

The New Deal Fresno Walking Tour and Guide was prepared by Elaine B. Stiles for the City of Fresno Historic Preservation Program, 2008.

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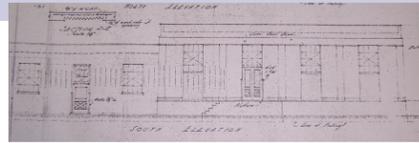
# New Deal Fresno

## Walking Tour and Guide



City of Fresno Planning Department,  
 Historic Preservation Program

## The Legacy of the New Deal



In the wake of the Great Depression, President Franklin Roosevelt instituted a series of programs collectively called the New Deal to provide relief for unemployed workers and foster economic recovery. The cornerstones of the New Deal were the Public Works Administration (PWA) begun in 1933 and the Works Progress (later Work Projects) Administration (WPA) begun in 1935. These programs employed millions of skilled and unskilled workers, including architects and artists, on massive campaigns of public works.

Projects funded through the PWA and WPA transformed countless communities in California, though few today recognize the impact these programs had on the landscape. In Fresno, the New Deal dramatically changed the Civic Center area with a campaign of five new buildings between 1936 and 1941. These include monumental works like the Fresno Memorial Auditorium, stunning examples of Art Deco design like the Fresno County Hall of Records, nationally recognized examples of the International style like the Fresno City Hall (Annex), and projects incorporating important works of art like the U.S. Post Office. The New Deal also left its mark in Fresno in more modest ways through park improvements, fire stations, support buildings, and new sidewalks.

Many of the buildings constructed in Fresno under the New Deal were designed by Allied Architects of Fresno, a partnership of architects W. D. Coates, Charles H. Franklin, H. Rafael Lake, Ernest J. Kump, Sr., Fred Swartz, and Edward W. Peterson. The partnership was formed to compete with larger firms for design work under the New Deal and to ensure that available architecture work was evenly distributed among local practitioners. The WPA's Federal One program commissioned regional artists to create artworks such as murals and sculpture for most of the New Deal-funded buildings in Fresno.

**1. Fresno (Veterans) Memorial Auditorium**  
 2425 Fresno Street, 1935-1936, Allied Architects of Fresno;  
 H.P. #52, Fresno Local Register of Historic Resources



Covering an entire city block, the Fresno Memorial Auditorium is the most substantial New Deal-era project in Fresno. Financed with a \$190,000 PWA grant, the monumental steel frame and concrete building has restrained, classical Art Deco ornament common in New Deal architecture. Originally designed to seat 3,500 people, the auditorium had removable floor seats for arena or convention events. The building now houses a smaller, 500-seat theater with banked seating. The foyer contains classically-themed murals by Dutch-born California artist Anthony Heinsbergen, an accomplished muralist known for his work in theater decoration.



**2. Fresno City Hall (Fresno City Hall Annex)**  
 2326 Fresno Street, 1939-1941, Franklin & Kump, Architects;  
 H.P. #49, Fresno Local Register of Historic Resources

Fresno's second City Hall was a radical departure from the previous, classically-inspired building, and is an example of how the New Deal brought new forms of architecture to communities across the country. Kump's International style building attracted national attention in 1944 when the Museum of Modern Art included it in an exhibition of the most significant buildings constructed in the United States between 1932 and 1942. Innovative features at the city hall include an interior ramp system



instead of elevators, movable interior partitions to accommodate changing functions and personnel, and the windowless, sky-lit City Council chamber with cantilevered dais extending outside the building.

### 3. WPA Sidewalks

*Fresno Street, M Street, N Street; 1941; Contractor unknown*

The still-vivid Works Progress Administration concrete stamps on the sidewalks around Fresno's second City Hall pay homage to the breadth of New Deal-era projects in Fresno, and the contribution the WPA made to improving city infrastructure.



