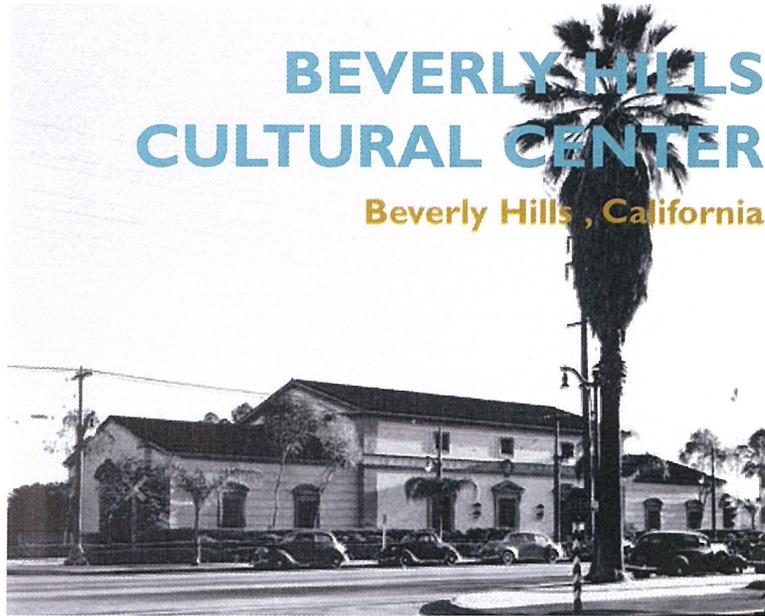


# **ATTACHMENT 3**

# BEVERLY HILLS CULTURAL CENTER

Beverly Hills, California



## 1932 CRESCENT DRIVE POST OFFICE HISTORIC STRUCTURE REPORT

March 8, 2002  
(Updated July, 2002)

SUBMITTED BY:  
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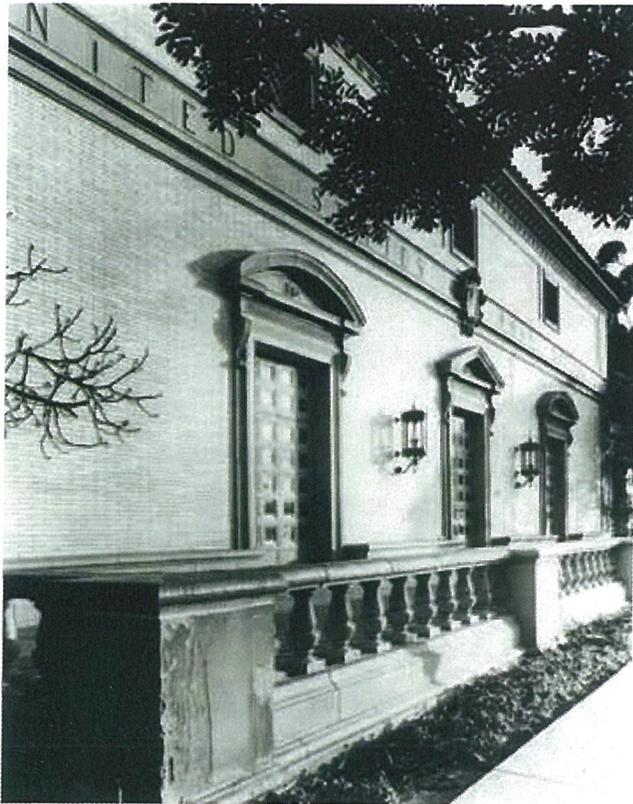
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# **INTRODUCTION**

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## A. Project Description

### Crescent Drive Post Office History

In the early 1900s, the City of Beverly Hills was slowly evolving into the community it is today and by the 1930's, had reached a point where a true "civic center" was needed to house city government and services. The plan for the civic center called for three buildings, a new city hall, fire station and post office. Architect Ralph C. Flewelling, who was selected to design the post office with consulting architects Allison and Allison began working on the design in 1931 and by 1934, Beverly Hills had its first Main Post Office.

After serving the community for over 60 years, the function of the post office outgrew its envelope and a new Main Post Office was constructed, leaving the original Post Office on Crescent drive empty, declared excess by the United States Postal Service. The building was offered for sale to Federal, State and local governments and in 1999, the City of Beverly Hills purchased the building with the intent of turning it into a new cultural center for the city.

