1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: U.S. Post Office and Courthouse (James R. Browning U.S. Court of Appeals)

Other Name/Site Number:

Designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior October 16, 2012

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 95-99 Seventh Street (Northeast Corner of Mission and Seventh Streets) Not for publication:

City/Town: San Francisco Vicinity: San Francisco North

State: CA County: San Francisco Code: 075 Zip Code: 94102

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property		Category of Property	
Private:		Building(s):	X
Public-Local:		District:	
Public-State:		Site:	
Public-Federal:	X	Structure:	
		Object:	

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing		Noncontributing	
buildings	1	buildings	0
sites	0	sites	0
structures	0	structures	0
objects	0	objects	0
Total	1	Total	0

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ Entered in the National Register
___ Determined eligible for the National Register
___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
___ Removed from the National Register
___ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: GOVERNMENT — Sub: Post Office, Courthouse

Current: GOVERNMENT — Sub: Courthouse

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Italian Renaissance
LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Beaux Arts

MATERIALS:
Foundation: Concrete, Metal (Steel)
Walls: Stone (Granite)
Roof: Composition, Glass
Other: Metal (Bronze)

Summary

Completed in 1905, the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in San Francisco, California, is nationally significant under Criterion 4 as the most opulent and high-profile design for a federal building entirely produced by the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury at the turn of the twentieth century. The building was conceived and realized against the backdrop of the Tarsney Act (passed 1893, implemented 1897-1912), legislation that opened mainly large federal building projects to competition by private architects and firms. The Tarsney Act resulted from decades of attack on the Supervising Architect's Office by the American Institute of Architects, which unfairly painted the talent, design process, and aesthetic judgment of the office as, at best, second-rate when compared to the private sector.

Under the leadership of the supervising architect, especially William Martin Aiken and James Knox Taylor, the Supervising Architect's Office, over many years, developed a Renaissance Revival design for the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. It is a palazzo in form, which was first popularized for institutional buildings in the United States during the antebellum period. After two decades of picturesque architectural eclecticism, the palazzo form was again embraced, but was greatly aggrandized through Beaux-Arts planning, sense of scale, and architectural and artistic articulation. The building's dignified and solid exterior is balanced by an opulent interior, both of which spoke clearly to the central role the government should play in a rapidly expanding nation. *The Construction News* noted this architectural dichotomy, observing in 1906: "The exterior is rather severely plain, after the manner of many Government structures. The interior, however, has had bestowed upon it the best in both design and workmanship, and takes on a rich and generous aspect."[1] The architectural success of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse places it on par with a very small group of the finest buildings designed by private architects and firms under the Tarsney Act.

The building maintains a very high level of integrity. The repairs to the building following the 1906 earthquake are included within the period of significance as they occurred within five years of its completion and restored the building to its pre-quake grandeur. An addition of 1933, enclosing the open end of the U-shaped building, was sensitively executed and is subservient to the original design. The repair, seismic retrofitting, and functional reconsideration that occurred in the wake of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake have both reasserted the building's character-defining features while also further safeguarding the building from future seismic damage.

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Introduction

The building is sited on a rectangular lot at the northeast corner of Seventh and Mission streets, which measures 275' x 334'. It is only minimally set back from the lot line and occupies virtually the entire parcel. Rising to a height of four stories, only three of which are visible from the street, the building is a granite-clad Renaissance Revival palazzo having a steel frame above a concrete foundation. It originally had a U-shaped plan, but a 1933 expansion closed off the U with a fourth wing.

Exterior

The Seventh Street (facing southwest) elevation is the building's primary façade. Although the building is technically four stories, the fourth story, set well back from the lower three, permits the reading of the façade as a classic Renaissance palazzo in its tripartite symmetrical composition. The raised first story consists of a regular rhythm of arches, each containing two windows topped by a lunette. The second story features simple square openings each also containing a window and aligned with the arched openings below. The lower two

[1] "A Notable Piece of Interior Finishing," *The Construction News* 29 Dec. 1906: XXII.

stories serve as a rusticated base supporting the third, and most elaborate, story. While the granite of the first and second stories is bush hammered lending their rusticated appearance, the granite cladding of the third story features a contrasting smooth finished stone articulated with evenly spaced horizontal low-relief bands wrapping the building, lending the façade a crisply finished look. Separated from the lower, two-story base by a belt course, the third story contains a third row of rectangular openings; the middle eleven bays have openings featuring triangular pediments. The final three bays at each end of the building are contained in projecting pavilions. At the center of the pavilions is a large two-story arch, which contains the principal entrances to the building with a window above. The doors are surrounded by tabernacle frames with triangular gables containing sculpture. The center bay of the pavilions is also emphasized by alternating triangular and segmental pediments over the third-floor windows and by a triangular pediment that rises above the cornice and merges with the decorative balustrade that runs along the roof.

The secondary Mission Street (southeast) and Stevenson Street (northwest) elevations are virtually identical. The composition of these elevations, including the arrangement of arched and rectangular window openings and their decorative treatments, replicates that of the Seventh Street elevation. The building entrances along these elevations, however, are slightly less elaborate than those on the main façade, signaling their secondary status. The projecting pavilions are also more simply articulated, but still highly decorative; notably, they have roundels containing a pink stone between the first and second stories on either side of the two-story entrance arch.

The northeast elevation, which is the 1933 addition, echoes the symmetry, tripartite composition, and basic detailing of the original building. It is considerably set back from the Mission and Stevenson façades, which lessens the impact of being a full four stories. This elevation is styled in a compatible, yet more restrained classicism, and the materials and composition refer to, but are more stripped down than the original. Vertically arranged in two parts, the first two stories form a rusticated base that aligns with the earlier part of the building. The upper two stories are sheathed in ashlar coursed blocks with smooth faces. The size and shape of the wall openings on the lower stories are similar to the other elevations. The decorative elaborations are minimal and this elevation is clad in terra cotta treated to resemble granite.

Rising from the roof of what was originally the post office workroom, the interior court walls reveal the building's second, third, and fourth stories. Like those of the exterior elevations, these interior walls are characterized by their regular rhythm of window openings. All three stories feature vertically arranged pairs of rectangular windows without trim. The window bays of the third story are differentiated from the stories above and below through the addition of a pair of quarter round windows arranged above the rectangular pair. The interior walls are clad in smooth-faced granite and terra cotta brick. A more modest version of the cornice that graces the building's exterior punctuates the interior roofline. It is punctuated by a series of decorative lion heads.

Interior

The first and third floors of the original building contain the major public and most elaborately detailed and ornamented spaces. The second floor primarily features office space and its decorative flourishes are more modest than those of the first and third floors. The fourth floor, while solidly designed, is workmanlike in its presentation. With the exception of its two courtrooms, the overall interior of the 1933 addition on all floors, in keeping with its exterior, generally is more restrained than the original spaces. The primary interior spaces establishing the building's architectural importance are described below.

First Floor

Post Office Corridor
The first floor is organized around a U-shaped double-loaded corridor. A 20'-tall, 260'-long elaborately ornamented corridor punctuated at either end by a vaulted rotunda parallels the Seventh Street elevation. The rotundas are lit by stained glass windows and decorated with decorative mosaic tile. They are accessed from the street through pairs of cast bronze doors and are separated from the corridor by brass doors topped with large semicircular transom windows. Elliptical plaster arches supported by white marble pilasters are spaced at regular intervals along the corridor. The arches are linked by a series of plaster groin vaults covered with white and multicolored marble mosaic tile. The corridor's walls are clad in a variety of marbles to a height of 14'. In some locations of the corridor, the arched areas above the marble are clad in plaster while in other areas fixed transom windows fill the arches. The service windows for the former post office are arranged along the northeast wall. The flooring consists of multi-colored ceramic mosaic tiles designed and laid in a pattern that echoes the vaulted ceiling segments. The flooring under the rotunda domes is arranged in a circular pattern echoing the leaded-glass dome above.

Postmaster's Suite
In addition to the corridor and the former post office workroom space in the center of the building (now repurposed as a law library), the first floor contains a series of offices. Most significant among them are the suite of five offices designed for the postmaster. The postmaster's private office features soaring ceilings, wood beamed ceilings, mahogany paneled walls, marble floors, and a marble fireplace.

Third Floor

Great Hall
Known as the Great Hall, this area vies with the Post Office Corridor as the most elaborate and impressive space in the building. Housing the building's original three courtrooms, the Great Hall stands out because of the richness of the materials and quality of workmanship, which are most on display in the public spaces on this floor.

A double-volume, single loaded corridor with windows opening on to the interior courtyard on one side and regularly spaced doors leading to courtrooms and offices on the other characterizes the spatial organization of this floor. A series of elliptical plaster arches set atop slightly engaged circular marble columns and festooned with elaborate cast plaster decorative accents and a series of bare Edison-style light bulbs punctuate the corridor at regular intervals. The arches are spanned by groined vaults whose ribbing features cast plaster decoration accented with gold leaf. The Great Hall's walls are clad on one side in Italian marble that rises more than ten feet, topped by a plaster dentil molding, and finished with a three-part arched transom window allowing light from the corridor to penetrate the offices beyond it. The floor consists of multi-colored ceramic mosaic tile arranged in geometric patterns and composed so as to reinforce the rhythmic arrangement of the vaulted segments along the corridor.

Courtrooms
The third floor houses the building's original three courtrooms. Designed to accommodate trials, Courtroom Numbers One, Two, and Three are differently sized and articulated but share certain design characteristics. Among these elements are soaring ceilings, marble walls, stained glass skylights, carved columns, and decorative caryatids and cherubim.

Courtroom Number One features white marble walls punctuated by pairs of semi-engaged rounded columns, elaborately decorated coved plaster ceilings and dentil moldings, and a series of three skylights. With dimensions of 35' x 54' and a 20'-high ceiling, ceramic mosaic tile murals and panels surround the room.

Furnishings such as the judge's and clerk's benches are crafted of mahogany and marble. The floor is clad with ceramic mosaic tile and marble.

Courtroom Number Two is slightly smaller, measuring 31' x 35', but with a 22'-high ceiling. Its decorative flourishes are slightly more restrained and include a single skylight and a coffered plaster ceiling. The walls are clad in a combination of the white and yellow marble punctuated at regular intervals by contrasting decorative marble panels bordered by glass mosaic tiles and marble columns.

