FHR-8-300 (11-78)

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

RECEIVED
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1. Name

historic United ~~States~~ Post Office

and/or common same; Berkeley Main Post Office

2. Location

street & number 2000 Milvia Street ___ not for publication

city, town Berkeley 94701 ___ vicinity of congressional district 8

state California code 06 county Alameda code 001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	_x_ public	_x_ occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
_x_ building(s)	___ private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	___ yes: restricted	_x_ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	_x_ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
		___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name U. S. Postal Service

street & number Western Regional Office
850 Cherry Street

city, town San Bruno 94099 ___ vicinity of state California

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Alameda County Courthouse

street & number 1225 Fallon Street

city, town Oakland 94612 state California

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title 1. State Historic Resources Inventory
2. Berkeley Urban Conservation Survey
3. Berkeley City Landmark
has this property been determined elegible? _x_ yes ___ no

date 1. Nov. 1977 2. June 1978 3. June 1980 ___ federal 1. state ___ county 2,3. local

depository for survey records 1. Office of Historic Preservation, Box 2390/ 1220 K Street,
2. Berkeley Architectural Heritage Assn., 1930 Addison Street,
3. Landmarks Commission, City of Berkeley, 2180 Milvia Street,

city, town 1. Sacramento 95811 2, 3. Berkeley 94704 state California

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
x excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	x original site
___ good	___ ruins	x altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Berkeley Post Office is located one block west of Shattuck Avenue (main business street on the west half of the block bounded by Allston & Harold Ways & Kittredge & Milvia Streets. The main facade is on Allston Way, where the adjacent corners are occupied by the YMCA, city office building (formerly Farm Credit), & Berkeley High School. The front section of the Post Office (130' frontage x 62' deep; 34' high) is 2 stories plus basement, with a hipped red tile roof; this houses the customer lobby, offices, & part of the work area. Behind this the work area extends another 162' south along Milvia St. in a flat-roofed, 1-story & basement building using the same wall & cornice & window motifs as the facade, even on the sides facing the driveway & loading dock. The northernmost 35' of this section is original; the southward extension, perfectly matched, was added in 1931-2. Construction of the whole is reinforced concrete.

Exterior finish is as described when the building opened: "Bedford, Indiana, limestone has been used up to the watertable line with granite steps; the walls above are of cement stucco with terra cotta trimmings having a sanded-cream finish, used for the first time on the Pacific coast. Kasota marble columns support the vaulted arches over the main entrance loggia " (Arch. & Eng., Oct.1915; early pictures show the columns dark, apparently red, but they are now the same sand color as the terra cotta). The arches, wide overhanging red tile roof, & classical details are common to 1910s post offices all over the country in the style sometimes called Second Renaissance Revival: the Berkeley post office has been described as "a free adaptation of Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital." The main feature of the Allston Way facade is an arcade of 11 high round arches on plain Tuscan columns, which runs the whole length of the main floor in front of a loggia about 10' deep. The arches are outlined in terra cotta, & a wide terra cotta belt course, with dentils, swags, medallions, & wave patterns, runs immediately below the 11 plain rectangular second-story windows & around the whole building, thus becoming the cornice ornamentation of the 1-story rear section. A smaller terra cotta frieze, with other classical motifs, tops the second story just below the eaves. The end sections of the facade, & also of the side walls, are heavily rusticated with cast blocks simulating stone. Each of these rusticated sections is topped with a terra cotta shield, & the very corners of the building are rounded & slightly set back between the sections of rustication. The roof is hipped, red tile over wood sheathing, & has a wide overhang with 2 rows of curved wooden brackets framing rectangular panels. This cornice soffitt was painted in 1979 in brown (brackets), blue & orange (panels), & sand (edges), at the same time that the whole exterior was cleaned & repainted in shades of beige & yellow & sand to highlight its details.

