and may be eligible in multiple categories. For example, many fur trade employees, and Army soldiers and civilian employees, lived and worked on such sites, which thus may also qualify as both commercial and residential properties. Military bases were sometimes institutional sites, as well, for Black occupants, who organized baseball teams and bands and political groups and other Black organizations.

Racism and Civil Rights Property Type

Description

Montana's racism and civil rights properties are those places associated with particular aspects of anti-Black policies or practices and/or the struggle against racial discrimination in the state. They vary greatly: the racism and civil rights property type is the most expansive and diverse property type documented in this MPD. It includes:

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

- institutional, commercial and residential buildings associated with civil rights efforts and/or practices;
- properties associated with prominent anti-Black incidents or practices (like the lynchings documented in this MPD);
- public spaces like swimming pools that were sites of prominent race-related persecutions or civil rights protests (like Billings city pool);
- linear sites or corridors that mark the routes of protest marches (like those in Missoula and Billings in Spring 1965);
- corporate limits of the City of Glendive and other reputed “sundown towns,” which prominently marked the boundaries of White supremacy and the exclusion and persecution of Montana’s Black population

A few buildings and/or sites may themselves have been built or established as a central component of civil rights efforts. Such properties were the product of community efforts to address and rectify aspects of discrimination against the Black community, like exclusion from accommodations and social spaces. In some ways, in the context of profound systemic racism expressed especially through exclusion of Black people from public and private spaces, all properties developed to serve the needs of the Montana’s African American population (like churches, or businesses, or homes) constitute this sort of civil rights property. So too, Black properties developed outside of segregated sections of different towns. In segregated cities like Great Falls and Billings, these were by definition sites of active civil rights integration efforts. The institutional, commercial and residential properties associated with the pursuit of civil rights via serving the basic needs of the Black community are components of the first three property types discussed above, and further details on them can be found in those sections.

Other properties of this type are primarily associated with the broader concerted civil rights struggle. They include public spaces and corridors that were sites of civil rights protests and actions—places like Butte’s Virginia Chop House—and official spaces where racist policies and practices were investigated, debated, enacted and/or targeted (like the Montana Legislature or the Cascade County Courthouse), as well as sites marking civil rights processes and developments (like the Cascade County Library and the public elementary schools, focus of segregation and integration struggles). They also include a variety of properties associated with racism and discrimination. Such sites range from locations of prominent racialized confrontations (like the 1926 killing of James Belden by a White mob in Hardin), to properties associated with Jim Crow practices (like Butte’s YMCA), to structures, corridors, and borders that marked the boundaries of segregation and shaped how Black people experienced segregation (like the corporate limits of the City of Glendive, which prominently marked the boundaries of White supremacy and the exclusion and persecution of Montana’s Black population).⁹³¹

These kinds of civil rights sites compose a spectrum of properties, and their historic physical appearance, evolution, and current condition varies. In addition to the institutional, commercial and residential properties detailed above (which may also be civil rights properties), a few racism and civil rights properties associated with African American history in Montana have been surveyed or otherwise documented in recent years. These include the NRHP-listed Montana Territorial Prison Historic District, where a disproportionate number of Black men and women were incarcerated, as well as Billings’s NRHP-listed Garfield School, an integrated school serving the primary Southside neighborhood to which Black residents were, in the main, confined. They also include the NRHP-listed Gallatin County jail from which Jonathan St. Clair was pulled by a White mob, and lynched, in 1873. The Snowden Bridge site that marks another lynching—that of J. C. Collins in 1913—has

⁹³¹ Interview with Mae Fite.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

been the subject of a HABS/HAER documentation. Montana's territorial legislatures in Bannack and Virginia City, both NHLs, and state capitol, listed in the NRHP, are also significantly associated with racism and civil rights, as are various courthouses and other government buildings, like the Cascade County Courthouse, where in 1952 the African American community of Great Falls persuaded the Cascade County Community Council to create the Inter-racial Committee "to study the matter of racial discrimination."

