

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received JUN 4 1986

date entered JUL 3 1986

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center

and/or common Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center

**2. Location**

street & number 30 W. Dale Street n/a not for publication

city, town Colorado Springs n/a vicinity of

state Colorado 80903 code 08 county El Paso code 041

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Ted C. Somerville, President  
Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center

street & number 30 W. Dale Street

city, town Colorado Springs n/a vicinity of state Colorado 80903

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Clerk and Recorder's Office, El Paso County

street & number 200 S. Cascade Avenue

city, town Colorado Springs state Colorado

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Colorado Cultural Resource has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 9/30/83 Survey #5EP622  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Colorado Historical Society; Preservation Office

city, town Denver state Colorado

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Integrating elements of the Southwest, modernism, Art Deco and classicism, the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center is a one- and two-level Pueblo-style monolithic poured concrete structure, with a four-story theatre fly tower. The predominant effect is that of a multi-level Native American terraced pueblo, created by the stepped massing, minimal fenestration and absence of decoration - an effect reinforced by the building's detached setting (particularly when viewed from the west). The building is advantageously situated on a bluff, overlooking Pikes Peak and bordering a city park. It is located in one of the oldest residential neighborhoods in Colorado Springs, now characterized by a mixture of residence, office and college buildings, within the nine blocks of the city's central downtown business district.

The building is virtually unchanged since its inception, retaining all of its important original elements, intact and in excellent condition. Appropriate restoration and maintenance has been completed when necessary, resulting in its present well preserved state.

Significant exterior features begin with the building's massive walls. Textured from the marks of the horizontal wooden concrete forms, they are broken only by narrow, carefully proportioned vertical windows and slim channels, which appear on some walls and the theatre fly tower. The minimal exterior decoration is limited to aluminum doors, window frames and loggia and balcony railings and well-spaced canales (Spanish-style water spouts). Murals appear in two, protected exterior locations. Directly above the five entryway doors, five spandrels are decorated with frescoes by Boardman Robinson depicting the five arts - sculpture, drama, dance, music and art - in a "faintly cubistic style."<sup>1</sup> A frieze extending the length of the courtyard features a fresco composition of horses by Frank Mechau.

The exterior squared columns of the loggia, which extends across the western face of the building, are repeated in the squared columns of the portico-style entrance with recessed doors, classical in effect. Further, a classical unifying device described as "abstracted Palladianism"<sup>2</sup> divides columns, windows and bays into 3s, 5s, and 7s.

A contrasting foundation, made of local red Manitou pumice, is evident on the sloping hillside section of the site.

Elements of traditional Southwest floor planning are accomplished with a colonnaded portal (porch) along the north side of the courtyard and with a zaguan (wide-gated entryway) east of the main entrance.

The interior of the building is characterized by its use of costly materials (heralded by the black granite front steps) and custom-designed details and fixtures. The building houses galleries, museum storage space, performing arts facilities, art studios, a museum shop, a library and offices. This description will focus on five, outstanding interior areas: entrance lobby and foyer; theatre; theatre lounge and loggia; library and music room.

The spacious, two-floor high entrance lobby, whose feeling has been described as "restrained Classicism,"<sup>3</sup> extends westward in a long, wide corridor which serves as an art gallery and an entrance hall for the theatre. Its flooring is marble terrazo, with insets and borders of green and black marble; the latter continues as wainscoting. Subdivided by two, gentle floor level changes, this foyer leads to a floor-to-ceiling window and magnificent view of Pikes Peak. Above the entrance vestibule are

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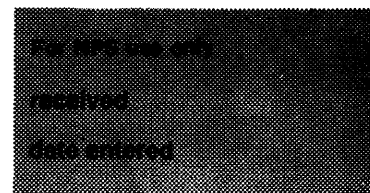
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five flower-motif lighting fixtures, reminiscent of Colonial Spanish tin work.

A full-component, 450-seat theatre features mahogany flexwood walls; three ornamental aluminum panels over the doors by sculptor Arnold Ronnebeck abstracted from Native American designs; an immense opaque glass and aluminum chandelier (10½-foot diameter) whose sunflower-based design incorporates curving, aluminum petals; and fine carpets, upholstery and draperies.

The theatre lounge, marked by its west-facing floor-to-ceiling windows and French doors, opens out onto the colonnaded loggia with red quarry tile flooring and a commanding vista of Pikes Peak. Black marble, continued from the lobby and foyer, borders a walnut parquet floor. Murals in muted tones, depicting facets of performing arts activities, appear over the doorways in the lounge, executed by Taos artists Andrew Dasburg, Kenneth Adams and Ward Lockwood. Striking chandeliers are found in both the lounge and loggia, with designs derived from Native American symbols. The lounge ceiling demonstrates the only interior use of uncovered cement: its woodgrained design, herringbone pattern and squared beams are abstracted from the cross-logs and vigas (support timbers) of southwestern ceilings.

