

AURORA LANDMARK PROPERTIES



NOMINATION FORM

City of Aurora
Historic Preservation Commission

SECTION A: SITE INFORMATION AND DESCRIPTION

1. *Name of Nominated Site*

Historic Name: **Strait Lumber Company**
Current Name: **Strait Lumber Company**

2. *Address of Property*

Street Address: **11150 East Colfax Avenue**
County: **Arapahoe** Zip Code: **80010**

3. *Geographic Description*

P.M.: **6** Township: **4S** Range: **67W**
NW ¼ of **NE** ¼ of **NE** ¼ of **NW** ¼ of Section: **2**
UTM: Zone **13S** UTM East: **512163.25** UTM North: **4398905.16**
Quad Map: **Fitzsimons, CO** Year: **1965 (revised 1994)** Map Scale: **7.5'**
Lot(s): **003** Block: **003**
Addition: **Aurora Heights** Year of Addition: **1910**

Boundary Description:

Lots 3-26 Tog With Vac Alley Adj Lots 7-13 Blk 3 Aurora Hts [Legal Description]
Strait Lumber Company occupies several lots, bound to the north by E. Colfax Avenue, to the west by N. Kingston Street, to the east by N. Lansing Street, and to the south by E. 14th Avenue.

4. *Legislative Information*

Aurora Ward #: **I** Colorado House District: **42** Colorado Senate District: **29**

5. *Site Owner*

Current:

Name: **Mark Strait Revocable Trust (dated June 10, 2003)**
Address: **11150 East Colfax Avenue** Phone: **303-366-3561**
City: **Aurora** State: **CO** Zip: **80010-5026**

Historic:

Name(s): **Seth O. Strait, Clint Strait, Russell Strait, M.L. Strait**
Source(s) of information: **www.straitlumber.com/history**

6. *Site Classification*
 building(s) district site structure object area
7. *Site Condition*
 excellent good fair deteriorated ruins
8. *Site Location*
 original location moved (date of move _____)
9. *Site Use*
 Historic: **Lumber Yard and Hardware Store**
 Current: **Lumber Yard and Hardware Store**

SECTION B: DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION INFORMATION

10. *Physical and Site Description:*

Finished in 1947¹, the Strait Lumber Company property at 11150 East Colfax Avenue comprises a large paved lumber yard, equipment and vehicle storage, and a store selling hardware and building supplies. The campus is relatively large (1.87 acres; 81,457 square feet), especially given its location directly on East Colfax Avenue. Across Lansing Street to the east is another pair of adjacent partially-paved parcels (0.80 ac; 34,848 sq. ft. in total) that Strait Lumber Company uses for lumber storage, addressed as 1430 North Lansing Street. The storefront at 11150 East Colfax Avenue is considered the primary structure.

Strait Lumber Storefront & Offices

The storefront building is 2,880 sq. ft. (48 ft. x 60 ft.), built in the Art Moderne architectural style using cinder block load-bearing walls. The building's expression of the style is humble, though the style by nature is unassuming. The storefront faces north, fronting East Colfax Avenue. It is finished in running-bond brick work. All visible brick and cinder block is painted white.

The plan shape of the storefront is a partially rounded rectangle, with two Art Moderne-style curves built into the northwest and northeast corners of the north façade, finished in glass block. One projection extends from the east side of the principal mass, housing the main office of the storefront.

The roof is flat with a parapet that is approximately two feet tall. The parapet follows the footprint of the principal mass and is topped with a perpendicular row of cut brick. An exterior component to the building's HVAC system, a swamp cooler, is present at the center of the flat roof. Numerous other exhaust components are present.

North Façade (Hardware Store front)

The façade is finished in white-painted brick, cinder block, and wooden paneling. Other exterior design elements include mid-century rounded awnings, glass block walls, and a large conspicuous Strait Lumber business sign.

The main entrance is centered on the storefront. It is a standard-sized single glass panel door in an aluminum frame, topped by a rectangular transom. Flanking the main entrance are two three-panel retail picture windows. The center pane is flanked immediately by brick pillars. Progressing outward on each side, a large (13 ft. x 4 ft.) three-panel storefront picture window is present. The center pane is twice as wide as the outer panels. The window frame is aluminum. Beneath the window is a perpendicular brick sill. A vertical white-painted wooden panel serves as a buffer between the window and the front door. Two more vertical panels frame the outside of the picture windows.

At the north façade's curves, the wall below the awning is constructed of square-shaped glass block. The curve is a quadrant in shape, forming a quarter circle. Above and below is white-painted brick, which extends to the roof parapet.

