Student Essays and Case Studies

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Mid-Century Modern Project – Fall 2013

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Purpose of Project:
- Educate the public about Mid-Century Modern architecture in Laramie, WY
- Help the public value MCM buildings
  - Generate appreciation for the time period
  - Explain features in context
  - Invoke nostalgia
- Share the diversity and uniqueness of this architecture as it was shown in Laramie, WY
- Identify areas where continued research and activism would be appropriate

Overview of Project:

The Fall 2013 AMST 5800 Historic Preservation class created a public campaign to bring attention to and inspire preservation efforts for Mid-Century Modern architecture in Laramie, Wyoming. Mid-Century Modern (MCM) architecture, most of which is 50 years old or more, has been identified by the historic preservation community as a threatened resource worthy of protection.

Students constructed their campaign from architectural and historical research about Laramie during the 1950s through the 1960s, which constitutes the MCM period. After compiling this information the students traveled around Laramie identifying and photographing buildings from the MCM period. The students then selected individual buildings to study further using city records and archival data. These case studies were compiled and highlighted in the public presentation.

In addition to the public presentation the students developed a web presence through a website and through social media including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The students achieved a modest level of engagement with online presence while they were maintaining the feeds.

At the end of the project, the students brainstormed opportunities for future engagement. Opportunities for the future would be increased engagement with the community of Laramie, developing additional case studies, and identification of a Mid-Century historic district.

Links:
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/LaramieMCM
Twitter: http://www.twitter.com/MCMLaramie
Instagram: http://instagram.com/MCMLaramie
Website: http://MCMLaramie.weebly.com

Contents of Collection:
1. Essays on the importance of Mid-Century Modern architecture
2. Laramie Case Studies
3. Public Presentation
Residential Mid-Century Modern
Sleek, cool, clean, sophisticated, functional, colorful are all words to describe mid-century modern design. If houses reflect the times they were designed, Mid-Century Modern is the architecture of ideas, created by those who believe the forward looking style could be a vehicle for social change to create a better society. Some of the distinctive design features are a metaphor for America’s boundless self-confidence after World War II. Built from 1945 to the late 1970’s, the homes features simplicity and an integration with nature, encouraging residents to explore the world in a new way. The car was central in the lives of the growing middle class, and became a key focus in new homes.

Mid-century modern style appealed to everyone. Across the nation the well-to-do hired the best architects of the day to design and build impressive custom homes. At the same time, suburban developers brought modern style to the masses, creating tract homes using the same design principles. Fueled by an expanding economy and boundless atomic age optimism, the American dream was well within reach of a growing middle class.

The style commemorates an exciting and new time of United States history. New construction materials, new designs, hope for the future, and new interest in accessing the outdoors, with access increasing as cars became more attainable and backyards becoming outdoor havens.

Construction and materials and layout

During this era, war technologies and skills were being brought home. A revolutionary design feature was exposed post and beam construction. This enabled the use of extensive glass and fewer interior support walls. Post and beam construction allowed interior walls to be used as space dividers instead of structural supports. This allowed architects to pick and choose which areas remained open-concept and which area remained enclosed for privacy. The windows and open floor plans aimed to connect the inside space of the house with the outdoors.
Common elements of MCM homes

- **Flat planes.** The geometric lines of the house are regular and rigorous. Flat roofs with large overhangs are common.

- **Large windows.** Sliding-glass doors and other expansive panes of glass allow light to enter rooms from multiple angles. The windows are integrated into the design and allow for the house and nature to be connected.

- **Changes in elevation.** Small steps going up and down between rooms creates split-level spaces. A mid-century modern might have partial walls, or cabinets of varying heights to create different depths in the space.

- **Integration with nature.** Rooms have multiple outdoor views, or multiple access points, encouraging an appreciation of healthy living. The homes were sited to recess into the natural landscape. Homes generally has a private side and an open side, facing the backyard to ensure privacy and integration with the landscape.

- **Strategic floor plan.** Homes were designed with three primary areas: living spaces, kitchen-dining areas at the intersection, and small bedrooms. The siting of the home to utilize the natural landscape shifted the emphasis of the home from the front living room by the front door, to the back of the house.

- **Modern features integrated into design.** Carports and the automobile became a focus and prominent from the street. Central hearths and built-in components emphasized the idea of “form as function”

- **Mix of natural materials.** These homes bring together a combination of textures and materials. Homes can feature stucco, brick, glass, and wood. Often times the mix of materials result in bold horizontal lines visually dividing the home.

- **Distinctive roof lines.** Houses can be designed to make the roof look like it is floating or unsupported. This can be done by utilizing windows that go up to the soffit, or the use of cantilevers to allow for large, overhanging eaves. Horizontal lines and elements are continue the use of flat or low pitched roofs.

Modern Issues with Mid-century modern

The biggest enemy of a modern house is deferred maintenance. The wood needs to be clear-coated, painted, or oiled. It expands and contracts from changes in temperature and problems can arise. Also,
materials like steel, aluminum, and stucco need more attention since they do not have a long lifespan. But, since they are readily available restorations are simpler. Another maintenance issue is keeping flat roofs free of leaves and debris.

Bibliography

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Kayla Sullivan
Mid-Century Modern Architecture Project - Residential Architecture

The era of Mid-Century Modern architecture came during a time of intense American expansion. In the aftermath of World War II there wealth was abundant and allowed a vision of a technological future. Coupled with that hope, there was also fear of that technology and the looming presence of the Soviet Union and the Cold War. Orientation towards exploration and technological innovation infiltrated all sectors of society and was reflected in the experimental style of Mid-Century Modern buildings. Mid-Century Modern (MCM) even made its appearance in residential architecture defining the home experience of a generation.

On the outside the MCM home makes a visual break from the residential architectural styles of the past. Gone was the typical peaked roof and singular materials. They were replaced by flat, multi-level roofs with “hanging” eaves. “Hanging” eaves are a hallmark of most MCM architecture regardless of whether it is a commercial or residential building. The popularity of this was due to new building materials that were able to be engineered into those shapes. Brick work in MCM homes are often highly creative from use of weeping mortar to machine made shapes, such as flowers, that are used in privacy walls. In addition, building materials were often mixed. This was often to contrast industrial materials, like aluminum, with earthy materials, such as stone or brick. This makes MCM homes visually stimulating despite their typical “box” shape. The industrial material was a nod to the future, while the traditional material was a nod to the past. Color schemes were often bright and daring, drawing attention to the angular lines of MCM architecture.

The MCM home is an icon incorporating hopes for the future and new orientations for American society. MCM homes are designed with the family in mind. The new American dream was owning a house, a car, and having a space for your family. Suburbs sprang up across America requiring the use of an automobile for commuting. The MCM home is oriented for automobile ownership. Most MCM homes are equipped with a garage, generally placed near entrances, or a carport. In warm climates, backyards may be accented with lavish porches or even an amoeba shaped swimming pool. The outside space of an MCM home was meant to be utilized by families for recreation.

The emphasis on the family continues into the architecture itself. MCM homes are adorned with windows of varying sizes. Large windows open into backyards from living rooms
or dining rooms, while small windows denote private spaces such as bedrooms. MCM homes were designed to “flow” in their environment and allow the people who lived there to do so as well. The large windows from family spaces into yards allowed families to inhabit, or “flow”, between indoor and outdoor space simultaneously. This emphasis on “flow” extended to the interiors as well where rooms often had few barriers between them. In a split-level home, a popular affordable style, an upper floor may only be separated by a railing. I more radical of the MCM home, there might be no barrier at all.

The MCM home represents a progression in the social history of the American neighborhood. They demonstrate the shift from Americans dwelling primarily in cities, to settling the suburbs. These homes reflect the attitudes, hopes, and fears of people in the post World War II and Cold War eras. In Laramie, most of the characteristics of MCM homes can be found, although they are often at a smaller scale. They show the ingenuity of people in this area to adapt designs that were made for places like California to work in the windy, cold Wyoming landscape. MCM homes in Laramie show a visible progression of how Laramie grew and changed over time. Laramie is lucky in that it can show the progression of Americans from pioneers of the frontier to the pioneers of space. These homes are quirky in their neighborhoods and they were meant to be, this architecture represents a dream the United States had for a technological future that had no limits. The MCM era was a break from an America that was oriented towards the past, to an America that was oriented towards the future. These homes embody that energy and that vision, it was so strong that the idea made its way from the coasts where it was born into the heartlands of this country. These homes are worthy of preservation and celebration because they are a visual reminder of how Laramie grew and how America dreamed.

