



COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT MEMO REPORT OF FINDINGS FOR CERTIFICATE OF DEMOLITION ELIGIBILITY

December 23, 2020

Address: 2001 York Street

Legal Description: PARKSIDE SUB B2 L7 TO L9

Current Building Name: 2001 York Street Suites

Construction Date: original residence—1926; office addition—1991-1992

Source of Information: building permit; architectural plans; aerial photographs.

Architectural

Architectural Style: original residence—Foursquare; office addition—Postmodern

Architect/Builder: original residence—J.A. Johnson; office addition—Bertram A. Bruton

Source of Information: building permit; architectural plans

Historical

Original owner: original residence—Augustana Lutheran Church; office addition—Bertram A. Bruton

Original use(s): parsonage

Current use(s): office

Historical background:

Assessor records show that the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church purchased lots 7-9 of block 2 of the Parkside subdivision in 1925. According to building permits, the Foursquare structure located here was completed c.1926. The building permit, pulled in 1925, describes the building as a “brick parsonage, full basement and garage.” The contractor was J.A. Johnson. The estimated cost was \$14,000. The Augustana Lutheran Church (located at 23rd St. and Court Place) used the property as a parsonage until c.1953 when the church purchased a new parsonage at 4230 E. First Ave.

The Master Property Records for this property could not be located to document the transfer of ownership from the 1950s through the 1980s. However, the *Denver Post* and directories provide documentation of building residents during this period. According to the *Denver Post*, Leroy Smith was living at 2001 York St. by 1955 when he ran for city council. Born in Oklahoma in 1911, Leroy Smith came to Denver in 1936. He opened the Rhythm Records Shop in 1939 which later expanded to become Rhythm Records and Sporting Goods Shop after he became the first Black business owner in Denver licensed to sell firearms. Smith was prominent in the Five Points cultural community, acting as a promoter for musical performers such as Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington. He ran the Rainbow Room ballroom and became Denver’s first

Black disc jockey with programs on KIMN and KFEL radio. He was also a neighborhood activist who started the Colorado Negro Voters Club and East Denver Improvement League. Various articles in the *Denver Post* record Smith as living at 2001 York St. through 1967.

Directories show that 2001 York St. became the home and architectural office of Bertram A. Bruton in 1968 (and assessor records show that Bruton owned the property until his death in 2018). Bruton established his architectural firm in 1961. According to directories, 2001 York St. functioned as both a home and office until c. 1976 when he moved his residence to 2627 Adams St., leaving just the architectural firm at 2001 York St. The property took on its current form c.1991-1992 when Bruton design a Postmodern addition to the house turned office. The two-story addition wraps around the façade, almost completely obscuring the original façade. Just the hipped roof and dormer of the Foursquare residence remains visible. The addition wraps around the northeast corner and extends across most of the north side. The historic Foursquare remains visible on the south and west sides. Addition plans show that the new addition added a lobby, reception area, restrooms, offices, drafting areas, and a coffee room.

Bruton was born in Jacksonville, Florida on May 18, 1931. He attended Jacksonville's Stanton High School where, according to an obituary in the *Denver Urban Spectrum*, Bruton's "interest in architecture was encouraged by an African American teacher at the school, who in the 1940s had been discouraged from entering the field. Recognizing Bertram's talent, the teacher encouraged his student to do what he'd been unable to do." Bruton attended Howard University, graduating with a degree in architecture in 1953. After graduation Bruton looked for work with architectural firms in Jacksonville, but none were interested in hiring a Black architect. Bruton decided to join the Air Force. He served as an installation engineering officer in Alaska from 1954-1956, leaving the service with the rank of 1st Lieutenant.

Bruton moved to Denver after leaving the Air Force. He worked for several architectural firms during his early years in Denver, including Paul W. Rader, James H. Johnson, Fisher & Davis and James Sudler Associates, and Donald R. Roard. On October 19, 1960, an article in the *Denver Post* announced that Bruton was one of 29 architects granted licenses to practice architecture in Colorado following the latest annual examination. Though many sources list Bertram A. Bruton as the first Black architect licensed in Colorado, he appears to actually be the second, though this does not lessen the significance of this achievement. According to the designation application for the John Henderson House, which became a Denver Landmark in 2018: "Shortly after Mr. Henderson received his license in October 1959, another African-American architect, Bertram A. Bruton, received his license in 1960. Some sources have recognized Bertram A. Bruton as the first African-American architect in Colorado. This may be because Mr. Bruton first received his license in Colorado, whereas Mr. Henderson first received his license in Ohio a few years earlier, and then reapplied in Colorado where his license was transferred in 1959. Both men were trailblazers."

