

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

982

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Bank of Italy Building

and/or common Bank of America Building

2. Location

street & number 128 E. Main St. not for publication

city, town Visalia vicinity of congressional district 17th

state California code 06 county Tulare code 107

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
object	<input type="checkbox"/> In process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input 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
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Gary L. Mertz and Lois R. Schlenker

street & number 216 W. Willow

city, town Visalia vicinity of state California 93277

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Tulare County Courthouse

street & number Mooney Boulevard and Main Street

city, town Visalia state California

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Visalia Historic Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date Spring, 1978 federal state county local

depository for survey records City Hall

city, town Visalia state California

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 Bank of America building is located at 128 E. Main Street at the corner of Church Street. The five-story plus basement steel frame construction structure is 82' x 124'. The Classical Revival design is a two part vertical block with an overscaled first story housing the bank, and unadorned upper stories for office use capped by a prominent cornice. The two street facades are sheathed with sandstone on the first story and yellow tone bricks laid in common bond on the upper stories; the exposed west side and back of the structure are stucco finish. The northeast and southeast corners of the building are rounded.

The main entrance on Main Street opens directly into the banking hall. The side entrance leads into the back foyer adjoining the elevator lobby with twin elevator shafts at the back center of the building. The upper stories have a central hall the length of the structure with offices on both sides.

The first story is treated monumentally with a sandstone facade resting on a granite block base evoking the Greek Doric classical order. Fluted pilasters with minimal bases and capitals between the windows support a full Greek Doric entablature. Metal spandrels above the lower third of the overscaled tripart windows have a foliage design. Decorative panels above the windows are lotus leaves with a center rosette.

The unimposing front and side door surrounds have rosettes in the immediate surround, classical and foliated moldings, and a rosette and acroterion on a pediment-like form at center top. The front door has ornate volute brackets supporting the pediment-like form and a foliate brass strip under the transom. The original brass and glass doors remain at the front; the side entrance has a modern glass door.

The upper stories are starkly plain with paired double hung windows piercing the brick with only a rounded sandstone sill as evidence of their framing. An elaborate copper cornice caps the street facades. Several classical moldings and a prominent row of acanthus leaf volute brackets separated by square panels are topped by a row of half-circle medallions silhouetted against the sky. Just below the cornice a row of decorative panels of swags are underscored by a copper molding.

The interior detailing shows a lively use of classical motifs. The main banking hall has a central aisle leading from the front door to the elevator lobby. The only significant visible alterations are the covering of the marble floor and the center portion of the ceiling with modern materials. The tellers' counter faced in Italian marble originally placed on the east side of the aisle now occupies the west side. The tellers' cages have had the bars removed; the brass supports for the glass shields have a logenze and floral design. Six octagonal columns divide the length of the room into thirds and rather than capitals at the top have a series of enriched wave, foliated urn, and acanthus leaf moldings. A large clock dominates the back wall and is interesting in its combination of classical symbols and Roman numerals with floral designs. The original color scheme was grey and gold and great bronze chandeliers and wall lights enhanced the setting.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X 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 1922-1924

Builder/Architect R. F. Felchlin & Co., Fresno, CA.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The old Bank of Italy building is a handsome statement of its type and period. Its reliance upon Neo-classical and Renaissance elements convey the sense of permanence and stability appropriate to the image of a banking institution of the early part of this century. The quality of the design is notable, and the overall integrity remains exceptionally high. In addition, the building is the work of an important San Joaquin Valley architectural and engineering firm. Historically, this bank was the center of Visalia's economic activity and played an important role in the development of the community.

The northwest corner of Church and Main Streets has been used for banking purposes since 1874. In that year, the Bank of Visalia was organized as a state bank, the same year Visalia was incorporated as a city. After 34 years, the bank was nationalized (1908) and became the National Bank of Visalia. In April 1921, the bank was acquired by the Bank of Italy and in 1930 became the Bank of America. Soon after the takeover by the Bank of Italy, the bank moved in August 1922, to temporary quarters across the street in the Sweet Company Building so the present structure could be built on the original bank site. The bank's official opening in the new building took place September 4, 1923; the Notice of Completion was filed with the Title Company on February 16, 1924 for the building. The cost of the new facility was \$300,000.

This building was the center of Visalia's business life for several decades. The Bank of Visalia, Bank of Italy, and Bank of America all played important roles in the economic development of the area. The bank's adequate capitalization and conservative management enabled it to grow steadily in resources and withstand several financial panics. The bank has been intimately involved in the capital intensive agricultural economy of the county. The offices on the upper floors were for many years the most prestigious address in town for professionals and businessmen. Lawyers, doctors, realtors, accountants, and businessmen of many types made the building a center of activity.