The library features two reading rooms paneled in walnut and birch, with floor-to-ceiling shelving and built-in cabinets of the same woods.

A second-floor music room (seating capacity, 140) is reached by stairs from the lobby, whose railing incorporates treble clef and musical notes. A small, rounded, streamlined Art Deco stage and a chandelier with rain/cloud motif with lyre-shaped supports are focal points of the room.

Further interior details of note are: a) the incorporation throughout the building of Art Deco designs, abstracted from Native American designs, into the satin-finish aluminum gallery gates, door trim and grills, in addition to the chandeliers and lighting fixtures already mentioned; and b) a mural by Archie Musick which wraps around the walls of the anteroom to the basement restrooms.

The only major alteration has been the addition, in 1972, of a wing which provides a fourth side to the courtyard. This enclosure of the courtyard allowed circular movement of traffic through the galleries, which now completely surround the courtyard. A two-level, nearly windowless wing was designed by Carlisle Guy, a protégé of the original architect, who adapted the original material, massing and details in scale and harmony with the original building. The open, colonnaded porch along the north side of the courtyard was glassed in at this time, further facilitating an interior circulation pattern.

Modifications have been minor: a) an adaptation to modern curatorial requirements by the exclusion of light through most gallery windows and by the removal of skylights; b) expansion of the reception area further out into the lobby, utilizing the original black marble base slabs in the newly constructed counter area; and c) addition of entryway and gallery rampways and railings to accommodate the handicapped. All of these modifications have been accomplished sensitively and subtly - using materials and a scale which conforms with the original design.

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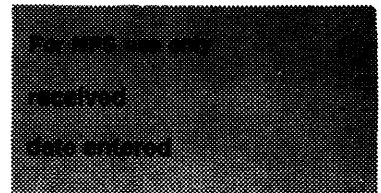
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The property contains two outbuildings. One, the Bemis Art School for Children, was completed in 1968. A flat-roofed, two-level unadorned concrete building, its architecture followed the material and basic details of Meem's design. Although lacking the ornamental touches of the Southwest, it achieves a solid reflection of the stacked-cube, pueblo effect when viewed from the west. The other building is a turn-of-century residence, constructed when the area was primarily residential. It has been extensively remodeled during the 20th century, with the various additions and the application of stucco. Both buildings are unobtrusively integrated into the same slope upon which the Fine Arts Center rises, with low profiles. Neither is evident nor forms a consequential part of any view of the Fine Arts Center. Both are considered non-contributing elements.

The Fine Arts Center represents a highly successful architectural integration on two levels. On the first, it integrates the varied needs of students, gallery visitors, theatre goers, museum researchers, library visitors, recital players and audiences, stage performers, and arts staff into one structure - without detracting from the requirements of any.

Further, it strikingly integrates major architectural expressions in a manner which led to its immediate description in 1936 as "a building which is modern, monumental and unlabored. Its simplicity reveals assurance, not sterility. Its character is local, but is not the result of any attempt to fake a pueblo."<sup>4</sup> Later, with the perspective of nearly fifty years, the building was described as the architect's "crowning achievement."<sup>5</sup> Its monolithic pueblo massing, its undisguised modern use of concrete, aluminum and glass; its southwestern details; its Native American designs abstracted into Art Deco ornamentation; its streamlined elegance; and its classical proportions - all result in a timeless character - with fundamental roots to the region and the time as well as manifesting an innovative architectural reflection of the building's underlying function, which is to preserve culture and to honor the contemporary.

<sup>1</sup>Christopher Wilson, "A Unique Opportunity: John Gaw Meem and the Design of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center," Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center: A History and Selections from the Permanent Collection (Colorado Springs: Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1986 in press), page not determined.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, page not determined.

<sup>3</sup>Bainbridge Bunting, John Gaw Meem: Southwestern Architect (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), p. 154.

<sup>4</sup>"Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center," The Architectural Forum, July, 1936, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>Bunting, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400-1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500-1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600-1699	XX architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/
___ 1700-1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	humanitarian
___ 1800-1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater
XX 1900-	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ transportation
		___ invention		XX other (specify) philanthropy
<b>Specific dates</b>	1936	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	John Gaw Meem; Architect Platt Rogers; Contractor	

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Called a "citadel to the finer things of life"<sup>1</sup> and "the region's most important tribute to culture"<sup>2</sup> by noted historian Marshall Sprague, the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center resulted from a lengthy architectural and philanthropic collaboration. Thus its significance lies in both the areas of architecture, deriving from the importance of its architect and design; and philanthropy/history, deriving from the importance of its contribution to the cultural life of Colorado Springs.

