

AURORA LANDMARK PROPERTIES

NOMINATION FORM

City of Aurora
Historic Preservation Commission



SECTION A: SITE INFORMATION AND DESCRIPTION

Nomination Site Name: **Bicentennial Art Center**

1. *Name of Nominated Site*

Historic Name: Lowry Air Force Base Building 1600 / Radar Transmission Building/Lowry
Communications Annex Facility

Current Name: Bicentennial Art Center

2. *Address of Property*

Street Address: 13655 E. Alameda Avenue, Aurora

County: Arapahoe Zip Code 80012

3. *Geographic Description*

P.M.: 6 Township: 3 Range: 67W Quad Map: Fitzsimons Year: 1964/95

NW ¼ of SE ¼ of SE ¼ of SE ¼ of Section: 12

Map scale: 7.5'

UTM: Zone 13: 5 1 4 5 3 4 mE 4 3 9 5 8 3 7 mN

Lot(s): 1 Block: 1 Addition: Bicentennial Park Subdivision Filing No. 1

Year of Addition: 1987

Boundary Description:

4. *Site Description:* The Bicentennial Art Center building is located at Bicentennial Park. The park is bounded by Potomac Street on the east, Alameda Avenue on the south, Ursula Street to the west and Bayaud Street to the north.

5. *Legislative Information*

Aurora Ward #: 3 Colorado House District: 42 Colorado Senate District: 29

6. *Site Owner*

Current: Name: City of Aurora

Address: 15151 E. Alameda Pkwy Phone: _____

City: Aurora State: CO Zip: 80012

(If the property has multiple owners, please give the names and addresses of all owners on a continuation sheet)

Historic: Name: United States Air Force

Source of information: Lowry Air Force Base Master Plan, Wings Over the

Rockies Museum Archives

7. *Site Classification*

Nomination Site Name: Bicentennial Art Center Building

building(s) district site structure object area

8. *Site Condition*

excellent good fair deteriorated ruins

9. *Site Location*

original location moved (date of move _____)

10. *Site Use*

Historic: Radar/radio transmitter equipment Current: Community pottery/art center

SECTION B: DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION INFORMATION

11. *Year(s) of Construction*

Original Structure: ca 1938 Additions or Alternations: 1976

Source of information: Lowry Air Force Base Master Plan, Wings Over the Rockies Museum and City of Aurora Real Property Services Department

Alterations: In 1976, a large addition was constructed to the north of the original building to accommodate a pottery art studio and class space.

12. *Architect, Builder, Engineer, Artist, or Designer*

Name: Unknown Location: Unknown

Source of information N/A

13. *Architectural Style/Engineering Type*

Type/Style: Art Moderne

Source of information: Colorado's Historic Architecture and Engineering Guide

<http://www.historycolorado.org/archaeologists/moderne>

SECTION C: SITE SIGNIFICANCE

14. *Significance of Property*

Nomination Criteria:

1. The Property (District) Exemplifies or Reflects the Broad Cultural, Political, Economic, or Social History of the Nation, State, or Community.

2. The Property (District) Is Identified With a Historic Person or Historic Group Significant To National, State, or Local History.

3. The Property (District) Embodies Distinguishing Characteristics of an Architectural Type Inherently Valuable to the Study of a Period, Style, Method of Construction, or Indigenous Materials or Craftsmanship.

4. The Property (District) Is Representative as the Work of a Master Builder or Architect.

5. The Property (District) Contains the Possibility of Important Archaeological Discoveries in Prehistory or History.

6. The District Consists of a Definite Area That, Due To Its Unique Location or Singular Characteristics, Represents Established and Familiar Visual Features of the Neighborhood, Community, or City.

Nomination Site Name: Bicentennial Art Center Building

15. *Significance Statement*

The Bicentennial Art Center (Bicentennial), formerly Lowry Air Force Base (AFB) Building No. 1600, is eligible for local landmark designation under Criterion No. 1 for its role in Aurora’s military history as well as its contribution to community history. The building is also eligible for local landmark designation under Criterion No. 3 as an excellent example of the Art Moderne architectural style. The period of significance for this building is from 1938 when the building was constructed through 1976 when it was a key component in the City’s celebration of the country’s Bicentennial when it was put into reuse as the community art center.

