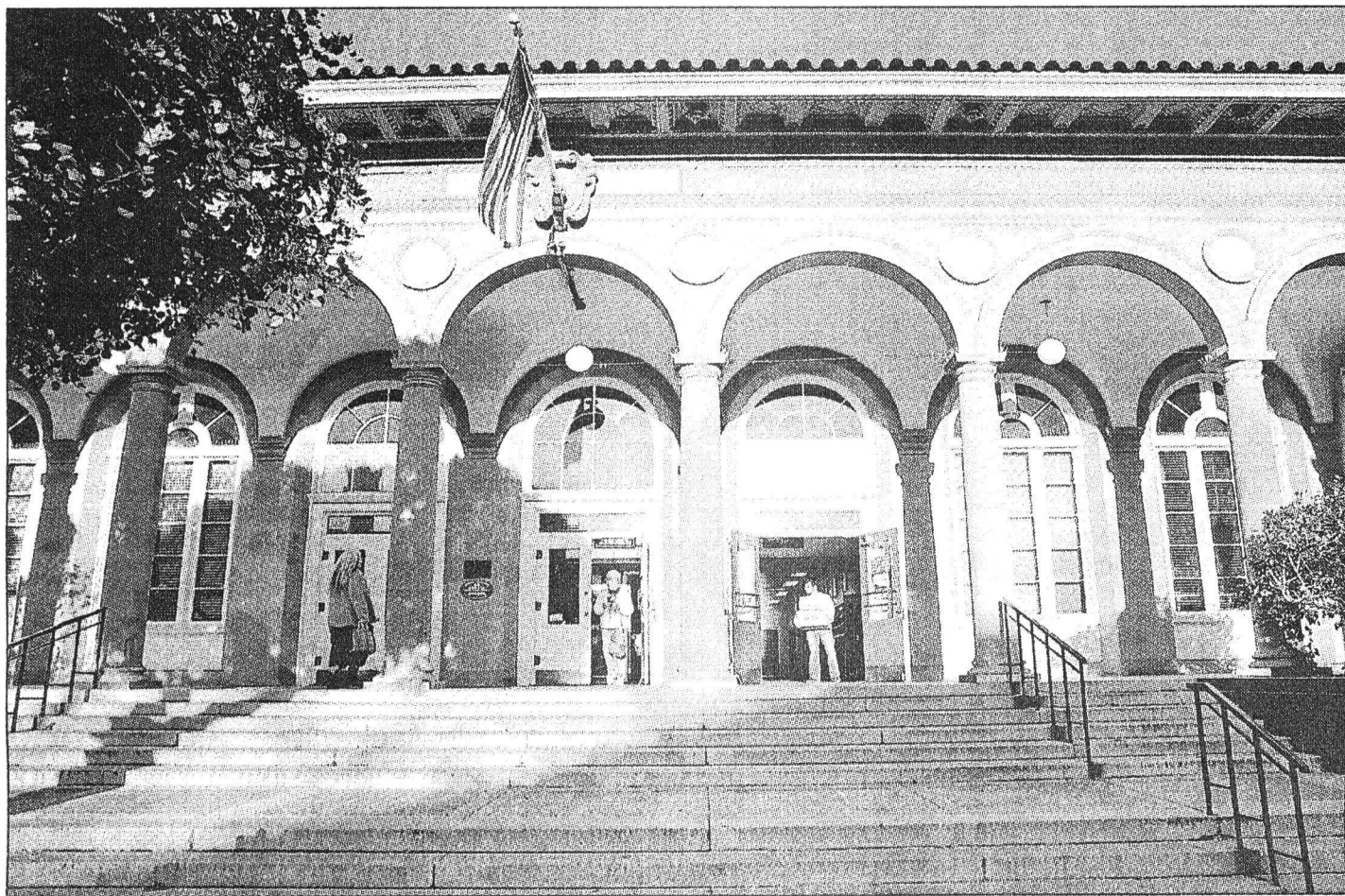


A Century of Service



CONTRIBUTED

Santa Cruz Post Office, landmark of Renaissance architecture and stability, turns 100



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

TOP: A photograph from the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History depicting the post office in 1917. ABOVE: The Santa Cruz Post Office celebrated its 100th anniversary in May, making it the oldest continually operating state post office on the National Register of Historic Places.

