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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16).

1. Name of Property

historic name Ford, Lee M., House other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 401 4th Ave. North city, town Great Falls state Montana code MT county Cascade code 013 zip code 59401

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private (checked), public-local, public-State, public-Federal. Category of Property: building(s) (checked), district, site, structure, object. Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 4, Noncontributing buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a. Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 (checked) does not meet the National Register criteria. Signature of certifying official: [Signature] Date: June 27, 1990. State or Federal agency and bureau: MT SHPO

In my opinion, the property meets (unchecked) 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. (checked) See continuation sheet.
determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain):

Entered in the National Register [Signature] 8/10/90

Signature of the Keeper [Signature] Date of Action

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6. Function or Use
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Historic: **single dwelling**

Current : **single dwelling**
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7. Description
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Architectural Classification: **Arts and Crafts, Prairie School**

Materials: foundation: **stone, sandstone** roof: **wood shingle**
 walls: **sandstone** other: **n/a**
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Describe present and historic physical appearance. (See continuation sheet.)

The Lee M. Ford house is a massive, two-and-one-half-story dignified stone residence, set on a high foundation, and featuring a pyramidal hip roof with wide eaves, and deep wrap-around porch. The house exhibits strong influence of the Arts and Crafts style and Prairie School, and the overall design is very well proportioned and pleasing while possessing great strength. Located at the corner of 4th St. and 4th Ave. North, the Ford House is a major historic component of the north side residential neighborhood in Great Falls, Montana.

The foundation and walls are constructed of solid, carefully squared, pinkish-grey sandstone, which was quarried south of Great Falls. The cut stone has a rough finish, and is laid in alternating layers of 8 1/2- and 12-inch high stones. The mortar joints are thin and finished with great perfection with a raised bead. The walls above the second floor windows are topped with a wide wooden frieze, above which sawn wood corbels support a wide, overhanging eaves that run continuous around the house. The wood shingled roof flares slightly near the eaves, which enclose a gutter. Matching hipped roof dormers with similar, scaled-down eave treatment project from the main roof and light the attic space. The southern bay features a gable roof with stucco infill and mock half-timber framing on the gable end. A tall stone chimney rises on the west elevation.

The massive porch with a rounded corner surrounds the west and part of the south elevations. Its square columns are fashioned of cut stone, with carved stone capitals, and the railing is made of heavy stone blocks laid horizontally. The porch is capped by a concave, flared wood shingle roof above a wide eave, matching that on the main roof. The concave edge of the porch roof encloses a large second floor balcony roofed with terneplate with soldered seams.

On the east side of the house, two massive stone columns matching those of the porch support a porte cochere. The wide eaves of the porte cochere are topped by a nearly-flat terneplate roof. An east entrance to the house is provided with a high stone step to make it easy to disembark from a carriage or, in this case, the high running board of an early automobile.

The windows are oversize, one-over-one double hung units with flat stone arches with keystones on the main level. The main south-facing windows on the first floor are bay windows, inset in the thickness of the stone wall, with beveled and leaded glass set in the upper sash. The dormer

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windows of the attic level have casement sash with leaded glass in a diamond design.

The main entrance to the Ford House is from the 4th Avenue North to the south, then up a flight of stone steps and under the deep porch. An oak and copper screen door and oak front door with a large beveled glass under a beveled and leaded glass transom lead to a vestibule, and a similar but more elaborate interior door leads to the reception hall. All the woodwork in the principal rooms is magnificently grained quarter-sawn oak, with a rich, dark brown finish. From the main reception hall the stair leads up three steps to a beveled mirrored door, through which the kitchen area is accessed. Turning to the right, the stairs ascend behind a grill of oak spindles. An unusual wainscoting with a swooping cap runs up the wall side of the stairs. The hall is paneled six feet high with wide oak boards alternating with reed and bead molding, capped with a plate rail. The ceiling features massive oak beams. To the right and front, through a pair of oak sliding doors, is the "music room." It has an elaborate molded plaster cornice. Beneath the stairs an almost secret sliding door that blends well into the wall paneling opens into the "den."

To the left from the reception hall through an opening flanked by oak Doric columns is the library. It has a massive stone fireplace and six-foot high oak built-in bookcases surrounding the room, which is paneled to the beamed ceiling. A pair of unique oak-framed sliding doors with large beveled, leaded glass lights lead to the dining room. The walls above a six-foot oak wainscoting and plate rail are covered with the original tapestry and crowned with a plaster cornice. All door panels are surrounded with egg and dart molding, and the hardware is beautifully sculptured cast brass.

From the dining room a butler's pantry with beveled, leaded glass doors, leads to the kitchen. A food pantry, back porch with its original oak ice box still in place, and back hall occupy the rest of the first floor.