Historic Background

Military -

Lowry Air Force Base opened in 1938 as a United States Air Force base. Its primary mission throughout its existence was United States Army and Air Force technical training and bomber crew training during World War II (WWII).

Dedicated by the Colorado Air National Guard in 1924, the first "Lowry Field" stood at 38th Avenue and Dahlia Street (See Figure 1). Of significant historic note, this first "Lowry Field" was not affiliated with the United States Air Force, but the two sites shared the name Lowry leading to much confusion about the original location of "Lowry."



Figure 1. The original Lowry Field, 1938. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.

Both Lowry Field and Lowry Air Force Base were named in honor of Second Lieutenant Francis Lowry, a Denver native killed in action in 1918 during World War I. Lowry's plane was shot down while serving as an aerial observer. Nicknamed "Blondie" by his friends, Lowry came from a prominent Denver family and was the first Denver aviator killed in wartime. He is buried in Fairmount Cemetery.

In 1934, the U.S. Army Air Corps (a forerunner to the U. S. Air Force) realized it required additional space for its facilities at Chanute Field, Illinois. The search began for a new facility where it could consolidate its Air Service Technical training schools. After looking at more than 80 sites across the nation, a military committee submitted a list to Congress with the names of six cities that would meet their needs. Denver ranked first, and Congress approved the Air Corps project in 1937; Chanute remained the headquarters of the Air Corps Technical School and home to the aircraft mechanics school.

In 1937, President Roosevelt authorized funds to accommodate the newly formed armament and photography branch of the Army. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) began work to convert the grounds of the former Agnes Memorial Sanatorium near East 6th Avenue and Quebec Street into a modern airfield. The base began its training mission in earnest the following year.

The onset of WWII necessitated the expansion of Lowry AFB and its facilities in order to train bomber aircrews along with a large number of other technical specialists.

In February 1938, Lowry came under the jurisdiction of the Air Corps Technical School, still headquartered at Chanute. The Departments of Photography and Armament moved to Lowry, followed in September by the Department of Clerical Instruction. Classes in aerial photography began at Lowry in 1938, and a runway opened on April 4 of that year. The first aircraft to land on the newly constructed paved runway was a B-18 Bolo. The sanatorium's main building became base headquarters. In addition, the largest single barracks, housing 3,200 men, was completed in mid-1940.

After WWII, Lowry AFB continued to train technicians for all branches of the United States military. In 1951, Lowry's 3415th Technical Training Wing formed a Guided Missile Department where it taught courses in guidance, control and propulsion for such weapon systems as the Matador, Falcon, Rascal, Snark and Navaho. Over the years, thousands of airmen trained at Lowry.

Bombing and strafing missions of the U.S. Navy, Air Force and the Air National Guard were practiced at the Lowry Bombing Range during the 1950s and early 1960s. By the mid-1960s, however, airspace in the Denver area became so crowded that in 1966, the Air Force directed Lowry to shift all of its flying activities to nearby Buckley Air National Guard Base.

In 1992, the Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1988, and the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1990, recommended Lowry AFB for permanent closure. In 1993, Lowry was closed as part of cost reduction

measures being taken by the US military. To consolidate military training, small missile maintenance training moved from Lowry AFB to Vandenberg AFB in California in 1993. Lowry Air Force Base officially closed on October 1, 1994. (See Figures 2 and 3 for maps of local military base locations.)

“The three locations of Lowry. The original Lowry Field at E. 38th Avenue and Dahlia Street, whose activities in 1937-38 moved a mile east to the new Denver Municipal Airport. During WWII, Lowry relocated again to its third and final location two miles south.”
From Colorado's Forgotten Airbase