Historic Buildings

By J.M. BROWN

jbrown@santacruzsentinel.com

The Santa Cruz Post Office, that marble-and-limestone landmark at the intersection of Water and Front streets, is now a centenarian.

Postal officials and local historians celebrated the distinction in May with commemorative stamps and a blue plaque from the Museum of Art & History, but otherwise the birthday passed without the public fanfare befitting the post office's historical significance.

The 1912 Renaissance Revival building — the oldest continually operating California post office on the National Register of Historic Places — was modeled after the 15th century Filippo Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital in Florence, Italy. It is home to four priceless murals by the American artist Henrietta Shore.

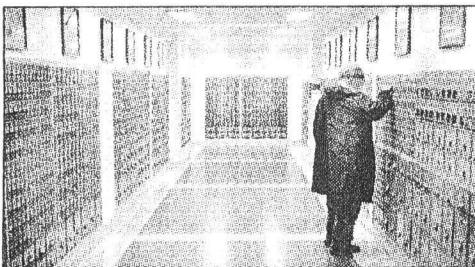
The 41,185-square-foot structure survived the 1989 earthquake with barely a

SEE POST ON A2



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A historical photograph dated 1968 of the Santa Cruz Post Office.



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

Thousands of post office boxes line the walls of the Santa Cruz Post Office, which turned 100 this year. The longstanding building on Front Street in Santa Cruz is the oldest working post office in California.

AT A GLANCE

SANTA CRUZ
POST OFFICE

ADDRESS: 850 Front St.

YEAR BUILT: 1912

ARCHITECTURE:

Renaissance Revival, by
James Knox Taylor

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE:

The oldest continually
operating California post
office on the National
Register of Historic Places

SQUARE FEET: 41,185

in original building, plus

49,812 in 1932 addition

EMPLOYEES: 65

SOURCE: Santa Cruz
Postmaster's Office

ON THE NET

To view a slideshow of
historic and contemporary
photographs from the Santa
Cruz Post Office, go to www.santacruzsentinel.com and
click on this story.

'With its dignified, graceful detail, quality materials and prominent location, the Santa Cruz Post Office was intended to reflect the community's importance, identity and aspirations, and it remains a defining feature of our downtown today.'