The rounded awnings are quadrant shaped, as well. Covered in blue canvas, the bottoms are flat grates. The textile is stretched over ribs. One distinct awning is present over each glass block wall and each picture window, as well as one over the main entrance. This awning prominently displays the street number (11150). A red-painted horizontal aluminum beam spans the space in between each awning.

East Elevation (Hardware Store)

The east elevation of the northernmost building is finished in brick and concrete block, both of which are painted white. A downspout bifurcates the elevation, further draining water from the flat rooftop using a scupper drain system. Right (north) of the downspout is brick, while left (south) of the downspout is concrete block.

The southern portion has two four-over-two double hung windows. They appear to be permanently sealed shut. The same perpendicular brick span forms the lower sill. No other decorative elements are present.

East Elevation (Material Shop)

Connecting to the Strait Lumber storefront is an 8,400 sq. ft. (60 ft. x 140 ft.) building which housed Strait Lumber's material shop. The material shop sits directly south of the storefront, and like the hardware store's east elevation, the east elevation of the material shop is modestly decorated. Built from concrete block, the parapet seen on the hardware store continues along the roofline of this façade. Eight windows occupy the elevation with three downspouts splitting the four pairs of windows. A standard exhaust grate occupies the wall beneath the third window from the left.

Though sized the same, three of the windows are configured differently than the standard four-over-two double-hung. A pair of the middle windows are two vinyl picture windows with awnings. In one window, the top four panels are boarded up and a vent was installed.

West Elevation (Hardware Store)

A small, 432 sq. ft. (12 ft. x 36 ft.) rectangular projection extends from the principal mass of the hardware store. Currently housing offices, building permits suggest this was the same use originally. The projection is finished in cinder block painted white. A low-pitched shed-style roof covers the structure. Centered on the elevation is a single, glass-panel aluminum frame door. Immediately above the door is a rounded canvas awning approximately three feet wide that extends three feet out from the wall.

Two windows occupy the wall north of the door. Both are horizontal two-pane slider windows framed in aluminum. Square in shape, they are covered in anti-theft rebar. A taller, rectangular horizontal two-pane slider window is located south of the door. Each window has a row-lock brick sill. A simple gutter runs along the western edge with a downspout at each corner.

Original Structure: 1947

Additions: **Metal-clad Warehouse (1962)** [northernmost third of principal structure]

Alterations: **Grouted Stone Façade Change (1970s), Awning Fabric Change (2015-2016)**

Source of information: **City of Aurora Building Permits**

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

Name: **L.D. Shotwell Construction**

Location: **Aurora**

Source of information: **City of Aurora Building Permits**

12. *Architectural Style/Engineering Type*

Type/Style: **Art Moderne**

Source of information: **Colorado’s Historic Architecture and Engineering Guide;**
McAlester, “A Field Guide to American Houses”

SECTION C: SITE SIGNIFICANCE

13. *Significance of Property*

Nomination Criteria:

- 1. The Property Exemplifies or Reflects the Broad Cultural, Political, Economic, or Social History of the Nation, State, or Community.**
- 2. The Property Is Identified With a Historic Person or Historic Group Significant To National, State, or Local History.
- 3. The Property 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 Is Representative as the Work of a Master Builder or Architect.
- 5. The Property Contains the Possibility of Important Archaeological Discoveries in Prehistory or History.

14. *Period of Significance*

Period of Significance: **1947-Present**

Justification:

While Strait Lumber has been in business since 1936, the building at 11150 East Colfax Avenue was constructed in 1947. Built especially for the Strait Lumber, the storefront building has housed the family business to present day. Strait Lumber’s continued operation in the Original Aurora community since 1947 allows the Period of Significance to extend to present day.

15. *Significance Statement*

Strait Lumber, located at 11150 East Colfax Avenue, is eligible to be listed in the Aurora Historic Preservation Local Landmark program under two Nomination Criteria.

The property is eligible for designation under Criterion 1 for its extraordinary longevity as a family-owned and –operated business in Aurora as well as its contributions to the literal growth of Aurora’s built environment. The Strait Lumber building also meets Criterion 3 for embodying the Art Moderne architectural style with its curved glass block walls and horizontal emphasis.

Criterion 1:

The Strait Lumber Company story begins in South Dakota in 1929. Seth Osiah (S.O.) Strait and his wife Ada operated a hotel and a used car business as the Great Depression began to unfold in the United States. During this nationwide economic collapse, the Straits and their three young sons, Clinton (C.B.), Russel, and Maurice (M.L.) moved to the small town of Copper Spur, Colorado (near the present-day towns of State Bridge and Bond) to live with Ada’s brother and his family. The men of the family worked at the small local saw mill.