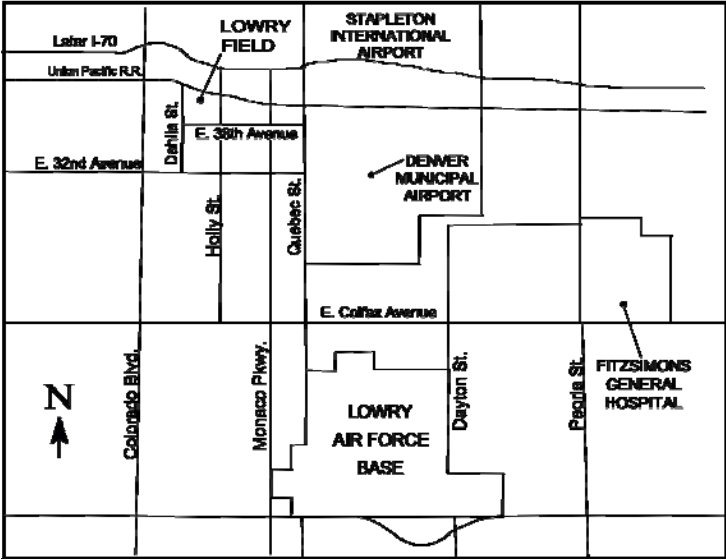


Figure 2.

Military Bases Map

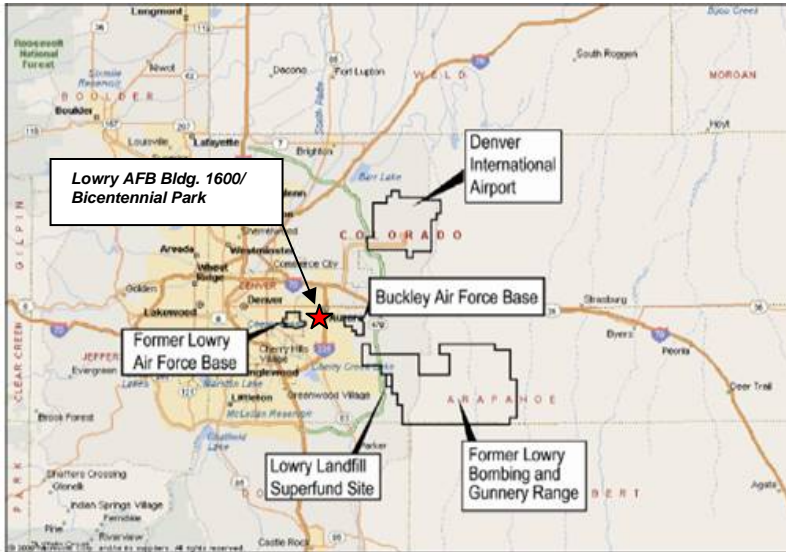


Figure 3. *Red star indicates approximate location of Lowry AFB Building 1600/Bicentennial Park

Radar -

The United States military used *radio detection and ranging* (RADAR) to locate air, ground and sea targets during WWII. Radar technology provides target position by reporting bearing and range data. Its use is now applied in many different fields where the need for position information is crucial in applications such as aircraft, ships and roads.

In 1935, Scotsman Sir Robert Watson-Watt successfully demonstrated the detection of an aircraft by a radio device. Full-scale development of radar was initiated later that year after it became evident that sound locators (which at the time were the only manner of detecting inbound bombers) could not provide adequate reaction time.

Radar consists of a transmitter, a receiver, one or two antennae and signal-processing circuitry (Figure 4). A signal is an electromagnetic wave capable of propagating or transmitting through space. The transmitter produces a signal which radiates through an antenna. If an object is in the path of a signal, then part of the signal reflects back to the radio detection device or radar. The receiver then picks up this "echo", sorts out the data from other types of interference, takes measurements to determine the object's location in space, its speed and other characteristics, and prepares the information for output to a display or at a remote command post. (See Figure 5 for an example of a military radar transmission building with its associated radio tower.)