CYNTHIA MATHEWS, former Santa Cruz mayor

POST

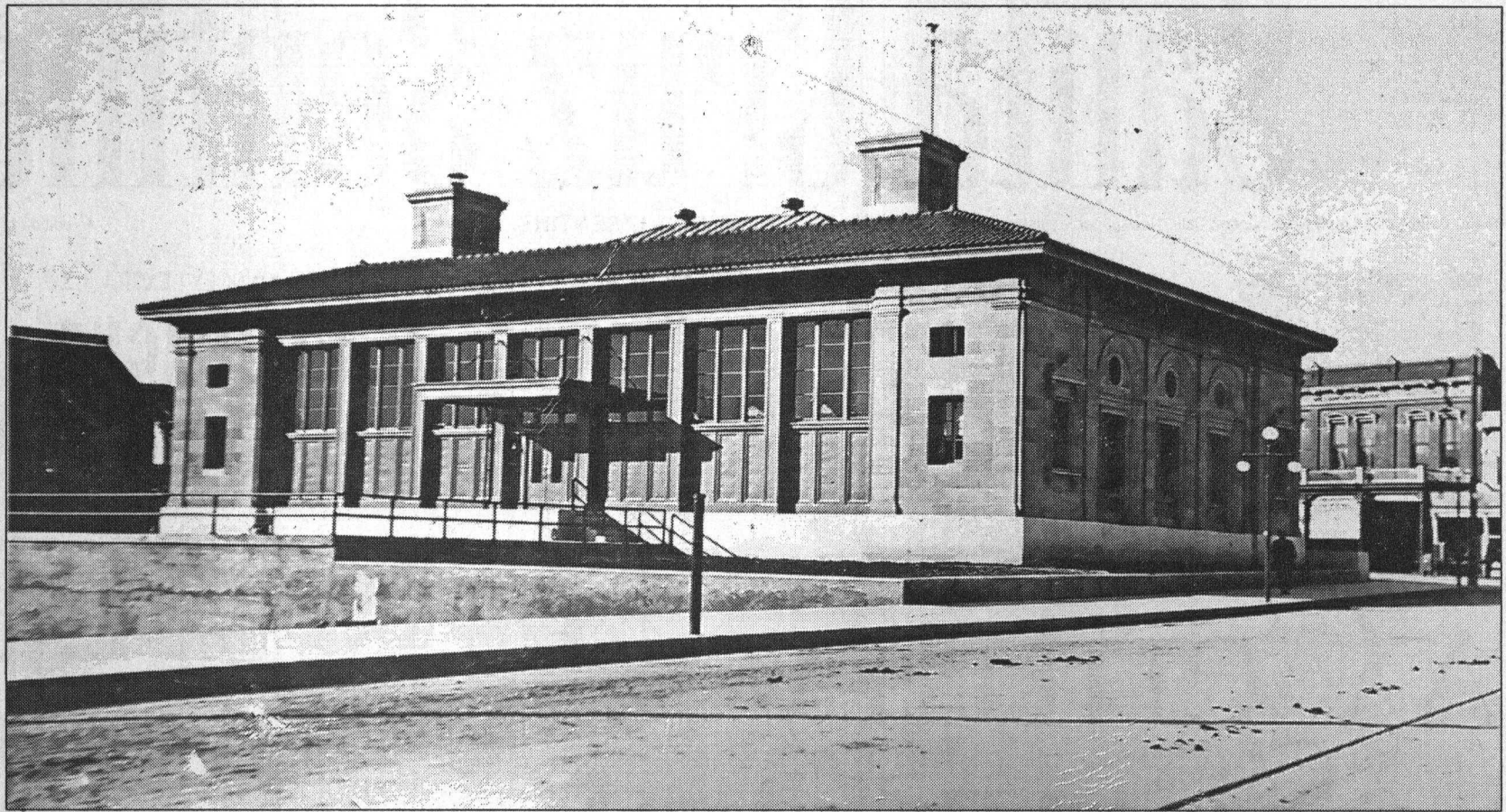
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lick and has been a gathering place for generations of Santa Cruzans as they marked the passing of two world wars, the reopening of quake-shattered Pacific Avenue and other momentous occasions.

"Inspired by classical Renaissance style, the design asserts the building's importance to civic life and confidence in the community's future — a message repeated in countless schools, banks, libraries and other civic structures from the same period," said former mayor and history buff Cynthia Mathews. "With its dignified, graceful detail, quality materials and prominent location, the Santa Cruz Post Office was intended to reflect the community's importance, identity and aspirations, and it remains a defining feature of our downtown today."

While bearing witness to an ever-evolving downtown, the post office designed by architect James Knox Taylor has seen plenty of its own changes.

Whereas the U.S. Postal Service was a strong symbol of the nation's institutional strength during most of the 20th century, the building today has just 65 employees, nearly half of what it had six years ago, Postmaster Aron Jones said. Although mail



A photograph from 1912 of the backside of the Santa Cruz Post Office.

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picked up from post offices in the San Lorenzo Valley, Davenport and Mount Hermon come through the site, all processing was moved in recent years to San Jose to save money.

Still, Jones said the Santa Cruz Post Office operates individually in the black while the overall postal ser-

vice struggles to stay solvent. And last year, the post office handled 55 million pieces, with its largest mailer being Netflix, the ubiquitous DVD service run by Santa Cruzan Reed Hastings.

Even as technology within the postal service has digitized operations, the Santa Cruz center still represents a bygone era, seen in details like its 2,160 see-through glass-and-metal post office boxes. They are original to the building, and the postmaster can't even get replacement parts for them.

