

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JAN 13 1983
DATE ENTERED	

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

RECEIVED
APR 12 1982
OHP

1 NAME

HISTORIC
United States Post Office
AND/OR COMMON
Federal Building; U.S. Post Office - Bell Station

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
401 West 18th Street
CITY, TOWN
Merced
STATE
California 95340
VICINITY OF
na
CODE
06
COUNTY
Merced
CODE
047
NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)
General Services Administration Region IX
STREET & NUMBER
525 Market Street
CITY, TOWN
San Francisco
VICINITY OF
STATE
California 94105

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Merced County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER
21st and M Streets
CITY, TOWN
Merced
STATE
California 95340

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
California Historic Resources Inventory
DATE
1 December 1977
DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS Merced County Historical Society
CITY, TOWN
Merced
STATE
California 95340
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input 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

The Federal Building is situated within the small town setting of the agricultural community of Merced. Located on a corner site - the northwest corner of Eighteenth and K streets - the building is within the downtown area, one block north of the city's principal commercial street. "Downtown" Merced today consists generally of low-rise commercial buildings of varying ages, which represent most of the architectural styles popular since the 1880s. Directly across the street from the Federal Building is one of several municipal parking lots; beside that is a two-story Victorian house - reportedly one of the city's oldest. Sharing the block with the Post Office is a row of modest single-story commercial row buildings built early in this century along Eighteenth Street and several detached houses behind the building, across the public alley. The Federal Building is oriented south-southwest with its front facade facing Eighteenth Street, the busier of the two thoroughfares. It is set back from the sidewalks along the two streets in a residential fashion and is bordered on the south and east sides by a small lawn. Landscaping along these sides consists of the broad sidewalks at curbside and the lawns, planted with foundation shrubbery at several points along the building and trees in the sidewalks and at the rear. A wide granite stair ascends from the sidewalk at the front to an entry landing at lobby level, raised several feet above street level. A recently added concrete handicapped ramp doglegs west of the stair to the front entry landing. The rear of the site is taken up by a large parking/loading area and the west side by a paved parking area. Two decorative bronze sconces are mounted at the front entrance; the only other original site furniture is the flagpole at the southwest corner of the site.

The building itself is made up of a raised main level with a full basement. Supported by a structural steel frame with pan type concrete floor and roof slabs and brick exterior walls, it is classified as a fireproof structure. It is symmetrically massed as an 84'2"x 90'0" main section flanked on both sides by small end wings. These wings - 20'0"x 48'6" and 41'6" - are attached at the front of the main section with only a minor setback from the plane of the main section front wall. A shallowly pitched hipped roof, covered with ceramic mission tiles, rests on the front part of the main section over the public lobbies and the front mailroom service area; parapeted flat roofs cover the remainder of the building. A reversed pitch shed roof cantilevers from the rear of the building over the loading dock. The hipped roof barely extends beyond the walls and is edged by a small classical terra cotta cornice. The flat roof parapets feature plain terra cotta band copings. A large skylight is mounted in the flat roof directly behind the row of six clerestory windows over the work area.

The facades are divided into three zones, corresponding to the classical vertical subdivisions of base, body and cap. The base is formed by the stone-faced raised foundation which is capped by a moulded watertable. Above this is the major zone

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of the building - the body- made up of stuccoed brick; the stucco is painted a pastel pink today, although the original specifications called for a grey-white color. Two types of cap are used: in the hipped roof section the cap is formed by the roof itself with its terra cotta cornice; in the parapeted sections a cap of sorts is formed by a moulded terra cotta stringcourse which, with the coping, enframes a small section of the stuccoed wall. The front facade of the main section contains the most prominent feature of the building, a five-bay series of large round-arch window and door openings. Enframed by terra cotta quoins and voussoirs, moulded terra cotta jambs and a continuous sill/stringcourse, these windows create a vaguely classical appearance for the building. Each window has, below the sill, a decorative terra cotta panel with a classical motif. The center bay of this detached arcade is the public entrance to the building. A double-leafed doorway (the original steel doors have been replaced with aluminum-framed glass ones) with a transom above, it features decorative terra cotta work in the spandrel over the door atop which perches the federal eagle. The bronze windows which infill the other openings have fixed sashes. Smaller rectangular windows are placed in the end wings; these share the continuous sill of the arched windows and display classical terra cotta surrounds with the decorative panels beneath. The rear facade is dominated by the central loading dock and canopy, and several of the smaller type of window are located on this face, alongside the dock.

