

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

104

1. Name of Property

historic name: Finney House

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: Corner of Main and California Streets

not for publication: n/a
vicinity: n/a

city/town: Nevada City

state: Montana code: MT county: Madison code: 057 zip code: 59755

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.

Mark Saunders / SHPO 1/8/2002
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau

(__ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

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

Eric Ball Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
Eric Ball 3/1/02

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public - State

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing Noncontributing

Category of Property: Buildings

 7 ___ building(s)

Number of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register: n/a

 1 ___ sites
 ___ structures
 ___ objects

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

 8 ___ TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions:

RECREATION & CULTURE/museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Other: Rustic

Materials:

foundation: stone
walls: wood
roof: wood

Narrative Description

The Finney House stands within the fenced enclosure encompassing Nevada City, Montana, a historic townsite which now includes more than 90 buildings -- a dozen original historic buildings, the rest moved period buildings which recreate the atmosphere of a historic 1860s gold camp. The Finney property is defined within Nevada City by a wooden fence that borders the yard and includes the buildings associated with the family historically. Within the fence lines, mature deciduous trees and shrubs shade the house and buildings, and grass sod covers the lawn.

The original cabin on the property dates to 1863 and the gold rush settlement of Nevada City. The following year, 1864, Frank Finney arrived in Alder Gulch and married Mary Bradfield. That year a larger log building with a second floor was built in front of the original cabin, providing more space for the family they began the year after Frank and Mary were married. In the 1870s, the family adopted several other log buildings when other town residents moved away. The buildings now associated with the property include the main house, six outbuildings and an abandoned well. They consist of what became the Finneys' summer kitchen, along with two other small log cabins and a well that were originally part of the Richards' property to the southeast. There are also two sheds and a privy that date to the Finney's residency. All contribute to the historic significance of the property.

The Finney House

The primary building and residence on this property is composed of three masses: at front, a one and a half-story gable-roofed log portion; at center, a one-story log cabin with a low-pitched roof; and at the rear, a stone root cellar. It is the center log cabin that is the original building dating to 1863. A single story, one room cabin measuring roughly 16'x18', it was built of hewn logs with dovetail notching. The low-pitched board roof is supported by three log purlins; a second board roof of slightly steeper pitch was added at a later date over this roof. As the residence was enlarged, this original cabin became the kitchen.

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The front part of the house, reportedly built in 1864, is of hewn logs with dovetail notched corners similar to the kitchen. The log walls are chinked with mortar and rise about two feet above the first floor ceiling. A fairly steep pitched roof framed with 2x4s and boards covers the front part of the house and provides space for a second floor. It is covered with wood shingles and the eaves of the gable are trimmed with simple decorative vergeboards. A simple shed porch with 4x4 posts and a rail of 1½ x 1½ square balusters spans the front of the house. The porch shelters a central doorway flanked with two windows. A window centered above the porch illuminates the second floor. The windows are 6-over-6 panes, and retain their original glass. The front only is clad with beveled siding, over the logs below the porch and in the gable above. An interesting feature of the south wall is the former location of a fireplace, later covered with spliced logs when the Finneys added a heating stove and removed the inefficient fireplace.

The interior of the front portion of the house consists of a large front room, a middle room, and small storage room on the first floor. An enclosed stairway rises from the storage room to two bedrooms upstairs. The entire front portion is lined with rare original muslin with layers of wallpaper intact. In the kitchen, the log walls are whitewashed.

The stone root cellar attached at the rear of the kitchen measures about 11'x12', and is one story in height, with a low-pitched board roof covered with metal roofing.

Summer Kitchen

Built ca. 1863, the Finney's summer kitchen is a miner's cabin that faces Main Street just northwest of the Finney House. The building was taken over by the Finney family after prior owners abandoned it. It is a single story, one room cabin constructed of hand-hewn logs. The logs are joined at the corners with crude dovetail notching, and the gaps between the logs are chinked with concrete. The low-pitched gable roof is covered with board and batten roofing (the outer boards are new). On the primary elevation, facing Main Street, there is a central doorway with a four-panel wood door, and west of the doorway, a double-hung, 6-over-6 window. At the rear, there is a 1x8 tongue and groove door, flanked by a fixed six-light window. On the interior, the summer kitchen has sawn board flooring. Log walls and the ceiling are finished with whitewash.