In 1961, Bruton announced the opening of his own architectural practice at 2239 E. Colfax Ave. An article in the *Denver Post* announced the opening, stating that "Bruton is an associate member of the AIA. Among his current commissions are an office building and an apartment house in East Denver and a motor hotel at Adams City." According to directories, Bruton moved his offices to 2001 York St. in 1968.

Much of Bruton's work was community focused, designing buildings to serve disadvantaged groups. This included a focus on subsidized and affordable housing. During the 1960s and

1970s, many of these projects were associated with Urban Renewal efforts and the Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA). Examples of this work include:

- Affordable housing in Whittier (1968-9). Bruton was the architect for two subsidized housing projects in Whittier sponsored by the Shorter AME Church and the Campbell Chapel AME Church. The housing was constructed on land purchased from DURA. The goal was to provide rent supplemented apartments to provide housing for those who could not afford market rate housing, but who make too much for public housing. Projects were described as having large windows and courtyard play areas. Units were located at Humboldt St. and E 23rd Ave and E 22nd and Downing St.
- City Park Manor Nursing Home (1968). This four-story nursing home was designed for the Missionary Volunteer League, Inc. According to the *Denver Post* this was the first privately built nursing home to be financed in Denver with a combination of funds from a federal grant and FHA loan. The facility was run by two Negro doctors: John F. Bookhardt and Thomas C. Hickman. According to the League this was the first Black-owned nursing home in the country: "There are many nursing homes in Denver which cater to those with low incomes. But none are located near a section where the Negro population is concerned. . . City Park Manor is an example of how Negroes can help themselves achieve."
- Sakura Square (1973): In 1970, DURA accepted a proposal from the Tri-State Buddhist Church to buy land from DURA for construction of a residential and commercial development with a Japanese cultural center on a full block bounded by 19th, 20th, Larimer, and Lawrence. A high-rise apartment building would be aimed at moderate-income tenants with some federal subsidies for low-income tenants. The project would be financed through the FHA. Bruton was selected as the project architect. According to the *Denver Post*, "Bruton said the design of the full block complex will have some Oriental motif but will be fully compatible with the rest of the modern architecture expected in the Skyline project." Upon completion, the *Denver Post* wrote: "a \$4million monument to the energy and artistry of Denver's Japanese-American community has risen without fanfare on a full block which only two years ago was part of the slum that constituted lower downtown Denver. . . a living symbol of modern Oriental culture in what, under urban renewal, is becoming Denver's skyscraper showplace." The exteriors of the building were concrete, swept with a broom to achieve a strong brushed texture, a feature that referenced contemporary Japanese architecture as well as the Brutalist style popular at the time. According to the website for Bruton's firm: "Since the character of the complex was to be essentially Japanese, our job become one of expressing the Japanese architecture and developing building techniques that would not increase the sq. ft. cost. Studies showed a six-inch flat plate structural system to be the most economical. Panel of rake finished concrete are used as fillers within the concrete skeleton."
- Park Hill West Condominiums (1973): Bruton formed the City Park Development Co. in 1969 along with Willie B. Anthony (contractor) and Gerald H. Bradshaw (realtor) for the condominium development they described as the "finest ever developed for the Park Hill area". According to Bradshaw: "Park Hill West is the most ambitious and sophisticated group of dwellings so far built in this section of East Denver. It follows the modern pattern of change in living style and the change from purchasing existing older homes to purchasing a new built residence." All units to include a fenced rear yard and patio as well as share playgrounds and green space.
- Mitchell Urban Renewal project (1975): Mitchell Sixty-Six Associates limited partnership was formed for the project with Bruton as the general partner. The partnership purchased lots from DURA, with a total of 26 scattered sites. The project was financed

by Colorado State Housing Finance Authority. Plan to construct 86 units with subsidized rents. Housing types ranged from duplexes to a 13-unit apartment building. According to the *Denver Post*, “The sites cleared and sold to Bruton by DURA originally contained housing considered structurally or economically unattractive for remodeling or rehabilitation.”