Courtroom Number Three features dimensions of 34' x 53' and a 22'-high ceiling. A series of paired marble pilasters, each enclosing a decorative marble panel topped by a broken pediment, punctuate the walls at regular intervals. Lunette shaped arches, each featuring a mosaic mural depicting a legal scene, span the distance between the pediments. Three skylights adorn this courtroom.

Judges' Chambers
Each of the courtrooms was designed with adjacent rooms to serve as judges' chambers. All three are lavishly appointed with extensive use of mahogany wood in wall paneling, doors, built-in bookcases, and floors. Ceilings in some places consist of intricately cast plaster, and others have marble-clad walls. Skylights are found in many of the rooms and each contains a fireplace. The most spectacular of these chambers is the Redwood Room, which contains elaborately carved wall paneling, decorative ceiling beams, and mantle surrounds all crafted of heavy redwood.

1933 Addition

Courtroom Numbers 4 and 5
The primary public spaces in the 1933 addition are two new courtrooms. Courtroom Numbers 4 and 5 both measure 35' x 55' and are identical in design. Expressing a minimally Art Deco aesthetic, the courtroom walls are clad in cork panels and punctuated with wood spandrels; marble is used sparingly. The ceilings feature a geometric cast plaster design. Six up-lights cast of bronze sound the courtroom's most dramatic note. The overall effect is sober and dignified. In addition to the new courtrooms, the 1933 expansion added a significant amount of office space to the building on the lower floors. In keeping with the stylistic restraint of the addition's exterior, interior design flourishes are minimal.

Summary of Finishes

The quality of design and materials found in the building's finishes virtually defies description. A sampling of the most sumptuous of the materials follows.

Walls and floors crafted of a wide variety of marbles appear throughout the building. While White Italian is most common for wall cladding, other marbles used in various decorative applications include: Pacific Gold and Black, Yellow Siena, Oriental Red, Red Numidian, Black Belgian, Pink Tennessee, Pavonazzo, Alaskan Gravina, Italian Cippolino, and Vermont Verde Antique. In addition to walls, floors, and decorative applications, marble is also used for stairway treads and landings.

The building features a wide variety of woods used in various applications including floors in the judges' chambers, jury rooms, and offices; window sashes and trim; doors and door trim; wall paneling; cabinetry; and fireplace surrounds and mantles. The wood species include mahogany, oak, and redwood.

Ceramic mosaic tiles laid in highly decorative patterns grace many floors throughout the building. Often, multi-colored tiles are laid in patterns that reflect the spatial organization and ceiling plan of the room. They also

grace the two domed vaults of the entrance rotundas on the first floor and serve as the medium for murals in the original courtrooms.

Most ceilings in the building are finished in plaster. In the more prominent public spaces, the treatment consists of highly ornamental coffering or elaborate casting.

Extensive original hardware consisting of solid bronze appears throughout the building in locks and latches; door stops; mail slots and chutes; window hardware, clocks, thermostats, and closets.

The building features extensive stained and leaded glass in skylights and other applications. Each of the original third floor courtrooms is lit by skylights trimmed in stained and leaded glass. In addition to their mosaic tile, domed entrance rotundas of the first floor also feature leaded glass domes.

Integrity and Legacy

Overall, the building is exceptionally well-preserved. Over the course of more than a century, the building has experienced programming changes and physical challenges. Neither the program changes that removed the Federal District trial court and post office from the building, nor the damage inflicted by two major earthquakes and subsequent retrofitting, nor the exceptionally sensitive 1933 addition and 1996 repurposing of the former post office sorting room, have resulted in a loss of integrity that diminishes the building's surpassing national significance. All deliberate changes were accomplished with great sensitivity to the building's historic fabric, minimally impacting its integrity of design, materials, and workmanship, and leaving its integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association unaffected. The building, therefore, retains ample integrity to convey its significance.

The April 18, 1906 Earthquake and Fire
Within a year of its completion, the building was tested by the San Francisco earthquake of April 18, 1906, and the resulting fire. The earthquake caused the ground in the general vicinity of the building to shift considerably, and its southwest corner, for example, subsided twenty-three feet.[2] While the interior finishes sustained damage, the building largely withstood the shaking. *The Wall Street Journal* reported on April 24 that "it now appears that many of the most prominent buildings will not even have to be rebuilt" and that the "new post office. [is] Not nearly so badly damaged as first thought."[3] Contemporary reports indicate that marble walls and mosaics along the corridors were among the most severe casualties of the earthquake.

The fire that followed the earthquake threatened the building as well, and caused severe damage to the opulent Redwood Room on the northeast side of the building's third floor, which housed the district judge's library.[4] In a 1907 *Washington Post* article on the reconstruction of San Francisco, U.S. Representative Julius Kahn noted the limited impact of the fire on the new federal edifice: "In the Post-office Building the fire was confined, fortunately to the chambers and library of the United States District Judge" (John J. DeHaven).[5] Kahn went on to write that total loss of the building to the fire was thwarted in part "through the herculean efforts of the government's employees."[6] In the aftermath of these twin disasters, the use of dynamite to raze heavily

[2] During the construction of the foundations, inquiries were made about "soft spots" in the soil at the portion of the site located at Mission and Seventh streets. Intriguingly, this was not the corner affected by the subsidence during the earthquake. See: "Work on the Post Office," *San Francisco Chronicle* 4 Mar. 1898: 3.

[3] "San Francisco Buildings," *The Wall Street Journal* 24 Apr. 1906: 6.

[4] National Park Service, "The Dowager Queen of Western Federal Architecture" in *An 'Unvanished' Story: 5,500 Years of History in the Vicinity of Seventh & Mission Streets, San Francisco*.

[5] (U.S. Representative) Julius Kahn, "The Rehabilitation of 'Frisco," *The Washington Post* 13 Jan. 1907: SM11.

[6] Postal employees are said to have used mailbags soaked in water from the tank for the hydraulic freight elevator to fight the fire. See: National Park Service, "The Dowager Queen."

damaged buildings across the street further shattered window glass and marble details in the building. Formal repair work commenced in 1908 and by 1910 the building was repaired, partially reconstructed, and fully restored to its pre-quake condition.

The skill involved with the design and construction of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was underscored by the building's survival. Interestingly, another building designed by the Supervising Architect's Office also survived the earthquake. The U.S. Branch Mint, San Francisco (NHL, 1961), completed in 1874 under supervising architect Alfred B. Mullett's supervision, was constructed with a novel granite and concrete "floating" foundation and did not collapse.

The 1933 Addition
By the early 1930s, recognition of the expanding federal jurisprudential demands of the Northern District of California and the Ninth Judicial Circuit dictated an expansion of the building. The building addition, designed by George W. Kelham, enclosed the U-shaped court. Constructed in terracotta produced to look like the granite used for the original portions of the building, the highly compatible addition also replicated its scale, massing, and organization of openings. The new wing honored the design of the original, and its slightly stripped down decorative articulation speaks as much to its subordinate location at the rear of the building as the period of its design and construction. It obscured the original ground-floor rear elevation, which contained the post office's loading bays. The addition was sympathetically designed and does not detract from the integrity of the building to its period of significance.

The October 17, 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake
In October 1989, the building again survived a major earthquake. As an enduring testament to the excellence of the building's engineering, it suffered serious, but eminently repairable damage during the seismic event. The scope of work for earthquake damage repair was extensive and, in particular, targeted areas with highly significant historic fabric. The scope also included extensive upgrades to the building's major systems including plumbing, electrical, HVAC, and communications wiring. Minor exterior changes occurred during this rehabilitation project. These included landscaping, new handrails, accessible ramps, and a seismic moat. Extensive restoration work to the building's interior finishes was also undertaken as part of this rehabilitation. For example, historic lighting and plaster work were repaired or recreated, exterior granite was cleaned, and interior plaster surfaces were repainted using historic colors.

Vital seismic strengthening of the building presented perhaps the greatest challenge to the repair and rehabilitation of the building. In order to avoid the widespread installation of extensive shear walls that would have decimated essential character-defining features of the building, the rehabilitation team designed a base isolation system that serves to insulate the building from the effects of ground shaking. Installed in the basement and underneath the foundations, the base isolation system does not affect any major character-defining features of the building. Shear walls were installed in strategic locations to supplement the base isolation system. Historic fabric was retained, removed and replaced, or recreated as needed.

The major rehabilitation of the building necessitated by the earthquake repairs and seismic upgrade provided the opportunity to reassess its programming functions. Thus, in conjunction with the post-Loma Prieta earthquake repairs, the post office was relocated to a new building. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill repurposed the former ground-floor sorting room for the post office to accommodate a law library. The redesign incorporated the essential character-defining features of the original post office, including the lobby area with its service windows, while adapting the utilitarian space once occupied by the post office workroom to a new use. The open court above the workroom/library remains open as it has since the building's original construction. The building reopened in 1996 as the U.S. Court of Appeals, once again exhibiting the original magnificence of both its exterior and interior. The original character-defining spaces, features, and materials have been expertly

protected and its integrity is strong. In 2005, the building was renamed to honor the service of James R. Browning.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide:__ Locally:__

Applicable National Register Criteria:	A__ B__ C X D__
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):	A__ B__ C__ D__ E__ F__ G__
NHL Criteria:	4
NHL Theme(s):	III. Expressing Cultural Values 5. Architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design
Areas of Significance:	Architecture
Period of Significance:	1897-1910
Significant Dates:	1906
Significant Person(s):	N/A
Cultural Affiliation:	N/A
Architect/Builder:	William Martin Aiken, Supervising Architect of the Treasury (1895-97) James Knox Taylor, Supervising Architect of the Treasury (1897-1912) George Kelham (1933 addition)
Historic Contexts:	XVI. Architecture G. Renaissance Revival (1830-1920)

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Introduction

Initially constructed between 1897 and 1905, the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in San Francisco (renamed the James R. Browning U.S. Court of Appeals in 2005) is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 4 as a superlative Beaux-Arts Renaissance Revival public building designed by the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury.[7] The magisterial architecture of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse physically represents the increasing affluence and sophistication of a maturing nation and new world power, a building devoted not to private concerns, but to the needs and functions of the government. It also documents an important period in the transformation of the practice and output of the Supervising Architect's Office. The building was conceived and realized during the period when the office was under attack by the American Institute of Architects (AIA), an organization that felt government-designed public buildings were architecturally substandard and desired to open large federal construction projects to competition by private architects and firms. The AIA's lobbying efforts paid off with the passage of the Tarsney Act, passed in 1893, but not implemented until 1897 through 1912. The architectural vigor and functionality of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse and its high quality craftsmanship and finish undermined the rationale behind the Tarsney Act as the building holds architectural significance at least equal to a handful of the most important buildings designed by private firms for the government under the act.