Significance

Racism and civil rights properties are locally significant under Ethnic Heritage for their association with one of the five African American history contexts identified in this MPD: 1) African Americans and the Montana Region Before 1865; 2) Montana and Black Communities in the Reconstruction-Era West, ca. 1862-1877; 3) The Heyday of Black Montana, ca. 1877-1910s; 4) A Shifting West: Decline, Ascent & Endurance in Montana's Black Community, ca. 1910s-1940; and 5) World War II and After. The majority of these property types should thus be considered for listing under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A. Resources may date to the any of the five context periods.

Areas of significance for Criteria A vary within limits. Properties of this type are all associated with particular aspects of anti-Black policies or practices and/or the struggle against racial discrimination in the Montana. In the context of profound systemic racism expressed especially through exclusion of Black people from public and private spaces, all properties developed to serve the needs of Montana's African American population (like churches, or businesses, or decent homes) are in some ways a sort of civil rights property. Particular areas of significance for properties of the civil rights type thus depend on the specific history of the site and uses of particular buildings, as well as the history of individuals or groups associated with it.

Registration Requirements

To qualify for listing in the NRHP, racism and civil rights properties must be associated with the history of African American with aspects of anti-Black policies or practices Montana, and/or with the struggle against racial discrimination. Given the expansive nature of this property type, there is a wide variety of properties that qualify for listing in the NRHP as racism and/or civil rights properties. Properties of this sort include institutional, commercial, and residential properties as well as sites more explicitly associated with anti-Black policies or practices and/ or with the struggle against them.

Many properties of this type are also representative of other property types, and may be eligible in multiple categories. Most obviously, civil rights properties were often associated with political organizations. But there are other possibilities for overlapping eligibility as well. Black social clubs might be a civil rights entity, a community institution and a Black-owned business entity (and other Black-owned businesses functioned as informal community institutions). Some properties might also be eligible in multiple categories because they contained a series of African American associated endeavors over time, and were associated with civil rights in multiple ways.

Civil Rights properties may be associated with the lives of people who are significant in the African American history of Montana and/or the West (Criterion B). Some properties may also be eligible for architectural reasons (Criterion C).

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

Section G: Geographical Data

The geographic area is encompassed by the boundaries of the State of Montana.

Section H: Summary of Evaluation and Identification Methods

The multiple property documentation of *Black Montana's Heritage Places* is based on primary and secondary research in an array of repositories as well as fieldwork across the state.

It builds on initial research, conducted under the direction of the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), begun in 2005 with grant funding from the Montana Cultural Trust. In “the first phase of the project, historians, staff and volunteers combed the Montana Historical Society collections looking for manuscripts, oral histories, newspaper articles, artifacts, census records, and photographs that told the stories of the state’s African-American residents.” From there researchers compiled and annotated primary- and secondary-source bibliographies and several biographical databases. They also transcribed, onto spreadsheets, the information on African-American residents in Montana listed in the 1870, 1910, and 1930 censuses. The goal of the first phase was “to make more visible an understudied group of Montanans by identifying who they were and where they lived.”⁹³² A second Montana Cultural Trust grant, in 2007, funded the development of timelines, lesson plans, and a website on Montana’s African-American history and historical resources.

Before this effort, little information was available regarding African American historical sites in Montana and the surrounding region. At the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, existing historic property records provided some documentation. A few properties associated with Montana African-American history had been identified as such and individually listed in the NRHP, including the Samuel Lewis House in Bozeman (listed 1999), Union Bethel A.M.E. Church in Great Falls (listed 2003), and the Morgan-Case Homestead on Rock Creek near Philipsburg (listed 2005). Others were sometimes identified when they were included in listed historic districts, like Missoula’s Northside Railroad neighborhood, where the Ephram Dorsey family and others lived together in a cluster on N. Second Street.⁹³³ Other properties in the state now known to be associated with African American history are listed in the NRHP but their registration forms do not include any discussion of their association with Black Montanans, e.g., St. Peter’s Mission and Fort Keogh. In 2014, Montana Historical Society personnel Ellen Baumler, Kate Hampton, and John Boughton completed a NRHP nomination for one of the most significant known African-American residential properties in Helena, i.e., the Haight-Bridgwater House. Helena, Montana’s capital, was the core of the state’s substantial, interconnected, widespread African American community from that community’s 1860s inception through its heyday into the 1910s.

