

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Robert and Elizabeth Fisk Residence

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: 319 North Rodney Street

not for publication: n/a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 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

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:

- 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):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beall

1.17.07

5. Classification

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling
DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

Current Functions:

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE VICTORIAN/Queen Anne
OTHER/Folk Victorian

Materials:

foundation: STONE
walls: WOOD
roof: ASPHALT
other: BRICK

Narrative Description

The Robert and Elizabeth Fisk property is located in the original township of Helena. It is in a residential neighborhood on a tree-lined street near downtown, on the northeast side above Helena’s main downtown corridor, Last Chance Gulch. Foothills of the Elkhorn Mountains rise above the city to the south, Mount Helena is immediately to the west and the house is situated on a hill that originally overlooked the Gulch. The property’s neighborhood boundaries consist of Lyndale Avenue to the north, Last Chance Gulch to the west, Broadway to the south, and Montana Avenue to the east. This area is made up mainly of older well-maintained single family and multi-family residences. The area is central to all local amenities and is in a popular and active urban market.

The original address of the property (that remains current) is 319 North Rodney Street. The building is situated one block from the original Governor’s Mansion for the State of Montana. The house was one of the first buildings constructed in Helena during the 1870s with an eye toward permanence and prosperity.

EXTERIOR

The property remains today largely as it was following the Fisk’s expansion between 1892 and 1895. The residential neighborhood now features tree lined streets and comfortable homes. The home displays the massing, bays, large porch and complicated roofline frequently associated with Late Victorian style. It is a generally rectangular building specifically measuring 130’ x 66’ x 14’ x 1’ x 116’ x67’. The total site is 8,696 square feet and the gross building area is 3,209 square feet.¹ It is a two-story building with a large attic making up an unfinished third level and a large unfinished basement. The building is a wood frame residence with a sturdy stone foundation. The roofline is hipped toward the front, rear and sides. There are protruding gabled bays on the west, south and east sides of the roof. The roof is comprised of architectural grade imitation wood shake shingles (updated in 2003 for weather and fire safety) with nine ridges and ten valleys. The siding is composed of the original wood shingle and clapboard siding with the different wood styles separating the levels of the house. Siding on the ground level and second story is the original wood clapboard siding. The siding separating the 1st and 2nd floor is decorative shingle siding. This siding pattern is continued completely around the home. The windows are the original double-hung sliding windows with (for the most part) original glass. Interior framing material (which is exposed in the attic and basement) is all composed of “dimensional lumber”. The attic still has remnants of the knob and tube wiring that was originally installed when the house was updated with electricity (1891).

See continuation page 1.

¹ Property Appraisal, Montana Licensed Appraiser #378, January 30, 2002.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, B

Areas of Significance: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT; SOCIAL HISTORY

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1871-1955

Significant Person(s): Robert E. Fisk
Elizabeth Chester Fisk

Significant Dates: 1871 – 1955

Architect/Builder: A.J Fisk, construction foreman.

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Robert and Elizabeth Fisk Residence is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its important associations with the earliest non-Indian settlement of the area and the patterns of development in Helena from the 1860s through the first half of the twentieth century. The Fisk family, particularly Robert and Lizzie, were important members of Helena society, and their influence in local political organizations, temperance, charity, and church was centered from their grand house above the Gulch. For these reasons, it is eligible for listing under Criteria A and B.

Early Helena History

Early Helena history started with a gold rush to the placer mines of the region beginning in 1862 with the first major strike at Bannack. In the summer of 1864 gold was discovered in a small stream adjacent to the Prickly Pear Valley and Last Chance Gulch boomed. It eventually emerged as Montana's business, economic, financial, governmental and social center.

Much has been written about the history of Helena: the numerous fires that plagued the early gold rich mining settlements including the five fires that devastated the town between 1869 to 1874; the first water delivery systems in 1869; the original business districts; and the United States Land office that was established in 1868. The development of the first industries occurred in 1865 with the establishment of two sawmills and a stone quarry operating by 1867. Robert Fisk and the *Helena Herald* newspaper were among those first signs of civilization. It is apparent that Robert and Elizabeth Fisk not only witnessed but also were instrumental in influencing and molding the direction of Helena's development.

Through the 1870s, Helena's economy skyrocketed, and merchants, delirious with success, erected lavish business blocks, often named in their honor. A number of talented architects worked in Helena during this period. As the profile of tall buildings cut into the skyline, and modern conveniences like electricity, telephones and trolley cars became commonplace, the "Queen City of the Rockies" came of age.

This prosperous atmosphere was short-lived however, for Helena's "golden years" ground to a halt with the Panic of 1893. Sparked by federal curtailment of annual silver purchases, the ensuing depression sent Helena and other mining communities across the West into a tailspin. The town never regained the momentum it once had, and in time the freewheeling profit of the goldfields gave way to a more stable economy that revolved around the affairs of state government.

Robert and Elizabeth Fisk

Robert Fisk was born in Ohio in August 1839, the fourth child of James B. and Jerusha Fisk. Robert was the third of six sons, and had one older sister. The family moved to Pennsylvania by 1850, and by 1860, twenty-two year old Robert was living with relatives and working as a printer in Niagara Falls. Though living in various states, the older brothers joined the Union Army. After, Colonel Robert E. Fisk came to Montana with the 1866 Fisk Expedition from Minnesota that was organized by his brother James. He returned to the east to marry Connecticut native Elizabeth (Lizzie) Chester that fall. Lizzie, born in February 1846, was the older of Isaac and Azubah Chester's two daughters. Though she was very close to her family, Lizzie agreed to move to Montana in 1867. The *Little Rock* (steamboat) left Omaha on May 16th and arrived at Fort Benton at 5:00 P.M. on July 14th. According to the Captain's ledger the cargo included the *Helena Herald's* new Gordon Presses and 116 bundles of newsprint.² It was Roberts's intent to further civilization in the goldfield by bringing news to the masses. This trip to Fort Benton by river started out as a pleasure cruise, but by the time the group was about to reach their destination the patience of the travelers seemed to be tried. The following is from a letter Lizzie wrote to her mother:

On Friday evening we passed the Milk River... We passengers are almost led to conclude that our officers are being paid by the month and having no hope of making another trip are determined to prolong this voyage till its utmost limit. Our potatoes are nearly gone, our white sugar ditto, and we had no milk for our coffee this morning.

See continuation page 3.

² Rex C. Myers. *Lizzie, The Letters of Elizabeth Chester Fisk, 1864 – 1893*, Mountain Press Publishing Company c 1989, pg. 10.

9. Major Bibliographic References

Abstract of Title, in possession of the author, including: Power of Attorney, June 7, 1871, Warranty Deed, March 7, 1904; Estate Number 2421; Deed Document Number 38641; Deed Document Number 102 678; and Distribution of Estate Document Number 187905.

Fisk Family Papers, Manuscript Collection 31, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

Jacobson, Herbert. L., Byrd, Donald L., and Chere Juusto, *Helena: A Historic City*, prepared for the City of Helena and Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 1982.