The whole building stands on a partly raised basement, with ~~fair-sized~~ windows on the west side where the grade is lower. Cornerstone is at north end of west side: "William G. McAdoo Secretary of the Treasury, Oscar Wenderoth Supervising Architect, 1914"; flagpole at NE corner. Across the front, granite steps rise from the sidewalk to the middle 5 archways of the loggia--7 steps at the east end, 10 at the west. Basement has 2 small windows with metal grilles at each end of the steps. The end arches have elaborate wrought iron railings, with heraldic shields & a diagonal rope pattern. The loggia has floor & baseboards of gray marble. Its inner wall--the front wall of the lobby--repeats the 11 arches & plain capitals of the outer arcade, & the end walls are also arched, resulting in a cross-vaulted ceiling. On the east end wall is a relief sculpture of postal workers, about 3' square, with the signature "David Slivka, Dec. 1937" worked into the address of one piece of mail, & the inscription "From U.S., To All Mankind, Truth Abode, On Freedom Road" on another. The 4th, 6th, & 8th arches have paired oak & glass doors with brass fittings; the door frames have modified Corinthian capitals which are repeated inside the building. The other arches have low cement windowsills with wave decoration & double-hung windows with their panes grouped in 3 vertical divisions. All the arches are glazed to the top, with functioning transoms.

Inside the building the arcade is reflected yet again in the screenline wall between the lobby & the workroom: the arches are again glazed, with the same arrangement of panes & transoms (these inside transoms are now painted or lined in white). It is as if the building was designed from the inside out, for the 3-part division of the windows, & the width of the arches themselves, ~~turn out to~~ fit around standard post office units of service windows & bulletin

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion	
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science	
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture	
___ 1500–1699	_x_ architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian	
___ 1700–1799	_x_ art	___ engineering	___ music		
___ 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater	
_x_ 1800–	_x_ communications	___ industry	_x_ politics/government	___ transportation	
		___ invention		___ other (specify)	

Specific dates 1914 **Builder/Architect** Oscar Wenderoth, Supervising Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Berkeley Post Office is a characteristic & well preserved product of the Treasury Department Supervising Architect's Office in the early part of this century, & embodies for the city of Berkeley the sense of mission which the government then put into its public building--"buildings which will educate & develop the public taste & eventually elevate it to a higher plane" (Arch. & Eng., Oct.1915). Outside & in, the building is conspicuous for fine & enduring materials. The lobby, particularly, is a civic treasure with its minimally altered marble, metal, & woodwork: especially since the 1908 City Hall was demoted to other uses, Berkeley has few if any comparable public spaces where citizens from all over the city come frequently & freely & can experience the quality workmanship & civic pride that used to be part of government building.(There is also a later history lesson, as well as an artistic experience, in the New Deal mural & sculpture added to the building in 1937.) The authorization of a post office building for Berkeley in 1910, & its completion in 1915, symbolized the city's coming of age, coinciding with a period of great economic & population growth & increasing political sophistication, Berkeley's Progressive charter & Socialist mayor reflecting the same quest for ideals & rationalization & reform that are evident in the extensive discussions of public building policy on the national level at that time. Downtown Berkeley is still essentially the Main Street that developed in the 1910s & 20s, & the well-patronized post office is important in keeping it alive. Though never formally part of any of Berkeley's (unrealized) civic center schemes, the post office is one important member of a de facto civic center to the west of Shattuck Avenue.

The inscription on Suzanne Scheuer's mural summarizes Berkeley's history prior to its incorporation in 1878, from the first white men in 1770 to "First Post Office established in Dr. Merrill's drug store 1877." In typical pioneer small town fashion, Berkeley's postal service for the next few decades occupied a succession of stores & rented premises--first adjacent to the university, then the downtown Shattuck Avenue branch of Merrill's from 1887 (where the 2nd postmaster was Napoleon Bonaparte Byrne, former Missouri planter whose 1868 Italianate villa in north Berkeley, the city's oldest known house, is on the National Register & about to undergo restoration). As in similar power struggles over train routes & the location of the city hall, the Shattuck Avenue business district won out over both the University & West Berkeley as the economic & governmental center of town, & after 1887 the city's main post office was always within a block or so of Shattuck & Allston Way.

By the fiscal year 1905-6 Berkeley's post office was doing $55,000 worth of business, & the city's rapid growth after the San Francisco earthquake helped it reach $100,000 by 1908-9. In 1913-4 it was $150,000: the amount necessary to qualify for a federally constructed post office building was at that time $10,000. When Clarence Merrill--son of the druggist--became postmaster in 1907 he immediately began campaigning for a building for Berkeley. Postmasters & chambers of commerce all over the country were of course doing the same, & in early 1910 the prognosis from Congress was "There are more than 200 public buildings that have been authorized, plans for which have not yet been touched by the Supervising Architect's office...it would take him until 1912 to prepare the plans...already authorized. Such being the case I doubt if any public buildings will be authorized at this session." However, by the end of the session Representative Knowland was able to report "I made a special plea for the city--citing its great growth, its postal receipts, & the important fact that it was the seat of the great State University....Of all the localities...Berkeley secured the biggest appropriation by $30,000"--a total of $180,000 for building & site, authorized in the omnibus public buildings bill of June 25, 1910. As a federal office building it would also house forestry & game comm-