- Adams County subsidized housing (1980): Bruton lost an effort to rezone land in Adams County near Coronado Parkway and York Street for 66 units of subsidized townhomes with three and four bedrooms. According to an article in the *Denver Post*: “The townhouse design, which Bruton describes as the next best thing to living a single-family home, would have given the residents ‘their own individual turf that they can call their own.’ He believes the residents would have greater pride in their townhomes than, for instance, in a third story walk-up.” Bruton “favors imaginative building designs, insisting that subsidized housing can’t remain barracks-like and be acceptable to its tenants and the community.” According to Bruton, apartment development designs “need to have some pizzazz.” Bruton stressed the importance of subsidized housing design and quality, with developments fitting in with the surrounding community. This would instill pride in the development while avoiding the stigma of public housing. Bruton stated that “the test I put to any development I’m involved in is, ‘Would I live there?’ If I can affirmatively answer that question, then I’ll be involved in it.”
- Kappa Tower (1984): Bruton designed and served on the planning committee for the construction of Kappa Tower, a 45-unit senior housing building in Denver at 21st and Downing. He also served on board of directors for the Kappa Management Corporation which managed building. The tower was constructed by Kappa Alpha Psi, a fraternity founded by Black students at Indiana University in 1911. The fraternity emphasized Christian values and achievement. According to the fraternity website: “the Fraternity would seek to raise the sights of Black youths and stimulate them to accomplishments higher than might otherwise be realized or even imagined.” Bruton joined the fraternity while attending Howard University. Kappa Tower was the first senior citizen housing building owned by an alumni chapter of a Black Greek organization in the U.S.

In addition to his active architectural career, Bruton was involved in numerous organizations and served on many boards. A snapshot of some of his volunteer activities during the 1970s:

- 1971—Appointed to a special planning board assigned to assist the Denver Olympic Committee in site selection, planning facilities, and reviewing environmental impacts.
- 1975—Served on the AIA Colorado Central Chapter Executive committee heading the Environment '76 campaign for projects to be completed as part of celebration of Colorado’s Centennial/Bicentennial.
- 1977—Appointed to the board of directors of the Denver Kiwanis Club
- 1977—Appointed to the board of the Urban League of Colorado. Goal of the league to “eliminate racism and the conditions that promote poverty and develop equal opportunity for all.”
- 1979—Appointed to the board of the Denver Chamber of Commerce

Bruton’s list of projects and community involvement indicates an individual who was remarkably driven to both succeed and serve. In 1980, Bruton was featured in a *Denver Post* feature “Zeal keeps happy workaholics on go” about six Denver workaholics. Bruton told the reporter that he loved his work because “it is involved with creation.” He wanted to be involved with projects “from design to completion, ending with an analysis of that project to determine how successful

you had been.” Bruton said that “when you enjoy what you do, it isn’t work. I love architecture, and I enjoy seeing a job well done. . . . Hard work is good for me. It is required of my basic metabolism.” Bruton said he wished that he could find more people who worked as hard as he did so that he could hire them. The article made it clear that Bruton was motivated by his passion for architecture, not a desire to make a profit. When asked about money, Bruton responded: “I keep telling myself that one day I’m going to make some. Seriously, though, I think money becomes secondary to the satisfaction of the job.”

Bruton’s drive was also recognized in a 1980 *Denver Post* editorial titled, “Despite Bruises, They Won’t Give Up Dreams.” It named Bruton as being among “a segment of society in the Denver metropolitan area that has grown from about 62,000 in 1970 to more than 100,000 today. They are doctors, lawyers, and business chiefs. They are responsible citizens. They are members of the Black community.”