### 4. Fresno County Hall of Records

*2281 Tulare Street, 1935-1936 and 1954-1955, Henry Villalon for Allied Architects of Fresno and Coates & Metz Architects; H.P. #17, Fresno Local Register of Historic Resources*

The Fresno County Hall of Records is considered one of the best examples of Art Deco architecture in Fresno, and exemplifies the high quality design of New Deal projects. The 1936, reinforced concrete main block was funded with a \$120,000 grant from the PWA. In addition to the aluminum window frames with chevrons and the geometric and floral banding at the roofline, major entrances feature elaborate terra cotta surrounds with figures of farmers and mechanics, as well as medallions with record keepers. Nationally recognized terra cotta artists Gladding, McBean & Co. of San Francisco



created these emblematic works. The 1955 addition has identical detailing to the main block, including one bank of windows from the original building. The monochromatic exterior of the Hall of Records stands in sharp contrast to the colorful public interior spaces. Terrazzo, marble, decorative metalwork and signage, and even sculpted drinking fountains reflect the large number of skilled craftsmen employed in this project.



### 5. U.S. Post Office

*2309 Tulare Street; 1939; William Dewey Foster and Louis A. Simon, Office of the Supervising Architect, U.S. Department of the Treasury; H.P. #50, Fresno Local Register of Historic Resources*

The U.S. Post Office building housed the main post office branch, as well as Federal courtrooms and offices, until the mid 1970s. The building is an example of PWA or WPA Modern architecture, which combines elements of classical and modern design. Elements of classicism on this building include the fluted,

column-like door surrounds and concrete exterior walls scored to look like masonry blocks, while the asymmetrical plan; spare, straight forms; and minimal ornament reflect modern design ideas.



The U.S. Post Office building features a wealth of artwork funded by the WPA, including cast concrete postal eagles by William H. Calfee and cast stone figure of Justice by Archibald Garner. The interior features two terra cotta reliefs titled "RFD-1" and "RFD-2" by Alameda sculptor Helen Bruton and a tile mural titled "Grape Picking" by Henry Varnum Poor, likely a reference to Fresno's raisin industry.



### 6. Fresno Unified School District Administration Building

*2348 Mariposa Mall; 1936; Charles Franklin, Ernest Kump Jr., and Alastair Simpson for Allied Architects of Fresno; H.P. #53, Fresno Local Register of Historic Resources*

Constructed in 1936 with PWA funds, the Fresno Unified School District Administration building served as the district's main administrative offices until 1973. The building is an early example of the International style in Fresno, and the first example of the style in the Civic Center area. Kump followed his New Deal era work with an award-winning career in school and campus design, pioneering the "finger plan" design for educational facilities.

## Other New Deal Sites in Fresno

### Fire Station No. 3

*1406-1430 Fresno Street, 1939, Edward W. Peterson, Allied Architects of Fresno; H.P. #213, Fresno Local Register of Historic Resources*

Fresno's Fire Station No. 3 was constructed in 1939 with support from a PWA grant. Designed by Edward Peterson of Allied Architects, the Art Moderne building is a cast-in-place reinforced concrete building. Original details include early wood, bi-fold doors on the E Street elevation. Station No. 3 is also one of only two fire stations in Fresno with a working fire pole.

### Chandler Field/Fresno Municipal Airport

*Kearney Boulevard, 1936-1937, Various designers under direction of Fresno Commissioner of Public Works; H.D. #2, Fresno Local Register of Historic Resources*

Funds from the WPA were used to construct four buildings and upgrade airfield infrastructure at Chandler Field in 1936-1937. An Administration Building (terminal), Administration Building annex, bathroom building and electrical control building, in varying styles, were added under this campaign. Each building was designed by different architects, most likely to offer employment to as many people as possible for the project. Chandler Field/Fresno Municipal Airport is notable as being one of the most intact WPA-funded airports in the United States.

### Fresno Unified School District Shop and Maintenance Building, 717 South Seventh Street, 1936, Ernest J. Kump Jr. for Allied Architects of Fresno

#### Other sites include:

- **Postharvest Quality and Genetics Research Laboratory**, USDA Field Station (WPA)
- **Radcliff Stadium** (PWA)
- **Swimming Pool, Frank H. Ball Playground** (PWA)
- **Roeding Park sprinkler and sewer systems** (PWA)

In addition, the 1912 **Rowell-Chandler Building** at 2100 Tulare Street was the location of the regional WPA offices in Fresno.