

CLEO PARKER ROBINSON DANCE/SHORTER AME BUILDING

119 Park Avenue West, Denver, Colorado 80205



Architects: Arthur and William Walton
Year Built: 1925

Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble was founded by Cleo Parker Robinson in 1970, and has called the former Shorter Community AME Church home since the 1980s. The space is located at 23rd and Cleveland Place in Five Points.

St. John AME Church was organized by Bishop Thomas M. D. Ward in July 1868. The first church building, a log cabin, was erected on land donated by Major Fillmore, a Union officer in the Civil War. The church began with eighteen members, including six trustees: Gible Burrell; Samuel Cook; Alvin Cummings; Gilbert Phelps; Lewis Price; and Irving Williams. The cabin served as the first church structure from 1864-1878. In 1878, a larger, brick structure was built on the corner of 19th and Stout Streets for \$2,000. In 1880, to honor the presiding Bishop, James A. Shorter, St. John AME Church was renamed Shorter Chapel.

In 1886, the structure at 19th and Stout (currently the U.S. Federal Court House) was sold for \$15,000, and other sites were considered to build a new church home. For almost a full year and at three different locations, Shorter Chapel experienced considerable opposition from neighbors against having a Black church in their community.

In the fall of 1887, three lots on the corner of 23rd and Cleveland Place were purchased for \$9,000. One of the homes purchased with the lots was converted into the church parsonage. The church site at 23rd and Cleveland Place served as the place of worship from August 5, 1889 until April 9, 1925 when it is alleged that the Ku Klux Klan set fire to and completely destroyed the building. The Shorter congregation shared worship facilities with People's Presbyterian Church until Easter morning April 4, 1926. On this morning, the first service was held in the new building erected over the same location of the previous building; 23rd and Cleveland Place.

Cleo Parker Robinson is the daughter of an African-American actor and a White musician. She experienced prejudice from a young age when, at 10, she nearly died when a segregated hospital in Dallas, Texas refused to admit her for a kidney condition quickly enough to prevent heart failure. Doctors expected her to be bedridden the rest of her life. She overcame the condition and threw herself into dancing in order to conquer the pain from the physical and emotional challenges of her experience. By age 15, she was teaching dance classes at the University of Colorado. She graduated from Colorado Women's College. The ensemble is widely respected and recognized. It has toured internationally, performed at the Lincoln Center and received coverage and positive reviews from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*.

References

Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, Who We Are. Retrieved from <https://cleoparkerdance.org/who-we-are/>
Five Points-Whittier Neighborhood History. Retrieved from <https://history.denverlibrary.org/five-points-whittier-neighborhood-history>
Shorter AME Church. Retrieved from shorterame.org