Sources Consulted
Per Hogestad, conversation with author, October 11, 2013.
2215 Spring Creek was built in 1963. These two duplex buildings inhabit the same lot facing each other with a parking lot in between them. This style of duplex was typical of mid-century modern developments during the 1950s and 1960s. They are a Laramie take on the “Dingbat” apartment style complex that was popular in Los Angeles, California. Carports were a common feature of many Dingbat apartment complexes, although due to space on the lot this Laramie duplex went without.

At the end of World War II, a major change happened in American society. People began moving from the central areas of cities into the suburbs. While the ideal may have been to own a freestanding house there were benefits to living in apartments for single individuals. Likely, these duplexes supported the growing student community of Laramie.

This duplex exhibits many of the common elements of architecture from this time period. It uses contrasting materials to accent the design. For example, the flat sides of the duplex are made in with brick, while the facades of the building are planked with wood. This highlights the entrances and creates an interesting contrast that alone would look simple and boxy. The design of the duplex was a nod to both progress, as seen in the angular lines, but also a natural bent, as portrayed by the brick. While the paint on the siding may not be original to the building it still follows the mid-century modern style of having bright colors and muted colors to further accent
the design features. The color scheme, again, gives more character to the otherwise plain façade of the Dingbat building. The soaring eave on the front of the duplex is also typical of the time. Building materials changed drastically from previous eras and provided an opportunity for more innovative designs. The doorway not facing the street is also common in many mid-century modern residences.

The “box” style is common among mid-century modern apartment style buildings, because they were often built quickly and the design is efficient to fit the building on a square lot. A design feature of houses at this time was large windows on a part of the building that allowed for an indoor-outdoor space, essentially, where people inside could see outside and vice versa. As seen on this building there was an attempt at that with the larger windows on the lower floor. This space is probably a living room that looks out over the lawn. The privacy landscaping appeared to be added later.

Typical of Laramie mid-century modern architecture, these two building are compact versions of larger designs found elsewhere in the country. Often, this style of building would be longer and contain more units. No doubt the size is due to Laramie’s compact cityscape that doesn’t lend itself to large buildings. At this scale they also fit in with the profile of older homes in Laramie neighborhoods. Laramie saw a lot of growth during the 1950s and 1960s due to the student population growing with the addition of soldiers under the G.I. Bill. With greater access to education there was a need for more housing. Buildings like these provided homes for the people who helped grow Laramie.

The three images above are of Dingbat style apartments in the city of Los Angeles, California. The photos are courtesy of the Los Angeles Conservatory.
865 Eleventh Street was built in 1948. It is an example of the split-level style home. The split-level home has been around since the 1930s, but became popular as an affordable home style in the period after World War II. This house is a very simple representation of the style. However, the two story section on the left possesses a roof that was quite popular in the mid-century modern era. Slanting roofs were a design element that was often employed in commercial buildings, but was sometimes employed on residences to give the home a more progressive appearance.

It was possible for split-level homes during this time period to appear traditional, as seen in the examples from *Better Homes and Gardens* magazines from around 1950. The green house is an example of a mid-century modern design where the roof slopes in an upside down checkmark to create a singular roofline over the split-level. Checkmark and boomerang shapes were a popular design to include in buildings during this time.

The home exhibits many features that were common to mid-century modern residential architecture. The lower floor of the building is a stucco material and the upper level is paneled with wooden boards. Contrasting material types was popular in order to accent the features of the building. The owners of this property have maintained this style by maintaining the light paint around the eaves and windows.
Often, mid-century modern home features were accented this way. Windows can be telling in a mid-century modern building, large windows designate family spaces and smaller windows designate private spaces, such as bedrooms. Large windows were popular to give families an indoor-outdoor feel. A growing lifestyle trend was to provide for “flowing” spaces where an individual could occupy both an indoor and outdoor space simultaneously with the use of glass. In Laramie, the windows are smaller than their counterparts in places like California. This creative use of window size to still accommodate the winter weather gives Laramie a Rocky Mountain take on mid-century modern.

Better Homes magazine articles throughout the 1950s and 1960s presented these homes as efficient with versatile internal layouts. The designs for these homes were very popular. It was possible during this time to order blueprints from an architect and have a local builder interpret them locally. A convenient aspect of the split-level designs is that they did not require a lot to be flattened; these homes could be built directly into a hillside or on a slope.

During the post-World War II and into the Cold War era Laramie was expanding in population due to the growth of the university and the shift of industry. Homes like these were able to be built affordably to accommodate the rising American dream of a nuclear family home. Depending on the design these homes can be simple like 865 Eleventh Street or more elaborate like 1213 E. Harney Street which followed the more iconic Usonian design common to the era. 865 Eleventh Street provides an example of a less flashy version of the mid-century modern iconic architecture. It is not uncommon for communities like Laramie to gain trends slowly. 865 Eleventh Street represents a transitional era for Laramie as it was moving from its more traditional roots to a technological future. This home being built in the late 1940s was probably an early adopter of mid-century modern style.
712 Thirteenth Street

712 Thirteenth Street was built in 1951. This house is a split-level Usonian style home. The term Usonian was coined by Frank Lloyd Wright, a prominent architect during this time. Usonian style homes are designed to support an indoor-outdoor lifestyle where the building “flows” on its landscape and people “flow” from room to room. Often, a mix of materials is used to emphasize the different parts such as the light paint on the flat roofs and the darker brick on the body of the house. The door and windows are highlighted through the use of different materials. The door has the same brick as the fireplace, while the windows most likely have aluminum lining. These features added to the “flowing” style of the architecture. Although Laramie Usonian homes are more muted than more well-known Usonian homes they still portray details that are indicative of their time.

During the mid-century modern building period an emphasis was placed on the family. Contrasting window sizes show the location of bedrooms and living rooms. The large windows on the left side of the house, facing the yard, indicate the designer’s intention to allow families to simultaneously “be” in an indoor space and an outdoor space. In warmer climates these windows were generally on the rear of the house. However, in Laramie these windows are generally on the south side of the house and better able to take in winter sunlight. The small windows indicate bedroom and other private spaces.

On the left side of the house there is a brick wall delineating the backyard. This wall is brick inlaid with artistic bricks that display a styled floral pattern. This floral pattern breaks up the uniformity of the brick providing a pleasant visual. In addition, a wide chimney rises from the flat roof. These massive fireplaces were a central feature of the living room or dining room where families gathered to spend time with one another. Kitchens were often connected to these
spaces so that even when adults were working in the kitchen, they could still keep an eye on and participate in their children’s activities.

The Usonian home style is one of the most iconic styles of mid-century home. They stand out in their neighborhoods. The large windows were designed to draw light into the home. The design was intended to both fade into and stand out in the landscape. The buildings that generally capture the attention of architects are found in California, but Laramie has its own fair share of iconic homes like 712 Thirteenth Street.

Homes like 965 Fourteenth Street show glimpses into our American past when our countrymen and women were dreaming big. This time period was filled with big dreams and hopes for the future. These homes show the progression of Laramie to the modern day. Laramie has a great opportunity to show its progression through time, from the pioneers of the frontier to the pioneers of space. Homes like these have great value to demonstrate Laramie’s history and that of the nation at large.
965 Fourteenth Street was built in 1949 and is an outstanding example of a Usonian style house that was indicative of the Mid-Century Modern architectural era. The term Usonian was coined by Frank Lloyd Wright, a prominent architect during this time. Usonian style homes are designed to support an indoor-outdoor lifestyle where the building “flows” on its landscape and people “flow” from room to room. Often these buildings are a mix of materials used to emphasize the different style such as the light frames around the windows and the dark stone at the base of the house. This home is stylistically different than many other Laramie Usonian style homes, which tend to be more muted designs. This stylistic difference may be due to this home’s prominent location on a street corner.

During the mid-century modern building period an emphasis was placed on the family. Contrasting window sizes show the location of bedrooms and living rooms. 965 Fourteenth St. is a split-level Usonian that has large windows facing away from the street for privacy. Something that marks this as a Laramie home is that the larger windows are facing the south, better to gather light and heat from the sun in the winter months.