The front facade originally displayed "United States Post Office" in attached bronze letters over the center arcade. This has been replaced with "Federal Building 18th & K Streets" in similarly sized attached letters. The cornerstone, set in the south corner of the main section reads:

Ogden L. Mills	Secretary of the Treasury
Ferry K. Heath	Assistant Secretary
James A. Wetmore	Acting Supervising Architect
Allison and Allison	Architects

1932

The interior has undergone several changes, most of which were made soon after the building was changed from the main office to a station with other federal offices. The large open workroom has been subdivided into a series of smaller offices accessed through a center hall. The postal work area has been reduced significantly from a space occupying two-thirds of the main level to a much smaller space in the northwest corner of the main section. Originally the Federal Building had three public lobbies - the large main lobby which extended the

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width of the main section at the front and two smaller lobbies at both ends of the main lobby which served as areas for the post office boxes. The north wall of the main lobby has been changed with the addition of the offices and subsequent changes in finish and openings, and the post office box areas have been moved to the northwest corner of the main lobby. The Postmaster's, Assistant Postmaster's, Postal Inspector's and money order registry offices remain intact today, and the lobby - the most impressive interior space - retains much of its architectural integrity. Still the full width of the main section, the lobby today features many of its original components, including the floor made of alternating Craig Pink Tennessee and Batesville marble squares bordered with pink marble, a wainscot made up of Golden Vein Saint Genevieve marble with Cardiff Green marble cap and base, textured plaster walls with original bronze grilles, tri-colored coffered plaster ceiling with rosettes in the coffer centers, original windows and doors with marble surrounds and sills and original chandeliers and bronze writing tables. Two 6'x 8' tempera murals are hung in the east and west walls of the lobby, over the doors to the Postal Inspector's and Postmaster's offices. These were produced in 1937 as part of a New Deal program (see Addendum, Item 8) and are an important feature of the building. The remaining portion of the postal workroom still shows many of its original finishes - maple basketweave flooring, plaster walls and ceiling and the inspector's gallery above the workspace (although the observation panels into the restrooms have been closed). The basement is today vacant, used primarily for storage, custodial and mechanical rooms.

Summary

The Federal Building is sited facing south-southwest on a corner lot within the central business district of Merced. Made up of a raised main level over a full basement, the building displays Mediterranean elements with its round arch windows with terra cotta surrounds and moulded panels beneath, painted stucco walls and ceramic tile roof. It is symmetrically massed as a hipped-roof main section flanked on both sides by small parapeted flat-roof end wings. The facades are divided into three zones, corresponding to the classical vertical divisions of base, body and cap; the base is formed by the stone-faced raised foundation capped by a moulded water-table, the body by stuccoed brick walls and the cap by the mission-tiled roof with its terra cotta cornice and parapet. The building has been maintained well, and the exterior remains in essentially original condition; the interior alterations have been undertaken with some sensitivity and have not substantially changed the character of the public spaces. As a moderately scaled, relatively small public

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building, the Federal Building at Merced does not present a radical departure from the other architecture of the city. It differs primarily in the degree of refinement of design and construction which it displays - a degree unmatched in the Merced central business district. For this reason, and given the building's heavy business and social use, it stands out as a local landmark, a visual anchor for the neighborhood and a prominent architectural feature in the city.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input 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 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES	Designed: 1931-32 Built: 1932-33	<u>BUILDER/ARCHITECT</u>	Allison and Allison Los Angeles
----------------	-------------------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------------------