Under the leadership of the supervising architect, in particular William Martin Aiken and James Knox Taylor, the architects and draftsmen of the Supervising Architect's Office looked to the Italian Renaissance palazzo as a model for the building, which they aggrandized via a thoroughly modern process of Beaux-Arts design. As such, the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse exhibits a complex merger of state-of-the-art engineering with a number of artistic disciplines: architecture, sculpture, painting, stained-glass, and decorative arts. The designers and fabricators incorporated rich materials collected from places around the world into a single design that truly represents a Beaux-Arts "unity of the arts." Contemporary and later critiques remark on the totality of the building's masterful design and the quality of its materials and finishes. A 1905 issue of *Sunset Magazine*, a nationally influential lifestyle magazine, which at the time was published in San Francisco, proclaimed the building "a post office that's a palace" and "the new federal building is the best constructed building in the United States."[8] The latter statement was not merely an instance of boosterism by the locally-published magazine as the building did not collapse during the 1906 earthquake, although it was damaged by the shaking and the subsequent fire. Repaired and refinished between 1908 and 1910, the building architecturally records a pivotal moment when a city, region, and nation were reaching new heights of world importance.

Establishing the Courts and the Postal Service in California

In the years following California's admission to the Union in 1850, the federal court system and physical requirements of its buildings evolved into a more elaborate bureaucracy to serve increasingly complex needs. The first federal court in California was immediately established in 1851 and met in the Merchants' Exchange Building on Battery Street between Washington and Jackson streets, a prestigious location in the heart of the financial district. In its early years, the federal court primarily adjudicated ownership cases stemming from land grants made under Spanish and Mexican rule. In 1855, the higher-ranking U.S. Circuit Court of California was established and in 1858 the courts moved to their own building, also on Battery Street. The Federal Ninth

[7] In this nomination, the building will be referred to merely as the "U.S. Post Office and Courthouse." Other buildings with similar historic names will be clearly differentiated through the use of the city of their location.

[8] Francis J. Dyer, "A Post Office That's a Palace: Details Concerning the Magnificent Structure Uncle Sam has Built in San Francisco," *Sunset Magazine* 15 (Aug. 1905): 339.

Circuit, made up of the districts of California, Oregon, and Nevada, was created in 1866. Aside from the needs generated by natural growth, the California Gold Rush and its accompanying disputes added to the California Courts' responsibilities.

As the court system grew in size and complexity, it also became somewhat nomadic. Soon after the formation of the Ninth Circuit, the court's new downtown quarters were destroyed by fire, and it met for a time in a succession of temporary facilities, all in the upscale financial district. Responding to the rapid growth of the state, Congress split California into Northern and Southern districts in 1880, and the courts moved again to an existing building. In an attempt to ease congestion in the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was established in 1891. As more states and territories were added to the Union, the Ninth Circuit also expanded to encompass Washington, Montana, Idaho, Arizona, Alaska, and Hawaii in addition to California. Today, the Ninth remains the largest of the Federal circuits.

The U.S. Postal Service established its first San Francisco office in 1848 and its growth paralleled the expansion of the court system. In response to the fast pace of population growth, new housing, and the commerce accompanying the gold rush, the ever-expanding postal service was housed in a series of downtown buildings. In 1855, the post office obtained grander quarters in the U.S. Customs House on Battery Street. As the complexity of the local service continued to grow, additional major branch stations were quickly constructed between 1886 and 1898.[9] Very quickly it became clear that a new federal building was needed to accommodate the courts' increasingly heavy caseload and the rapid expansion of the postal service in San Francisco.

The Site in a Rapidly Growing City

San Francisco is located at the northern end of a peninsula with the Pacific Ocean to the west and San Francisco Bay to the north and east. The California Gold Rush, which began in 1848, was a major catalyst for the city's development. San Francisco grew rapidly to become the largest city on the West Coast. The wealth and culture initiated by the Gold Rush were followed by success in silver mining, and this sustained prosperity resulted in the rapid growth of the city to the west and south in the vicinity of Seventh and Mission streets. The wharves of the waterfront were repeatedly extended to accommodate expanding urban development. By the 1880s, street paving was well underway, which was soon followed by the electrification of the cable car lines.[10]

During the earliest growth and expansion of San Francisco, the surrounding area of the future home of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse (south of Market Street at the intersection of Seventh and Mission streets) was devoted to wholesale goods, small manufacturing, warehouses, railroad yards, and alley residential buildings. In local jargon, the area lay "South of the Slot." As described by Jack London:

> The Slot was an iron crack that ran along the center of Market Street, and from the Slot arose the burr of the ceaseless, endless cable. North of the Slot were theater, hotels, and shopping districts, banks and respectable houses. South of the Slot were the factories, slums, laundries, machine shops, boiler works, and the abodes of [the] working class.[11]

Despite the less than laudable connotation given to streets south of Market, the federal government endeavored to build a new federal building there, distant from desirable, and expensive, downtown and the central business district real estate. U.S. Congressman William W. Morrow of San Francisco introduced a bill in 1885, which

[9] Page & Turnbull for the U.S. General Services Administration, "United States Court of Appeals, San Francisco: Historic Structure Report," 2009, 4-5.

[10] National Park Service, "The Dowager Queen.

[11] As quoted in Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 53.

requested $350,000 to purchase a site for a joint courthouse and post office in San Francisco. Congress appropriated that amount in 1887 and directed the Secretary of the Treasury to appoint a three-person committee to select a site. The committee determined that no suitable site could be purchased with the allotted funds. The land acquisition appropriation was subsequently increased to $850,000 in 1887 and a second time to $1,250,000 in 1891.

After considering two dozen sites, L. G. Harvey offered the commissioners a property at the northeast corner of Seventh and Mission streets, measuring 275' square at a cost of $700,000. The lot, however, was deemed inadequate and it was initially rejected. Harvey later proposed increasing the size by 50' along Mission Street for an additional $90,000. Tellingly, of the more than twenty proposals received the commissioners ranked this parcel second because the large sandy site was both situated over a mile away from the central business district and south of Market Street, which even today still serves as somewhat of a boundary between the more upscale urban center to the north and supporting businesses and facilities to the south. But the large site was both affordable and available, and on October 7, 1891, the offer of $1,040,000 was accepted for the new federal building.[12] Remote from the city's center of business, San Francisco's chamber of commerce immediately protested the decision, but, as reported by *The Washington Post*, "Secretary [of the Treasury Charles] Foster will favor the retention of the site selected."[13] Two years later, Congress appropriated $2,500,000 for construction of the building on the lot at Seventh and Mission.[14]

The Design of Federal Buildings in the Nineteenth Century

Operating between 1852 and 1939, the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury was responsible not just for the highest echelons of federal architecture, but also, as observed by historian Antoinette J. Lee, for "enrich[ing] the American landscape with hundreds of lesser buildings—post offices, customhouses, courthouses, and marine hospitals."[15] As the office populated the nation with federal buildings, its own practice of architecture and its relationship to the private sector practice evolved, all of which impacted the design of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse.

The need for a government design office with a centralized administrative structure rose from the immediate and urgent demands of the three branches of government: executive, judicial, and legislative, which began operating on March 4, 1789. Along with the Post Office, the Continental Congress established the Treasury Department in 1775, which was to control the financing and construction of federal buildings once appropriated by Congress. One of the earliest needs was for customs houses, vital to regulate trade and raise revenue. The customs service with its fifty-nine districts in eleven states was a strong presence in many places and, because of this its early customs houses were designed by important architects such as Benjamin Latrobe, Robert Mills, John Norris, Ithiel Town, and Ammi B. Young. They were designed, as called for by customs collector Samuel Swartwout in 1832, to be "spacious, safe, [and] secure."[16]

[12] Page & Turnbull, 5-6.

[13] "The San Francisco Site," *The Washington Post* 17 Oct. 1891: 4.

[14] U.S. General Services Administration, "James R. Browning U.S. Court of Appeals Building, San Francisco, CA: Building History," accessed online, 22 Dec. 2011, https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/historic-preservation/explore-historic-buildings/find-a-building/all-historic-buildings/james-r-browning-us-court-of-appeals-building-san-francisco-ca.

[15] Antoinette J. Lee, *Architects to the Nation: The Rise and Decline of the Supervising Architect's Office* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), viii. Unless otherwise noted, all general information about the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury is drawn from this publication, which is the only intensive study to date on its history and influence. Direct quotes from this publication are provided with individual references.

[16] As quoted in Lee, 18.

In 1836, Robert Mills was named "Architect of Public Buildings" and, though he was "an independent officer of the Government," is considered to be the first in the line of supervising architects.[17] Mills launched a new era of federal architecture with his designs in Washington, D.C., for the East Wing of the Treasury Department in (1836-42, finished in 1869 with the completion of its fourth wing; NHL, 1971), the first portion of the General Post Office (1839-42, with an addition of 1855-66; NHL, 1971, now the Hotel Monaco), and the Patent Office Building (1836-42, finished in 1868 with the completion of its fourth wing; NHL, 1965, now the National Portrait Gallery and Smithsonian American Art Museum). Mills's designs set the stage for high quality federal architecture after 1852 with the naming of Ammi B. Young as the first supervising architect. Under Young, the Supervising Architect's Office designed many new federal buildings across the country. These stone Greek Revival and Renaissance Revival buildings exuded solidity and permanence in a rapidly expanding nation.

During the Civil War, nearly all construction, public and private, ceased, and, as the nation recovered, architecture "took off in a new direction."[18] The output of the Supervising Architect's Office, accordingly, embodied the trend towards historical and architectural eclecticism. Alfred B. Mullett, supervising architect from 1866-74, became known for Second Empire design, most notably the State, War, and Navy Building (now the Eisenhower Executive Office Building) in Washington, D.C. 1871-88; NHL, 1971). High Victorian Gothic and Richardsonian Romanesque also became featured styles of the Supervising Architect's Office. As the last decade of the nineteenth century began, however, the "bloated high Victorian architecture associated with the corruption of Ulysses S. Grant and Boss Tweed…or any architecture that was unschooled, highly agitated, and indiscriminate in copying" was rejected as vulgar and lacking in the unity the country sorely desired.[19] In time, the architectural establishment came to believe that only the government remained mired in passé architectural modes.