9. Major Bibliographical References

see continuation sheet

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

10. Geographical Data

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Acreage of nominated property 0.95 (150' x 285')

Quadrangle name Oakland West **Quadrangle scale** 1:24000

UMT References

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A	10	561421910	4119131010	B			
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

Book 57, Block 2027, Parcel 5; lot about 150' wide along east side of Milvia Street, from Milvia Street on the north to Kittredge Street on the south.

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

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Betty Marvin

organization Berkeley Architectural Heritage Assn. **date** June 24, 1980

street & number Box 7066, Landscape Station **telephone** (415) 845-6591

city or town Berkeley 94707 **state** California

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state X 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 [redacted]

title **date** 12/10/80

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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boards. A service window at the east end & the postmaster's office at the west occupy the space of the 1st & 11th outside arches, so the lobby is 9 arches across—about 75'. It is about 15' deep, with, of course, arches around the service window & postmaster's door at the ends.

Floor is flecked gray vinyl tile, apparently over mosaic (early photos show this, & there is still some mosaic at the second floor landing). The baseboard is dark gray marble, with a light gray marble wainscot or dado above. The walls & coffered ceiling are painted white (as they originally were); the capitals of all the columns & a band joining them have been painted dark brown, & the east end wall below capital level is orange. All the capitals inside the lobby are Corinthian—cast ceramic (?) ones on the columns between the doors & windows & between the service bays, & carved wood on the entrance vestibule & postmaster's door.

There is a finely crafted wood & glass enclosed vestibule at the center door—all 3 doors originally had them, standard post office equipment to protect employees against drafts through the service windows. The postmaster's office door is framed in carved wood similar to the vestibule, with a triangular dentilled pediment & "Postmaster" in gold incised letters. In the arch around the door is a mural of figures from the Spanish & pioneer period of Berkeley's history, painted in 1936-7 by Suzanne Scheuer for the Treasury Relief Art Project. The service window at the opposite end, like several of the others on the screenline wall, retains the original finely detailed wood framing, windows with brass grilles & feather-chip glass, curved ledges for the customer to write on. At some bays the middle space is occupied by a bulletin board with hinged glass front. Piecemeal but reasonably discreet alterations have installed metal rolldown shutters at the eastern 3 bays, & stamp machines in 2 others. One bay contains parcel & letter drops, with brass & wood doors. The bay nearest the west end is occupied by lock boxes—brass & glass, with fretwork edging, & petals around the keyhole.

The westernmost arch leads to a corridor at right angles to the lobby, with office doors & stairs along its west side & more lock boxes on the east, the newer combination-locked ones set into what was originally more bulletin board space (as shown by carved letters in the wood frame). The second floor is occupied by finance & personnel offices, & closed to the public by a modern security door. The stairs are again finely crafted, with white marble treads, oak handrails, & ornamental metal endpieces & railings. At the landing the floor is of small square mosaic tiles, white with black & red fretwork around the edge—apparently matching the original lobby floor.

copied on board

issioners, internal revenue officials and a civil service exam room. Search for a lot "in the center of the city" began at once; of several offers (including one for George Pape's planing mill, now one of the city's prized historic buildings), Washington settled on the southeast corner of Allston and Milvia, where the pioneer Woolsey family had an apple orchard. The price was $30,000.

Plans for the new building were ready only in July, 1913. In April, 1914 the contract was let, with sixteen months to finish, and excavation was begun. The successful bidder as general contracter was Van Sant-Houghton, Co. of San Francisco and Berkley; the Van Sants, Sr. and Jr. were well established in Berkeley with expensive residential work in the Claremont district. They also worked on the 1915 Exposition in San Francisco. A week after ground breaking the postmaster and civic leaders were petitioning Washington to the effect that "substitution of surfaced brick for...cement in the outer part of the structure would be a decided improvement, and as there is sufficient money available...it is believed that the desire of the people of Berkeley for a first-class building will be granted": reinforced concrete and stucco was still somewhat unproven where civic grandeur was at stake. They also intended that the bricks would be made in California.