Mid-century modern homes were generally built with a family vehicle in mind. Due to 965 Fourteenth Street’s placement on a street corner the driveway and garage were placed on the downward slope with another entrance facing Fourteenth St. This entrance makes use of mid-century modern features that were concerned with privacy. The door is set behind a glass tiled wall on one side and a stone privacy screen to one side. A focus on privacy came into play during this time period, and such features were attractive ways to provide for that. This is a form that was borrowed from Japanese style architecture which became popular at the end of World War II.

The Usonian style home is one of the most iconic styles of mid-century home. Many were made famous throughout the country due to the daring break from traditional home construction. 965
Fourteenth Street has many of these daring features introduced at this time such as the “hanging” eaves which were made possible by new building materials. In addition, the flat roof that accents the angles of the house has given this Laramie home flair, a futuristic look from a time period dedicated to a technological future.

965 Fourteenth Street inhabits a neighborhood that sprang up in the years after World War II. The homes in that part of Laramie tell a story of more lavish homes like these, and their inexpensive pre-fabricated counterparts that were necessary to provide homes for soldiers and their families. The ideal of the time was to own a free-standing home and the various styles of mid-century architecture provided that opportunity.

Homes like 965 Fourteenth Street show glimpses into our American past when our countrymen and women were dreaming big. This time period was filled with big dreams and hopes for the future. These homes show the progression of Laramie to the modern day. Laramie has a great opportunity to show its progression through time, from the pioneers of the frontier to the pioneers of space. Homes like these have great value to demonstrate Laramie’s history and that of the nation at large.

Two examples of Usonian style homes in Arapahoe Acres Historic District in Denver, Colorado. The left is the McCallin House designed by Edward Hawkins. The house on the right is the Middlebrook house also designed by Edward Hawkins. To learn more about Mid-Century Modern homes in the Arapahoe Acres Historic District please visit http://www.arapahoeacres.org
The house at 2121 Spring Creek in Laramie Wyoming is a great example of a mid-century modern home. The home in Laramie was built in 1962. The home features a low pitched roof over the house and a flat roof over the car port on the west side of the house. Being true to mid-century modern designs the upper half of the house is stucco and the lower half features brick with a simple geometric design.

The front door is off of the sidewalk, next to the car port and driveway. During the post-war era homes began featuring the car as a prominent design element that helped shape the home’s layout and design. The changing focus to the automobile also shifted the living room to the back of the house where large windows open up into the backyard, bringing nature into the home and the living space outside. New construction techniques developed during the war allowed for large windows, sometimes used for an entire wall.

These design elements are seen in Arapahoe Acres, a housing development of 124 houses south of Denver. The homes were designed by Denver University Professor Eugene Sterburg and developed and built by Edward Hawkins. One home in Arapahoe Acres looks like 2121 Spring Creek, a house known as the Hollans House (Image 4). The Holland House incorporated a plywood paneled ceiling, masonry wall of brick with variegated color, vertical tongue and groove siding and exposed beams. It features a vertical band of simple geometric ornament in the brick as well as a broad brick chimney at the center of the house. Many of these same features and materials are shared with the house in Laramie, though they are rotated 90 degrees.

Figure 1. South perspective of house, showing car port, and low pitch roof.
Figure 2. East perspective showing the mix of brick and wood materials.

Figure 3. East profile showing the reach of the house into the backyard and the brick chimney indicating the living room is in the back of the house.

Figure 4. Hollans House in Arapahoe Acres.
Case Study 2- Bim Kendall House

The Bim Kendall house is a 1954 prairie-style building near the west side of the University of Wyoming campus. The Bim Kendall House was formerly the Hitchcock House, named for Verna J. Hitchcock who was a department head in Family and Consumer Sciences (Image 1 and 2). As the Hitchcock House, the building was home to women learning to manage households, and later, to a UW daycare center.

Now part of the UW Environmental and Natural Resources program, the Bim Kendall House has been rehabilitated and enhanced with additional offices and collaborative spaces. The upgrades to the house were completed with sustainable building practices in mind. The mid-century modern style roof design of the addition allows for properly oriented site for photovoltaic and allows for passive ventilation within staff offices. In 2012, the house was awarded LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council for its energy saving measures, low resource consumption, educational components, and healthy workspaces (Images 3, 4, 5, and 6).

The original house features numerous mid-century modern elements including the split level design, and large windows to allow for great views and bringing nature into the living space. The west side of the house has large fixed glass windows that provide an unobstructed view to the outdoors. Below the large windows are smaller windows with screens that allow for ventilation. This feature is replicated in several other locations in the building. The building has large eaves as well as wooden slats that provide shading for the large windows in the summer, but allow the winter sun to warm the house. The mid-century modern features of the house were designed to fit the site, the heating and cooling needs of the climate in Laramie, and bring the views of nature inside with the large windows.

Additional details that help define the style are the second-story windows that go right up to the soffit, giving the roof a hovering appearance and the people inside great opportunity for light and views. The glass block around the southern, second story door allows for light to come into the stairwell, provides privacy, and uses the modern materials of the time. The entryway from the front (north) and back (south) are screened and slightly hidden.

Brick is a major component of the main house. The light brick for the first floor is separated by white molding and the part of the roofline, from the darker brick on the upper half of the house. The horizontal lines are prominent, bold, and very mid-century modern. Finally, the enormous brick chimney anchors the house onto the landscape.

Similar details and architectural design are seen in a photo from Yorke and Whiting’s The New Small House from 1953 (Image 7). The flying roof and windows that wrap around the building are the most similar design elements. The City of Chicago identified the prairie style mid-century modern house a critical part of some of their neighborhoods and history. Image 8 helps define and identify some of the key design elements in these types of homes.

The building materials are a mix of textures and materials and colors highlighting the architectural features of the house as well as creating “warm feelings” from the natural earth tones. The roof line is flat or low sloping, a common element in mid-century modern homes. The mid-century modern architecture of the Bim Kendall House aims to make a connection between the inside of the house and nature outside. The building elements address site and climatic concerns, putting emphasis on the siting
and environmental constraints so as to make the house part of the landscape, a key mid-century modern element.

Figure 1. Kendall House, view from the north showing prairie style windows, shading designs, and the large chimney.

Figure 2. Kendall House view from north showing entryway, bold horizontal lines, and part of the addition.
Figure 3. Kendall House, view from the south including addition.
Figure 4. Details and features of a prairie style home. Source: http://www.westchicago.org/Departments/images/Prairie.jpg

Prairie style dwelling at 1014 N. Spring Street.
These homes reflect the change in form of houses after the war and the mid-century era. The blue house, 1408 Baker, was built in 1957. The green house, 1218 Sanders, was built in 1959. This is a common house design in Laramie and provides affordable and functional housing. With the advent of large sliding glass doors opening into backyards, the front of the house was no longer where the family met or lived. These two homes found in Laramie have the bedrooms at the front of the house, with small windows to allow for privacy in the bedrooms. The core of the house is towards the back where there is the large fireplace evidenced by the blocky chimney. The low-pitched gable roof with wide eaves gives the house a low profile but allows for high ceilings inside. Both houses have use mixture of stucco and wood on the exterior.

At one point in our nation’s history there were no attached carports or garages. By the post-war years the car was a member of the family. The driveway takes up a substantial portion of the property, prompting the moving the entryway from the front of the property via the sidewalk to the side of the house. The homes’ architecture focuses on functionality, not ornate details, though there are great little details like the wood siding creating vertical lines, or the diamond design adding a bit of flair. This style of home in Laramie fits a family’s needs and captures some of the changes occurring in the 1950’s.

Figure 1. 1408 Baker Avenue.
Figure 2. 1208 Sanders.
There are few home styles that are as easily recognizable as the ranch home. With its multiple windows and backyard, the style has become a significant piece of mid-century American pop culture. The original ranch style created a warm feeling with large windows capturing natural light. They often feature lofty ceilings, and airy hallways to create an open living space. Attached garages, long, low rooflines and back yards were standard on the original Ranch.

