

Architect: Hoyt, Burnham F.
Birth / Death Dates: 1887-1960
Practice Dates: 1919-1955
Firms: Kidder and Wieger
Post and Goodhue
Hoyt and Hoyt 1919-1933
Burnham Hoyt 1936-1955

Biographical Information

Born in Denver in 1887, Burnham F. Hoyt attended the Boulevard School and graduated from Denver's North High School. Hoyt began his architectural apprenticeship with the Denver firm of Kidder and Wieger. In 1908, with the encouragement of his brother Merrill, a Denver architect, Burnham left Denver to study at the Beaux Arts Institute in New York City. He excelled in his studies, won design competitions, and continued his training with the prominent New York firm of George Post and Bertram Goodhue. While there Hoyt designed the interior woodwork for St. Bartholomew's Church, a New York City landmark.

Goodhue was one of the foremost architects of the early twentieth century. He was responsible for one of the great masterpieces of the Art Deco Style in America, the Nebraska State House of 1922-1932 in Lincoln, Nebraska. Hoyt's developed sense of detailing may have had its origins in Goodhue's office.

After serving two years in the army designing camouflage during World War I, Hoyt returned to Denver in 1919 and became a partner with his brother, Merrill. The Hoyts prospered in the postwar years. The firm was responsible for a number of buildings in various historical revival styles. These include the English Gothic Style Lake Junior High, the Spanish Baroque Revival Park Hill Branch Library, and the eclectic Cactus Club. In 1926 Hoyt returned to New York to undertake the ultimate commission of the first phase of his career, the interior design of the Riverside Church in New York, commissioned by John D. Rockefeller. Associate architects on the project were Henry C. Pelton, Francis Allen and Charles Collens. After working for several years as a professor of architectural criticism at New York University, Hoyt became dean of the School of Architecture in 1930 while retaining his association with the firm of Pelton, Allen and Collens. Throughout this time he maintained a long-distance relationship with Hoyt and Hoyt. His brother Merrill died of a heart attack in 1933 at the age of 52. This ostensibly ended the existence of the firm. In 1936 Burnham married Mildred Fuller, a Denver-born interior designer, in New York. That same year, he returned to Denver and established his own firm. It is at this time that his second mature phase emerged.

Hoyt's debut work with his own firm was the Bromfield Residence of 1936. This structure immediately established Hoyt's preeminent position among the first generation of Colorado Modernists. The residence was frequently illustrated in national publications and in surveys of modern architecture of the period. The placement of the residence derives from an analysis of the "view" from the principal sitting room. Furniture in this room was "laid-out" by Hoyt's brother-in-law Thornton Fuller, the premier Denver interior designer of the period. The design of the rest of the house carried out from there. This great work was significantly altered through numerous major renovations.

Hoyt's work following the Bromfield House is marked by a consistently high level of architectural design. These buildings constitute the most important body of International Style work in the

region by a single figure. Hoyt was recognized nationally for his achievements. The Denver Children's Hospital of 1936 at E. Nineteenth Avenue and Downing was described in *Architectural Forum* as the first hospital design in the country to eschew the historicizing elements of the various revival styles then current. The hospital likewise has been affected badly through insensitive resurfacing and substantial alterations. The Albany Hotel, also of 1936, was built at Seventeenth and Broadway and received praise in *Architectural Forum* for its elegant and functional plan (demolished). The Boettcher School of 1940 at 1900 Downing was featured in *Architectural Forum* as an early example of an educational building specially designed for the physically disabled (demolished). An important innovation in the Boettcher School was the wheelchair accessibility of the building. Colorado Springs High School (now Palmer High) of 1940 was also praised by *Architectural Forum* for its up-to-date features. The 1941 Sullivan residence at 545 Circle Drive in Denver is Hoyt's finest surviving commission in luxury residential design. The residence is closely associated stylistically with the now-lost Bromfield House.

