

BLAIR-CALDWELL AFRICAN AMERICAN RESEARCH LIBRARY: KEEPERS OF FIVE POINTS' UNIQUE HISTORY

How do you think this library's design might be influenced by its collection?

The Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library was built in 2003. This unique branch, named for Elvin Caldwell, the first African American Councilman in District 8, and Omar Blair, the first African American President of the Denver Public School Board, is the only research library of its kind west of the Mississippi. The library replaced the much smaller former Five Points Branch Library. The library is the gateway to Five Points and the Historic District along Welton Street. Five Points is unique among Denver's neighborhoods because of the rich contributions of its diverse community, particularly African Americans (Five Points-Whittier Neighborhood History).

Structure

The building, designed by OZ Architecture and Harold Massop Associates, merges with Sonny Lawson Park via a plaza connecting the two. The long three-story brick and glass building with enclosed porch is known for the views of downtown from atop the grand stairway, large bronze and mosaic reliefs on the front facade and portraits of namesakes Blair and Caldwell. Modeled after Brunelleschi's Pazzi Chapel in Florence, Italy, the Blair-Caldwell AARL combines traditional masonry forms and modern detailing to create a handsome, dignified structure.

Several artists were selected to create unique works of art for the Blair-Caldwell AARL. Two 15-foot bronze and mosaic reliefs representing the noble strength, bearing and pioneer spirit of African American men and women in the West are located in the large niches on either side of the front facade of the library. These striking sculptures were designed by internationally renowned artist Thomas Jay Warren. Renowned artist Yvonne Muinde was selected to create the mural just inside the library in the entrance foyer (Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library).

Collection

Each of the library's three spacious levels has a unique purpose. Level one has an entry gallery with exhibitions, conference and meeting rooms, study rooms, an area for children, teens and adults, and a collection of more than 45,000 books, magazines and audiovisual materials. Level two hosts the Collection Archives and Research Library, as well as a gallery.

Housed in the Archival Collection are more than 150 collections which showcase stories of African American musicians, gold miners, cowboys, homesteaders, politicians, physicians, educators, artists, business owners, religious leaders, scholars and everyday hard-working pioneers. Additionally, young and old students, scholars or the merely curious can have access to the original personal and professional papers, artifacts, photos and scrapbooks of great African Americans who shaped the West. Level three is home to the Western Legacies Museum and Exhibit Space, highlighting African Americans who settled in the West. These exhibits tell stories ranging from early pioneers to present-day heroes, where the public may follow the footsteps of African Americans who settled the West.

References

Denver Public Library. Five Points-Whittier Neighborhood History. Retrieved from <https://history.denverlibrary.org/five-points-whittier-neighborhood-history>.

Denver Public Library. Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library. Retrieved from <http://denverlibrary.org/content/blair-caldwell-african-american-research-library>.