



Architect: Robb, William B.
Birth/Death Dates: 1922 - 1999
Practice Dates: 1953 - 1986
Firms: William B. Robb, Architect
Robb & Brenner, Inc., Architects and Planners
RB+B Architects

Research compiled by Susan Downing

Biographical Information

William B. Robb, more commonly known as Bill Robb, was a prominent architect whose prolific work shaped the face of Fort Collins, Colorado. When he moved to Fort Collins in the early 1950's he was the first person to establish a local architecture firm. As Fort Collins quickly grew in size, so did the firm's reputation for impeccable work. Their work was known for being economical, functional, and innovative, as well as being aesthetically pleasing additions to the community. Robb was able to achieve this reputation by approaching each new project with an open mind, without any preconceived notions of what the design should be. His only goal was to create a design that was the most beneficial for the client, based on their needs, wants, and budget. Fort Collins was not only Bill Robb's place of business, but also where he raised a family and a community he was deeply involved in. He was a member of the Fort Collins Regional Planning Commission, Community Council of Fort Collins, Citizens Committee of Fort Collins Schools, Chamber of Commerce, Colorado Society of Architects, Kiwanis, and the Colorado Northern Chapter of American Institute of Architects. Robb was quoted as saying, "We feel when you are close to your work, you can form a close relationship with your client and provide a better service." His love for the town and its citizens is evident in all aspects of his body of work. It would be very hard to find someone living in Fort Collins who has not stepped foot into a building designed by William Robb or his firm, RB+B.

Bill Robb was born on August 9, 1922 in Pueblo, Colorado. Shortly thereafter, his family moved to Durango, Colorado where he spent the rest of his childhood. After graduating high school, Bill joined the United States Army and served in World War II. As the pilot of a B-26 bomber, he was responsible for leading 33 missions over Germany during the course of the war. Once the war ended, Bill returned home and married his high school sweetheart, Eleanor. They started a family which would eventually include six children; Sue, Bruce, Cynthia, Christine, Joanne, and Pamela.

Due to his affinity for mathematics, logical way of thinking, and appreciation for creativity, Bill decided to pursue a Bachelor's of Science degree in Architectural Engineering from University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado in his pursuit to become an architect. After completing this degree in 1947, Bill went on to complete a Masters in Structural Engineering in 1948 from the same university. Bill, his wife, and their two young children then moved to Boston after he was accepted into the Architecture program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1951, he graduated from M.I.T. with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Architecture before moving back to the Colorado Front Range.

In 1953, Bill Robb became a licensed Architect in the State of Colorado and moved to Fort Collins, Colorado to start his own architecture firm. At the time it was considered a risky move by many because Fort Collins was a small "cow-town" known only for being the location of Colorado A&M, now named Colorado State University. Where most people saw a dead-end, Bill Robb saw potential. When he opened his firm William B. Robb, Architect he was the only architect listed in the Fort Collins City Directory. Bill knew work would be limited at the beginning and "versatility became the rule" in order to bring in a wider scope of work. He is quoted as saying "I was almost like a country doctor, because I did everything". At the time local builders and clients were not used to having an architect in town but Bill Robb's perseverance and open-minded approach soon showed them how valuable a resource that could be.



After establishing William B Robb, Architect in 1953, Bill Robb received his first major job, designing the American Baptist Church. Between 1944 and 1955 Fort Collins had doubled in size which meant there was a larger need for new buildings in many sectors. “When I first came here, there wasn’t a lot of building, and the university was only half as big as it is now. The town’s growth was steady and slow. Then the town became a city. Construction really boomed” according to Bill Robb. Throughout the decade Bill Robb was also commissioned to design Putnam, Moore, and Barton Elementary Schools for Poudre School District. These were the first of many schools he would design for the district. Along with schools, Robb was also commissioned to design the new Fort Collins City Hall. By the end of the decade, Robb had become an established Fort Collins architect with a reputation for innovation designs.

During the 1960’s Bill Robb continued his trend of forward-thinking projects by creating innovative designs, especially in the education and religious sectors. He continued to gain commissions for new schools from Poudre School District and started to establish his reputation as the first-choice architect for educational design in Fort Collins. This decade was also when Bill Robb designed some of his most iconic religious projects that still serve as well-known Fort Collins landmarks. These projects include the First Methodist Church and St. Luke’s Episcopal Church. The 1960’s marks the start of Bill Robb’s projects not only being recognized as ground-breaking designs on a local level but from a national one as well.

