

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

**1. Name of Property**

Historic Name: Pasadena Post Office  
Other name/site number: Bob Harris Station Post Office  
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

**2. Location**

Street & number: 102 N. Munger  
City or town: Pasadena State: Texas County: Harris  
Not for publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐


**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D



State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

2/7/22

Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the 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 the Keeper

Date of Action

Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

### Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

### Number of Resources within Property

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: NA

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions:** GOVERNMENT / Post Office

**Current Functions:** COMMERCE/TRADE / Professional = office

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification:** MODERN MOVEMENT: Modern Classical

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Brick; Stone/limestone

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7-8)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria:** A, C

**Criteria Considerations:** NA

**Areas of Significance:** Government, Architecture (both at local level)

**Period of Significance:** 1940

**Significant Dates:** 1940

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** Simon, Louis (Supervising Architect, Department of the Treasury); Guenther, Carl (architect, exterior designer); Melick, Neal A. (supervising engineer)

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 9 through 16)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheet 17)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- ☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ 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:**

- ☐ State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** 0.5 acres

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 29.712343      Longitude: -95.210793

**Verbal Boundary Description:** Recorded by the Harris CAD (Central Appraisal District) as:  
"LTS 22 23 & 24 & N 1/2 OF LT 21 BLK 60 PASADENA OUTLOT 60"

**Boundary Justification:** The nomination includes all the property historically associated with the building.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Gregory Smith (THC), with Cathleen W. Hart, AIA (Director of Architecture for J. Morales, Inc.)  
Organization: J. Morales, Inc.  
Street & number: 102 N. Munger  
City or Town: Pasadena      State: TX      Zip Code: 77506  
Email: c.hart@jmoralesinc.com  
Telephone: 281-610-6626  
Date: November 15, 2021

## Additional Documentation

**Maps**      (see continuation sheets 18-19)

**Additional items**      (see continuation sheets 20-37)

**Photographs**      (see continuation sheets 38-57)



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### **Photograph Log**

Pasadena Post Office

Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

Photographed upon completion of the rehabilitation in November 2021 by Emily Jaschke

Photo 1

East elevation

Photo 2

Southeast oblique

Photo 3

Northeast oblique

Photo 4

Primary east entrance

Photo 5

Looking across portico. facing south.

Photo 6

East elevation, portico, facing southwest

Photo 7

North elevation

Photo 8

Northwest oblique, loading dock and annex

Photo 9

West elevation

Photo 10

Lobby, looking north towards former postmaster's office

Photo 11

Lobby, looking south

Photo 12

Lobby, looking northwest from southeast corner

Photo 13

South side of lobby (conference room), looking east

Photo 14

Former workroom, looking northwest

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Photo 15

Former workroom, looking southeast toward clerk windows and new offices

Photo 16

Former workroom, looking north

Photo 17

Former workroom, looking southwest

Photo 18

Former workroom, looking east towards clerk windows

Photo 19

Workroom detail, looking northwest towards former vault door

Photo 20

Former workroom, looking southwest toward annex and loading dock

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## Description

The 1940 Pasadena Post Office is a freestanding 1-story (with basement) tan brick and limestone Modern Classical building with a hipped roof at the southwest corner of Munger and Shaw streets in central Pasadena, Texas. Built from standardized plans under U.S. Dept. Treasury Supervising Architect Louis Simon, with an exterior design by architect Carl Guenther, the building is distinguished by its primary east façade, with a symmetrical five bay composition featuring a double door central entrance with sidelights and transom flanked by window bays filled with large 9-over-9 sash windows, all set under a full width integral porch supported by six massive limestone-clad square columns. The columns support a plain limestone entablature inscribed with the words "United States Post Office Pasadena Texas." The design features classical proportions and façade treatments, with simplified detailing that exhibits the influence of Colonial Revival and modernistic architecture of the New Deal era. The building retains a high degree of integrity on the exterior, while the interior has been retrofitted with offices in manner that retains key character-defining features, in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

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The Pasadena Post Office occupies the southwest corner of Munger and Shaw in central Pasadena in eastern Harris County, Texas, approximately ten miles southeast of downtown Houston. The city grew along railroad tracks that were in the right-of-way now occupied by the elevated Pasadena Freeway, one block south of the post office. The city has an irregular street grid. The lot is flat, with the building occupying a portion of the north half, with a grassy lawn to the north and a parking lot to the south. The building has a rectangular plan, measuring approximately 66 feet wide and 102 feet deep, extending to the end of the rear loading platform, and is set on a slightly raised foundation that is accessed by a short flight of steps leading from the sidewalk. The concrete foundation has oyster shell aggregate (common along the Texas gulf coast), the load-bearing brick walls are finished with orange brick, and the hipped roof is covered in composition shingles.

The primary façade is dominated by a full width inset colonnade porch, featuring six symmetrically placed limestone-clad square columns. The porch floor is a concrete slab with a scored and stained geometric pattern featuring incised squares set within each column bay. A low metal railing with repeating crosshatched squares runs between each column. The central white painted wood entrance bay is flanked by black metal light sconces and retains the highest level of classical detailing, with paneled French doors under a classical entablature, supported by narrow engaged Tuscan columns, and enframed by sidelights and a tall transom. To the north and south of the entrance are two window bays with tall 9-over-9 steel sash windows.

The building stands as the only known example of a New Deal era post office in Texas with a design that reflects the Beaux Arts training of architect Carl Guenther of Cleveland, Ohio, whose designs won two of ten prizes offered by the Treasury Department in a 1938 competition. His winning design, which did not consider the potential geographic location where it would be applied, is both traditional and modern, with a classical façade finished with fine historic detailing set behind an unusually bold colonnade of massive square columns devoid of bases or fluting, and topped with minimal capitals, a composition and treatment that barely disguises the building's concrete structural frame. The plain limestone entablature, roughly the same height as the column widths, runs along the top of each elevation, as does a narrow stone belt course that runs continuously under the windows.

The south and north sides are slightly longer than those on the front and rear of the building, and are similarly finished with same orange brick and limestone entablature and belt coursing. Each of these façades feature a symmetrical five bay composition with centrally placed windows, with the exception of the central bay of the north side which has an inset brick panel in place of a window. At the rear of the north side is a staircase that descends to the basement level.

The west façade at the rear of the building features the original loading dock, which has infilled and expanded slightly with a new addition, in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Similarly, the external

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stairs leading to the basement of the south side of the wing have been enclosed. Both the west wall of this original section and a square chimney stack are extant and visible, as is the original brick exterior finish within the newly enclosed spaces.

The interior of the post office is similar to many post office plans of the period, with the main lobby and public offices in the front portions of the main floor, while the rear housed the main mail sorting and distribution areas, with direct access to the loading platform. Although most of the rooms have been divided and reconfigured, significant interior walls and finishes have been retained, including all of the stained woodwork, doors, trim, and paneling. Like most Depression Era post office built from standardized plans, the post office featured an enclosed vestibule within a lobby. Upon entering the building, one would face the service counter opposite the entrance. The lobby was originally L-shaped, running nearly the full width of the building, except for the postmaster's office on the north end, and wrapped along the south wall to give public access to a large bank of post office boxes. The working end of the building contained a finance section, vault, and restroom on the north side, but the majority of floor space was occupied by an open T-shaped work room where the mail was sorted and processed. Above the workroom is a skylight with vertical windows that provided indirect light to the workers below. In the course of the recent rehabilitation, these rooms have been subdivided, with transparent walls to retain the appearance of the overall volume in the original public spaces. Below the main floor is a full basement level, subdivide into storage and utility spaces for the original boiler heating system. The building has 24' high ceilings and 9' high double hung windows could be opened to allow ventilation up to a well in the hip roof, which had windows operable by a crank on the ground floor. This created a chimney effect to cool the building.

After decades of service as a post office, J. Morales, Inc., an architectural, engineering and surveying firm, has rehabilitated the building utilizing state and federal tax credits. The building retains a high degree of integrity on the exterior, with the exception of alternations to the loading dock at the rear. The interior has been retrofitted with offices in manner that retains key character-defining features that are characteristic of its original use as a post office facility.

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## Statement of Significance

Completed in 1940, the U.S. Post Office Building in Pasadena, Texas (hereafter Pasadena Post Office) is a rare late New Deal post office with a design selected by a federal committee as part of a 1938 competition to elicit designs from professionals outside of federal employment. The competition marked the waning days of the Office of the Supervising Architect as an independent entity within the U.S. Treasury Department. Cleveland architect Carl Guenther designed the Modern Classical exterior, informed by Colonial Revival architecture, while the Office of the Supervising Architect, under Louis Simon, provided the standardized plan and prepared working drawings and plans. The resulting combination of Classical Revival and Colonial Revival forms with Moderne influences is representative of federal buildings constructed across America during the period, and it is Pasadena's most significant local example of these trends. The property is nominated at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Government as it represents major federal investment in the city of Pasadena at a point when the city was primed for growth as an industrial center prior to U.S. entrance into World War II. As the first federal building constructed in Pasadena, it represents the local effect of a substantial new program of public building construction undertaken by the federal government during the New Deal. It is also nominated at the local level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as it represents the federal public building program in the waning days of the New Deal, and as the product of a national design competition that opened the federal building design to non-federally employed architects, and as one of the final projects of the independent Office of the Supervising Architect.

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## Development of Pasadena, Texas

Pasadena, Texas, is in the upper Gulf Coast region of Texas, along the southern side of Buffalo Bayou, a waterway that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century became the Houston Ship Channel, one of the major seaports in the United States. In 1893 Col. John H. Burnett of Galveston founded the community of Pasadena as one of a series of new towns in southeastern Harris County along the La Porte, Houston and Northern railroad line.<sup>1</sup> Abundant rainfall and fertile soil supported an agriculture-based local economy, with many early settlers being farmers escaping droughts and bankrupt farms in and around Kansas. Burnett acquired the land for investment and laid out lots for a new town but did not file the plat until May 25, 1896.<sup>2</sup> Unlike other nearby developers, Burnett did not build a hotel nor set aside school and church sites for his new community, leaving development of Pasadena depended largely to its early residents. After state legislation allowed a local community to incorporate for school tax purposes instead of relying on the county school system, the residents of Pasadena were the first in Harris County to elect to establish an independent school system in 1899.<sup>3</sup> After the 1900 hurricane that devastated the city of Galveston and other southeast Texas communities, the American Red Cross shipped in 1.5 million strawberry plants from Louisiana to provide local farmers with a spring crop and self-sufficiency.<sup>4</sup> Pasadena farmers took advantage of the offer and strawberries quickly became the major cash crop for the community. In 1900 the population of the community was approximately 200.