A second phase of the project, which sought to identify extant properties significantly associated with Helena’s African American history, began in 2014. That year, the National Park Service awarded new “Underrepresented Community Grants” to “increase the number of listings in the National Register of Historic Places associated with communities currently underrepresented, including African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and LGBT Americans.” One of these inaugural grants—just 13 awarded nationwide—went to the Montana State Historic Preservation Office’s “Identifying Montana African American Heritage Places Project.”⁹³⁴ Over the next two years, the Montana History Foundation provided nearly \$10,000 in additional support. Within the City of Helena, past local survey efforts had by then produced hundreds of recorded historic sites. These survey efforts emphasized local history broadly, or specific architectural or development

⁹³² Meredith, “Identifying African American Resources Project.”

⁹³³ Mathews, “Northside Missoula Railroad Historic District NRHP Registration Form,” 6.

⁹³⁴ National Park Service, “State, Tribal, and Local Plans & Grants.”

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

patterns. Although properties historically associated with Helena's African American community were occasionally included in these surveys, this significant association was often omitted, overlooked or simply unknown.

With this NPS funding, staff and interns set out to identify Helena's African American heritage places. This first step produced an accurate list of some 110 historical addresses associated with Helena's African-American community. The next step entailed determining whether those buildings still stood. This produced an initial list of some 43 extant properties associated with the history of Helena's African-American community. SHPO Community Preservation Coordinator Kate Hampton, along with assistants Steffany Meredyk and Anthony Wood, then conducted a reconnaissance survey of extant historical resources with some of the strongest associations to Helena's Black community. The results of this survey were incorporated into a list of about 25 properties targeted for intensive survey as part of a Multiple Property Submission project on *African American Heritage Places in Helena, Montana*.

In 2016, Dr. Delia Hagen completed that intensive survey and Multiple Property Submission, which included two National Register of Historic Places registration forms in addition to the MPD.⁹³⁵ The *African American Heritage Places in Helena, Montana, Multiple Properties Documentation* prepared by Dr. Hagen identified three historic contexts and three general property types associated with Helena's African American heritage. These contexts and property types developed from research in a host of primary and secondary sources on the past patterns and trends that produced Helena's African American properties. Research sources were located in federal, state, county and local repositories as well as online collections under various auspices. In conjunction with the MPD, the Crump-Howard House and the Dorsey Grocery and Residence, both in Helena, were listed in the NRHP. Since completion of the *African American Heritage Places in Helena, Montana, Multiple Properties Documentation*, two other resources have been listed in the NRHP, i.e., Shaffer's Chapel A.M.E. in Butte (listed 2018), and, in Helena, the Lyman-Neel Residence (listed 2019).

This Multiple Property Submission, including the *Black Montana's Heritage Places MPD* and an NRHP registration for the associated Driver's Saloon and Café in Anaconda, builds on this previous research, as well as on extensive additional primary and secondary research and fieldwork.

Primary and secondary source research for the context and MPD included review of relevant paper and electronic archival files of the Montana's African American Heritage Resources project; research to identify, locate and/or review relevant secondary and archival sources at local, state, regional and national research projects and repositories (both physical and electronic); identification, location and review of potentially-relevant NRHP nominations and other existing cultural resource documentation; identification and review of all relevant Montana county/centennial histories; research in historic Montana newspaper archives (both African American and local/state publications); research to identify, locate, and review oral histories held at a spectrum of repositories; identification of and in-depth research on nationally- and regionally- prominent individuals/families; identification, location, review, database building and analysis of statistical sources (e.g. U.S. Decennial Census returns, U.S. Army Secretary of War troop disposition reports, 1896 Anaconda city

