



Rocky Flats Cold War Museum

Weapons to Wildlife

Feb./March 2007, Vol. 1 # 2 Monthly newsletter for Friends of the Rocky Flats Cold War Museum

ZONING PRE-APPLICATION SUBMITTED FOR MUSEUM SITE

A pre-application for rezoning the 1.4 acre property in the Rocky Flats Industrial Park for the Rocky Flats Cold War Museum was submitted Jan. 29 to the Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Division by Jack Swanzy, museum board member and architect. He also developed a conceptual construction and operations budget. The site for the museum is at the northeast corner of Highway 93 and the Rocky Flats West Gate Road, south of Buildings 60 and 61.

The museum board of directors and property owner Charles C. McKay are requesting the rezoning by adding Museum, Visitor Center and Restaurant/Food Service uses to the existing zoning. The present zoning of the property allows Office/Light Industrial/Warehouse uses. The existing uses would remain in effect. The museum will contract for fire protection. Water and sewer for the building will be arranged.

Swanzy, former architect and facilities planner for Jefferson County School District, said the plan is for a two-story building totaling 15,300 square feet. The lobby entrance would be at the southeast corner. The high groundwater table would prevent building a basement. Swanzy designed Buildings 60 and 61 for McKay in the mid-1980s, and is therefore knowledgeable about the high wind conditions there which require durable exterior surfaces to withstand the wind and sandblasting.

The site includes 25 percent landscaping with xeriscaping and paving for 53 cars and four buses. The South Boulder Diversion Canal is on the east border of the site. The McKay Ditch easement is on the north side.

The next step in the rezoning process will take up to six months. Fund-raising for the \$4 million project is continuing.

Memories of jail from a Rocky Flats activist...

After reading the museum's web site about an Oct. 28, 2006 event for activists at Rocky Flats, Lane Cosner wrote that he spent a week in the Clear Creek County Jail with Daniel Ellsberg (known for releasing the Pentagon Papers about the Vietnam War to the New York Times) and Allen Ginsberg (poet) after being arrested for occupying the tracks at Rocky Flats during a protest in the late 1970s.

Lane wrote, "I was in the very first protest and the third wave of occupation...I was only in my early 20s. I learned to play Spades from the famous Daniel. I was there too when Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orloff read poetry around the campfire. I live in southwest Oregon now. I am still involved in activism out here, but now it's saving the last of our ancient forests..."

Quote

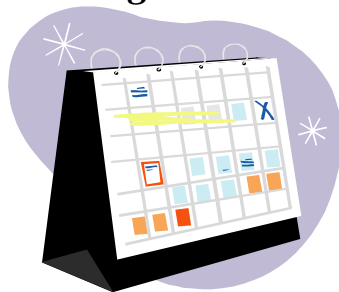
"The only winnable nuclear war is the one we prevent."

--Anonymous

NEWS BRIEFS

- ❖ **Help fund architectural drawings for the museum.** Send your tax-deductible donations to the Rocky Flats Cold War Museum at P.O. Box 871, Arvada, CO 80001-0871.
- ❖ **The Rocky Flats Oral History Project** presentation is planned at the April 11 museum board meeting (see meeting details below). It summarizes the 90 videotaped interviews of Rocky Flats workers, political leaders, government regulators and activists conducted from May 2004-Nov. 2006. Call Ann Lockhart at 303-388-6978 to schedule a presentation for your group.

Meetings/Events



Tues., March 20, 1 p.m. or 7 p.m. Colorado Historical Society, 1300 Broadway, presentation by Mark Fiege, "Atomic Sublime: Scientists and Nature at Los Alamos." RSVP to 303-866-4686. There is a small fee.

Thurs., April 5, 11:30 a.m., Executive Committee, Parisi's, 44th and Tennyson, northwest Denver.

Wed., April 11, 5 p.m. Rocky Flats Cold War Museum Board of Directors meeting at 11025 Dover St., Ste. 1000, Westminster (northeast of 108th Ave. and Wadsworth Blvd.)

BOARD MEMBER BIO: *Duane Hunter*

Duane Hunter, a 34-year Rocky Flats site employee, managed the Analytic Chemistry Labs at the plant and was facility manager for a number of plant facilities. He was a Deactivation and Decommissioning Project Manager for Kaiser-Hill at Rocky Flats during the closing years of the site. Hunter has both bachelor's and master's degrees in analytical chemistry from the University of Northern Colorado. Duane and his wife Marty, who have three married sons and five grandchildren, enjoy skiing and snowshoeing in the winter. In the summer, they hike and bike in the Colorado mountains.



Duane joined the museum board about four years ago and has worked to identify and secure items from the Rocky Flats site for the museum's Collections Committee. He also helped the Oral Histories Committee. Duane said he hopes to see a working museum that all present and past workers of the site can be proud of and will tell the story of the work Rocky Flats performed as part of the Cold War.

