

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 96000881

Date Listed: 8/8/96

Bluebird Building
Property Name

Missoula
County

MT
State

Missoula MPS
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

8/8/96
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

State Certification:

This documentation constitutes a nomination for a property evaluated at the local level of significance.

Related Multiple Property Listing:

The property is nominated as part of the Missoula MPS.

U. T. M. Coordinates:

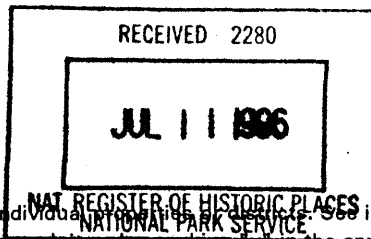
The correct U.T.M. Coordinate is: 12 271880 5195006

This information was confirmed with Chere Jiusto of the MT SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



881

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual historic properties. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bluebird Building
other names/site number Empress Theater

2. Location

street & number 220-224 North Higgins [N/A] not for publication
city, town Missoula [N/A] vicinity
state Montana code MT county Missoula code 063 zip code 59802

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> objects
			<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.

See continuation sheet

Signature of certifying official

7-10-96
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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: _____) See continuation sheet.

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

8-8-96
Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/Specialty Store
CULTURE/Theatre

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/Specialty Store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century American
Movements/ Commercial

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick
walls wood

roof single ply
other brick, tin

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Bluebird building is a two-story brick and wood frame commercial structure with flat roof and symmetrical ornamented facade. The building is rectangular in plan on an east/west axis and is situated between similar commercial buildings on the north and south sides. The building was constructed as part of the expansion of a central business district in the city of Missoula, Montana, on what was considered to be prime commercial property in the 1880s and is now centrally located within the downtown district facing onto Higgins Avenue. It currently features two entrance doors at street level centered within a recessed alcove leading to present day retail spaces; the entrance to the second floor is offset to the north side. The retail entrances are flanked by full height display windows carried to the height of the second floor. A decorative tin facade dating to 1898 begins at the second level and includes a bracketed cornice at the parapet and raised relief panels between the windows. There are two pairs of second floor windows symmetrically arranged which are the original 1/1 double-hung. The first floor interior is divided into two retail spaces which have been renovated numerous times since 1932; they currently feature sheetrocked ceilings and walls, new light fixtures and carpeted floors. The stair on the north side of the building to the second floor was originally accessed from the interior of the lobby; it is one of two stairs that led to theatre balcony seating and the mezzanine. The second floor office space retains the original double acting, raised-panel entrance doors, wallcovering and detailed wood trim. The original skylight glass panels are intact above the central reception area with new lighting above to allude to the former opening in the roof which has since been filled in. Portions of the original pressed tin ceiling remain in some areas. The storage space on the east end of the second floor houses the remainder of the 1913 movie theatre proscenium, ornamental tin ceiling, original wallcovering and wood floor divided into levels for balcony seating no longer in place. The original theatre footlights and floodlights have been salvaged and some have been converted into lighting for the office. A postcard photograph of the first floor after its conversion to a silent movie theatre in 1913 shows that the facade had a highly ornamented pressed tin front, gilded plasterwork within the entry recess which extended the full width of the first floor, and two double door entries on either side of a projecting ticketbooth. Many of the decorative facade elements as well as the stage and theatre seating were removed in the 1932 conversion to a shoe store; the second interior stair to the balcony was also removed at this time. In 1992 the lower floor storefront was remodelled in order to return the historic character to the facade. An historic photograph of the neighboring Higgins Block showing the Bluebird Building was the basis for the restoration of the exterior facade which included wood framed display windows with transom above and recessed wood panels below were installed and the doors were returned to wood frame full-lite units. The ornamental tin facing of the second floor was repaired and the entire facade was painted.

The building has undergone remodelling since its construction on several occasions:

- in or about 1913, for conversion from commercial retail and offices into a silent movie theatre.
- in 1932, for conversion back to retail space; the ornamental tinwork remained on the facade. The interior was radically altered by filling in the open ceiling beyond the balcony and within the two-story lobby to create a lower ceiling for the first floor spaces.
- in or about 1945 and 1970, for retail operations modernizing; the roof structure was reinforced and the skylight in the second floor covered over with a new beam. The first floor facade was altered and precast aggregate panels, aluminum storefront entrances and a flat metal awning were installed.
- in 1992, to restore the historic 1898 period appearance to the facade and to remodel the vacant upper floor into office space.