In 1966, Bill Robb received a commission from Poudre School District to design their first prototype elementary schools. For the design of these schools Bill Robb devised the “pod” concept floorplan. The floorplan consists of classrooms surrounding a flexible learning space, which is now a common design used for Fort Collins schools. The schools could have multiple pods connected to the central area in the building depending on how many students they need to accommodate. This first round of prototype schools consisted of four new elementary schools which had identical floorplans. The new schools were Bauder Elementary, Irish Elementary, Riffenburgh Elementary, and Tavelli Elementary.

The 1970’s saw the expansion of William Robb’s portfolio of work including large planned developments, prominent buildings, and many more projects for the Poudre School District. One of the biggest changes that occurred during this time period was the firm changing its name. In 1971, Bill Brenner, who joined the firm as an architect in the late 1950’s, was made principal and the firm’s name was changed to Robb & Brenner, Inc., Architects and Planners.

The Indian Meadows West Apartment Development is Bill Robb’s most well-known planned unit development. It was the first of its kind in Fort Collins. The underlying goal of this project was to make it as economical as possible, with at least 12 units per acre. Along with that goal, Bill Robb wanted to make sure the existing environment was taken into consideration during the design process. He made sure to save as many existing trees as possible and design each unit to have views of green areas. The positioning of the buildings allowed for outdoor spaces of varying sizes throughout the complex. Once the project was completed it had exceeded the original goal of 12 units per acre by having 34 units for the 2.67 development. The shake roofs and green-toned cedar siding used on the buildings was chosen to create an informal, rustic atmosphere. Bill Robb’s use of wood in this project resulted in the firm receiving the W.O.O.D. Citation for Excellence award, which is presented annually by the Wood Products Manufacturer’s Association. Indian Meadows won this award out of 50 projects that were submitted to the state-wide contest. The award was received for building the best multi-dwelling development made of wood in Colorado. W.O.O.D. Inc. especially admired the “esthetic and creative way [Robb] combined lumber and wood products in this imaginative development”.

The 1980’s brought about big changes to the firm of Robb & Brenner, Inc., Architects and Planners. George Breilig, an architect who joined the firm in 1979, was promoted to principal in 1986. After this promotion, the name of the firm changed to Robb Brenner & Breilig Architects, Inc. The name was later shortened to RB+B Architects, which is what the firm is still known by. Also, in 1986, William Robb officially retired from the firm after a prolific, 35-year career. When he retired, Bill Robb had worked on at least 33 public schools, 15 commercial buildings, 16 churches, 6 research and university buildings, 7 fraternity houses, and 15



developments and housing projects. Even though he no longer had an official role at the firm, Bill continued to consult on projects for many years. The firm continued to expand their portfolio of work during this decade and expanded their site design and land planning for developments services.

Bill Robb officially retired on August 9, 1986, on his 65th birthday, but even after he left RB+B Architects his approach to architecture and work philosophy stayed a central part of the company. Many of the client relationships he had cultivated over the decades are still holding strong, especially the partnership with Poudre School District. As of 2020, RB+B Architects has designed or worked on 33 of the 46 schools in the district. Bill Robb and his firm designed schools that all six of his children attended, most of his grandchildren attended, and even a few of his children worked in as teachers. Starting in the 2000's, all the schools the firm designed have become national examples of sustainable architecture in the education field. Sustainability has become a cornerstone of the RB+B brand, which started with Bill Robb's design philosophy. In a 1971 article for the Larimer County Guardian, he talked about his hope that as Fort Collins grew, natural and open spaces would be preserved. He always considered how a project would relate to the site location and environment, which would determine the look and design of the building. From the beginning of the firm, he embraced innovative and forward-thinking ideas, many of which are now commonly used sustainable design elements. Some of these elements included bringing natural light into a building, using low maintenance materials, and trying to keep as many existing plants and trees as possible.

Robb was always an advocate of a healthy work-life balance which is still evident in the company today. Even at his busiest, Bill would always make it a point to come home every day for lunch with his wife, according to his daughter Pamela. This appreciation for the people in his life was incorporated into the way he ran his firm as well. He started a tradition at the company that every Friday afternoon the whole firm would take a break from work so the employees could hang out and catch up with each other on a personal level. The Friday afternoon break is a tradition that still happens at RB+B Architects every week. While Bill Robb loved his work, he always made sure to prioritize his family and employees. Making its employees the top priority is one of the main reasons that RB+B Architects is still a highly successful firm. As of 2022, RB+B Architects is its 69th year of business and is the oldest, continuously operated architecture firm in Fort Collins.