On September 29, 1915, the Gazette announced: "New Post Office to be Opened Tomorrow." The clerks would carry their materials over to the new building after closing time, so business would not be interrupted a minute, "and the same efficiency which has characterized it in the past will still be in evidence." The new building was also featured in a six page lead article in the October, 1915 Architect and Engineer: "The Berkeley Post Office -- an Example of the New Public Building Policy", namely, "to establish a national system of uniformity and business economy" and to clean up the pork barrel system in which "buildings were constructed to fit whatever appropriation the Congressmen were able to get".[2]

Within fifteen years the post office was doing $500,000 worth of business a year, and feeling cramped; in January, 1930 an annex was authorized (and completed in time for Christmas, 1932) which doubled the floor space, and, at about $200,000, was "the largest government improvement ever made here." A few years later there followed some smaller, but highly significant government improvements: a sculpture and a mural commissioned by the Treasury Relief Art Project. Both pieces are representative of the style and subjects of the program, and are well-preserved examples of the sadly ephemeral New Deal Art.[3] The fresco around the Postmaster's door, depicting life in Berkeley in the Mission, Land Grant and early Yankee Eras, was painted in 1936-37 by Suzanne Scheuer (b.1897) who had already painted the News-gathering scene in Coit Tower's Treasury Public Works of Art project, and did other murals in Texas post offices.[4] Complementing the nostalgic, regional/primitive local history of the Scheuer painting,[5] the relief panel of David Slivka represents another dominant theme in New Deal art: pride in the American Worker and Democracy. Slivka (b.1913), a graduate of the California

School of Fine Arts, also created sculptures for the 1939 Golden Gate Exposition and for S.F. public schools, and later worked in New York.

As for the post office building itself, it was hailed in its day as "a happy medium" between beauty and economy, standardization and locality, and in this it is a perfect example of government policy of its day.[6] The post office Supervising Architect's Office rhetoric of the era was consistently cost- and efficiency-conscious; the granite and marble and oak that look so rich today were chosen not just for local and national pride, but for endurance.[7] Detail after finely crafted detail turns out to have been standard utilitarian post office equipment -- utility defined to include not just economy but the credo that "no government office or place so thoroughly belongs to the people without distinction or reservation. The lobby is the principal point at which the postal service touches the people and for that reason is deserving of particular attention." The glassed-in vestibules were prescribed to protect employees from drafts, and the tall windows above the service counters put there on the principle that "It is desirable...that the operations in the workroom of the post office may be seen from the lobby... It is important that sympathetic and friendly relations be maintained between the personal representatives of the postal service and the patrons; and such relations will be promoted by giving the patrons the fullest opportunity to understand what is done in the post office."[8]

Again, in architectural style, the building embodies the policy described above. In this case, the arcaded, tile-roofed Renaissance design reflects the Supervising Architect James Knox Taylor's 1901 decision "to adopt the classic style of architecture...in order that the public buildings of the United States may become distinctive in their character" (in contrast to the previous mixture of Second Empire, Gothic, and Richardson Romanesque.)[9] Although the Berkeley post office is the product of a bureacracy rather than of one architect's vision (in fact, the actual architect is unknown[10]), it is clearly a "distinctive" building; it is also the "happy medium" between beauty and servicibility extoled in the era of its construction, and it continues to examplify those not-outmoded ideals although, over the years, it has several times been declared outmoded or outworn.[11] Most recently, there is concern that streamlined merchandising plans threaten the fine old materials, even the design, of the lobby, but it is hoped that, as in the words of Daniel Roper (U.S. Post Office..., 1917), the postal service does have a soul "which is the common cooperative endeavor of the people...and its ideal is the advancement of civilization" -- which today, we must certainly agree, includes preservation of the past.