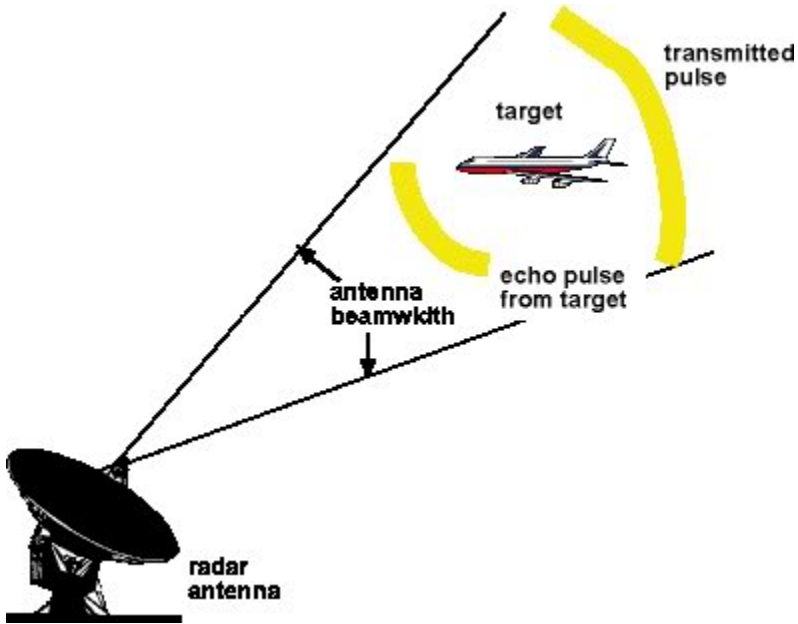


Figure 4. How radar works



FPS-18 Jeffersonville GA, Nov 1965

Figure 5. A radar transmitter building and its associated tower.

Lowry Radar Transmitter Building -

Constructed around 1938, the Bicentennial Art Center building accommodated radio transmission operations for the United States Air Force. (See Figure 6 for a photograph of the interior of a military radar transmission building.) The purely functional building served to shelter the transmitter components and control devices. Unfortunately, little information exists pertaining specifically to this building. Research conducted at the Wings Over the Rockies Museum and the National Archives at the Denver Federal Center yielded no results after Nomination Site Name: Bicentennial Art Center Building

reviewing the Lowry AFB Master Plan and all Real Property Transfer Records documenting real property transfers and sales of surplus property. (See Figure 7 for aerial photograph of Lowry Building 1600).



Figure 6. Interior of a Navy radio control room.

In 1962, the property that later became Bicentennial Park was annexed into the City of Aurora by Annexation Ordinance 62-36.

The City of Aurora, in June 1971, applied to the federal government for surplus property to be used as a public park or for recreation activities. This property, including an existing 1,640 square foot building located at 13655 East Alameda Avenue, formerly Lowry AFB Building 1600, was acquired by deed in November 1971 from the United States Government.

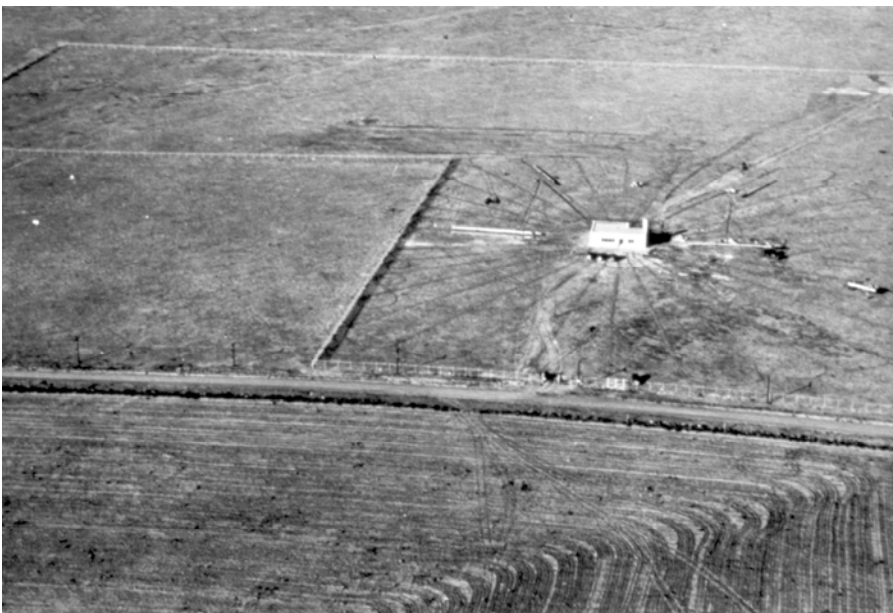


Figure 7. Aerial photograph of Lowry Building 1600, undated. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.

Community Involvement –

In 1975, the Denver Post reported that “Members of the Aurora Centennial-Bicentennial Committee hope to build a \$1 million park without using any tax money” (See Figures 8, 9 and 10). Aurora citizens raised over \$10,000 by purchasing “A Piece of the Park.” This contribution, combined with donations from local clubs, paid for landscaping at the park. The City of Aurora also contributed to the project by funding the installation of a formal entrance and parking lot for the park.

