

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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NOV 27 1964

DATE ENTERED

JAN

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

U.S. Post Office

AND/OR COMMON

Visalia Town Center Station

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

11 W. Acequia Street

Na NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Visalia

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

17

STATE

California

CODE

06

COUNTY

Tulare

CODE

107

**2 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	AGRICULTURE MUSEUM
BUILDING(S)	PRIVATE	UNOCCUPIED	COMMERCIAL PARK
STRUCTURE	BOTH	WORK IN PROGRESS	EDUCATIONAL PRIVATE RESIDENCE
SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION		ENTERTAINMENT RELIGIOUS
OBJECT	NA IN PROCESS	ACCESSIBLE	GOVERNMENT SCIENTIFIC
X Thematic Group	BEING CONSIDERED	X YES: RESTRICTED X YES: UNRESTRICTED NO	INDUSTRIAL TRANSPORTATION MILITARY OTHER

**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

U.S. Postal Service, Western Regional Office

STREET &amp; NUMBER

850 Cherry Ave.

CITY, TOWN

San Bruno

NA

VICINITY OF

STATE

CA 94099

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

County Clerk/Recorder

STREET &amp; NUMBER

County Civic Center

CITY, TOWN

Visalia

STATE

CA

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE A Guide to Architecture in Los Angeles and Southern California  
(by Gebhard and Winter, published by Peregrine Smith, Inc.)

DATE

1977

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY X LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

c/o Dr. David Gebhard

SURVEY RECORDS

Department of Art History, University of California

CITY, TOWN

Santa Barbara

STATE

CA

## **7 DESCRIPTION**

CONDITION	CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE <u>NA</u>

4/27/84

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Visalia Post Office conforms to the standard symmetry used in most post offices, but has unusually sophisticated detailing. The elevations are decorated with cast terracotta, in shapes directly derivative of 1920s Art Deco motifs. Dark brown brick is used in decorative patterns to contrast with the light tan brick used for the bulk of the building's walls. Interior ornament is lavish, and includes cast aluminum, marble, and a decorative multi-colored terrazzo floor.

### LOCAL CONTEXT

Visalia, 60 miles south of Fresno on State Route 99, was platted in 1852, and made the Tulare County Seat in the following year. Though the town's economy has been oriented from its founding towards the surrounding agricultural area, tourists traveling to Sequoia National Park, 45 miles to the east, have supplemented the economy. The post office is one block south of what was, through the 1950s, the main commercial center, though new development has since shifted commercial activity to the southwestern portion of town. Several architecturally significant buildings survive in the downtown area, among them the Art Deco-style Tulare County Social Services Building, two blocks northeast of the post office. The subject property is not, however, within a designated historic district.

The site survey prepared for the present building indicates that the site was occupied by three structures before construction of the post office: a ten-stall brick auto service garage, a one-story brick auto service garage, and a small, one-story brick lunch stand. Basement excavations for the present structure have probably destroyed any traces of these earlier buildings and no archaeologic or paleontologic resources are known to exist within or adjacent to the site.

### PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The building has a structural steel skeleton, brick walls, a flat asphalt composition roof, and a reinforced concrete basement. Exterior trim included terracotta, aluminum, and white bronze, with granite steps and plinth. The lobby is ornamented with veined marble, an elaborate terrazzo floor, and the workroom has a maple floor. The post master's and assistant postmaster's offices have oak floors.

Two distinct traditions are visible in the building: the late, or neo-classical phase of the Beaux-Arts, and the Art Deco or Zigzag Moderne style. The fenestration and ornament are strictly symmetrical on the facade, typical of Beaux-Arts design, though the ornamental terracotta panels all contain Art Deco motifs. Panels above the windows on the front and side elevations contain stylized, geometrically rendered floral and plant motif with a zigzag running along the sides, and stylized sun at the top. Six curved brick pilasters are placed on the front facade; the two nearest the door are topped with terracotta ornament, and support terracotta representations of bald eagles. The cornice, formed by a row of molded cavity-tile blocks, is broken on the front facade by two acroteria-like ornaments directly above the eagle flanking the front entrance.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW							
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)				
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION						

SPECIFIC DATES Began 1932,  
completed 1933.

BUILDER/ARCHITECT William D. Coates

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The building is in a remarkable state of preservation; though it has been remodeled once, the work is fully compatible in style and workmanship with the original, and is difficult, to distinguish from the 1933 construction. The building is also one of the most aesthetically successful post offices in California, and is certainly one of the most sophisticated buildings in Visalia.

### ARCHITECTURE

The Visalia Main Office conforms to the standard composition of early 1930s post offices—a projecting central portion flanked by two smaller wings, and a strictly symmetrical facade. Its terracotta ornament and brickwork set the structure apart from other buildings. It would qualify for listing based on its aesthetic merit alone. This is the clearest statement in monumental Art Deco architecture applied to any public building constructed in California. The basic form of the central mass contrasts with the two smaller volumes defined by the side wings. This rectangular geometry is played off against the curved forms of the pilasters and the fragmented geometry of the ornamental moldings. In addition, the structure is almost completely intact, and has been recently restored, using detailing specified in the original 1930s working drawings. The lobby retains its original service windows, light fixtures, and has an elaborate, multi-colored terrazzo floor and veined marble wainscoting. There is a subtle interplay of the vertical ornament and the horizontal building mass.