In 1985, the historic significance of the Crescent Drive Post Office was recognized with its placement on the National Register of Historic Places. The building is in excellent condition and is well suited to house the new cultural center with modest modifications to the historic areas of the interior. The primary historic spaces consisting of the public lobbies and foyers will be incorporated into the new cultural center and preserved for future generations to enjoy. Spaces with little or no historic value will be adaptively reused to house the working areas of the Cultural Center.

### Current Project

The current project began in 2000 when a preliminary team of architects and engineers were retained by the Beverly Hills Cultural Center to do a preliminary study on the feasibility of inserting a 500 seat theater into the existing shell of the building. The conclusion of the study was the project could proceed without damaging the historic fabric of the building while ensuring a state of the art, high quality cultural center for the city.

In December of 2001, the Beverly Hills Cultural Center retained Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates to provide the design and consultant services necessary to design the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the Crescent Drive Post Office. The first step in this process was an investigation of existing conditions, preparation of an Historic Structure Report, and development of a program and design concept for the rehabilitation. The Historic Structure Report and its Appendices are the result of this work.

## B. Summary of Historic Structure Report

The Historic Structure Report describes the history, conditions and future for the Crescent Drive Post Office. In preparation of this report, numerous technical and research efforts contributed to the report's findings. These are included in the Appendices of the report and include existing conditions forms and photographs, archival research and the exterior building materials survey.

### C Contributors

The Historic Structures Report was developed with the input and help of the following entities:

Beverly Hills Cultural Center - Owner  
Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates - Architects  
Wiss Janney Elstner - Materials Conservation  
Dennis Tannenbaum - Historic Consultant  
Alan Schneider - City of Beverly Hills General Services  
Manager  
Beverly Hills Public Library Reference Librarians  
Sally Sims - Curator, National Trust for Historic  
Preservation Library Collection

**HISTORIC BACKGROUND & CONTENT**





of land to various investors including James Whitworth, Edison A. Benedict, Pierce Benedict and the largest land purchaser, Dr. Edward A. Preuss who bought 3,608 acres for \$10,775. Preuss sold half his interest to a partner and together they sold the land for \$32,000 to the De Las Aguas Land Association. The land association subdivided their holdings, almost all of the original Rancho, into 75-acre farm lots with the center reserved for the "Town of Santa Maria". Santa Maria was laid out with wide streets and tracts selling for \$10 each, but due to another round of severe drought the town was abandoned and the land was re-established as a rancho by new owner Remi Nadeau.

In the 1880s Charles Dencker and Henry Hammel began to purchase the rancho parcel by parcel to use for growing supplies that would be used at their hotel, the United States Hotel, in Los Angeles. Due to their extensive land holdings, the original rancho became known as the Hammel & Dencker Ranch. They used the land for many years growing such staples as lima beans for the hotel.

Eventually, interest in oil reappeared and shareholders of the Amalgamated Oil Company, including Burton E. Green, purchased the Hammel and Dencker holdings. Similar to previous attempts to discover oil, the venture proved to be a failure as the equipment couldn't drill deep enough but the owners struck water on the site instead of oil. The Rodeo Land and Water Company was born and was dedicated to founding a residential community with "broad tree-lined streets, spacious lots and generous parks."<sup>1</sup> Burton Green named the community Beverly Hills after Beverly Farms in Massachusetts where Green had spent time. "Hills" was selected instead of "farms" due to the surrounding landscape. On January 23, 1907, the subdivision of Beverly Hills was officially recorded.

By 1910, only six residences had been built in Beverly Hills due to the panic of 1907-8 and slow economic growth. In order to boost promotion of the subdivision, the Rodeo Land and Water Company decided to build a lavish hotel to draw attention to the area. The Beverly Hills Hotel opened in 1912 and garnered the amount of attention that had been anticipated. New residents moved into the hotel as well as the surrounding area and by 1914, Beverly Hills had grown to almost 500 residents and was incorporated as a city. In 1920 "the reigning King and Queen of Hollywood [Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford] had moved to Beverly Hills"<sup>2</sup> starting an influx of Hollywood stars who set up home in the area.

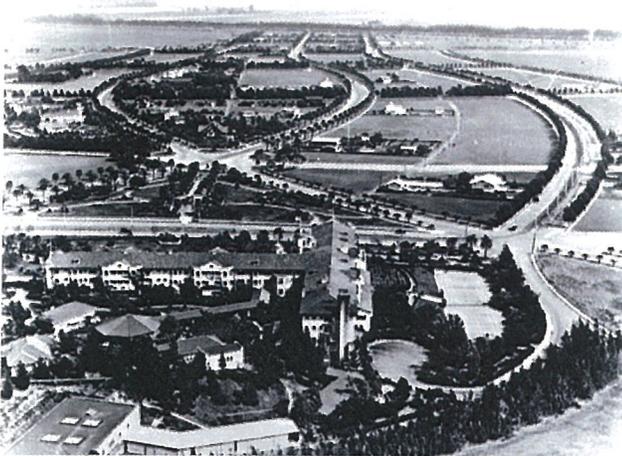
With the population continuing to expand, fears arose within the Rodeo Land and Water Company that their wells were not sufficient to supply water to the entire city. The Company rallied support and had a proposition placed on the ballot to have the city annexed by the city of Los Angeles to solve the water problems. Concerned about their identity as Beverly Hills, local citizens defeated the measure on election day in 1923 and soon



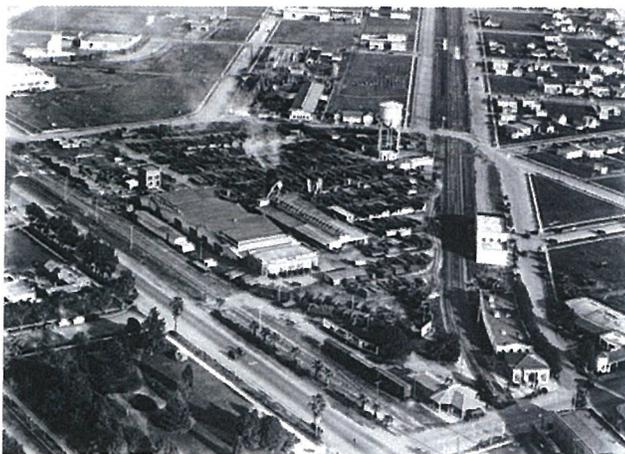
Hammel & Dencker Ranch - 1880s



Crescent Drive - 1911



Beverly Hills Hotel and Surrounding Area - 1912



Site of Future Civic Center (Santa Monica Blvd. in Front)

after, the Rodeo Land and Water Company sold out and led the way for the development of Beverly Hills' own well and water system.

From 700 residents in 1920, the city ballooned to over 7,500 residents in 1925. By 1926 the population reached 12,000. As churches and schools were constructed all around the city, the newly instated mayor and city council of Beverly Hills began ambitious plans for an official civic center which would include a city hall, fire station and post office. In 1930, the city purchased land from the Pacific Electric Railway for the location of the new civic center and construction began on the new city hall. The new city hall was dedicated in 1932 and design work was well underway on the new post office.

## 1930 - 1934

After the city of Beverly Hills had grown to over 12,000 people in 1926 it was determined that a post office needed to be secured for the city. In 1928 a committee was appointed and two of the members appeared before the Appropriations Committee in Washington to request funds for the site and structure. The Appropriations Committee offered the city \$85,000 for the new building which was seen as inadequate by the city and refused.

Failure to secure the proper amount of funding led famed political humorist and one time honorary mayor of Beverly Hills, Will Rogers to step in. In 1930 he wrote a letter to Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon:

*Dear Mr. Mellon -*

*This will introduce you to Mr. Lon Haddock of Beverly Hills, California. It seems you owe us \$250,000 to build a post office and they can't get the dough out of you, and I told them that I knew you and that you weren't that kind of fellow at heart. So in place of suing you, why, he is going back there and see is he can't jar you loose from it.*

*We are getting a lot of mail out here now, and they are handling it in a tent. It is mostly circulars from Washington with speeches on prosperity, but it makes awful good reading while waiting for the foreclosure.*

*But all seriousness aside, why don't you give these birds this dough and we will build you a post office that Republican campaign literature won't be ashamed to come into.*

*Let me know when Columbia University is going to give you another dinner. I don't want to miss it.*

*I had luncheon in Pittsburgh with your brother last spring. He*



Pacific Electric Station on Future Site of Post Office

*was awful nice to me. I bet he don't owe any town anything. I know your daughter very well, and I don't want to have to go over your head and take it up with her.*

*By the way, if some town don't call for their post office money, why lay it aside for Claremore, Oklahoma. We don't get no mail, but might if we had a post office.*

*Hope the budget balances.*

*Regards to you,  
Will Rogers<sup>3</sup>*

As a result, Washington appropriated \$300,000 for the Beverly Hills Post Office.