In 1934, S.O. and his sons established a small lumber business including a portable saw mill near Deckers, Colorado. Their primary contracts were for cutting mining shore timbers and railroad ties. Soon after, S.O. acquired land in Aurora at 11300 East Colfax that was used to dry and store excess construction grade lumber.

Straits Mill and Lumber Company officially opened on May 7, 1937 at 11300 East Colfax Avenue.² Business

was purportedly very good and one year later Straits publicized a 100% increase in sales the first year.³

Russel and Maurice Strait both served the country in the armed forces during World War II. Clinton, the eldest Strait son, served the community of Aurora as a Ward 1 Councilmember.

The post-World War II “Baby Boom” and subsequent housing shortage saw an immense increase in retail sales at the Strait family business. During this retail boom, construction of the new Strait Lumber office, 7200-square-foot attached warehouse, and lumber yard was started in March 1947 at 11150 East Colfax Avenue.⁴ The grand opening was held six months later on September 6, 1947.⁵ Sandwiches and refreshments were served and the Aurora Democrat considered the opening “a wonderful success.”⁶ An iconic neon sign was constructed by Hanger Neon & Sign Company, a local sign vendor, the backing of which still stands today.

Since its construction, Strait Lumber has provided materials for the construction of many homes, duplexes and apartment buildings, and helped relieve the housing shortage for returning veterans, families, and patients at Fitzsimons Army Hospital. Strait Lumber also supplied the materials for the Hoffman Heights Shopping Center and was involved in a partnership responsible for the Lynn Knoll and Lynn Meadows subdivisions. The Strait family business helped build the community symbolically as well as physically, sponsoring a baseball team, a basketball team and a bowling team in Aurora in the 1940s and 1950s.⁷

Mark Strait assumed sole leadership of the Strait Lumber Company in 1978, a position he holds today. Strait Lumber, in its third generation of Strait family ownership, is Aurora’s oldest continuing privately-owned business. For over 70 years, the storefront at 11150 East Colfax Avenue has sold building materials for Aurora’s residential and commercial properties through numerous growth booms. Strait Lumber has played an inextricable role in the broad history of the city.

Anecdotally, Strait Lumber is already an Aurora Landmark; many Aurora citizens recall fond memories of shopping there and consider it the lumber yard of their childhood.

Criterion 3:

Built in 1947, Strait Lumber’s storefront strongly embodies the Art Moderne, or simply Moderne, style of architecture. This trendy architectural choice was likely influenced by the structure’s location fronting East Colfax Avenue, a once major thoroughfare in travel and commerce. The avenue boasts other conspicuous architectural styles most prominent in the mid-1900s.

One of the Strait Lumber storefront’s most prominent Art Moderne features are the matching curved glass block walls at the northwest and northeast corners. An immensely popular choice from the 1930s-50s, these glass block walls were temporarily covered in the 1970s by grouted rock. Fortunately, the rock was removed in the intervening decades to restore this original component that now frames the building with a distinguishable appearance. The curved glass block walls also contribute to the Art Moderne aesthetics by forming distinctly rounded corners, which are mirrored in the roof parapet.

Another strong Art Moderne component to the building’s design is an emphasis on horizontal lines. Wide picture windows occupy the north façade storefront, constructing a horizon as well as serving a commercial function. The original windows extended to the floor, but the width of the contemporary windows remains unchanged in its current configuration and are supported by a long jutting rowlock brick sill. The structure’s horizontal emphasis is strengthened by a flat roofline, short brick course parapet, and a horizontal aluminum beam that originally ran the length of the façade. This last component is semi-covered by mid-century-style awnings. While not original, they are typical to the era of construction and their rounded shape compliments the rounded Art Moderne corners.

The Strait Lumber building also has smooth walls with little ornamentation, common in Art Moderne architecture.⁸ Adding to its “clean” look, all visible brick and cinder block is painted white. The starkly contrasting blue awnings contribute to a prominent store front.

The Strait Lumber sign, though not necessarily Art Moderne in nature and not original to the structure, is a historic component in its own right. Constructed in 1961, the 30-foot-tall sign was originally designed to mimic wood in its appearance with white neon spelling "STRAIT LUMBER."⁹ Presently, only the sign backing (now painted white) and text (now painted blue) remains. The sign is a fundamental component to the Strait Lumber business; it was grandfathered into current regulations, as 30-foot-tall signs are generally disallowed. This mid-century sign adds to the rich character of Strait Lumber and is therefore included in this Aurora Historic Landmark designation.

Images:



Fig. 1: Straits Mill and Lumber Company Storefront (11130 E. Colfax Ave), 1937. Photo: Mark Strait archive.

Man on far right is Russel Strait.



Fig. 2: Young Employee next to Straits Mill and Lumber Company truck, 1937. Photo: Mark Strait archive.



