

HISTORIC SUGAR BUILDING: 112 YEARS OF CONTINUOUS USE

Businesses can have huge impacts on the communities where they are based. What kind of impact do you think the Great Western Sugar Company might have had on Denver?

The Sugar Building's buff brick aesthetic reflects Louis Sullivan's Chicago style, and was built for the Great Western Sugar Company, an East Coast Company, that was part of the "sugar trust." It is unusual for the area because it is built of buff-colored brick while almost all of its neighbors and contemporaries are of red brick.

Structure

The design is functional and reminiscent of the Sullivanesque (Louis Sullivan) style with its arrangement of the windows between vertical piers, and the use of terra cotta decoration based on geometric and stylized foliage forms. Additionally, new-classic ornamentation is combined with the geometric and foliage forms to present a very pleasing overall effect of exterior decoration. The building is a basic cube of buff-colored brick with light colored terra cotta frills.

The façade has pavilion-like end bays and is complemented with corbelled brick pilaster capitals, drop pendants, and foliate forms, similar to the roundels of the cornice (National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form).

The main entrance, which sits on 16th Street, boasts a terra cotta rectangle sign that reads "Sugar Building." The additions blend with the original building in style, and in the window arrangement, in that they sit between piers that follow the vertical flow of the floors beneath. On the Wazee side of the building there are three bays and the ornamentation is the same as on the 16th Street side (Voelz Chandler, 2013). The Sugar Building boasts an Otis birdcage elevator that is still in use. The elevator is one of the few west of the Mississippi that is still operating. In 1912, two stories were added to the building at a cost of \$40,000. In 1999, the building exterior was restored and the interior adapted so that it could be used for modern office space.

People

Charles Boettcher was the face of Great Western Sugar Company, which was controlled by the American Sugar Refining Company in 1903. By 1905, the company was incorporated as a New Jersey corporation with Henry Havemeyer as president. The Boettcher family has been prominent in Denver since the early 1900s. Charles travelled west and made a fortune selling hardware to miners, after which he invested in insurance and cement. In fact, the offices at 17th and Champa have walls that are ten feet thick. Charles maintained an office in this building for forty years, and his cement company had offices here until 1975. In 1928, the building was sold to Denver National Bank, which is still in operation (Boettcher Family and Foundation History).

Architect

Architect Aaron M. Gove (1867-1924) received his professional training at the Colorado School of Mines and the University of Illinois. He practiced architecture in Denver for 35 years. Thomas F. Walsh (1866-1948) started his architectural career with Edbrooke and Burnham in Chicago before moving to Colorado. After arriving in Denver, he supervised construction of architect Robert Roeschlaub's Trinity

Methodist Church. Gove & Walsh became partners in 1894. They were the architects for many of the warehouse buildings in the LoDo neighborhood and the 1914 Great Hall addition to Union Station.

Neighborhood

Lower Downtown Historic District is a warehouse neighborhood that was developed around the railroads. Many of the buildings are “boxes,” and almost all are made of brick, though each has its own features, which distinguish them from their neighbors. Some of the warehouses are primarily brick construction, while others have heavy timber interior construction, and even later buildings boast steel or concrete construction. The later construction materials came only after the advent of the railroads in 1870 (Paglia, Wheaton and Wray, 1999).

References

Sugar Building National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form.

Voelz Chandler, M. 2013. *Guide to Denver Architecture*. Denver: Fulcrum Group.

Boettcher Family and Foundation History.

Paglia, M., Wheaton, R. and Wray, D. 1999. *Denver: The Modern City*. Denver: Historic Denver, Inc.