



**Architect:** Clifford Nakata  
**Birth/Death Dates:** 1929-2016  
**Practice Dates:** mid 1950s-2013  
**Firms:** Higginbotham, Nakata & Muir 1961-1971  
Clifford S. Nakata Associates (CSNA) 1972-79  
Nakata Planning Group, Inc. 1979-2016



Researched compiled by Kathryn Spencer, UCD Student, 2022

---

## Biographical Information

Clifford Shozaburo Nakata was born on Valentine's Day, February 14th, 1929, along with his twin sister Carolyn in Kingsburg, CA. Nakata's middle name Shozaburo was after his great-great uncle, who was a samurai warrior. In 1941, he along with his parents and sister, were sent to the Gila River War Relocation Center in Gila, AZ in response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In the summer of 1945 Nakata returned to California at 16 years old where he finished high school and earned an associated degree in civil engineering from Reedley Junior College. Nakata was drafted and fought during the Korean Conflict and graduated range school as a paratrooper. He served with the 187th airborne regimental combat team, formed in 1950. Nakata completed 77 missions behind enemy lines and was the only survivor of his unit. After returning from overseas, Nakata developed a devout sense of patriotism for his country and continued to utilize both his military and engineering training as a military planner.

After his time serving in the military and as a military planner, Nakata enrolled and graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in architecture in 1953. He briefly worked for Bruce Heiser in San Francisco, CA where he met his future wife, Gayle Yagi. He then took a job with the Air Defense Command planning and designing the new Air Force Academy complex in Colorado. In 1956, Nakata and Yagi married. In 1959, they moved to Colorado Springs, CO and had a son named Eric. Nakata continued his military planning career after this project. He went to Europe on an increasing number of large-scale military projects. Nakata briefly lived in Germany with Gayle and Eric while working on master plans in Germany and France for the NATO Air Base. In 1961, Nakata and 2 fellow architects launched their partnership Higginbotham, Nakata & Muir focusing on federal, military, and institutional planning/design work. Nakata and his family returned to Colorado Springs in 1962 and a year later welcomed a daughter named Cara. During the 1960s Nakata worked on designs for the IBM Office Building as well as the GE Johnson Construction Company headquarters in Colorado Springs. The firm was heavily involved in building several bond-issue schools around El Paso and Douglas Counties in the early 1970s.

Higginbotham, Nakata & Muir dissolved in 1971 with each partner going their own separate ways to start their own firms. Nakata founded Clifford S. Nakata & Associates (CSNA) a year later in 1972. In an informational brochure, CSNA advertised: "your goal is ours: the best building for you, architecture of the highest quality, and a positive contribution to the community and nation of which it will be a lasting part." With this goal in mind, CSNA would expand on Higginbotham, Nakata & Muir's previous focus and branch out to correctional facilities and school districts in Colorado and Wyoming. Under CSNA, Nakata planned several notable projects in Colorado, particularly in the Colorado Springs area. Per Nakata's partner Gregory Friesen, "Through his patriotism, the activities of his life that brought him here, his impact on shaping and thus protecting the national defense, and his many contributions to



institutions, corporations, and the very fabric of downtown Colorado Springs, Clifford S. Nakata FAIA has helped shape the character, buildings and urban fabric of Colorado Springs.” CSNA’s prolific portfolio includes St. Mary’s High School/ Catholic Education Center, Helen Keller Elementary School District #11 and later High School, El Paso County Public Safety Building, Colorado Springs Municipal Airport Terminal, the Noyes Residence, the Main Exchange Complex at Peterson Field, Centennial Campus at Pikes Peak Community College, Alamo Corporate Building, and renovations to Acacia Park. Each project served to help the community, adapt to growing and changing populations, and provide structurally sound architecture to the Colorado Springs community. Most of Nakata’s projects directly exemplify mid-century modern and brutalist designs.

In 1979, Nakata developed a subsidiary of CSNA, the Nakata Planning Group Inc. This planning group was “one of the premier professional military planning practices in the 1980s and 1990s.” According to the Colorado Springs Pioneer Museum (CSPM), Nakata’s group developed base master plans as well as demobilization plans for U.S. bases throughout Germany, England, Italy, Japan, and South Korea. Along with these plans, Nakata also advanced plans for installations across the US including local ones such as for NORAD, Peterson Air Force Base, and Fort Carson. These plans both overseas and all across the Continental U.S. and Alaska played a key role in the U.S. victory in the Cold War.