Myers, Rex C. *Lizzie, the Letters of Elizabeth Chester Fisk, 1864 – 1893*, Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1989.

Polk City Directory, Helena, 1929 & 1931, R.L. Polk & Co. of Montana.

Property Appraisal, Montana Licensed Appraiser #378, January 30, 2002.

U.S. Department of the Census, *Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, and Twelfth Censuses of the United States*.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Montana Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	
	12	420930	5159620	(NAD 27)

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): SE ¼ SE ¼ SW ¼ of Sec. 30, T10N R3W

Verbal Boundary Description

North nine feet of Lot Four, Lots Five and Six, and the west fourteen feet of the north sixty-six feet of Lot Seven, in Block Forty-nine of the Helena Original Townsite.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, based on legally recorded boundary lines, to include the land surrounding the building that has been historically associated with the building and conveys the property's historic setting.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Marty Roos
organization: date: November 26, 2005
street & number: 1920 Highland telephone: (406) 457-8423
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59601

Property Owner

name/title: Marty Roos
street & number: 1920 Highland telephone: (406) 457-8423
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59601

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The front entry to the building faces west and includes a covered porch that is held up by four round columns. The entry is highlighted by a hand carved 8' tall wood door original to the house. On each side of the entry door is a small fixed frame window measuring approximately 1 ½' X 2'. This entry door opens to a small vestibule and then a second door, which in turn leads to the foyer of the house. This second door is decorated by wood scrollwork and a large oval beveled window in the center of the door (original glass, approximately 3'x1 ½'). North of the entry porch is a large bay window, 9' wide and 3' deep. This bay window is made up of single double-hung windows flanking a large fixed frame picture window. These window units are double-hung and separated in narrow vertical panes. The second story above this bay window is highlighted by two side by side double-hung windows. As is common in Late Victorian/Queen Anne style homes, the south side of the building is curved, resembling a turret bay. This bay matches the window pattern on the first floor on the opposite side of the porch. It is made up of double-hung windows on either side of a large fixed frame picture window. This same window pattern is repeated on the second story on this (south) side of the porch. This perspective also shows a dormer built into the attic (third floor) that also houses an original double-hung window.

On the east side of the north elevation there is a wrap around porch that continues to the east (rear) of the building held up by four more decorative columns and one square column. This porch originally did not wrap around, but was limited to the east side of the north elevation. The porch extension was constructed after 1900, but before 1930, and is similar in materials and design as the original section of the porch, including decorative spindles in the balustrade. The north elevation also has a bay window built into the original structure as the dining room bay window. The windows in this bay are made up of four original double-hung windows. The second story above has intermittently spaced double-hung windows. This side of the property also reveals a two-story brick chimney that was used for both the first and second story fireplaces.

The rear elevation(east) of the building features, the two-story hipped kitchen wing and the wrap-around porch across its north side. At the south side of the porch is a two-light over two-panel wood door that provides entry to small (3 X 5') vestibule and reveals a stairway that is narrower (than the front), that leads to the second story and attic above. There is a small, single, one-over-one double-hung window immediately north of the entry door. Above the porch, at the second story, is a vertically-divided two-over-two double-hung window off center to the south. To the south of the porch and entry, at the junction of the kitchen bay and the main bay of the house, there is an entrance to the basement through a wood cellar doorway common to the time. When this cellar door is opened it reveals a cement stairway with stone side walls that leads to the basement. At the bottom of this stairway is an original wooden door with original hardware. Above this entry, at both the first and second story, is a single two-over-two double hung window.

The (south) elevation shows the second two-story brick chimney that was used for both the first and second story fireplaces. The Fisks relied on the four fireplaces and a wood-burning kitchen stove to heat the house until they upgraded to a central coal burning heater in the basement. They accomplished this change in September of 1892. The windows on this side of the house are evenly-spaced, single, double-hung windows.

INTERIOR

The foyer retains its original woodwork and finishes, including the doorways and banister for the stairway to the second floor. This stairway is composed of three sets of stairs with two landings. The foyer has three doors, one to the south enters into an apartment that utilizes ½ of the main floor square footage, one to the north enters into an apartment that utilizes the other ½ of the main floor, the third door is an entry to the basement. The stairway leads to the second floor which is divided into two apartments. Each take up ½ of the square footage and share a common landing that has a small area used as a reading nook. There is also a doorway on this level that is the entrance to the full unfinished attic above. Each of the apartments are similar in layout. The front entrance to each opens to the living area which is approximately 13'x15'. This room opens through a set of French double doors to the main bedroom (12'X15'). Off this room is the bathroom, a large walk in closet and a hallway that leads to the kitchen located at the rear of the building. Each kitchen has an exit door that opens to the back stairway.

Integrity

The residence retains a high degree of integrity. Its location, setting, feeling, and association are intact. Changes to the design are limited to the interior, where the single-family residence was converted into four apartments, and the extension of the back porch. This transition took place within the historic period, and contributes to the significance of the property. The original wood shingles on the roof have been replaced with architectural grade imitation shake roofing material to ensure structural integrity through weatherization and fire safety, and new hot water boilers were added in 2005 to provide appropriate modern heating systems, otherwise the historic

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materials are intact, and include interior woodwork, interior fixtures, wood floors and tile as well as the original coal burning boiler installed by Lizzie in the basement. All the apartments in the building have original woodwork with one apartment still maintaining the original natural wood finish. Chandeliers in each apartment's two main rooms are original to the period. Wood floors remain intact as well as the hot water radiators that were installed when the coal furnace (installed by Lizzie) was converted to a hot water boiler in later years. Gas service was updated at the property in 1932 and again in December of 2005.

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Everyone is "down on" the Captain of the boat. All the preparations for our journey were of the cheapest kind, even a sufficient number of men were not hired. Owing to the want of care much of the freight consisting in great measure of groceries have been allowed to spoil. Robert finds his paper in a most miserable condition. It has become mildewed and musty and the mice have nibbled paper and string...³

Three newspapers had been established in Helena by 1868: The *Helena Weekly Herald*, the *Montana Post*, and the *Rocky Mountain Gazette*. The *Radiator*, Helena's first newspaper had made its initial appearance on December 15, 1865 and was to make its last on October 13, 1866. Early issues were printed on brown paper because of the unavailability of white newsprint. The *Radiator* was bought out in 1866 by the Fisk brothers, who established the *Herald* and started publishing in November of the same year. Robert Fisk served as editor.⁴

During 1867 and 1868 during initial start up of the newspaper Robert faced severe challenges including legal control as well as editorial politics and labor issues. In the fall of 1867 James Whitlatch, one of Montana's first millionaire mine owners who was a major owner in the *Helena Herald* decided to assert himself in the newspaper's management. When he attempted to cut wages, most of the newspaper's typesetters quit in protest, creating one of the first labor disputes in the territory. Frustrated by the meddling, Robert, in partnership with Charles R. Stuart, decided to buy out Whitlatch's interest. As spokesmen for Montana Republicanism, Fisk and Stuart advocated African-American voting rights and suffrage in the territory. This was a radical concept at the time among some Republicans as well as all Democrats. A gap developed in the ideals of the Republican Party. Fisk and Stuart conveyed more moderate views while George Pinney represented the more radical section of the party.⁵ George Pinney bought the *Montana Post* in Virginia City and moved it to Helena to combat the *Herald*. By the end of 1868 Stuart and Fisk emerged as the sole owners of the *Herald*.

