

Architect: Shaver, A. John

Birth/Death Dates: c. March 4, 1918 in Salina Kansas, death November 21, 2010 in Salina, Kansas (92 years old)

Practice Dates: Draftsman, Charles W. Shaver, Architect, Salina, KS, 1945-1947; Partner, Charles W. and John A. Shaver, Salina, KS, 1947-1961; Shaver and Company, Salina, KS, 1961; President, John A. Shaver, Shaver Partnership, 1961 -1995

Firms: Shaver & Shaver, Shaver & Company, Shaver Partnership



Research data compiled by Katelyn Puga, UCD Student, 2022.

Biographical Information

John Shaver was born in Salina Kansas on March 4, 1918, to Charles and Vera Shaver. Prior to his birth Charles and Vera moved to Salina, Kansas in 1915 from Nebraska. Charles was an architect and started his architecture firm in 1915 when he made Salina home. Charles Shaver became the first registered architect in the State of Kansas and is credited for designing more than 1,000 buildings during his career. He specialized in the design of public buildings such as schools, municipal facilities, and churches.

In response to his design philosophy, Charles Shaver, stated that "As all buildings are seen," he wrote, "society has a right to demand that none be ugly; the life of the community requires that none be dangerous to health; social economy requires that they be not wasteful of space or ill-suited to its purpose."

Charles Shaver's son, John Shaver, grew up in Salina and helped his father at his architecture firm called Shaver & Company as early as fourteen (14) years old. After Shaver graduated high school, he went to college to continue his education in architecture at Kansas State University. After graduation from Kansas State University in 1941, he joined the Army during World War II for the duration of the war (1941-1945) where he achieved the rank of Captain during his service.

After Shaver's dedicated service in the Army, he attended post-graduate school in the summers at Stanford University. There he partnered with the Ford Foundation and became involved in The Educational Facilities Laboratories organization. The purpose of this organization was to provide research on new concepts in educational architecture in hopes of contributing to the overall goal of the Ford Foundation, advancing the welfare of the country. Shaver's time spent in the organization influenced many of his works for colleges and school districts both nationally and internationally. In addition to Shaver's graduate work with the Ford Foundation, he was able to join his father's architecture firm as a partner during his post-graduate studies at Stanford. Upon joining the firm, it was renamed to Shaver & Shaver to reflect the new era of architecture in the Shaver family. John Shaver described the importance of his father in an interview with the Salina Journal.

"I learned integrity from him and the feeling of responsibility we have towards our clients. And, I learned the most satisfying thing about architecture is a well-designed building and a satisfied client."

The 1960s and 1970s proved to be the start of two-decades of important work for John Shaver in the Shaver & Company architecture firm. Some of his most renowned work was designed and built during this time. At the heart of the mid-century modern era, Shaver practiced an innovative design, with unique modern characteristics that challenged the typical designs of educational facilities throughout the country. Entire teaching and learning systems were created to function specifically in the facilities that he designed. He came to be known as a pioneer in educational design and mid-century modern architecture. He had an ability to challenge the material application on buildings and pioneered innovative new building material technologies. One of his most notable projects is the first permanent tensioned membrane structure for the Sports Science and Athletics Pavilion at the University of La Verne, in La Verne, California, built in 1973. Another innovative educational building is the Montgomery Central High School building in Tennessee, completed in 1969. The school was designed as three



Pods, situated in a man-made lake. The high school has received accolades such as the most beautiful high school in Tennessee and been notable for its mid-century modern concept.

Shaver is also responsible for the development of the open-concept design for schools, or otherwise known as the "Schools-in-the-Round". The idea was first developed to meet the desires of the Educational Facilities Laboratories to address new school functions and changes in technology. The schools-in-the-round design was characterized by an open-plan, where the schools were separated by round pods with transitional walls to create varied classroom and gathering spaces within the schools. Many of the buildings were modest in appearance, with minimal use of windows in classrooms and geometric roof forms. Some of the roof forms incorporated into his schools were hexagonal, dome, or keyhole shaped.

To convince the educational systems of the 1960s to invest in Shaver's new concepts of how schools should function, he built a model, known as McPherson High School in Salina, KS. This was the first prototype of schools-in-the-round. The build of McPherson High School was sponsored by the Ford Foundation that influenced much of Shaver's work in education. Shaver's design was first introduced to Colorado when the Greeley School District visited the model school in Salina, Kansas. The superintendent of Greeley School District 6 traveled to Kansas to visit McPherson High School and was sold on the idea. By 1961, the Greeley School District had hired Shaver to construct six (6) schools in Greeley.