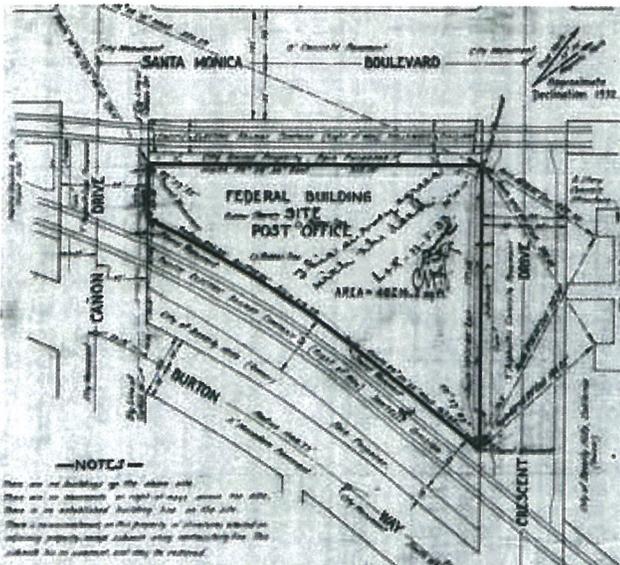
According to dated drawings, design work was well underway in 1931 after the supervising architect's office of Treasury Department retained architect Ralph C Flewelling of Beverly Hills with Allison and Allison of Los Angeles as consultants. Hiring private architects to design government structures was a new process for the Treasury Department due to "its recently adopted policy of retaining private architects to speed up the government's building program."<sup>4</sup>

The site for the building was a parcel of land that had been purchased from the Pacific Electric Railway Company by the city as part of the master plan for the new civic center. Designed to compliment City Hall which had already been designed and was under construction directly across the street, Flewelling chose the Italian Renaissance Revival style for the building.

The site was sandwiched between two sets of tracks that belonged to the Pacific Electric Railway Company. The Hollywood Division line ran parallel to Santa Monica Boulevard immediately north of the site while the Sawtelle Division line ran parallel to Burton Way immediately to the south of the site. Due to this, although the north (Santa Monica Boulevard) façade was designed as the main formal entry, the public ended up using the side entries off of Crescent Drive on the east and Canon Drive on the west to avoid the rail traffic.

Then Postmaster J. Lewis Ross stated that the building was being designed to make it, "a little better than the ordinary federal building and to construct it in keeping with the high class nature of Beverly Hills."<sup>5</sup> The design review process by the City Council was ongoing during the course of project and at times conflicted with governmental requirements for the post office. In a wire sent to Ferry K. Heath, assistant secretary of the Treasury, Mayor Paul Schwab stated:

*"Your wire regarding postoffice received shortly before last night's council meeting. Matter discussed but no action taken because two members of council absent. Find still some objection to plans with suggestion strongly urged that a larger portion of building*



1930 Site Survey Showing Railroad Tracks

*should be placed in second story to give better balance with City Hall building. This suggestion has been rejected by the Pacific Coast postoffice inspector. Will appreciate knowing if his decision final. Counsel feels plans have been substantially improved since first submitted and seriously considering granting additional ground. Expect submit matter for action in two weeks.*<sup>6</sup>

After the final drawings were accepted, the firm of Sarver and Zoss of Los Angeles were retained as contractors and ground breaking occurred in early spring, 1933. By May of that year, the steel superstructure was complete and the building started to take form. The building stayed in the public eye during construction as newspaper articles described a building that was to be clad in brick and terra cotta on the exterior with a two story lobby on the interior clad in tile and marble. The structural system for the building was "produced in structural steel with reinforced concrete filled walls and provide[d] for earthquake resistance."<sup>7</sup> The corner stone was laid on Wednesday, November 15, 1933 and the building was finally opened on April 28, 1934 with an elaborate dedication ceremony and celebration that included a flag raising ceremony, automobile show, introductory parade, UCLA band concert, vaudeville stage show, fashion show and bathing beauty pageant "in which rubber suits are featured."<sup>8</sup>

Aside from the exterior facade, the grand public lobby, which housed all of the post office services, was the jewel of the building. Flanked by single story transition spaces on both the east and west, the double height main lobby with its barrel vaulted ceiling provided the citizens of Beverly Hills with a dignified space in which to send and receive mail. The floors and walls of the room were clad in marble and topped off with WPA murals by artist Charles Kassler.