### COMMUNITY PLANNING

Though the building is not immediately adjacent to any buildings of historic interest, it is only a block away from the recently restored old central business district. In this context, the post office contributes to the overall integrity of the downtown urban fabric, and, in fact, is placed in a built environment almost identical to that in which it was constructed.

### SCULPTURE

This building has unusually rich terracotta adornment on the front and side elevations, directly derivative of Art Deco motifs. The eagle is designed in a fragmented, almost

## **9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

"Coates, William D. -Obituary", Michigan Society of Architects, June 1959;  
 Gebhard, D. Winter, R., "A Guide to Architecture in Los Angeles and  
 Southern California". Peregrine Smith, Inc., Santa Barbara and  
 Salt Lake City, 1977.

## **10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

.25

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

UTM REFERENCES

A	1	1	2	9	4	3	8	0	4	0	2	2	5	8	0
ZONE	EASTING							NORTHING	NORTHING						
C															

B															
ZONE	EASTING							NORTHING							
D															

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 1-8, Block 44, Town of Visalia Subdivision, Tulare County Assessor.  
 The rectangular site has a 140' southern frontage on S. Court Street, and  
 a 190' eastern frontage on E. Acequia Street.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE NA	CODE NA	COUNTY NA	CODE NA
STATE NA	CODE NA	COUNTY NA	CODE NA

## **11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Doug Robertson, Planner

ORGANIZATION

DATE

April 27, 1984

Beland/Associates, Inc.

STREET &amp; NUMBER

TELEPHONE

16 S. Oakland Ave. #204

(818) 796-8093

CITY OR TOWN

STATE  
Ca 91101

Pasadena

## **12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION**

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES \_\_\_\_\_

NO \_\_\_\_\_

NONE \_\_\_\_\_

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is \_\_\_\_\_ National \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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CONTINUATION SHEET Visalia Town  
Center Station

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE one

Item 7

Two fantastic white bronze fixtures flank the entrance; the general shape suggests a navigation buoy or lighthouse, though two flanges at the top recall Egyptian lotus capitals. The entire composition is topped by a giant scallop shell which houses flood-lights aimed at the front of the building. The frieze on the front facade is ornamented with a series of lozenge shapes, formed of bricks with a reduced-black finish, which contrasts with the reddish brick of the walls.

Veined gray and red marble pilasters and wainscoting decorate the lobby, which remains in essentially its original condition. The original service windows and bronze post office boxes are still in use. Lighting is provided in the lobby by the large windows on the north elevation, and by the original white bronze fluorescent fixtures suspended from the ceiling. The floor is paved with red, yellow, gray, and green terrazzo, in a design which recalls Southwest American Indian motifs. Lobby desks, custom-designed for the post office by the architect, remain in use and are in excellent condition. The postmaster's and assistant postmaster's offices, now occupied by the station manager, have oak parquet floors and pine chair rails, though some of the original furniture in the postmaster's office has been removed. The workroom is lit by four skylights and new fluorescent fixtures, and has a maple parquet floor.

Art Deco architecture borrowed freely from a multiplicity of sources, and this building is no exception. Pre-Columbian architectural motifs, Southwestern Indian textile designs, and ancient Greek, Roman, and Egyptian elements are all freely combined and applied to the building. This style was commonly used in private projects in the twenties and is often associated with expensive, luxurious, and even slightly decadent shops and hotels, though by the time of this building's construction, the Depression had halted most of these private projects. Though the Visalia Main Office uses Art Deco ornamental motifs, the structure is monumentalized, rather than prettified, by the ornament. The building's volumetric massing is symmetrical and derived from the neo-classical phase of Beaux-Arts design.

The Public Works Administration often used Art Deco elements in a primarily classical and monumental framework. The Visalia Main Office thus presages the style and aesthetic of much subsequent government architecture in the thirties.

The construction process for this building was highly labor-intensive, as seen in the careful masonry, the elaborate terrazzo floor, and the use of parquet rather than strip flooring in the workroom and office areas. The level of craftsmanship was uniformly high in most Depression-era government construction, and the Visalia Main Office provides an excellent example of this concern for craft.

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**CONTINUATION SHEET** Visalia, Town **ITEM NUMBER 7, 8 PAGE two**  
Center Station

Item 7

**ALTERATIONS**

The building appears to be in excellent structural condition, and has received exceptionally competent and historically sensitive maintenance. The lobby has recently been repainted, using painting and trim detailing specified in the original plans, and the maple workroom floor has been cleaned and resurfaced. Only minor tuckpointing appears to be required on portions of the exterior elevations. Large, specimen cypress and magnolia trees, situated in broad, grassy lawns, flank the building on the east and west, while several low ferns are planted along the front elevation.

Item 8

**SCULPTURE, continued**

cubist, style, and the plaques on the projecting wings contain geometricized flower/sunrise motifs, an Art Deco hallmark. The two white bronze fixtures flanking the front entrance resemble nothing so much as nautical buoys, revealing Coates's cognizance of the then-developing Streamline Moderne. Even functional items are treated as sculpture, as in the cast aluminum radiator grills in the public lobby, decorated with a repetitive floral motif.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Visalia

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

N ▶

W. Acequia St.

190'

POST OFFICE

S. Court Street  
140'

S. Locust Street  
140'

190'