The architect, as well as the design, contribute to the architectural importance of the Fine Arts Center. The architect, John Gaw Meem, whose office logs record 654 commissions during his career from 1924 through 1959,<sup>3</sup> designed a range of residences, churches, government offices and university buildings. He worked primarily in New Mexico, with only a handful of commissions in Colorado. One of the Southwest's leading architects, he developed and refined the typical "Santa Fe" style, derived from Pueblo and Spanish Colonial architecture. "Honors came to him consistently . . . He had a penchant for winning commissions in tough competitions . . . Universities gave him honorary degrees . . . The governor of New Mexico declared a special John Gaw Meem day."<sup>4</sup>

The building's design, which earned for Meem the Silver Medal in 1940 at the Fifth Pan American Congress of Architecture in Uruguay, was the most modern design he was ever to create. It represented a pivotal point in his career - the successful combination of the regional style, for which he was already well known, and modernism. In recognizing the innate compatibility of the two, he skillfully integrated tradition, technical expertise and functionalism.

The design manifested three important trends of the 1930s - Art Deco, here expressed in an adaptation of the idiom, utilizing decorative designs from the Pueblo and Navajo cultures;<sup>5</sup> regionalism and modernism. These three, added to the elements of classicism, give the design a universal feel. The styling, combined with the quality of finish and detail, and the survival of the interior, make the Fine Arts Center unique in the state. The presence of murals by nationally-known artists Robinson, Mechau, Musick, Lockwood, Dasburg and Adams and aluminum panels by Ronnebeck (refer to Section 7), also lends importance and artistic achievement to the design.

The design has additional value for its successful grouping of various art activities into a complete art center, resulting in one of the first such consolidations in the country, and certainly the first in the Rocky Mountain region. This solution would henceforth be adopted by medium-sized communities across the country.<sup>6</sup>

The historical/philanthropic importance of the Fine Arts Center is associated with its founder, Alice Bemis Taylor, and with its complete embodiment of the prosperity and level of cultural aspiration which have characterized Colorado Springs since its founding in 1871. Mrs. Taylor (for whom the Taylor Museum division of the Fine Arts Center is named) was one of the community's leading benefactors, supporting an array of civic

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

(see continuation sheet)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1.58

Quadrangle name Colorado Springs

Quadrangle scale 7.5

### UTM References

A 

1	3	5	1	5	1	5	0	4	2	9	9	4	8	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

### Verbal boundary description and justification

(see continuation sheet)

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Josie De Falla Kerstetter, Administrative Assistant

organization Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center date 1/15/86

street & number 30 W. Dale Street telephone (303) 634-5581

city or town Colorado Springs state Colorado 80903

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Barbara Sudley

title State Historic Preservation Officer date May 21, 1986

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
Entered in the  
National Register.

J. Allous Byen  
Keeper of the National Register

date 7/2/86

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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received  
date entered

and scientific projects and higher education. The Fine Arts Center represented her crowning achievement. Originally envisioned as a modest folk art museum to house and display her personal collections, it was expanded to a "vast center where all the community could practice all the arts."<sup>7</sup> In conjunction with the encouragement and collaboration of two other major community leaders and philanthropists, Mrs. Meredith Sage Hare and Mrs. Spencer Penrose (of Broadmoor interests), and building upon the already existing and nationally known Broadmoor Art Academy, the Fine Arts Center came into being.

This philanthropic accomplishment took place in a community which had been specifically chosen by its founder, General William Jackson Palmer, as a place "where he could build a nice place for nice people to live out their days in comfort, gentility and peace."<sup>8</sup> Thus the city, known as "Little London," was settled and its cultural climate forwarded by the upper echelon. By the 1890s, it was also known as an art colony. The building of the Fine Arts Center served as a tangible, and one of the best, representations of the cultural milieu of the community which had supported art since its beginning. Its creation was made even more significant by its erection in the midst of a depression, when most communities were not building major arts facilities. The gala avant-garde opening in 1936 not only characterized the nature of the creation and the vision of its founder, but pointed out that the institution served "great value as a form of community self-expression and as a point of reference for art standards."<sup>9</sup>

Critical to the overall significance and success of the Fine Arts Center was its evolution over a five-year period, which made sufficient time available to its benefactress to develop its multi-arts scope, and which provided the architect with the opportunity and luxury to adapt and respond innovatively to the complex and changing demands of the project.