Amid these intrigues, Fisk and his newspaper promoted the town and were influential in community growth. He wrote the following editorial on February 28, 1867:

As a centre of population and trade in the future settlement and development of the Territory, Helena must far outrival every other, from her commanding geographical position, and many other natural advantages which surround her. Helena is flanked on every side by endless mountains of gold and silver quartz, while both front and rear, and at every point on the compass...there are almost countless placer mines, whose extent and richness will give employment and fortune to many thousand honest laborers for years to come.

Within sight of the city...may be counted some two hundred cultivated farms and ranches where cows, sheep, horses and cattle are herded and fattened...Adjacent to the city are splendid quarries of granite and blue limestone, admirably suited to the construction of neat and massive fireproof storehouses and business blocks, quite a number of which already ornament our city...We have pipe and hydrant works furnishing our city with pure water from fountain springs...⁶

During this period, the Fisks began their family and settled into Helena. During the first years in Helena, James' home became the family headquarters. The families worked and lived closely with one another. The first years were spent sharing homes with the extended family. Despite this tight situation, Robert and Lizzie quickly fell into the prominent spheres of Helena society.

Lizzie was an active member in church and social groups including the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Poor Committee in the state. She on several occasions visited the "poor farm" to provide assistance to the indigent. During Robert's trips east to secure supplies and advertising for the newspaper Lizzie enjoyed a level of independence uncommon for middle or upper class women on the frontier.

³ Elizabeth (Lizzie) Chester Fisk to her mother, Mrs. Isaac (Azubah) Chester, June 1867, as quoted in Myers, pg. 23.

⁴ Herbert. L. Jacobson, Donald L. Byrd, and Chere Jiusto, *Helena: A Historic City*, prepared for the City of Helena and Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 1982, p. 3.

⁵ Myers, pg. 25.

⁶ As quoted in *Helena: A Historic City*, p. 3.

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Sometimes she traveled alone, sometimes in the company of one of the Fisk brothers, and sometimes with bachelor physician William M. Bullard. Public schools did not exist in Helena during the earliest settlement period, so Lizzie called on her previous expertise, and tutored several children...She charged \$1.00 per week for her services.⁷

Together, they were active in organizations whose aim was to develop stability and civilization in the early history of Montana. In a letter to her mother Lizzie describes a visit:

We were honored (?) during the last week by an evening's visit with the Gov. of Montana, the Hon. Green Clay Smith... Dr. Baker and daughter... were invited to meet with us. Col. Howie being an intimate friend of Col. Fisk must be included and having a previous engagement with Mr. Bohm, one of our leading bankers, brought him here also. Dr. Bullard and Gov. Smith with Mr. Chemidlin completed the party. After an hour's pleasant chat, refreshments, cake and apples, wine and cider, were served. Goodie and I fought against the wine, taking a most valiant stand in favor of cold water, but without success. How can men put poison in their neighbor's lips? Our worthy Gov. could drink neither of these beverages but took brandy by himself."⁸

Her insistence that alcohol contributed to the downfall of man is dictated in another letter to her mother:

...If I needed any reminder of the peril of touching one drop of ardent spirits the lesson has been brought home to me...during the three last weeks. I cannot understand how any man can be as lost to every principle of manhood as to (seek) in intoxication relief from sorrow.

Charlie (Witlatch) has not been free from the influence of liquor during all that time and has made a complete fool of himself, nearly ruining not only himself, but all those connected with him and that business of which he is head during Rob's absence."⁹

The Fisk family, as a result of Robert's influence because of the *Herald*, was involved in major events of the period. In August of 1870 there was an expedition to explore the reaches of Yellowstone. Lizzie recounts their contact with the group:

Saturday (August 20) was rendered memorable by the arrival at Bozeman of the Yellowstone party (Washburn-Doan Expedition). They were all so delighted to see us, not only our old friends but those with whom we had only a slight acquaintance. Our room was at once made headquarters and the hurry and bustle, the noise and confusion can be better imagined than described. The wits of each member of the party seemed to have been considerably sharpened and jokes, puns, and other pleasant wit and repartee enlivened the hours.

In the evening we had a grand reception of the entire party and a number of officers from Fort Ellis distant from the city two miles. Music and pleasant chat whiled away the hours. At eleven o'clock the company separated to meet again, oh! When?...Had Rob been at liberty and the escort a little larger I would have been glad to join the party, and go where no lady has ever been."¹⁰

After more than three years living with relatives, Lizzie was anxious to have a home of her own. Robert purchased the corner lots at 319 North Rodney, and subsequently gave them to his wife who recorded them in her name with the Clerk and Recorder on September 21, 1870.¹¹ The lots were located on the northeastern edge of the original townsite, just uphill from the downtown gulch where Robert had his offices. Lizzie's excitement over the transaction is captured in a letter to her sister:

Within two weeks I have become a real estate holder; what do you think of that? Rob purchased and gave me a corner lot, one of the prettiest building sites in town. It is on Rodney St. in the block above us. Governor Ashley is building in the same block on the upper corner. We hope to be able to erect a modest little house some time during

⁷ Myers, pg. 30.

⁸ Lizzie to her mother, February 9, 1868, as quoted in Myers, pg. 40.

⁹ Lizzie to her mother, April 5, 1868, as quoted in Myers, pg 45.

¹⁰ Lizzie to her mother, August 26, 1870, as quoted in Myers, pg. 69.

¹¹ Abstract of Title, September 21, 1870.

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the winter. Rob already has several thousand feet of lumber. We would like to put up a brick or stone house but cannot afford it.

You shall receive a copy of the plan and also a drawing of the house as soon as we decide on any thing. I anticipate so much pleasure in watching the building of this house, in laying out the grounds and in time securing a pleasant home. One room is to be the aunties room forever set apart to your use, and woe be to you if you do not come and use it.¹²

Almost a year later, however, Lizzie's excitement had turned to frustration as finances delayed construction. Apparently, Robert and Lizzie decided to build two houses, with the hope that one would provide additional income. They were staying with Robert's brother Jack, a fair distance from downtown. Lizzie explained to her mother:

We are still in Jack's home and will probably remain there for a year. The building of two houses in one season was a piece of folly and the consequence will be that we must sacrifice ours unless Rob can rent it advantageously. I had no suspicion of this till I reached home and looked into matters. It has been a grievous disappointment for our house is so very convenient and pretty...¹³

The situation worked itself out, and in late September 1871, the couple and their two-year-old daughter, Grace, moved in to the 319 North Rodney House. The following is from a letter written to her mother dated September 25, 1871:

Friday we moved (into our new house)... Suppose you open the gate, come up the walk and enter the front door. The doors are double with ground glass in a pretty pattern in the upper part. You are now in the hall, a cozy little place 7 ½ X 9 ½ from one end of which the stairs wind up. We have, so say the builders, the handsomest flight of stairs in the territory.