Footnotes

[1]Just three days before the post office contract was announced, Werner Hegemann's famous city plan for Berkeley and Oakland was submitted to the City Club that had commissioned it. Thus the new post office did not figure directly in Hegemann's sketches for City Beautiful civic center to the east of the 1908 Beaux Arts city hall, but it adjoined the area Hegemann discussed

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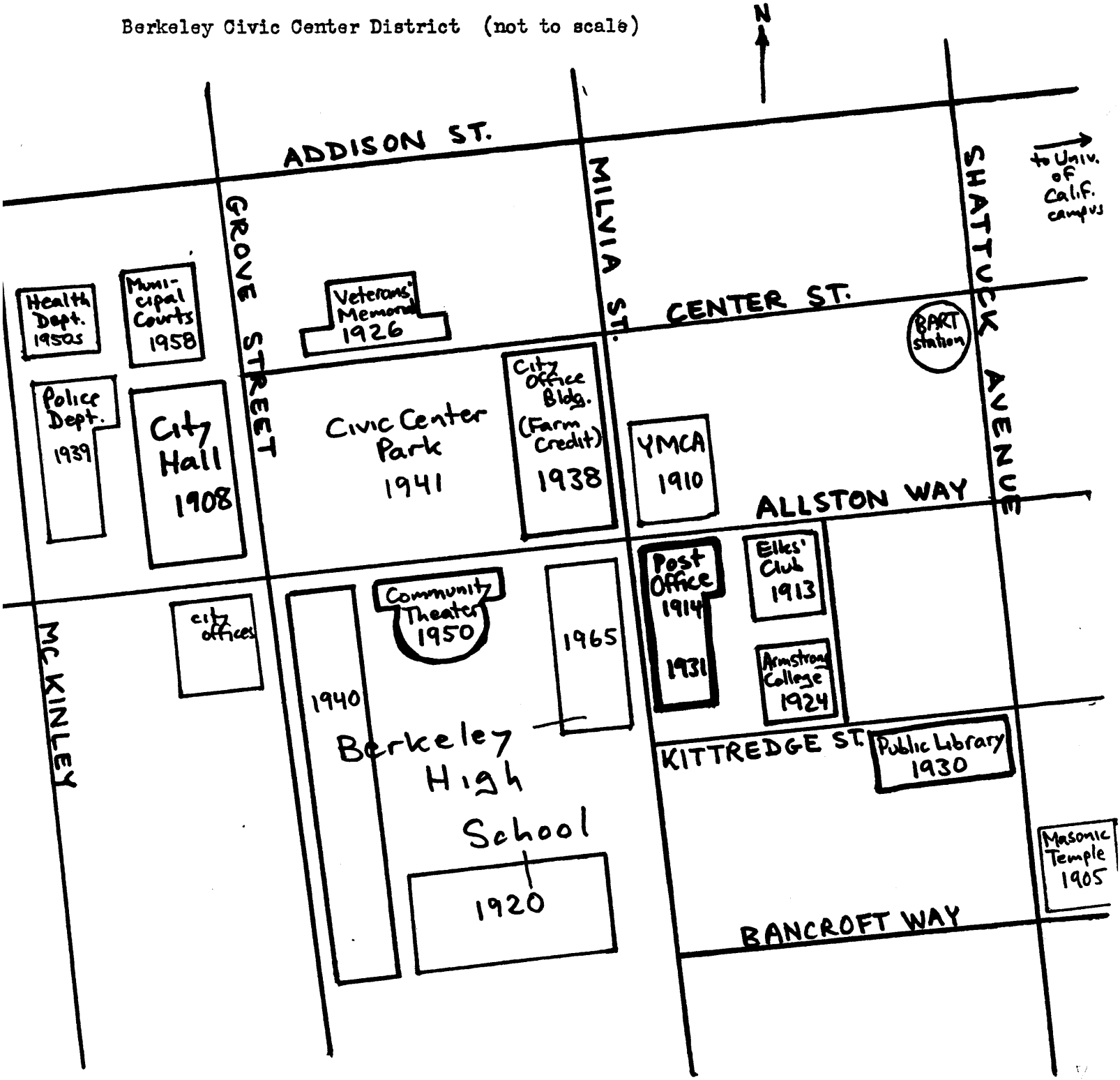
CONTINUATION SHEET U.S.Post Office, Berkeley CA ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3a

Berkeley Civic Center District (not to scale)



and linked it with the business district--as well as being fully in harmony with the motto he took for his chapter on Civic Art and Civic Centers, "They shall be simple in their homes but splendid in their public ways." In fact Hegemann accurately foresaw the way Berkeley's civic center really has developed: after the large scale Beaux Arts sketches, he acknowledged that "Berkeley is very slow in acquiring land" so it was really a case of "possibility of gradually grouping all public buildings." Just how gradually and in what a variety of styles might have surprised him, but there is a coherent district of civic and semi-public buildings extending from the public library at Shattuck and Kittredge to the Health Dept. at Addison and McKinley, with the post office, city hall and city offices building as main links in the chain. (see map)