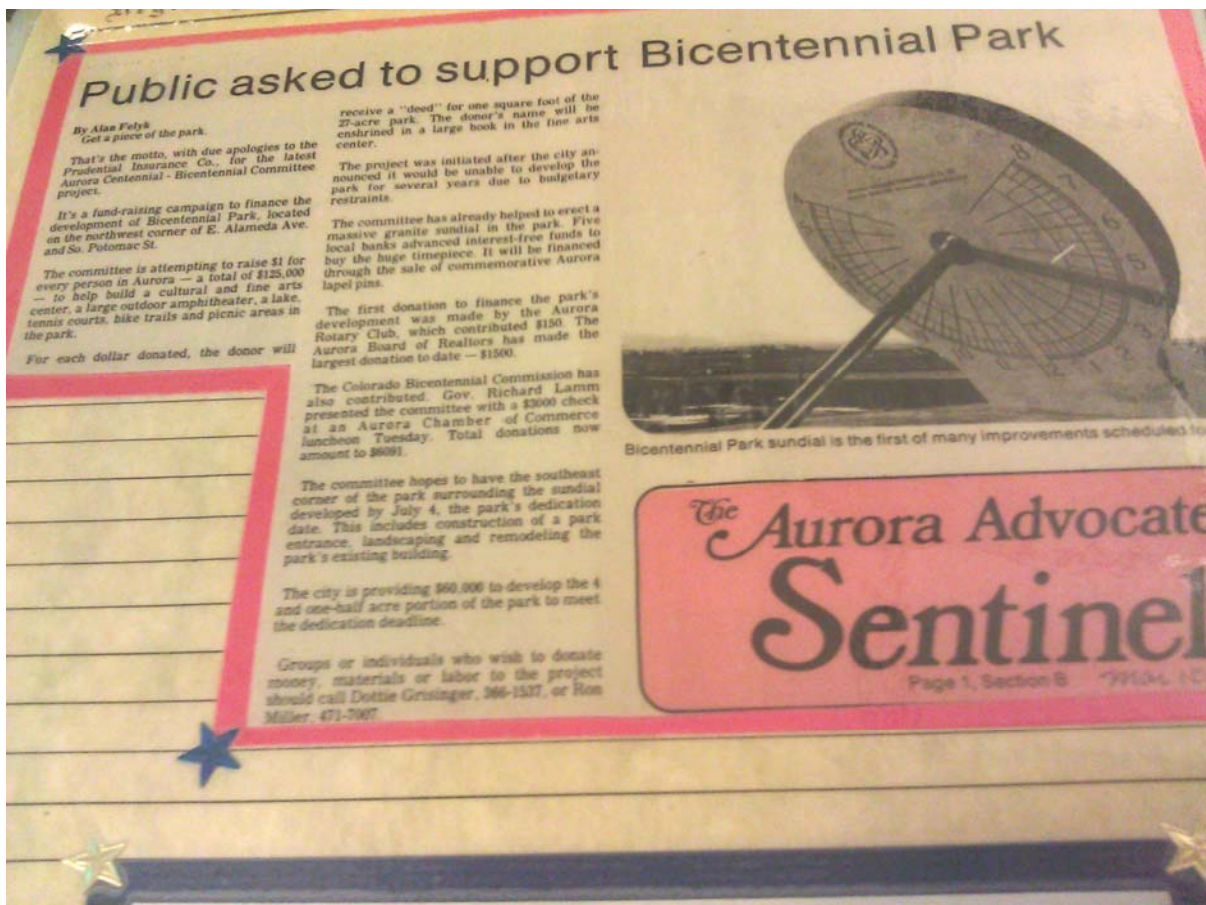


Figure 8. Aurora Advocate newspaper clipping seeking public support. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.



Figure 9. Undeveloped Bicentennial Park land. Note Lowry Building 1600 on the horizon to the right of the sign. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.



Figure 10. Stakeholder's Interest in Bicentennial Park Certificate. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.

By July 4, 1976, the City celebrated the country's bicentennial with the christening of the first phase of the citizen-funded Bicentennial Park construction. This phase provided the landscaping of five and one-half acres and the construction of a garden. Profits from the sale of the Aurora Centennial-Bicentennial pins funded the purchase of a large granite sundial (See Figures 11, 12 and 13) – one of the first sundials in the nation to be dedicated as part of the Bicentennial celebration.

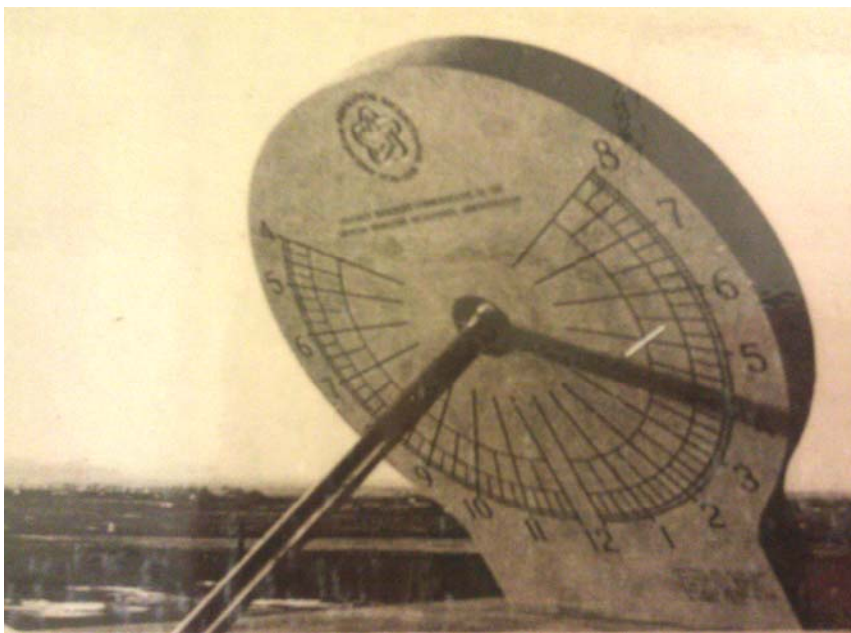


Figure 11. Bicentennial Park sundial. View looking northwest. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.



Figure 12. Erecting flag pole at Bicentennial Park. Note original Lowry Building 1600. View looking northeast. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.



Figure 13. Erecting flag pole at Bicentennial Park. Note original Lowry Building 1600. View looking north. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.

Expansion, Remodeling, Celebration and a Time Capsule –

In 1978, the City of Aurora announced the opening of its first art center, the Aurora Bicentennial Art Center. The newly remodeled Lowry Building 1600 accommodated classroom and art studio space. To officially open the building, the Aurora Arts and Humanities Council in cooperation with the Parks and Recreation Department and funding in part by the United Bank of Aurora, scheduled a two-day festival dubbed “AurorArts ’78.” The fundraising festival featured performing artists in belly dancing, folk dancing, and ballet, barbershop and gospel musicians and the renowned concert violinist, John Fodor, and pianist, Evon Banning. In addition to these performances, a grant was received from the Colorado Humanities Program to help finance “A Literary Happening” at the festival where some of Colorado’s top writers discussed their professions of journalism, fiction and non-fiction writing, screen writing and poetry. Best-selling author Clive Cussler and controversial poet Allen Ginsberg were even on hand to give talks. Fine artists from around the area attended to showcase their fine art works. A time capsule was ceremoniously buried beneath the sundial to be opened in the year 2078. Since its dedication festival in 1978, the City has sponsored an art festival every year until 1993. Today, Bicentennial Art Center continues to serve the citizens of Aurora as an art and community center.

Architectural Significance

Art Moderne –

Lowry Building 1600 is designed in the Art Moderne architectural style popular during the 1930s and 1940s. The Art Deco, Moderne and International styles that comprise the *Modern Movement* era began in Europe and spread to the United States in the 1920s. Prominent architects at the time, including Eliel Saarinen, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, abandoned past building precedents by designing to accommodate new materials and technology. The Modern Movement in architecture saw a conscious break with traditional design to create a new aesthetic – one that celebrated the shape and function of a building rather than follow traditional aesthetic concepts: *form follows function*.

