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CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PLANNING DIVISION

RESOLUTION NO. 95-112

A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF
SANTA BARBARA DESIGNATING THE SANTA BARBARA
POST OFFICE AT 836 ANACAPA STREET AS A CITY
LANDMARK

WHEREAS, on May 11, 1994, the Historic Landmarks Commission adopted a resolution of intention to begin the Landmark designation process; and

WHEREAS, on May 14, 1994, a categorical exemption of the proposed designation was issued by the City Environmental Analyst; and

WHEREAS, the Historic Landmarks Commission held a public hearing on May 25, 1994, during which hearing comments were invited on the proposed designation; the postmaster was present; Rick Ryba, a University of California at Santa Barbara graduate student, presented the proposal; no persons spoke in opposition to the designation; and

WHEREAS, on May 9, 1995, the City Council received a recommendation from the Historic Landmarks Commission to designate the Santa Barbara Post Office as a City Landmark; and

WHEREAS, Section 22.22.050 of the Municipal Code of the City of Santa Barbara states that the City Council may designate as a Landmark any structure, natural feature, site or area having historic, architectural, archaeological, cultural or aesthetic significance by adopting a resolution of designation within ninety (90) days following receipt of a recommendation from the Historic Landmarks Commission;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SANTA BARBARA THAT:

1. The Santa Barbara Post Office and a portion of the grounds located at 836 Anacapa Street, Assessor's Parcel Number 31-011-01, shown on Exhibit A attached hereto and incorporated herein, is designated a City Landmark.

2. The City Council finds that the Santa Barbara Post Office together with a portion of the grounds (described above) meet the following criteria listed in Section 22.22.040 of the Municipal Code:

a. The Santa Barbara Post Office has character, interest and value that make it a significant part of the heritage of Santa Barbara;

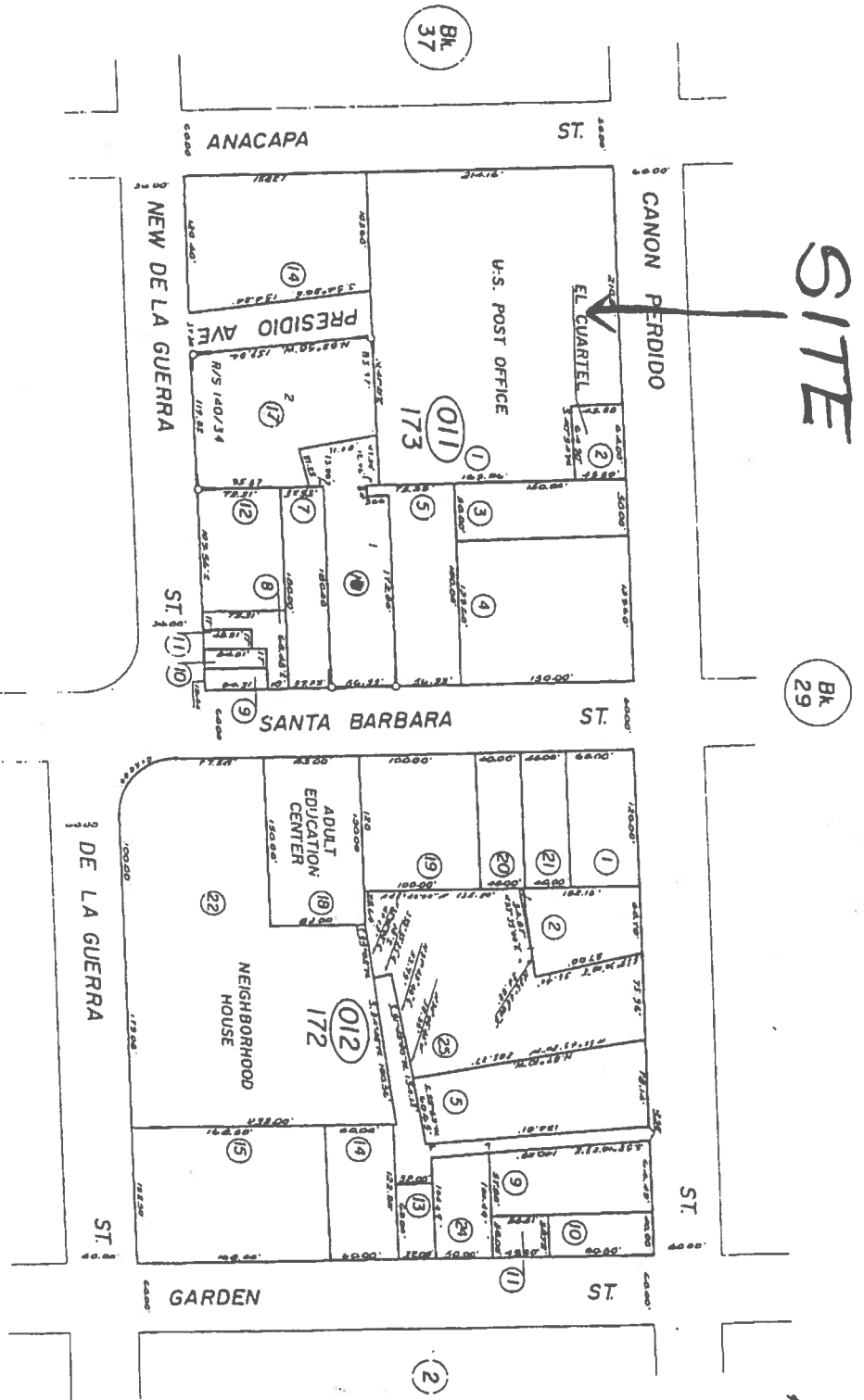
- b. Its association with the Public Works Administration, Postal Service, and the New Deal, in general, demonstrates the extent to which the federal government effected change in Santa Barbara during the Great Depression. The relationship between Postmaster James T. Farley and local newspaper editor Thomas Storke, likewise, represent the interplay between federal, state, and local agencies in United States history. Further, connections between the post office and its chief architect, Reginald Johnson, contribute to its stature as an extraordinary structure in comparison with others in Santa Barbara and around the State;
- c. It exemplifies Mediterranean architectural styles and incorporated elements from the New Deal Moderne vocabulary, as well as mail services rendered over 57 years of continuous service;
- d. It embodies elements demonstrating outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, materials, and craftsmanship; and
- e. It has a unique location on a prominent corner in downtown Santa Barbara and the proximity to other buildings of historic significance represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood.