The Bank of America building is a true landmark in Visalia and is one of the few remaining large scale public/commercial buildings from the early 20th century. It was the tallest building built in Visalia. It anchors the east end of the business district and with the Fox Theater several blocks west on Main Street, is a reminder of earlier architecture in downtown Visalia. Banking continues in the building though the Bank of America built a new structure across the street in the late 1970s. The Visalia Community Bank restored the first floor as a new main office in 1979.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Visalia City Directory 1923, 1925
Visalia Delta, Visalia Daily Times newspapers

10. Geographical Data

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreage of nominated property .23

Quadrangle name Visalia

UMT References

A	1 1	2 9 4 6 5 0	4 0 2 2 8 1 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C			
E			
G			

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D			
F			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

Occupies lot 8 of block 291, Book 94 of the Tulare County Assessor's map.
Dimensions are 82' x 124'.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Pat Clevenger and Betsy Bradley

organization Visalia Historic Preservation Board date August 3, 1981

street & number 345 Todd Drive telephone (209) 734-3136

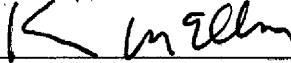
city or town Visalia state California 93277

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title

date 2-8-82

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date

 8/1/82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

200

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

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Interior decoration is concentrated at the front door surround and at the wall cornices and ceiling panels. The classical moldings and low relief foliage and animal designs are tinted several colors heightening the less formal mood of the interior detailing. The door surround has decorative plaster panels with foliage, urns, and griffins holding a cartouche at center top. The entablature above is composed of classical moldings and includes a frieze of cupids holding a cartouche with the bank name.

Swags with tinted wall above form a band around the room below the rows of classical cornice moldings. Acanthus leaf sheathed modillions alternating with square panels with foliage rosettes at the outer edge of the ceiling form a transition to the more exotic ceiling panels. The only visible row of panels has rosettes, urns with stylized foliage and pelicans in a repeat pattern.

The back foyer and adjoining elevator lobby have marble floors and eight-foot marble sheathing on the walls. The foyer has thin paired pilasters at the corners. Large plaster panels fill the space between the marble sheathing and the ornate cornice moldings incorporating rosettes and foliated scroll motifs. A brass radiator cover is executed in a scallop design and a brass floor directory is bordered with a circle design. The cornice moldings in the elevator lobby include the Greek key, scroll, rosette, and acanthus leaf designs. Two elevator shafts were constructed although the second elevator was not installed until the 1940s. The brass door of the original elevator is a diagonal lattice pattern. Both elevators have half-circle floor indicators above. A large brass letter box with a drop system from the floors above is hung between the elevators. The iron stair banister leads from the elevator lobby, decorated with rings separated by plain balusters and a Greek key molding below.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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

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DATE ENTERED APR 1 1982

CONTINUATION SHEET

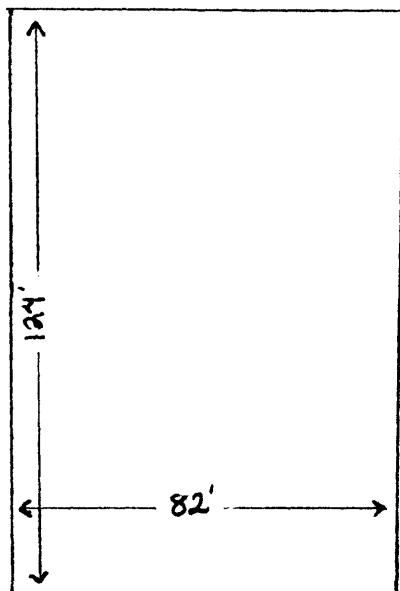
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The involvement of the R. F. Felchlin & Company firm of Fresno in this major construction project in Visalia is not surprising. The Felchlin Company was a prominent firm that provided architectural, engineering, and contracting services. This early developer is noted for several multi-story office buildings in downtown Fresno - the Bank of Italy Building (1917), the Californian Hotel (1922), the PG&E Building (1923), and the Security Pacific Building (1923). Felchlin was a structural engineer and retained several young architects in apprentice type positions. Raymond T. Shaw, Charles Franklin, and Rafael Lake worked with him in the early 1920s. L. H. Nishkian and Charles T. Philips of San Francisco were consulting engineers.

J-0306H

Sketch map: Bank of America (Bank of Italy)
Visalia, Tulare County, CA

Scale  = 20 feet



North Church Street

East Main Street