Along the eastern side of the kitchen, a shed-roofed addition extends along the length of the building and a short distance beyond. The addition was apparently a late 19th century addition and is clad with vertical boards on the front and with horizontal board and batten on the rear. Cladding along the east side is a combination of vertical boards, split face log and horizontal boards. A secondary rear door opens from this addition; the doorway is about four feet high and houses a 1x10 tongue and groove door.

Cabin 1

Built ca. 1863 according to Bovey Restorations records, this cabin is original to the site. It was constructed with unpeeled, sawn end logs and joined with saddle notching. The chinking is more recent and is reinforced with nailed log strips. The gable roof has a single ridgepole and 4 purlins, two layers of plank sheathing, and the south half retains sheet metal roofing. There is a vertical plank door on the east end of the building.

Cabin 2

According to Bovey Reconstruction records, this cabin is also an original site feature dating to ca. 1863. It is a hand-hewn log cabin with a broad, low gable roof. The gable roof is supported by a heavily massed ridgepole and 4 purlins,

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and has board sheathing covered with recycled tin can metal. The front gable end incorporates a cantilevered roof that projects to shelter the entrance. The primary entrance is on the south elevation; the door is a vertical board unit with a white porcelain knob. On the east side, the original window opening is now boarded over.

Woodshed

This shed stands at the rear of the Finney yard and likely dates to the latter 19th century. It is a pole shed with board and batten siding. The shed roof is sheathed with boards and covered with sheet metal. On the south side there is a board door. On the interior there is an earthen floor.

Chicken House

This shed appears to have been built by the Finney's during the late 19th century, and may have served as a chicken house. It is a pole frame structure with tongue and groove siding, reinforced with corner boards. The door is a wooden 5-panel unit and opens to a board stoop.

There is also a wooden privy and a stone well surrounded by a 3' river rock wall in the Finney yard.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT,
ARCHITECTURE

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1864-1949

Significant Person(s): n/a

Significant Dates: 1864

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Finney House is an important 19th century Nevada City property, representing one of the earliest periods of Montana's territorial settlement and the evolution of the Alder Gulch gold camp. The house and outbuildings served two generations of a Montana pioneer family that lived in Nevada City for over eighty years. The Finneys' experience was reflective of many in the cyclical world of gold mining in the west, representing those who remained in towns on the decline after the era of active mining drew to a close. In contrast to neighbors who were forced to move on, the Finneys diversified, adopted much of what the departing residents left behind, and kept on making a living. Through this adaptive process, the Finneys salvaged some of the last original buildings in Nevada City, helping to preserve a significant sampling of the local building traditions and structural forms of this early Montana gold camp. For these reasons, the building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places according to Criterion A and C at the local level of significance.

Introduction

Following the discovery of gold at Bannack in 1862, miners swarmed over the region of western Montana working their claims and searching for even richer gold finds. In 1863, the greatest placer rush in Montana's history was set off by the strike at Alder Gulch. On May 26, 1863, Bill Fairweather, Henry Edgar and a prospecting party happened to strike gold along Alder Creek as they were returning to Bannack from a failed rendezvous with the James Stuart party and a prospecting foray into the Yellowstone area. Word of the strike leaked out, drawing a great deal of interest and a large group of miners who trailed them back to Alder Gulch where the Fairweather Mining District was formed. In its first five years, it is estimated the gulch produced between thirty and forty million dollars worth of gold.¹ The amount of gold mined from this Gulch to date is placed at \$130 million, or the equivalent of roughly \$2.5 billion at today's values.

Virginia City and Nevada City were initially populated in late May and early June of 1863, launching one of the great gold camps of the American West. Within a year and a half, some ten thousand persons were living and working in the towns of Virginia City, Nevada City, and an assortment of other towns strung along the gulch for roughly fourteen miles. The town of Nevada City became the first incorporated town in the Montana Territory, although it was eclipsed in size and influence by nearby Virginia City. From its earliest days Nevada City, Center City and other small camps in Alder Gulch were tied economically to Virginia City, where businesses, services, a post office and a booming population were located. Virginia City emerged as the hub of the greater mining district, and achieved prominence from 1867-1875 as capitol of the Montana Territory.

The Placer Mining of Alder Gulch

The discovery of gold started placer mining in Alder Gulch that extended in several phases through the 1930s. Although the placer period lasted for nearly eight decades, it experienced numerous fluctuations. The first wave of placer mining

¹Malone, Michael and Richard Roeder, *Montana - A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, Revised Edition 1991), p. 65-67.