Designed to take maximum advantage of its site - geographic and cultural and to serve as a major cultural resource for the community, the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center remains a lasting symbol of the profound interest of its benefactress and the community in the preservation and extension of culture. Through the excellence and innovativeness of its design and the foresight of its planners, it remains an architectural and historical tribute of the community.

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SIGNIFICANCE continued

- <sup>1</sup> Marshall Sprague, Newport in the Rockies (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1971), p. 1.
- <sup>2</sup> Marshall Sprague, "Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center: The Formative Years," Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center: A History and Selections from the Permanent Collection (Colorado Springs: Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1986 in press), page not determined.
- <sup>3</sup> Bainbridge Bunting, John Gaw Meem: Southwestern Architect (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), p. 159.
- <sup>4</sup> Beatrice Chauvenet, John Gaw Meem: Pioneer in Historic Preservation (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), p. 102, 103
- <sup>5</sup> Marcus Whiffen and Carla Breeze, Pueblo Deco: The Art Deco Architecture of the Southwest (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), p. 18.
- <sup>6</sup> Christopher Wilson, "A Unique Opportunity: John Gaw Meem and the Design of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center," Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center: A History and Selections from the Permanent Collection (Colorado Springs: Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1986 in press), page not determined.
- <sup>7</sup> Sprague, 1971, op. cit., p. 287.
- <sup>8</sup> Sprague, 1971, op. cit., foreword.
- <sup>9</sup> Sprague, 1971, op. cit., p. 306.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Bunting, Bainbridge, John Gaw Meem: Southwestern Architect. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983.
- Chauvenet, Beatrice, John Gaw Meem: Pioneer in Historic Preservation. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985.
- "Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center," The Architectural Forum (July 1936).
- Sprague, Marshall, "Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center: The Formative Years" in Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center: A History and Selections from the Permanent Collection. Colorado Springs: Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1986 (in press).
- \_\_\_\_\_, Newport in the Rockies. Chicago: The Swallow Press, rev. ed. 1971.
- Whiffen, Marcus and Breeze, Carla. Pueblo Deco: The Art Deco Architecture of the Southwest. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984.
- Wilson, Christopher, "A Unique Opportunity: John Gaw Meem and the Design of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center" in Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center: A History and Selections from the Permanent Collection. Colorado Springs: Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1986 (in press).



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Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, El Paso County, Colorado

Continuation sheet

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FOR USE WITH COLORADO REGION AMERICAN LAND TITLE ASSOCIATION LOAN POLICY 1970 (AMENDED 10-17-70)  
FOR USE WITH COLORADO REGION AMERICAN LAND TITLE ASSOCIATION OWNER'S POLICY-FORM B-1970 (AMENDED 10-17-70)

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION --ITEM #10

**SCHEDULE A—Continued**

The land referred to in this policy is situated in the State of Colorado, County of  
El Paso, and is described as follows:

Parcel I:

Lots 4, 5, 6, 7 and the South 50 feet of Lot 12,  
Block K,  
ADDITION NO. 5 to the CITY OF COLORADO SPRINGS

Parcel II:

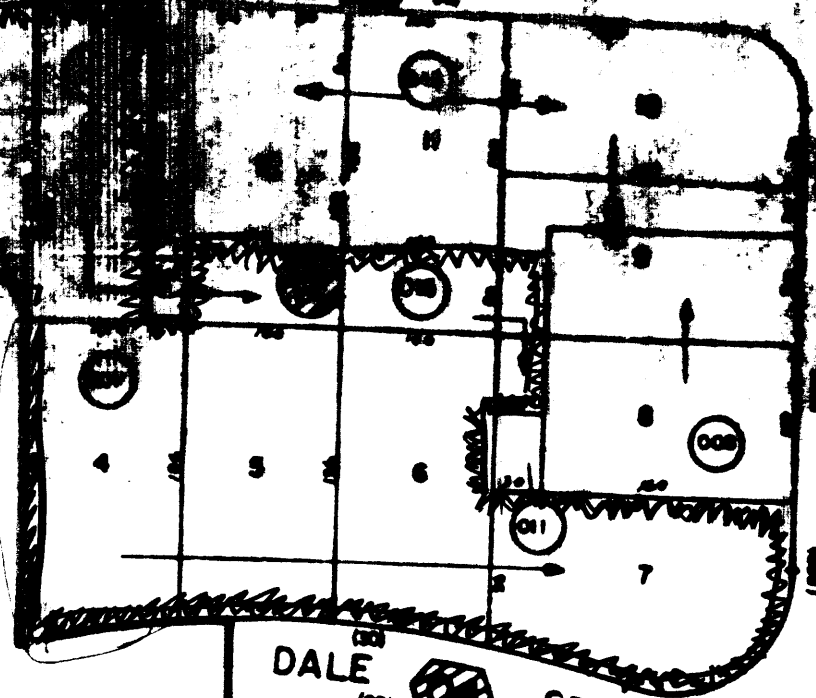
Lots 1, 13 and 14,  
Block K,  
ADDITION NO 5 to the CITY OF COLORADO SPRINGS