[] See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance 1899-1931	Significant Dates n/a
COMMERCE	Cultural Affiliation n/a	
Significant Person R.M. Cobban	Architect/Builder unknown	

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Historical Contexts:

The building's location on the northern thirty feet of lots 11-14 of Block "B" of the Higgins Addition ties that property to the southern one-hundred feet of property, which became the site of what was known as the "Higgins Block." The Sanborn Fire Map of 1888 noted that excavation was being made for the 2 or 3 story brick building "100'x 90' to be built in Spring 1889." This corner building, completed in 1889, would become the C.P. Higgins Western Bank on the southern end and D.J. Hennessy Mercantile Company on the north, and collectively be labeled the "Higgins Block." The construction of the Higgins Block was part of a plan to locate a new central business district between the original commercial townsite two blocks to the south, and the businesses appearing near the Northern Pacific Railroad depot north and west of the proposed location. As the Higgins Block attracted both commercial customers and enticed other business to build on the remaining lots of Block "B," the area began to be referred to as the "Golden Block," in reference to its commercial success.

A one-story frame building described as "Temporary," appears on the northern thirteen (13) feet of the northern thirty (30) feet of Block "B" on the 1889 Sanborn Map. This building remains labeled "Temporary" on the 1890 Sanborn Map, but disappears by the 1891 Sanborn Map. No building appears on the 1893 map, however, by the next Sanborn available (1902), the present two-story frame building appears with an address of 212 Higgins and the label, "Offices" imposed upon it. It shared a "party wall" with the Higgins Block building to the south. A photo of Higgins Avenue published in 1899, shows a single-story building adjacent to the Higgins Block.

The 1901-02 Polk Directory for the City of Missoula lists several business as being located at 212 Higgins, including "Cobban Realty Company, R.M. Cobban, President; E.B. Howell, Vice-President; A.E. Pound, Secretary and Treasurer; Real Estate and Mines;" "The Butte Miner, Charles Morton Representative;" "C.W. Chattin & Co, stationers, Charles W. Chattin, manager;" and, "William Dyson, Real Estate and Insurance Agent." Of those listed, both Dyson and Cobban were significantly important in the expansion of the boundaries of Missoula through the development of subdivisions bordering the city limits during the turn-of-the-century era.

9. Major Bibliographical References

BOOKS AND PUBLISHED PAMPHLETS

- A Preliminary Index to Biographies in Montana Subscription Histories and Other Selected Works. Helena: Montana Historical Society Library, 1983.
Rainbolt, Jo. Missoula Valley History. Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1991.
Toole, John H. Men, Money and Power. Missoula: First Interstate Bank, 1986.
Wagner, Charles J. Historic and Scenic Missoula and Ravalli Counties: Souvenir Addition of the National Irrigation Congress. Missoula: 1899.

ARTICLES

- Woody, Frank. "A Sketch of the Early History of Western Montana." Montana Historical Society Contributors, Vol. 2, pp. 88-106. 1896.

See continuation sheet

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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property

UTM References

A)	12	272880	5189006	B)			
C	Zone	Easting	Northing	D)	Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet

Located in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 22, T13N, R19W.

Verbal Boundary Description

North 30 feet of Lots 11-14, Block B, CP Higgins Addition, City of Missoula

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Bluebird Building are within the legal description of the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James R. McDonald
organization James R. McDonald Architects
street & number 224 North Higgins
city or town Missoula