2. Neither the walled yard along the eastern edge of APN 31-011-01 nor the adjacent concrete loading dock are to be included in the proposed area of designation. These findings are based on historic, architectural, and cultural significance of facts presented in the Exhibit B, attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference.

3. The City Clerk shall cause this resolution, upon adoption, to be recorded in the Office of the Recorder of the County of Santa Barbara pursuant to Santa Barbara Municipal Code Section 22.22.055.

Adopted July 18, 1995

EXHIBIT "A"
 Resolut on No. 95-112



NOTE - Assessor's Block Numbers Shown in Ellipses
 Assessor's Parcel Numbers Shown in Circles.

Assessor's Map Bk. 31 - Pg. 01
 County of Santa Barbara, Calif.

PUEBLO LANDS

31-01

APPENDIX

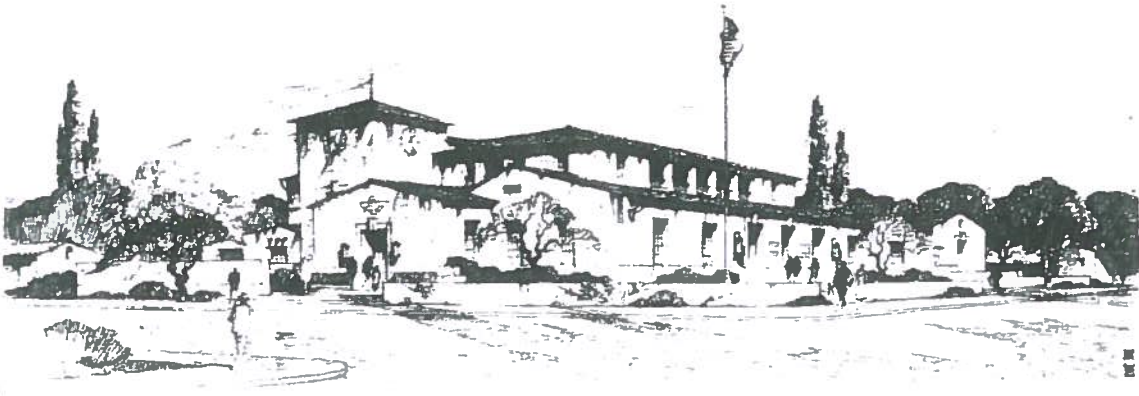


Fig. 1. Johnson's 1937 drawing of his Santa Barbara Post Office



Fig. 2. Santa Barbara Post Office, 1994.

