

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	NOV 27 1984
DATE ENTERED	JAN 11

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

San Diego Downtown Station

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

815 E. Street

NA NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

San Diego

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

44

STATE

California

CODE

06

COUNTY

San Diego

CODE

073

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 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	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thematic Group	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (if applicable)

U.S. Postal Service, Western Regional Office

STREET & NUMBER

850 Cherry Ave.

CITY, TOWN

San Bruno

NA VICINITY OF

STATE

CA 94099

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

San Diego County Recorder

STREET & NUMBER

1600 Pacific Highway

CITY, TOWN

San Diego

STATE

CA

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

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

DATE

1977

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS c/o Dr. David Gebhard

Dept. 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED	DATE <u>NA</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED			
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED				

4/27/84 DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The San Diego Post Office is a large Starved Classical building, located just outside of the present-day downtown area of San Diego. The building has a symmetrical facade and floor plan, and is constructed of reinforced concrete. The front elevation is characterized by window openings extending through the second floor, and separated by fluted piers. Entrance to the public lobby is by two projecting wings. Four low-relief sculptural panels by Archibald Garner are placed on the front elevation.

LOCAL CONTEXT

The Downtown Station is located near San Diego's central business district; new office construction has been focused to the north, and buildings dating from the 1930s surround the post office on the south and west. Though this part of San Diego has been platted since the 1870s, the Downtown Station is not within a designated historic district.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The public lobby occupies the northern portion of the first floor, and has limestone pilasters and a marble floor. Several of the original black-glass lobby desks remain in use, and many of the original bronze post office boxes are still in place. Doors facing the lobby are covered with polished brass plates.

The building has a structural steel skeleton, and reinforced concrete walls. The foundation is reinforced poured concrete, and the structure is topped with a flat, asphalt-composition roof. The lobby has a limestone wainscoting and limestone pilasters, and a terrazzo floor. Doors opening into the lobby have a polished bronze veneer, and the original railings and door moldings are also polished bronze. The original lobby desks, which are still in place, have one-inch thick black glass tops, and square, fluted bronze pedestals.

The San Diego Downtown Station is an example of the "Starved Classicism" that became the characteristic idiom of the WPA architecture. Through the influence of the late phase of Beaux-Arts classicism, ornament is reduced to a bare minimum. The concrete pilasters on the front elevation are fluted to resemble classical pilasters flanking each door. Terracotta panels, sculpted by Archibald Garner, depicting a train, a ship, an airplane, and a car, are placed over the windows at the front entrance. An inscription placed in the frieze carried by the pilasters of the front elevation reads, "Through science and the toil of patient men, the nation's thoughts traverse the land, sea, and air".

ALTERATIONS

An automatic-opening aluminum and glass door was installed on the south entrance when an access ramp for the handicapped was constructed in the early 1970s. The original lobby light fixtures have been replaced with mercury-vapor lights, and the registry area has been filled with two banks of lockboxes. The assistant postmaster's office and the postmaster's office have been removed, and replaced with additional lockboxes. The site is landscaped with palm trees and a strip of lawn on the north.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input 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 **Begun 1936,
completed 1938.**

BUILDER/ARCHITECT **William Templeton Johnson**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The San Diego Main Post Office retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. It is significant on the state level and exceptionally significant on the local level, under National Register Criterion C, as a distinctive example of a type, period and method of construction.

ARCHITECTURE

Johnson was a well known San Diego architect, and received several important commissions in the San Diego area in the 1920s through the 1940s. His first major project was the U.S. Exhibition Hall (later the U.S. Consulate) constructed for the 1928 American-Iberian Exposition in Seville, Spain. These buildings were archetypic of the Southern California version of the Spanish Colonial Revival, a style in which most of Johnson's work was designed. In addition to the post office, he collaborated with a team of architects on the San Diego City and County Building, constructed in 1938 with WPA funding.

Johnson described the building's style as "a kind of classic", perhaps revealing an ambivalence about the style. The Starved Classicism of the San Diego Main Office was almost *de rigueur* for large post offices in the mid-thirties. This building is an example of an architect known for his devotion to the Spanish Colonial Revival who adopted the Starved Classicism of the Supervising Architect's office for one project. This building is unique in the architect's *oeuvre*. The building has significance on the state level as one of the earliest and largest Starved Classical buildings. On the local level, it is exceptionally important as a relatively rare survivor from the thirties in San Diego's downtown area, thus giving historical focus and a sense of place to its immediate surroundings. The building embodies the fine craftsmanship characteristic of Depression-era public buildings. Its structural sturdiness is also typical of federal building of the period, though a combined structural steel skeleton and heavily reinforced bearing wall construction was found in relatively few projects.

SCULPTURE

The sculpted relief panels on the front elevation are representative of federally-sponsored art in general and of Garner's work in particular. The panels lack distinction as art, but combined with the building's architecture, contribute to the overall significance of the building. The panels also have local significance; though several federally-sponsored murals exist in San Diego, the post office reliefs are the only known federally-sponsored sculpture in the city.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Jones, Frederick W., "William Templeton Johnson's Exposition and Museum Buildings", Architect and Engineer, Vol. 99, Oct. 1929;
 Johnson, W.T., "San Diego Post Office", Pencil Points, Vol. 21, Feb., 1940;
 Johnson, W.T., "Buildings of the United States of America at the Iberian-American Exposition, Seville", American Architect, Vol. 133, NO. 2457;
 "Johnson, W.T., Obituary", AIA Journal, Vol. 29, Jan 1958.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.5

UTM REFERENCES

A

1	1	4	8	5	3	7	0	3	6	1	9	4	1	0
ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

B

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots A,B,C,D,E,F,J,K,L, 1,2,3, Block 5, City of San Diego, San Diego County Assessor. The rectangular site has a 250' northern border on E Street and southern border on F Street, and a 370' western border on 8th Street and eastern border on 9th Street.