Although the marble gave the lobby a somewhat lavish appearance, architect Flewelling stated that, "the architectural detail, while inspired by the work of that [early Renaissance] period, has been simplified and modified to a large extent, particularly in the interior of the public lobby where the entire surroundings are a study in scale and proportion where the amount of detail work is quite limited. This produces quite a modern atmosphere in the lobby interior."<sup>9</sup> All of the marble was provided by the Vermont Marble Company and originated from Italian quarries. The floor pattern contains three types of marble, French Gray, Verde Antique Light, and Verde Antique Dark while the walls and pilasters are clad in Roseal and the base and plinths are Verde Antique Dark.

In addition to the marble, ornamental metal lobby screen grilles, ornate mail tables and decorative metal light fixtures resulted in a highly finished room.

The murals on the walls above the marble were commissioned by the Treasury Department under two different contracts. Painted as frescos, there were actually 8 lunettes, one on each end of the



Crescent Drive Post Office - 1934



East Lobby - 1934

room, "Post Rider" and "Air Mail", and three on each the north and south sides of the room which as a complete painting were entitled "Construction - PWA." The murals on the north and south were part of the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) which was created to employ artists during the Depression. The Kassler mural is the PWA only effort in the state of California that shows depression era unemployment problems. The subject matter was not chosen to criticize the government, but rather to "underscore the virtues of the New Deal" and to show "the administrations effort to solve the unemployment problem."<sup>10</sup>

The remaining space in the building was allocated to non-public working spaces. The first floor included the Postmaster's suite (Postmaster Office, private toilet room, Assistant Postmaster Office, safe and receptionist area), the Superintendent of Mails Office, the workroom and associated loading and delivery rooms. The second floor housed an office for the Postoffice Inspector, the Men's Swing Room, and Men's Toilet. The basement housed vault rooms for storage of post office supplies, custodian quarters and mechanical spaces. All of these non-public spaces were quite plain and finished with plaster or concrete walls with metal trim and doors. The Postmaster's suite, although a non-public space, had a higher level of finish than the rest of the back of house spaces and was trimmed in American Walnut. The Postmaster's private office in particular was finished in 8' high American Walnut wainscot.

The systems in the building were state of the art as described by the architect, "the heating plant is a combination oil and gas fired boiler. The system is a vacuum return steam plant with fin type recessed grille radiators in the public spaces and the usual cast iron radiators elsewhere."<sup>11</sup>

**1934 - Present**

The Crescent Drive Post Office served as the hub for postal operations in Beverly Hills until 1960 when the letter carrier operation was moved to an annex located at 325 North Maple Drive. After the move, the Crescent Drive Post Office retained service of retail sales and post office boxes and underwent a major renovation which included additional excavation to enlarge the basement, infill of all the skylights in the building, and modifications to the second floor. A full listing of all the changes during the remodel are listed on page 11 of this report.

Additional modifications were made to the building in 1981 which included the addition of retail windows and more post office boxes. The Crescent Station continued to serve such notable citizens as Fred Astaire until 1990 when construction of a new postal facility named the Beverly Hills Main Post Office at the site of the old Maple Street Annex was completed. Upon completion, almost all postal services moved to the new location and the Crescent Drive Post Office was declared excess.

The structure was made available to Federal, State, County and Municipal governments and was purchased by the City of Beverly Hills for \$3.2 million. The City awarded the Beverly Hills Cultural Center Foundation a long-term lease with the provision that the building be restored and adaptively reused to create the new Beverly Hills Cultural Center. The Crescent Drive Post Office was officially closed in March 1999 and all remaining post office boxes were moved to the main Post Office on Maple Drive.

Today the building stands vacant aside from the use of the old Postmaster's Suite by the Executive Director and staff of the Beverly Hills Cultural Center.