The Art Moderne style was influenced by the advancements in industrial design of ships, planes, railroad engines and automobiles. The style is characterized by smooth-finished walls with little surface ornamentation, rounded corners and curved glass. Art Moderne buildings have flat roofs and banded windows to create a prominent horizontal emphasis. Other architectural elements often seen on buildings of this style include pipe balustrades, panels of glass-block windows, curved canopies, and aluminum or stainless steel detailing portraying a sense of “speed” based on an aerodynamic concept of motion and speed developed from scientific thinking.

Architectural Description –

Characteristic of its style, the rectangular plan, one-story Art Moderne-designed Bicentennial Art Center building maintains a low, sleek horizontal profile. The flat roof is banded by a narrow edge, or coping, to emphasize both the roofline and the entry canopy. That banding is currently painted a dark reddish color to contrast with the stuccoed sand-colored building exterior. Originally constructed on dry and non-vegetated land, the building is now surrounded by well-maintained park landscaping, mature trees, pedestrian walkways and parking lots. Landscaping stones and locally crafted ceramic artwork adorn the main walkway to the building.

South elevation

The main entry to the south-facing building is recessed and centered on the main façade. Flanked by steel-framed divided-light windows, the doorway and these windows are covered with a curved canopy, typical of the Art Moderne style. The walls at the entryway retain their original character-defining curves. A tall chimney penetrates the flat roof at the original rear northeast corner of the building. An addition to the building, constructed in 1976, attaches to the original building at the northwest corner. (See Figures 14, 15 and 16.)



Figure 14. Original Lowry Building 1600, circa 1975. South elevation. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.



Figure 15. Bicentennial Art Center circa 1980s. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.



Figure 16. Bicentennial Art Center main entry, south elevation. 2011. Photograph by author.

East elevation

A large addition was constructed on the north side of the original building and is evident on the east elevation. Though the original building's windows are covered, their profiles (frames and sills) are still visible. The newest portion of the building is differentiated by the smaller of two cylindrical canopies at the roofline. The section of exterior wall between these two canopies is finished in textured concrete in a gridded pattern. To the north (right) of the larger canopy, a section of exterior wall is painted with brightly colored geometric shapes and figures. In keeping with the design of the original building, the addition's roofline and ornamental coping were continued. (See Figures 17 and 18.)



Figure 17. Bicentennial Art Center east elevation. Photograph by author.



Figure 18. Bicentennial Art Center , east and north elevations. Photograph by author.

North elevation

The north side of the building is the addition constructed in 1976. Like the addition on the east elevation, the north side of the building is painted with a brightly colored mural depicting waves, aquatic figures and sun and sky. This decorative paint treatment is a unique way to identify the new use of the building as a community art center. Three small windows are present on the north elevation. Two gable-roofed shed structures are present at the west end of the north addition. These sheds house pottery storage. (See Figures 19 and 20.)



Figure 19. Bicentennial Art Center east and north elevations. Photograph by author.



Figure 20. Bicentennial Art Center, north elevation and northwest corner. Photograph by author.

West elevation

The west side of the building shows the north addition as well as the original building. There are no windows along the west wall of the addition. Two of the original windows remain on the original building and two other windows are covered over. There is a large concrete area on this side of the building which borders the park area. The City of Aurora maintains the park's grass lawn and landscaped flower/plant beds. (See Figures 21, 22 and 23.)



Figure 21. Bicentennial Art Center west elevation. Photograph by author.



Figure 22. Bicentennial Art Center, west elevation. Photograph by author.



Figure 23. Bicentennial Art Center southwest corner. Photograph by author.

