



Resource Information:

Date: March 19, 2025
Staff: Sara Evenson
Name: Louis Jefferson Long Library and Wells College Arts Complex
Location: No Location Available

Resource Status:

- Determination:** Determined SR/NR eligible by the Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation on the date noted above.
- Contributing:** Not Determined

Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register:

- A. ☐ Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns in our history.
- B. ☐ Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. ☒ Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possesses high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- D. ☐ Have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.



No Photo Available



Source: Esri, Mapbox, Birdseye, and the GIS User Community



Summary Statement:

The Louis Jefferson Long Library and Wells College Arts Complex, located in the Village of Aurora in Cayuga County, appears to be eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture with a period of significance from 1969 to 1974. The building district is comprised of the Long Library (1969), Campbell Art Building (1974) and Barler Music Hall (1974). It is a largely intact example of an institutional complex of buildings designed by architect Walter Netsch, and is an important representation of his revolutionary Field Theory. The three buildings were designed by Netsch to architecturally and spatially complement one another, with intentional landscape features and paths integrating the three buildings into one cohesive complex.

The Long Library, determined eligible for listing in 2022, was the first of these buildings and was constructed in 1969. It is a three-story Midcentury Modern-style library built into the slope of a hill. The library's roof consists of a series of low-slung triangular planes. A central peak rises from the main roof and features tall, narrow vertical ribbons of fixed pane windows. Interior spaces at the west side of the library are open from the lower floor to the upper floors. The roof supports include bundles of smooth timbers set at diagonal angles. It is clad in red brick with black metal windows and a white roof.

The Campbell Art Building and Barler Music Hall were both constructed in 1974 as complements to the Long Library. They were also built according to Netsch's Field Theory in which buildings were intentionally sited with purpose in relationship to the environment and one another. Field Theory is defined by geometry in plane, repetition of shape, and asymmetrical form with emphasis on the relationship between the built and natural environments. Architect Colin Koop has argued that, regarding the Long Library and Wells College Arts Complex, "One can see in a plan overlay that the subsequent commission for the Arts and Music was designed upon this same unifying Field, with an additional layered geometry to respond to the functional program and to preserve trees."

These two complementary buildings are of similar modernist design with irregular sloping rooflines, shifting geometric shapes, and disrupted elevations informed by the terrain. They mirror the Library's construction with red brick and glass exteriors with steel framing and are clad in red brick with black window sashes, and have distinctive white roofs. When compared to more traditional architectural styles seen on the rest of the Wells College campus, it is clear that the three buildings were intentionally designed as a cohesive modernist complex.

Interior spaces of both Campbell and Barler are defined by irregular openness, sloping ceilings, skylights, and angular patterned rooms. Their design embodies Netsch's ideal of harmonizing utilitarian purpose with the environment, creating spaces that reflect and relate to the exterior world while providing spaces with both the natural light and privacy required to engage in the artistic process. One key difference between the Library and the Campbell and Barler buildings is that the Library was intentionally designed to have concealed ductwork, whereas both Campbell and Barler emphasize plumbing and ductwork as complementary architectural features that are integrated into the interior designs.



The design of this complex falls firmly into Netsch's most prolific period of design, which began in 1962 with his design of the US Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel in Colorado and ends in 1979 with his design of the Miami University Art Museum in Ohio. He considered his designs at Wells College to be some of the finest of his career. Netsch was a longtime partner at the firm Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM).