



Architect: Gordon Lee Charles
Birth/Death Dates: 1918-1966
Practice Dates: 1949-1966
Firms: Musick and Lee
Kunz Construction Company
Taliesin Associated Architects



Research compiled by Daniel Martinez, UCD Student

Biographical Information

Charles Gordon Lee was born in Hutchinson, Kansas, on July 11, 1918. Lee went on to attend the University of Pennsylvania as an undergraduate. While at the university, Lee studied architecture and graduated in 1940. Soon after graduating, he enrolled in Taliesin East. While at Taliesin East, Lee studied under Edward Wigham as a draftsman and then under Frank Lloyd Wright.¹

When the United States entered WWII, Lee served as a United States Air Force Captain from June 1942 – January 1946. He also served during the Korean War from May 1951– September 1952. Following WWII, Lee received the Taliesin Fellowship in 1947 and again studied under Wright at Taliesin West, Arizona.

Created in 1932 by Frank Lloyd Wright and his wife, the Taliesin Fellowship was a community of apprentices who lived and studied with Wright. Wright wanted his fellowship "to develop a well correlated, creative human being with a wide horizon but capable of the effective concentration of his faculties upon the circumstance in which he lives."² Wright being a modernist architect, advocated for functionality and minimalism. His signature style was organic architecture, which utilizes natural surroundings to help inspire the design of buildings. Upon Wright's death in 1952, his wife formed the Taliesin Associated Architects, which preserved Wright's architectural vision. The Taliesin Associated Architects consisted of loyal apprentices and senior fellows who integrated his design philosophy in future projects.³ When Lee established his practice in 1952, his firm became part of the Taliesin network.

Charles Gordon Lee began his career as a draftsman for various architectural firms in Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Colorado. He obtained architectural licenses in Colorado and Wyoming. In 1949 he partnered with J. Roger Musick to create the firm Musick and Lee. In 1951 Lee ended his partnership with Musick and established the Kunz Construction Company the following year. While under his firm, Lee constructed many notable buildings and residences, most notably the Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building and St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

¹ The Center of Preservation Research CoPR University of Colorado Denver College of Architecture and Planning. *Colorado's Mid-Century Modern Schools*. Denver: The Center of Preservation Research University of Colorado Denver, 2014.

² Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, "The Taliesin Fellowship," Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, January 1, 2017, <https://franklloydwright.org/the-taliesin-fellowship/>.

³ "National Park Service: Mission 66 Visitor Centers (Chapter 5)," accessed December 5, 2022, <http://npshistory.com/publications/allaback/chap5.htm>.



In 1965, Lee was contacted by Tom Casey, project architect for the Taliesin Associated Architects, to be an on-site architect for the Rocky Mountain National Park Administration Building in Estes Park, Colorado. The resulting building is considered a great example of Wrightian organic architecture, and is listed as a National Historic Landmark.⁴ Unfortunately, Lee did not live to see the completion of the building. In 1966, a pair of hunters came across Lee's abandoned car, and his body was later found with a self-inflicted wound and a suicide note. He left behind his wife, Polly Lockwood, and two children.

Credited Buildings (partial list)

Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date*	Status
Wright (Phil W.)/Trumbull (F.H.) residence	Aspen, Colorado		1953	
Capitol Mortuary: Chapel of the Flowers	South Colorado Boulevard and Cherry Creek, Denver, Colorado		1954	
Kimbark Office Building	East 3rd Avenue and Fillmore Street, Denver, Colorado		1957	Addition
St. Paul's Episcopal Church	West 10th Avenue and Garrison, Denver, Colorado		1957	
Capitol Mortuary: Chapel of the Chimes	1331 Sherman Street, Denver, Colorado		1957	
Knapp Elementary	West Alaska and Utica Street, Denver, Colorado		1959	
South High School	Louisiana and Race Street, Denver, Colorado		1965	Addition and remodel
North High School	Speer Boulevard and Eliot Street, Denver, Colorado		1962	Addition and remodel
Goldrick Elementary				
Capitol Mortuary: Chapel of the Angels	Reception Building, 7177 West Colfax, Denver, Colorado		1959	
Aurora Chase Mortuary	Aurora, Colorado		1965	

⁴ Ibid.



Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date*	Status
Colorado State Capitol Building	Broadway and Colfax Avenue, Denver, Colorado		1962	Remodel
Rocky Mountain Park Administration Building	Estes Park, Colorado		1966	National Register
Arapahoe Basin Ski Area Administration Building			1965	
Carson Elementary	Idaho Springs, Colorado			
Fort Lewis A and M College Science Building	Durango, Colorado		1963	Addition
Ella Strong Denison Elementary	West Colorado Avenue and South Yates Street, Denver, Colorado		1961	
National Bureau of Standards	Boulder Colorado		1964	Clean room revisions
Harry M Barrett Elementary School	West 29th Avenue and Jackson, Denver, Colorado			
Dabney Residence	5595 South Elmwood, Littleton, Colorado		1961	
Nelson (James) residence	Bergen Park, Colorado		1962	
Taylor (Moses) residence	4500 East Belleview Avenue, Denver, Colorado		1960	Remodel
Lee (Charles Gordon and Polly Lee) residence	1133 South Windermere Avenue, Littleton, Colorado		1961	
McDonald residence	727 Marion Street, Denver, Colorado		1959	Remodel

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



Information Sources

Charles Gordon Lee Architectural Records, WH1232, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

Denver Post. "Charles Lee." The Denver Post, October 18, 1966.

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"National Park Service: Mission 66 Visitor Centers (Chapter 5)." Accessed December 5, 2022. <http://npshistory.com/publications/allaback/chap5.htm>.

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Noel, Thomas J. *Buildings of Colorado*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

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Palmer, Joan and Ilene Bergsman, "Architects of Colorado: Database of State Business Directory Listings, 1875-1950." Denver: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, 2006.

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