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the Federal Building in Merced rests upon its intrinsic and representational values on a local level to the city. These values lie in three areas: architecture, art and politics/government. Architecturally the building is typical of the eclectic revivalism which distinguished many public buildings of the time. Like the Post Office for Beverly Hills, executed by Allison and Allison at the same time as this building, the stylistic expression is neither avant garde nor strictly classical. It is a well-preserved and locally prominent example of its genre - a small public building of the early 1930s. Similarly the original tempera murals mounted on the lobby walls are locally important examples of the type of federally sponsored decorative artwork produced during the Depression, the only works of their kind in the city. As art, the murals are somewhat clumsily executed; as artifacts reflecting the social climate in which they were produced, however, they are important on a local scale and, if viewed comprehensively, on a national scale as part of the widespread social realist art movement of the thirties and forties. Finally, the Federal Building represents Merced's part of an extensive federal construction program initiated in the late 1920s by the Hoover administration. As the first federal building erected in the city, it was a source of pride for the townspeople and a locally prominent symbol of the federal government.

Addendum

S.C. Bates was designated Merced's first postmaster for the fledgling town's first post office in 1872. Merced had been founded earlier in the year with the coming of the Southern Pacific Railroad; as a shipping and trading center for the surrounding farmlands and self-named "Gateway to the Yosemite Valley," the city was incorporated in 1889. By the time Congress had appropriated \$180,000 and federal officials had begun searching for a site for a new post office building in 1931, the facility had been housed in a series of rented spaces around town under ten postmasters. Bids were solicited for the site in 1931, and the land at the corner of Eighteenth and K streets offered by the Merced Irrigation District for \$31,000 was selected. The proposed building, as one of several public buildings in the region authorized and constructed in the early

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Addendum, Item 9

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .64

UTM REFERENCES

A 10 723315 4131180
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Legal description: Lots 14-16 and east 35' of Lot 13, Block 146, City of Merced
 Property is located on northwest corner of 18th and K Streets, with 185.04' frontage
 on 18th Street and 150.0' frontage on K Street.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Clayton B. Fraser, Principal

ORGANIZATION

Fraserdesign

DATE

March 7, 1982

STREET & NUMBER

1269 Cleveland Avenue Suite Two

TELEPHONE

303-669-7969

CITY OR TOWN

Loveland

STATE

Colorado 80537

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES

NO

NONE

4/20/82

Kumeller

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

J. Roth

J. WALTER ROTH

TITLE

DIRECTOR, HISTORIC PRESERVATION
 GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

DATE

12 JAN 83

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:

Shelove Byers

DATE

2/10/83

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Entered in the
 National Register

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1930s, would be the first civil federal structure erected in Merced.

In reality the Federal Building was part of an enormous federal building program undertaken by Congress and the Hoover administration in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During this period some 1300 new civil federal buildings were erected across the country, nearly doubling the number under the aegis of the Treasury Department. The program was initiated in 1926 - the first such federal initiative for public building construction since 1913 - with a Congressional authorization of \$165 million over a period of eleven years. The authorization was increased by \$125 million in 1928 and, with the Depression worsening, by \$330 million in 1930 and 1931. The total appropriation, including revenues from the sale of so-called obsolete structures which added \$69 million, hovered at \$700 million. According to Lois Craig in The Federal Presence: "In terms of establishing the image of the United States government, this program was the most important undertaken since the first few decades under the Constitution."

The massive construction effort was designed to serve three functions. First, it represented fiscal pragmatism and was calculated to reduce the rising rental costs incurred by the growing number of federal agencies in leased space. The program also afforded Congress an opportunity to distribute political presents in the form of post offices and courthouses, a type of logrolling it historically has found hard to resist. Finally, under the deepening shadow of the Depression, the building project was in the later years a make-work project, intended to provide jobs for the local unemployed. A predecessor to the myriad New Deal programs (Roosevelt took office six weeks before the laying of the cornerstone for this building), Hoover's building program was later absorbed within the Public Works Administration.

