

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received SEP 22 1986
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

NOV 6 1986

1. Name

historic Paxson, Edgar, House

and or common Paxson House

2. Location

street & number 611 Stephens Avenue

N/A not for publication

city, town Missoula

N/A vicinity of

state Montana

code 030

county Missoula

code 063

3. Classification

| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input type="checkbox"/> public | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> both | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site | Public Acquisition | Accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | <input type="checkbox"/> in process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial |
| | N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> no | <input type="checkbox"/> military |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> museum |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> park |
| | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> religious |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

4. Owner of Property

name Jack and Barbara Bishop

street & number 611 Stephens Avenue

city, town Missoula

N/A vicinity of

state Montana

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Missoula County Courthouse

street & number 200 W. Broadway

city, town Missoula

state Montana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town

state

7. Description

| | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|-----------------|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input type="checkbox"/> moved | date <u>N/A</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Edgar S. Paxson House is a 1 1/2 story, wood frame, vernacular building located in the central part of Missoula. As originally constructed in 1890, the house was a one story, five room, wood frame building. Between 1912-1919 Edgar Paxson altered the rectangular-shaped building by adding a half story, three dormers, and modifying the rear of the house to incorporate a second story gable atop a hip roofed addition. In 1932, a son of Paxson made a few minor alterations to the interior.

The main (southeast) facade of the house features a central door flanked on each side by a 1/1 double hung window with colored glass panels in the upper sash, and a large cottage window with two fixed lights. Attached to the main block is a one story, pedimented, hipped porch supported by six square, wooden posts. Small brackets enhance the porch along the frieze. Parts of the original porch, which had a closed rail, turned posts and decorative trim along the base, were replaced in 1978. The southwest elevation has a small, single pane fixed sash and a three-sided, square bay window with three fixed windows with transoms. A one story, wood frame, lean-to addition with two small, square fixed windows flanking an entrance is attached to the west corner of the building. A one story, wood frame, hip roofed addition with one 1/1 double hung and two single light fixed windows wraps around the north and northwest (rear) sides. Access to the basement is gained by an exterior stair at the back of the house. The main block of the northeast elevation features two 1/1 double hung windows, each with diamond-patterned, leaded glass upper sashes. A single shouldered brick chimney is attached to the east corner of the house. The main block and additions to the building are sheathed with beveled lapped siding and corner boards. Brackets decorate the frieze of the original section of the house. Square butted wooden shingles cover each of the three pedimented, gable dormers. The southwest- and northeast-facing dormers have paired 1/1 double hung windows, while the larger dormer to the southeast (front) has tripled, 1/1 double hung sashes. The entire building rests on a rubblestone foundation which is reinforced by concrete at the rear.

Interior walls of the kitchen, dining room and study are wainscoted, while each of the latter two rooms have fireplaces. The entire house has ten foot ceilings and oak floors covered with carpeting.

A one story, gable roofed garage covered with beveled lapped siding is located northwest of the house, and is included as a contributing feature in the property boundary. A 1 1/2 story, wood frame art studio formerly stood west of the house, but was removed in ca.1943 due to its deteriorated condition.

8. Significance

| Period | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> law | <input type="checkbox"/> science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> economics | <input type="checkbox"/> literature | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input type="checkbox"/> theater |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> invention | association with Edgar Paxson | |

Specific dates 1890, 1912-1919 **Builder/Architect** Edgar Paxson, builder of 1912-19 addition

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The E.S. Paxson House is significant for its association with the well known Western artist Edgar S. Paxson, who lived in the residence at 611 Stephens from 1906 until his death in 1919. With the loss of Paxson's former residence in Butte and art studio adjacent to 611 Stephens, the Edgar Paxson House is the only remaining building that serves as a reminder of Paxson's career as an artist.

Edgar Paxson was born in western New York in 1852. Although he showed promise as an artist in New York, Paxson did not commit to working professionally as a painter until he was 24. He came to Montana Territory in 1877, living first in Deer Lodge and working as a lumberman, hunting guide, scout and artist. In ca.1880 Paxson moved with his family to a small house at 30 E. Woolman in Butte (no longer extant) where he established an art studio and sign shop. There Paxson earned a living painting signs for businesses and scenes for several theaters, music halls and opera houses. The Renshaw Opera House and Butte Grand Theater, both in Butte, the McDonald Opera House in Philipsburg, and other theaters in Anaconda, Bozeman, Deer Lodge, Helena and Livingston all had interior scenes illustrated by Paxson.

Paxson did not have any formal training in art as a youth in rural New York and living in Montana Territory similarly provided no opportunity for guidance in developing his skills or associating with other artists. Based on an interview with the artist, a 1902 article in Outdoor Life quoted Paxson as saying he learned to paint by "absorbing technique through keen observation." Yet Paxson's only opportunities to view works by respected artists were on brief trips to galleries in Buffalo, New York, California and Chicago. Apparently Paxson was impressed by the work of Albert Bierstadt, particularly his depiction of Indians hunting buffalo on a wide plain in "Laramie Peak." Paxson later wrote in his diary that the painting "still lingers in my memory."

In 1876, while Paxson worked as a freight wagon driver in Wyoming, General George Custer and his Seventh Cavalry were killed by the combined Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Inspired by what he considered to be fictitious and inaccurate accounts of the battle, Paxson began collecting information for his largest work ever, "Custer's Last Stand." In an effort to achieve historical accuracy for the painting, Paxson interviewed 96 officers and soldiers who were close to the battle, as well as Indian participants including Cheyenne leader Two Moon, who went to the battlefield with him to describe the fight. Paxson also collected photographs of many of those Indians and soldiers in the battle, and studied artifacts from other Indian wars. In reference to his painting, Paxson was quoted as saying that, "In all this time I never lost view of my object and for twenty years gathered data, sifted and re-sifted it, conversed with participants on either side, visited the scene and became as familiar with ground and circumstance as with my own home."