[2]This reform spirit was reflected in local Berkeley politics as well: in 1909 the city adopted a charter including such Progressive measures as the nonpartisan ballot, initiative-referendum-recall, and the possibility of municipal ownership of utilities; in 1911 J.Stitt Wilson was elected mayor as a socialist, and Clarence Merrill's appointment as postmaster was said to have been at the instigation of University president Wheeler and other "leading citizens who desired to check the machine politicians who sought the appointment of one of their number." Civic concerns which shared the pages of the Berkeley Gazette with the progress of the new post office included street lighting and widening, women's suffrage (1911), and a sanitation campaign "Starve the Fly". (As a different measure of the city's coming of age, a generation after incorporation, these years also saw the frequent announcements of the deaths of pioneer Berkeleyans.)

[3]Despite the usual term "WPA mural", art work in post offices and other federal buildings actually was a separate set of programs under the Treasury Department, which had the construction and stewardship of public buildings from the early 19th century until WW II. The Treasury section of Fine Arts and Treasury Relief Art Project operated parallel to the WPA Federal Art Project from 1935 to 1939, with different funding and procedures and an attempt to cultivate the image that the treasury was after "quality", while the WPA offered "relief". The TRAP produced some 89 murals and 65 sculpture projects throughout the country, mostly in post offices "old and new, without appropriations for decoration but possessing fine spaces...We chose buildings in the vicinity of an available artist or group of artists"; the job would be awarded by competition, or directly to an artist who had attracted notice in a previous Treasury competition. Budgets were usually around $2000 to $5000 per project. (O'Connor, New Deal Art Projects...Memoirs)

[4]In view of the current interest in women artists, it is worth mentioning that Suzanne Scheuer's participation in the program was no rarity, at least in California where 1938 statistics showed 234 women out of 669 artists on relief, a higher percentage than in any other state. Five out of the fourteen California murals in the Treasury's publication Art in Federal Buildings

...1934-36 were by women (in contrast to only another five women out of 111 more murals nationwide).

5The Treasury favored subjects of "local history, pursuits, or landscape," or "the postal service...as a concrete link between every community of individuals and the federal government." Related, was the preference for mural work as "relatively public and subject to scrutiny and criticism...a little less liable to charges of boondoggling than easel painting"; even so, epithets like "Pork Barrel Renaissance" (Mag. of Art, 3/38) flourished throughout the period, and finally helped to close down the New Deal art programs and contributed to the low repute which allowed so many of the works to be lost and destroyed in so short a time. (Treasury works, being generally affixed to buildings, have fared marginally better; tales of WPA prints and easel paintings sold as scrap in government surplus wastebaskets are by now well known.)

6 The authorization and design of the Berkeley Post Office of course predated the recommendations of the Public Buildings Commission of 1913-14 (whose general recommendation was "practical standardization of the plans for buildings" and "the adoption of a business policy more...like that of private builders."), which for the most part reflected how post offices were already being constructed. There were outcries like that of the California State Minerologist against the San Francisco post office in the Aug. 1910 Architect and Engineer, but even there the complaint was less against the lavish use of marble and onyx than that they had been brought halfway around the world when California quarries produced as good a product. Somewhat ironically, the reformers' proverbial stone structures in small villages were becoming a dead issue at just about this time anyway, as the spread of reinforced concrete construction lessened the inequality between classes of post office buildings.

7Even under the new regulations marble was allowed in the lowliest post offices "where sanitary conditions demand." Although, in the words of Treasury secretary McAdoo, the department had a "mission of architectual education to every part of the country", the trouble was, of course, that the boundary was not always clear between this mission and--again McAdoo's words --"construction of many public buildings in small towns and locations where they are not needed...dictated by local reasons and without regard for the best interests of the government." Increasing nationwide demand for federal buildings--especially post offices--led to the use of omnibus public building bills from 1902 authorizing many projects at a time instead of debating each one separately. The inevitable result was that public building in the 1910s was enmeshed in constant and many-sided controversy between the desire for dignified, enduring, uplifting federal outposts and charges of extravagance on "gimcracks and curly-cues of architecture"; between the wish to bring every citizen "a government building representative of the sovreignty and glory of this great country" and the suspicion that that was nothing but local pork-barreling; between the Supervising Architect's Office's

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claim that it alone had the specialized expertise necessary for government building (and needed only additional staff to make up its two-year backlog) and the feeling that competition from private architects might result in better and cheaper work. The result was a series of congressional hearings on the Supervising Architect's Office and building expenditures in 1908, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1916, and a Public Building Commission (1913-14) whose general recommendation was for "practical standardization of the plans for buildings" and "the adoption of a business policy more...like that of private builders."