This renewed activity rekindled long dormant animosities between the Supervising Architect's (SA) office in the Treasury Department and private architects, represented by the American Institute of Architects. The AIA, protective of a membership beleaguered by the Depression, objected vociferously to in-house design of federal buildings by the SA's office, which had increased its staff from 432 in 1929 to 750 in 1932. A 1931 Resolution of AIA Board of Directors proclaimed:

We believe that the country is entitled to the services of the best architectural talent available, and that the concentration of so large a volume of work as the present appropriations provide, into the hands of a single Government bureau, must inevitably tend to produce stereotyped, mediocre and uninspiring results.

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Architects railed against the SA repeatedly in the trade periodicals; American Architect was particularly fervent in its criticism, regularly publishing articles like "Government Architects Cannot Create Beauty" and "The Time Has Come for Government to Get Out of the Architecture Business." A counterattack was printed in the April 1931 Federal Architect, a magazine sympathetic to the SA:

The ethics of the profession has certainly taken a jolt when the architects of the country on letterheads of their A.I.A. Chapters blacken without investigation the work of other architects' offices with the naive and frank admission that it is for the purpose of getting architectural commissions for themselves.

The Federal Architectural offices are weaned and reared on criticism. If they use material A, delegations appear to lambaste them for not using material B. Or vice versa. If they face the building north, a newspaper crusade develops because it was not faced south. The bitter attacks of private architects are, therefore, merely the regular order. . . . But - one could have wished that architects would have stood by architects.

Although the Public Buildings Acts of 1926 and 1930 granted the Treasury Department the option to commission private architects for federal projects for the first time since the repeal of the Tarnsey Act in 1911, the Hoover administration used their services sparingly, and the fusillades continued throughout the early 1930s.

There were stylistic differences as well. At one extreme was the SA's office, which continued to advocate classicism as the appropriate symbolic expression for public buildings. The SA executed hundreds of buildings of varying scales with classical facades and detailing during the twenties and thirties. James A. Wetmore was the Acting Supervising Architect from 1915 to 1933. A graduate of the Georgetown University Law School, Wetmore was not himself an architect, the reason for the "Acting" before his title; stylistic direction for the office was given by the Superintendent of the Architectural Division Louis A. Simon, a stylistic traditionalist who later succeeded Wetmore as Supervising Architect - the Treasury's last. At the other end of the spectrum were a number of architects in the avant garde of the private sector. Embracing the tenets of the emerging Art Deco and Moderne styles (and a decade later the International style), these architects designed public buildings relatively unembellished by ornamentation and austere when compared with their classical predecessors. Between the two extremes, architects designed with a wide range of stylistic expression, combining new forms with borrowed revivalist or vernacular forms or motifs or somehow compromising between the classical and modern trends to create what is termed "starved classicism."

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The Merced Federal Building, one of several in the region designed by private architects, fell within this ground. Its round-arched windows with terra cotta surrounds and moulded panels beneath, painted stucco walls and ceramic tile roof draw upon Mediterranean forms, an eclectic kind of borrowing typical of the time. The interchangeability of styles from one region of the country to another is evidenced by the resemblance of the Merced Building to the Post Office built at Mammoth in Yellowstone National Park in 1938.

The Los Angeles architectural firm of Allison and Allison was commissioned to design the building, and most of the construction drawings were completed by late 1931. Renderings of the design were featured in at least two architectural journals - Architectural Record and Architect and Engineer. After a number of delays, bids for construction were advertised in late April 1932; despite the fact that one of the goals of the federal program was to provide work for the local unemployed, a Michigan firm, the North-Moller Company of Jackson, was awarded the contract in August. North-Moller had submitted a bid for \$99,400, underbidding nearly thirty California construction companies. The Notice to Proceed was given by the Treasury the following month, and construction - with the requisite groundbreaking ceremony - commenced soon after. Benjamin S. Hirschfeld was designated Construction Engineer for the project by the Treasury Department; Hirschfeld assured the local labor council that local manpower would be used whenever possible and that laborers on the job would receive a minimum wage of \$4.00 per day. North-Moller did employ several local suppliers and subcontractors on the building: J. Walton Huffman, Merced, excavating; Collins Electrical Company, electrical fitting; Scott and Company, San Francisco, plumbing; Dan Bishop, Modesto, masonry; M.J. Smith and Company, Los Angeles, ornamental iron; Coffman, Fresno, roofing; Keaton and Gibbons, sheet metal; Phoenix and Day Company, St. Louis, lighting fixtures; Yale and Towne, Stamford, Connecticut, bronze lock box equipment and Illinois Steel Company, Los Angeles, structural steel. A problem arose, however, when they neglected to pay their bills. The complaints were resolved only after Hirschfeld recommended that payments be withheld from the Michigan firm.