In Laramie, 1815 Park Avenue is an outstanding example of the ranch style. It has large, south facing windows, a bi-level or split level floor plan, and cantilevered eaves that project in space, seemingly without support from beneath. The roof is a shed roof, meaning single slope, as seen from the street. The door is hidden from sight from the street, with the entrance paralleling the street, providing some privacy, also hiding behind the tree. The attached garage uses the same lines as the other roof lines and highlights the development of the car during this time. The house was built in 1953 and utilizes a mix of materials including brick, wood, and stucco. Other examples found around the country with a similar design include a home built in 1963 in New Orleans (figure 3), and a home in Portland, Oregon built in 1951 (figure 4). These homes share many of the same features and play with different levels and horizontal lines.

Figure 1. 1815 Park Ave.

Figure 2. 1815 Park Ave.
Figure 3. House in New Orleans, built in 1963 by Contractor David Kraus.

Figure 4. Home in Portland Oregon, 1951.

(http://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-detail/9770-Sw-Vista-Pl_Portland_OR_97225_M22812-20443#modal_Photogallery)
Commercial Mid-Century Modern
The mid-century modern era can be dated between the years of 1945-1970, though it can also be seen some before and after these dates. This was a time period for growth and movement. Cities demolished neighborhoods to build highways and interstates, not thinking about the historic significance these old neighborhoods may have had or would have had. New architectural styles were created for new construction. These styles brought nature, light, and family into the home by opening it up and placing large windows and glass doors in the home. Commercial buildings were designed with the consumer in mind. Large display windows, sometimes walls of glass, glass doors to bring the people in with views of items sold in the store. Roof lines became unique and varied in shape; eaves grew long to assist with heating and cooling of the buildings. Space age and cosmic themes brought out pending futuristic ideals.

Mid-Century Modern in commercial buildings are meant to draw the customer in. Store fronts are made of glass, with display windows and an entryway or vestibule that draws people to the front door. Entryways can be set at any angle directing a shopper to the door. These entryways can be paved with cement, travertine, marble, terrazzo and even tiles. Entryway floors and ceilings have lines that do not compete with the window displays and direct to the door.

Glass store fronts and glass displays in the entryways are a great resource for drawing people into the store. These allow people to see what the store has placed in the windows to show what the store has to offer. The doors though look plain, have been given lots of thought on how to best bring people in the store. Mostly made of glass they have some sort of “eye-
catcher” on them, ranging from the kick-plate to the door handle to a sign or object on the door.

While many commercial buildings were built with this design in mind there are others that have had modifications. These modifications often involved removing brick supports and small windows to add large glass windows with aluminum framing, and/or display cases. They also included pushing back the door way and expanding the entryway creating the vestibule like area. While some businesses modified entryways, others modified the entire storefront physically changing the look of the building. They added large canopies to give the illusion of a larger vestibule area, or added wood, marble, stucco, granite, stone, tiles, glass brick, and/or brick.

With the need for new buildings, new architectural styles, and a changing community the buildings of the past are at risk. The preservation of the mid-century commercial building is important not only future generations but for the generation who lived during that time. These buildings are a great example of a once need that was met and expanded upon. These buildings now tell stories of store owners past and present. Materials used allowed store owners to share their products from the inside with the outside; they encouraged people to enter the store.

Another important preservation is that of the automobile era. This era took place during the same years as the mid-century architecture, and was brought on by a rush of people buying cars to travel and see the country. Because of the growth of the car population across the country service stations and carwashes popped up. These service stations and carwashes were located along main roads, and would be easily accessible for those passing by them or through the towns. Service stations were built uniquely in accordance to their company, many following a mid-century architecture style. This was done so that each company could easily be identified by their building.

It is important to preserve these service stations and carwashes because of the decline in the automobile era. Cars today are not as a big deal as they once were; they have become a necessity for many. These buildings have been neglected or demolished, with very few of them still remaining. They are unique to a period of time where travel and family were important.
**Mid-Century Modern Architecture**

Mid-Century modern architecture reflects special features of its time. Through the style of the buildings we can understand the main needs and trends of those times and connect it to the way of people’s lives and aspirations of society. Mid-century modern architecture meets needs in convenience and private space, trying to be extremely efficient in the same time. This architectural design appeared as a result of emerging domination of suburban and car-oriented way of life. In addition to natural materials such as wood, stone and brick, there was an extensive use of drywall, aluminum and glass.

Distinctive feature of offices and commercial structures related to mid-century architecture is flat roof (low sloping roof is more typical for residential houses). Commercial buildings often have cantilevered overhangs, where the second story overhangs the first story, creating a tributary area (MCM design guidelines, p.8) (for example Platinum Hair studio).

Common feature is also a presence of large, vertically-oriented windows. To enable large-sized windows, fixed glass is commonly used (for example Spic and Span Laundromat). This type of windows allows the abundance of natural light in the rooms. To protect the inside area from the overheating and create shadow deep roof overhangs and/or solar shades (such as aluminum awnings) are also used (for example Dodds, Undercover Bed and Spas). Commercial and office structures often appear to be completely comprised of glass (Spic and Span).

Sometimes windows are shielded by decorative concrete or metal elements, such as screens (Spiegelberg). Leaded glass may also be used in geometric patterns or for a more simple appearance, aluminum mullions can be applied (Mid-Century Modern Design Guidelines). Glass tiles are also very common element that is used for decoration and allowing more natural light inside the building (for example Dodds).

Planter boxes are a common design element of a mid-century modern architecture (for example Speigelberg, Spic and Span). Plantings in concrete containers are used to introduce a sculptural element and splashes of color that direct traffic flow. It also could be used to separate a structure from the sidewalk or parking lot or just create an impression of connectedness to the nature.

Very often commercial mid-century modern sites are large and sprawling (not taking into account buildings that are situated in the downtown areas). They have large parking spaces,
relatively low-rise structures and less green space (Travel Inn Hotel, Penn’s and Mackmillan). Other features that can help to distinguish mid-century modern architecture are contrasting colors, repetition patterns, atomic and space-age themes and big eye catching signs.

It is very important to preserve distinctive and significant examples of the mid-century architecture. It is a unique style that conveys the atmosphere of the special period in American history. Mid-century architecture can be controversial, can be “not beautiful” according to some point of views, but there is no doubt that this distinctive architectural style gives us many really beautiful, unique and convenient buildings that can continue to serve and accommodate inhabitants, offices and different institutions. There is a big chance that with the return of walking types of communities, changing of zoning laws and overall emphasis of Smart Grows and sustainable development buildings will be completely different from what they are now and what they were in mid-century. Thus, it is very important to save this chapter of our history and be sure that existing structures can be well fitted into the changing urban environment.

Sources:
1) Selected Post-World War II Residential Architectural Styles and Building Types, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation Colorado Historical Society, 2006
2) 
3) Mid-Century Modern Design Guidelines - City of Southfield, Lawrence Technological University, 2012
The Spic and Span Laundromat building was built in 1958, with the current business opening in 1961. This is a good example of mid-century modern due to the glass windows, aluminum frames, and over-all design of the building with the door opening on the corner. There are also planter boxes around the building. The cosmic feel to the sign and the use of neon fits with the space age, futuristic feel that some buildings were designed to represent.
The complete glass store front with aluminum framing allows passers-by a view of what is inside the building. The windows also are meant for natural light during the day. The wide over hanging eaves supported by slender steel posts provide shade in the summer months and allows heat in the winter. The sign for this building has a cosmic feel to it, and lights up with red neon lighting. The entry way, with a glass door, is located on the corner of the building and block. This door way is to bring people into the building from crossing the street. The planter boxes around the building are made of brick, and placed there for an aesthetic feel.
Formerly the Phillips 66 Service Station, the building that sits on the corner of East Grand Avenue and 22nd Street was built in 1964. This is a good example of Mid-Century Modern for its shape, roof line, cinder block construction, and large windows. It is along the main road in town, allowing support of the automobile era. This building has served as multiple businesses over the years. It currently has a new construction, drive through coffee shop located in the parking lot, and the gas pumps have been updated.

The main building is made of cinder block painted blue and white. The roof is a soaring canopy, with a steep triangular section over where the gas pumps are and a flat roof over the building. The roof fascia is painted red (the color scheme is probably not original, as the building has been home to several other businesses over the years). Large windows framed by aluminum make up the store front, allowing for natural light to enter the main building. The storefront windows are canted, with a recessed door to bring people in the main entry. This open storefront can also be seen in other businesses such as the buildings downtown.