The second floor includes the master bedroom suite, which is complete with a sitting room with fireplace, a separate bath, and huge walk-in closet; three other bedrooms, ample closets, linen closet, and main bath with separate water closet, and a generous hall. The fir doors are grained as mahogany, while the other elaborate woodwork was apparently originally painted. Fine brass hardware accents the doors, with matching window lifts, etc. Here, as throughout the house, are the beautiful original light fixtures. The floors on the main and second levels are oak.

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A wide, open stairway leads to the third floor, which is occupied by a large room called the "attic," but which, in fact, is a finished space with a stained glass billiard table light hanging in the center. A pleasant playroom occupies the south gable, and a maid's room is found in the north dormer.

The basement is reached by a wide, curving staircase from the back hall, and from an outside "cellar" door with sloping cover. There is a hall, a large well-lighted laundry room with three built-in tubs, a workshop, fruit room, toilet, furnace room, coal bin, and bedroom for the man tending the furnace. Even here ceilings and most walls are neatly plastered, and the fir woodwork is of high quality.

An interesting feature on the main stairs at the landing level consists of a glass door with beveled side lights. Well acquainted with older houses heated by individual stoves, the Ford family knew that if the hall was not separated from the living rooms, the heat would escape up the stairs. While it was not necessary to close off the hall in the new age of hot water heat in 1908, they had apparently still insisted on this feature, which does its job without detracting from the effect of the open stairs.

The mechanical systems of the house are worthy of note because they represent the latest innovations of the 1908 period and remain preserved to the present day as something of a museum of technology in themselves. The original coal-fired boiler, converted in the 1950s to natural gas, is still in use, as are the hot water radiators. They work perfectly. Ample circuits for electric lights were provided by the original wiring, which is concealed knob and tube. Besides the beautiful original light fixtures, many of which are works of art in themselves, the original push-button switches, rotary switches, and antiquated plug-ins are still in use (supplemented by a number of floor and wall plugs added later and wired in conduit, visible only in the basement). There is also the convenience of a laundry chute, an "inside telephone" (the modern 1908 replacement for speaking tubes), and, of course, an annunciator. The original copper window screens are still on many windows and others are carefully stored.

Lee Ford liked to drive his own car, and in 1909 added a garage to the property. It is built of high-fired, dark red solid brick on a sandstone foundation. There are large, triple six-over-one and ten-over-one double-hung windows on the east, north, and west, and a sliding door on the south. A pyramidal roof has elaborate curvilinear parapet walls facing all four directions. Except for the north, each parapet features a large round window. There are corbels beneath the eaves which project at the corners. Inside finish is bare brick. An interesting interior feature is the pit used to work on the car and a brass gasoline pump. The garage makes a

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strong contribution to the historic architectural significance of the
property.

A wood frame pigeon house, part one-story and part story-and-one-half, runs across most of the rest of the back of lot line. It has a gable roof and full clerestory windows oriented toward the south. Lee Ford raised both racing and homing pigeons, and this odd building was erected during the 1910s to accommodate them.

There is also a small frame building with a gable roof and drop siding that was built for a playhouse for Rachel Sue about 1912. The playhouse measures approximately 6' x 10' and has a gable roof. The exterior walls are covered with beveled siding. Windows located on the east, north and west elevations are small single lights.

The original fences are still on the property. A fence of vertical four-inch v-grooved cedar about six feet high encloses most of the back yard, while part of this fence is made of lattice. Clothes washed in the basement were carried up the outside stairs and hung inside the back yard out of sight of the neighbors. Trees and bushes in the yard were gathered by the Ford family on motor outings and now add greatly to the landscaping of the house. Other than these plantings, which have improved the property greatly over its first bare appearance, the house and lot look exactly as it did during the 1910s.

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8. Statement of Significance
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: **local**

Applicable National Register Criteria: **C**

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : **n/a**

Areas of Significance: **Architecture**

Period of Significance: **1908-1915**

Significant Dates: **1908**

Significant Person(s): **n/a**

Cultural Affiliation: **n/a**

Architect/Builder: **Henry N. Black (architect); C.O. Jarl (builder)**

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. (See continuation sheet.)
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The outstanding architecture of the Lee M. Ford house has attracted attention in Great Falls since its construction in 1908. Considering the design, fine craftsmanship, and use of now-rarely employed building materials, it is one of the most significant historic residences in the city today. Elements of the Arts and Crafts and Prairie styling were combined by Great Falls architect H.N. Black to achieve an impressive statement of family wealth and prestige. The distinctive character-defining features of the house include the use of locally quarried rusticated sandstone, a gently-sloped hipped roof with wide overhanging eaves supported by decorative brackets, and a low, deep porch with massive stone piers that wraps around the two primary facades.