Book review

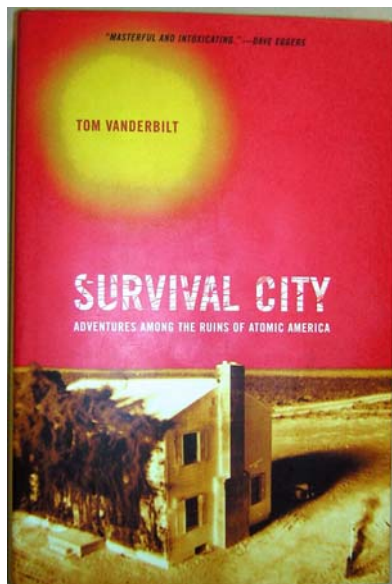
“Survival City: Adventures Among the Ruins of Atomic America”

by Kim Grant, former president, museum board

Tom Vanderbilt's masterful account of the effect of the Cold War on America's physical landscape and psyche makes for powerful and eye-opening reading for anyone with an interest in post-war America. The book is much more than the keen observations and ramblings of a self-described "Cold War tourist," but instead probes deeply into the motivations and fears that drove much of the nation's military preparedness and planning. Vanderbilt has a keen eye for detail and contradiction, and this capacity enables

readers to look deeper into our local environment for evidence of the profound and lasting effects the Cold War had on the western American landscape.

As Vanderbilt explains, “The Cold War was—and is—everywhere, if one knows where to look for it. Underground, behind closed doors, classified, off the map, already crumbling beyond recognition, or right in plain view, it has left an imprint as widespread yet discreet as the tracings of radioactive particles that blew out of the Nevada Test Site in the 1950s.” This contradictory Cold War landscape ranges from obvious architectural edifices such as the Berlin Wall, Cheyenne Mountain, missile silos, and the myriad laboratories in places like Los Alamos, Oak Ridge, Hanford, and Rocky Flats, to a vast secret landscape installed from Greenwich, Connecticut, to Greenland characterized by unseen command-and-control facilities, communications networks, and relocation centers. Thus, the Cold War was defined both by what could be seen and what could not be seen. To underscore the latter point, Vanderbilt frequently notes that much of the Cold War landscape is still secret, unseen, and beyond the reach of the Freedom of Information Act.



With regard to the physical remnants of the Cold War, Vanderbilt notes, “Here was a landscape as central to the nation’s history and identity as any restored Civil War battlefield or presidential home, and yet it was languishing unseen, its meanings obscured, grafted onto the imaginary terrain of Hollywood.” His observations of “places that seem in danger of vanishing even as we are just beginning to understand their history,” are particularly poignant, and point to the inherent difficulty in preserving the best of these important sites and artifacts. Many of these relics sit “abandoned in place,” too old to be technologically useful but too new to be “culturally venerated” or appreciated.

The most chilling chapter of the book relates to what Vanderbilt calls “Survival Cities.” This refers to the parallel effort to perfect the means of mass destructive nuclear weaponry through comprehensive testing and technological refinement, while at the same time trying valiantly to develop the capacity to withstand such a horrible attack directed at us through blast testing, fallout shelters, and the memorable “duck and cover” drills.

Virtually every Cold War laboratory, testing ground, missile site, and command and communications center was an obvious target should the imaginary Cold War actually break out. But nowhere does this targeting play out more dramatically than with regard to the nation’s largest and most strategically located cities, which instantly lost their historic capacity for fortified defense in the face of the new, annihilating capacity of nuclear weapons. Technology played a huge role in bringing about this new vulnerability for the city, particularly aerial photography and satellite mapping. As Vanderbilt explains, “As the means of comprehending the city improved, so too did the means for wholly destroying it.” Thus, as Hiroshima proved, “The destruction of entire cities had progressed from a distant specter to a rational science. The aerial view was no longer a fleeting glimpse at an enemy, but a clinical crime-scene photograph of an urban corpse.” In the end, Vanderbilt argues quite forcefully that in order to understand the impact of the Cold War, it is necessary to look beyond the physical landscape and understand the psychological effect this vulnerability had on the modern world.

The author makes a little too much of the supposed connections between the Modern movement in architecture and the Cold War, but it is hard to argue with his observation that missile silos, launch pads, underground testing facilities and laboratories, and their supporting infrastructure are some of the purest examples of the “form follows function” dictum. At the same time, he points out how many prominent post-war architects and firms cut their teeth working for the federal government in designing and building Cold War architecture and infrastructure. Firms like Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and Parsons Brinckerhoff Company, and individuals including ex-patriot German architects Erich Mendelsohn, Konrad Wachsmann, and Walter Gropius, as well as Americans Paolo Soleri, Victor Gruen, Paul Rudolph, William Pereira, and Buckminster Fuller were enlisted in designing and shaping the Cold War landscape. As a generic “Survival City” took shape across America in the form of fallout shelters, deeply buried facilities, and interconnected

interstate highways that made evacuation of cities theoretically possible, architects found themselves pressed into the front lines of defense. As Vanderbilt notes, “In the Cold War, all architecture was military architecture.” Of course, the atomic age also had an impact on common, everyday popular culture through the ubiquitous, but rapidly disappearing, “atomic kitsch” that has been the source for many books, films, and other recent documentary efforts.