In 1982, Bruton was announced as one of 22 Denver residents to invest in Mile Hi Cablevision. The select group (all courted by Mile Hi as investors) would own 15 percent of firm which had been given exclusive cable television operating rights in Denver. The *Denver Post* stated that the “22 local owners of Mile Hi Cablevision Association Ltd.—through their experience, associations and public service—make them 22 of the more politically well-connected people in the city. In one way or another, each has close political and personal ties to the Denver City Council, Mayor Bill McNichols and state officials, or with people who do.” According to the article, Bruton was: “an energetic architect who has been characterized by friends—and even himself—as a workaholic. Bruton has been active in Denver civic affairs. He operates Bertram Bruton and Associates, a Denver architectural firm that has designed several low- and moderate-income housing project. He is a former director of the National Organization of Minority Architects and is involved with the Urban League of Colorado, the Griffith Home for Boys, the East Denver YMCA, and the Denver Chamber of Commerce.”

While in its early decades Bruton’s firm focused on smaller projects where they were the sole designer, in the 1990s, the firm began partnering with other firms, serving as associate architects on large-scale public projects. These included the Denver International Airport, Wellington Webb building, Denver Convention Center expansion, and Mile Hi Stadium. In 2002, Bruton also opened a second architectural office in Jacksonville, Florida. According to the website for Bruton’s firm: “Our emphasis ranges from apartments and medical facilities to churches, community centers, public schools, municipal buildings and airport facilities. Our tallest high-rise project is 22 stories and our construction costs for building construction projects of all types are in excess of 1 billion dollars. . . . We have developed an approach to architectural design that stresses creative and workable concepts within the realities of client and budget constraints.” At some point in this period, the firm name was shortened from Bertram A. Bruton Associates to BAB Associates. Bruton also served on the Colorado State Board of Examiner of Architects from approx. 1995 to 2003.

Burton passed away on January 19, 2018. Ownership of the office building at 2001 York St. passed to his wife Dorothy who sold the property to RDC TWO LLC in December 2019. A sign on the property currently advertises office space available in the building, currently named 2001 York Street Suites.

Bertram A. Bruton Associates projects (this is a partial list of known projects based on research conducted for this staff report and is not comprehensive):

1961: Park Manor Nursing Home, 1801 E 19th Ave

1964-1966: Hoffman Heights Shopping Center remodel and expansion in Aurora including a new post office, U.S. Royal Auto Service Center, and Luby's Cafeteria

1968: City Park Manor Nursing Home at 1899 Gaylord St.

1968-9: Whittier Plaza Apartments and Coleman Manor Apartments

1969: Payne Chapel Apartments (subsidized housing), Colorado Springs

1970: Low-income housing development at W. Nevada Drive and W. Alameda Ave. in Lakewood.

1973: Sakura Square

1973: Park Hill West Condominiums at Jackson and E 37th

1973: Supervising architect for the Nest, a 144-unit apartment complex on E. Kentucky Ave in Aurora near the Buckingham Square Shopping Center

1975: Mitchell Urban Renewal project (DURA). Design 86 apartments on scattered lots between E 32nd Ave, E. 29th, E. 28th, alley between Marion and Lafayette and alley between High and Race.

1976: Wellshire Post Office, 2080 Holly St

1979: East Side Health Center, 501 28th Street

1980: Converted historic Olin hotel at 1420 Logan Street into 106 efficiency and one-bedroom apartments for older adults and disabled individuals.

1983: Glenarm Recreation Center, 2800 Glenarm Pl

1984: Kappa Tower, 2160 Downing St

1986: St. Charles Plaza townhome development at 37th And Lafayette. Development of the Urban League of Metropolitan Denver for low- and moderate-income families.

1990: Betawest Office Building in Englewood at 188 Inverness Drive, associate architect

1994: Manual High School addition including a gym and swimming pool

1995: Denver International Airport, associate architect

1996: Pauline Robinson Branch Library, Denver

1999: La Casa Family Health Center, 4545 Navajo St.