date 2 April 1996
telephone (406) 721-5643
state Montana zip code 59802

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The purchase of the Higgins Block properties in 1899, including the north thirty feet of the lots, which by then was occupied by a single-story building at 212 Higgins, from the Higgins estate by R.M. Cobban and Samuel Dinsmore for "a sum of \$50,000," was verified by the abstract and filing records at the Missoula County Clerk and Recorder's Office. There was some controversy surrounding the purchase of the Higgins Block which connected Cobban and Dinsmore to Senator William A. Clark of Butte mining fame who was seeking to expand his interests in the Missoula area. The purchase price, while on the surface much less than the property was worth -- the Higgins building had reportedly cost \$125,000 to construct in 1889 -- can most likely be attributed to the difficult financial situation that faced the heirs of Missoula's founder, C.P. Higgins. Four years after the "Higgins Bank" opened, (C.P. Higgins died before its completion), the bank, operated by C.P.'s sons, Frank and George Higgins, closed its doors, creating a run on other banks in Missoula. The Higgins estate never recovered, and much of the property became heavily-laden with back taxes. The nation-wide economic depression of 1893, the year of the Higgins Bank closure, contributed to a general business slow-down in Missoula which also contributed to the Higgins family's financial woes.

The speculation of "copper king" and senator W.A. Clark's involvement in the purchase of the Higgins Block points to the interest that Missoula residents had in the senator's business activities and potential Missoula investment. Though no legal documentation can be found to tie Clark to the purchase of the Higgins Block by Cobban and Dinsmore, it is interesting that one of Clark's newspapers, *The Butte Miner*, set up an office in the building at 212 North Higgins shortly after the sale.

William Dyson, born in Newburgh, New York in 1853, moved to Missoula with his wife, Grace, in January of 1890. Having been employed by the Northern Pacific Railroad in Minneapolis, Minnesota, prior to coming to Missoula, Dyson continued his association with that employer, working as a conductor until he started his real estate and insurance business in 1902. He continued that business in Missoula until the time of his death in 1920. Dyson also became involved in Missoula's social justice system, serving as Justice of the Peace and running for re-election as a candidate for the Republican Party at the time of his death. His wife, Grace, not only established precedent by taking over his real estate business, but also by serving out his term as Justice of the Peace, becoming the first woman to hold that position in Missoula's history.

If the Dysons were notable players in Missoula's development, R.M. Cobban, the other real estate principal and co-owner of the building at 212 Higgins, was even more influential in determining the eventual make-up of the city. He and his partner, Samuel Dinsmore, established the subdivisions of Orchard Homes, Cobban Addition and Dinsmore Addition and Park Addition. All but Park Addition, which was located near the Rattlesnake area northeast of the original townsite, were situated to the southwest of the city. Both Cobban's and Dinsmore's reputations as business leaders had become firmly established throughout western Montana by the first decade of the twentieth century.

R. M. Cobban, like W.A. Clark and Samuel Dinsmore, represented the Butte-Missoula connection that would play a dominant role in the establishment of the office building at 212 Higgins. Cobban, born at Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin in 1859, joined his father in the lumber mill business, first at Chippewa Falls, and later at Eau Claire. In 1880 he came to west to Butte and constructed a planing mill. By August of 1883, the mill was incorporated, taking on the name of Montana Lumber and Produce Company, with Cobban acting as foreman. The following January he sold the mill and began his career in the real estate and insurance business. As 1889 drew to a close, Cobban expanded his business horizons west, joining with J R. B. Coon, also of Butte, in organizing a real estate office in the Schilling Block of Missoula. R.B. Cobban moved swiftly to establish himself on the Missoula business scene. On August 11, 1890, along with Charles Morton and A.H. Barret, he received a franchise from the City of Missoula to manufacture gas and pipes under the name of the Missoula Gas Light and Coke Company. The contract stipulated that the company would be required upon request by the city council, to furnish lights for the city on all but moonlit nights.

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In October of 1890, Cobban purchased 7/10 interest in the Morton coal claim of 160 acres. The following month Cobban, Charles Morton, Alfred E. Driggs, Cyrus F. Chapin and Charles Williams incorporated their holdings into the Missoula Coal and Fire Clay Company.