On the Floor is a bright ingrain carpet, under the stairs a little table and hanging on the wall a picture of Niagara (Falls) in all its glory, and a lamp for evening use. To the left you enter the parlor, a bright airy room, wearing ever a cheerful home look; we have a three ply (carpet) for this room, drab, scarlet and green, pure white shades with scarlet cords, and the old furniture.

Here we have a half-dozen pictures, all (photographs) but one a fine colored lithograph of two canaries on a spray of wheat. This room is 13 ½ feet by 16 ½ feet exclusive of the bay window which is nine feet wide and three feet deep.

From the hall on the parlor we enter the dining room, the same size of the parlor except that the bay window is at the end, instead of the side. Here we have a carpet like that in the hall, green, scarlet and white, green shades at the windows, in the bay window a small round table where stand books and work. A stove, sewing machine, half dozen chairs, with pictures and a clock on a carve bracket complete the furniture¹⁴

The house soon became a social center for the town. Less than a month after moving in, Lizzie wrote her sister of the local Women's Society's plans:

The "Society" of which I wrote you some time since held its first meeting for organization at Mrs. Col. Teall instead of here... They will probably meet here this week. We have as entertainment for the evening music, select readings, an essay, and a discussion of the question as to which has been of greatest benefit to the world, steam or electricity... We hope to derive most profit as well as pleasure from these gatherings...¹⁵

Within a year, son Robert L. Fisk was born, and befitting their place in Helena society, the Fisks saw an endless stream of visitors in their home:

¹² Myers, pg. 69; Lizzie to her sister Fannie, October 2, 1870, Fisk Family Papers, MS31, Box 6, Folder 11, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

¹³ Lizzie to her mother, August 9, 1871, Fisk Family Papers, MS31, Box 6, Folder 13, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

¹⁴ Lizzie to her mother, September 25, 1871, as quoted in Myers, pg 75.

¹⁵ Lizzie to her mother, November 12, 1871, Fisk Family Papers, MS31, Box 6, Folder 13, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

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A New Years Rob gave me the mortgage on the house, so now we have a home, free of debt...On New Years day we received quite a number of calls though we did not hold a formal reception. Nearly everyone in town, man woman or child who ever calls upon us has to see the baby. Yesterday we had seven callers, the day before, five, and so it goes...¹⁶

Lizzie was a popular figure in early Helena life, particularly for her association with several causes and her participation in education and church. Popularity contests were a common event in early Helena. The Methodist and Episcopal Church arranged many fairs to raise money for the churches. During the January 1872 fair the ladies nominated Lizzie as one of the most popular. This is recounted in a letter:

I must tell you something of the Fair, which commenced a week ago this evening...Much to my surprise, I learned on Tuesday morning, that my name had been placed on the list of ladies to be voted for. I felt a little badly about it at first but as it was impossible to withdraw it I tried to reconcile myself to the notoriety; and I was a little comforted by the assurance from many of my friends that they would not allow me to be beaten. And they were true to their word, and, when the polls closed on Saturday evening, I was three hundred votes ahead of all competition...And I have been voted the most popular lady in Helena.¹⁷

Lizzie was very pleased with her new home, and the Fisks often hosted sumptuous dinner parties for influential local politicians, military officers, and businessmen, as well as organization meetings there.

If only I could make it right for you to come out here. Do you think you could be content to leave your old home so far away and live in this country, so far removed from "the genial influences" of civilization? I often wonder how my home would look to you could you step in some particular moment. Tonight, for instance, the fires are burning cheerfully, the lamps in the parlor and dining room serve to make all bright, the curtains are closely drawn, the bay window full of plants and every plant is fresh and bright, the five hanging baskets are beautiful in their luxuriant vines trailing and climbing all about the window. O! I have so much to be thankful for and I am often led to exclaim "My cup runneth over with mercies."...

We gave a dinner party on Friday, to six gentlemen, all friends of Rob's. We treated them to soup, roast beef, chicken pie, turnips, potatoes and vegetable oysters, apple pie, Yorkshire pudding, apple trifle, flating island and coffee, and every article was perfect of its kind. Our guests were Judge Wade, Judge Hedges, Col. Viall, Dr. Wright, Col. Wheeler, and Maj. Simmons. Three of the gentlemen have their wives and families in the states and all seemed to enjoy a good dinner so much.

Two weeks ago the church Sociable met here and we prepared refreshments for that. After Rob is gone I propose to give a dinner party to some lady friends – a hen party. We won't have a gentleman on the premises. Won't you come?¹⁸

Two more sons, Rufus Clark and Asa Francis., were born in 1874 and 1876. As their family grew, Lizzie began to agitate for a larger house. She told her mother she was in a quandary as to how to proceed, as she did not like the ideas of adding on to the house and breaking up its symmetry. In the mean time they did build a chicken house, improved the walks and fence, and updated the kitchen.¹⁹ By 1883, with the arrival of their twins Florence and James the previous year, Robert and Lizzie roof decided to raise the roof above the kitchen, adding an extra room and closet upstairs.

These improvements coincided with general optimism, prosperity, and speculation in the Helena community:

The "new room" is very pleasant, and though the boys claim it, it is to be ready for grandpa and grandma this summer if they prefer it to the front room. The window looking north takes in the whole valley and includes a view

¹⁶ Lizzie to her mother Mrs. Isaac (Azubah) Chester, January 19, 1873, Fisk Family Papers, MS31, Box 6, Folder 15, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

¹⁷ Lizzie to her mother, January 29, 1872 as quoted in Myers, pg. 79.

¹⁸ Lizzie to her mother, February 16, 1873, Fisk Family Papers, MS31, Box 7, Folder 7, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

¹⁹ Lizzie to her mother, March 24, 1880, as quoted in Myers, pg. 79.

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of the railroad for several miles. From it we expect to see the first train rushing in here in about a month. The end of the track is only fifty miles now, a day's ride in a comfortable carriage.

There is much speculating in "lots" corner and otherwise, and the depot is still on wheels making many moves each day. It will not probably be very near the city whether on the east side or the west, but we will not complain if it is here somewhere...²⁰

Almost exactly a month later, Robert remarked on the railroad's arrival and the changes to the city:

During most of the twenty years since the organization of Montana her citizens have been widely separated from centers of trade, population and power in the United States as if they dwelt in a foreign land with an ocean rolling between. Those good old days when a shrewd merchant could prospect the market of the city in a few moments, and ascertaining what was in store, a make a corner of some sort in the market and enjoying his monopoly for months in perfect security, have gone forever. Now a person can telegraph his order to St. Paul and within three days have his goods delivered to his store. Rail connection is virtual annexation to the United States. We all long for statehood, but of the two, rail connection is the greatest blessing, whose benefice we feel every moment.²¹

During this period of heady optimism, and in addition to his duties at the *Herald*, Robert served as the Postmaster for Helena (a Presidential appointment) from 1881 to 1884 when Grover Cleveland (a Democrat) was elected President²². He also became active in the Grand Army of the Republic and the Montana Press Association, of which he served as president in 1889. In the interest of both groups he traveled around the state and to national conventions.