2000: UCHHealth Anschutz Outpatient Pavilion

2001: Invesco Field at Mile High, associate architect

2002: Wellington Webb building, associate architect

2004: Colorado Convention Center expansion, associate architect

2007: on call architect for Denver International Airport and for City and County of Denver

Source of Information: Denver Assessor's Office; Denver City Directories; Federal Census Records 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940; Denver householder's Directory and Street Avenue Guide 1924-1950; Denver building permits 1915-1955; *Denver Post*; AIA Directory; Blackthen.com; *Kappa Alpha Psi Journal*; *Denver Urban Spectrum*; babassociates.net; kappaalphapsi1911.com

Designation Eligibility Assessment

Landmark Designation Criteria:

A structure or district may be designated for preservation if, due to its significance, it meets the criteria listed in subsections (1), (2), and (3) below

(1) The structure or district maintains its integrity;

(2) The structure or district is more than 30 years old, or is of exceptional importance; and

(3) The structure or district meets at least 3 of the following 10 criteria:

- It has a direct association with a significant historic event or with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;
- It has direct and substantial association with a recognized person or group of persons who had influence on society;
- It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style or type;
- It is a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder;
- It contains elements of design, engineering, materials, craftsmanship, or artistic merit which represent a significant innovation or technical achievement;
- It represents an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, community or contemporary city, due to its prominent location or physical characteristics;
- It promotes understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity;
- It represents an era of culture or heritage that allows an understanding of how the site was used by past generations;
- It is a physical attribute of a neighborhood, community, or the city that is a source of pride or cultural understanding;

- It is associated with social movements, institutions, or patterns of growth or change that contributed significantly to the culture of the neighborhood, community, city, state, or nation.

Integrity: If a structure maintains its integrity, it may be designated for preservation.

- Has integrity
 Does not have integrity

Does the structure have potential for designation?

- Has potential for designation
 Does not have potential for designation

The c.1991-1992 addition dramatically altered the appearance of 2001 York St., so this staff report is focused evaluating the significance of 2001 York St. in this current form rather than the original Foursquare dwelling. Due to the scale of the addition and placement on the façade, the property does not retain integrity related to its original use as a residence. However, the property does retain a very high degree of integrity as related to the office expansion and association with Bertram A. Bruton's architectural firm. Based on architectural plans, the building appears to be effectively unchanged from the construction of the addition c.1991-1992. The property in this form is approximately 28 years old. Based on the Landmark ordinance, to qualify for designation, a property must be 30 years old or of exceptional importance. The 30-year threshold was established to ensure that sufficient time had passed to allow for the evaluation of a property in a historic context. With the construction date of the addition so close to the 30-year mark and the contributions of Bruton well documented and the evolution of the Postmodern style extensively analyzed, sufficient information is available to evaluate 2001 York St. in context. Due to the exceptional significance of Bertram A. Bruton with whom the property is associated as well as the uniqueness of the Postmodern design, staff finds that the property meets the threshold of exceptional significance. This property is strongly associated with Bruton's architectural career since he both designed and worked in the building.

Staff finds that 2001 York St. has significance in the following areas:

- 2001 York St. has a direct and substantial association with Bertram A. Bruton who has been recognized for his significant contributions to the development of Denver from the 1960s into the 2000s. Bruton was an advocate for the development of high quality subsidized and affordable housing. Bruton played a significant role in the Urban Renewal movement in Denver, working on many projects with the Denver Urban Redevelopment Authority (DURA). The City and County of Denver established DURA in 1958 with the goal of guiding the redevelopment of blighted property and fostering the sound growth and development of Denver. Though the extensive demolition of building in the urban core by DURA during the 1960s and 1970s is now generally criticized, DURA did play an undeniable role in shaping the development of the city. DURA's work was part of a larger national Urban Renewal movement at this time which promoted the clearance of many older (and generally poorer) neighborhoods in urban cores to create

a blank state for redevelopment. This rebuilding was promoted as the way to reverse the damage that decades of white flight and suburbanization had cause to urban cores. According to his obituary in the Kappa Alpha Psi Journal, was responsible for “the creation of more than 50 housing developments with nearly 4,000 units of low-income housing.” According to an article in the *Denver Post*, “Bruton’s experience in development of government assisted housing is extensive.” In addition to providing architectural services, Bruton was also involved in the development and management housing projects. Bruton volunteered his time extensively to organizations working to create more equitable housing, health, and professional opportunities for all. Bruton was an active member of Kappa Alpha Psi, the American Institute of Architects, Urban League of Metropolitan Denver, National Organization of Minority Architects, Kiwanis, the Griffith Home for Boys, the East Denver YMCA, and the Denver Chamber of Commerce.