Though Cobban began to expand into energy-related businesses, land acquisition and development remained his primary area of interest. The *Missoula Gazette*, which continued to refer to his real estate firm as "Cobban and Company of Butte," reported on December 18, 1890, that A.E. Driggs of that company was handling a new Missoula subdivision named the Park Addition and that plans would be released in the spring. Even before that time, Cobban and Company in consort with Gilbert, Raymond and Wylie, had purchased an additional 120 acres adjacent to the Park Addition to the north of the city proper. The Cobban Company acquired the land from H.C. Hollenbeck for \$12,000.

Though R.M. Cobban had become a major player on the Missoula real estate scene, Butte would remain his home for some time as he continued to maintain offices there. While land development opportunities seem to abound in Missoula, Butte and the presence of his powerful relative, William F. Cobban, prevented R.M. from making a clean break from Butte to Missoula until 1898. When he did finally move, his Missoula residence became a stately Queen-Anne style house in a rural section just north of the city; an area that had been subdivided by Cobban's company to become Park Addition of Missoula. William F. Cobban, R.M. Cobban's wealthy relative, arrived in Montana in 1881, and enriched himself from the Butte real estate market through shrewd business transactions such as the purchase of the Moonlight Mine for \$9,000 in 1890. Six years later the mine sold for \$6,000,000 and eventually became one of Amalgamated Copper Company's largest properties in Butte.

R.M. Cobban's business connection with another former Butte resident, Samuel Dinsmore, would gain him a place among the most influential of Missoula's developers. At the turn-of-the-century, Cobban and Dinsmore began buying up land southwest of Missoula in preparation of subdividing some four to five square miles into five acre lots under the name of Orchard Homes.

Samuel Dinsmore was born at Fort Madison, Lee County, Iowa, on June 26, 1867. He attended Burlington College, eventually moving to Salt Lake City where he entered the real estate business. In the process, he acquired considerable property in the Salt Lake City area. In 1894 he moved to Butte, assuming a position as state manager of the Etna Savings & Loan Company.

Dinsmore's interests, however, soon turned to land acquisition, fruit growing, and poultry farming near Florence, Montana. The Dinsmore Poultry Farm, on which he also planted orchards, became one of the largest poultry operations in the state. He owned mining properties near Clinton and at the head of the Bitterroot river, and in 1905, began construction of a seventy-two mile long irrigation ditch from Lake Como across to the east benches of the Bitterroot Valley. His company, Dinsmore Irrigation and Development completed the massive project the following year. However, it was his promotion of the fledgling Montana fruit growing industry that established his reputation throughout the region. In conjunction with this, he served as president of the Fruit-growers Union of Montana.

Dinsmore's partnership with R.B. Cobban made for a powerful team that would leave its mark on the Missoula landscape, with two additions bearing the names of the two pioneer businessmen, and a park being named for Cobban. In May of 1922, Mrs. Thomas Greenough, widow of the Missoula lumber baron, sold Cobban Park with 16 furnished cabins to the Missoula Chamber of Commerce for a tourist auto park. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment for the two developers, however, was the extensive subdivision known as Orchard Square.

In addition to its tremendous size and uniqueness as a combination residential and fruit orchard development, Orchard Homes also became historically important in that it was the scene of the formation of the Orchard Homes Country Life Club, which is today reputed to be the last active Country Life Club in the United States.

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Organized on January 17, 1912, by twenty women of Orchard Homes, the club followed President Theodore Roosevelt's admonition of 1911 to form such clubs to provide rural residents a community gathering place. At the June 1, 1912 meeting, Missoula's Orchard Homes Country Life Club affiliated with the state and national federations and in 1922, it joined the County Federation. Throughout the years, the Country Life Club has assisted with a variety of community-related social causes, including, among other projects, hot lunches, garden contests, maintenance of school grounds, art shows, and scholarships and other financial aid for high school girls. In the years following World War I, the Country Life Club purchased land and established a community park.

R.B. Cobban and Samuel Dinsmore continued their connection with the Higgins Block and the building at 212 North Higgins for a number of years into the Twentieth Century. The Missoula Polk City Directory shows that R.B. Cobban retained his offices in the building at 212 Higgins from 1901-02 until 1908. In September of 1900, Samuel Dinsmore sold his half interest in the property at that address and considerable other property to R. B. Cobban for a sum of \$40,000. The following year, Dinsmore and Fayette Harrington of Butte purchased the Higgins Block from Cobban and his wife, Alice for the sum of \$70,000.