"Being postmaster in Santa Cruz is being a part of history," said Jones, who took the job in February 2007.

MORE THAN A BUILDING

Historian and author Geoffrey Dunn, who has visited the Italian hospital that served as inspiration for the post office, said the building had no peers when it was completed in Victorian Santa Cruz. It was built on the site of the former Swanton House hotel, which burned down in 1887.

"It largely looked extraneous to the themes of downtown architecture," Dunn said. "When it was built, it was kind of an anomaly."

Despite that, Dunn said, "It's very reflective of local history."

Dunn noted the building went up in an era when the federal government sought to assure the nation of its own resilience, often through the majesty of its institutions.

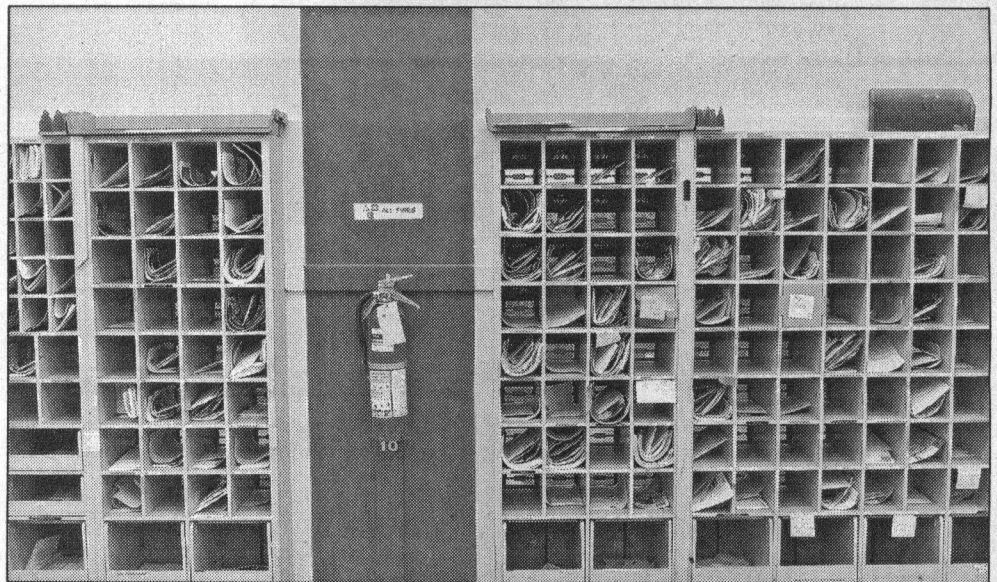
"Post offices were supposed to be a symbol of stability in the American economy and American commerce," he said. "That is where this formal, established look comes from with the post office."

The two-story building, which also contains a basement, was expanded with a 49,812-square-foot addition in 1932, the same year as the neighboring Veterans Memorial Building was completed. On the first floor, although no longer accessible to the public, sits the service



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

A postal van sits in the back of the Santa Cruz Post Office garage on Friday. The garage was an original piece of the building, which celebrated its 100th anniversary this year.



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

Delivered mail sits inside of dozens of post office boxes at the Santa Cruz Post Office.

window and office of former Postmaster Orin Howard, a 6-foot-7-inch man who died after collapsing at his desk in 1971 after 29 years of service, according to a Sentinel article from that year.

Howard's post office was to be the site of another big birthday party two decades earlier, but it never happened.

In April 1950, Howard and others were set to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first Santa Cruz post office

established in 1850 in a general store near the current post office, according to an article in the Sentinel-News. A number of dignitaries were set to attend, but the event was cancelled due to heavy rain.

This year's big birthday may have come and gone without much notice, but it wasn't lost on Santa Cruzans Janet and Jerome Fardette, who sent a letter to the Sentinel celebrating the centennial's significance.

"That means that our great-grandparents, our grandparents, our parents, us, our children and our grandchildren have all used her services and admired her classic architecture for a century," the couple wrote. "Truly amazing. Wouldn't it be lovely if everyone in Santa Cruz sent her a birthday card? We certainly will."

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