⁹³⁵ Additional related work was undertaken concurrently, including improving and expanding the project webpage, preparing Montana Historic Property Record forms for African-American historic resources from other Montana locales, collecting oral histories from elders of Montana's black community (ie. Jim Brooks, Joan A. Duncan, Jules Harrell, Ruth Parker McLendon, Wade Parker, and Nancy Radcliff), creating a corrected version of Helena's 1910 census of African-American residents, transcribing significant portions of Montana's historic black newspaper, designing sophisticated interactive maps highlighting the properties identified under the project, and completing an article (by Anthony Wood) on Helena's retired Buffalo Soldiers (forthcoming in *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*).

Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

directory); preliminary identification and GIS mapping of African American inhabitants for each of the available U.S. Decennial Census years (i.e. 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940); consultation with other scholars currently studying African American history in Montana and the surrounding region; research on the development of dozens of different Montana communities with significant historic African American residents; research on the development of rural African American settlement (i.e. on agricultural, mining, and forest parcels as well as other rural properties/sites).

In also included research (primary and secondary) to identify and document African American-associated/NRHP eligible properties, including help coordinating a remote reconnaissance survey of over 500 resources previously identified and mapped—on historic Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps—by the MT African American Heritage project (including about 99 in Anaconda, 60 in Billings, 13 in Bozeman, 103 in Butte, 71 in Great Falls, 139 in Helena, 11 in Miles City, and 43 in Missoula); remote reconnaissance survey of historic African American church properties; identify, locate, procure and review cultural resource reports/site forms documenting other historic properties for their association with African American history; identify resources associated with Montana African American history listed in the NRHP whose significant association with that history is under-/un-documented (e.g. Fort Union, Bannack, St. Peter's Mission, Fort Shaw, Fort Keogh, the Grand Union Hotel in Fort Benton, the downtown Historic Districts of Fort Benton, Belt and Virginia City, the Missoula Northside RR Historic District) and locate, procure, and review relevant reports; preliminary identification and GIS mapping of relevant residential, institutional, and commercial/economic properties; preliminary mapping of Montana sites associated with nationally- or regionally- prominent individuals/families; preliminary mapping of sites associated with groups of African Americans in Montana (e.g. Buffalo soldiers, baseball teams, bridge-building/RR and other work crews, CCC camps, Butte miners battalion, "colored" bands etc.); preliminary mapping of previously undocumented properties associated with significant Montana events (e.g. lynchings, protests, performances, exhibitions, speeches etc.); preliminary identification and mapping of dozens of cities and towns with previously undocumented/unsurveyed properties; and preliminary identification and mapping of previously undocumented/unsurveyed rural properties.

This research was supplemented by reconnaissance fieldwork to facilitate survey/assessment of extant African American heritage resources and NRHP-eligible properties, including in Fort Benton, Great Falls, Belt, Cascade, St. Peter's Mission, Ft. Shaw/Sun River, Lincoln, Butte, Anaconda, Bozeman, Missoula, Virginia City and elsewhere.

Research and fieldwork informed the selection of Lee Pleasant Driver's Saloon and Café, in Anaconda, for individual listing in the NRHP in conjunction with this MPD. Focused research on Lee Pleasant Driver's Saloon and Club Rooms (primary and secondary) followed. It established and documented its history and NRHP Significance. It documented ownership, occupancy, use, and physical-evolution histories as well as broader historical associations, and was enriched by the Driver family archives. Fieldwork documenting the site's physical details was completed, and included detailed field notes on, and photographing, the general and specific features of the property, as well as preparation of location and site maps, showing the size of features and the relationship of the building to associated landscape elements.

The MPD and associated NRHP nomination relied on hundreds of sources. A full list of sources consulted for the project is available in the bibliography below (section I).

Other Black Montana Heritage properties will be listed in the NRHP under this MPD in the future.

Black Montana's Heritage Places
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Montana
State

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Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
State

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State

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Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Montana
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Black Montana's Heritage Places
Name of Multiple Property Listing

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