Antoinette J. Lee has observed that there was ultimately backlash against the "cacophony of towers, turrets, polychromatic images and irregular massing" used in federal design.[20] The post offices, courthouses, and custom houses were frequently among the most imposing in their city or town, which would have made their picturesque design all the more visible and open to criticism. In the 1870s and 1880s, a growing number of American architects had been educated at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and increasingly found public and institutional design trends at home retrograde and unsuitable to a nation fast becoming one of the world's most important. Beginning in the 1880s, the American Institute of Architects (AIA), using the pages of *The American Architect*, began a campaign against the Supervising Architect's Office. As noted by Antoinette J. Lee, "the AIA argued that federal buildings designed under the Supervising Architect's Office were more costly than those erected for state, municipal, and private clients and were more inferior in architectural design and treatment."[21] This activity coincided with the planning, construction, and architectural triumph of the White City at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, which was a showcase of Beaux-Arts design. Together, the movement by the AIA against the closed design operations of the Supervising Architect's Office and widespread acceptance of Beaux-Arts planning and classical design resulted in the passage of the Tarsney Act to increase the standards of the Supervising Architect's Office and produce higher-quality designs by allowing private firms to compete for federal building projects.

In February 1893, U.S. Representative John Charles Tarsney of Missouri introduced a bill that allowed private architects to compete for federal commissions, which was the culmination of a twenty-year battle by the AIA. Political struggles revolving around the power of the Secretary of the Treasury prevented such competition to actually occur until four years later with the appointment of Lyman J. Gage as Secretary. The persuasive,

[17] Lee, 35.
[18] Leland M. Roth, *American Architecture: A History* (Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 2001), 265.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Lee,164.
[21] Ibid., 154.

powerful Chicago financier had served as the president of the board of directors and chief fundraiser for the World's Columbian Exposition's "White City." Gage had worked closely with Daniel Burnham and the rest of the Exposition's complement of architects and landscape architects. Now at the helm of the Treasury, and the Supervising Architect's Office, he finally allowed the bill to be fully implemented.

Under the plan to implement the Tarsney Act, a jury consisting of the supervising architect and two others would critique the designs of no fewer than five architects invited by the Secretary of the Treasury. The Tarsney Act did open plum commissions to private sector architects, few of whom applied for the supervising architect's position as it periodically opened up, in large part because of the comparatively low salary. The Tarsney Act's impact on the architectural modes used in the design of government buildings within the Supervising Architect's Office is less clear. Antoinette J. Lee has observed that, "The early buildings designed under the Tarsney Act may have influenced the actual application of the [Classical and Colonial Revival] styles to federal buildings. These buildings themselves were reflective of the predominant national taste in architecture."[22] Indeed, James Knox Taylor's tenure as supervising architect (1897-1912) saw almost all federal buildings designed in the Classical or Colonial Revival modes. Furthermore, the Renaissance Revival design for the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in San Francisco, which largely occurred before implementation of the Tarsney Act, demonstrates that the AIA's arguments, which claimed a retrograde design philosophy within the Supervising Architect's Office, were either spurious or already in the process of changing.

A Beaux-Arts Reinterpretation of the Renaissance Revival Palazzo

The Tarsney Act's impact on federal design merely reinforced changes already being made within the office. The Supervising Architect's Office developed the design for the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse over the course of the 1890s and broke ground for the building in the year that the Tarsney Act was implemented. It was the particular dedication of supervising architects William Martin Aiken (1895-97) and James Knox Taylor (1897-1912) to Beaux-Arts design ideals and the emergence of an American Renaissance in architecture that began to significantly alter the character of federal architecture developed in the Supervising Architect's Office.

For the design of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, the Supervising Architect's Office turned to the palazzos of the Italian Renaissance for inspiration. The Renaissance Revival in America had two primary periods of development, one predating the Civil War and one postdating it. The introduction of Italian Renaissance forms and elements into antebellum American architecture was part of a broader revivalist spirit that defined the second quarter of the nineteenth century, competing most notably with the Greek Revival and Gothic Revival. The bracketed eaves appearing on many vernacular commercial and urban residential buildings were the most easily applied and widely seen features of Renaissance Revival, but the antebellum period also saw the popularization of the palazzo form. Architectural historian Richard Guy Wilson has observed the "brief appearance of the Renaissance palazzo formula during the 1840s and 1850s in the work of architects such as Ammi B. Young, who later designed important federal buildings, and John Notman."[23]

The best-known early landmarks of the Renaissance Revival in the United States, all derived from Renaissance palazzo forms, are Mill's aforementioned General Post Office (1839-42, with additions); John Notman's brownstone Philadelphia Athenaeum (1845-47; NHL, 1976), and the A. T. Stewart Company Store in Manhattan (Trench & Snook, 1845-46; NHL, 1978). Notman's Athenaeum in particular has become a touchstone in American architectural history. Leland Roth has observed that the building was "one of the earliest manifestations of a correct use of the palazzo mode," and Richard Guy Wilson has argued that it spoke

[22] Ibid., 209-10.

[23] Richard Guy Wilson, "Architecture and the Reinterpretation of the Past in the American Renaissance," *Winterthur Portfolio* 18:1 (1983): 71.

particularly to the desire of educated Americans to be viewed as genteel and civilized.[24] Palazzo prototypes were particularly well adapted to the emerging tradition of cast-iron construction most often used in commercial districts, as expressed in work such as the Haughwout Store in Manhattan (1857); the form's traditional urban location suited growing American cities very well.[25] Because the palazzo was domestic in nature and initially created for urban centers, it quickly became a favored model for large urban mid-nineteenth-century houses as well. Renaissance Revival architectural ideas quickly spread into the country's interior due in no small part to the efforts of Ammi B. Young during his tenure as supervising architect. In the 1850s, Young utilized the palazzo prototype for a number of new U.S. custom houses in such cities as Rutland, Vermont, Mobile, Alabama, and Cleveland, Ohio.[26]

Two decades of architectural eclecticism began waning in the 1880s and the Renaissance Revival began a second, more prolific flowering from that time into the first decades of the twentieth century. The resurgence of the architectural mode occurred within a general strain of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century monumental classicism known most inclusively as American Renaissance. The major distinctions between the early and later Renaissance Revival buildings were a vastly increased scale and the influence of Beaux-Arts planning principles during the later period.

The rapid expansion of the United States meant that designs based on the Renaissance palazzo were even more numerous and geographically widespread during the second period, including government buildings, private clubs, libraries, and art museums. The Villard Houses (1882-84), a unified group of attached dwellings in what is now Midtown Manhattan designed by McKim, Mead & White, signaled a shift in national taste in the design of large buildings. American architecture became increasingly defined by balance and solidity, as explained by Leland Roth: "just as American businesses also consolidated and sought standardized, more efficient methods in manufacturing and product distribution, and just as business and industry sought a greater sense of order, so, too, a wish for common standards appeared among architects in the 1870s."[27] The Boston Public Library, also by the celebrated firm of McKim, Mead & White (1888-95; NHL, 1986), is generally considered to be the most consequential Beaux-Arts Renaissance Revival palazzo. As a (non-federal) public commission designed by a private firm, the Boston Public Library was an example of how public architecture could be enhanced through the participation of private architects. Although much admired, the Boston Public Library had only a limited audience with regard to changing expectations for public architecture; not so, the "White City" of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Millions visited the exposition and it had a massive impact on how Americans conceived of public architecture and space. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Seale noted that "The fair sold the public on Beautiful Architecture, with the corollary that real beauty could only be created by established professionals…Over and over again, in the remotest places, mayors and businessmen pored over pictures of the White City and imagined what their own towns might become."[28]

The White City and the Boston Public Library proclaimed the realized potential of the private architect in highly public realms and sealed the combination of Renaissance Revival forms and vocabulary with Beaux-Arts planning and scale in the development of a proud American architectural identity. For many, the wealth, knowledge, and artistic development during the Italian Renaissance were useful comparatives for late-nineteenth-century conditions in the United States. Gilded Age tycoons were effectively compared to the Medicis of Renaissance Florence for their great wealth, influence, and increasing artistic patronage; America,

[24] Roth, *American Architecture*, 265-66; Wilson, 70-1.
[25] Marcus Whiffen and Frederick Koeper, *American Architecture, 1607-1976* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 204-5.
[26] For more information on the work of the Supervising Architect's Office in the 1850s, see Lee, chapter 3.
[27] Roth, *American Architecture*, 265.
[28] Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Seale, *Temples of Democracy* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 215.

not Europe, had the direct and intimate intellectual kinship with the Italian Renaissance.[29] It was no accident that Charles McKim turned to the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, and the Palazzo Farnese and the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome for inspiration in the design of the Villard and Boston Public Library projects. Indeed, it was McKim who co-founded the elite American Academy in Rome with the energetic support of the Carnegie, Frick, Rockefeller, and Vanderbilt families. Many critics believed that America was a natural "successor to the Italian Renaissance, sometimes specifically using the work of Charles Darwin to link America to the Renaissance as part of the evolutionary process."[30] When the design of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse began in the 1890s, a Beaux-Arts Renaissance Revival palazzo was both modish and the most appropriate choice for a major federal building in an important American city.