[8]This and the previous quote are from Daniel Roper, The United States Post Office: Its Past Record, Present Condition, and Potential Relation to the New World Era, 1917--a fine Progressive Wilsonian title and date, in addition to this pre-echo of "open covenants openly arrived at".

[9]Berkeley's design has echoes all over the country, some as early as 1898 (Akron, Ohio and Pottsville, Pa., though with arches less numerous and more Romanesque), and into the late 1910s and 20s (Pasadena, St. Petersburg, San Bernardino). Most of its close counterparts date from the early 1910s, and reflecting both the great volume of construction during this period and its real architectural distinction, a large percentage of the post offices now listed in the National Register date from those years.

[10]The Berkeley building was authorized and probably partly designed during James Knox Taylor's term as Supervising Architect, cornerstoned under Oscar Wenderoth, and opened under James Wetmore. This raises the subject of the structure of the Supervising Architect's Office, and the attribution of any of these federally designed buildings to any individual architect.

In 1913 Oscar Wenderoth reported that his department had a Washington staff of 253--somewhat smaller than the Justice Department and larger than the State Department--and was completing about 75 buildings a year. The office was divided into technical and executive branches, each with an officer in charge; within the technical department, architectural work went on in the drafting division of some 50 draftsmen, whose superintendent was the usual liaison to the post office. Wenderoth, like almost every Supervising Architect before and after him, complained that the job was overwhelmed with administrative duties and "the Supervising Architect has no opportunity for original work." Another continuing complaint was that overwork and low pay made for "a constantly shifting personnel, in which a standard of achievement is maintained with the greatest difficulty." Nevertheless it is continuity and tradition which impress one about the Taylor-Wenderoth-Wetmore period--not only resemblances among two decades of classical-Renaissance post offices, but things like the perfectly matched addition to the Berkeley post office.

Whatever the turnover of junior draftsmen, the men who became Supervising Architect spent many years in the department. In addition, Taylor, Wenderoth, Wetmore, and even Louis Simon, the last Supervising Architect (1933-39) were all of the same Beaux Arts generation, born between 1857 and 1871; in fact Taylor, Wenderoth and Simon all joined the department as draftsmen in 1895-97

Form No. 10-300a
(Rev. 10-74)

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(Wetmore, trained as a lawyer and administrator, not an architect, joined the treasury in 1885 as a court reporter. James Knox Taylor, who decreed the adoption of the classical style in 1901 and whose name is on many of these Renaissance-classical post offices, was born in 1857, trained at MIT and in offices including Cass Gilbert's, practiced privately, and joined the Treasury Department as senior draftsman in 1895, becoming Supervising Architect in 1897, and returning to private practice in 1912. Oscar Wenderoth, born in 1871, apprenticed in Philadelphia offices before becoming a draftsman for the Treasury in 1897, worked his way up to head draftsman for the House and Senate office buildings (1904), and later spent some time in the office of Carrere and Hastings before returning as Supervising Architect in 1913; his tenure was cut short by failing eyesight after two years. For the next 18 years the Acting Supervising Architect was James A. Wetmore--whether so titled because of his non-architectural background, or because Wenderoth was on some kind of disability leave, is not clear. Wetmore's successor was Louis Simon, MIT 1891, who had in fact been superintendent of the technical section since 1905: thus it is not surprising to find the 1931 Oakland Post Office a colonnaded full-dress Beaux Arts edifice, and its lobby uncannily similar to Berkeley's but in aluminum instead of wood and brass; nor to find the same year's addition to the Berkeley Post Office not only faithfully matched to the 1914 building, but given original ornamentation in the same idiom.

11 In 1933 the solution was a new parcel post station near the West Berkeley railroad tracks. In 1977 there was public outcry over the transfer of mail sorting to new regional facilities in Oakland, and citizens' fears that the post office might be abandoned altogether, in spite of its being the only branch in Northern California operating at a profit.

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