Though Robert traveled extensively due to his career and associations, Lizzie worked to keep their home in good order and their burgeoning family happy and healthy. Their family and status was growing, but their financial situation was often tight. Setbacks, including a fire that destroyed the newspaper offices and extended family obligations were frustrating. By 1890, though, Lizzie began to agitate in earnest for a larger home. Her aggravation with house is clear in her letters: "Our bathroom freezes up every night, we shall have to build it all over next summer. I would like to see the carpenter who built it and tell him what I think of him."²³

Since the establishment of the Maudlin Addition (1879), then the Hauser Addition (1880), the west side of Helena became the most fashionable neighborhood, though the Rodney Street neighborhood boasted fine homes and prominent families. Many of the Fisk's friends lived on the west side, however, and Lizzie was intent on building a new, larger home on Monroe Avenue. These plans were thwarted by Robert, however, who did not like the situation and distance from his office.

In lieu of a new house, Lizzie improved her home on Rodney Street as amenities became available in Helena. Electric lights were added to the home in 1891. From a letter of Lizzie's to her mother:

Have I ever told you that we are using electric lights all through the house? We had the house wired about the first of July (1891) and though our chandeliers have not come yet we are very brilliant with the one light in each room. No more slopping of coal oil, cleaning of lamps or breaking of chimneys. No heat or smoke, but a clear, steady light, just by turning a screw. Now if I only had a heater and could dispense with wood stoves I should be well pleased.²⁴

The next year, the heating system was soon replaced by Lizzie during a time when Robert was on one of his many trips out of town. Again, from a letter to her mother:

Since Rob left I have had a furnace put in the house. Our old stoves were all burnt out and had to be replaced with new ones or newly lined which cost almost as much. We consumed twenty-five cords of wood last winter and then

²⁰ Lizzie to her mother, May 13, 1883, MS31, Box 7, Folder 10, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

²¹ Robert Fisk, *Helena Herald*, June 12, 1883, as quoted in *Helena: A Historic City*, p. 7.

²² Myers, pg. 84.

²³ Lizzie to her mother, February 22, 1891, MS31, Box 8 Folder 7, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

²⁴ Lizzie to her mother, July 1891, as quoted in Myers, pg.140. The original chandeliers Lizzie mentions remain in eight of the eighteen rooms in the home today.

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were not comfortable if it was at all cold. So I just made up my mind I had waited long enough and would save dirt and wear on carpets and put my fire in one place instead of four...

In putting in the furnace, which is hot air, I had also much to look after. We excavated under the dining room, took out forty-eight cubic yards of earth which made an immense pile which must be hauled away. When the furnace was in I had a carpenter to board up and build a coal bin, put in a window, &c., then a stone mason to plaster up the foundation. Then followed the housecleaning which was not quite completed a week since...

We find the air in our house pure and good. The cold air is supplied from outside the house, a pipe at least fifteen inches in diameter brining in a constant supply which is heated and rises. With the coal fire it is easy to maintain an almost uniform temperature. A ton of coal...lasted just three weeks. This costs \$6.25 so we heat the whole house three weeks for that amount. We could not have done it with wood.²⁵

These home improvements did not distract Lizzie from the political and social affairs in Helena. Lizzie maintained high standards for the city's people. "In March of 1886, millionaire mine owner Thomas Cruse married a woman nearly forty years his junior. Lizzie did not approve. She and Robert received invitations, but at her insistence, they did not attend. As with her strong opposition to liquor, Lizzie remained steadfast in her principles."²⁶ She and Robert were also very vocal, as leaders in local Republican party, about their political opinions. Lizzie vented her frustration with the new state legislature, as the tied House and marginally Republican state senate were so bitterly divided as to be completely ineffective. Senate Democrats fled the state to keep the Republican majority from electing the U.S. Senators. Senator W. S. Backer was caught, arrested and sent back to Helena, only to flee again, this time to Idaho and outside Montana jurisdiction.

I intended to mail you Saturday's *Herald* as it contains the account of the pursuit and arrest of Senator Becker and his return to Helena. Today's paper has the grand finale so far as he is concerned, for notwithstanding his pledged work he again ran away. That too before the appropriation bills were signed. So he with all the other members of the legislature, the State officers, etc., can draw no pay. What a disgraceful state of affairs is this in Montana's Capital. And to think this must go into history for our children to read. But it is the same old rebel element which was never whipped and never reconstructed both here and in Washington dictating to true and loyal men. The men who once tried to overthrow the government are at it again in another way...²⁷

Sadly, Lizzie's letters to her mother stopped in May of 1893 when her mother died at Vernon Center, Connecticut at age 70. Lizzie was by her side and had been for several weeks.

The Fisk family continued to reside in their Helena home for another nine years. During that time, they witnessed Helena's economic crisis after the Panic of 1893, and transition from a waning mining town to a political center. The community development and expansion of the late 1880s through 1892, however, would not return, and Helena's growth was relatively stagnant through the turn of the twentieth century. Perhaps because of the slow real estate market, or because the family finances, Robert and Lizzie did not sell the house as she wanted, but instead expanded 319 North Rodney. Between 1892 and 1895, the Fisks undertook a major renovation of their home, giving them much needed room.

The addition of space on the south side of the house, and raising the gable and wing roof on the original house to accommodate a full second story and attic beneath a hipped roofline, increased their square footage considerably. It was fortunate that they had the space, as Robert and Lizzie's oldest daughter, Grace had married Broadwater Hotel accountant Stephen Hardy, but soon divorced him. Grace and her son Stanley moved back to the family home by the mid 1990s. The house was full even after sons Asa and Rufus Clark moved out. In 1900, Robert, Lizzie, Grace, Robbie, Jamie, and Florence were still at home, plus the Fisks had taken in a boarder, Blanch Henton, and a servant, Mary Erickson.²⁸ The family stayed in the house until December 1902 when Robert sold the *Helena Herald*

²⁵ Lizzie to her mother, September 25, 1892, October 9, 1892, and December 4, 1892, as quoted in Myers, pg.. 151.

²⁶ Myers, pg. 115.

²⁷ Lizzie to her mother, February 10, 1890, MS31, Box 8, Folder 6, Montana Historical Society, Helena. For more information about the first Montana legislature, see Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, rev. ed. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991), pp. 197-200.

²⁸ U.S. Department of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, enumerated June 9, 1900, Lewis and Clark County, Helena 4th Ward, Precinct

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and took part of his family to Berkeley, California where they spent the rest of their lives. Six years later he died there. Elizabeth outlived him by nineteen years, passing away at Berkley in April 1927. Their last decade in Helena witnessed their children coming of age, marrying, leaving the family home, and returning again.