Completion of the Houston Ship Channel in 1914 precipitated industrial growth north of Pasadena but the area's transition from a farming economy to an industrial one did not occur until the late 1930s. Because the City of Houston had annexed land along both banks of the ship channel, the boundary for what ultimately became the incorporated city of Pasadena in 1928 ended about one-half mile south of the channel, which limited industrial growth within the Pasadena city limits. Small family farms continued to grow and larger commercial operations increased the productive agricultural yields but increasingly non-agricultural workers began settling in the community. The community first

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<sup>1</sup> C. David Pomeroy, Jr., *Pasadena, the Early Years* (Pasadena: Pomeroy Press, 1993), pp. 27, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Pomeroy, 27; Pomeroy, 55. See also the NRHP nomination "Pomeroy Homestead, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas), 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Pomeroy, 64; Title 17, Ch. 11 as amended by Article 541a, Revised Statutes of Texas, 1897. Pasadena High School was constructed in 1924, and both the Genoa and South Houston school districts were consolidated into the Pasadena system in 1935.

<sup>4</sup> Pomeroy, 75.

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incorporated as a city in 1923 but dissolved the incorporation the following year to avoid a legal contest with Houston and the State of Texas regarding Pasadena's attempts to include industrial properties along the Houston Ship Channel within the new city boundaries.<sup>5</sup> The city of Houston attempted to annex Pasadena, but was ultimately blocked when citizens voted to incorporate on December 26, 1928.<sup>6</sup> The new city immediately set out to provide much-needed municipal services, with bonds approved and sold before the Great Depression hit.<sup>7</sup> The growth of industrial facilities along the south bank of the ship channel, despite not being within the boundaries of Pasadena, nevertheless increased the city's population and commercial growth because it was the closest city that could house the influx of workers and their families. Pasadena's population was 1,647 in 1930, and nearly during the 1930s, with 3,435 people recorded in 1940. That year, Pasadena reported over \$411,000 in building permits within the city, while suburban and industrial construction beyond city boundary amounted to over \$6,400,000, including the \$3 Million Champion Paper Mill and \$3 million Sinclair Oil Refinery. Public construction in 1940 included expansion of the sanitary sewer system and water services, and over \$25,000 on street improvements. City Secretary T.S. Griffin noted at the time that "Men employed in Industries along the Houston Ship Channel in our area are buying homes in Pasadena and the developers are finding it difficult to keep pace with the demand."<sup>8</sup>

The post-Depression boom fueled by World War II finally shifted the city's economy from an agricultural base to an industrial one, as farms yielded to petrochemical plants and residential subdivisions to house their workers. With its community infrastructure well in place, Pasadena quickly became the dominant city in eastern Harris County and by 1950 grew into the second largest city in Harris County. By 1960 the population had jumped to 58,787.<sup>9</sup> Through a series of annexations, the city grew in area from 1.7 square miles in 1893 to 58.6 square miles in 1980. The rapid post-war boom continued as the community left its agricultural roots behind, and the 2019 population of Pasadena was 153,350. Employment in Pasadena is still closely linked to ship channel industries, the Bayport Industrial District, and the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in adjacent Clear Lake.

### Post Offices in Pasadena

The 1940 U.S. Post Office building was the first purpose-built post office facility built by the federal government in Pasadena. Previous post offices had been located in various private buildings since the first Pasadena post office opened in 1893. Six individuals served as postmasters until Carroll T. Coolidge was appointed in 1928, and under his 24-year tenure, receipts rose dramatically. The post office was upgraded from a fourth class to a third class facility (based on receipts) in 1925, and upgraded to a second class office in 1938.<sup>10</sup> By the late 1930s, postal service operations had outgrown the space provided in Defree's Grocery Store on Main Street, and plans for a new permanent facility were underway.<sup>11</sup> A new and permanent Pasadena Post Office was part of a \$130,000,000 public building program launched in July 1938, with ten of the 280 approved projects located in Texas, all but one of which were small post office buildings costing less than \$100,000.<sup>12</sup>

A parade and groundbreaking ceremony for the new post office were held in November 1939, attended by "several hundred persons" on the future post office site. Postmaster Coolidge opened the ceremonies by proclaiming that "this has been an event we've been looking forward to for months, but...we have done in about 18 months what many

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<sup>5</sup> Pomeroy, 247-250.

<sup>6</sup> Pomeroy, 258.

<sup>7</sup> Pomeroy, 296.

<sup>8</sup> "Building Permits Set New Record in Pasadena," *Houston Post*, December 31, 1940.

<sup>9</sup> Mike Kingston (ed.), *Texas Almanac 1992-1993* (Dallas: A.H. Belo, 1991), p. 175.

<sup>10</sup> "\$77,000 Pasadena Postoffice to be Dedicated Friday," *Houston Chronicle*, July 18, 1940.

<sup>11</sup> "Post Office Received Stamp of Approval," *Pasadena Citizen*, July 16, 1993. 1938 receipts totaled \$11,820.

<sup>12</sup> "Reporting Washington," *Dallas Morning News*, July 2, 1938.

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[cities] have required three or four years to do.”<sup>13</sup> Mayor Delbert Atkinson expressed gratitude to the federal government by allocating \$70,000 for the new facility, followed by Judge C.A. Leddy of Houston (former member of the Texas Supreme Court commission of Appeals), who delivered the main address in the absence of Congressman Albert Thomas. Leddy noted that the building would be “the first post office to be built according to the new design selected in a recent contest,” referring to the 1938 Treasury Department competition for post office designs. He further claimed Houston’s destiny as the greatest city in the south and encouraged the people of Pasadena to make their city one that will “draw a fine citizenry as Houston grows.”<sup>14</sup>

The new post office opened on June 22, 1940, and was dedicated as a first class postal facility in a July 1940 ceremony hosted by Judge J.C Henderson, member of the fifth circuit court of appeals at New Orleans. The building measured 3,833 square feet in area and housed four clerks. In 1942, the post handled five sacks of letters and 60 sacks of parcel post daily, and by 1943, the amount doubled to 12 pouches of mail, and 120 sacks of parcel post, amounting to 30,00 pieces of mail daily. During World War II, five of six original employees joined armed forces and were replaced with women, which postmaster Coolidge described as “doing a most credible job, too.”<sup>15</sup> Home delivery was not an option at the time, requiring postal customers to pick up their mail at the facility. The number of rented boxes grew from 68 in 1942 to more than 1,000 in 10 years. In addition to residential customers, the post office handled mail for local corporations, including Crown Central Petroleum Corp., the Texas Company (Texaco), Shell Oil Company, Pasadena Lighting and Power, as well as the school district and the telephone company.

By 1943, the population of Pasadena had grown to 12,000 with several defense industries in the city and environs, employing 74,000 people a six-mile radius. Workers from across the country followed job opportunities in Pasadena and the post office enabled them to send cash payroll checks and send money orders to their families back home. The postal money order business was so large that that a separate fenced off area of the post office’s work room (Finance Section) is shown on the original blueprints and two teller windows were dedicated to money orders.

### Office of the Supervising Architect, 1852-1939

The Pasadena Post Office was built just as the Office of the Supervising Architect was in the process of breaking up. Established in 1852, the Office of the Supervising Architect was a bureau within the U.S. Treasury Department until 1939. Acting as the federal government’s in-house architecture firm, the office designed numerous large and small federal office buildings, courthouses, post offices nationwide. The office employed thousands of architects over the years and served as a starting point for many architects who later found success in private practice. The office, however, also faced growing tensions among private architects and the American Institute of Architects (AIA), a dynamic that threatened the scope and power of the office for much of its history. The AIA first launched attacks against the federal architecture program in the mid-1870s, and gained some traction with the passage of the Tarnsey Act in 1893, a bill that gave the Secretary of the Treasury great discretion regarding architectural competitions.<sup>16</sup> This discretion, however, did not ensure competition, and subsequent administrations failed to fully implement the law. The federal building program to create large-scale buildings placed the office at the forefront of building technology, but the goal of designing buildings for “predictable and standard governmental functions” often resulted in an “apparent sameness of federal government buildings,” which fueled criticism that the entrenched federal office was antithetical to progressive architecture.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “Ground is Broken In Pasadena for New Postoffice,” *Houston Post*, November 30, 1939.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> “Post Office Received Stamp of Approval,” *Pasadena Citizen*, July 16, 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Antoinette J. Lee, *Architects to the Nation: The Rise and Decline of the Supervising Architect’s Office*, 1st edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 167.

<sup>17</sup> Lee, 163.