This design is unique to the era where oil companies were looking to create buildings and signs that were unique to their company, and would be easily recognizable as such.
Robo-Wash located on the corner of South 3rd Street and Russell Street, was built in 1968. With the use of materials such as cinder block, geometric shapes, aluminum framing, colors, and the robot/space theme this building is a great example of the mid-century modern architecture. It is also an example of the automobile era that swept the nation. Although not in use any more the Robo-Wash used to be a car wash, and a small gas station.

The building is built of cinder blocks, which have been painted a light blue color. Small windows are in the main building to watch customers. The car wash bays are made of red and white colored plexy-glass panels, aluminum frames and has diamond shaped red and white lights around the roof line. The gas pumps have been removed, but there is still evidence of a self-serve pumping station. There are two signs for the Robo-Wash. One sign is tall looking like a car antenna, with a 1960s car in front of a black and white checkered pattern. The second sign is with a robot displaying the Robo-Wash. Parts of both signs are missing due to neglect and weather.
The robot theme of this car wash plays on the space age/robot themes that came out of mid-century modern era. During the mid-century modern era many buildings looked to the future in ideas of space age and robots and tied these themes into their building shapes, signs, and overall theme. The Robo-Wash plays on the robot theme with the name of the carwash and possibly the mechanics of the wash bays themselves.

The building is currently for sale, and has been for quite some time.
Dodd's Shoe Co.

Address: 401 S. 2nd, street

Built in 1955

Dodd’s Shoe Co. building is very interesting example of Mid-century Modern architecture. This building was build after the Holliday Furniture store burned down, and since then it was a shoe store.

It has a simple rectangular shape and a flat roof. One of the most distinctive features is the large-sized windows of fixed glass that form huge storefronts both from north and west sides of the building. The shoe store has canted corner entrance made of glass. There are also inclusions of glazed tiles between the glass storefronts. The second store is made of brick. On the second floor there are a small rectangular windows placed in a bigger elongated sections of glass bricks. An eye-catching feature is the contrast of colors in the elements of the building: ginger brick and brown-red tiles together with dark turquoise awnings and tiles.

The building has textile awnings of contrasting color, to protect the showroom from the sun. The rounded awnings are not a typical feature of mid-century architecture, but were added later. This structure has a vertical sign in contrast to the overall horizontal from of the buildings and elongated shapes of its elements.
This building is significant because it has many features that are inherent to the style of mid-century architecture. The Dodd’s also has a steel sign on the north side entrance. The entrance is made of glass and framed by contrasting materials, colors and shapes. This entrance leads to the offices on the second floor. It has a vertical emphasis with a 2-story framing in contrasting colors and materials. This feature is typical for the Mid-century Modern architecture:

Left: Dodd’s Shoe Co., Laramie
Right: Anaheim Professional Building Anaheim, CA

Examples of vertical signs:
Left: Parking garage, Wichita, KS
Right: Town and Country Liquor, Fort Smith, AR

Glaze blocks usage:

Left: Fraternal Order of Eagles Brockville, PA
Right: Dodd’s Shoe Co., Laramie,

Sources:

Anna Shevtsova

Pence and MacMillan LLC

Address: 501 E. Garfield Street, Laramie WY

Built in 1966

This building is an example of mid-century modern architecture that has many distinctive features of the style. It is characterized by modular construction, which means that it looks like it was made from separate parts. The uneven roof is gable and low-sloping on the south and north sides of the building and flat in the middle.

The building structure looks quite asymmetric. Very typical of mid-century modern design is the use of different materials, such as bricks and glass that forms large, vertically-oriented windows, as well as stone cladding and wooden beams. The walls are made from different materials, some of them are formed from brick, some have stone cladding and some are decorated with wood. Red stone, sand-color brick and painted wood create a color contrast. The roof slopes down to form wide eaves that protect the interior rooms from sunlight. On the east side of the building there is a construction that has some features of a porte cochere, but built of wooden beams with what appears to be a mainly decorative function. This building was originally built as commercial building. Before the Pence and MacMillan LLC, there was Capitol Saving and Loan office located in this building.

This example of MCM architecture is worth attention, because of some features that nowadays are not popular in architecture anymore. That is why it is necessary to identify and preserve these significant features of structures.
Different roof lines in one building:

Left: Pence and MacMillan, Laramie WY
Right: mid-century building, Nampa, ID

Eaves, porte cochere,:
Sources:

Ranger Motel

Address: 453 N 3rd street, Laramie, WY 82072

Built in 1954

This building has many elements of mid-century modern style, however, may be due to the influence of the west culture it is a little bit different in the same time. Most likely this motel was updated in the 70th, when it was popular to “naturalize” the mid-century features of buildings. The structure of this motel consists of two parts: the main building, where the reception and some offices are located, and the long U-shape motel-room section.

The roof of the main part of the building is flat, a distinctive characteristic of mid-century architecture which makes the building look modern and up-to-date. The motel unit has a roof that is flat on top and sloped on the sides in the neo-mansard style. The main entrance has a porch supported by two metal posts. The entire building has a wide roof overhang that shields the structure to protect it from sunlight. The main entrance consists of large, vertically-oriented fixed windows. Between the building and the road there is brick planter box with small shrubs. The space to the south of the building is a parking lot that is characteristic of the car-oriented era. Other distinctive feature is a huge sign, made in distinctive space-age style. The sign is made with details of contrasted colors and
geometric forms. The words “ranger” and “motel” is written in different size of letters and different fonts. Interesting feature that defines the space theme of sight is decorative antenna.

Space-age sign, Ranger Motel, Laramie WY;

Other examples of sign of the same style:

Left: Sun-n-Sand Motel, Jackson, MS
Right: Melody Cleaners, Yuma, AZ
Ranger Motel represents a particular era in American history. It contributes to the distinctive and diversified image of Laramie as it is today.

**Sources:**

1. “Mid-Century Modern Design Guidelines. City of Southfield”
This building with its simple and straightforward design is a good example of mid-century modern architecture. It is a single-story building with a flat roof. Windows are shielded behind decorative metal screens. On the east side of the building some walls are substituted by a concrete screens. Straight horizontal and vertical lines are dominant in the appearance of the building. The Entry door is shaded by a small metal canopy. The architect used two different colors of brick (lighter on top and darker bottom part) to create large geometric forms. Glazed blue tiles decorate the area above and around the entrance. Other significant elements are planter boxes that frame the entrance door on the south side separate the sidewalk from the road on the west side. This building does not have sight, however name of the company is written using aluminum lettering.
Metal and concrete screens, Spiegelberg, Laramie, WY:

Examples of screens in the US:

International Union of Operating Engineers, Spokane, WA

Cossitt Public Library, Memphis, TN
Sources:

Andrea Lewis
28 October 2013
Historic Preservation
Mid-Century Project

**Downtown Modified Storefronts**

214 & 216 South 2nd Street

Herb House and Earth, Wind & Fire Gallery

1925 – 216 S 2nd Jc. Penny (now Earth, Wind & Fire), 214 S 2nd Kleemann’s (now Herb House)

- Image from the Ludwig-Svenson Studio Collection AHC

2013 – Earth, Wind & Fire, Herb House

- Photo by Andrea Lewis
According to the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the historic downtown district these buildings both underwent a change in the 1950s. This changed included covering up the upper windows, removing the awnings, and changing the entry ways. Currently the upper windows and brick were covered with stucco. The upper level of 216 S. 2nd (Earth Wind & Fire) has a frame like decoration around it, while the upper level of 214 S. 2nd (Herb House) has a plain stucco design. The awnings were never replaced; instead the area where the awnings would have been is now used for business signs. The entry ways on both buildings have been recessed, adding windows for display space. This is a marketing technique to draw the passer-by into the store by displaying goods. The recessed entryway of Earth, Wind, and Fire looks to have been a glazed tile is now covered with a pebbled surface, while the entryway of the Herb House is still a glazed tile.

These modifications are examples of mid-century modern for the materials used and the marketing techniques. The large display windows with aluminum framing, recessed glass door. Remaining brick supports on either side of the buildings, one support shared between the buildings. Other brick supports were removed to make room for more windows. Each building has wooden accents.

The Herb House has a partial grant to remove the stucco from the upper level of their building so that they can expand to the second level.
According to the owner, Anne Brande, this building had a modification done to it in the late 1950s/early 1960s. This modification covered up the original building with enamel baked steel tiles to look like granite, and corrugated steel panels. Block glass was added where old entry ways were. Entry way is recessed with large windows on either side. This entry way is not as recessed as some others downtown.