The Design and Construction of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in San Francisco

The design of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse took as much time as its construction and collaboratively involved a number of supervising architects and the many architects and draftsmen in the Supervising Architect's Office. By the 1890s, the position of supervising architect had moved from one primarily of designer to one of administrator. Antoinette J. Lee has observed: "Although it can be discerned through the buildings and written statements that each supervising architect possessed a well-developed philosophy that guided the design staff, the connection between each supervising architect and the design of each building became more distant with the passage of time."[31] An increasingly hands-off approach was possible both because spatial arrangements and processes related to the function of the courts, post offices, and in customs collection were increasingly standardized, and, despite the AIA's claims otherwise, the Supervising Architect's Office was actually able to attract skilled practitioners. Movement of the supervising architect into a more administrative position allowed him to deal more effectively with the vagaries of the federal bureaucracy and also responded to his often short appointment. Interestingly, given the AIA's opinions, this structure was not all that distinct from large private architectural firms where one or more named partners—the ones for whom design attribution was given—more and more relied on the firm's junior architects or draftsmen. Yet the negative critique by the private architectural lobby about the abilities and structure of the Supervising Architect's Office remained well in place. Reporting in 1896 on local architects' complaints about the design of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, the *San Francisco Chronicle* conveyed architect George H. Sander's opinion: "The design was a good illustration of the fallacy of giving such work to political departments. It should be given out to competition…It was impossible for a Government architect in Washington to carry six or seven buildings at once."[32]

Willoughby J. Edbrooke was the first supervising architect involved with the design portion of the project, but very little occurred under his tenure as Congress did not appropriate funds quickly enough for him to have much of an impact. Edbrooke visited the site in January 1893 to, in his reported words, "examine the site of the proposed Postoffice [*sic*] structure…so as to determine what style of building would look best in that particular place."[33] When asked by a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* to give his opinion about the "sort of a post office we are going to have," Edbrooke replied, "nothing can be said about it architecturally until I have had more time and until Congress decides how much money it will appropriate."[34] Edbrooke departed in April 1893, having, it seems, only completed a sketch rendering of a building.[35] Detailed work on a design was

[29] Wilson, 69.
[30] Ibid., 70, 82.
[31] Lee, 160.
[32] "Designs for the New Post Office," *San Francisco Chronicle* 20 Nov. 1896: 8.
[33] "Edbrooke in Town," *San Francisco Chronicle* 2 Jan. 1893: 8
[34] Ibid. In response to a question about the timing of the work, Edbrooke stated: "The present administration will last but two months longer, and, as Congress must make the appropriation for the edifice, it is impossible to say when the work will reach the supervising architect's office."
[35] Page & Turnbull, 6.

probably started during Jeremiah O'Rourke's term as supervising architect (April 1893-September 1894), and while Charles E. Kemper, the chief clerk, acted in that capacity (September 1894-April 1895); however, it was not until William Martin Aiken's tenure (April 1895-June 1897) that the project had progressed enough to elicit comment from the architectural community.

In November 1896, the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran a scathing article about the proposed design of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. A drawing of the Seventh Street elevation was included and captioned "The Atrocity Designed at Washington for San Francisco's Postoffice."[36] The image of the elevation and an accompanying diagrammatic first-floor plan record a moment in the design process that was considerably advanced and, at least in footprint, overall functional arrangements, and architectural organization, is recognizably the building as eventually constructed. The elevation shows clear influences of the Spanish Colonial Revival, particularly in the articulation of the towers, which seemed to be the center of opposition to the design. The writer of the *Chronicle* article mused: "Is it a fish market? a union depot? a barrel factory? a seaside hotel? or what is it? are among the questions asked by those who look at designs for the new Postoffice [*sic*] for San Francisco as prepared in the office of the Government architect at Washington. The proposed structure is devoid of the character of a Government building and displays no scholarly architecture in its lines."[37] The article was largely a platform for San Francisco architects to express the need for private involvement in government commissions, but, in truth, aspects of the design seemed unresolved and disjointed. Towers had been a common feature of public buildings designed by the supervising architect's office for many years and likely seemed a tired architectural device to relieve the "long squatty structure" or to establish the building's importance:

> Two tall towers or chimneys surmount the architectural monstrosity. The purpose of these towers is included in the mystery that pervades the whole design. It has been guessed that they might serve as signal stations or that they could be used to fly kites from. It has been suggested that the only ability which these chimneys could possibly serve in connection with a post-office building is that of crematory for dead letters.[38]

The critique of the design was not all negative. In May 1897, an article in *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* praised improvement of the designs coming out of the Supervising Architect's Office under Aiken, stating: "Government architecture in the United States, from an aesthetic standpoint, has long been a reproach and a byword, but the buildings erected or designed during the last two years show a decided improvement."[39] Among the buildings included as examples of Aiken's "feeling for architectural fitness and an adaptability to requirements and surroundings that are rare even in the best private practice," the writer included "The Post-office and Courthouse for San Francisco, designed on the somewhat florid style of the Spanish Renaissance."[40] That Aiken might be lauded for his abilities is not surprising as his education and experience was typical of most successful late-nineteenth-century architects. He received his architectural education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which was the first American architecture school and adhered to a Beaux-Arts curriculum.[41] After his 1879 graduation, Aiken entered of the office of renowned architect Henry Hobson Richardson before practicing independently in Cincinnati and New York, and later being appointed by

[36] "Designs for the New Post Office," 20 Nov. 1896.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid, for block quote and "long squatty structure." The criticism of the design extended to questions of materials and engineering, as reported in: "Defective Plans for the New Post Office," *San Francisco Chronicle* 10 Jul. 1897: 16.

[39] "The Fine Arts: American Government Buildings," *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 29 May 1897: 378.

[40] Ibid. Despite the article's favorable outlook toward the work of the Supervising Architect's Office under Aiken, the writer still concluded that federal commissions would best be designed by "local talent, subject to the approval and under the superintendence of the Government Architect."

[41] For Aiken's biography, see entry in Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (1956) (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970; reprinted 1996), 11-12.

President Grover Cleveland as supervising architect. Despite his leadership, Aiken departed with the change of administration and party. After a period of months during which Charles E. Kemper, the chief clerk who handled the business end of the office's work, was, again, in the acting role, James Knox Taylor was named the new supervising architect.

By the time of his elevation to supervising architect, James Knox Taylor had served under Aiken as a department draftsman for several years. Before his tenure with the U.S. Treasury Department, Taylor had distinguished himself in private practice. Aiken and Taylor had been classmates at MIT. During his two years there, he also met Cass Gilbert, who had developed a national reputation working for McKim, Mead & White in New York. The two became partners and their St. Paul, Minnesota-based firm of Gilbert & Taylor, practicing from 1885 to 1892, was highly successful, known in particular for lavish houses and substantial churches.[42] Joining the Supervising Architect's Office in 1895, Taylor assumed the position of supervising architect on October 20, 1897. Only forty years of age, Taylor was very young for such a high-profile position. This early history is important because it underscores the fact that Taylor (and Aiken) was Gilbert's equal in education and exposure to the École de Beaux-Arts method to the caliber of architects eventually competing for government commissions under the Tarsney Act. As with Aiken before him, Taylor possessed the skills and intellectual requisites to oversee the design of such an important building as the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse.

Taylor's tenure was a critical period in the history of the Supervising Architect's Office, as various factions, including the AIA, Congress, the Corps of Engineers, and the head officials of the Treasury, sought control of federal commissions and, ultimately, civic identity.[43] Earlier, although the AIA approved of Aiken, citing his willingness to bring in "several men who are likely better designers than himself," Aiken was not prepared to ride out this period of transition, while Taylor seized it. He brought new life to the Supervising Architect's Office and proved to be one of the most popular leaders in its history. He was also responsible for an unusually large number of completed buildings and, under his leadership, the office assumed more of the liveliness and sense of exploration associated with a private atelier, a reflection of the influence of the studio atmosphere at MIT. Taylor's tenure (1897-1912) took place completely under the Tarsney Act, and under it he facilitated the competitive involvement of private architects and firms in over thirty projects, mainly in large cities, which delighted the AIA and private sector firms. Staff architects, meanwhile, focused on more modest assignments such as inland post offices, primarily because Taylor could not justify the costs of such competitions to Congress. The U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was the most important building completed entirely within the Supervising Architect's Office during the period of the Tarsney Act.

While the redesign of the building's exterior may have started before Taylor assumed the position of supervising architect, he was a draftsman in the office beginning in 1895, soon rising to chief draftsman, and had likely already been very much involved in the project. Lingering questions about the quality of the building's exterior architecture became part of a February 1899 Senate debate about the role of the supervising architect in the creation of federal buildings. The proceedings primarily show the strength of the AIA's lobby about private competition for federal commissions, but also document continued antipathy toward the design of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. Senator George C. Perkins from the Bay Area commented that "Our jail in San Francisco is a pleasant picture as compared" to the new federal building, just before proposing that the "public spirited" people of San Francisco would pay a local architect through public subscription to finish the building.[44] Taylor and the Supervising Architect's Office did not relent and no private firm became involved in the design of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse.

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[42] Hitchcock and Seale, 38.

[43] Lee, 174-75.

[44] "The Senate and the Supervising Architect," *The American Architect and Building News* (transcript reprinted from the *Congressional Record*) 25 Feb. 1899: 59. See also: "The Design a Monstrosity," *San Francisco Chronicle* 10 Feb. 1899: 3.

Despite the increasing distance between the supervising architect and the office's design work, Taylor was probably more involved with the building's exterior design than what had become usual. Taylor arrived in the office in 1895 and rose to the position of chief draftsman while the building was being designed, and he likely had been previously at work on the project. He surely was also fiercely aware of the scrutiny that the design was receiving, in part as a proxy for the condemnation of all government designed buildings by the AIA. It was also the most significant building being undertaken entirely within the Supervising Architect's Office. All of these things led to a significant reconsideration of the exterior. In the final design, the loathed towers disappeared and the composition attained a more unified appearance, answering the earlier harsh critique by the *San Francisco Chronicle* that it lacked "scholarly architecture in its lines."[45] Final drawings by Taylor demonstrate his mastery of the Renaissance Revival idiom and his ability to use it to great effect.[46] Under Taylor's auspices, the design maintained the same classical grandeur and overall footprint as the earlier proposals, but the execution showed "a dignity gained through restraint" and clearer spatial relationships based on function, a major feature of Beaux-Arts design.