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The Public Buildings Act of 1926 (Keyes-Elliott Act) allotted \$100 million to construct federal buildings outside of the District of Columbia, and stipulated that the Secretary of the Treasury and Postmaster General select the towns or cities in which buildings would be constructed. The department conducted a post office survey to determine need for new facilities, and identified over 2200 cities and towns with postal receipts exceeding \$10,000 that had no federal buildings. The 1927 survey report informed planning during the Great Depression, and in May 1930 congress authorized increased funding for public buildings. The amended act also authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to “employ, by contract or otherwise, outside professional or technical services of persons, firms or corporations, to such extent as he may require without reference to Civil Service Regulations.” This legislation marked the beginning of the trend in public works projects that came in direct response to the depression, serving as the precedent for subsequent policies to relieve unemployment and stabilize the economy.<sup>18</sup>

The Public Buildings Act of 1926 gave the Secretary of the Treasury the option to employ persons outside of the Office of the Supervising Architect “when in his opinion it is necessary or useful to do so.”<sup>19</sup> Little was done to implement these provisions, however. In the late 1920s, representatives of the AIA met on several occasions with Treasury officials, making some headway that resulted in the assignment of several large projects to private architects. The Office of the Supervising Architect was particularly active during the Great Depression, as New Deal relief programs turned towards large government-funded projects to provide employment, but increasingly found itself at odds with private architects, firms, and their representative organizations. At the end of the 1930s, as the federal government transitioned towards wartime needs, the Office of Supervising Architect was diminished as an independent entity. Longstanding efforts by private architects to wrest control of federal building design from government agencies were finally realized after WWII with the creation of the General Services Administration (GSA), which followed a policy of hiring non-government architects to design federal buildings.<sup>20</sup>

### **Office of the Supervising Architect in the 1930s**

The ambitious federal building programs of the 1920s became a means of providing employment in the aftermath of the Wall Street crash, and the Treasury Department utilized standardized designs to expedite construction contracts for smaller buildings.<sup>21</sup> These practices favored the employment of contractors over providing jobs for private architects, although many architects in private practice were hired to work on larger projects, such as large federal courthouses. In light of this, the AIA demanded that federal design projects be contracted out to private firms and supported a reorganization of the Office of the Supervising Architect that would limit the organization’s role to a supervisory capacity, rather than as “gigantic unit for the design of government buildings.”<sup>22</sup> The OSA staff instead nearly doubled, growing from 432 in 1929 to nearly 750 in 1931. Meanwhile, architects in private practice who had enjoyed the boom years of the 1920s began to look towards federal projects as private development dried up. Half of the nation’s private firms failed in the first year of the Depression; the 5,000 remaining firms saw depleted work, and 2,500 architects applied for work in the OSA in 1932.<sup>23</sup>

Like previous legislation that opened the door to the possibility of private architects to gain federal commissions, the Public Buildings Acts of 1926 and 1930 authorized - but did not require - the Treasury Department to hire private

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<sup>18</sup> United States Postal Service. “History of Post Office Construction, 1900-1940” (July 1982). 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> Lee, 239.

<sup>20</sup> Lee, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Lee, 248.

<sup>22</sup> Lee 249.

<sup>23</sup> “The Venerable Office,” Craig, Lois A., and Staff of the Federal Architectural Project. *The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics, and Symbols in U.S. Government Building*. (The MIT Press, 1984), 327.



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architects. The Hoover administration used the authority sparingly. In 1933, the federal buildings program suspended and the OSA staff was furloughed four days per month, and with a greatly fluctuating workload, part time “consulting architects” were often hired, laid off, and rehired. The Roosevelt administration reorganized the Treasury Department as part of much larger federal reorganization of the New Deal, and the Office of the Supervising Architect became part of the Public Buildings Branch in the department’s new Procurement Division, which was responsible for non-military federal properties, machinery, facilities, stores, and supplies.<sup>24</sup> In 1934, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. ordered that all future buildings be designed in the Office of the Supervising Architect, under the understanding that most federal buildings in the foreseeable future would be smaller and more adaptable to standardized plans. Once again, these actions were meant to facilitate employment in construction, and not that of architects. Larger buildings, however, would still be assigned to consulting architects.<sup>25</sup>

Louis Simon, the last Supervising Architect, headed the office from 1933 until its demise in 1939. Trained as architect (unlike his predecessor, attorney James Wetmore), Simon graduated from MIT in 1891 and joined the office in 1896. He served as superintendent of the Architecture Section from 1915 through 1933, and was thus the highest ranking architect in the office. Simon determined the direction of the office’s architectural direction during the period when “Starved Classicism” reigned. When he became the Supervising Architect at age 66, he was already well known and respected within the architecture community as an AIA member; he achieved FAIA status in 1937. Simon’s architectural philosophy was reflected in his buildings’ simplicity and restraint. Simon was not a slavish adherent to Beaux Arts principles, and federal buildings designed and built under his tenure reflected a variety of influences, particularly the Italian Renaissance and Colonial Revival styles, often employing modernistic principles by reducing or simplifying ornament, resulting in a stylistic hybrid later termed as “Stripped” or “Starved” Classicism.<sup>26</sup>

In 1934, Simon established an in-house Board of Consulting Architects to review existing post office designs and suggest improvements.<sup>27</sup> The board proposed a policy to govern new federal building design, emphasizing the need for buildings to reflect their region’s architectural traditions and materials, such as Spanish influenced design and the properties of adobe construction in the southwest, and Colonial architecture in the east.<sup>28</sup> Through the 1930s, the AIA continued to petition for greater involvement of private architects in the federal building program, which culminated in the 1939 government reorganization that took the control of federal architecture out of the Treasury Department. The Reorganization Act of 1939 merged the Office of the Supervising Architect with the building management section of the National Park Service, becoming the “Public Building Administration” (PBA) within the Federal Works Agency (FWA). The new agency was headed by a Commissioner of Public Buildings, appointed by the Federal Works Administrator.<sup>29</sup> The Public Building Administration designed buildings to support the war effort, but little funding was allocated for postwar buildings. In 1949, the General Services Administration (GSA) formed, and the Public Building Administration was folded into it.

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<sup>24</sup> Lee, 253.

<sup>25</sup> Lee, 255.256.

<sup>26</sup> Lee, 260-261.

<sup>27</sup> Lee, 261.

<sup>28</sup> Lee, 263-264.

<sup>29</sup> United States Postal Service. “History of Post Office Construction, 1900-1940” (July 1982). 20.

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## Post Office Construction in the 1930s

The robust post office building program of the 1930s reflected federal emphasis on new construction as a means to provide employment, and new post offices became the most publicly visible legacies of the New Deal era, although the push for relief work in the form of building construction began in the Hoover administration. In 1931, 267 staff members were added to the Supervising Architect's office, increasing the work force to almost eight hundred. Standardization continued to be a priority, as the Treasury Department produced a set of "Cabinet Sketches" which provided standard floor plans for post offices of different sizes. Where practicable, individual treatment was given to exterior details, but the priority was minimizing the number of individual drawings to facilitate speedy construction. The 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act created the Public Works Administration (PWA), which was authorized to disburse funds to both federal and non-federal agencies for construction projects. The interest of economic recovery could not be served with a slow design process: the goal was to construct many buildings as quickly as possible.<sup>30</sup> A total 406 post offices were built using Public Works Administration funds.<sup>31</sup> The Office of the Supervising Architect created standardized plans that limited innovation to the treatment of the facades, with little room for changes to the plans.<sup>32</sup> From 1933 to 1942, almost 1,500 post office buildings were built.

By 1937, President Roosevelt ordered a slowdown of the federal building program to reduce demands on the federal treasury, affecting small post office projects as well as major projects, but planning and construction continued, albeit at a lower rate than before.<sup>33</sup> In early 1938, a group of architects, including Paul Cret, formed a non-governmental National Competitions Committee (an outgrowth of the modernist League for Architectural Progress) to advocate open competitions to select private architects for federal projects. The Procurement Division responded in favor of holding competitions, although director C. J. Peoples recommending that the designs apply only to exteriors of small buildings, while the interiors would follow standardized plans. The AIA offered limited support for such competitions. The Department of the Treasury had previously used competitions to create art (famously murals) in federal buildings, and in mid-1938, the Supervising Architect organized the first building competition, offering ten prizes for small post office designs, with a \$1,000 award for each chosen plan. This was the first federal design competition since the repeal of the Tarnsey Act in 1912 and was followed by ten similar regional competitions for larger buildings in specific cities, open to architects in ten newly-determined regions.<sup>34</sup> These competitions drew over 2000 entries, and most awards went to modern classical designs. Any of the designs used by the federal government would be completed in the Office of the Supervising Architect, which would create working drawings and plans.<sup>35</sup>

The Treasury Department issued a press release in May 1938 announcing the first two competitions:

The Treasury Department is seeking ten designs for small Post Office buildings costing approximately \$50,000 each. This competition is for design only, the services of the winners to terminate upon selection and approval of the winning designs. Working drawings and specifications will be prepared in the office of the Supervising Architect. The ten winners will receive \$1,000 each for their designs. This competition is of unlimited form and is open to any architect who is a citizen of the United States, except employees of the Federal Government or of the District of Columbia. In this competition, if any design is duplicated for use by the Federal Government the author of that design will receive \$100 for each such repetition occurring within one year of the award...While no attempt is made to limit the

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<sup>30</sup> United States Postal Service. "History of Post Office Construction, 1900-1940" (July 1982). 16.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> United States Postal Service. "History of Post Office Construction, 1900-1940" (July 1982). 18.

<sup>33</sup> Lee, 268.

<sup>34</sup> Lee, 270.

<sup>35</sup> The other competition was for a post office building and court house in Covington, Kentucky.

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competitors in the conception of their designs, the exterior treatment and the materials used should be related to the expected cost. Buildings constructed for carrying on the business of the federal Government...should have an architectural expression that is governmental in character, which demands dignity without undue elaboration, and a careful study of proportion and scale. The purpose of the competition is to afford to architects in private practice the opportunity to express their conceptions for the design of federal buildings.”<sup>36</sup>

The Jury of Award consisted of eight members, including Paul Cret of Philadelphia, and Richard J. Neutra of Los Angeles. Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, served as architectural adviser.<sup>37</sup> Carl F. Guenther of Cleveland, Ohio, was one of eight award recipients, having the distinction of submitting two winning individual designs, and a third winning design submitted with fellow Cleveland architect John. E. Miller.<sup>38</sup> The winning designs were not published, and there is no record of other post offices built according to Guenther’s plans besides the one in Pasadena.<sup>39</sup> Guenther’s design placed an emphasis on geometric massing combined with simplified ornament to produce a building of greater architectural abstraction than most post offices of this period. The building’s signature full colonnade with plain squared columns is extremely rare among the hundreds of small post offices of the New Deal Era. Few post offices of the period featured full colonnades of any type, and post offices with minimally adorned and heavy rectangular façade components (columns, pilasters, and/or entablatures) are a small subset of the whole.<sup>40</sup> Selected from national competition entries, the Pasadena building was not designed with any particular location nor setting in mind, and it clearly has little in common with historical Texas architectural precedents. It nevertheless stands as a major federal investment in the growing city of Pasadena and was without peer at its time of construction as the most prominent high style building in the central business district, and meets Criterion A in the area of Government and Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance.