Parcel III:

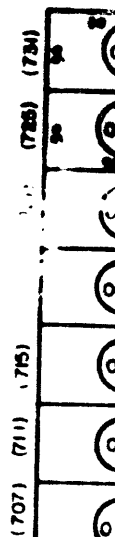
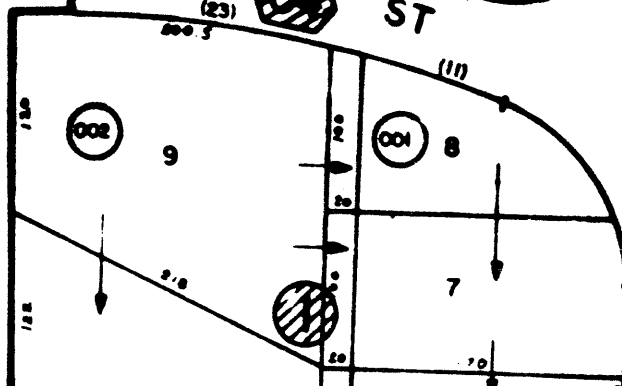
The Westerly 30 feet of Lot 8 and the Westerly 30 feet of the  
South 50 feet of Lot 9; The Southerly 50 feet of Lot 11 and the  
Southerly 5 feet of the Northerly 150 feet of the Easterly 50 feet  
of Lot 11; The Southerly 5 feet of the Northerly 150 feet of the  
Westerly 50 feet of Lot 12,  
All in Block K,  
ADDITION NO. 5 to the CITY OF COLORADO SPRINGS

011111

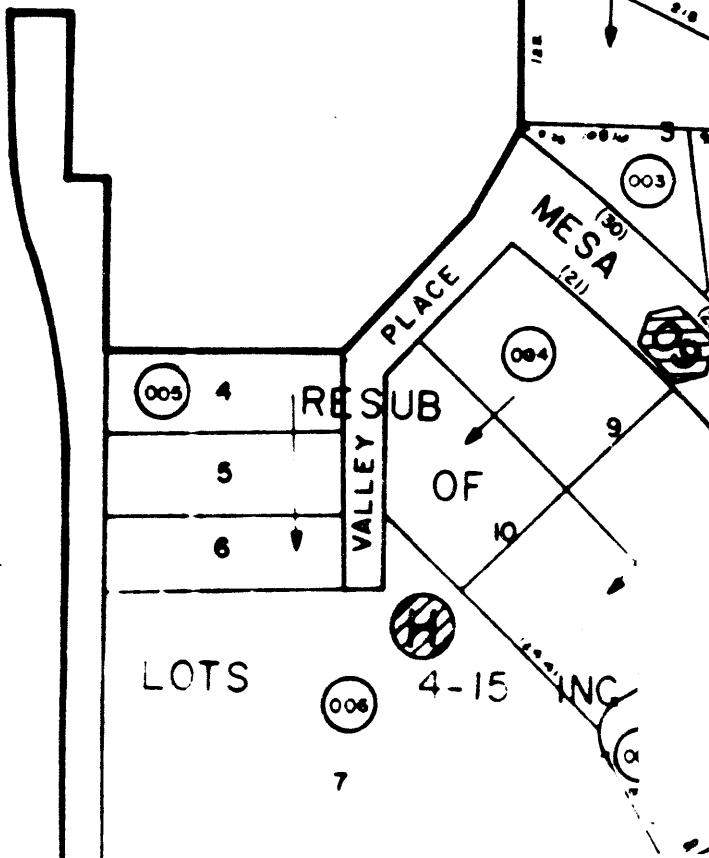
CACHE LA POU



DALE ST



AVE.



COLORADO SPRINGS FINE ARTS CENTER  
El Paso County, Colorado

Plat Map  
No Date  
City of Colorado Springs  
Scale: 1"=100'

LOTS

4-15

INC