This building is a good example of mid-century modern due to the enamel baked steel tiles, and the steel panels on the upper level. The square glass tiles are also a good example.
Building built in the late 1800s, in the mid-1960s a modification was made to the building. This modification is the addition of a large steel canopy. This canopy covered the brick and windows of the upper level. It also served as a means for advertisement, and to draw people into the recessed entry way. One way of drawing people in is the speakers that play music under the canopy. The recessed entry way has raised glass display cases standing out from large glass windows framed with aluminum. The door is glass. The display cases and glass door are to allow people to see what is in the store. The recessed entry way is now covered in an outdoor carpet, though at one point would have probably been a glazed tile.

This building is a good example of a mid-century modern modification because of its outer display cases, steel awning, and recessed entry way. The materials used in the modification are also a good example of mid-century modern.
Institutional Mid-Century Modern
Institutional Mid-Century Modern Architecture

Mid-century modern as an architectural style came into being in the decades following the end of the Second World War, a boom era for both the economy and population. At its most rudimentary level, mid-century architecture promoted a vision of the future through minimalist aesthetics and modern-day technologies. In this abundant period, which left thoughts of the depression well in the past, mid-century modern aspired to promote a life of leisure by reducing the perceptual barriers between the home interior and its landscaped outdoor surroundings.

Structurally, institutional mid-century modern buildings maintain a modest height in relation to their surrounding structures.\(^1\) The building construction often follows a relatively modular design, maintaining simple clean lines, with possible cylindrical shapes for added interest.\(^2\) One sees the frequent use of materials like brick, cement and stucco, all of which are left exposed.\(^3\) Simple concrete is displayed in arches, columns, and cantilevers, and may also be shaped in unique ways or used to frame windows and doors. Brickwork frequently uses the common bond, dutch cross, or stacked pattern designs.\(^4\)

Often a building will present a combination of both natural materials and more modern elements like steel, glass and aluminum.\(^5\) More rudimentary materials and the use of muted earthlike colors demonstrate the modern style characteristic of lessening the barrier between nature’s associated leisurely qualities and the modern structure.\(^6\) Following this theme, natural materials are left unfinished and used to highlight aspects of the structure.\(^7\) In the case of large institutional buildings, stone may be used to accent the building by means of

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2 Ibid. p. 8, 10
3 Ibid. p. 8
4 Ibid. p. 12
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid. p. 10
7 Ibid.
coursed ashlar patterning. Large floor to ceiling windows allow the inflow of natural light and often promote the idea of transparency where possible. Entryways too may mimic the design of windows. Geometric patterned window tinting and deep roof overhangs serve to shade the interior when necessary.

In comparison to commercial or industrial mid-century structures, which use only understated flat roofs, institutional buildings may also use the butterfly or folded plate styles. It is not unusual for an institutional structure to host more than one style of roof design. Furthermore roofs are often extended to shelter entrances. Entrances may be defined with forecourts and covered with porticos or pavilions, which present a prominent, welcoming entryway, whilst simultaneously providing functional shelter. Buildings may also have sheltering breezeways, which link structures and mimic their design aesthetics.

The car impacted severally upon outdoor surrounds of mid-century institutional buildings, with large areas devoted to parking and landscaping serving to soften the interaction between the building and adjacent hard surfaces. Built-in, concrete, geometric plant boxes are often used to provide this perimeter buffer and where possible, sizable green landscaped spaces are a common feature. As such, such mid-century institutional structures are characteristically large and sprawling.

Mid-century architecture merits attention because it represents an important breakaway era from the classic modes of design and construction. The modern aesthetic architecturally promoted the huge technological advances of the time, as well the social attitudes towards burgeoning concepts of leisure, entertainment, the enjoyment of nature, and the future.

However, this promotion of rapid construction, new materials and untested designs has also resulted in a contemporary preservation problem with regards to mid-century

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9 Ibid. p. 11
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid. p. 10
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid. p. 9
14 Ibid. p. 14, 16
15 Ibid. p. 14, 16
structures. Many buildings, now achieving the fifty year recognition mark, have come to demonstrate huge structural and material deficiencies. In this respect, the preservation of such buildings may require far greater material replacement and structural alteration than normally desired in historic preservation projects. Nonetheless, with these structures presenting such an influential period of architectural design and social consciousness, as well as accounting for a large portion of the present day building stock, the challenge of preservation is both historically and environmentally important.

One particular disadvantage faced by institutional buildings may be the lack of positive memories associated with the structures. For example the poor material quality of the buildings can impact upon the comfort of their regular users, and aversion towards the institutions themselves may also encourage resentment for their buildings. Furthermore, the supposed abundance of mid-century structures may promote a lack of appreciation for their distinct architecture and thus allow destructive policies to be enacted unchallenged.

One sees then that institutional buildings, due to their size but also their relatively varied design features, lie somewhat in between commercial structures and residential homes. These buildings therefore offer unique architectural designs which are distinct from the other two subgroups. However, owing to the potential wealth and image consciousness of institutions, mid-century modern institutional buildings, with their inefficient and dated designs, are arguably under the greatest threat. If such style perceptions were changed however, this wealth could place institutional buildings in the strongest position of all.
Bibliography

Mid-century modern architecture: Institutional buildings

In my case studies for mid-century modern architecture I am predominantly looking at institutional buildings that are located on the University of Wyoming campus.

In the introduction to the *Mid-Century Modern Design Guidelines* the style of that era is described as a "‘new post-war style of architecture [...] recognizing people’s desire for fresh, innovative design with function. Clean lines, minimalism, and both organic and geometric shapes characterize mid-century modern design.” (Page 1) The need for a new start and progress towards the future after the war can be seen in the development of the UW campus. Starting in the late 1940s, the construction boost reached its climax in the 1960s and led to an extensive expansion of the campus and thus the city, as those two are closely intertwined. Looking at the mid-century modern design of the newly built additions, one can also see the 1960s zeitgeist being reflected in every construction. According to the Historic American Buildings Survey of the UW campus, “the postwar architecture of UW contrasts with the earlier notion of a timeless architectural style, and reflects a widespread trend on American university campuses towards buildings expressing the dynamic and ever-changing nature of education as well as the current interpretation of the ‘modern’ or contemporary style.” (Page 35)

Buildings like the Classroom building, the Coe library, the Washakie Dining Center or the Laramie High School show many mid-century modern stylistic features. Those features include flat, overhanging roofs, extensive glass elements and fronts, interesting mixes and juxtapositions of rectangular and circular shapes, the space-themed style of the so-called ‘Googie’-design as well as landscape features like big parking lots and planter boxes. Moreover, the buildings embrace materials that were typically used during that era. Especially popular were things like glass bricks, (aggregate) concrete and aluminum window frames.

Taking a look beyond the border of Laramie, one discovers that countless important institutional buildings were built in the 1960s and are great examples for why that style matters. One of them
is the work of Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer who was one of the key figures in designing Brazil’s capital, Brasilia. Many of the city’s public and institutional buildings like state departments or the National Congress were developed by Niemeyer. All of them show undeniable mid-century modern features in the way they are shaped and constructed.

Another great (national) example for mid-century modern architecture is the buildings designed by Edward Durell Stone. Especially his post-war work including the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the U.S. Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair or the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi are textbook cases of the mid-century modern era. Comparing those buildings with mid-century modern buildings in Laramie one realizes that you do not necessarily have to travel to Brazil, India, Washington or California to get a good impression of 1950s and 1960s progressive style. It can be found right here. Therefore it is important to give those buildings the attention and time they deserve.

But those buildings are not just good examples for the presence of an international architectural style in Laramie. They are also a symbol for the social and educational changes that were going on during the 1950s and 1960s. Like I mentioned at the beginning, the new institutional buildings reflect the transition and transformation happening within the American educational system after World War II since the government decided to focus more intensely on that matter in the second half of the 1940s.

Next to symbolizing national trends and movements, those buildings also hold many memories that are important for the community. Especially the Laramie High School is significant story site for the entire town and its citizens. Generations of locals attended the school since it was built in the 1950s. Events and experiences connected to the school and shared by many people bring the community closer together by creating a common memory. Some might have won their first football game here or met their future spouse. Others might remember how hidden corners of the school presented the perfect opportunity to have your first – forbidden – cigarette, representing a tiny rebellion against one’s parents.