After 1902, Grace remained in Helena and became the Society Editor for the *Record-Herald* until she was re-married to a Helena dentist, Wall M. Billings. In 1905 she and her new husband moved to Berkeley. She continued to live in California until her death in 1935.

Robert and Elizabeth's oldest son Robbie learned the printer's trade and also moved to the *Record-Herald* and eventually became the print shop foreman. In 1917 he and his wife Mamie (Yelland) moved to Lincoln, Montana and became involved in the forest products industry until he retired in the 1940's. His cabin on the Blackfoot River served as a summer retreat and reunion spot for the family many years after most of his brothers and sisters left the state. Lizzie joined these family vacations on several occasions.

Rufus Clark married Florence Julia McIntyre in 1898 and went to work as a postal assistant under the supervision of his uncle, attorney A.J. Fisk. It was Robert's brother A.J., who was hired as foreman to build the house at 319 North Rodney.²⁹ Asa Francis enlisted in the First Montana Volunteers in 1898 and saw duty in the Philippines. He was married in 1903 to Claire Brace Hassler and had three children. Asa left the service about that time and became involved in exporting. He moved to New England in 1914 and unexpectedly died in 1915 in Beacon Falls, Massachusetts. The twins Florence and James moved to Berkeley with their parents. Florence married and had six children. She died in Berkeley in 1947. James never married but lived in Berkeley all his life except for occasional vacations to Montana. He passed away in Oakland on September 10, 1951 and among his possessions were his mother's letters. Through the estate of James Fisk the Montana Historical Society received the Elizabeth Fisk letters in 1952, along with various notes and mementoes from the children.³⁰

The Fisk house was sold to William E. Thistlewaite on March 7, 1904 with the documents being signed by Robert and Elizabeth Fisk in Alameda California on March 11, 1904.³¹

The Fisk House through the 20th Century

William Thistlewaite was born in Canada, and had two children when he purchased the house in 1904: five year-old Roy and baby May Frances. He worked as the proprietor of Thistlewaite's, his downtown shoe store, and his wife Eleanore kept house and cared for the children. By 1920, May Frances was still living at home, working as a stenographer, and her brother Roy had married and moved a few blocks away on Main Street. When William died in 1921, he left the shoe business to son Roy, and left the house to Eleanore. May Frances married a man named Orrin, but she was single again by 1930, and living with her mother in Los Angeles. Eleanore rented the house to Louis D. Haegg, the district manage of the Federal Reserve Bank. Heagg lived there with his wife Ethel, their three children, and two boarders. Eleanore sold the property to Henry E. Carstensen on June 3, 1930.³²

As the Great Depression began to take hold of the nation, and to Helena, Carstensen kept the house at 319 North Rodney as his residence, but rented it out to three tenants as well. It is likely that upon Carstensen's purchase, he converted the grand single-family residence to a multi-family dwelling with four apartments.

Building construction in Helena had been sporadic at best after 1893, and the decline of wealth in the city took its toll on the grand single family homes. Throughout the city many were converted to apartments to help property owners pay for the upkeep and generate income. Henry (a single man of Helena) kept the property for 29 years until he sold the property to John and Flora McLaughlin on September 1, 1959.³³ John died September 29, 1959 so the property transferred by right of survivorship 29 days later to Flora McLaughlin. The property again changed hands and was owned by Wallace H. Hustad (W.H. Hustad) and at the time of his death in

7, Sheet 11..

²⁹ Abstract of Title, Power of Attorney, June 7, 1871.

³⁰ Myers, pp. 157-158.

³¹ Abstract of Title, Warranty Deed, March 7, 1904.

³² Ibid. Deed Document Number 38641

³³ Ibid. Deed Document Number 102 678

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May of 1967 was transferred through probate to his wife Faith E. Hustad.³⁴ Subsequent owners were Michael Kecskes and the current owner Marty Roos who have both maintained the current status as a 4-plex apartment building.

After the Fisks sold the property to William Thistlewaite, Helena grew and filled in the vacant lots to the east of the house toward the Lenox subdivision. The city itself changed from the rough and tumble mining camp of 1865 to a prosperous seat of state government as the state capitol. With Helena's economy and population in decline after 1893, building construction was sporadic. In the 1930's Helena struggled and saw a shift in economy that saw residents looking to means other than mining and use of natural resources for income through the Great Depression. By the time the Depression of the 1930s hit, those that stayed often could not afford to maintain their extravagant homes. Many of the older mansions were divided in to multiple-family dwellings to help pay the bills. The Polk directory of 1929 shows that there was one individual listed as a resident of the 319 North Rodney address, (Mrs. Vernon L. Haegg). The next published directory in 1931 showed that Henry Carstensen (who purchased the property in 1930), Myles Thomas, Ernie Bartells and Armell Bailey were all listed as residents. These are the first tenants and this is evidence that Mr. Carstensen like others in Helena were making lifestyle adjustments to help make ends meet during these difficult times.³⁵

It is apparent that Robert and Elizabeth Fisk were key players in the settlement of early Helena and its development as Montana's center for commerce, politics and social endeavors. Their house was a focal point for social, charitable, and political activities throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The activities of the Fisks, including renovations to the home, are reflective of the patterns of community development and local social history. After their tenure there, successive owners followed familiar local historical patterns, culminating in dividing the house into apartments to secure additional income during the Depression. For the reasons outlined above, the property is eligible for listing under Criteria A and B.

³⁴ Ibid. Distribution of Estate Document Number 187905

³⁵ Polk City Directory 1929 & 1931, R.L. Polk & Co. of Montana, page 354.