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

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

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Doug Robertson, Planner

ORGANIZATION

Beland/Associates, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER

16 S. Oakland Ave. #204

CITY OR TOWN

Pasadena

DATE

April 27, 1984.

TELEPHONE

(818)796-8093

STATE

CA 91101

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

1/1/85

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 San Diego Dntn. ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE one

Sculpture, continued

Archibald Garner, Sculptor, (1904-1970):

Garner received his art education at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute), and was a pupil of Ralph Stackpole and Ruth Craveth. He was a sculpture designer for 20th Century Fox Studios in Los Angeles, and taught at Occidental College in Eagle Rock. He received several commissions for federal art projects, among them "Astronomer's Monument", at the Griffith Park Planetarium, Los Angeles; "Law", an eight-foot limestone relief in the Los Angeles Federal Building lobby; "Law", a red sandstone relief in the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art; a large wood relief in the Inglewood Post Office; and "Justice", a concrete relief in the Fresno Post Office.

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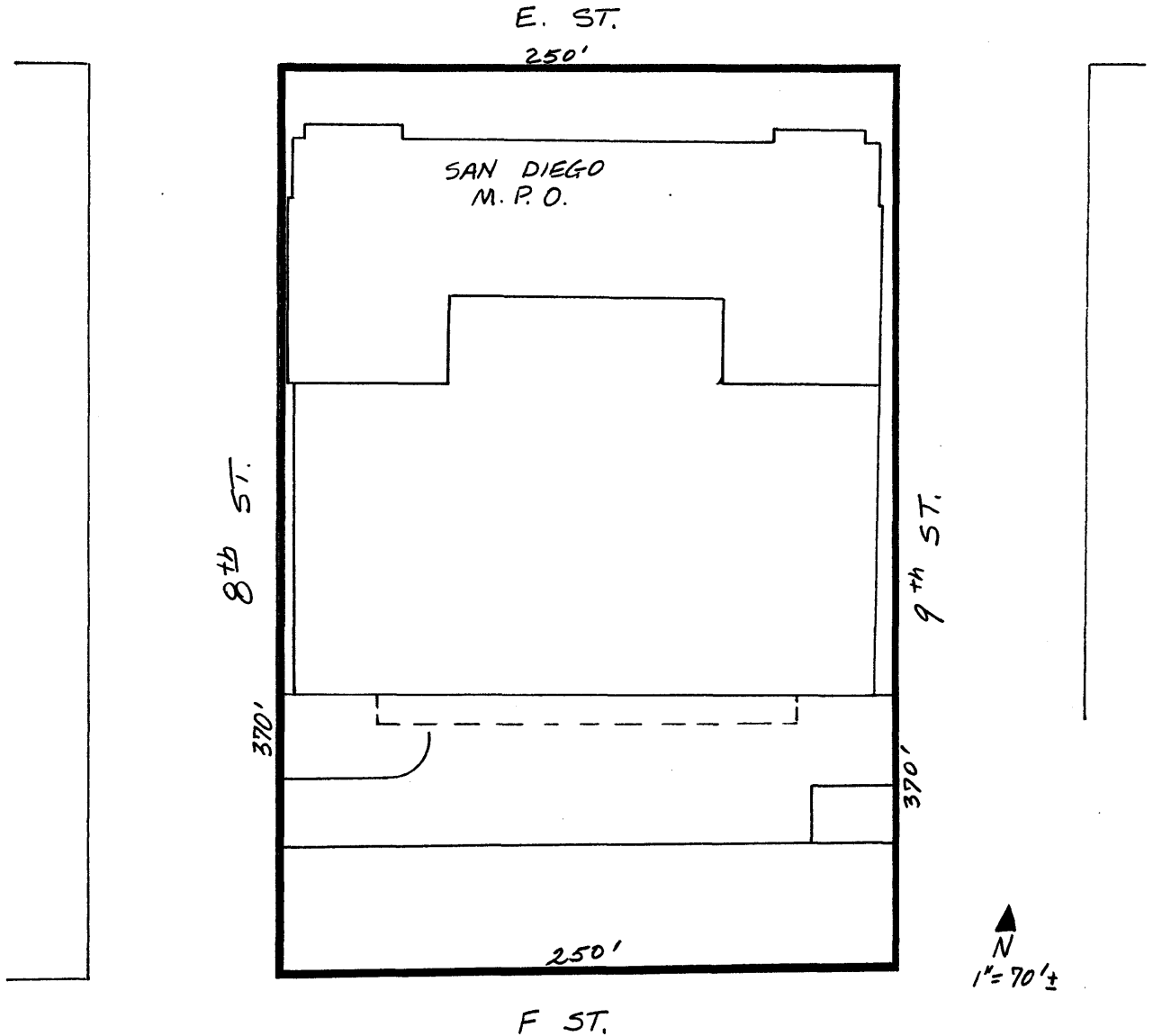
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CONTINUATION SHEET San Diego MPO ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE two



Note: Post Office site outlined in red.

Source: Sanborn Map, San Diego Book, page 50A, 1956-62; Geography Map Library, California State University, Northridge, CA.