Buildings are not just made of bricks and stones but are also made of memories. By preserving those buildings we also preserve those memories.
Case study# 1: Classroom building, University of Wyoming campus

Picture 1: eastern front view

Picture 2: side entrance

Picture 3: square planter boxes

Picture 4: western view

Picture 5: “Classroom building with four men holding a blueprint” (digital collections American Heritage Center, probably taken around 1970)
The Classroom building was built in 1968 and dedicated in 1971. It was designed by Laramie architects W. Eliot and Clinton A. Hitchcock and according to a plaque inside the building it is especially praised for being one of the most innovative architectural structures in the Rocky

1 http://www.playle.com/listing.php?i=SABASUSH697
2 http://www.grahamfoundation.org/grantees/3965-architectural-strategies
Mountains region. With its prominent round shape the Classroom building represents one of the most significant stylistic characteristics of the so-called “Googie” architecture that was very popular during the mid-century era and is famous for its space-age and atomic-age themes, as can be seen in the examples shown in pictures 6, 7 and 8. Informed by the government’s extensive efforts in the space program, that style was a synonym for progress, future and modernity.

Another trademark of mid-century modern architecture is the play of curvilinear and rectilinear shapes, which is emphasized by the juxtaposition of the Classroom building’s base and top (pictures 2 and 4). The new geometries were based on variety within repetition. Looking at the top of the building the reoccurring vertical windows create an interesting and intriguing pattern that contributes to the structure’s UFO character. But despite its ‘extraterrestrial’ shape the Classroom building blends in nicely with its surrounding thanks to the material that was chosen for its construction. The buff-colored sandstone can be find in most of the buildings on the UW campus.

Site features of mid-century modern buildings include square planter boxes which also can be seen on the north and the south side of the Classroom building. They serve to reduce and break impervious surfaces and create a more ‘natural’ atmosphere.
Case study #2: Washakie Dining Center, University of Wyoming Campus

Picture 1: Front view from King Row

Picture 2: White Hall in the background

Picture 3: Aluminum framed windows, concrete aggregate

Picture 4: Architectural rendering showing the new food service-recreation building, taken from a newspaper article in the ‘Daily Times’, 11th of March 1965
Picture 5: Washakie Dining Center with McIntyre Hall in the background³

Picture 6: Santa Fe Federal Savings and Loans, 1961⁴

Picture 8: Edward Durell Stone’s Ponce Museum of Art, Ponce, Puerto Rico (built in 1961)⁵


⁴ [http://blog.preservationnation.org/2013/03/22/a-modern-use-for-a-modernist-gem-in-palm-springs/#.Um_PKxAbzIU](http://blog.preservationnation.org/2013/03/22/a-modern-use-for-a-modernist-gem-in-palm-springs/#.Um_PKxAbzIU)

The Washakie Dining Center was built in 1967. Designed by Corbett/Dehnert of Lander and J.T. Banner & Associates of Laramie, the new ‘food service-recreation building’ was part of a big construction endeavor on campus of the University of Wyoming during the mid-1960s, adding not only the new dining center but also three new dormitories to the campus. Those additions were necessary in order to meet rising numbers in enrollments. One very smart feature of the new dining center was underground tunnels that connected it to the dorms.

The Washakie Dining Center has many characteristics that are typical for mid-century modern architecture. One of the most prominent trademarks is the flat roofline. As can be seen in pictures 6-9, flat and overhanging roofs were often featured in buildings designed and constructed in the 1960s. Moreover, a typical feature of the mid-century modern style is having a low base contrasting with a tall tower. In the case of the Washakie Dining Center it is a separate building, as can be seen in picture 5. Nevertheless, the overall impression is dominated by that contrast.

Another interesting detail is the underside of the roof with its ‘egg-carton’ pattern. A similar design is also featured in Edward Durrell Stone’s Ponce Museum of Art (picture 8). The base of the building is recessed, giving the entire structure a lightweight expression, almost as if it is floating above ground. The floor-to-ceiling windows add to that lightness and make the building seem more transparent. Again, installing big window fronts was a popular tool in mid-century modern architecture (pictures 6, 7 and 9). Looking at the materials used one can also detect the architectural zeitgeist of the 1950s and 1960s. Next to aluminum framed windows the builders relied on natural stone and concrete aggregate.

In 2003 the dining center was modernized extensively and the part facing Grand Avenue (Picture 5) was added. However, the exterior additions were all designed to accompany the overall mid-century modern style and blend in perfectly with the original structure.

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6 http://www.pinterest.com/pin/74239093827755740/
The Washakie Dining Center and the dormitories surrounding it are not only a great example of mid-century modern architecture, they also represent an important decade of growth in the university’s and thus the town’s development.
Case study #4: Coe Library, University of Wyoming Campus

Picture 1

Picture 2

Picture 3

Picture 4

Picture 5

Picture 6
The original library of the University of Wyoming was built in the 1920s. Thanks to an agreement between the state and the university, the university was to receive a share of the federal oil royalties the state of Wyoming got. That money enabled the university to start constructing new buildings and much needed additions to the campus, one of them being the

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2Ibid.

3Ibid.
original library. That story shows how closely linked state, education and oil business are in Wyoming and is certainly a fact that is quite unique to this area.

However, after World War II the focus on new and better education grew and the university was in need of an improved, modern university library that could meet the standards of a more ambitious educational system and was also suitable for the rising numbers of students. After the stunning gift of $750,000 from William Robertson Coe in 1953, construction of the new library started in 1956. Coe Library was opened in 1958. The architects responsible for the design of the library were Eliot and Clinton Hitchcock who planned many mid-century modern projects in Laramie. The building “incorporated aspects of the international style with the traditional use of native stone.” The most striking thing about the library is of course its plain, simple, flat and rectangular form. The windows, whose form and order is also very strict and linear, are framed by typical mid-century modern aluminum frames. Over the windows we can see glass brick elements (picture 2). Material like aluminum and glass were also used in the construction of the side entrance, whose big, overhanging roof — another mid-century modern stylistic device — is supported by two pillars that at least look like they were made out of aluminum. The door at that entrance is framed just like the windows. The original entrance can be seen in pictures 8 and 9. Nowadays, this entrance is closed but the mid-century modern features are still there. The flat, over-hanging roofline that used to over the entrance is now supported by big window elements that fit well into the mid-century modern façade. The roof is still overhanging and the original pillars carrying it are incorporated in the ‘new structure’. It seems as if the open spaces were just ‘filled up’ with glass elements. Another characteristic typical for that era are the planter boxes that surrounded and still surround parts of the library (pictures 6 and 7).

In 1979 and most recently in 2009, the library underwent extensive renovations and several additions were made to the building. However, despite of those changes it is still possible to see the mid-century modern design of the entire structure.

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4 Historic American Buildings Survey, 17
5 Ibid. 40
The Coe Library is a symbol for the university’s educational and academic ambition and stands for its constant striving to improve resources for students and scholars. Its history shows the interdependence of education, state, industry and private donors as well as the growing importance and transformation of education after World War II.
College of Education Building (1949)

The college of education building, designed by Porter and Bradley of Cheyenne and constructed in 1949, included not only laboratories and classrooms but also a kindergarten, modern clinical facilities, an auditorium and gymnasium. The structure’s classrooms also boasted the inclusion of the then seemingly modern green chalkboard.

Architecturally the building was designed with a low, wide profile. The flat roofs, modular design, coursed ashlar stonework, and exposed concrete, all maintain the mid-century modern aesthetic. Incorporated planter boxes help soften the entrances, while a large green front lawn area creates a leisurely atmosphere. The classroom wing’s ribbon windows, with their incorporated glass blocks, metal shade awnings, and ceiling level height, most clearly reflect the period’s modern design characteristics. Indeed the juxtaposition of a vertical entrance way with a characteristically horizontal building was also typical of the time. Smaller side entrances can also be found to host stone privacy walls.

As demonstrated in the 1949 year book picture, the structure has an almost symmetrical, classical-plan central portion, which contains the auditorium, offices and classrooms. One can note the quintessential post World War II classroom building extending to the east, and the gymnasium behind. The bas relief sculpture on the façade was designed by Robert Russin and the curve of the entry provides the contrasting forms that are so typical of mid-century modern design.

