

CROW AGENCY, EMPLOYEE'S QUARTERS  
(Building No. 54)  
East of north end of Weaver Drive  
Crow Indian Reservation  
Crow Agency  
Big Horn County  
Montana

HABS MT-79-A  
MT-79-A

HABS

MT-79-A

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
INTERMOUNTAIN REGIONAL OFFICE  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
12795 West Alameda Parkway  
Denver, CO 80228

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

## CROW AGENCY, EMPLOYEE'S QUARTERS (Crow Agency, Building No. 54)

HABS No. MT-79-A

### I. INTRODUCTION

**Location:** Building No. 54 is north of the main commons in Crow Agency, Montana and east of the north end of Weaver Street. Crow Agency is located in Big Horn County, in the northeastern corner of the Crow Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana. The community is situated along the west bank of the Little Bighorn River and is about twelve miles south of the town of Hardin, and about a mile northwest of the Little Bighorn Battlefield.

Quad: Crow Agency  
UTM: Zone: 13; Easting 308402; Northing 5053076

**Present Owners:** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Indian Health Service

**Present Occupant:** None

**Present Use:** Vacant

**Significance:** Building No. 54 is a contributing building to the significance of Crow Agency historic district. Building No. 54 is one of three buildings built in 1936 under the Progress Works Administration (PWA), one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs. The building is a well-preserved example of standardized Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) plans for employee housing constructed by PWA funds during the 1930s, displaying simplified design features.

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## II. HISTORY

Building No. 54 is a historic government dwelling located within the boundaries of Crow Agency on the Crow Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana (Figure 1). From the establishment of Crow Agency on the Little Bighorn River in 1884, government agency employees lived in sub-standard housing. Calls for improvements from the agency superintendents went unheeded into the 1930s. By 1934, the housing conditions for agency employees at Crow Agency presented a “shanty town” appearance.<sup>1</sup> In May, 1934, Architect Carl Erikson, from the Chicago firm of Schmidt, Garden, and Erikson which designed the hospital complex at Crow Agency, declared that “the housing conditions at this agency are very bad. Insufficient housing for personnel has forced the use of buildings not intended for human habitation” with most quarters “in poor state of repair.”<sup>2</sup>

New Deal programs under Roosevelt’s Administration rectified this situation by providing funds through the Progress Works Administration (PWA) to improve housing conditions at Indian agencies. The buildings constructed at Crow Agency through these programs came under the supervision of Charles Brashear of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) regional office in Billings, MT.

In 1935, the PWA allotted \$15,000 for the construction of two new dwellings at Crow Agency. After the successful completion of these two identical dwellings, a second allotment of \$18,525.00 from the PWA was received in December 1935 for three additional dwellings under designation F. P. 497. However, this amount was found insufficient to construct three buildings of the same scale as the two previous PWA constructed buildings. Instead, the Billings office chose BIA’s “A” series standardized plans for three smaller dwellings. Plan A-177 was selected for two dwellings including Building No. 54 and Plan A-199 for the third dwelling. Construction of all three dwellings began in the spring of 1936.<sup>3</sup> These three buildings still stand today in a row on the north side of the public commons.

In July 1936, Edward Poynton, a federal government inspector, reported that the construction of the three cottages, including Building No. 54, was “very good.”<sup>4</sup> Building No. 54 was completed in 1937 at a cost of \$5951.74.<sup>5</sup> This single family cottage consisted of five rooms: a living room, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms and a bath. In 1955, the BIA transferred Indian medical facilities, including Building No. 54, to the Public Health Service. Building No. 54 has housed government employees from its completion date but has been vacant since 2002.