9. Major Bibliographical References

Paxson, William Edgar, Jr., E.S. Paxson Frontier Artist, Pruett Publishing Co., Boulder, CO., 1984.

Toole, K. Ross, "E.S. Paxson: Neglected Artist of the West." Montana Magazine of History, (Spring, 1954), pp. 26-41.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than one

Quadrangle name Missoula, MT.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

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| Zone | | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | |

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 21 and 22, Block 42, South Missoula Addition to the City of Missoula, Montana.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

| state | N/A | code | county | code |
|-------|-----|------|--------|------|
| | | | | |

| state | code | county | code |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| | | | |

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jack and Barbara Bishop, edited by Michael Koop, Montana SHPO

organization _____ date August, 1986

street & number 611 Stephens Avenue telephone (406) 728-0129

city or town Missoula state Montana

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

maucello

Sheffy

PK

title

SH PO

date

Sept. 19, 1986

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

William B. Bushong

date

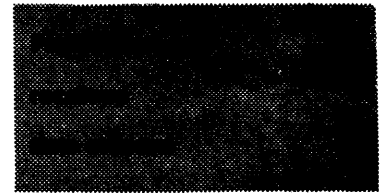
11/6/86

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
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Continuation sheet

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During the 1890s Paxson increasingly devoted time to easel paintings. Beginning about 1897, articles in local newspapers mentioned Paxson's artwork depicting Western subjects, and by 1898 his nearly complete "Custer's Last Stand" also attracted local public attention. After briefly serving in the Spanish-American War, Paxson returned to Montana at the end of 1898 committed to small easel works and finishing the Custer painting. Within a year, "Custer's Last Stand" was completed and ready for a tour of major Eastern cities. The massive documentary painting which was started eight years earlier measures 6'x 9' and contains nearly 200 figures from the battle. In 1899, a representative of Kleckner and Co. of New York City, one of the nation's largest art dealers at the time, requested several of Paxson's paintings to sell.

While Paxson is best known for his accurate portrayal of the Custer battle, the drama of frontier warfare was not the major focus of the bulk of his work. He wanted to show not only bravery in conflict, but also the independence, endurance, skill and harmony with nature that he had seen in Indians, mountain men and pioneers. In many of his paintings, subjects are shown at ease or engaged in everyday frontier activities. It is these subjects' noble bearing and the impressive landscapes around them that project the lofty image that Paxson desired. One of Paxson's most commonly painted subjects was the Indian, which he often depicted in a tranquil, harmonious setting. In February, 1905 the Fine Arts Journal commented on the artist's relationship with the Native Americans:

Being very gentle and kindly of manner, Mr. Paxson got along well with the Indians. He was ever a welcome guest among them. He learned their speech as well as their sign language, and made himself familiar with their manners and customs and always showed respect for the same, while the Indians themselves responded to the kindness of their pale-faced brother, who could use color so cleverly and in a manner unfamiliar to themselves; yet proved that he was no "squaw man." And so, while each day the artist established himself on a more friendly basis with the red man, the latter grew to like his overtures of comradeship, and finally sat without fear as a model for his easel paintings.

In 1900 Paxson began producing small Indian head portraits in watercolor. Art critics have suggested that these are perhaps his most important contribution to Western art. He painted several hundred over the next two decades. Measuring between 4"-18" high, the paintings vary from a few simple but expressive brush strokes to those exhibiting exquisite detailing. Each of these works is a distinctive representation of the hundreds of Indians Paxson had known, and each is a unique study in detail. Paxson also portrayed Indians in dramatic action scenes to show their skill and tenacity as hunters and horsemen. He painted many buffalo hunts in both oil and watercolor, always striving for complete accuracy. The Fine Arts Journal commented that, "Mr. Paxson's paintings are characterized by good composition, a knowledge of color and a keen sense of intelligence in its use, and by superior draftsmanship. His paintings tell of that which is fast becoming forgotten incidents of the past."

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In 1906, weary of the noisy, crime-ridden city life in Butte and frustrated with inadequate lighting conditions due to constant smoke from mine smelters, Paxson moved his family to 611 Stephens in Missoula. Situated at the time on the edge of the city, the residence was within easy walking distance for hunting and fishing, hobbies Paxson had enjoyed since youth. Using split logs from a nearby forest, Paxson enlarged an outbuilding behind his house, adding a fireplace and converting the building into an art studio. There he continued to produce oil and watercolor paintings, book illustrations, and occasionally gave art lessons. By 1914 he had painted two of his most notable works, the State Capitol and Missoula County Courthouse murals, in 1912 and 1914, respectively.

During the course of his artistic career, Edgar Paxson was dedicated to recording the essence and detail of the West he understood and appreciated. He painted harmonious wilderness scenes, dramatic action, and sensitive studies of the Indians he came to know so intimately. In the later years of his life, Paxson realized the need for providing surroundings where he could feel comfortable during his work. The house at 611 Stephens was deliberately chosen by Paxson for its remote location, and remodeled to suit his needs during the latter part and then conclusion of his career. Apart from his extant paintings, the Paxson House is the only vestige of Paxson's career remaining in the state. The building is in excellent condition and, except for the loss of integrity in the porch, stands today nearly exactly as it did when Paxson lived there during the first quarter of the twentieth century.