On February 6, 1902, Harrington and Dinsmore sold "The North Thirty (30) feet" of that same property, together with the "party wall the north wall of the building immediately adjoining the premises above described on the south, known as the 'Higgins' Block," to Leona B. Forbis for the sum of \$10,000. From that point on, the "North thirty feet " was recognized as a separate legal entity from the Higgins Block.

Leona Forbis was the wife of noted architect, Charles Forbis, who is recognized as the leading player in Missoula's second architectural dynasty (the first being A.J. Gibson, Ole Bakke and H.E. Kirkemo), of Forbis and John Kennedy. Forbis and Kennedy were responsible for designing a considerable number of Missoula residences.

The building and property at 212 Higgins, which changed to its present address of 220-224 Higgins prior to 1922, remained in the Forbis family until 1961, when it was purchased by John and Doris Minckler. The Minckler's sold the property the following year to Eddy and June Dussault. Eddy Dussault was a well-known figure in Missoula government. During his distinguished career, he served at various times as a judge, a senator and Missoula County Attorney.

Various businesses occupied the building over the years, including Philips & Daniels Haberdashers in 1911, and a cigar shop and card store in 1912. That same year, Tremont Rooms was listed at 212 1/2 Higgins. In 1913, the building was transformed into a theater, first called the "Empress Theatre," which by 1925 had been renamed the "Bluebird Theatre." Four years later its name changed again when it became "The Strand" in 1929. The building's last year of use as a theater was 1931, when the "Fox-Strand Theater" occupied the site.

From 1932 to the present, a number of businesses existed at 220-244 Higgins. These included Brown Bilt Shoe Store (1932-34); Haines Style Shop (Womens Clothing) and Haines Shoe Store (1936-38); Keith A. Steeve (Shoes) and Buttreys Womens Shop (1938-1961); the Kiddie Shop (1962-1991) and Coyotees Custom Tee-Shirts (1991-) and Mom & Me (1992-1995) and Rattlesnake Dry Goods (1995-). The upper floor has been renovated to serve as the office of James R. McDonald, Architects PC.

The commercial building at 220-224 North Higgins possesses sufficient integrity of setting and location as an integral part of the Higgins Block development, even sharing a "party wall" with that building. Recent restoration of the building has returned the design integrity to that of the turn-of-the-century period, the era of its original construction. As a result, it is now visually identifiable with that historic commercial context and property type. The embossed tin facade --recently highlighted -- dates back to the early 1900's.

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The historical importance of the original owner-occupant, R.M. Cobban and his partner, Samuel Dinsmore, of the Higgins Block, in the commercial growth of Missoula during the boom period of 1898-1917, and their leadership in establishing and promoting the Cobban Orchard Homes, Park and Cobban Camp Sites subdivisions would support the addition of this property at 220-224 North Higgins to the "Historic Resources in Missoula, Montana, 1864-1940" Multiple Property National Register of Historic Places listing of April, 1991. The property at 220-224 North Higgins fits into and expands upon Historic Context #1 (The Commercial Development in Missoula, Montana 1864-1940) under the subsection "The Construction Era, 1880-1920," with the happenings surrounding the Higgins Block, the activities of Cobban and Dinsmore, and William Dyson, as well as the connections with W.A. Clark and the Butte business interests of William F. Cobban.

The property also adds to "Historic Context 2. Commercial Historic Architecture in Missoula, Montana, 1880-1940." Its elaborate, highly decorative tin facade, pilaster-bordered double-hung windows, and bracketed cornice, evoke a feeling of that historic commercial era, giving the building the appearance that it is an integral part of the Higgins Block, which shares its party wall to the south.

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NEWSPAPERS AND NEWSPAPER SPECIAL EDITIONS

The Democrat-Messenger (Missoula)

The Evening Republican (Missoula)

PUBLIC RECORDS

Archival

A.J. Gibson scrapbook, K.Ross Toole Archives, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

R.M. Cobban letters. Small Collection #169, K. Ross Toole Archives, University of Montana. Missoula, Montana