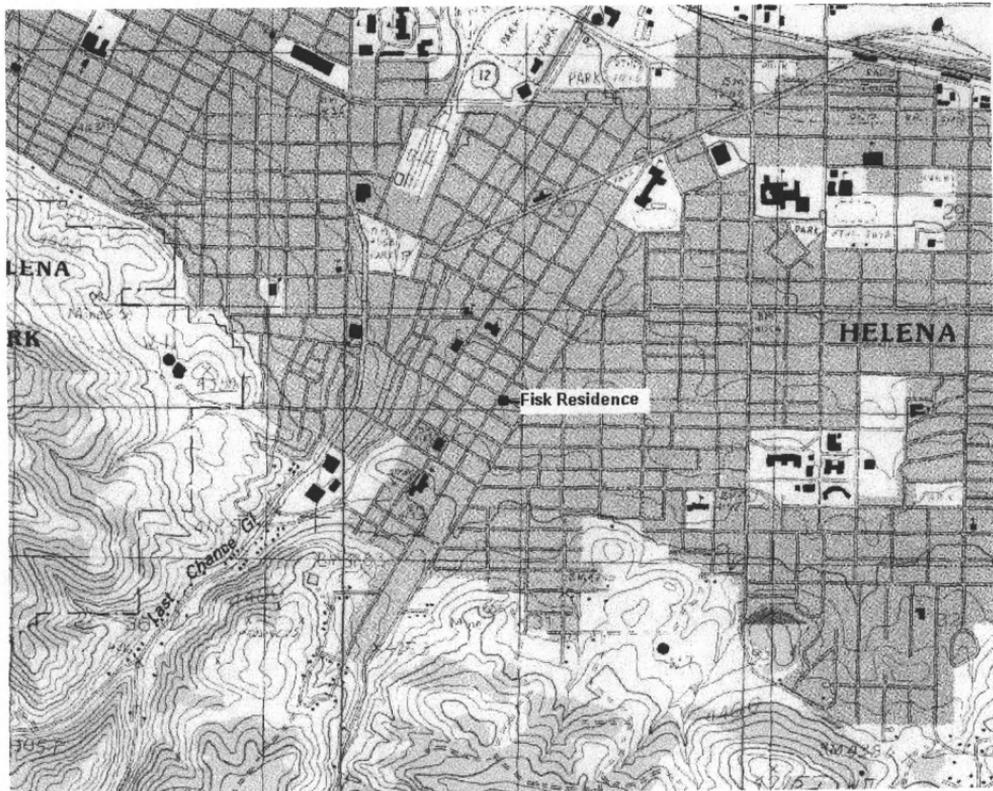
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Detail of Helena 7.5 minute topographic map showing location of Robert and Elizabeth Fisk Residence.

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Detail of Montana Cadastral Mapping Project image, showing location of the Robert and Elizabeth Fisk Residence property.
<http://cadastral.mt.gov/>.

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Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives, Photo Collection PAC 77-46, "Sunday morning, October, 13th, 1895, Bob & Asa just home from a hunting trip, Jim with Trilby, Florence, Gracie, Stanley, Bob, Asa" [family on back porch of Robert and Elizabeth Fisk Residence]. Photographer Unidentified.

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Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives, Photo Collection PAC 77-46, "The R.E. Fisk 'mansion,'" 1886, L to R: Robbie, Robert E., Elizabeth holding Jamie, Grace with Florence, and Asa. Clark is missing from photograph. Photographer Unidentified.

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The photographs that accompany this nomination were taken by Kate Hampton on September 13, 2006, using a high-resolution digital camera. In accordance with the March 2005 Photo Policy expansion, the photos are printed on HP Premium Plus Photo Paper, using a Hewlett Packard 100 gray photo cartridge. This combination of paper and inks is included on the NR's list of "Acceptable Ink and Paper Combinations for Digital Images." The images are also recorded as .tif files on a CD-R with a resolution at least 1200x1800 pixels, 300 dpi in "true color" 24-bit format.

Historic Photographs:



Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives, Photo #942-297, Robert E. Fisk, no date.
Photograph by Bradley & Rulofson, San Francisco, California



Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives, Photo #942-299, Elizabeth Chester Fisk, taken in early 1860's.
Photographer Unidentified

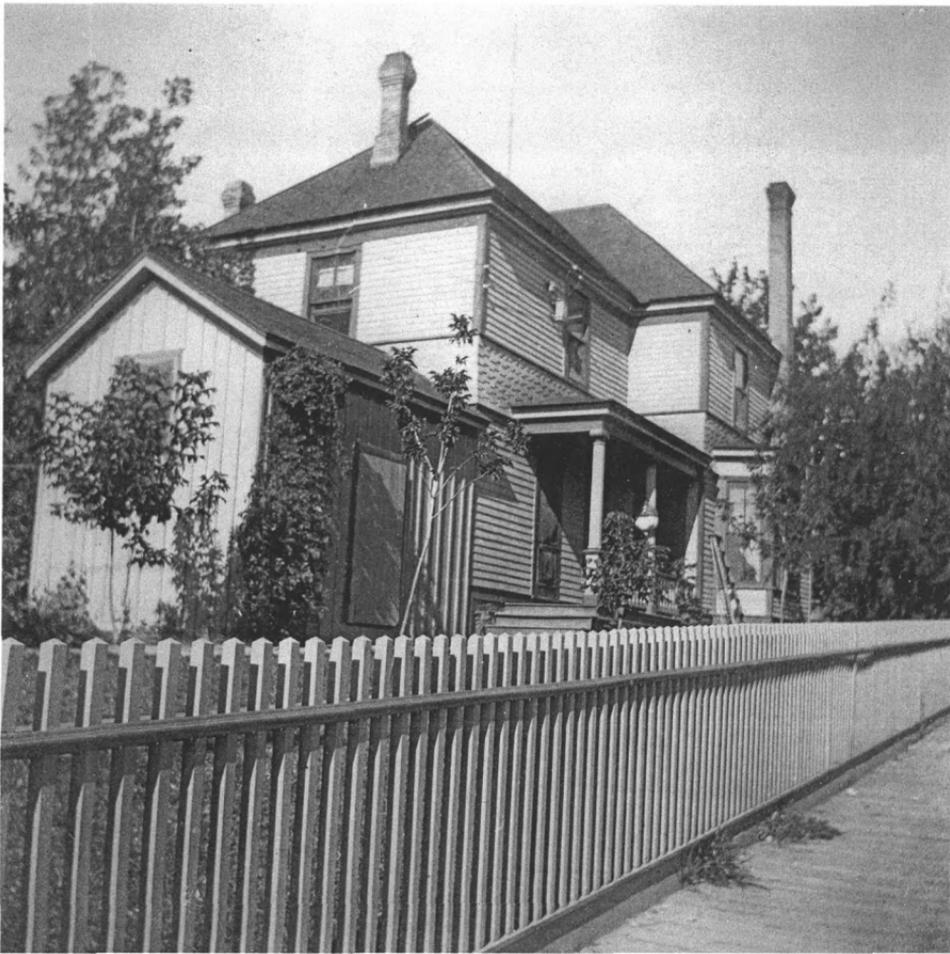
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Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives, Photo Collection PAc 77-46, "Rear view of the R.E. Fisk home, Helena, Montana, 1900," [319 N. Rodney]. Photographer Unidentified.