As supervising architect, Taylor oversaw the design of buildings that shared characteristic features, among them the feeling of solidity, restraint, clarity, and dignity within the framework of Renaissance Revival vocabulary and detailing. There is a compact neatness in many of these buildings, some of which subtly and gracefully integrated the more delicate sensibilities of the Colonial Revival with more robust Beaux-Arts rationalism and show-stopping qualities of the Renaissance Revival. While the designs coming out of the Supervising Architect's Office under Taylor were largely successful, it was the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse that cemented his reputation in that role. Writing in *The Architectural Record* in June 1906, critic H.W. Frohne notes that the propensity to view new cities, especially those in the West and Midwest, as "wild and wooly" places led to a "state of affairs that produced a great variety of very charming architectural problems which have been credibly solved by James Knox Taylor, the Supervising Architect for the government."[47]

The design for the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse synthesized a range of known Italian Renaissance precedents, such as the palazzo of Bramante known as the "House of Raphael" begun in 1512, with more general knowledge about Italian Renaissance architecture, more and more accessible through the period expansion of publishing.[48] Taylor and his staff integrated these disparate concerns in a unique way, befitting a master architect trained in the discipline of the manner of the École. For example, the sustained horizontal parapets provide the building with a sense of largesse typical of Italian palazzi. In its breadth, the building takes full advantage of the opportunity presented by the site's size, even if its location, away from Battery Street and the heart of the prestigious business district to the north, was once deemed less than ideal. The architects then mitigated the potential for a visually unrelieved length by punctuating the façade with full-height projecting entrance bays that enliven public entrances at each major corner. The property is further distinguished by entrances featuring individual, taller arches with segmented engaged columns and richly ornamented pediments that slightly recess or that project, an architectural pattern that is not derivative but is helpful in subtly orienting a visitor new to such august surroundings.

Further aligning its design with the Italian role model, the building's handsome bronze entry lanterns are replicas of the torch-holders designed in 1489 by Niccolo Grosso for the palazzo of the wealthy Florentine

[45] "Designs for the New Post Office," 20 Nov. 1896.

[46] A number of construction drawings are extant and located in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), and 1,996 drawings from the restoration and renovation are located in the basement level of the building**.** Original drawings were produced by the Office of Supervising Architect under James Knox Taylor.

[47] H.W. Frohne, "The Indianapolis Court House and Post Office," *The Architectural Record* 19 (Jun. 1906): 437.

[48] U.S. General Services Administration, "James R. Browning U.S. Court of Appeals Building, San Francisco, CA: Architecture," accessed online, 22 Dec. 2011, https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/historic-preservation/explore-historic-buildings/find-a-building/all-historic-buildings/james-r-browning-us-court-of-appeals-building-san-francisco-ca.

banker Filippo Strozzi, the same that inspired Charles McKim with the Villard Houses and Boston Public Library designs. The U.S. Post Office and Courthouse however, departs from strict precedent in that it assigns a fluid band of flatter rustication to the lower two floors rather than more typically restricting it to the ground floor, which imbued the building with a more commanding presence. The upper story, rusticated in a different manner, is no less lavishly treated. Housing the three original courtrooms, the third floor is more embellished and more deeply articulated, creating dramatic, but ordered, contrasts of light and shadow in keeping with its programmatic importance.

The sophisticated design was constructed using the highest levels of craftsmanship. The granite carvings on the exterior were so "exceedingly well-executed" that they elicited "considerable comment" by the architectural community, which "believed such detail would be impossible in granite," *Sunset Magazine* reported in 1905.[49] The public spaces of the interior were treated to an equal order of quality, reinforcing the requisite unity of the arts that anchored the design philosophy of both Renaissance and the Beaux-Arts architecture. In the professional journal, *Architect and Engineer of California*, William Eames, president of the AIA at the time and a beneficiary of the Tarsney Act, is reported to have exclaimed that the third floor corridor "was a thing of beauty and a joy forever."[50] As Eames was a private architect who might gain from downplaying the quality of work coming out of the Supervising Architect's Office, this praise is particularly noteworthy. Joseph W. Roberts, the on-site architect overseeing construction, explained that the interior finishes were more opulent than initially planned because of cost savings elsewhere in the project: "'It had been intended to have plain ceilings in the halls and corridors, but the surplus moneys available permitted the architect to provide in his plans for groined ceilings with Mosaic finish. The floors will also be Mosaic…when finished the San Francisco Postoffice [*sic*] will have the most magnificently fitted interior of any post-office and court building in the United States.'"[51]

The finishes of many of the private offices were no less impressive. *The Construction News* reported in 1906 after the catastrophic earthquake:

> It is generally conceded by all who know anything about the matter that the San Francisco disaster damaged one of the finest examples of interior woodwork in the country…This work has attracted wide attention among architects and builders, as well as among lovers of art, and has been pronounced by them without exception a piece of work preeminent in artistic room finishing.[52]

In the architectural statement Taylor molded about the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse for the 1901 Report of the Supervising Architect, he positioned the in-process project as producing one of the country's most magnificent Beaux-Arts public buildings in an architectural mode appropriate for the nation:

> The Department, after mature consideration of the subject, finally decided to adopt the classical style of architecture for all buildings, as far as it is practicable to do so, and it is believed that this style is best suited for Government buildings. The experience of centuries has demonstrated that no form of architecture is so pleasing to the great mass of mankind as the "classic" and it is

[49] Dyer, 339.
[50] William Eames, as quoted in Page & Turnbull, 4.
[51] "Says New Post-Office Is Safe," *San Francisco Chronicle* 1 May 1902: 7.
[52] "A Notable Piece of Interior Finishing," 29 Dec. 1906. The article noted that the William H. Warren Manufacturing Company in Chicago crafted the interior woodwork.

> hoped that the present policy may be followed in the future, in order that the public buildings of the United States may become distinctive in their character.[53]

It took eight years to complete the 365,000 square foot U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in large part because of the richness of the interiors, which were created by scores of imported Italian stonemasons, marble workers, and wood carvers. The expertise of many of these craftsmen was so highly regarded that they were later employed by William Randolph Hearst in the construction of Hearst Castle "San Simeon" (Julia Morgan, architect, 1919-47; NHL, 1976).

It was officially dedicated on August 29, 1905, led by Governor George Pardee before a crowd of 3,000 people. Despite a decade of attack on the design, the completed building received high praise from an unlikely source. The *San Francisco Chronicle* seemed to forget its prior vociferous opposition to the government-designed building when it pronounced:

> In its exterior and interior San Francisco's new postal and judicial building is an expression of the highest art in architecture. We utter no local judgment, influenced by local pride and patriotism, but that of the best judges, in saying that the building is second only to the new Congressional Library in Washington. That building is acknowledged to be one of the finest in the world… [It is] among our crown jewels.[54]

The opulence of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is evidenced through its consummate craftsmanship, materials, and as one of the sole large-scale structures to survive the great 1906 earthquake. *The Construction News* remarked in the aftermath of the quake: "The building, as a whole, is spoken of as the best works of the Government's supervising architect's office."[55]

The Flagship Federal Buildings of the Tarsney Act Era

The U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is a testament to the design skill and talent of the Supervising Architect's Office at the turn-of-the-twentieth century. Its success as a design undermined the claim that the office could not produce buildings that were both attractive and appropriate settings for and representations of the United States government. Among the buildings designed entirely within the Supervising Architect's Office, the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse was the largest and most opulent, and it is most appropriately compared to a select group of federal buildings designed by private architects under the auspices of the Tarsney Act between 1897 and 1912. The U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is as architecturally significant as this group of finely conceived and crafted federal buildings that included: the U.S. Custom House, New York (Cass Gilbert, 1900-07; NHL, 1976); the U.S. Courthouse and Post Office, Indianapolis, now the Birch Bayh Federal Building (Rankin & Kellogg, 1901-05; contributing building to the Indiana World War Memorial Plaza NHL District, 1994); the U.S. Custom House, Baltimore (Hornblower & Marshall, 1903-07); the U.S. Post Office, New York (now the James A. Farley Post Office; McKim, Mead & White, 1912-14). These buildings are outstanding examples of Beaux-Arts design as applied to federal buildings. Each of them shares Classical and Renaissance elements and the unity of the arts and architecture throughout in order to create a grand *gesamtkunstwerk*, but each is also unique in combining the general architectural vocabulary and specific precedents in different ways.[56]

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[53] James K. Taylor, as quoted in Page & Turnbull, 7.

[54] *San Francisco Call*, as quoted in Page & Turnbull, 9.

[55] "A Notable Piece of Interior Finishing," 29 Dec. 1906:

[56] In an architectural context, *gesamtkunstwerk*, meaning "total work of art," refers to the harmonious combination of a building's overall design, its integrated decoration (sculpture, murals, mosaics, plasterwork), and its finishes and furnishings (decorative arts).

The U.S. Custom House, New York is a *tour de force* of Beaux-Arts architecture of the American Renaissance, and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976. The building is profusely ornamented and no expense was spared. It was the fourth competition under the Tarsney Act and Cass Gilbert won the commission. The building was intended to represent New York's undisputed leadership as America's premier port city at the time, with a commanding site on Bowling Green in Lower Manhattan at the heart of the civic-business district. Antoinette J. Lee has commented that the commission was "the biggest plum of the Tarsney Act program."[57] The building's primary façade is bilaterally symmetrical, divided by a tall arched public entrance. It features a French mansard roof, deeply articulated rustication and entablatures, profuse acroteria, and a massive three-story tall colonnade on its primary façade that was bounded by anchoring pavilions. Like the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, the U.S. Custom House exemplifies Beaux-Arts planning and the requisite "unity of the arts."

The Indianapolis federal building originally known as the U.S. Courthouse and Post Office and renamed after Senator Bayh in 2003 shares a startling resemblance to the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. The building is located on a pivotal downtown location and is a contributing building to the Indiana World War Memorial Plaza NHL District. Designated in 1994, the plaza is an exceptional, nationally-significant demonstration of City Beautiful urban planning of which the Beaux-Arts unity of the arts is a principal component. Both the Indianapolis and San Francisco federal buildings share numerous features, including: a block-wide site, U-shaped massing, Beaux-Arts organization and detailing, four-story height, articulated entry pavilions; they even were enlarged in a similar way with the open end of the U at the rear later completed as a square. The Indianapolis building also received considerable praise. H. W. Frohne wrote in *The Architectural Record*:

> The whole exterior composition, which pretends to be severely plain and admirable for the largeness of its parts rather than by reason of any ornateness, agreeably disappoints us on the interior by its stately corridors with their vaulted ceilings, its rich marble incrusted [*sic*] walls and floors, and a free and fanciful ceiling treatment in colored mosaic, which in some part of the building would take one back to the charming villas of the Italian Renaissance.[58]

The critic's observation of the contrast between the interior and the exterior of the Indianapolis building was likely the principal difference between it and the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, as its exterior opulence was mirrored on the interior.

