



Architect: John R. Henderson
Birth/Death Dates: 6/15/1921 – 6/29/2018
Practice Dates: 1952-1998
Firms: Fisher and Davis
Earl C. Morris
Wheeler and Lewis
James Sudler Associates
Hornbein and White



Research compiled by Summer Carper. UCD Student. 2022

Biographical Information

John R. Henderson was born on June 15, 1921, in a predominantly poor Black and Mexican neighborhood of Wichita County, Kansas. After graduating high school in 1939, Henderson moved to Louisiana following his parents who had left the year before. In Louisiana, Henderson struggled to adapt and moved back to Kansas in 1940. Henderson did return to Louisiana later that year at the bequest of his mother, who urged him to attend university. From 1940-1943 Henderson attended Grambling State University, a historically Black university until joining the military during World War II.

After an honorable discharge in 1946, Henderson enrolled at Friends University, using the G.I. Bill and worked for the wealthy Coleman family (that invented the Coleman lantern). He also helped establish a chapter of Congress for Racial Equality (CORE). Upon graduation in 1948, Henderson struggled to find work as a Black, male teacher. This allowed him to decide to follow his dreams of becoming an architect. The 1940s were also full of joy for Henderson as he married Gloria E. Thomas and raised his son, Lynn B. Henderson.

Immediately after graduation from Friends University, though, Henderson enrolled at Kansas State University in their architecture program. He credits his admiration of Paul Williams, the first Black architect west of the Mississippi who combatted racism throughout his architectural career, for his desire to become an architect. Henderson graduated in 1952 and renewed his job search. Thanks to urban renewal, many cities were hiring city planners and Henderson found a job as a junior city planner in Youngstown, Ohio. He became licensed shortly after Robert P. Madison – the first Black architect of Ohio. Henderson succeeded in his job for three years. Henderson later worked for an architectural firm in Akron, Ohio.

Henderson and his family disliked the weather of Ohio so while Gloria was visiting family in California, Henderson visited Denver, Colorado. In Colorado, Henderson interviewed with several architectural firms like Fisher and Davis, Eugene Sternberg, and Casper Hegner. On October 7th, 1959, with encouragement from Hegner, Henderson transferred his architectural license and became the first Black architect in Colorado.

Once Henderson and his family had moved to Colorado, they found themselves in segregated neighborhoods of Denver. Luckily, they were able to purchase land in the Skyland neighborhood where



Henderson began to design their home. This first year in Colorado, Henderson worked for Fisher and Davis while they collaborated with James Sudler Associates on the Federal Building and Courthouse (renamed the Byron G. Rogers Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in 1984). Henderson worked on the drawings for the Formalist federal buildings but left the firm before construction began due to the lengthy federal approval process. Henderson worked with Earl C. Morris in 1960 but lost his job shortly after when a large project fell through.

Henderson continued his career with several other prominent Denver architectural firms in the 1960s. After Morris laid him off, Henderson designed modern schools under Wheeler and Lewis. Yet, he only stayed with Wheeler and Lewis for a short period before leaving for James Sudler Associates. Under Sudler, Henderson worked on the drawings for the United Bank of Denver and a housing project for the Colorado School of Mines. The last firm Henderson worked with in his career was Hornbein and White. After this period, Henderson worked for the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs across the United States.

After years of architectural firm employment, Henderson transitioned to designing residential homes and a few commercial buildings' alterations, often consulting with Kobey Culbertson Homes, Inc. Henderson's residential designs spread throughout the Denver Metro area and include a 4000 sq. ft. home for Carlotta Walls LaNier, one of the Little Rock Nine. An active community member, Henderson and his wife owned and operated The African and American Trading Company, which sold African American art and furniture. Henderson also attended mass every Sunday at Denver's St. Ignatius Loyola Church where he was the head usher until his mid-90s.

The most well-known design in Henderson's portfolio is his own Denver home, nicknamed the Henderson House. Bought when they first moved to Denver, they built the house was throughout the 1960s through 1990s, as Henderson added to the home until it was perfect. Located at 2600 Milwaukee Street in the Skyland neighborhood of Denver, the mid-century modern home is in the shape of an "H." The design includes several aspects of mid-century modern architecture including large windows and extensive built-ins. The home is also reminiscent of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who helped shape modernist architecture worldwide. The Henderson house has very similar lines and form to the Farnsworth House Mies designed in 1951. In 2018, the Henderson House received a landmark designation shortly after John Henderson passed away.

Design-wise, Henderson embodied the architectural forms of each firm he worked for, but primarily focused on modernist architecture. Most of his designs are examples of formalism, modernism, or mid-century modern architecture.

John R. Henderson passed away on June 29th, 2018. Later, Lynn B. Henderson, John Henderson's son, donated his father's collection to History Colorado in October 2019. The collection includes original drawings, sketches, and blueprints for commercial and residential buildings from 1951 through 1998, though most are from 1960-1988.



Credited Buildings (partial list)

Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date*	Status
The McCullough Williams Jr. Funeral Home Addition	818 Belmont, Youngstown, Ohio		1955	
Residence	1302 East Elm, Wichita, Kansas		1958	
Residence	2945 Elm Street, Denver, Colorado		1960	
Student Family Apartments and College Union, Colorado School of Mines (James Sudler Associates)	Golden, Colorado		1963	
United Bank of Denver (James Sudler Associates, design)	Denver, Colorado		N.D.	
Security State Bank	Sterling, Colorado		1964	
Federal Building and Courthouse (Fisher and Davis, drawings, now the Byron G. Rogers Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse)	1961 Stout Street Denver, Colorado	5DV.201/ 5DV.1775	1965	Listed in the National Register, Denver Landmark
Doctors Office Alterations (Hornbein and White)	Fourth and Corona, Denver, Colorado		1966	
Residence	6609 S. Bonsallo Ave., Los Angeles, California		1967	
Residence	3210 Milwaukee St. Denver, Colorado		1968	
Elks Empire Lodge Alteration	Denver, Colorado		1970	
Residence	Lot #154 Happy Canyon/Douglas County, Colorado		1970	
Residence	409 East 21 st St., Denver, Colorado		1977	
Residence	Arapahoe County, Colorado		1978	
The Griffin Group Limited, Condominium	1165 Columbine Suite 4, Denver, Colorado		1982	
Residence	Chaumont in Cherry Hills, Arapahoe County, Colorado	Lot 19 Block 1	1985	
Residence	6453 Stanford Ave, Englewood, Colorado		1986	



Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date*	Status
Residence (The Henderson House)	2600 Milwaukee St. Denver, Colorado		1962-1998	Denver Landmarked

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

Information Sources

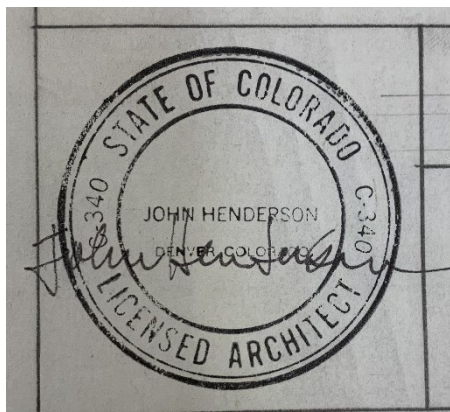
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Created by Summer Carper, December 2022.



The John R. Henderson Collection, MSS.3129,
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