

Finding aid for the James R. Bronkema papers Collection 482

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids History and Special Collections

111 Library Street NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

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URL: <https://www.grpl.org/research/history/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Grand Rapids History and Special Collections
Title:	James R. Bronkema papers
ID:	Collection 482
Date [inclusive]:	1948-1987
Physical Description:	1.5 Linear Feet
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	James R. Bronkema was an architect from Grand Rapids, Mich, primarily active in the 1940s and 1950s. The homes he designed and built were part of the mid-century modern design aesthetic. This collection contains photos of some of the homes he built as well as materials from his days as a navy pilot. Also included in this collection are press clippings related to the fiftieth anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge, a celebration which Bronkema chaired after moving to California.

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Biographical / Historical

James R. Bronkema, born in 1925 in Grand Rapids, Mich., was an architect well known for his mid-century modern style. In 1942 he attended Calvin College and in 1943 he enlisted in the Navy. He served as a pilot delivering planes to combat zones. When he returned from the war, Bronkema originally planned to become a dentist but went into his father's real estate business instead. The first home he built was for himself and his growing family at 1809 Leonard Street Northwest in 1947. It cost \$7,800 to build and Bronkema had to use street paving stones in the construction as bricks were not available after World War II.

A self-taught architect and builder, Bronkema designed and built more than 150 contemporary homes and office buildings between 1947 and 1960. The best examples can be found in the Riverside Park neighborhood on the city's northeast side and on Fultonwood Avenue SE. His modern style of homes were moderately priced and designed with large, naturally lit spaces. In the late 1940s, he became the youngest president of the Grand Rapids Area Home Builders Association at age 25.

In 1960, Bronkema moved to Florida and finally settled in San Fransisco in 1970 where he oversaw the development of Embarcadero Center. He remained on the board of the Embarcadero Center until he retired in 1989. In 1987 he chaired the committee tasked with celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge. He died in 2014 at the age of 89 in Palm Springs California.

Citations:

Harger, J. (2014, February 28). Pioneer of mid-century modern architecture in West Michigan dead at age 89. Retrieved August 12, 2018, from https://www.mlive.com/business/west-michigan/index.ssf/2014/02/james_bronkema_pioneer_of_mid-.html

Ripma-Tignor, -. (n.d.). James Robert "Jim" Bronkema's Obituary on Grand Rapids Press. Retrieved August 12, 2018, from <https://obits.mlive.com/obituaries/grandrapids/obituary.aspx?n=james-robert-bronkema-jim&pid=169998294>

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Content Description

Photos and newspaper clippings about buildings, mostly homes, that James Bronkema designed in and around Grand Rapids, Mich. as well as a scrapbook covering similar material. This collection supports research on mid-century modern architecture in Grand Rapids and West Michigan as a center of design. Jill Brokema Moore, James Bronkema's daughter, annotated the photographs with identifying information which is included. Also included are military records and newspaper clippings regarding the San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge 50th Anniversary.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gifted by Jill Bronkema Moore, 2018.055

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Controlled Access Headings

- Architects -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Architecture -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Midcentury modern (Architecture)
- James R. Bronkema

Collection Inventory

Architecture		
Title/Description	Instances	
1809 Leonard St Northwest, 1947	Box 1	Folder 4
Parkhurst Avenue, 1948	Box 1	Folder 5
1338 Parkhurst Ave Northwest, 1948	Box 1	Folder 6
Oakgrove Northwest / Baldwin House, 1948	Box 1	Folder 7
3 Mile Road Northwest / Kaastra House, 1948	Box 1	Folder 8
Plainfield Northeast / Carr House, 1949	Box 1	Folder 9
Homrich House, 1950	Box 1	Folder 10
Muskegon, Mona Lake / Dr. Meenq House, 1950	Box 1	Folder 11
Northrup Northwest / Ray Vander Hyde House, 1950	Box 1	Folder 12
2640 Leonard Northwest / 2660 Leonard Northwest, 1950	Box 1	Folder 13
77 Lakeview Drive Southeast / Bronkema Family Home, 1951	Box 1	Folder 14
Cascade Road Homes , 1951	Box 1	Folder 15
1869 Oakgrove Ave Northwest / Sproul House, 1951	Box 2	Folder 1
Grand Rapids Home Show / Bronkema Builders Display, 1951	Box 1	Folder 16

230 Sligh Boulevard Northeast, 1951	Box 1	Folder 17
705 Shawmut Boulevard Northwest, 1951	Box 2	Folder 2
Kirby House, 1951	Box 1	Folder 18
Plainfield Northeast and 3 Mile (on corner) / Maloney House, 1951	Box 1	Folder 19
Littlefield Drive Northeast / Evenson House, 1951	Box 1	Folder 20
1327 Rosewood Southeast, 1952	Box 1	Folder 21
Van Dusen Home, 1952	Box 1	Folder 22
Muskegon Lake / Sheldon Home, 1952	Box 1	Folder 23
Various Homes / Persma Home / Warren Home / Knape Home - Fisk Lake / Littlefair Home - 5200 Buttrick Rd / Sklar Home / Muzzall Home - Plymouth Dr. SE / Schuiling Home - Lake Michigan Dr. / Smith Home - San Lucia SE / Bertsch Home - Morningside Dr / Nishyama - Cascade Rd. / DeHollander Home - Cascade Road, 1952	Box 1	Folder 24
Various Homes / Norwalk Home - Maryland NE / Bond Home / Dornbos Home - Boltwood Dr. NE / 215 Maryland NE, 1953	Box 1	Folder 25
Various Homes / Gail Probst Home and unidentified homes, n.d.	Box 1	Folder 26
Fultonwood Plat Photo, 1957	Box 1	Folder 27
2875 Plainfield Drive Northeast, 1958	Box 1	Folder 28
350 Woodruff, Toledo Ohio / Baumgarten Building, 1959	Box 1	Folder 29
Scrapbook, 1949-1951	Box 2	Folder 3

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Military

Title/Description	Instances	
Aviators Flight Log Book, 1943-1945	Box 1	Folder 2
Pilots Log Book, 1943-1944	Box 1	Folder 2
Naval Discharge Paperwork, 1945	Box 1	Folder 3

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San Francisco

Title/Description	Instances	
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Golden Gate Bridge 50th Anniversary Press Clippings, 1987	Box 1	Folder 30
Golden Gate Bridge 50th Anniversary Promotional Packet, 1987	Box 1	Folder 31

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Miscellaneous

Title/Description	Instances	
Articles and Photos regarding Bronkema business, 1987	Box 1	Folder 32
James Bronkema Biography, n.d.	Box 1	Folder 33
Photograph of James Bronkema, n.d.	Box 2	Folder 4
R. Bronkema Lumber Receipt, 1882	Box 2	Folder 5

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