The steel-frame, granite-clad U.S. Custom House, Baltimore is considered an outstanding example of Beaux Arts architecture befitting the city's long role as one of the nation's most important ports. The U-shaped building was designed by the Washington, D.C., firm of Hornblower & Marshall. The design of the crisply articulated custom house is more reserved than Taylor's final design for San Francisco. Baltimore's Custom House features an exceptional Call Room whose principal feature is the ceiling mural, considered to be American artist Francis Davis Millet's masterpiece, demonstrating the unity of arts and architecture quintessential to the Beaux-Arts.

The U.S. Custom House, San Francisco, completed in 1911, was designed by the St. Louis-based firm of Eames & Young. Thomas Young trained at the École de Beaux-Arts while William Eames, a former Deputy Commissioner of Public Buildings in St. Louis, took a "grand tour" of continental European architecture and sensibilities cherished by American and European architects alike (Eames was also the uncle of famed mid-twentieth-century designer Charles Eames). The main body of the opulently detailed Beaux-Arts building is U-shaped, permitting day lighting on two sides of each wing. The building is distinguished by a French mansard roof, while the majority of the exterior is articulated with Classical details.

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[57] Lee, 202.
[58] Frohne, 442.

The U.S. Post Office, New York by McKim, Mead & White recalls the iconic Altes Museum in Berlin, completed in 1830 on a design by renowned architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel. In dramatic contrast to the heavily decorated buildings around it, the museum's somber façade, recalling a peripteral Greek temple, features an Ionic colonnade raised on a plinth that is articulated by a continuous bank of steps. The colonnade and stair were primary features of McKim, Mead & White's design for the post office, although the more opulent Corinthian Order was used for the latter. The monumental colonnade terminates with end pavilions and the whole is capped by an ornamented parapet. The interior reflects the rigorous symmetry and careful programmatic planning characteristic of Beaux Arts training. Altogether, these character defining features connote a Beaux-Arts approach that is not flamboyant, but rather muscular and disciplined.

Conclusion

It is difficult to overstate the architectural significance of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse when considering the quality, scale, and soundness of its design and construction. The Renaissance Revival Beaux-Arts building boldly demonstrated that the Office of the Supervising Architect possessed the talent to produce a building on par with buildings designed by the most respected and prolific private firms, undermining the AIA's claims to the contrary. The materials, artistry, and craftsmanship used to create the building were the finest available at the time and endure and continue to impress to this day. The project was not part of the competitive process put in place by the Tarsney Act (1897-1912), but it ranks among the most important designs for federal buildings produced by private architects and firms under the act. It is a testament to the level of skill nurtured and promoted in the Supervising Architect's Office, particularly under the leadership of William Martin Aiken and James Knox Taylor, and is a key touchstone to a time when the nation had emerged as one of the most important and wealthiest in the world.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

__ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_X_ Previously Listed in the National Register: October 14, 1971
__ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
__ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
__ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
__ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
__ Other State Agency
_X_ Federal Agency: General Services Administration
__ Local Government
__ University
__ Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 2.6 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	10	551990	4181360

Verbal Boundary Description: The U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, San Francisco is located on a lot oriented to Seventh Street (95-99 Seventh Street), accounting for the entire frontage on the northeast side of Seventh Street between Mission and Stevenson streets. The lot covers approximately 40 percent of the land area within the block bounded by Seventh, Mission, Sixth, and Stevenson streets at its southwest end, and corresponds to the property having the San Francisco Assessor's Parcel Number 3703/41 (Block 3703, Lot 41).

Boundary Justification: The boundary encompasses the property historically associated with the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, San Francisco.

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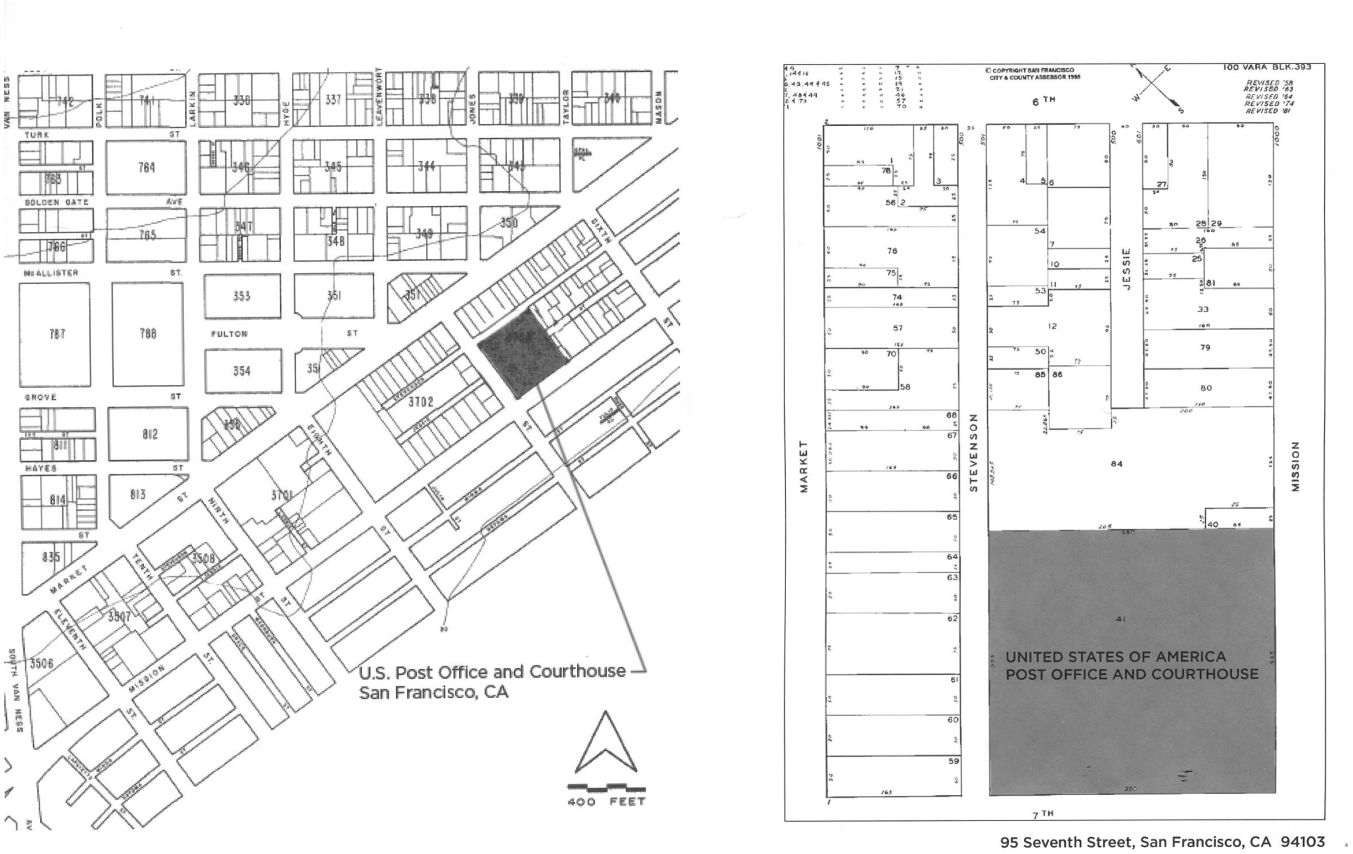
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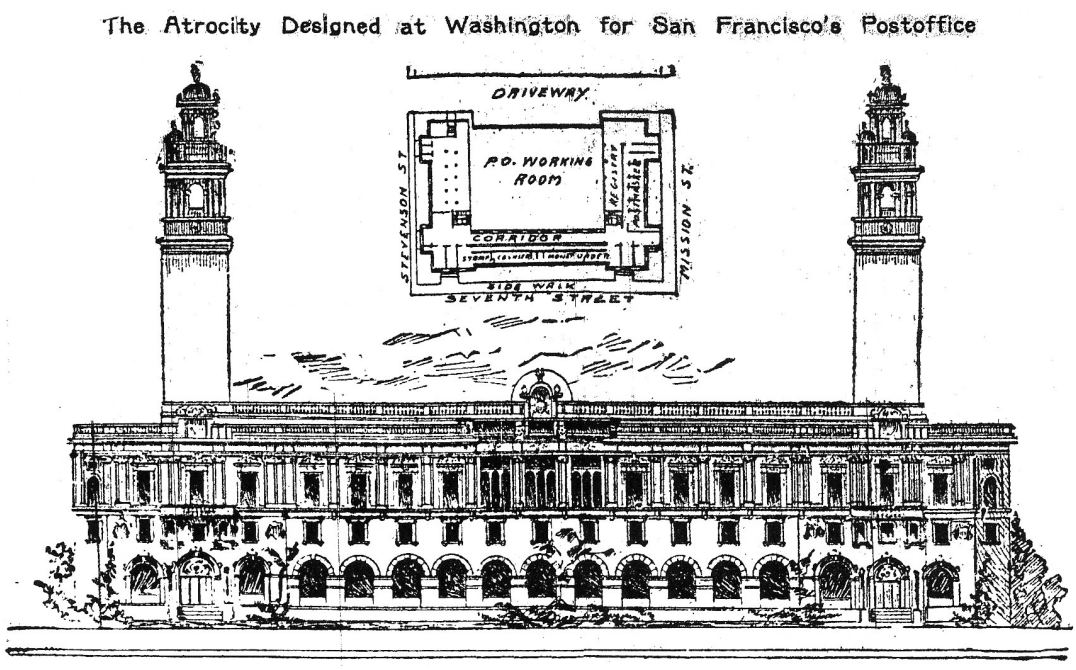
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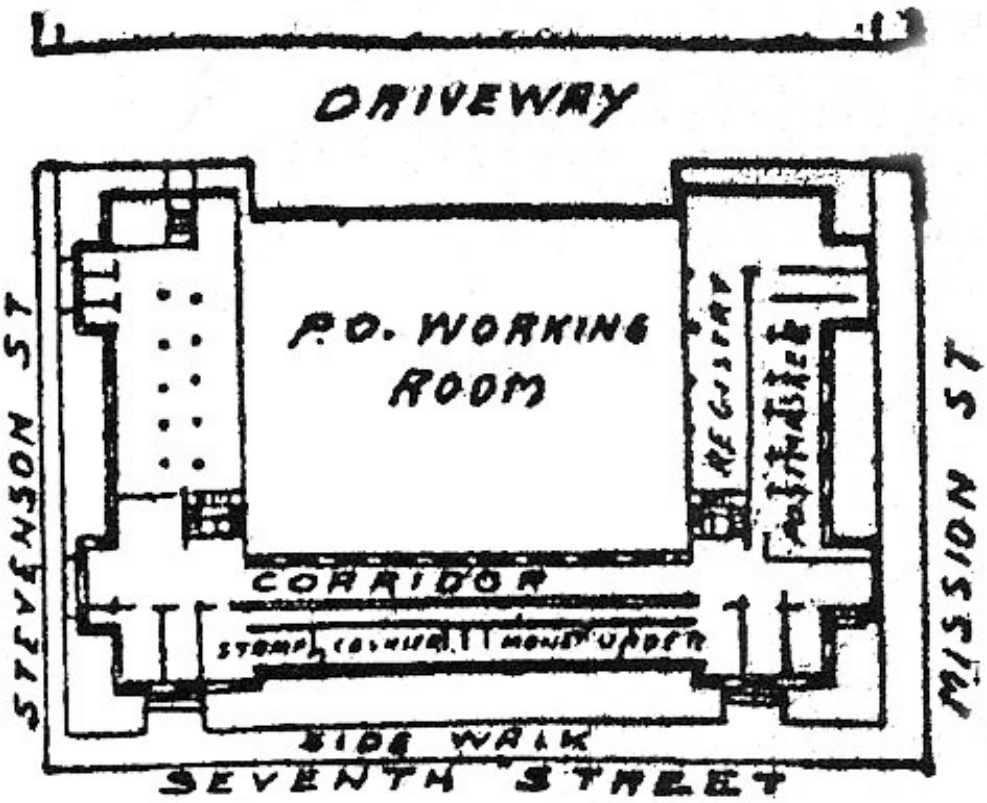
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The U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, site plan and NHL boundary, 2012