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extended from the discovery of Alder Gulch in 1863 to the late 1860s. Once the initial rush period had subsided large amounts of capital were required to build the ditches necessary for hydraulic mining and the dredges that chewed the streambeds. Hydraulic mining was practiced extensively beginning in the 1870s through the close of the nineteenth century. After hydraulic mining had run its course, a dredge period began in the mid-1890s and extended into the 1940s.²

In the 1890s a boat-type steam dredge christened the Maggie Gibson was moved over from Grasshopper Creek to lower Alder Gulch. This type of dredge removed gravel and dirt from creek beds, bars, or banks with connected buckets, and processed the aggregate to extract the gold. The gravel and dirt were then extruded, forming long piles that are still evident all along Alder Gulch from Alder to Virginia City.³ The Conrey Mining Company (in which Harvard University was the major stockholder) was the principle dredge operation in the gulch. Initially Conrey owned the land worked by the Maggie Gibson, but not the dredge. By 1899, however, the company had its own Conrey Dredge No. 1 working the gulch, and the Maggie Gibson was gone. The Conrey Company worked Alder Gulch from 1899 to 1922, acquiring land and mineral rights from local landowners.⁴ During that time, Conrey used four dredges: two were steam driven as the Maggie Gibson had been; two were electrically driven, a cutting-edge technology at the time.

When the Conrey Company closed operations in 1922, the local economy declined. Six small operations pulled a total of only \$13,800 in gold from Alder Gulch in 1923; and a few lingered for years after Conrey left. In 1935, Humphrey's Gold Corporation worked with a dry-land dredge for two years; in 1940-1941, another dry-land dredge recovered about 1,180 fine ounces of gold.

These dredge operations directly and indirectly led to the destruction of all but about a dozen original mid 1860s Nevada City buildings. In addition to the dredging of the townsite where the historic buildings stood, buildings were also taken for fuel. Some buildings may also have been moved, but given their modest frontier-era construction, it is not likely to have happened very much.⁵

The Finney homestead, located in the northwest portion of Nevada City, was saved from the dredge when Frank Finney would not sell out. His buildings are now among the very few original buildings remaining in this historic townsite.

Frank Finney and the History of the Finney Family Homestead

The Finney family was the longest in residence at Nevada City, beginning with the arrival of Frank Finney to Nevada City in 1864. Born in Vermont on April 2, 1833, Frank Finney was in his early twenties he ventured to the Montana gold fields. He arrived in Nevada City in 1864, and that same year met Mary Bradfield, an Irish immigrant who traveled to Nevada City by wagon a couple months later. They were married on October 27, 1864, and about a year later their first son William J. was born. (A second son, Thomas, listed on the 1870 census at three years old, must not have survived to adulthood.) The two other children were Cora and Alfred L.⁶

²Pace, Dick, "Golden Gulch - The Story of Montana's Fabulous Alder Gulch" (Virginia City, Montana: Bovey Restorations, 1962).

³ Ibid.

⁴ L. A. Fenner Papers, SC 315 (Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena).

⁵ Ellingsen, John D., Verbal communication, October 13, 1999.

⁶ Carey, Dorothy. *Pioneer Trails and Trials: Madison County 1863 - 1920* (Virginia City: Madison County History Association, 1976), p. 325.

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According to Bovey Restoration records for the property, the Finneys moved into a log cabin that was constructed on this property in 1863.⁷ Frank Finney initially made a living as a miner after establishing a placer claim in 1864 in Nevada City. Later, he became a successful dairy farmer producing milk, cream and butter. The Finneys were industrious workers; along with mining and farming, they ran freight by hauling wood from Granite, and coal and general merchandise from Alder to Virginia City.⁸

Frank and Mary Finney both saw the early development of the town -- from the 1860s boomtown to the bust in the 1870s. They witnessed a drop in population during that time from over 1,000 to only 51 people as the placer claims gave out and only a little hardrock mining developed in the area. In the 1880 census it is clear that what had been a cosmopolitan town, had become a homogeneous little community consisting of eight families. The parents were generally emigrants from England, Ireland, and Germany, while the second generation of Nevada City residents were mostly born in Montana. Of the eight single people in town in 1880, all were male. There was one each from Canada, England, and Ireland; the other five were born in Eastern States. Nevada City had one grocer, three teamsters and the rest of the men were miners. All of the eight mothers were homemakers.⁹

As the decades passed, life changed little on the Finney homestead. The only updating that the Finneys did to the house was to add electric lights. During the dredge era, most of the eight families left, prompted by the buy-outs offered by Conrey and after 1922, by the closure of company operations. As people abandoned homes and left town to live elsewhere, the Finneys would buy and use the buildings left vacant for various functions. One of these buildings located north of their home was a cabin that they turned into a summer kitchen. Each spring the Finneys gave the interior of this cabin a new coat of whitewash, which in time grew to be more than an inch thick. An open well where water was drawn with a bucket, rope, and pulley was located right outside the back door. This water was used for laundry and bathing, but for drinking and cooking, water had to be carried from a spring some distance away.¹⁰

Over the years the family became a fixture in the little community. Frank and Mary celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1914, and it was a large community event. The next year, after a full life Frank Finney passed away on November 29, 1915. The funeral was held in the house, and a Catholic service followed at the Nevada City cemetery.¹¹ Mary Finney passed away at the house on April 23, 1922 at age 83. She had the largest funeral in Nevada City's history and was laid to rest next to her husband of over 50 years.¹²

⁷ Records of Madison County. Deed for Finney to Bovey, 12/27/1951, Book 200/ page 112. Title transactions on the property were made far later than the original settlement period of Nevada City, the mineral patent on this property dates to 1877. Finney's obtained clear title to the property in May 1889, purchasing the lots from Louisa E. Coad. The deed notes that Mrs. Coad occupied the cabin before it became the property of the Finney family, possibly the earlier year of 1863. The 1870 census for Nevada City lists brothers Samuel and Richard Coad, both miners from England.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Census for Nevada City, Montana. United States Census, 1880.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Madisonian Times* (Virginia City) December 3, 1915.

¹² Ibid. April 28, 1922.

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The oldest son William was the next to pass on when he died of cancer in 1935. The two younger family members lived on in the house on Main Street and visitors were always welcome. Cora was a reliable source of cookies, while Alfred always had stories to relate about bygone years in and around Alder Gulch. They saw the oiled highway push though in front of their house and witnessed the toll the dredge took on the buildings of their town. On January 24, 1951 Alfred died with no warning in the house where he was born on September 2, 1875. After Alfred's death, with no neighbors nearby, friends talked Cora into moving to Virginia City where she died on May 12, 1958.¹³

Architectural Significance of the Finney House

During the 1860s, the gold camps of Montana featured a range of architecture built of locally available materials, particularly stone and log. By nature of their construction and their materials, these buildings were sturdy, naturalistic and aesthetically suited to the rugged mountainous environment of the mining districts. Transplanted from the eastern United States and Europe, the builders of these camps carried with them the log-building and carpentry traditions of Europe and colonial America. Combining this know-how with a sense of architectural style and spatial patterning that emanated from urban settlements to the east, these builders created towns of permanence and solidity almost overnight.

The architecture of the American West was born of this parentage, and in young camps and budding towns the built environment was characterized by rectangular buildings built in close proximity to one another, generally fronting onto a main thoroughfare. Most commonly at the outset, gabled log buildings were erected and aligned side by side, with only the fronts of some receiving special treatment. To create a more uniform streetscape, to lend a larger than life effect to otherwise plain buildings, to create a more stylish façade for gold camp businesses, many buildings were masked with false wooden fronts. Homebuilders and particularly business owners could create a stylish look by adding a false front onto a simple gabled building with a minimal amount of milled lumber, thus reserving that material for the critical building of flumes and other elements of a camp's mining infrastructure.

During the early history of Virginia and Nevada Cities, these patterns applied. In a historical and architectural survey of Virginia City completed in 1990, the territorial period architecture was categorized in three phases: settlement phase, gold camp phase and town phase.¹⁴ The historical and architectural legacy of these closely built townsites is intertwined, and the architectural patterning observed in Virginia City appears to fit the early history of Nevada City as well. The settlement phase was reflected in a short, energetic burst of log and stone construction during the first years in the Alder Gulch diggings. By 1864, sawmills in Alder Gulch were milling lumber and balloon frame buildings sprouted. The style for residences was typically vernacular: single story, gable roof, simple rectangular or L-shaped buildings with clapboard, plank or board and batten siding. The camp phase was followed by the town phase, where national architectural styles began to take root and late 19th century revival styles including Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, and Italianate predominated. In Nevada City, the remaining dozen original buildings relate to the settlement and camp phases of architecture.

¹³ Carey, Dorothy. *Pioneer Trails and Trials - Madison County 1863 - 1920* (Virginia City: Madison County History Association, 1976). p.325.

¹⁴ See Paul Friedman "Final Report of the Architectural, Historical and Archaeological Inventory of the Virginia City National Historic Landmark, Madison County, Montana", sec. 4.2.6 Architecture. The phases outlined were modeled after those identified in Colorado mining towns by C.E. Stoehr in his book, *Bonanza Victorian* 1975.

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The Finney Home is the home that was occupied longest of all those in Nevada City. As such, it was a last outpost of community in the townsite. The original dwelling reflects patterns of the settlement phase of architecture, with its hewn log and dovetail notched construction, gable roof and simple rectangular massing. The added 1864 building on the front and stone addition on the rear, as well as other cabins which were adopted as outbuildings by the Finneys also reflect that era. And where the gable faced the streetscape, the Finney's home was very typical of 1860s settlement era residences, striving toward more stylistic elements of architecture with added clapboard, open shed porch and sawn vergeboard trim. Fenestration included the multi-pane, double hung windows that were standard fare throughout early periods when glass panes made their way upriver to Montana via steamboat. The building further illustrates period design through its well-preserved interior, including muslin wall coverings and whitewashed log treatments. The summer kitchen and other cabins on the property typify the modest, pragmatic log cabins that characterized the early gold camp era in Nevada City. The summer kitchen is today the townsite's best remaining example of the single-room cabin commonly used by miners and their families during the boom years in Alder Gulch.

Summary

The Finney House was the last occupied residence of those remaining Nevada City when Charles Bovey started his restoration efforts in the 1940s. A rare, intact example of local gold camp architecture, this building is highly significant. The homestead is also a monument to the perseverance of the Finney family whose lives here chronicled the boom and bust history of Nevada City. Their house is now the treasure of all Montanans and a window into the era when gold miners and their families wrote the history of Alder Gulch.

Finney House
Name of Property

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County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

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: less than one acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	12	424100	5017380

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): NW ¼, SE¼, SE¼ of Section 16, Township 6 South, Range 3 West, M.P.M.

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheets for verbal description and a sketch map of the property and its boundaries.

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Josef Warhank and Chere Jiusto, historians
organization: Montana State Historic Preservation Office
street & number: 1410 Eighth Ave, PO Box 201202
city or town: Helena state: Montana

date: November 1999
telephone: 406-444-7715
zip code: 59620

Property Owner

name/title: Montana Historical Society
street & number: 225 N Roberts
city or town: Helena state: Montana

telephone: 406-444-2694
zip code: 59620

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Verbal Description of the Historic Property Boundary (corner numbers reference those marked on the site map):

That certain lot or parcel of ground, situate, lying, and being in the town of Nevada, described as follows:
Beginning at the south corner of the dooryard fence, thence northeast 87' and parallel with the California Street of Nevada City, (corner number 2);
Thence northwest 80' (corner number 3);
Thence northeast 43' (corner number 4);
Thence northwest 90' (corner number 5);
Thence southwest 70' (corner number 6);
Thence southeast 60' (corner number 7);
Thence southwest 60' (corner number 8);
Thence southeast and parallel with the main street of Nevada, 110' back to the point of beginning.

The following title transactions apply specifically to the Finney property legally described above, and being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at this time:

U.S.A. to L.A. Fenner, April 25, 1877, M.E. 285;
L.A. Fenner to John B. Fehring, April 2, 1879;
John B. Fehring and Mary to Mrs. Louisa E. Coad, December 22, 1883;
Louisa Coad to Frank Finney, May 10, 1889.¹⁵

[The legal description for the Finney lot, as given when purchased by Charles Bovey from Cora Finney in 1951 read:

Beginning at the south corner of the door yard fence, in front of the residence at one time prior to May 10, 1889 occupied by one Louisa E. Coad, in said town of Nevada, [also known as the Finney House] thence northwest along said front door yard fence and parallel with the main street of Nevada, seventy-two feet; thence northeast two hundred feet, more or less, to the north line of the South half of the North half of the Southeast quarter of the Southeast quarter of Section Sixteen in Township Six South, Range Three West, of the Principal (sic.) Meridian of said state; thence east along said line seventy-five feet; thence southwest two hundred feet, more or less, to the place of beginning. Said property being the same property described in that certain deed made by Louisa E. Coad to Frank Finney May 10, 1889, and recorded December 19, 1890, in Volume 48 of Deeds at page 69, records of the County Clerk's office of Madison County, Montana.¹⁶]

¹⁵ Records of Madison County. Book 48/ page 479; Book 30, page 399; Book 32/page 406;Book 38/ page 479; Book 48/ page 69. According to records of the County Clerk's office of Madison County, Montana, Lawrence A. Fenner gained the U.S. Mineral Patent on the property that became Nevada City, on April 25, 1877. Fenner deeded various parts of the townsite to those who actually were in possession of the land and houses, in order to give them a deed that ran from the U.S. Govt. to the owners.