A map highlighting the sites featured in the book would have helped a lot, and would perhaps stimulate more of the “Cold War tourism” Vanderbilt seems to champion. It would also help local efforts like the proposed Rocky Flats Cold War Museum, which itself is a striking example of the inherent contradiction between physical impact and invisibility that so many Cold War era sites demonstrate. Otherwise, the book is richly illustrated with photographs that capture much of the remnants of Cold War architecture, coupled with descriptions of the sites and their related infrastructure that help us understand this important history.

The importance of *Survival Cities* lies in its ability to awaken our preservation instincts with regard to the Cold War. As “the sites sit, vacant memorials to a war that never happened...possessing neither recognized architectural significance nor entirely positive historical connotation, they lie beyond the reach of historic preservation.” Let us hope this isn’t entirely true, and that we can now find the will and resources to preserve those aspects of this legacy that we can, before it vanishes from the landscape forever.

For further reading, consider *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*, by Kenneth Osgood. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006. Pp. 506.

Oral History: Don Bingman

The challenges of integrating women into production jobs

Interview recorded Sept. 15, 2004 by Hannah Nordhaus for the Rocky Flats Cold War Museum and the Maria Rogers Oral History Program, Boulder Public Library.

SUMMARY: Don Bingman worked in the Accounting, Salary, and Benefits Departments at the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant from the early 1950s to 1975. He talks about Dow Chemical’s management style, safety procedures at the plant, attitudes about the work being done at the plant, and the challenges of integrating women into production jobs, among other topics. An Ohio native, he came to Lowry Field in Denver in the Air Force. He earned a B.S. in business administration from the University of Denver in Dec. 1949, then worked at Gates Rubber Company’s payroll department. When he learned about Dow coming to Denver to build and to start up the Rocky Flats plant for the Atomic Energy Commission, he went to Dow’s office at the Double A building at 13th and Glenarm in downtown Denver. When Dow Chemical left in 1975, he went to work at Dow Corporate Headquarters in Midland, Michigan for three years. He then returned to Denver to work at Adolph Coors Company. He retired from Coors in 1989. ***Read excerpts of his interview below.***

(Nordhaus: You heard through the grapevine that Dow was coming to open a plant. Did you know anything about it?)

“I didn’t really know too much about it until I applied for the job...I learned...it was going to be a weapons plant with a contract with the Atomic Energy Commission...I was number 30 on the Dow payroll. I know that that’s true because I assigned the numbers.”

(Nordhaus: At the time that you started, were there any buildings?)

“...They had some temporary guard posts at Rocky Flats...They had started by digging some huge holes in the ground at Rocky Flats for the buildings. Shortly after I started, they had a Family Day at Rocky Flats...families of all the employees were able to go to the site ...which was nothing but a bunch of holes in the ground.”

(Nordhaus: Did your wife know what you were gonna do? What could you tell her?)

"I could tell her what I was doing. I was hired to take care of the payroll department...That's about all we knew about the job and the fact that it was a secret plant that was being built and that we were not to talk about anything that we might have learned there about the production..."

(Nordhaus: What was it like being cleared to work at Rocky Flats? Was that a rigorous process?)

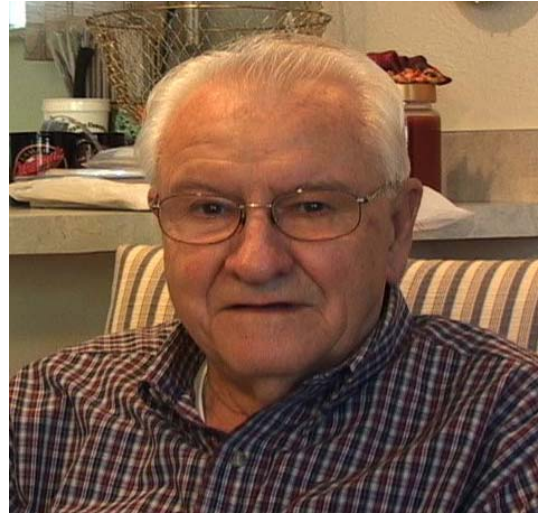
"The FBI...had gone to Columbus, Ohio, to talk with my mother and dad, who lived there, and I had a sister and brother who were living there. Their neighbors were interviewed. And then, of course, the neighbors where we lived were interviewed by the FBI. Her family was checked out in Longmont ...I think it took about six months..."