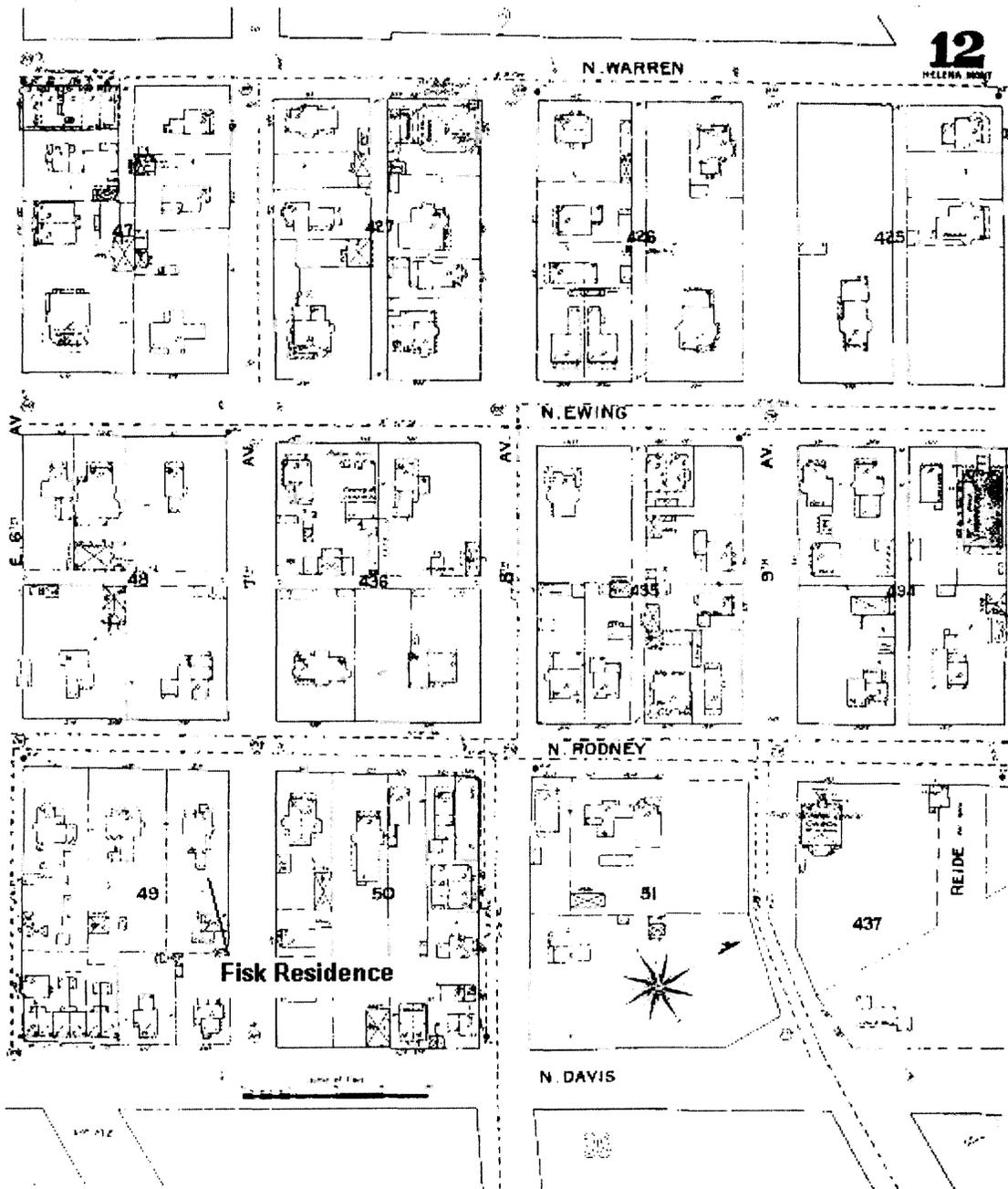
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1892 Sanborn Map of Helena, sheet 12.

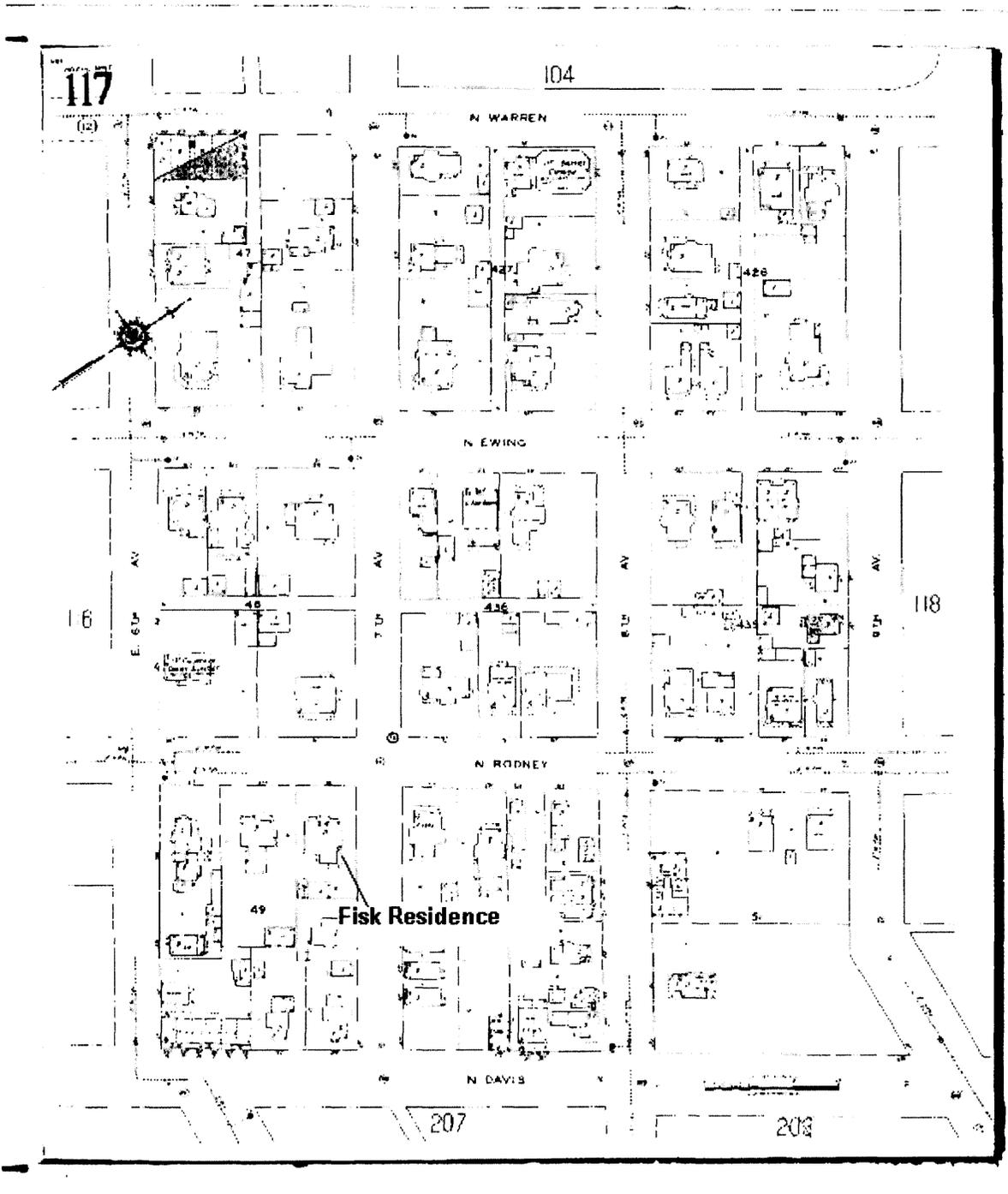
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1930 Sanborn Map of Helena, sheet 117