Fig. 3: Strait Lumber Company storefront (front façade), 1947. Photo: Mark Strait archive.



Fig. 4: Strait Lumber Company storefront and warehouse, (west elevation), 1947. Photo: Mark Strait archive.



Fig. 5: Strait Lumber Company storefront and warehouses, (front façade and east elevation), 1980. Photo: Mark Strait

Note the blocked front window, gouted stone façade treatment, and old sign appearance.



Fig. 6: Strait Lumber Company storefront and warehouses, (front façade and west elevation), 2018. Photo: Drake



Fig. 7: Strait Lumber Company storefront and warehouses, (front façade and west elevation), 2018. Photo: Drake



Fig. 8: Strait Lumber Company storefront, (front façade), 2019. Photo: Drake Brownfield.

Re-photographed to demonstrate newly installed aluminum to match western window.



Fig. 9: Strait Lumber Company storefront, (northwest corner), 2018. Photo: Drake

Note the stylized mid-1900s glass block. Mirrored on northeast corner.



Fig. 10: Strait Lumber Company storefront, (front façade), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.



Fig. 11: Strait Lumber Company warehouse gutter, (east elevation), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.

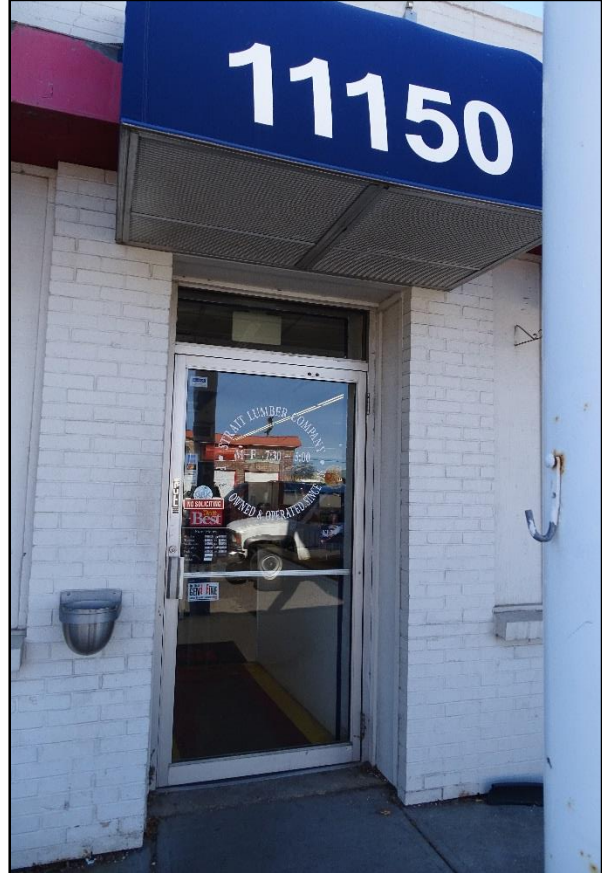


Fig. 12: Strait Lumber Company storefront entrance, (front façade), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.



Fig. 13: Strait Lumber Company storefront [offices], (west elevation), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.



Fig. 13: Strait Lumber Company sign, (front façade), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.



Fig. 14: Strait Lumber Company storefront glass block, (northeast corner), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.



Fig. 15: Strait Lumber Company sign, (front façade), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.



Fig. 16: Strait Lumber Company former store entrance detail, (west elevation), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.



Fig. 17: Strait Lumber Company window brick sill detail, (front façade), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.



Fig. 18: Strait Lumber Company sign detail, (front façade), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.



Fig. 19: Strait Lumber Company storefront and warehouse, (east elevation), 2018. Photo: Drake Brownfield.

16. *Bibliography*

1. www.straitlumber.com/history
2. *Aurora Democrat**, Volume 28, Number 21, May 7, 1937; Page 1
3. *Aurora Democrat**, Volume 29, Number 16, April 1, 1938; Page 1
4. *Aurora Democrat**, Volume 38, Number 9, March 21, 1947; Page 1
5. *Adams County News**, Volume 38, Number 33, September 2, 1947; Page 1
6. *Aurora Democrat**, Volume 38, Number 34, September 12, 1947; Page 1
7. *Aurora Advocate*, Volume 2, Number 46, September 29, 1949; Page 5
8. Former (never completed) Strait Lumber Landmark Nomination, Aurora History Museum Archives
9. Colorado's Historic Architecture and Engineering Guide, "Moderne," www.historycolorado.org/moderne
10. McAlester, "A Field Guide to American Houses," Knopf, 2013

*Denotes Newspaper articles in digital archives: www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org

17. *Nomination Preparers*

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