Historic Landmarks Commission
City of Santa Barbara
Staff Report
25 May 1994

SUBJECT: Designation as a City Landmark of the Santa Barbara Post Office, at 836 Anacapa Street, Assessor's Parcel Number 31-011-01

RESOLUTION OF INTENTION ADOPTED: 11 May 1994

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT: 16 May 1994

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Historic Landmarks Commission adopt a resolution to recommend to City Council designation of the Santa Barbara Post Office, APN No. 031-011-01 and a portion of its grounds as a City Landmark. Neither the walled yard along the eastern edge of 031-011-01 nor the adjacent concrete loading dock are to be included in the proposed area of designation.

Staff's evaluation suggests that the following criteria be considered by the Commission as the necessary findings in recommending this designation to the City Council:

- 1) The Santa Barbara Post Office has a character, interest, and value that makes it a significant part of the heritage of Santa Barbara;
- 2) Its association with the Public Works Administration, Postal Service, and the New Deal in general demonstrates the extent to which federal government effected change in Santa Barbara during the Great Depression. The relationship between Postmaster James T. Farley and local newspaper editor Thomas Storke likewise represent the interplay between federal, state, and local agencies in United States history. Further connections between the post office and its chief architect, Reginald Johnson, contribute to its stature as an extraordinary structure in comparison with others in Santa Barbara and around the State;
- 3) Its exemplification of Mediterranean architectural styles and incorporated elements from the New Deal Moderne vocabulary, and mail services rendered over 57 years of continued service;
- 4) Its identification as the creation and design of architect Reginald Johnson, whose efforts on the Biltmore Hotel, Santa Barbara Post Office, and other buildings have won acclaim while contributing to the emerging aesthetic and heritage of the City and the State;
- 5) Its embodiment of elements demonstrating outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, materials and craftsmanship;
- 6) Its location on a prominent corner in downtown Santa Barbara and proximity to other buildings of historic significance representing an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood.

EXHIBITS:

- A. Historical Background
- B. Profile of Reginald D. Johnson, Architect
- C. Physical Description of the Santa Barbara Post Office
- D. Sources on the Santa Barbara Post Office
- E. APPENDIX: Sketch and photograph of the Santa Barbara Post Office
- F. APPENDIX: California Historical Resources Survey

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Historical Background:

The present incarnation of the Santa Barbara Post Office was constructed in 1937, one of a handful of public buildings completed in the midst of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Located on the corner of Anacapa and Canon Perdido Streets, the post office replaced an older State Street facility now occupied by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. The old post office had been built in 1914 according to a standard post office service plan used in Berkeley, Pasadena, and other California communities. An attractive, formal building in the Italian Renaissance tradition, the earlier building had been rendered too small by a tripling of Santa Barbara's population and a quadrupling of its volume of mail.

Other factors facilitated the move as well, including a major earthquake in 1925 and the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. The earthquake had given impetus to local groups seeking a Mediterranean image for the community and fostered the reconstruction of numerous buildings in the appropriate architectural style. While private development contracted in the 1930s, federal agencies delivered funds to beleaguered cities in need of larger public buildings and jobs for the unemployed. The first plan hatched by the United States Postal Service in 1936 called for an addition to the State Street post office. Unimpressed with proposed drawings "resembling a three-story shoe factory," *News-Press* editor Thomas Storke judged the mass-produced federal building anathema to the unique Spanish Revival and Mediterranean styles embraced by Santa Barbarans since the mid-1920s.

Local opposition would not have stood a chance against plans for expansion were it not for the friendship Storke had cultivated with James A. Farley, FDR's chief political advisor and consultant. As a delegate to the 1933 Democratic National Convention, Storke had worked with Farley to deliver the California delegation to Roosevelt, securing the nomination for FDR. When Storke acted on his outrage and sought post office plans more sympathetic to Santa Barbara's new image, it happened that James A. Farley, Roosevelt's new Postmaster General, was in a position to help. Pressuring his subordinates to work with Storke, Farley killed the "shoe factory" proposal and guaranteed the construction of a new post office to be designed by the architect of Storke's choosing.

The federal government allotted \$485,000 for construction and an additional \$100,000 for acquiring a site. On the same day he secured the deal with the Postal Service, Storke convinced award-winning Pasadena architect Reginald D. Johnson to design the building for free. Shortly thereafter, the city secured a lot at the corner of Anacapa and Canon Perdido Streets for

construction. Just one block east of State Street, the designated parcel was convenient to nearby public buildings such as the courthouse and equally close to downtown. As an added bonus, the decision to build the post office on its present site set gentrification efforts into motion. The neighborhood in question had long been considered a red light district, and few maligned the decision to raze a Chinese restaurant and other disreputable establishments located on that notorious corner. Presidio Avenue, an existing thoroughfare from the late Presidio period, stretched southward from the chosen site, offering yet another means of accessing what would become the Santa Barbara Post Office and Federal Building. North and east of the proposed structure lay foundation stones from the Presidio itself, as the southwestern corner of the Spanish fortress had once infringed upon the upper end of Presidio Avenue.