¹⁶ Records of Madison County. Deed for Finney to Bovey, 12/27/1951, Book 200/ page 112. (The entire deed includes two "Richards lots" as well).

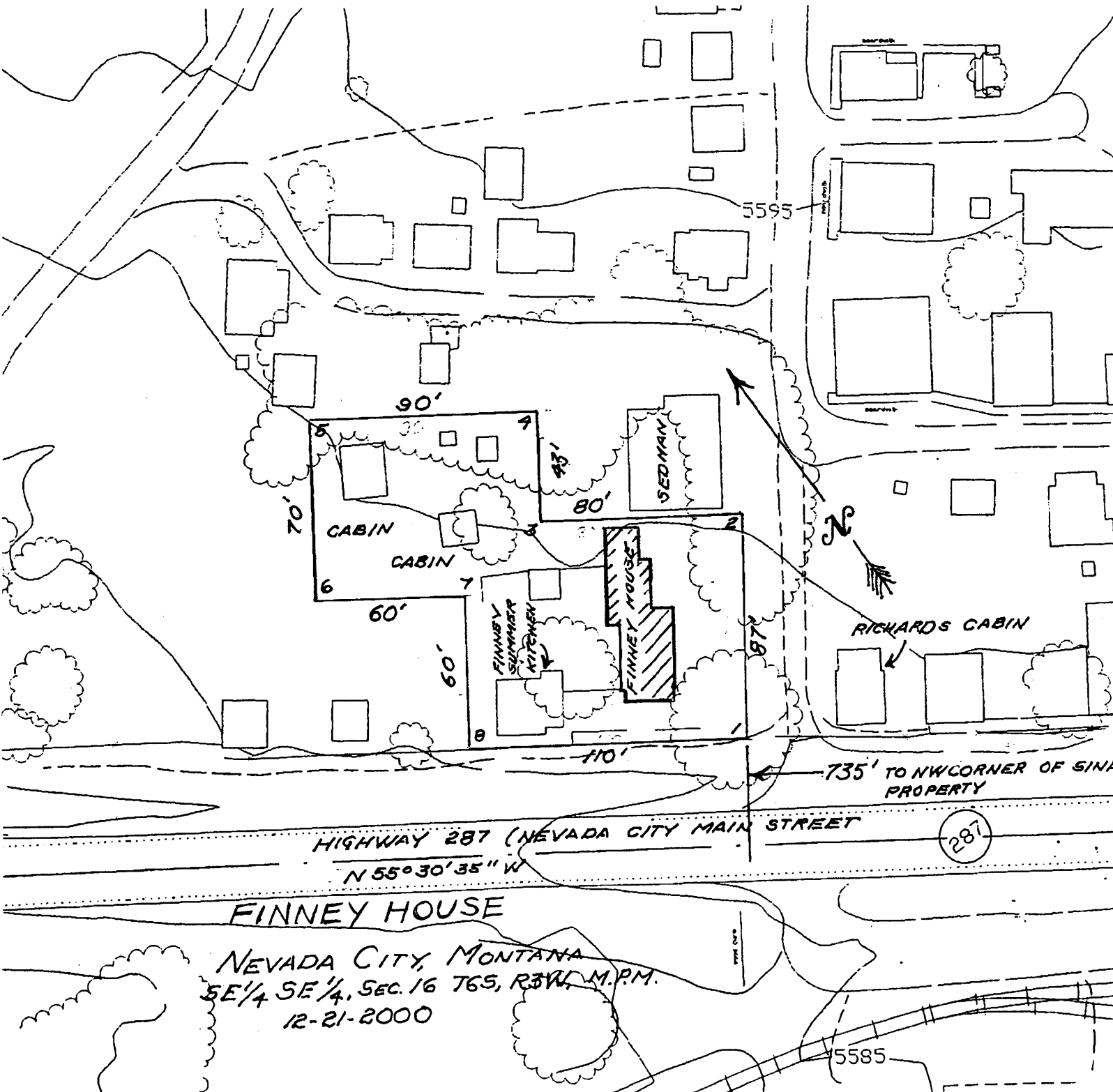
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