As noted in Post Office Department Annual Reports, 1938 was the last year before World War II that any new postal facilities were authorized, but a total of 335 new post offices building began operations between 1940 and 1942. These facilities were apparently already in the pipeline.<sup>41</sup> During Fiscal Year 1940, over 200 small post office buildings costing between \$70,000 and \$100,000 were completed.<sup>42</sup> In general, the post offices constructed during this period conformed to standardized plans and stylistic detail varied but most buildings and simplified classical or colonial-inspired designs. Economy, as well as the movement toward modernism, dictated streamlined design and minimum ornamentation.<sup>43</sup> The 1940 Pasadena Post Office was outgrown and outmoded within two decades, and in 1962, congress approved funding for a much larger facility at 1199 Pasadena Blvd., at that time much closer to the center of the sprawling suburban city. The Formalist building, completed in 1968, was four times larger than the facility it replaced.

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<sup>36</sup> U.S. Treasury Department press release, Press Service No. 13-39, May 20, 1938.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Treasury Department press release, Press Service No. 13-39, May 20, 1938. The other members were Charles Z. Klauder, Philadelphia; Aymar Embury, II, New York; Philip B. Maher, Chicago; Henry R. Shepley, Boston; Gilmore D. Clarke, New York; and Edward Bruce, Washington, D.C.

<sup>38</sup> “Prize Awarded,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 13, 1938, 19.

<sup>39</sup> The only other verified built product of this competition is the Gresham, Oregon, Post Office by Theodore Ballew of Philadelphia.

<sup>40</sup> Only the U.S. Post Office in South Hadley, Mass, appears to have a similar colonnade. See other examples in figures.

<sup>41</sup> URS Group. “History and Context Study of Postal Facilities Constructed or Occupied Between 1940 and 1971” (Preliminary Draft prepared for The United States Postal Service), 2012, 3.

<sup>42</sup> United States Postal Service. “History of Post Office Construction, 1900-1940” (July 1982). 22.

<sup>43</sup> United States Postal Service. “History of Post Office Construction, 1900-1940” (July 1982). 25.

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### **Architect Carl F. Guenther (1909-1978)**

Carl F. Guenther was born in Cleveland in 1909 and was awarded a four-year scholarship at the Cleveland School of Architecture at Western Reserve University. While in college he won many awards, receiving the Cleveland-Fontainebleau Scholarship upon his graduation in 1930 with a bachelor's degree in Architecture. He attended the Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts in France in the summer of 1930 and returned to Western Reserve for graduate work in design.<sup>44</sup> In 1931, Guenther received First Medal (among 644 competitors) in the Paris Prize competition sponsored by the Society of Beaux Arts Architects, which providing \$3,600 in funding to study at the Ecole de Beaux Arts and travel through Europe.<sup>45</sup> Guenther and architect Richard Franklin Outcalt founded the architecture firm Outcalt and Guenther in 1942. Outcalt had practiced architecture in Cleveland since 1928, while Guenther, a graduate of Western Reserve University, began his practice in the late 1930s. The firm designed many school facilities, including the Columbus School for the Blind (1953), the Cleveland Airport terminal building (1956). The firm became Outcalt, Guenther, Rode & Bonebrake by 1964; Guenther left the firm in the late 1960s and died in 1978.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Paris Prize Competition Results," *Pencil Points*, August 1931, 613.

<sup>45</sup> "Carl F. Guenther Wins Beaux-Arts Prize as Architect," *Chicago Tribune*, June 26, 1931, 25.

<sup>46</sup> "Outcalt and Guenther," *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* (Case Western Reserve University)  
<https://case.edu/ech/articles/o/outcalt-and-guenther>.

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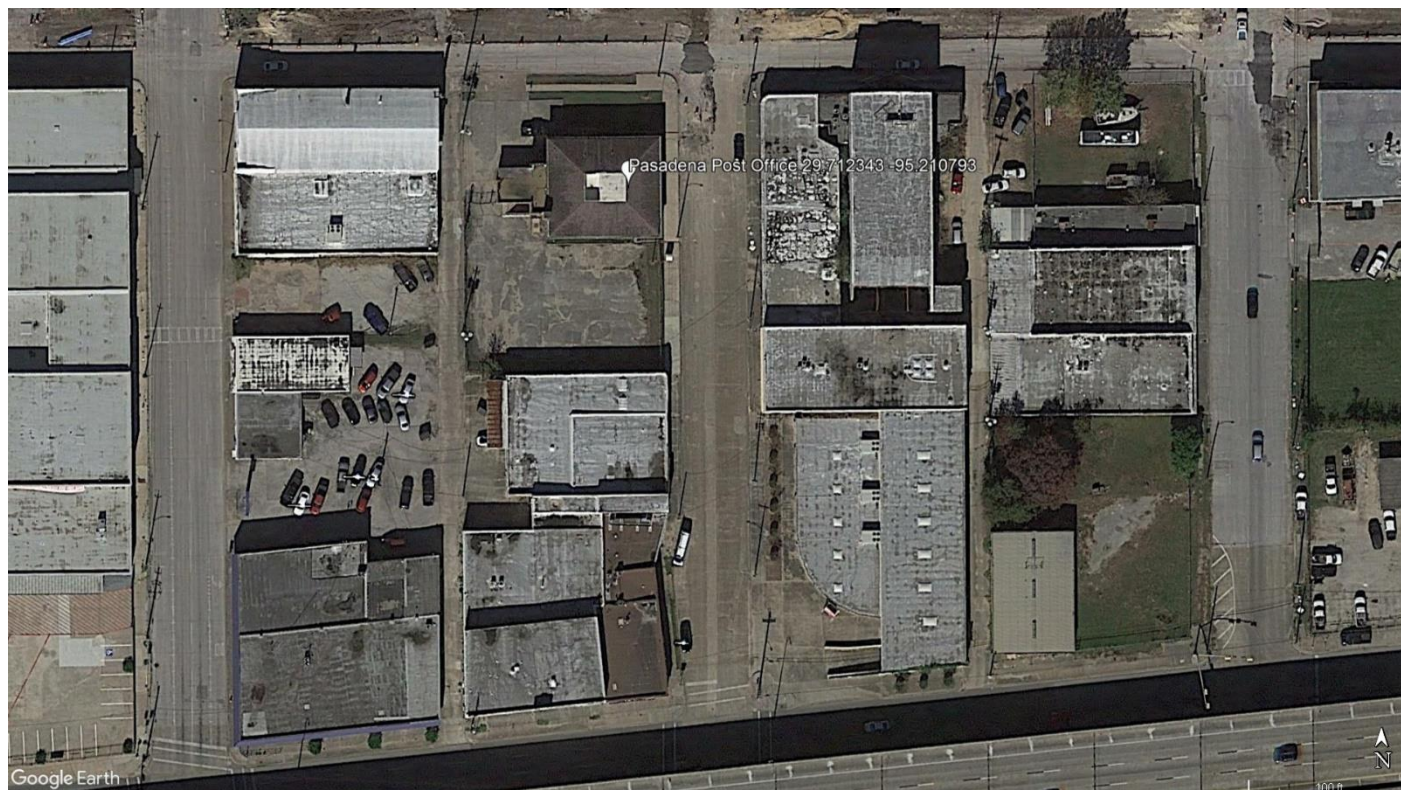
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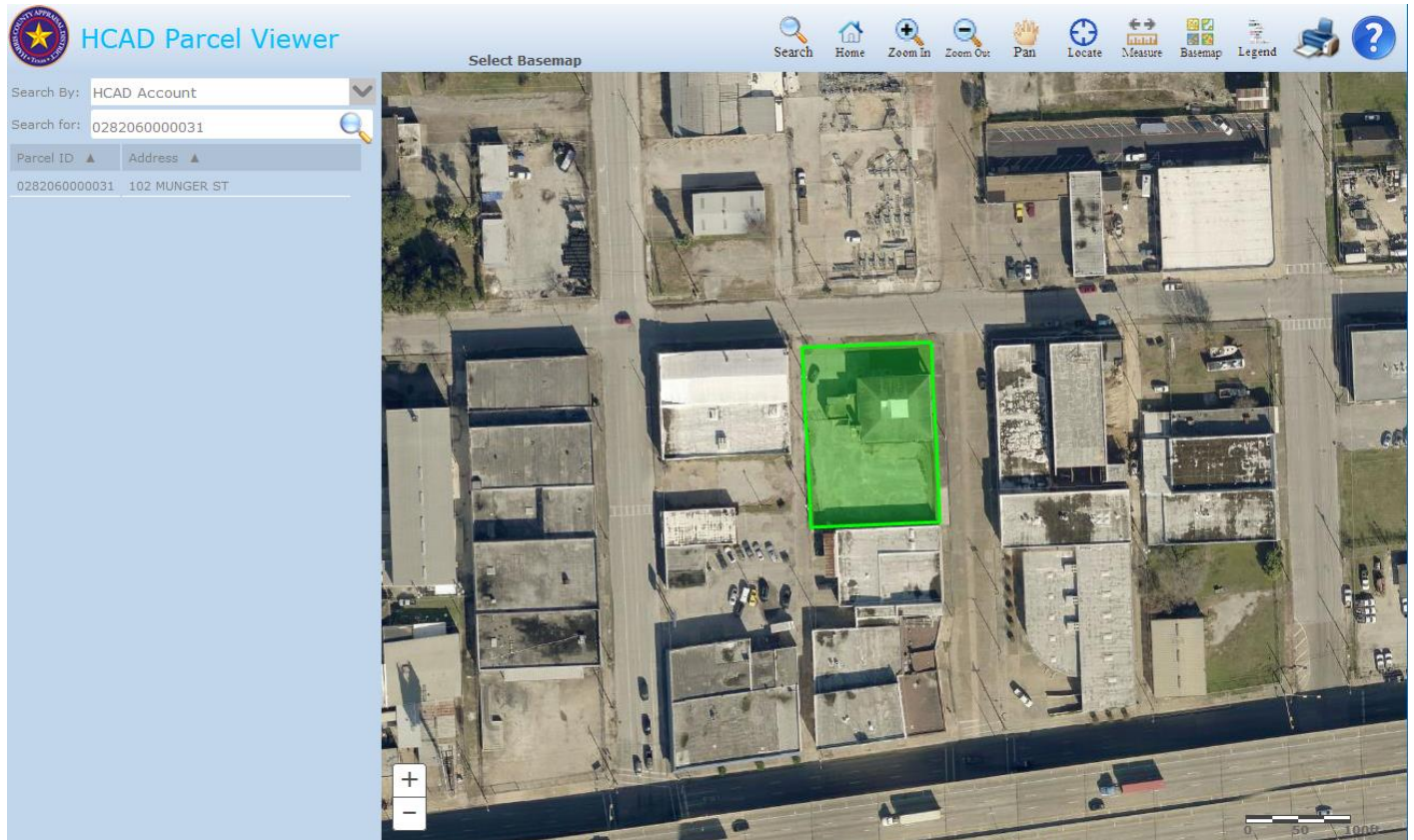
Google Earth Map  
Accessed October 6, 2021





Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

## Harris CAD (Central Appraisal District) Map

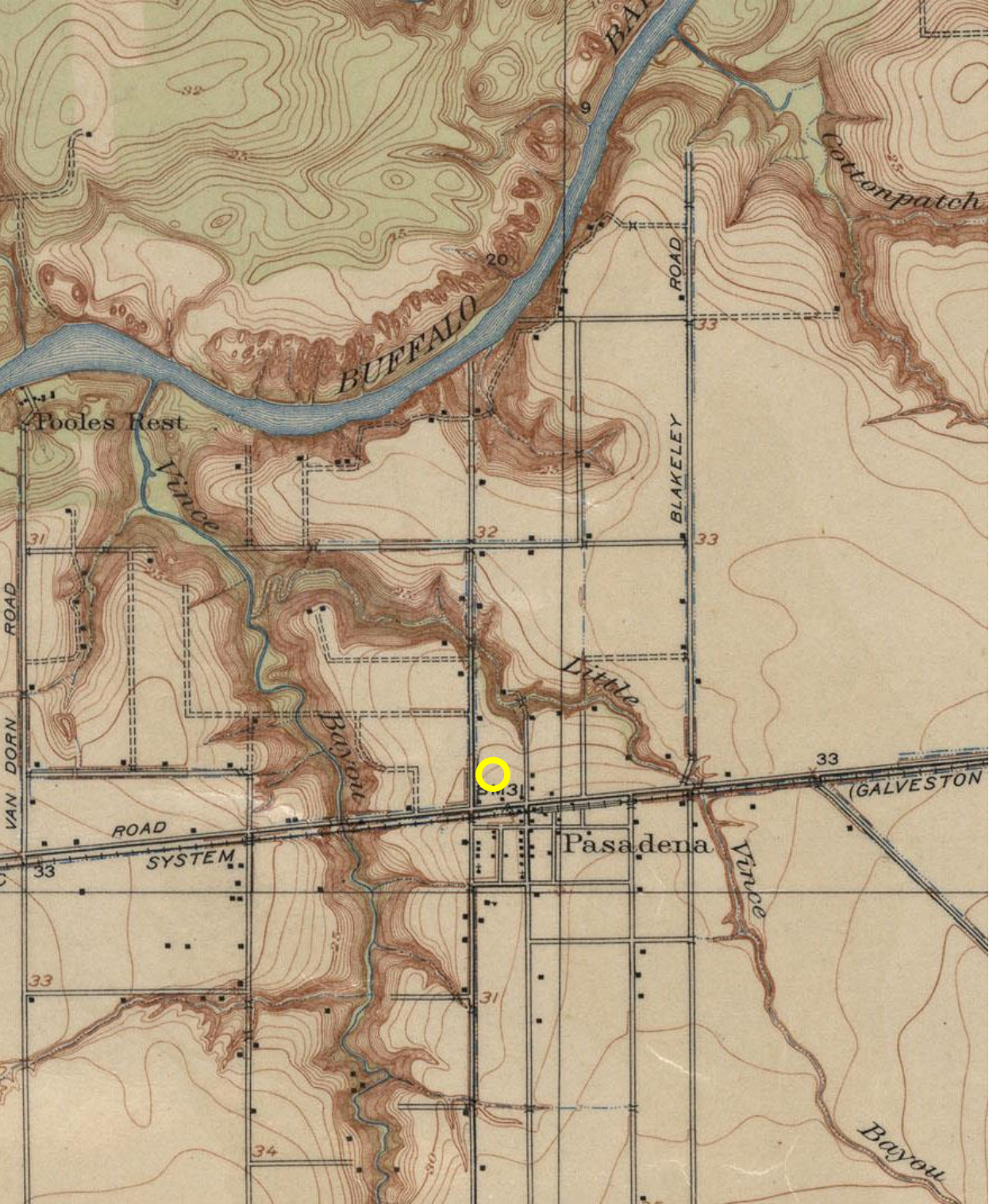




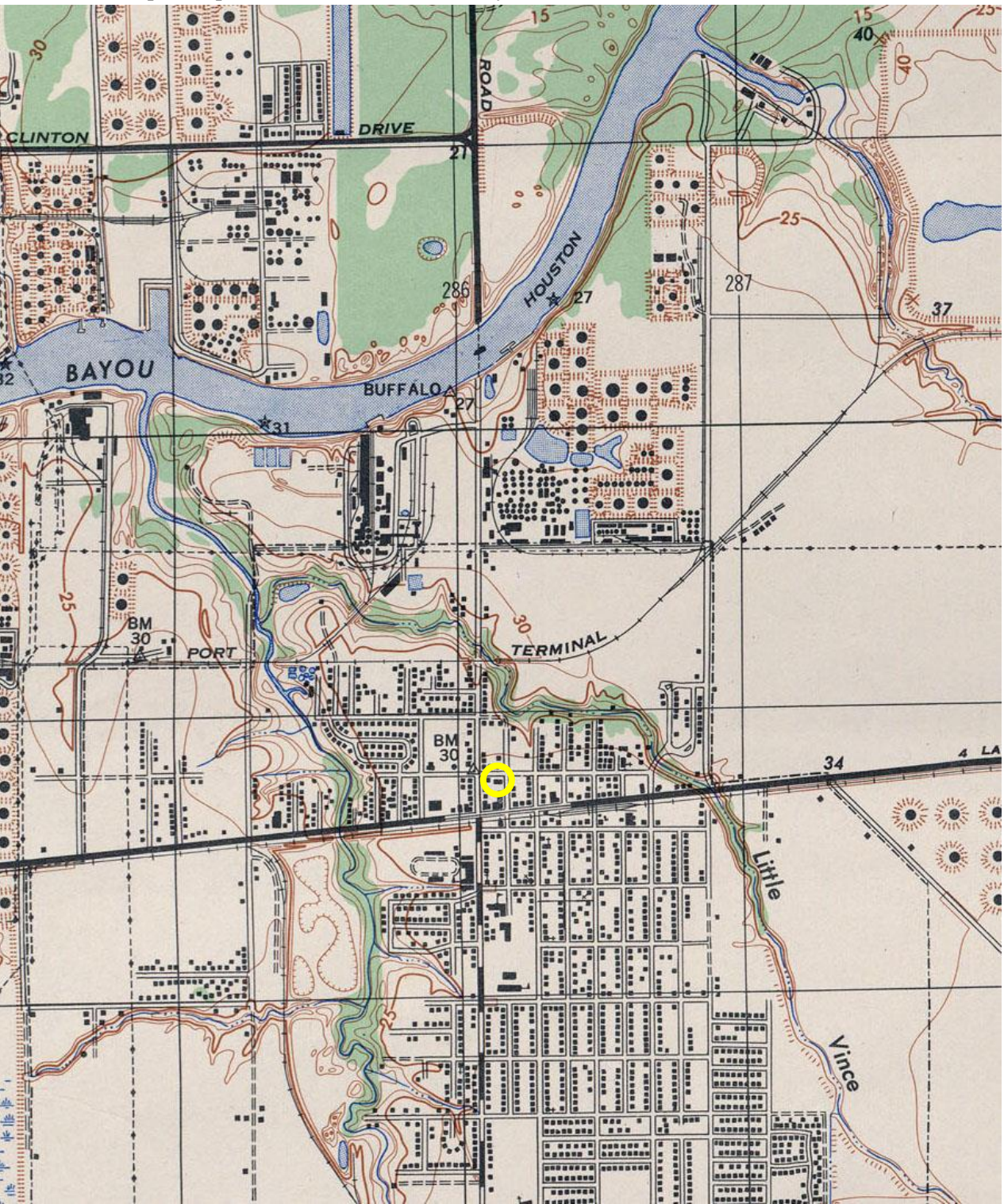
Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

Development of Pasadena after completion of the Houston Ship Channel in 1914.

1915 USGS Map, (Deepwater, Texas). Future site of post office in yellow circle.



1947 USGS Map, (Deepwater, Texas). Post office in yellow circle.





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Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. May 1932

Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.