The house was built as a wedding gift from Robert S. Ford, pioneer cattle man and principal organizer of the Great Falls National Bank, to his son Lee. The house not only illustrates the popular tastes of the first decade of the 20th Century but also reflects the philosophy of its original owner, Lee M. Ford, who succeeded his father as president of the bank in 1913 and continued in that position until 1950. Lee Ford believed that one should invest only in the finest materials and quality craftsmanship at the outset so as to avoid the need to purchase replacements in the future. As a result of such thinking, the house stands today essentially unaltered in its appearance and possesses the remarkable distinction of having in place the functional mechanical systems that were installed at the time of construction.

Background History

The families associated with the owners of the Lee M. Ford House have been important in the development of the Cascade County region and especially Great Falls. Robert S. Ford was a pioneer in the cattle industry in Montana, first arriving in the territory in 1863, and bringing the first large herd of cattle to the Sun River area in 1870. He furnished beef to Fort Shaw, Fort McLeod, Canada, and Indian tribes. In 1873, he established his ranch at Sun River and, in 1886, entered the banking business. In 1891, he founded the Great Falls National Bank.

Robert Ford's son Lee was born on his ranch at Sun River April 1, 1883. Educated in Great Falls and at St. Paul's Academy in Concord, New Hampshire,

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Lee was student of natural history, the Indians and Montana history. He served on the board of the Montana Historical Society for many years as well as in many other community-related positions that helped shape Great Falls' future.

Lee M. Ford was married in 1906 to Rachel Mary Couch, the daughter of Capt. Thomas Couch, a mining engineer. Born in Cornwall, England, in 1843, Capt. Couch came to America at age 20 and was self-educated in mining. After working in California, Nevada and Utah, he came to Butte where he put together a group of mines which became the Boston and Montana Copper and Silver Mining Company. Largely on his advice, the Boston and Montana located their new smelter at Great Falls in 1889. The B&M, later the purchased by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, was the major industry in Great Falls for many years.

Capt. Couch's oldest son, Thomas Jr., married Gwendolyn Black, the daughter of Henry N. Black, the architect of the Lee Ford house. The residence is a masterpiece of his design, embodying not only excellent proportions, a livable plan, and perfection in craftsmanship and construction, but also reflecting the personal ideas of Mr. and Mrs. Ford and the tastes of the period. Henry N. Black was accorded the relationship of a beloved uncle and was a close member of the family. Born in Malden, Massachusetts on August 1, 1854, H.N. Black studied and practiced architecture in the Boston area before coming to Montana in 1895 as a competitor for the design for the State capitol. He designed many buildings in Anaconda, and several major edifices in Great Falls, including the numerous schools, commercial blocks, churches, and residences, such as Thomas Couch Jr. House at 1200 4th Avenue North. Black's most important commission in Great Falls was the Cascade County Courthouse (1901).

Lee and Rachel Ford had one child, Rachel Sue, born September 12, 1907. On February 23, 1933, she married Charles A. Bovey, whose Minneapolis family was involved with the Washburn Crosby Company, the makers of Gold Medal Flour. Charlie Bovey operated a wheat ranch east of Great Falls. In the 1930s he and Sue became very concerned about the rapid loss of Montana's historic buildings. To save a few, he gathered a number of buildings inside a large barn at the Great Falls Fairgrounds, calling his full scale street museum "Old Town." In 1944, he and Sue founded the Historic Landmark Society of Montana to preserve historic structures. In 1945, the Boveys began preservation of Virginia City, an historic placer mining town and capital of Montana Territory during the early gold-rush years (1863-1875). The Boveys also began collecting historic buildings and moving them to a location near Virginia City in 1959 for use as a tourist attraction. C.A. Bovey served in the Montana House of Representatives in 1943 and 1945, and in the Senate from 1947 to 1965. Both he and Sue served on the board of the Montana Historical Society.

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Sue Bovey's mother occupied the home until her death, and her daughter made very few changes since. Except for slight remodeling of the kitchen and bathrooms, the house remains unchanged from when it was built. Remarkably, even the fine interior decorations have been little changed in over 80 years.

9. Major Bibliographical References

- Miller, Joaquin, An Illustrated History of the State of Montana, Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1894, p. 34.
- Anonymous, Progressive Men of the State of Montana. Chicago: A.W. Bowen & Co., no date, p.p. 144, 999.
- Sanders, H.F., A History of Montana, Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1913, pp. 954, 1,260.
- Stout, T., Montana, Its Story and Biography, Chicago: American Historical Society, 1921, pp. II - 535, 536, 498, 500.
- Burlingame, M.G., and Toole, K.R., A History of Montana, New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1957, pp. III - 11, 12.

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:

Cascade County Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than 1 acre

UTM References

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Block 191, lots 13 and 14, original townsite of Great Falls, Montana.

Northeast corner of the intersection of 4th Avenue North and 4th Street North, Great Falls, Montana.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The site includes those lots included in the yard of the house since it was built in 1908.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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organization _____ date March 24, 1990
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