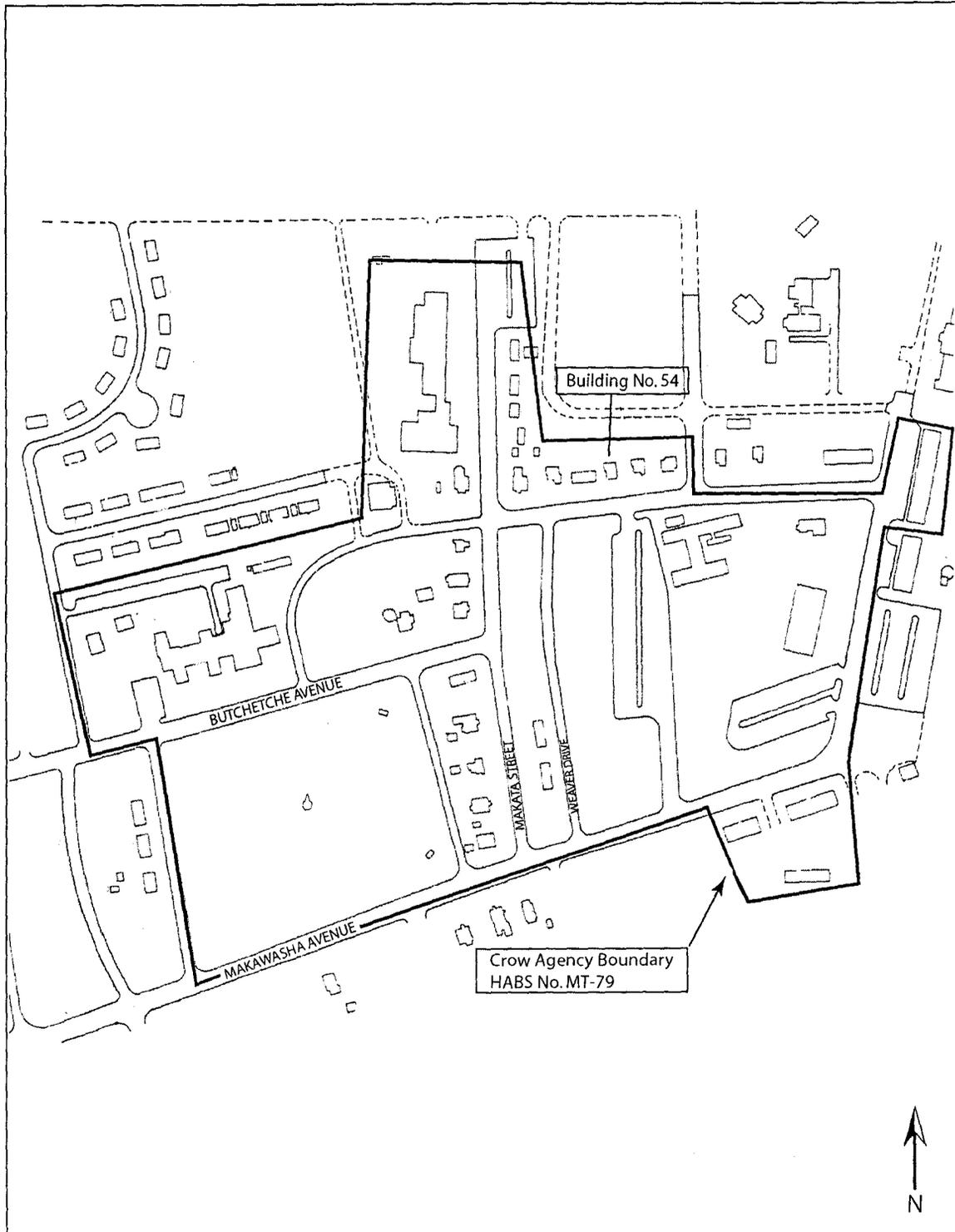


Figure 1. Location Map of Building No. 54 (map courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs).

### III. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Indian Health Service Building No. 54 is within the boundaries of the original Crow Agency located on the Crow Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana. It stands north of the public commons and in a row of government dwellings, primarily historic, that line the north side of an unnamed east-west street. This unnamed street is intersected to the west by Makata Street. Building No. 54 occupies a rectangular lot and faces south toward the street. It is of the identical plan and design to the dwelling immediately to the east. Building No. 54 is presently unoccupied.

Building No. 54 is a one-story dwelling of wood-frame construction (Figure 2). Its main mass consists of a 28-foot by 29-foot block with a side gable roof. A gable-roofed wing (6' by 12') projects from the east end of the front (south) façade and there is a narrow gabled-roof bay (3' by 16') on the west elevation. The building rests over a full-basement on poured concrete foundation walls. The west foundation wall holds an iron coal chute door that originally emptied into a coal compartment in the basement.