[http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4034pm.g4034pm\\_g086931932](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4034pm.g4034pm_g086931932)

The future post office site is highlighted in blue

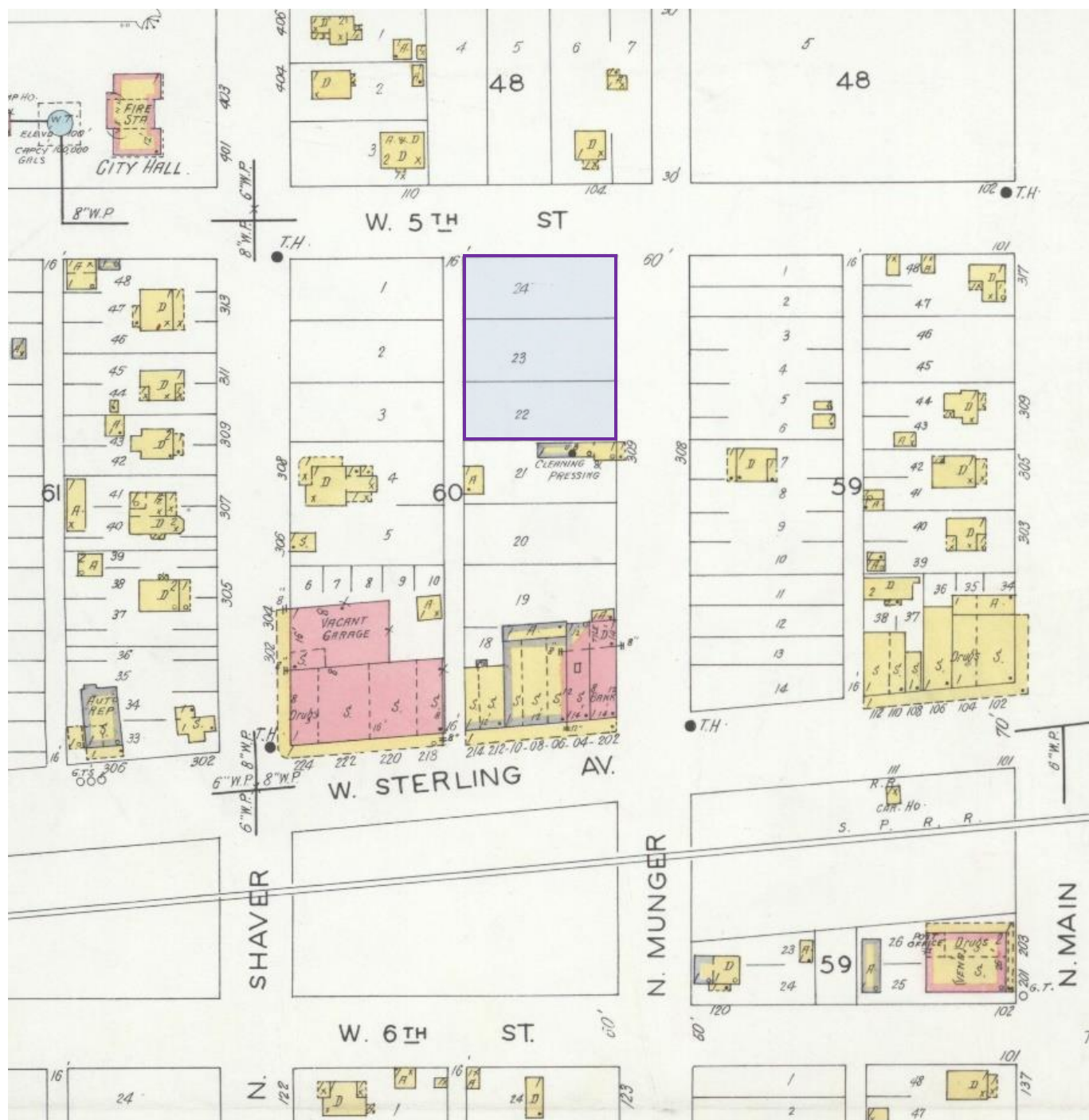


FIGURE - Page 21

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Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1943.

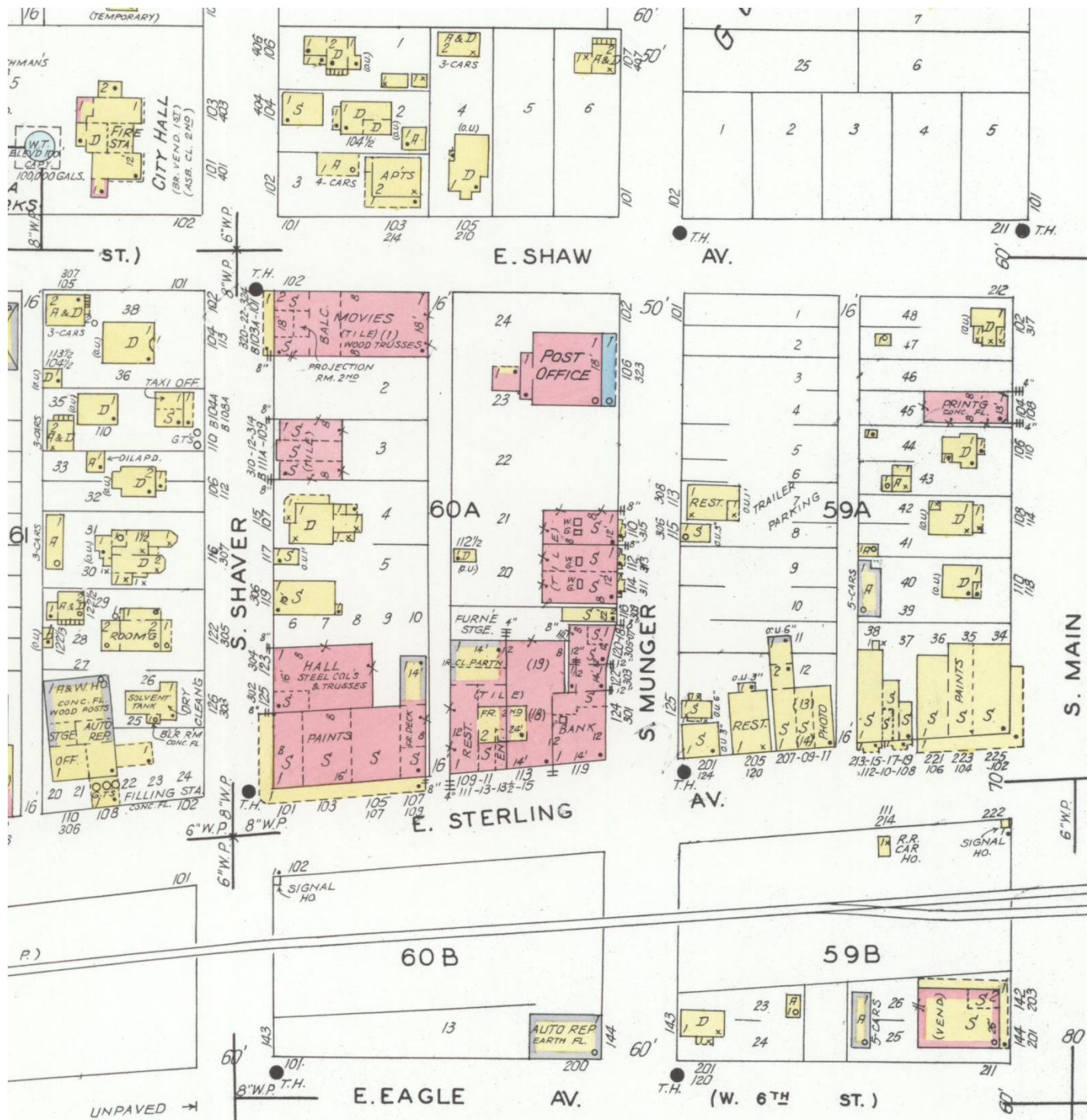


FIGURE - Page 22

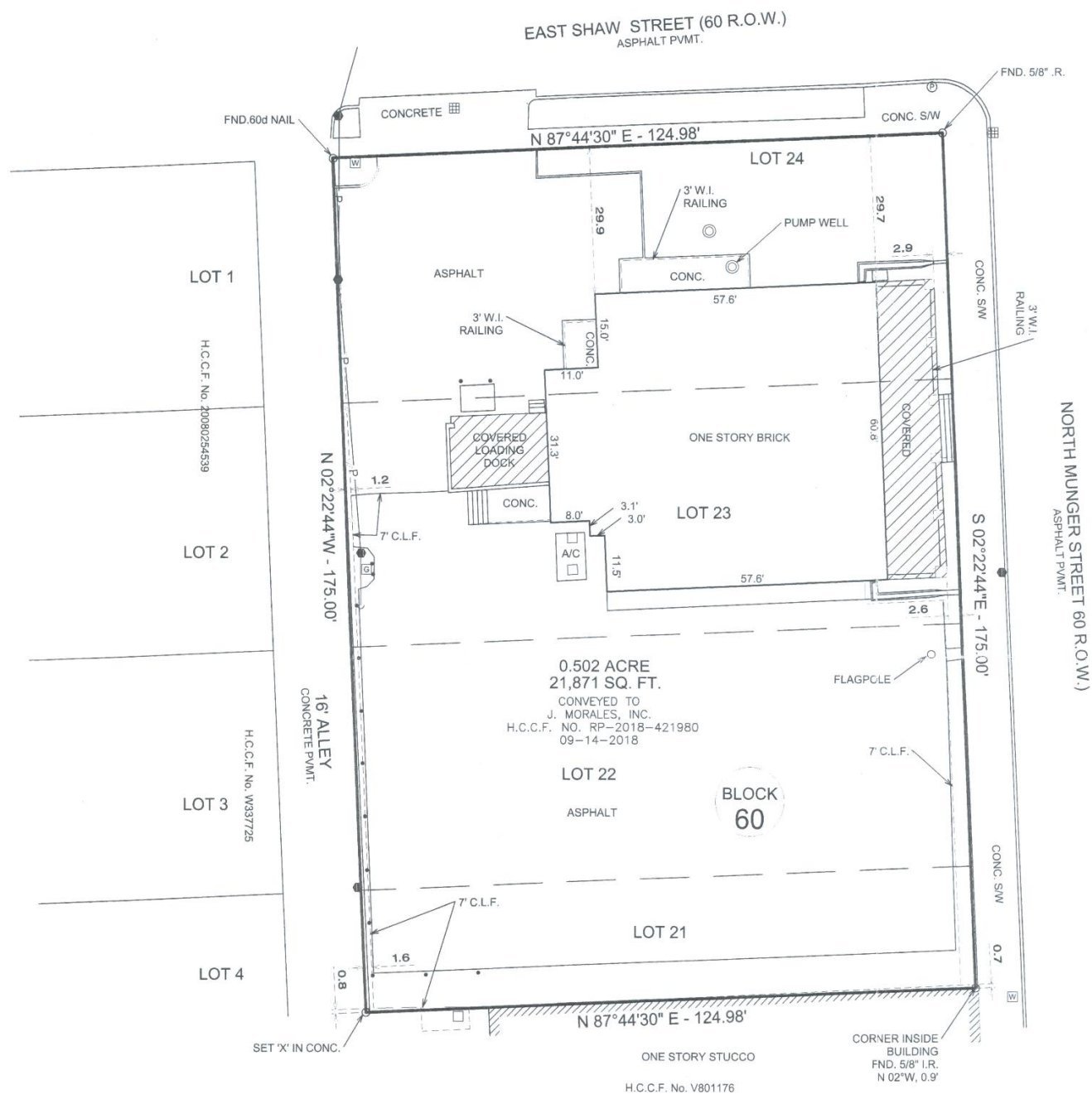


FIGURE - Page 23



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

1939 Floor Plan by the Office of the Supervising Architect

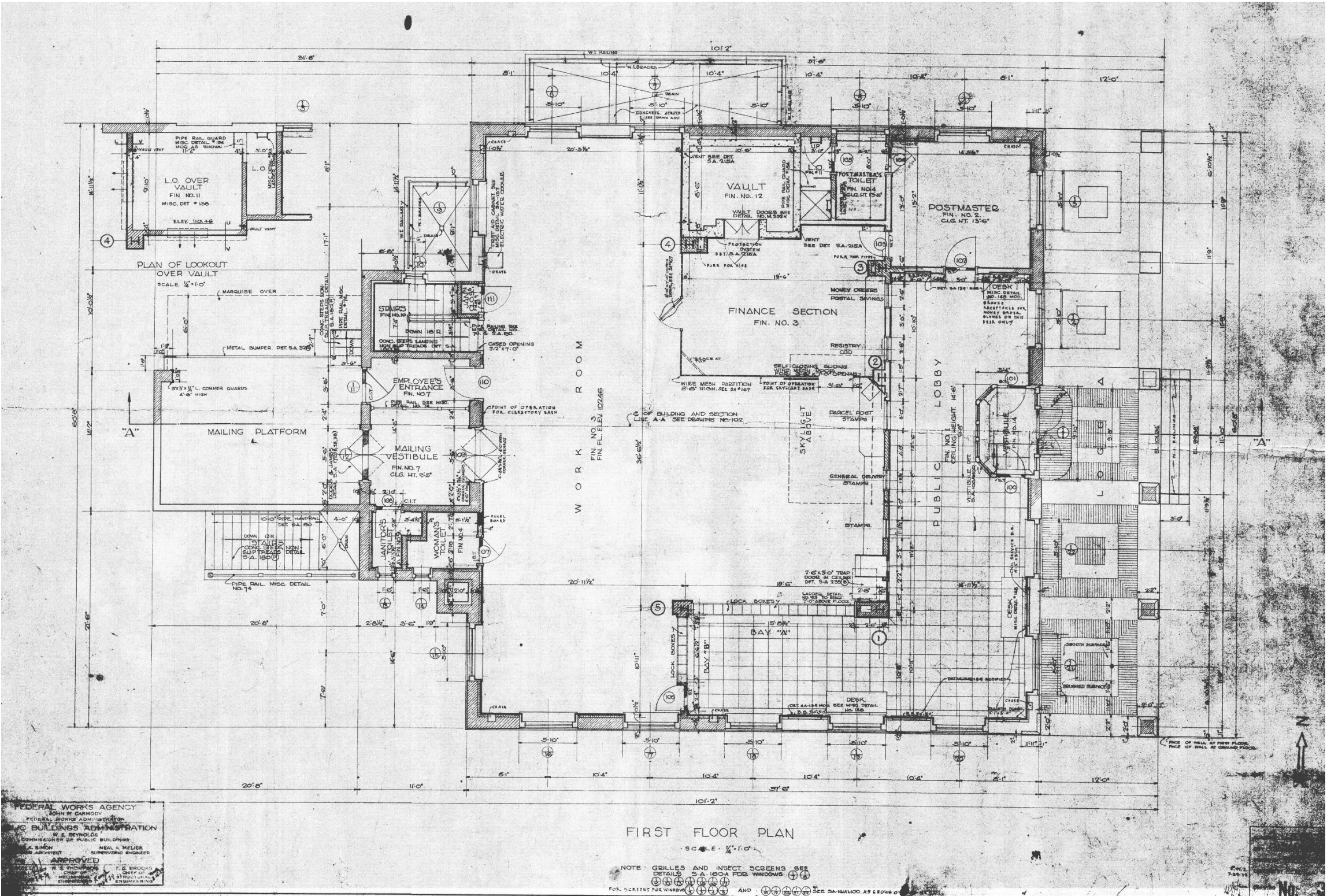


FIGURE - Page 24





Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

Final Rehabilitation Floor Plan

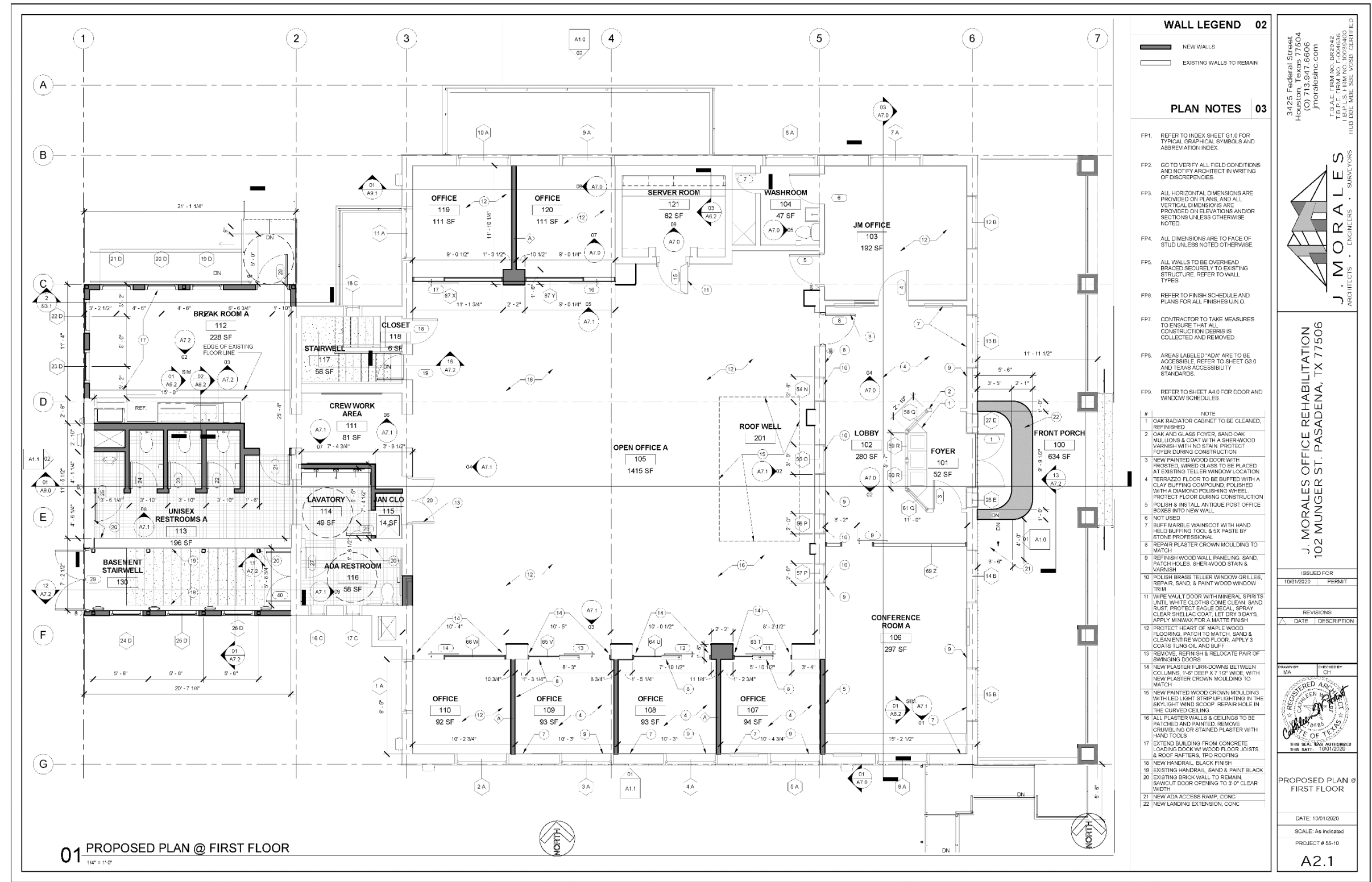


FIGURE - Page 26



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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Post Office site, December 6, 1939

Looking from the southeast corner of the construction site.



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Post Office site, December 23, 1939

Looking from the southwest corner of the construction site.



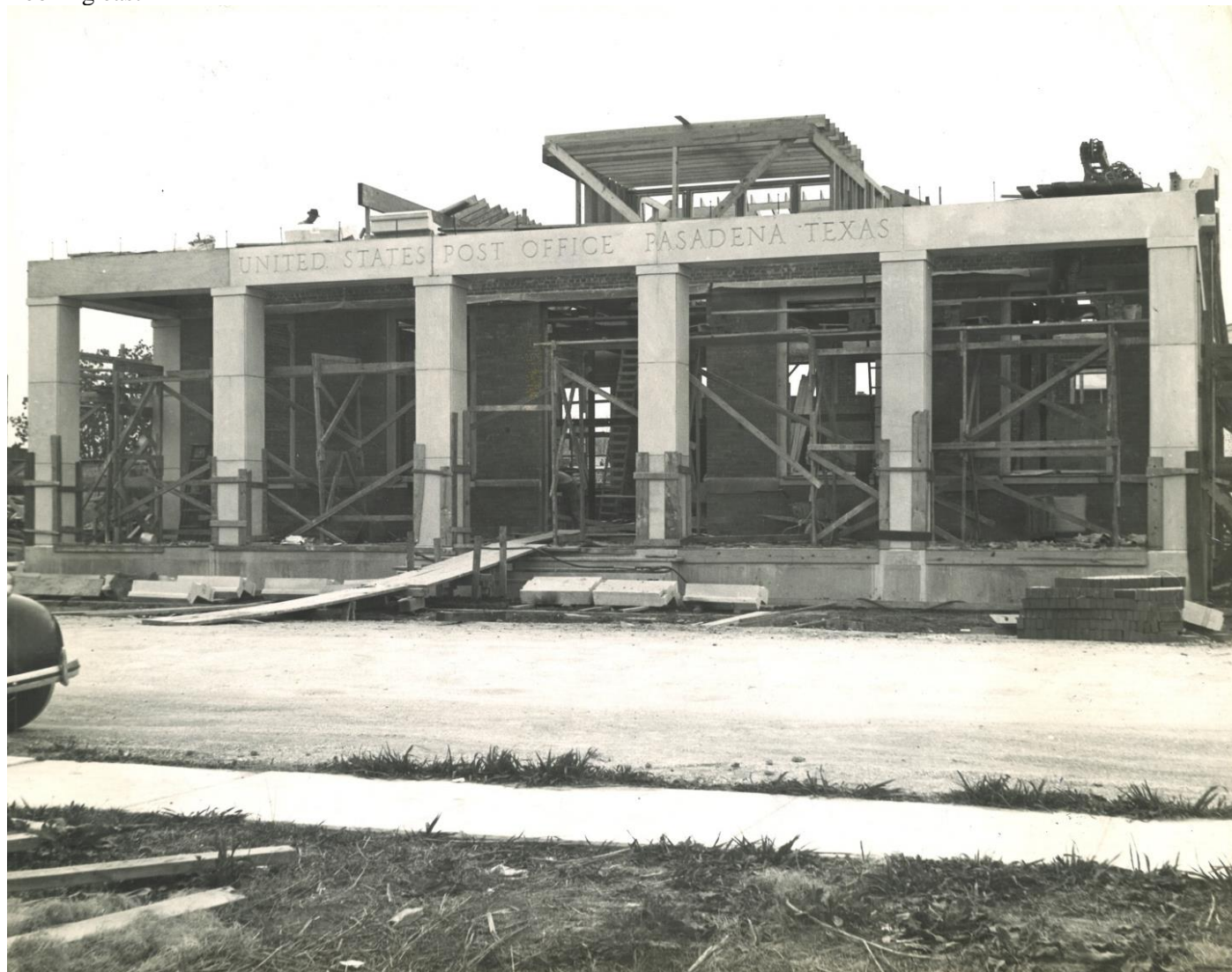


Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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March 26, 1940

Looking east



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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March 26, 1940  
Looking southeast



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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Official USPS Photo upon completion, 1940.



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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Pasadena Post Office in 1963 (*Houston Post*)



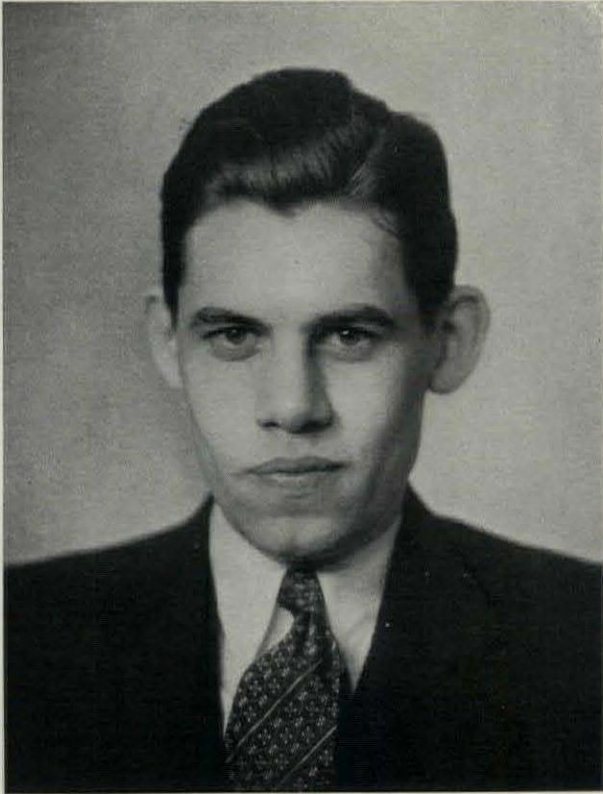


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Building designer Carl Guenther in 1931

*Pencil Points*, August 1931



CARL F. GUENTHER

Carl F. Guenther, who placed first in this year's Paris Prize Competition in Architecture, was born in Cleveland in 1909. Upon graduation from high school he was awarded a four-year scholarship at the Cleveland School of Architecture at Western Reserve University. While in this school he won various prizes, including the Cleveland-Fontainebleau Scholarship, which he was awarded upon his graduation in June, 1930, with the Degree of B. Arch. During the summer of 1930 he attended the Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts and returned to W.R.U. for graduate work in design during the past school year.

Mr. Guenther wishes to express his appreciation for the kind assistance and guidance of Mr. Abram Garfield and for the constant interest taken in his work by Dean Francis R. Bacon of the Cleveland School of Architecture. He also expresses thanks to his Patron, Rudolph Stanley-Brown, and Messrs. John E. Miller and Arthur J. Kelsey for their helpful criticism and training in the course of the competition.

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New Deal Post Offices with Similar Characteristics

U.S. Post Office, Tallulah, Louisiana (1935)

This New Deal Era small post office is closest in façade composition to the Pasadena Post Office. Examples with full colonnades of any type are extremely rare.



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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U.S. Post Office, South Hadley, Mass. (1935)

This wedged-shaped post office has a full colonnade on its narrow primary façade.





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Two rare examples featuring semicircular porticoes with squared supports

U.S. Post Office, Great Neck, New York. (1937-38)

Round portico at center bay of a rectangular-plan building.



U.S. Post Office, St. Marys, Penn.. (1935)

Round portico infilled with glass block at fulcrum end of wedge-plan building.





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Pasadena Post Office  
Birdseye looking southwest, April 2021



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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Current Photos (November 2021)

1. East elevation





Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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2. Southeast oblique



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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3. Northeast oblique





Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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4. Primary east entrance



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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5. Looking across portico. facing south.





Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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6. East elevation, portico, facing southwest.



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7. North elevation.





Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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8. Northwest oblique, showing loading dock and annex at right.



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9. West elevation.



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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10. Lobby, looking north towards former postmaster's office.





Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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11. Lobby, looking south.



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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12. Lobby, looking northwest from southeast corner.





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13. South side of lobby (conference room), looking east.



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14. Former workroom, looking northwest.



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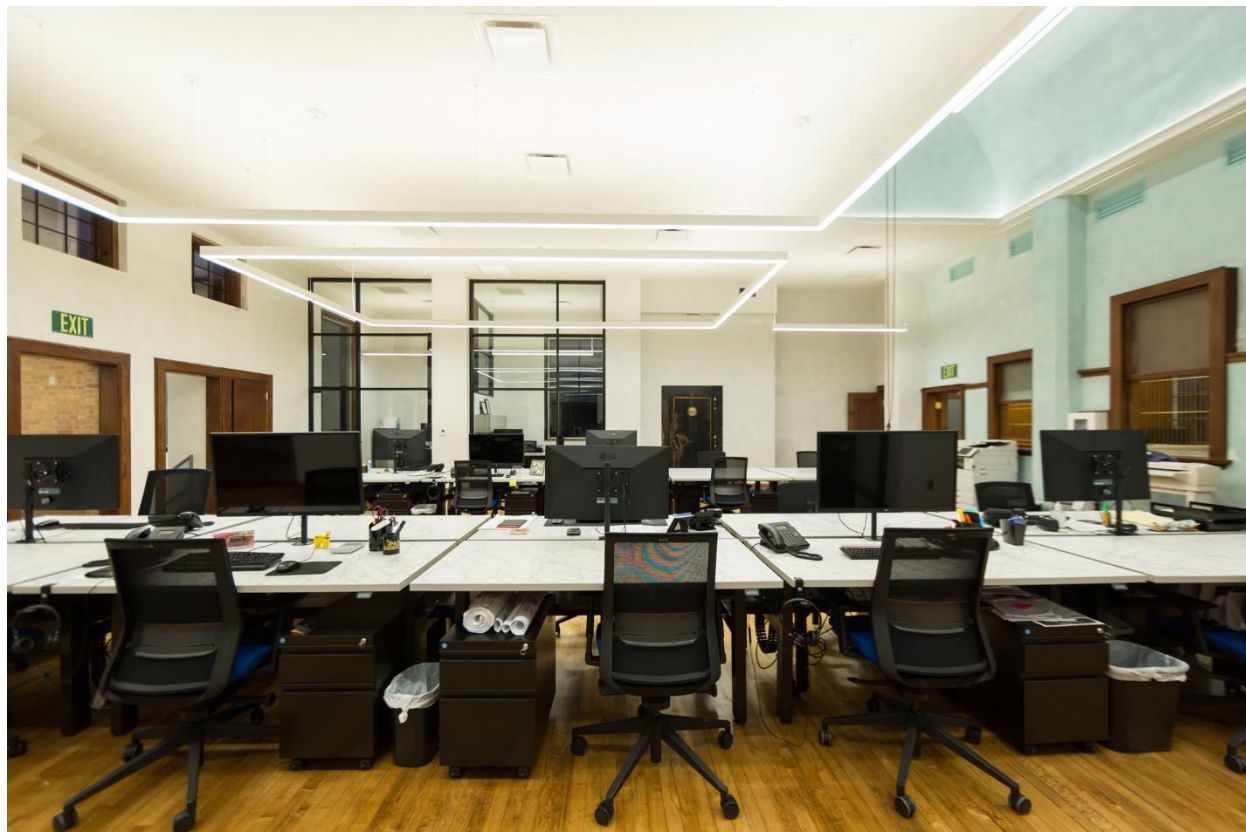
15. Former workroom, looking southeast toward clerk windows and new offices.



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16. Former workroom, looking north.





Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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17. Former workroom, looking southwest.



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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18. Former workroom, looking east towards clerk windows.



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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19. Workroom detail, looking northwest towards former vault door.



Pasadena Post Office, Pasadena, Harris County, Texas

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20. Former workroom, looking southwest toward annex and loading dock.



- end-