**B2. Building Chronology**

**Design and Construction**

The design and construction of the Crescent Drive Post Office was an important piece of the development of Beverly Hills' Civic Center. In conjunction with City Hall (completed in 1932) and the fire station (also completed in 1932), the building stands as one of three buildings built during the Depression that mark the triumph of a city establishing itself. Due to the press coverage of the construction of the civic center and surviving construction drawings, many of the original consultants and materials suppliers are known. The list is as follows:

- Architects - Ralph C. Flewelling, Beverly Hills
- Consulting Architect - Allison & Allison, Los Angeles
- Consulting Engineers - C.A. Sanborn, Los Angeles
- Mural Artist - Charles Kassler
- Contractors - Sarver & Zoss, Los Angeles
- Brick & Terra Cotta - Gladding McBean Company (Glendale Plant)
- Sand Concrete, Etc. - Graham Brothers, Los Angeles
- Steel - McClintic Marshall Co., Los Angeles
- Structural Steel - McClintic-Marshall Corporation, Washington D.C.
- Reinforcing Steel - Pacific Coast Steel. Corp.
- Decorative Stone - Vermont Marble Company
- Terrazzo - Venetian Terrazzo & Mosaic Co., Los Angeles
- Varnish & Shellac - W.P. Fuller Co., San Francisco
- Doors & Windows - Soule Steel Company, San Francisco
- Hardware - Lockwood Hardware Mfg.
- P.O. Boxes - Yale & Towne Manufacturing, Stamford, Connecticut



East Lobby - 2002

**Use and Alterations: 1934-Present**

During its 68 year history, the Crescent Drive Post Office was modified numerous times to accommodate the increase of mail that came through the doors due to a surge in population from 12,000 in 1926 to over 30,000 in 1990. Those changes and modifications are chronologically listed as follows:

<b>1932-1934</b>	Construction
<b>1936</b>	Decorative Lobby Painting
<b>1937</b>	Metal and Glass Partitions (Location Unknown)
<b>1945</b>	Heating and Piping Upgrades
<b>1950</b>	New Doors at Crescent and Canon Drive Entrances
<b>1952</b>	New Steps at Canon Drive Entrance
<b>1954</b>	Driveway Extension
<b>1956</b>	Yard Improvements
<b>1961</b>	Major Renovation Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Basement Expansion</li> <li>- Realignment of Exterior Basement Stair</li> <li>- Basement Remodel</li> <li>- Women's Break Room</li> <li>- Loading Dock Remodel</li> <li>- Glass &amp; Aluminum Partition Between Foyers and Lobby</li> <li>- Revised West Stair (Extended to Basement)</li> <li>- Intake Lovers at Exterior Doors</li> <li>- Lowered Ceiling in Superintendent of Mails' Office</li> <li>- Infill of all Skylights</li> <li>- Additional Rear Doorway</li> <li>- Modifications to Second Floor</li> <li>- Upgraded HVAC &amp; Electrical</li> </ul>
<b>1968</b>	Paving & Landscaping
<b>1980</b>	Lobby modifications including additional post offices boxes
<b>1980</b>	Exterior Repairs to Stone, Windows and Doors

1982	Miscellaneous Repairs
1984	Miscellaneous Exterior Repairs

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1. Basten, Fred E., Beverly Hills: Portrait of a Fabled City. Douglas-West Publishers; Los Angeles, CA. 1975. p. 26.
  2. Ibid. p.63.
  3. "Will Rogers' Jokes Won Day for New Post Office." Citizen-News, 3/23/62.
  4. "Designs for Postoffice Buildings Conceived by Private Architects." Southwest Builder and Contractor, 12/11/31, p 35.
  5. "Postoffice Site Obstacle Waived". The Beverly Hills Citizen. September 17, 1931.
  6. "Decision on New Postoffice Soon." The Beverly Hills Citizen. February 18, 1932.
  7. "Renaissance of Northern Italy Style for Beverly Hills Postoffice." Southwest Builder and Contractor. 5/11/1934, p19.
  8. "Complete Program of Saturday's Celebration." The Beverly Hills Citizen, Special Souvenir Section 4/26/34, p3.
  9. "Renaissance of Northern Italy Style for Beverly Hills Postoffice." Southwest Builder and Contractor. 5/11/1934, p19.
  10. California History, 58:2:111
  11. "Renaissance of Northern Italy Style for Beverly Hills Postoffice." Southwest Builder and Contractor. 5/11/1934, p19.

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**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