The dwelling's wood-frame is constructed of 2 x 4's. Lap wood siding painted yellow sheaths the exterior walls. An entry porch is nestled in the ell on the front façade. It was originally open but is now partially enclosed with plywood. Four 8-inch square posts support the porch's shed roof. The porch has a concrete floor and beadboard ceiling. The front entry holds a modern wood flush (slab) door with three small glass inserts. The same type of modern replacement door is found at the side entry on the dwelling's east elevation. A concrete pad with steps on both sides provides access to this door.

The dwelling retains all its original windows with only one exception where a window on the east wall has been sided over. Wood-sash double-hung units with 6-over-6 glazing predominate, and occur in both single and paired settings. Most display modern metal-sash storms with screens. Other windows include small three-light awning units in the exposed upper few feet of the north, west, and east foundation walls and half circular wood sash windows in the east and west gable ends (one each). The apex of the east gable end holds a wood louvered vent over the half-circular window.

The dwelling's gable roofs are constructed of 2 x 6 rafters covered by 1 x 8 rough board decking and asphalt shingles. All of the gable ends exhibit open returns and flush roof eaves display crown molding painted brown. A tall, corbelled brick interior chimney protrudes from the south roof slope of the main gable near the roof ridge.

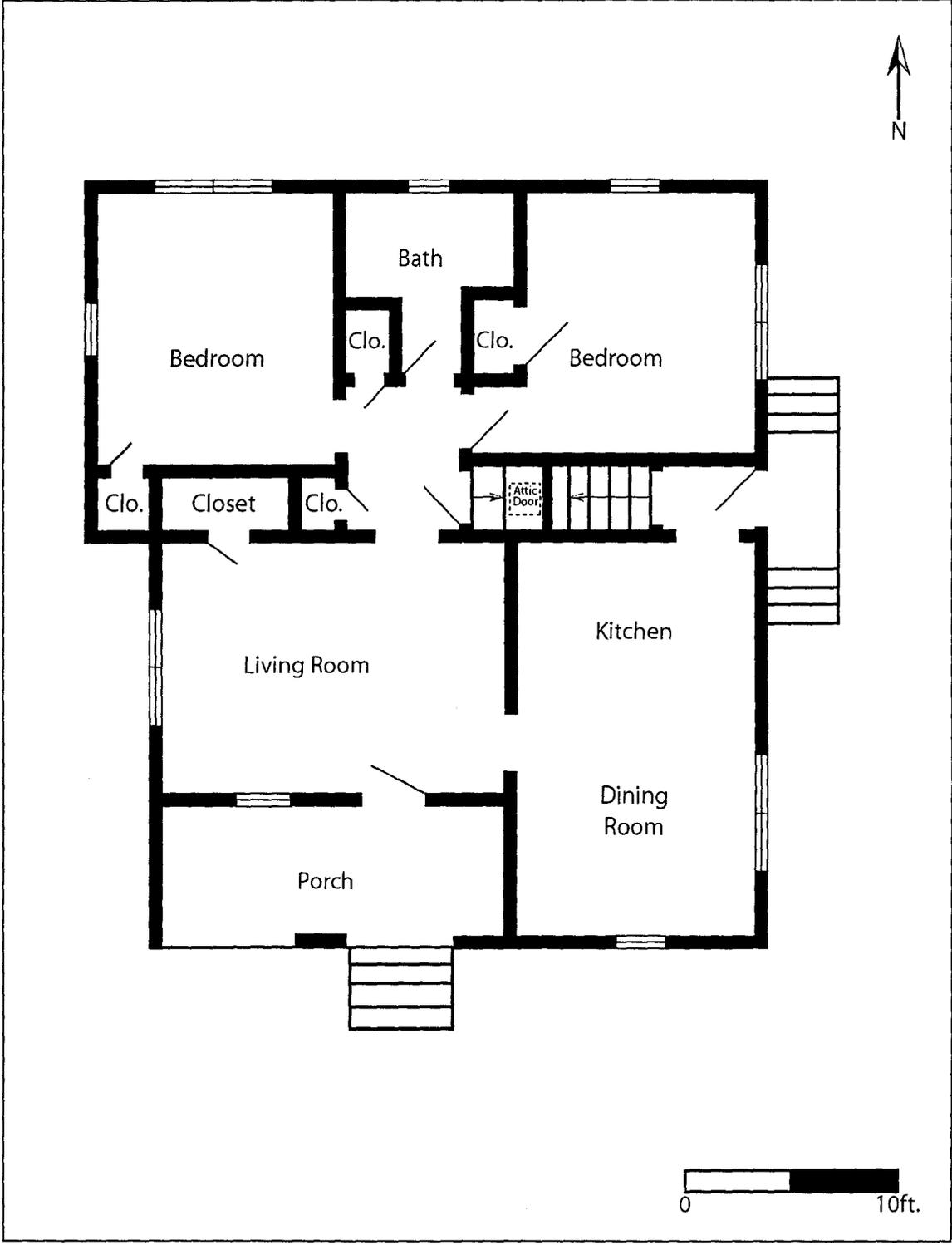


Figure 2. Building No. 54 Floor Plan.

The interior of Building No. 54 generally retains its original plan consisting of a kitchen, dining room, living room, two bedrooms and a bath. One wall has been removed to create a combination kitchen and dining room space. Closets are found in the living room and bedrooms and the small hall between the bedrooms. This hall also has a door that opens onto two wide steps that provide access to the attic trapdoor.

The dwelling's interior has been subject to various remodeling projects over the years and currently displays a mixture of historic and modern finishing treatments. The original lath and plaster walls have a sheet rock veneer and the hardwood floors are now only visible in the closets. Carpet covers the floors in all rooms except the kitchen and bathroom that alternatively have linoleum flooring. No historic lighting fixtures remain. The kitchen has modern cabinetry and all of the bathroom fixtures are replacements as well, including the bathtub, toilet, vanity, sink and medicine cabinet.