Preliminary elevation and schematic first-floor plan, *San Francisco Chronicle* 20 Nov. 1896: 8.



Seventh Street façade, looking east (above)
Mission Street façade, looking northwest (below)
Carol Highsmith, photographer, 2009

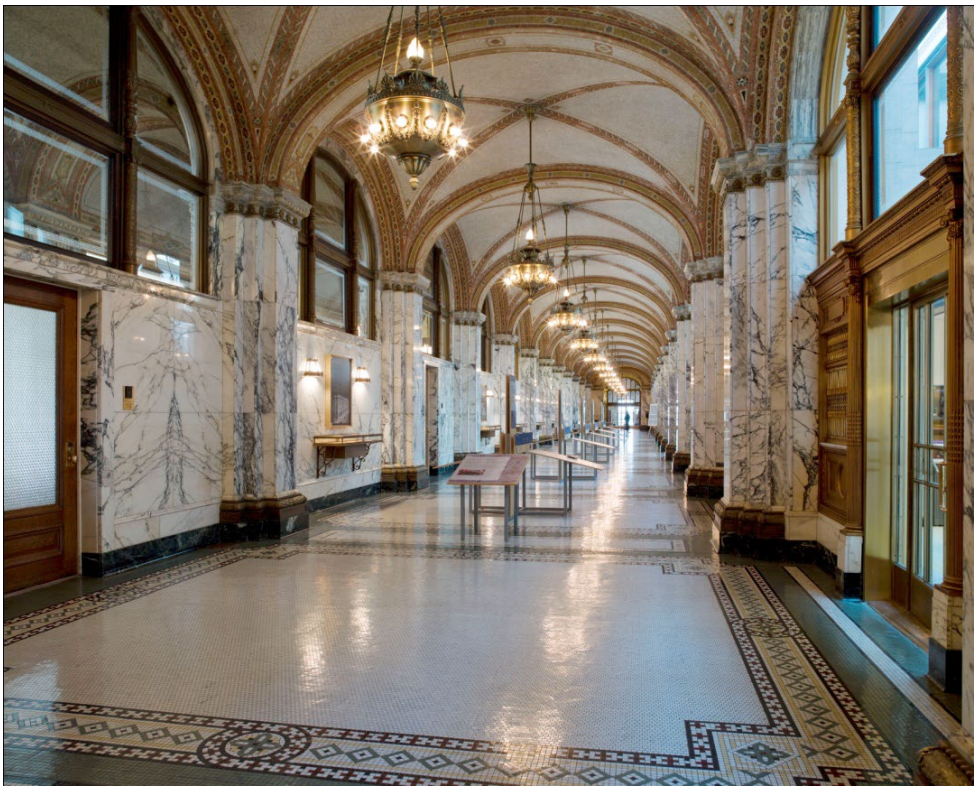


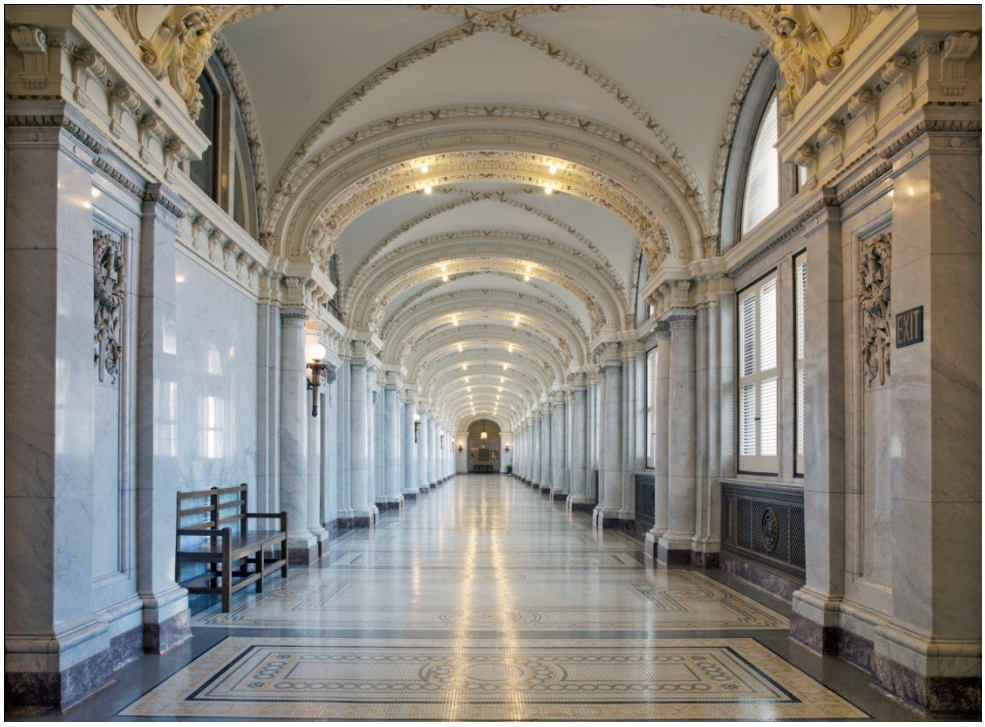


Stevenson Street façade, looking south
The 1933 addition is the portion of the building to the left. The building in the background is the San Francisco Federal Building, located across Seventh Street from the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse. Carol Highsmith, photographer, 2009

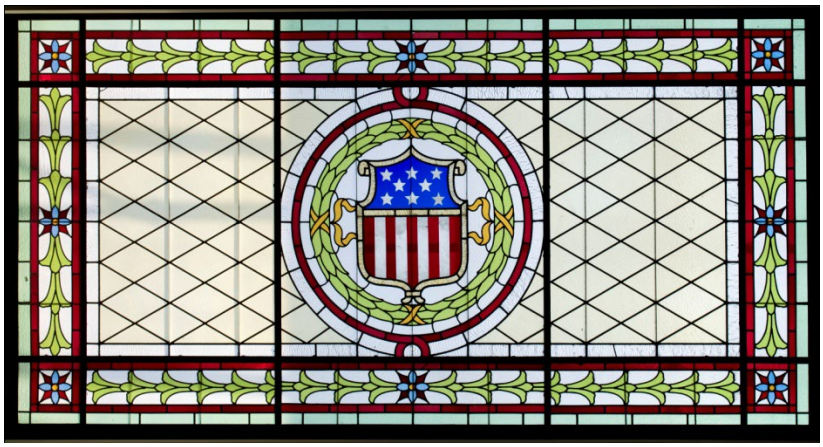


Entrance detail
Carol Highsmith, photographer, 2009





First-floor corridor (top) and Third-floor corridor (bottom)
Carol Highsmith, photographer, 2009



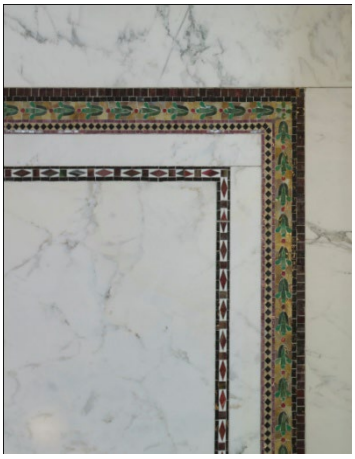


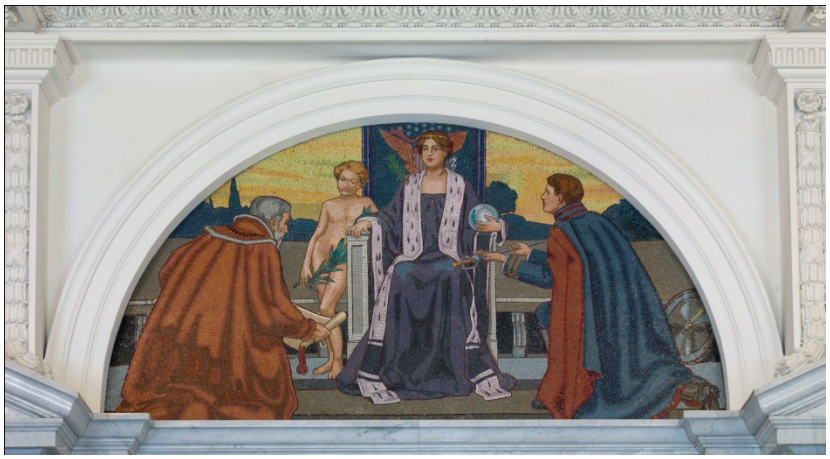




Courtroom One, general view and details
Carol Highsmith, photographer, 2009







Courtroom Three, general view and details
Carol Highsmith, photographer, 2009



Redwood Room, general view (above)
Courtroom in the 1933 addition (below)
Carol Highsmith, photographer, 2009