- 2001 York St. embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of the Postmodern style. The concept of Postmodern architecture arose in the 1960s as a reaction against the austerity of Modern architecture. Postmodernists criticized Modernism as sterile, anonymous, too universal, overly simplistic, and meaningless. Postmodernists argued that when Modern architecture rejected ornament and forms with past associations, it lost the ability to communicate a building’s reason for existence, creating buildings that looked similar regardless of purpose and place. Postmodernists promoted architecture that was unique and surprising, blending traditional, contemporary, and newly invented elements. Postmodernism reinterpreted traditional design elements, combining inspiration from various styles and periods. Familiar shapes and details were used in unexpected ways, creating striking contrasts.

Postmodern architecture evolved into an identifiable architectural style in 1970s and gained widespread popularity by the 1980s, becoming hugely influential on design and culture. Postmodern architecture was part of a larger Postmodern cultural movement that included philosophy, education, criticism, literature, performing arts, and sociology. Overarching themes of the Postmodern movement include the questioning of reality and presentation, a critique of Western institutions and established knowledge, and an emphasis on individual interpretation. Postmodern architects emphasized the importance of context, often achieved through symbolic references to history, local materials, and vernacular forms. Postmodern architecture reintroduced identifiable forms and motifs such as columns, gables, arches, and chimneys, but often modernized or abstracted traditional elements in humorous, whimsical, and ironic ways. Postmodern architecture was a theatrical style, often using dramatic effects to engage the viewer, playing with the form and scale of traditional elements. Postmodern buildings often featured a juxtaposition of elements not historically found together, with bold, geometric forms common.

By the late 1990s, Postmodern architecture fell out of favor. Critics declared it kitsch, garish, cartoonish, and overly commercial, a reflection of the excess of the 1980s. However, Postmodern architecture had recently seen a revival in interest with multiple articles and books published on the style. Contemporary architects are beginning to look to Postmodern designs of the past for inspiration, and efforts have been made to preserve significant works of Postmodern architecture. Denver designated Cableland, its first Landmark in the Postmodern style, in 2019. However, there are relatively few good examples of Postmodern architecture in Denver, giving additional importance to 2001

York St. Michael Graves's Central Branch of the Denver Public Library and Philip Johnson's "Cash Register" building are Denver's best-known examples of Postmodernism.

Key Postmodern elements seen in 2001 York St. include: oversized, stylized versions of traditional building elements (such as the cornice, deconstructed pediment, and window details); strong geometric composition with repeated motifs (seen in the square and circular windows); a varied wall plane with projections and recesses creating a play of light and shadow; a design that plays with scale and proportion, exaggerating, manipulating, and distorting traditional forms (such as the bubble windows); and a whimsical, playful design that gives the impression of a building created from a set of children's building blocks.

- 2001 York St. is a significant example of the work of a recognized architect, Bertram A. Bruton. Receiving a license in 1960, Bruton was the second Black architect licensed in Colorado. Bruton's firm played a major role in shaping Denver. Most of Bruton's designs were not glamorous projects, but instead the practical buildings that people live in, work in, and use daily. The firm focused on project types with a public benefit including subsidized housing, recreational facilities, and medical offices. The firm also worked on many large-scale public projects in Denver: including Wellington Webb Municipal Building, Mile High Stadium, the Colorado Convention Center, and Denver International Airport. Bruton worked in a variety of contemporary styles during his career. Design influences included Formalism (Sakura Square and City Park Manor), Brutalism (Sakura Square and East Side Health Center), Neo-Mansard (Payne Chapel Apartments and Whittier Apartments), and Neo Traditional (Park Hill West). With a career focused largely on subsidized/affordable housing and government projects, Bruton was generally dealing with tight project budgets with limited scope for experimentation. For Bruton, 2001 York St. provided a rare opportunity to design in whatever style he chose. His choice was a bold Postmodern design that completely altered the traditional character of his Foursquare office building.
- 2001 York St. is an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood due to both its prominent location and physical characteristics. It is located at the corner of York St. and 20th Ave. directly across from City Park. The unusual Postmodern design combined with the corner location on a major road adjacent to the park has made this building especially prominent and a key visual feature of the neighborhood. According to a recent real estate advertisement for the property, an average of 14,591 vehicles per day pass 2001 York St., giving the property "great street visibility."