Original simple wood moldings, however, remain at the door and window openings. Some interior doors have been removed, but those that remain are historic solid wood two-panel units with metal spheroid knobs. A few doors exhibit plain metal hardware sets. The living room and bedrooms retain historic wood base molding while the dining room displays vinyl base molding. Ceiling moldings are found in most rooms as well. Some closets also display the original base molding.

Buildings No. 54 retains much of the modest detailing typical of dwellings designed by BIA "A" series standardized architectural plans and constructed at Indian agencies during the New Deal. Some of the minimal detailing includes the specialty half-circular window in the gable ends, open returns and multiple light double-hung sash windows. The dwelling represents the type of dwellings constructed at Crow Agency during the New Deal era to adequately house government employees.

#### IV. ENDNOTES

1. William Zimmerman, Assistant Commissioner to the Administrator, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, 31 October 1934, Crow Agency Records, RG 75, National Archives-Rocky Mountain Region, Denver, CO as cited in Fred L. Quivik and Mark T. Fiege, "The Historic Architecture of Six Montana Indian Agencies: A Determination of Eligibility For the National Register of Historic Places," (Butte, MT: Renewable Technologies, Inc (RTI), 1987), p. 25. [Crow Agency Records used in the RTI report are now housed at the National Archives-Rocky Mountain Region, Denver, CO and have been reprocessed.]
2. Carl A. Erikson, "Memorandum," Crow Agency Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75 (RG75), National Archives-Rocky Mountain Region, Denver, CO, copy on file at RTI, Butte, MT.
3. John Collier to Charles Brashear, November 19, 1935, and Brashear to Collier, February 12, 1936, Folder F.P. 497, Records of Construction Division, Files of PWA Projects, 1931-1943, Entry 999, RG75, National Archives, Washington, DC, copy on file at RTI, Butte, MT.
4. Edward O. Poynton, "Report in connection with Crow Hospital, F. P. 378," Records of Construction Division, Files of PWA Projects, 1931-1943, Entry 999, RG 75, National Archives, Washington, DC.
5. Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Evaluation Survey Data, September 1943," on file, Billings Area Office, Indian Health Service, Billings, MT.

## V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Quivik, Fred L. and Mark T. Fiege. *The Historic Architecture of Six Montana Indian Agencies: A Determination of Eligibility For the National Register of Historic Places*. Butte, MT: Renewable Technologies, Inc., 1987.
- U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs "Evaluation Survey Data," September 1943, on file, Billings Area Office, Indian Health Service, Billings, MT.
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- U.S. Department of the Interior, Records of Crow Agency, MT. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75. National Archives-Rocky Mountain Region, Denver, CO.