(Nordhaus: How did the work environment compare to Gates?)

"I felt like the work environment was great at Rocky Flats. There were many young people who were being hired...at Rocky Flats. Most of the older people at that time...transferred maybe from the Dow Chemical Company or...from Los Alamos. I was probably the youngest supervisor at Rocky Flats for a number of years. I was 23 or 24 years old when I started..."

(Nordhaus: How did the commencement of production change the environment?)

"...it was inevitable that unions would come in to being at that time. I think the first group...was the Denver Metal Trades Council, a combination of a number of different craft unions in Denver...I think it was United Mine Workers that came in next. Then further along...the Steelworkers."



(Nordhaus: You were there for the 1957 and the '69 fire.)

"I remember the one in '57 because it was a pretty scary situation. There were about three employees that...got some contamination in their lungs...everybody was pretty worried about it. But the AEC did provide the best treatment that anyone could possibly think of. To my knowledge all three of the people survived....But that '57 fire bothered me a little bit. Then in '69, of course, that was a huge situation there. But the people who cleaned up afterwards and were in charge, handled the cleanup, I knew quite well. I felt, if anybody can do this right, they can..."

"...I grew up with these people through those years at Rocky Flats, and they were serious about their mission and about the work they were doing. Their inventions, things they built at Rocky Flats that have never been seen or heard of before in the world were at Rocky Flats."

(Nordhaus: In terms of worker safety, you mentioned earlier that Dow put a premium on safety. Did you feel that that was always the case? Were there ever any slipups or anything like that?)

"... we nearly set a record of 25 million man hours. The disabling injury that prevented us from getting there was a person who hurt their finger with a screwdriver that slipped. They later had to have surgery on that finger to repair it, so therefore it became a disabling injury. There was only one other company in the United States at the time that we were shooting for the 25 million man hours, and that was duPont, that had a better safety record among corporations than we had at Rocky Flats. That's how good we were...Even in the offices it was mandatory that we have a safety meeting at least once a month. ...We had to look for things that were hazards..."

(Nordhaus: I wonder if you could tell me how the environment changed for women...that you saw?)

"...most of the job opportunities for women when I started out there were in the offices...as the years went by, more and more women protested to that and said, "We want to be able to work in production as well."

The plant wasn't designed with the safety requirements with women in mind. For example, they had showers in all the production areas where if by chance a person was contaminated, the first thing they would do is try to scrub the contamination off your skin. The showers were not enclosed. They didn't have a shower curtain, they didn't have a shower stall, it was right out in the area where you get under there and if you're not capable of pulling the handle on

that shower somebody else will, and get your clothes off and get you washed off or scrubbed...That was one of the reasons, the first manager...was very concerned about women in the ...manufacturing area....they didn't have restrooms for women in the production areas. Just the shower, the locker rooms, where guys could go in, change their clothes, shower, and get ready to go home or put on their protective clothing...

... when they did change their mind, they had to go in and remodel and put in restrooms and make it possible. But there was one thing that could never be changed, and that is, if it was necessary that you hit the showers, it didn't matter whether you were a man or a woman. You had to be willing to do that before you would get an assignment in any of those buildings”.

(Nordhaus: As the city grew up to Rocky Flats, did you continue to think this was a good place to have a plant that handled radioactive materials?)

”I think it served its purpose. I think we did a great thing in helping to prevent something disastrous with Russia, for example...I hate to see the place disappear, for sentimental reasons, but on the other hand, I'm glad that it's being dismantled. I think it's time for it.”

”...when I left there, as all employees that left Rocky Flats, one of the last things that you went through was a body counter that checked you for any type of radiation that might be within your body. After 24 years...I was around a lot of it, and there wasn't a sign of anything with me.”

”The body counter that they had at Rocky Flats was located in a lead-lined room...Floors, ceilings, the whole thing was lined with lead to prevent any possibility of outside radiation getting into the reading on the personal body counter. That was to prevent radiation that's natural in the soil, in the mountains in the area that we live in...It's also interesting to note that a couple of years ago, the United States gave Russia that same body counter that we had at Rocky Flats. That meant they had never had anything like that in all of these years for their own people. That was invented, designed and built by our scientists there at Rocky Flats years ago.”

”I really feel like there's not going to be any harm to anybody if they make that into a park or put the museum out there or have hiking trails. I don't believe they would do it if they had the slightest idea that there would be anything there. don't think they would be careless about that.”

Read/hear the full interview at www.bplcarnegie.org/oralhistory; OH 1270V A-B Don Bingman.



See www.rockyflatscoldwarmuseum.org

Send comments and ideas to ajldenver@aol.com

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