Erection of the structural steel frame was begun in January 1933 and completed the following month. Then, on 29 April 1933 the cornerstone was laid amidst a parade and ceremony presided over by the local contingent of Masons. Featured speaker on the platform was ex-Congressman Henry E. Barbour, the man largely responsible for securing the building for the town. Various papers, coins, records and other memorabilia were deposited in the hollow stone, the crowd dispersed and construction was resumed. It continued through the spring and summer, and by the end of September the building was completed. About the dedication and

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open house held the following month, the Merced Sun-Star reported:

Opened last night for public inspection, the Merced postoffice was visited by approximately 500 persons who took advantage of the first opportunity to go through the \$180,000 federal building before business operations are transferred from the old postoffice.

The new Italian style edifice at the corner of Eighteenth and K was given favorable comment by every person who went through the departments. Affording many times the floor space and boasting the newest type of equipment, the new structure will replace the present postoffice on Seventeenth in use since 1921.

The new Federal Building was opened for business on 23 November 1933, and the landscaping was finished within the year. The building underwent no change for the next four years; in 1937, Helen Forbes and Dorothy Puccinelli were each commissioned to create a 6'x 8' tempera mural for the public lobby. As part of a New Deal relief program to aid struggling local artists and place art into public buildings, the two women were selected from a competition among local artists. The competition was one of some 190 sponsored by the Treasury's Section of Fine Arts, which awarded 1371 commissions between 1934 and 1943. The paintings, which depict Jedediah Smith and a group of men crossing the Merced River (Forbes) and a military group at the bank of a river (Puccinelli), were similarly styled. Both reflected the Treasury Department's inclination toward somewhat romanticized versions of American historical or social subjects.

The operational history of the Merced Federal Building over the past fifty years, not surprisingly, has been rather undistinguished - essentially a chronicle of the daily activities of the occupant agencies. The 8500 square-foot main level originally was occupied entirely by the post office, with a lobby and workrooms occupying the main section of the building and offices for the Postmaster, Assistant Postmaster and Postal Inspector and an office for the money order registry in the two end wings. The post office continues to use the first floor today, although the facility has been demoted from main office to station status with the completion of a new building in 1965. Designated the Bell Station after Thomas V. Bell, a postal employee who had worked in the Merced office for nearly fifty years before retiring, the building is reportedly the first station in the postal system named after a former employee. The basement, with its nondescript exterior entrance at the rear of the building, originally housed Yosemite National Park and National Forest Service offices, a plant inspection room, IRS collector's office and a "clerk-carrier club room" for off-duty postal employees, as well as storage, custodial and mechanical facilities. Today the basement is unoccupied,

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with the ancillary spaces still used as such. Additional office space on the main level was created in a 1966 remodeling by subdividing a portion of the main postal workroom; those spaces not currently vacant are now occupied by the IRS, up from the basement, and Congressional offices for the Fifteenth District. Although the Federal Building at Merced is not quite fifty years old, its shortfall is so minor as to be almost moot. The building is an important structure for Merced, both architecturally and historically; a pivotal building in the central business district, it is a local landmark for the city - the first federal building erected in Merced and a well-executed and -preserved example of 20th century classical eclecticism.

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- "Post Office Buildings in Beverly Hills and Merced, California," Architect and Engineer, January 1932.
- Sawyer, Phillip. "The Design of Public Buildings," Architectural Forum, September 1931.

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- "Bids Called on P.O. Work Here," Merced Sun-Star, 26 April 1932.
- "Church to Rule on Postmaster," Merced Sun-Star, 21 November 1933.
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- "Democrats Fail to State Choice," Merced Sun-Star, 15 November 1933.
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