Just as the Greeley School district hired John Shaver, his father Charles Shaver died in 1961 in Salina, Kansas. Upon Charles' death, the architecture firm (previously Shaver & Shaver) became Shaver and Company. A 6.4-million-dollar bond measure was passed by voters in Greeley to construct six new schools for the district. The district gave four reasons for why Shaver was selected; demonstrated ability to build low-cost schools, willingness to work with district teachers and administration in planning, favorable reports from other school districts, and the firm's experience working with the Educational Facilities Laboratory, which was an indication of its ability to look into the future. All schools were designed in Shaver's experimental schools-in-the-round form, and by 1964 most of the six schools were constructed and fully functioning. While Shaver had a unique relationship with the school district, the distance from Salina may have caused construction and budgetary issues that ultimately resulted in the delay in construction of the schools. The Greeley School District and Shaver were able to overcome the challenges and the schools became nationally acclaimed and were even featured in *The Life Magazine* in 1964, after completion of the schools "...which lauded the City's "rich investment in tomorrow". John Evans Junior High School and Sherwood Elementary School of Greeley were published in the *American Institute of Architects*, a guide to the states architecture, which highlighted outstanding historic and contemporary buildings. Overall, Shaver won fifteen national design awards for his work in education. Shaver became one of the only architects of his time to develop an exclusive relationship with a School District. Shaver designed a total of seven schools in Colorado, six of which are the Greeley schools, and one in La Junta, Colorado. One other notable project in Colorado was a home that Shaver helped design for astronaut Gus Grissom, located in Crested Butte, Colorado.

By the 1970s Shaver & Company was operating multiple offices with some located in Salina, Kansas (headquarters), Menlo Park, California, and Willingsboro, New Jersey. Throughout Shaver's career, he is credited for the design of over 500 schools, both nationally and internationally. In 1973 the architecture firm was renamed for a third time to Shaver Partnership, the change was a reference to the many branch locations throughout the country. The focus of educational design in the firm declined in the later 1970s, causing Shaver to close his branches and downsize the company. An interview about Shaver in the *Salina Journal* in 1974 talks about Shaver and his longtime commitment to the architecture firm and his work.

"The architect [Shaver] doesn't appear to be slowed by age, often putting in long hours at the office. He gives no thoughts to retirement or dedicating any time to hobbies. "This is what I enjoy most," Shaver said. "This is my hobby."



After operating under the Shaver leadership for 80 years, at the age of 77 years old, John Shaver sold the architecture firm in 1995 to Farid Afani. It is not clear as to when, or if, John Shaver ever formally retired from his career. John Shaver's career spanned nearly his entire life, beginning with early exposure of his father's architecture career, through the peak of mid-century modern designs, and finally, becoming an icon in educational design. John Shaver was not just a career architect; he was an architect for life and a pioneer in educational and mid-century modern design.

Credited Buildings (partial list)

Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date*	Status
John Evans Middle School	2900 15th Avenue, Greeley, CO	5WL.8357	1964	Demolished
East Memorial Elementary	614 East 20th Street, Greeley, CO	Not Assigned	1964	
Madison Elementary	500 24th Avenue	Not Assigned	1964	
Greeley West High School	2401 35th Avenue, Greeley, CO	Not Assigned	1964	Demolished
Scott Elementary	3000 13 th Street	Not Assigned	1963	
Brentwood Middle School	2600 24th Avenue Court, Greeley, CO	Not Assigned	1964	
La Junta High School	1817 Smithland	5OT.705	1964	
Astronauts Gus Grissom and Gordon Cooper Duplex	Crested Butte	Not Assigned	Unknown	

*Credited buildings list are not exhaustive, and updates are common. Completion date is stated if known. Plan, building permit, or assessor date is shown if completion date is unknown.



Images:



RICH INVESTMENT IN TOMORROW

A. Y. OWEN

Greeley, Colo. this year spent \$6 million building six spanking new schools like this one with a sunken amphitheater classroom that has wall-to-wall carpeting. This is not a frill but an earnest step toward more efficient education. Last year the U.S. poured \$32 billion into its schools, three times more than 10

years ago. The pupils themselves are major consumers. Twenty million teen-agers spent \$22 billion last year—they are the insatiable customers for pop records, cars, cosmetics. Manufacturers are already planning ways to meet the demand when they carry their expensive tastes into adulthood.



Life Magazine Feature – Source Greeley Tribune



Schools-in-the-round – Source Greeley Tribune



Information Sources

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