Along with Nakata’s prolific work in federal, military, educational, and community projects, he also has a significant list of corporate projects in Colorado Springs: Current Inc., Goodwill Industries, IBM, and the corporate offices of GE Johnson and Nunn Construction companies. Many of these have since shut down or been remodeled/refurbished but some such as the IBM building still stand today as they did decades prior. Nakata also created the Downtown Action Plan for Colorado Springs in 1992. This plan was the answer to decades of developmental concerns in downtown Colorado Springs. The plan “organize[d] the downtown into distinct districts and set forth specific economic and land use recommendations for each of those areas” and spearheaded the two-year-long initiative known as ‘Imagine Downtown.’

After 21 successful years, Nakata sold CSNA to employees Gregory Friesen, Roger Sauerhagen, and Bill Box in 1993 and CSNA officially changed ownership on January 1st, 1994. They kept the name, but their focus was to be “no longer split between trying to excel at both planning and architecture” as they slowly transitioned to exclusively focusing on architecture. Shortly after in 1999, Nakata was selected to become a Fellow with the American Institute of Architects (FAIA). Nakata had mostly retired by this point; he kept his licensure up until 2011 but did not participate directly in any further projects. In his retirement, Nakata spent his time with family skiing, supporting the Denver Broncos, and traveling to and from Pebble Beach, CA. Nakata died in 2016 of cancer.

**Credited Buildings (partial list)**

Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date*	Status
IBM Office Building	5525 Erindale Dr. Colorado Springs,		1967	
GE Johnson Construction Company	Colorado Springs		1967	
Colorado Springs YMCA	207 N Nevada, Colorado Springs		1971	
Helen Keller Elementary School, District #11	3730 Montebello Dr. Colorado Springs,		1971	
St. Mary’s High School	2501 E Yampa St. Colorado Springs		1972	



Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date*	Status
Goodwill Industries Corporate Building	1460 Garden of the Gods Rd. Colorado Springs		1975	
Centennial Campus at Pikes Peak Community College	5675 S Academy Blvd. Colorado Springs		1978	
El Paso County Judicial Complex & Criminal Justice Center	2739 E Las Vegas St. Colorado Springs		1979	Renovations and expansions to the jail in 2005
Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame & Museum of the American Cowboy	103 Pro Rodeo Drive, Colorado Springs		1979	
Ponderosa High School	7007 East Bayou Gulch Road, Parker		1980-81	
Alamo Corporate Building	102 S Tejon St. Colorado Springs		1982	
Pikes Peak Center for the Performing Arts	190 S Cascade Avenue, Colorado Springs		1982	
Lincoln Middle School	531 S College Avenue, Fort Collins			
Baca Campus Lodge (Colorado College)	Crestone, Colorado		1992	
Barnes Center (Colorado College)			1988	
Worner Center (Colorado College)			1987	
Current Inc. Corporate Building	Colorado Springs			
Nunn Construction Company	Colorado Springs		Unknown	
Acacia Park Renovations	115 E Platte Ave. Colorado Springs,		1994	
Colorado Springs Municipal Airport Terminal addition	7770 Milton E Proby Pkwy Colorado Springs		1994	

\*Completion date is stated if known. Plan, building permit, or assessor date is shown if completion date is unknown.

---

### Information Sources

Alina, Lee. "Celebrating Asian American History Month: Clifford Nakata." *Fox 21 Local News*, May, 20, 2022.

Cara Nakata, "Object Record: Catalog Number 2021.0084.0001 Scarf," Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum. Accessed Nov 30, 2022.



City of Colorado Springs, *Imagine Downtown Colorado Springs: Master Plan* (Colorado Springs: 2006) 10-11.

“Clifford S. Nakata FAIA,” *The Gazette*, December, 11, 2016.

CSNA projects portfolio. <https://www.csnaarchitects.com/en/projects-portfolio/>

Gregory Friesen FAIA, “Clifford Nakata,” Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum. Accessed Nov 1, 2022.

Moix, Cameron. “CSNA Architects offer broad experience.” Colorado Springs Business Journal. Published May 1, 2014. Revised March 4, 2021.

GE Johnson Construction Company, “GE Johnson Construction Company Celebrates 50 Years,” 2017.

“The Beginning of St. Mary’s High School.” SMHSCS Webpage

JE Dunn Construction Company, “El Paso County Jail Expansion and Remodel,” JE Dunn Construction Company Projects Portfolio, 2005.

Heather Poll M.A., “Pikes Peak Center,” Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum. Accessed Nov 1, 2022.

“Negligence Alleged,” Rocky Mountain Jiho, December 19, 1973. Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection.

“New Parker high school to be low energy user,” *Douglas County News-Press*, March 20, 1980. Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection.

Site Files Database, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver.

Revised: January 2023