His best-known work is the Red Rocks Amphitheater in Morrison. Hoyt incorporated the natural topographic features and rock formations to create the amphitheater. Constructed in the 1930s using Civilian Conservation Corps labor, it is considered to have some of the finest acoustics of any concert venue in the country. The project brought Hoyt immediate national recognition in architectural and design publications. The amphitheater was the only work of architecture in Colorado to be featured in the American Institute of Architects' historical review exhibit of American architecture in 1957 at the National Gallery. The Museum of Modern Art in New York selected Red Rocks Amphitheater as one of the decade's 50 outstanding examples of American architecture. Red Rocks is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

During the period 1945 to 1960, Hoyt's practice was severely limited by declining health. He designed his own home and studio at 3130 E. Exposition in 1947. With architect James Sudler, he designed the renovation of a dry cleaner, a garage, and other buildings for the Denver Art Museum at Acoma and Thirteenth, which was on-going from the late 1940s until its completion in 1960 (demolished). Hoyt's only major commission in the period was the 1955, International Style, Central Library of the Denver Public Library system.

Hoyt's body of work in the International Style is a seamless and consistent whole. Hoyt generated the designs for his buildings with reference both to site and to the unique functional considerations of the building type. He often juxtaposed circular volumes to rectangular ones. Typically, these buildings have flat roofs. The regularity of the facades suggest a symmetrical treatment; yet, the facades are generally handled in an asymmetrical way. These buildings feature smooth and uniform walls. These walls are eaveless, though boxed-in eaves are sometimes used by Hoyt. His interest in light is demonstrated by his attention to fenestration. Large expanses of glass are typically seen. The windows and doors of Hoyt's buildings are stressed with trim. In the interiors, this interest in light is further stressed by clever uses of a variety of direct and indirect lighting. All of these standard features of Hoyt's best work in the International Style are fully illustrated in the Central Library, the finest expression of Hoyt's mature design philosophy.

The aesthetic of the Central Library was industrial. This aesthetic was softened, however, with the juxtaposition of the warm tones of traditional materials, such as wood and stone, with modern industrial materials like the gleaming window trim and the shiny interior surfaces. Hoyt generated the design of the building from functional analysis. This analysis has been so completely applied that even the specific dimensions, as has been previously described, were

derived from the dimensions of the standard library shelving used. The height, color, materials, and massing of the building were determined in response to its Civic Center site.

The interior abounded in Hoytian details. Ventilators and lighting were used to create visual interest. Lighting in the library directed users through the building. The lighted interior of the rotunda, though altered, remains one of the most notable views on the Civic Center at night.

Hoyt was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in the early 1950s. He designed the library in collaboration with the Denver firm of Arthur Fisher and Alan Fisher. Fisher and Fisher carried out much of the actual design work due to Hoyt's growing disability. Hoyt closed his office in 1955 and his staff was absorbed by Fisher and Fisher. Nonetheless, from conception through execution, the library was clearly within the concerns of Hoyt's full body of work and well illustrates his mature design philosophy. Hoyt was assisted on the site by architect Oscar Stromquist, who carried out Hoyt's spoken instructions. Rod Davis was the on-site supervising architect for the firm of Fisher and Fisher. The library was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.

Michael Graves designed the major Postmodern addition to the library which reopened in 1995. Though preserving most of the exterior integrity of the Hoyt building, the interior was extensively modified. The only original interior feature to survive was the main staircase.

Burnham Hoyt died at his home in 1960. Mildred Fuller Hoyt donated his papers to the Western History Collection of the Denver Public Library.

Credited Buildings (partial list)

| Building Name | Location | Site No. | Date | Status |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|---------|-------------------------------------|
| Fourth Church of Christ Science | 3101 W. 31st Ave., Denver | 5DV611 | 1920 | |
| Merritt Gano Jr. House | 101 High St., Denver | 5DV167 | c.1920 | Country Club NR HD |
| Park Hill Branch Library | 4705 Montview Blvd., Denver | | 1920 | Denver Local Landmark |
| Merryweather House | 375 Humboldt St., Denver | 5DV167 | 1922 | Country Club NR HD |
| Anne Evans Mountain House (remodel) | 1970 Evans Ranch Rd., Evergreen | 5CC545 | 1924 | National Register |
| Cherokee Castle | Cherokee Ranch, Hwy. 85, Sedalia | 5DA708 | 1924-26 | National Register |
| Unnamed House | 840 Gaylord St., Denver | | 1925 | Morgan's Subdivision Local HD |
| Cactus Club Clubhouse | 444 14th St. Denver | | 1925 | Demolished |
| Colorado National Bank (addition) | 900-918 17th St., Denver | 5DV524 | 1925 | |
| Davis House | 385 Gilpin St., Denver | 5DV167 | 1925 | Country Club NR HD |

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|--|--|-----------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Denver Press Club | 1330 Glenarm Pl., Denver | 5DV601 | 1925 | Denver Local Landmark |
| Maitland Estate | 9 Sunset Dr., Cherry Hills Village | 5AH1431 | 1925 | National Register |
| Phi Delta Theta | 1111 College Ave., Boulder | 5BL2750 | 1925 | |
| Standart-Cleworth House | 2025 E. 7th Ave., Denver | | 1925 | Seventh Ave. Local HD |
| Harrington School | 3230 E. 38th Ave., Denver | 5DV45.1 | 1926 | |
| Lake Junior High School (with Merrill Hoyt) | 1820 Lowell Blvd., Denver | 5DV668 | 1926 | Denver Local Landmark |
| Charles S. and Marie Thomas House | 380 Gilpin St., Denver | 5DV167 | 1926 | Country Club NR HD |
| Donald Bromfield House | 100 Gaylord St., Denver | | 1927 | Country Club Local HD |
| Montview Boulevard Presbyterian Church, Education Wing | 1980 Dahlia St. Denver | 5DV9034 | 1927 | National Register pending |
| Riverside Church (associated with Collens, Allen and Pelton) | New York City | | 1927-30 | Extant |
| Sigma Nu Fraternity | 1722 Illinois St., Golden | 5JF636 | 1928 | |
| St. Martin's Chapel at St. John's Cathedral (with Merrill Hoyt) | 1313 Clarkson St., Denver | 5DV171 | 1928 | National Register |
| Steele Elementary School (addition) | 300 S. Marion Pkwy., Denver | 5DV2087 | 1929 | Denver Local Landmark |
| Albany Hotel (addition) | 1720 Stout St., Denver | 5DV514 | 1938 | Demolished |
| Boettcher School for Crippled Children | 1900 Downing St., Denver | 5DV714 | 1938 | Demolished |
| Maer House (Sullivan House) | 545 Circle Dr., Denver | | 1940 | |
| Red Rocks Amphitheater | 16351 County Rd. 93, Morrison | 5JF442 | 1941 | National Register |
| Nurses Quarters (design attributed to Hoyt by Rocky Mtn. News article) | Fitzsimons Army Medical Center, Aurora | 5AM123.95 | 1942-44 | |
| Infirmery Ward Buildings 203 & 206 | Fitzsimons Army Medical Center, Aurora | 5AM123.96 | 1942 | |
| Burnham F. Hoyt House | 3130 E. Exposition, Denver | | 1947 | |
| Central Library, Denver Public Library | 10 W. 14 th Ave. Pkwy., Denver | 5DV3520 | 1955 | National Register |

| Undated Buildings | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--------|------|----------------------|
| Garry House | E. 7th Ave. Pkwy., Denver | | | |
| Waring House | Hawthorn Pl., Denver | | | |
| Broadmoor Hotel (addition) | Lake Ave., Colorado Springs | 5EP368 | | |
| Colorado Springs High School (addition) | Colorado Springs | | | |
| Central City Opera House (addition & alterations) | 124 Eureka St., Central City | 5GL8 | | National Register |
| Burnham F. Hoyt House | 3130 E. Exposition, Denver | | 1947 | |

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