Building alteration

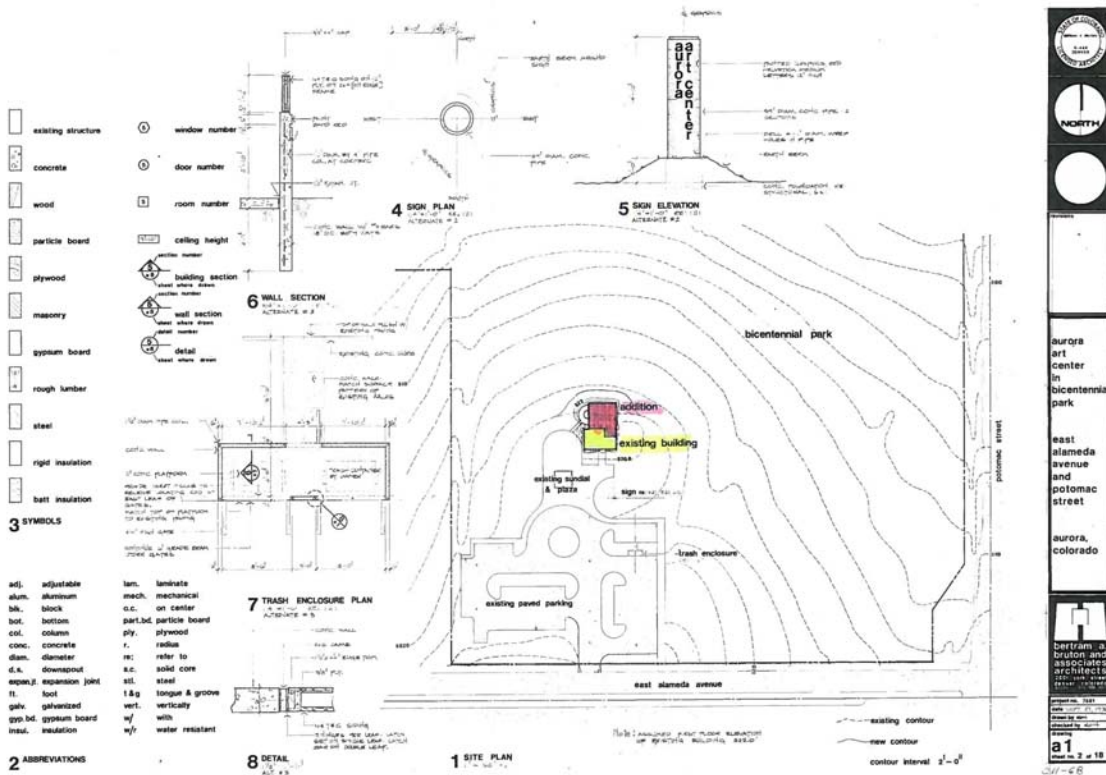


Figure 24. Architectural site plan of addition. 1976. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.

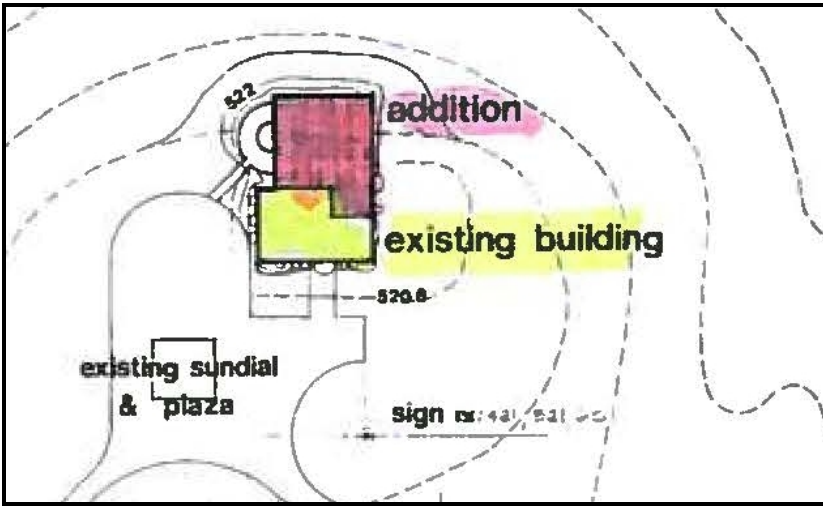


Figure 25. Site plan of addition. 1976. Photograph courtesy Aurora History Museum archives.

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© 2002, © 2011 by Paul Freeman. Revised 7/4/11.

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<http://www.radioblvd.com/WWII-PostWar%20Hamgear.htm/>

Aurora History Museum archives

Architectural photographs taken by author

17. *Nomination Preparer*

Name: **Jeanne Ramsay, Historic Sites and Preservation Coordinator** Date: **May 1, 2012**

Organization: **City of Aurora, Historic Sites and Preservation, Aurora History Museum**

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