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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

DEC 14 1992

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Porter Flats Apartments

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: 335 N. Ewing St.

not for publication: n/a

vicinity: n/a

city/town: Helena

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Lewis and Clark code: 049

zip code: 59601

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant    nationally    statewide X locally. (   See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Maudie Shroyer SHPO 12-11-92  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Entered in the National Register of Action

   entered in the National Register    see continuation sheet

   determined eligible for the National Register

   see continuation sheet

   determined not eligible for the National Register

   see continuation sheet

   removed from the National Register

   see continuation sheet

   other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Helena Shroyer 1/14/93

5. Classification

<b>Ownership of Property:</b> Private	<b>Number of Resources within Property</b>	
	<b>Contributing</b>	<b>Noncontributing</b>
<b>Category of Property:</b> Building(s)	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<b>Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:</b> 0	___	___ sites
	___	___ structures
	___	___ objects
<b>Name of related multiple property listing:</b> n/a	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u> Total

6. Function or Use

<b>Historic Functions:</b> Domestic/Multiple dwelling	<b>Current Functions:</b> Domestic/Multiple dwelling
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7. Description

<b>Architectural Classification:</b> Late Victorian/Italianate	<b>Materials:</b>  foundation: stone walls: brick, metal roof: metal
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Narrative Description

Porter Flats, an apartment building constructed in 1884, is located in the Allen Addition to the City of Helena, Block 436, the North 68 feet of Lot 1. Facing west on North Ewing Street, a rubble stone retaining wall encloses a small yard with two lilac trees on the north and south ends. The back yard has been covered with concrete to provide parking space for the residents. This three-story building with common red brick veneer is set upon a coursed stone foundation and has a full daylight basement. A hipped roof, with gables that project over two matched octagonal bays, covers the main building. These projected bays, as well as a back addition to the complex, modify the rectangular layout. A central entry recessed between the octagonal bays is found on the main floor, while wooden balconies are located on the second and third levels above the entry porch.

Access to this building is gained by a flight of nine stairs, originally of wood and now composed of poured concrete, leading to the entry porch of the main level. Poured concrete also composes the porch support posts and encloses the open space that was originally beneath the porch. This alteration poses a minimal impact to the visual integrity of Porter Flats for the modification echoes the lines, scale, and massing of the original porch design as depicted in historical photographs. Originally, a small enclosure sheltered the main door, formed by a simple wooden partition between the front bay walls. This enclosure was removed circa 1915. The main door, while certainly not original, is sympathetic to the style of the building. It is centrally located, placed within flanking sidelights and a narrow rectangular transom. The original doorway was centrally recessed, housing double doors and a rectangular transom. Two narrow, round-headed windows were set in the top half of the doors.

Each north side and south side apartment has a door opening onto the porch of the main level or the balconies of the second and third levels. The door of the south side apartment on the main floor is original. Not unlike the original main door, it is extremely tall with long, arched windows that are paired and a porcelain door knob. No transom exists above this particular door; however, transoms can be found on all other doors in the front facade. On the two doors of the basement apartments, a decorative scroll-like carving with a central rosette can be found above each transom. The

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

Porter Flats Apartments

Page 1

balconies are supported by the original knee braces. The railings, however, have been altered. The original railings were composed of turned spindles; these have since been replaced by blocky 2 by 4 pieces of painted lumber.

On the front facade, all levels are lighted by the original tall, double-hung windows. The windows on the front face of each octagonal bay are paired. Each window is set within low-relief, projecting segmental arches with drip moldings. Such characteristics were common to the early masonry buildings in late nineteenth-century Helena. Wood trim lines the edges of each window, all of which have heavy wooden sills. The space above each window head is decoratively carved with the same scroll-like design and central rosette as found above the transoms of the basement apartments.

This stately building has wide eaves with regularly-placed brackets. The small brackets supporting the eaves are merely decorative "scroll-cut" rafter tails. Other large, decorative curvilinear brackets support the projecting gables of the front facade. The original gables of this structure were adorned by sawn vergeboard with a floral design and curvilinear finials. A wooden addition to the roof was added to connect the gables sometime after 1920. Its exact date of construction, however, is not known.

As the main windows on each octagonal bay are paired, so too are the middle windows of each floor on the north and south sides of the complex, paired in a regular pattern. The windows have a 1-over-1 sash pattern. Three windows on each floor are set in each side. The original window units remain intact; storm windows have been added. The segmental arches that span the windows on each side of the building do not retain the drip moldings found on the front facade. There are window wells surrounding each basement window unit to accommodate the full-sized windows. Window wells are smaller on the north side of the building, indicating that Porter Flats was constructed on a north-to-south slope.

The addition to the back facade is sided with tin, impressed with a brick design. According to the Helena Sanborn Maps, the addition was constructed at approximately the same time as the main structure, yet it has been somewhat altered. There is evidence that the addition sustained substantial damage in the large earthquake that struck the Helena area in October of 1935. A building permit dated June 8, 1936 indicates that this annex was reconstructed with a wooden frame covered with metal siding, most likely to repair masonry damage. S-shaped plates located near the juncture of the main brick structure and the pressed tin suggest the presence of tie rods, which were most commonly used to stabilize masonry during this early period.

The two windows found on the second floor back side appear to be replacements made in the post-earthquake era, and reflect popular 1930s design with a 3-over-1 sash pattern. They are flat across the window heads with the upper half of the window being vertically divided into three panes. These windows are shorter and wider than the windows found on the main portion of the building. From the exterior, the top of a door on the third floor can be seen. This door served as a fire escape, with stairs running into the back yard of the residence to the north of Porter Flats. The fire escape was removed in the 1989-1991 renovation. A back porch with a shed roof was added to the main floor of the back side possibly during the addition's 1936 reconstruction; no reference to the porch's date of construction can be found, however. The shed roof is supported with chamfered columns.

As previously indicated, the roof of the main structure is hipped and covered with ribbed metal roofing. This covering, however, most likely replaced wooden shingles, the most common roof covering material of the 1880s. Porter Flats had six flat-topped, capped interior chimneys when it was originally constructed in 1884. These no longer remain; a number of metal ventilation pipes now project above the roofline.

The interior portion of the building has been refurbished. The floor plans include a central hallway on each floor with apartments opening into the hallway on either side. The main staircase leading to the upper levels of the building retains the original balustrade with balusters that resemble the turned spindles found on the original railings of the front

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

Porter Flats Apartments

Page 2

balconies. The newel post at the base of the staircase on the main floor is decoratively carved in a curvilinear design. The interior portions of the windows and doors are trimmed with the same carving as found above the window heads of the exterior. Rosettes adorn each corner of the interior door and window trim. Six apartments were found in Porter Flats in the original floor plans. Sometime between 1920 and 1930, these apartments were reconstructed into twelve units. The complex has since been restored to the original six units.

Porter Flats also has two outbuildings that were constructed approximately in 1930. The two-stall garage on the south side of the property is a contributing structure, despite the modern garage door and rolled composite roofing. It has a wooden frame and is sided with the same brick-patterned, pressed metal as the back addition to the main building. In addition to the historic siding, this outbuilding retains an original four-paned fixed window and a panelled wooden door with a porcelain door knob. The two-stall garage was, most likely, originally sided with the same red brick veneer as the main building prior to the 1935 Helena earthquake. The current metal siding was added to the garage at the same time as the addition in the post-earthquake era.

The second outbuilding is located on the northeast corner of the property. This three-stall garage is a non-contributing structure. The walls of this building are braced by a wooden frame and are composed of particle board pressed to resemble wood siding. This structure, as well, was originally sided with red brick veneer, which was replaced during the renovation of Porter Flats between 1989-1991. The hipped roof of the structure is covered with composite shingles. The modern garage doors match the door on the two-stall garage. While this structure no longer contributes to the historic property due to replacement of the historic fabric, it certainly does not detract from the historical attributes of Porter Flats. The three-stall garage retains originality in scale, massing, and function. The hipped roof is sympathetic to the main structure, and the garage has been painted to resemble both the apartment building and the two-stall garage.

When Gary and Jill Guthrie bought Porter Flats in November of 1988, the building was in great need of restoration. Mr. Guthrie assumed this task, remodeling the interior and restoring the building to its original six units between 1989 and 1991. Within the kitchen of the south side apartment on the main floor, the original English Tudor ceiling was restored. Each apartment also retains at least one original light fixture as well. New cabinets, carpet, and tile were added to modernize the units. Due to the fire code, the uppermost level of the complex has been closed off. Mr. Guthrie also added storm windows to the exterior window units and painted the trim blue. When the Guthries bought the apartment building, the brick veneer on the three-stall garage had wholly deteriorated. Therefore, in addition to renovating the main residence, Mr. Guthrie completely remodeled the exterior of this outbuilding as previously explained.

Porter Flats has great historic integrity, representing a level of craftsmanship that is skillful and appropriately reflects the designs and styles of the late nineteenth century in Helena. Alterations have been minor, largely limited to repairs made during the historic period in the aftermath of the 1935 earthquake. The building is a well-preserved example of the early architectural styles and construction techniques that characterized an era of growth and maturation in Helena. By design, craftsmanship, materials, setting and feeling Porter Flats endures as a major component of a historic neighborhood that contains such great buildings as the Wilbur Fisk Sanders home, the William Chessman Mansion, and the Morris Silverman home--all of which are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: Architecture  
Exploration and Settlement

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1884-1942

Significant Person(s): n/a

Significant Dates: 1884

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: Builder: Porter, Muth & Cox  
Architect unknown

### Narrative Statement of Significance

Porter Flats qualifies for the National Register in accordance with Criterion A. Significant for its association with the settlement, development, and maturation of the city of Helena, Montana, the building's construction was a response to the unparalleled growth that this region experienced through the 1880s. Porter Flats is thought to be the earliest example of multi-family dwellings constructed in the Helena area. As an example of early apartment construction and for its qualities of construction and architectural design, the building gains significance under Criterion C. Exhibiting mixed architectural influences, predominated by the Italianate style, the building is representative of popular local construction methods. It also exhibits local awareness of high style sensibilities and attention to detailing, as Helena increasingly became a settled, established community. As a multiple-dwelling complex, Porter Flats was designed to allow for fashionable yet affordable living, and readily serves as an effective symbol of life in the bustling boom era of late nineteenth-century Helena.

### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

It was in July of 1864 that the "Four Georgians" wandered into the Helena Valley in search of glittering wealth. In a last chance attempt to strike it rich, the miners settled down to pan Prickly Pear Creek in the south end of the valley. Their discovery of gold in that creek bottom touched off the boom era that established the town of Helena. As news of the fortunes of Helena spread, the small mining camp experienced unprecedented growth.

By the 1870s, Helena no longer resembled the mining camp established in 1864, but a prosperous and vigorous town that became known as the "Queen City of the West." Small masonry business buildings began to line Last Chance Gulch in this decade but were soon overshadowed by the construction of large commercial blocks in the 1880s. The arrival of the Northern Pacific railroad in the Helena area in 1883 encouraged more settlers to move West and settle in the region. Soon a great demand for housing arose. In response to this great exponential growth, James Porter, a principal real estate developer in the city, became a partner of the construction firm Porter, Muth, and Cox and built Porter Flats in 1884.

Located at 335 North Ewing Street, Porter Flats was one of the first apartment buildings in the Helena area. Although multi-family dwellings were seen as relatively innovative and risky ventures, Porter Flats successfully helped to answer the growing demands for housing in the region.

The builder, James Porter, was one of the leading developers of the area and, besides contributing to the growth of the east side of Helena with the construction of Porter Flats, is primarily credited with initiating the development of Helena's historic west side. Born in Monroe County, Missouri in 1850, Mr. Porter first came to Helena as a farmer and school teacher in 1875. After a brief sojourn back home to Missouri in 1877, Mr. Porter returned to Helena and soon pioneered the realty firm of Porter and Foote. His construction of Porter Flats in 1884 symbolizes Helena's growth, development, and maturation during the boom decades of the late nineteenth century.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Porter Flats Apartments

Page 1

The location of Porter Flats also remains as a historically significant element. This complex is found in one of the most historic and fashionable early neighborhoods of the city, which developed north of the territorial courthouse square. In addition to residential buildings, public buildings found in this area include the county jail built in 1890, a Jewish synagogue built in 1891, and a Presbyterian church also built in 1891. Besides Porter Flats, other multiple dwellings built in this area in the 1880s and 1890s include the Courtland Apartments built in the early 1880s and the Chessman Flats Apartments built in 1892. Residences found in this neighborhood include the homes of William Fisk Sanders and Morris Silverman, as well as the mansion of William Chessman, which served as Montana's governor's mansion after 1912. These last three historic residences are currently listed on the National Register.

From the above profile of residents of the area, it is evident that this neighborhood early on harbored a very well-bred and fashionable character. In addition to distinguished politicians and businessmen who made their homes on North Ewing Street, tenants who resided in Porter Flats during the late nineteenth century contributed to the refined quality of this area as well. Some of the first tenants of this building included a doctor, a lawyer, a mining superintendent, and a clergyman.

### ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Like other residences in this historic section of Helena, Porter Flats embodies architectural ideas common to Helena during the late 19th century. Porter Flats can best be described as an example of Mixed Revival style architecture, reflecting influences especially of the Italianate style, as well as detailing which became popular during Montana's pre-statehood period. Italianate influences predominate, and are represented by the forthright symmetry established by the projecting bays and central entry, tall segmental windows, and the hipped rooflines with the wide projecting eaves. Mixed styles were popular throughout the nineteenth-century developmental periods in Montana.

Porter Flats also displays characteristics common to the early masonry construction in the Helena area. These include such features as the segmental arches with decorative wooden trim above the window heads, and the construction of red brick veneer above a well crafted stone foundation. These elements were frequently patterned on the early masonry commercial buildings that lined Last Chance Gulch, as well as residential buildings in the emerging town. Attention to decorative detailing -- the brackets, vergeboard, and ornately crafted window heads -- also reflects the growing popularity of pre-fabricated materials as Helena's manufacturing base expanded and commercially milled building materials became more widely available. Careful construction and carving of these features suggest that people began to find comfort in the thought of Helena as a "permanent" home, as the area became increasingly settled and prosperous. Subsequently, more consideration was taken in the design and decorative features of the homes.

Porter Flats is purported to be the first apartment building constructed in Helena. As one of the earliest examples of multi-family residences in town, Porter Flats is an important local example of this building type. The building was functionally structured into six large units with three units on the north and south sides of the building and separated by a central hallway on each floor. The apartments are large with a living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. Porter Flats continues today to serve as a multi-family residence in one of Helena's oldest residential areas.

A strong contributor to the historic character of Helena's lower East Side, Porter Flats is an integral thread in the fabric of this neighborhood. A visual symbol of Helena's early periods of settlement, development, and maturation, both its design and its function are important to understanding the evolution of Helena from early mining community to an emerging regional center of population and culture.