After its 1937 opening, the Santa Barbara Post Office and Federal Building served the public first as a headquarters for area mail delivery and later, with the construction of larger postal facilities elsewhere, as a convenient branch office for individuals conducting postal business downtown. Already a local landmark in the minds of many Santa Barbarans, preservationists placed the post office on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. A handful of similar citations, including one incorporating the Santa Barbara Post Office into the California Historic Resources Survey in October 1978 point to the building's rich history, aesthetic beauty, and significance as a local institution. On the basis of these factors, the Historic Landmarks Commission should designate the Santa Barbara Post Office a City Landmark as well.

The Architect:

The responsibility of designing this new Santa Barbara Post Office fell upon California architect Reginald D. Johnson. Selected for his skill in manipulating Spanish architectural motifs, Johnson had achieved considerable renown for buildings throughout Southern California. Of those Johnson completed before contracting the post office, Santa Barbara's Biltmore Hotel stands out as the architect's best received commercial design. One particular organization, the Architectural League of New York, saw fit to award Johnson and the Biltmore a silver medal in 1928: it was the first such medal ever given a commercial structure in the state of California. This commendation and the attention given Johnson's work in trade publications throughout the period merely solidified Johnson's carefully crafted international reputation.

In 1936, Reginald Johnson outlined the direction he hoped American architecture would take. Dissatisfied with traditional architecture's ability to solve modern architectural problems and its inability to take full advantage of modern construction techniques and materials, Johnson eschewed tradition. He announced it suitable only for use in communities where architectural traditions were so deeply rooted that it made sense to extend them--the Northeast, South, and some parts of the Southwest.

In the Santa Barbara Post Office and Federal Building, Reginald Johnson created a design which conveyed modernity, efficiency, and permanence (each thought to be a desirable projection by the federal government during the Great Depression), both inside and out. While New Deal Moderne on the interior, the exterior blended with and helped add to Santa Barbara's Mediterranean architectural image. Santa Barbara's beautiful Mediterranean-Art Deco Post Office and Federal Building by Reginald Johnson fits squarely within the city's architectural traditions,

exemplifies the spirit of the New Deal, and embodies Johnson's vision for a new American architecture.

Description:

Johnson's design for the Santa Barbara Post Office and Federal Building is both functional and informal. Asymmetrical, the plan provides a public lobby in front, a large work area and loading dock behind, and offices on the sides and upstairs. While he enjoyed some freedom in laying out the building, Johnson had to adhere to federal guidelines governing post office design. The Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, which oversaw the design and construction of post offices published "Instructions to Private Architects Engaged on Public Building Work Under the Jurisdiction of the Treasury Department." This set of guidelines set out standards for designs, which needed to accommodate postal machinery and provide the postmaster and postal personnel to observe activities within the building.

Johnson's design also satisfied his second criterion: that the building express its materials. The Santa Barbara Post Office's reinforced concrete construction is covered with only a thin coating of white stucco--through which one can easily discern lines and patterns left by the forms into which the structural concrete was poured. Finally, it is based on past architectural forms--embodied in the Mediterranean Revival--yet is crafted of modern materials and executed in a simplified, modernized style. Well known for his ability to interpret Mediterranean and Spanish styles in the modern idiom, Johnson was an excellent choice for Santa Barbara's Post Office.

Through its use of a second-story setback, and a sprawling design Johnson achieved a horizontal, ground-hugging appearance--perhaps alluding to El Presidio de Santa Barbara and its ground-hugging walls that once overshadowed the post office's very site. Johnson's building seems well-rooted, rising from the low wall which also acts as a visual pedestal. The rear loading dock, garden, and plaza combine to put the entire site to architectural use.

The post office's construction material--reinforced concrete--and simple surfaces were required by state law. Following a 1933 earthquake in southern California, the legislature enacted the Field Bill, which abolished veneer construction, did away with projecting cornices and unnecessary free or loose ornament, and required reinforced concrete construction able to withstand seismic disturbances. The reinforced concrete walls, with a coating of white stucco and deep recesses at the windows and doors emphasize thick walls and echo Santa Barbara's adobe tradition of construction. The reference to adobe and Mediterranean styles is continued in the use of brown terra cotta roof tiles, and low gable and hipped roofs, with narrow wooden eaves exposing carved wooden rafters.

