

BLAIR-CALDWELL AFRICAN AMERICAN RESEARCH LIBRARY

2401 Welton Street, Denver, Colorado 80205



Architects: Harold Massop Associates, OZ Architecture
Year Built: 2003



Named for Omar Blair and Elvin Caldwell, the first African American President of the Denver Public School Board and first African American Councilman in District 8, respectively, this is the only research library of its kind west of the Mississippi. Blair-Caldwell replaced the much smaller former Five Points Branch Library. A historic commission charged with design input declared that the library should be a modern, culturally significant building, fitting of its historic context and integrated with significant artwork. The result is a unique library that combines the functions of a standard library branch with that of a research library, art gallery, museum and community center.

The rectangular building runs lengthwise along Welton at 24th Street, facing southeast with main entrances on Welton. It merges with Sonny Lawson Park to the southwest via a plaza connecting the two. The long, three-story building is clad in running bond brick that sits atop a precast concrete base with decorative sailor courses wrapping in accent at door height. Neoclassical and Italianate styling is often subtle but undeniable, exemplified in the fenestration placement, projecting eaves, the low-pitched and hipped roof and the pronounced symmetry of the front façade. The main entrance is centered with large glass arched windows above. Tall, thin windows on the first floor are placed in regular rhythm with narrowed windows on the second floor and clerestory on the third floor. Niches flank either side of the southeast and southwest facades. On the Welton Street side, the niches hold 15' tall sculpted bronze reliefs over porcelain mosaic, artwork by Mississippian Thomas Jay Warren titled "The African American Spirit of the West." Inside, an acrylic mural, "The Spirit of Togetherness," by artist Yvonne Muinde, is displayed over the reception desk. A grand stairway provides impressive views of downtown Denver. The first floor includes a full-service branch library, while the second and third floors contain archival collections, a research library, exhibit space and the Western Legacies Museum.

Photo courtesy of denver.org

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