Present Day College of Education
Photographed by Author, Robin Posniak.
"THE COWBOY MEETS HIS CHALLENGE..."
College of Education 1952
Images from 1952 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
College of Education 1956
Images from 1956 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
College of Education 1959
Images from 1959 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Crane-Hill Dining Hall (1961)

Crane-Hill Dining Hall, constructed in 1961, served as the prime cafeteria to its flanking residency halls. In 1966 however, due to an unpredicted decline in on campus living, the cafeteria was closed. Today the structure still continues to be used by the University of Wyoming as an events hall.

Crane-Hill Dining Hall is a spectacular example of institutional mid-century modern architecture. The structure hosts both flat and folded plate roof designs, with a deep front roof overhang and perimeter eaves. Large windows occupy the majority of the front wall space, allowing natural light in and views of the landscaped garden without. The entrance too mimics these aesthetic features. Muted color window tints, aluminum frames, and natural stone patterning all compliment the surrounding mid-century residential structures. It is interesting to note the incorporation of University of Wyoming sandstone, which is so typical of the campus’s older structures, in this modern design. A large forecourt promotes the entrance, whilst also blending the contrast between the structure and the outer gardens. Notice that the original forecourt planter boxes have been removed.

Present Day Crane-Hill Dining Hall and Breezeway
Photographed by Author, Robin Posniak.
Crane-Hill Dining Hall Exteriors 1964
Images from 1964 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
**Interior 1969**
Images from 1969 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Crane-Hill Dates Unknown
Images from the University of Wyoming American Heritage Centre archives.
Hill and Crane Halls

Crane and Hill residency halls were opened in 1962. Crane initially began as a 400 person men’s dormitory, boasting the luxury of personal telephones. Hill played host to the relatively innovative idea of mixed sex residential living, with men occupying the bottom three floors and women residing on the top three. In 1966, however, the dorm would resume full male residency again as girls moved out to Downey Hall.

Both residency halls mirror each other, as depicted in the aerial plan below, presenting the same mid-century modern features. One can note the flat roofed, modular construction, with its earthy color palette – most clearly demonstrated by the tinted spandrel panels. Each with its own sizable parking lot, both halls are decorated with in-built planters and encapsulate Crane-Hill Dining Hall and a green landscaped garden. Almost transparent breezeways, with tinted glass windows, link to the dormitories to the cafeteria. A coursed ashlar pattern stone design highlights the lower floors and end façades. Decorative geometric breeze blocks can also be found in use at the ends of the both buildings. Exposed concrete, aluminum window frames, and covered entrances with aluminum awnings, all adhere to the mid-century style. One can further note the typical vertical entrance design, which contrasts the characteristically horizontal building.
Present Day Hill and Crane Halls
Photographed by Author, Robin Posniak.
Crane and Hill Halls Student Life 1964
Images from 1964 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Crane and Hill Halls Student Life 1966
Images from 1966 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Crane and Hill Halls Student Life 1969
Images from 1969 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Case study #3: Laramie High School

Picture 1: Main entrance

Picture 2

Picture 3

Picture 4

Picture 5

Picture 6
http://digitalcollections.uwyo.edu:8180/luna/servlet/view/search?QuickSearchA=QuickSearchA&q=laramie+senior+high+school&search=Search
After World War II, the American government increasingly concentrated attention to the educational system. Consequently, more and more schools had to be built. This trend also reached Laramie and Wyoming, where the school enrollment grew by 50%, from 55,000 to more than 80,000 students, between 1946 and 1960. Just in Laramie, four new schools were built between 1952 and 1959: Slade Elementary School, Beitel Elementary School, Harmony Elementary School and Laramie High School. The design and style of school buildings changed radically in those years. While schools in the 19th and early 20th century had been constructed with an elaborate and ornate exterior, architects responsible for the design of mid-century modern schools focused more on the interior. Hence, they preferred “modern aesthetics that emphasized simplicity” and put more effort into new elements like classrooms suitable for education in science and industry, cafeterias, and spaces for physical education or other non-classroom activities. The emphasis on rather simple, plain structures can be seen in pictures from other schools built in that era (pictures 12 and 13). Especially the Junior High in Mt Union has a striking resemblance with parts of Laramie High School.

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3 [http://wyooshpo.state.wy.us/pdf/WyomingSchoolsContext.pdf](http://wyooshpo.state.wy.us/pdf/WyomingSchoolsContext.pdf), 136
4 Ibid. 149
5 Ibid. 152
6 Ibid. 148
7 Ibid. 149
Laramie High School has many features that make it easy to identify as a mid-century modern school building. Built in 1959, its construction fell right into the heyday of mid-century modern architecture and the educational system’s transformation. It was designed by Hitchcock&Hitchcock, who are responsible for numerous mid-century modern buildings all over Laramie. The first thing that is quite unique about Laramie High School is its shape. As can be seen in the aerial photo (picture 11), it has a center with a couple of arms or wings extending from it, almost like rays, making the school building a ‘shining’ example of education. Another mid-century modern characteristic is the multiple use of glass elements. Next to big window fronts, as can be seen in pictures 1 and 2, countless glass bricks were included in the construction of the school. The main parts of entire fronts and walls are made out of those bricks (pictures 5-7). Moreover, there are smaller glass elements that look almost like ornaments in the way they are incorporated into the façade (picture 8). The concrete elements framing the windows (pictures 3 and 4) give the exterior an enhanced three-dimensional look and together with the round shapes of some parts of the building (pictures 1 and 2) they prevent the building from appearing ‘boring’ or monotonous, even though it does not have any extensive ornamentation like buildings from previous decades. Another mid-century modern feature that became necessary due to the rising numbers of people who owned their own car is wide and big parking lots. As can be seen in pictures 9 and 10, there is ample space for parking one’s car at the Laramie High School. Especially in rural areas like Wyoming, people had and have to rely on their own vehicle as public transportation is more or less non-existent.

The cafeteria and the library on the south-east corner of the Laramie High School (picture 10) were added a couple of years after the opening of the original core building. The exact years of those additions could not be determined, but they were definitely made after 1971. Their style, however, does not give away the fact that they were constructed post hoc. The circular form and big window front with aluminum frames are similar to the design of the original, mid-century modern main entrance (picture 1).

Laramie High School is not only an interesting example for mid-century modern architecture. It also represents an era of a new beginning after World War II concerning education. It has been the
place where generations of Albany County citizens have been educated and have grown up. Thus, it most certainly holds precious memories for the entire community.
Wyoming Hall (1948-1949)

Wyoming Hall was said to demonstrate a “new frontier” in on-campus housing. The structure promoted the modern technology and leisure-oriented characteristics of the mid-century era by boasting a lounge area fully enclosed in thermopane glass and decorated with inlaid linoleum fraternity insignias. Bedrooms, completed in eight pastel shades, conveyed a contemporary hotel atmosphere. The building, with its ability to host up to 400 men, was considered impressive in size. However, by 1966, due to the leveling off of student enrollment and a decline in on-campus living, Wyoming Hall was closed as a residential dormitory.

Architecturally Wyoming Hall boasts many mid-century features. One can start by noting its flat roof and moderate height. The structure’s first floor is highlighted by means of a stone coursed ashlar pattern, with subsequent floors using a similar toned brick in a running bond style. The ground floor demonstrates the popularity of the floor to ceiling vertical window wall, with its aluminum frames and matching entrance. A concrete overhang, supported by simple metal posts, shields the extensive ground floor windows and a small patio area. The back and side entrances have a similar overhang, as well as glass block and brick privacy walls. One sees the use of built-in planter boxes as a means of buffering the building’s perimeter and a planter box island as a softening contrast to the practical hard surface pathway.
Present Day Wyoming Hall
Photographed by Author, Robin Posniak.
Wyoming Hall 1951
Images from 1951 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Wyoming Hall 1952
Images from 1952 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Wyoming Hall 1956
Images from 1956 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Wyoming Hall 1959
Images from 1959 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Wyoming Hall 1960
Images from 1960 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Wyoming Hall Student Life 1964
Images from 1964 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Wyoming Hall Student Life 1966
Images from 1966 WYO, The Year Book of the University of Wyoming.
Boys leave as Viet Nam invitations come

It's always so dark now . . ."