On the facade, which fronts Anacapa Street, fenestration is of metal-framed, double-hung sash windows and metal-framed casement windows. Each is recessed into the wall, circumscribed by a slightly recessed window surround, capped by a slightly protruding block. This block is reminiscent of a keystone in an arch and is given visual interest through a scalloped design imprinted in the concrete. The windows are few for such a large building, helping create large flat and simple spaces on the exterior walls, which impart a sense of monumentality.

Doors are treated much the same way as the windows. Set deep with a recessed bay and surround, the three sets of double doors, framed in pewtered bronze, are surmounted by transom lights and flanked by sidelights. They are crowned, like the windows, with an Art Deco "keystone," this time with the style's characteristic chevron pattern. The doors are flanked by two massive and handsome pewtered bronze lanterns, the glass lenses of which repeat the chevron motif. Above the doors, the building is its own sign--inscribed in the wall is "United States Post Office."

The second story facade is set back from the plane of the first story facade. It features a recessed porch supported by four square piers and flanked by two pilasters. The piers and pilasters are ornamented with a slight hint of cornice. Metal railings are placed in between the piers. Each is decorated by integral metal swags.

The southeast elevation is not readily visible from the street and is largely a plain surface, lacking detail or ornament. Several different masses come together informally on this elevation, two axes intersect and the building rises to its full two stories on this side. The rear of the building is dominated by a loading dock supported by several chamfered concrete piers. Above the dock is a sun deck. Removed from the public eye, this elevation also lacks ornament.

The northwest elevation, facing Canon Perdido Street, features a three story square tower capped by a hipped roof. Two side entries--one in the tower leading to the Federal offices, and one leading to the side lobby of the post office--are treated in the same way as those on the facade, only without sidelights and with a scallop design on the Art Deco keystone ornament rather than chevrons. Large pewtered bronze lanterns light the entries at night. A scroll-like vestigial buttress decorates the side post office entry, which is also surmounted by a sculpted bas-relief eagle. This stylized, modernistic rendering of the national symbol serves as an icon reflecting the building's role as a federal office building and as the federal government's chief outpost in Santa Barbara. The flag plaza on the Anacapa Street side features a large flagpole for flying the American flag, further announcing the building as a public place.

Inside, the post office lobby is an eloquent example of New Deal Moderne. Pewtered bronze is everywhere--replicating with a more durable material the aluminum which was so popular during the period. Pewtered bronze booths, lit by multiple-pane glass window, create an insulating double-entry for each set of doors, as well as aiding in the dispersion of traffic in and out of the building. The windows of the post office counter face the doors and the lobby wraps around the counters on both sides.

The floors are of terra cotta tile, laid in a pattern. The walls are clad two-thirds of the way up with sheets of travertine marble capped by a carved louvre. The final third of the wall is surfaced in plaster, capped with an entablature and cornice. Embedded in the plaster at the top of the walls are a total of six sunken-relief sculptures by William Atkinson (1937) entitled "Transportation of the Mail." The sculptures depict the pony express; Indians attacking a stagecoach; homesteaders settling the land; Chinese laborers constructing the transcontinental railroad; a sailing ship; and a streamlined train, airplane engines, and pilots. Banks of mailboxes lines the interior walls. The windows are set above Art Deco grilles of pewtered bronze. The ceiling has a shallow vault, from the peak of which hang several pewtered bronze lanterns. At intervals along the exterior walls are pewtered bronze Art Deco tables with black glass tops, intended for use by patrons.

The interior of the tower is octagonal (although the tower is square on the outside). A large lantern hangs from the center and the stairway, lined with an iron-and-brass railing, wraps around each wall. Travertine marble and terra cotta tile on the floor mimic the tower's octagonal plan. The tower has a separate outside entry and the tower lobby is separated from the postal lobby by an imposing Art Deco gate.

* * * *

Sources on the Santa Barbara Post Office:

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Clark, Alson. "Reginald D. Johnson: Regionalism and Recognition," in *Johnson, Kaufman, Coate: Partners in the California Style* (Santa Barbara, 1992).

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Johnson, Reginald D. "Architectural Expression: Design Influenced by Environment and Tradition," *The Architect and Engineer*, 124 (February 1936): 25-27.

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Park, Marlene and Gerald E. Markowitz. *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1984).

"Post Offices." *The Architectural Forum* (September 1933): 223-230.

Short, C.W. and R. Stanley-Brown. *Survey of the Architecture of Completed Projects of the Public Works Administration*, vol. 1. (Washington, DC: Public Works Administration).

Storke, Thomas M. and Walker A. Tompkins. *California Editor* (Los Angeles, CA: Westernlore Press, 1958).

The description herein is the result of fieldwork conducted by the authors, including an in-depth field reconnaissance conducted on 12 March 1994.