"Pervading, yet simple. Unique, yet honest. Such could describe the structures designed by William B. Robb, award-winning Fort Collins architect." This quote from the Larimer County Guardian article "William Robb: Beautiful Designs" succinctly describes the feel of Bill Robb's architectural body of work. Over the course of his 35-year career, Robb not only gained notoriety for his designs but also the respect of clients and peers. He approached every project with an open mind and treated it like a partnership so that the clients felt as much a part of the process as he was. This approach to client-architect relationships created strong partnerships and friendships that have lasted decades, with many clients who were extremely happy with the outcome of their projects. When Bill passed away in 1999, he was one of the only non-Catholics to receive a full funeral Mass at St. Joseph's Catholic Church due to his long history of working on projects for the church.

Bill Robb understood the importance of not only meeting a client's needs, but also creating aesthetically pleasing additions to the community. He was quoted as saying, "There's more to architecture than just the drawings – it's the planning, the designing, the knowing of materials. You might design a pretty building, but if it can't be built, you haven't solved anything." For Bill Robb, the designing of the building was only the start and he made sure to be involved of every step in a project in order to provide the best product possible for his clients. David Neenan, of The Neenan Co., once compared Robb to "the master builders of old – the people who could design, engineer, and build their own buildings" and went on to say that he was the kind of architect who would have been successful in any time period. This kind of high praise is commonly heard when Bill Robb is brought up in conversations, but you would rarely have heard Bill talking about his long list of accomplishments. He was a down-to-earth person who never asked for recognition or credit, instead focusing on the things he loved most, his family and his work.



Over the course of his career, William Robb significantly influenced the landscape and character of Fort Collins, as well as the local architecture industry itself. Many of his former employees have gone on to establish successful architecture firms in town, always with the support and encouragement of Bill. Buildings designed by Robb can be found in all parts of town and he often joked that his wife would accuse him of driving around purposely to look at his buildings. His love for the Fort Collins community is clear in his work, as well as his appreciation for the art of architecture itself. William B. Robb's philosophy about architecture, which helped define his outstanding career, is best summed up by one of his most well-known quotes.

"Throughout the ages it has been the simple buildings that solve a problem and have won the awards and become the representative buildings of their time." - William B. Robb

Credited Buildings (partial list)

Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date*
American Baptist Church	600 S Shields St. Fort Collins,		1955
Putnam Elementary School (with Robb, Brenner & Brelig)	1400 Maple St. Fort Collins,	5LR.10794	1956
Fort Collins City Hall	300 Laporte Ave., Fort Collins		1957
Barton Elementary School (with Robb, Brenner & Brelig)	703 E Prospect Rd., Fort Collins	5LR.10776	1957
Moore Elementary School (with Robb, Brenner & Brelig)	1905 Orchard Place, Fort Collins	5LR.10791	1957
Bennett Elementary School	1125 Bennett Rd, Fort Collins	5LR.10778	1963
O'Dea Elementary School	312 Princeton Rd. Fort Collins	5LR.10792	1963
St. Joseph's Catholic Church School Remodel	127 N Howes St. Fort Collins		1963
Chapel in the Pines	23947 W County Rd 74e Red Feather Lakes		1963
First Methodist Church	1005 Stover St. Fort Collins	5LR.3515	1963
St. Luke's Episcopal Church	2000 Stover St. Fort Collins		1965
Bauder Elementary School	2345 W Prospect Rd. Fort Collins	5LR.10777	1968
Jean Irish Elementary School	515 Irish Dr. Fort Collins	5LR.10787	1968
Riffenburgh Elementary School	1320 E Stuart St. Fort Collins	5LR.17095	1968
Tavelli Elementary School	1118 Miramont Dr. Fort Collins	5LR.10798	1968
Poudre School District Administration Building	2407 Laporte Ave. Fort Collins	5LR.10785	1970
Indian Meadows West Apartment Development	Fort Collins		1970
Home Federal Savings & Loan Tower Addition	300 W Oak St. Fort Collins		1972
Home Federal Savings & Loan University Branch	1101 W Elizabeth St. Fort Collins		1972
Eyestone Elementary School	4000 Wilson Ave. Wellington		1973
Laurel Elementary School	1000 Locust St. Fort Collins	5LR.2803	1973
Juan Fullana Elementary School	220 N Grant Ave. Fort Collins	5LR.7396	1975
Scotch Pines Village Shops & Apartments	Fort Collins, CO		1980

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



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Larimer County Assessor

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