

Guide to the Art and Architecture of the New Deal



SAN FRANCISCO

New Deal Sites in San Francisco



Rincon Annex Post Office mural series "History of California," by Anton Refregier. Photo: Carol M. Highsmith, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress

1. Coit Tower Murals

1 Telegraph Hill Boulevard

The 210-foot landmark atop Telegraph Hill contains 27 recently restored murals commissioned by the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). They were the first New Deal mural project in the country. Completed in 1934 at a time of labor unrest, the murals were deemed controversial for their political content, and the city delayed opening them to the public. WPA workers improved Pioneer Park, which surrounds the tower.

2. Sun Yat-sen Statue

St. Mary's Square

Revered as the "Father of Modern China," Sun Yat-sen visited San Francisco in the



Sun Yat-sen statue by Beniamino Bufano, 1937. Photo: Harvey Smith

early 1900s and often relaxed in St. Mary's Square. The park's 14-foot-high statue of Sun by artist Beniamino Bufano was erected in 1937 under the FAP.

3. Aquatic Park, Bathhouse, and Artworks (Maritime Museum)

Hyde Street Pier, 900 Beach Street

Hundreds of WPA workers built the Aquatic Park and bathhouse on the edge of San Francisco Bay. Completed in 1939, the shiplike building, adorned with artworks commissioned by the FAP, is a national park and maritime museum. Sargent Johnson, a



San Francisco Maritime Museum at Aquatic Park, 1939. Photo: National Park Service

prominent African-American artist, carved the green Vermont slate over the entrance. His mosaic of sea creatures ornaments the veranda. Hilaire Hiler painted the murals in the lobby, as well as the "Prismarium." Beniamino Bufano's granite "Seal" was completed in 1942.

4. Rincon Annex Post Office and Murals

101 Spear Street

Built by the Public Works Administration as a post office in 1940, the Moderne building's exterior is decorated with dolphin bas-reliefs and carved eagles. A series of 27 murals, "History of California," by Anton Refregier, completed after World War II, was the last New Deal mural project. In 1953, some in Congress considered Refregier's murals anti-American and wanted to destroy them, but San Franciscans came to their defense. The murals were protected when the lobby was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.



Bay Bridge workers. "Quitting Time," by Peter Stockpole. Photo courtesy of Oakland Museum of California

5. San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge

Life in the Bay Area changed dramatically on November 12, 1936, the day the Bay Bridge opened. Until then, transportation across the bay was by ferries. The advent of cars and trucks propelled construction of the bridge. Financed chiefly by the PWA, it took just over three years to build. At four-and-a-half miles, it was the longest steel high-level bridge in the world.

6. Treasure Island

Mid-span of the Bay Bridge

The WPA constructed the 400-acre artificial island for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition. The PWA's Moderne Administration Building served as the fair's welcome center. It was to become the Pan Am terminal for the city's first airport, but the island was made a naval base when the United States entered World War II. San Francisco Airport was constructed farther south on land reclaimed by the WPA and the PWA.

7. Presidio Main Post Chapel Mural

130 Fisher Loop

Painter Victor Mikhail Arnautoff, who supervised the mural project at Coit Tower, completed the chapel fresco "Peacetime Activities of the Army" in 1934. The mural depicts figures from California history. The Presidio itself is replete with New Deal works—rock walls, a theater, and Officers' Club. The Presidio served as the base for Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) operations during the 1930s.

8. George Washington High School

600 32nd Avenue

The school, which opened in 1936, is decorated with frescoes by WPA artist Victor Arnautoff depicting scenes from the life of the first U.S. president. Arnautoff also sculpted the figures over the entrance. WPA muralist Lucien Labaudt painted "Advancement of Learning through the Printing Press" in the library. Sargent Johnson created the enormous frieze of athletes that spans the width of the football field.

9. Beach Chalet Murals and Artworks

Ocean Beach, 1000 Great Highway

The Beach Chalet across from Ocean Beach first opened in 1925 as a bathhouse. Today it's a brewpub and visitor center for Golden Gate Park. WPA artists decorated the building's interior. Lucien

New Deal Sites in Golden Gate Park

A. Beach Chalet

B. Archery Field

C. Model Yacht Club

D. Angler's Lodge and Casting Pools

E. Mounted Police Stables

F. Public Stables

G. Botanical Garden at Strybing Arboretum

H. Tennis Courts

I. Young Girl Sculpture

J. Horseshoe Pits

K. Kezar Stadium



Beach Chalet mural "San Francisco Life," by Lucien Labaudt, 1937. Photo: Harvey Smith

Labaudt painted the lobby frescoes depicting many well-known San Franciscans amid city scenes. Master tile setter Primo Careadio executed the mosaics. WPA sculptor Michael von Meyer carved the elaborate wooden staircase.

10. Golden Gate Park

Golden Gate Park benefited from many WPA projects. WPA workers resurfaced roads, installed landscaping for Strybing



Angler's Lodge and Casting Pools, Golden Gate Park. Photo: Gray Brechin

Arboretum, and built the horse stables. The horseshoe courts, an archery field, the renowned Angler's Lodge and casting pools, and the San Francisco Model Yacht Club at Spreckels Lake also are legacies of the WPA.

11. San Francisco Zoo

2845 Sloat Boulevard

The WPA expanded the zoo to eight times its original size. Architect Lewis P. Hobart introduced cage-less exhibits, including Monkey Island, Lion House, Elephant House, a sea lion pool, an aviary, and bear grottoes. FAP artists Dorothy Pucinelli and Helen Forbes painted the murals of animals that adorn the interior of the Mother's Building.

12. West Portal Library

190 Lenox Way

The library, designed by architect Frederick H. Meyer and constructed by the WPA in 1939, is Mediterranean style with red roof tiles. Inside, delicate paintings grace the ceiling beams.

13. Laguna Honda Hospital Artworks

375 Laguna Honda Boulevard

Built in the 1920s, the renovated hospital campus contains more than a hundred contemporary and historical public artworks. The entryway to the main building displays five murals by WPA artist Glenn Wessels. The WPA inspired three contemporary mosaic murals in the lobby depicting the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge. A statue of Florence Nightingale by FAP sculptor David Edstrom honors the founder of professional nursing.

14. City College

50 Phelan Avenue

Established in 1935, City College is rich in New Deal art and architecture. The WPA constructed gymnasiums and the Science Hall where WPA artist Herman Volz installed elaborate mosaics in the porticoes. In the lobby are two fresco murals by Frederick E. Olmsted. Mexican muralist Diego Rivera painted an enormous mural for the 1940 World's Fair at Treasure Island that was later moved to the theater. Rivera's assistants worked for the WPA.

15. Glen Canyon Park

Bosworth and O'Shaughnessy Avenues

WPA workers transformed the park. They planted trees, resurfaced the tennis courts, and built stairs and rock walls, a baseball diamond, a recreation center, a gymnasium, a director's office, and a community theater.

16. Sunshine School

2730 Bryant Street

One of many special schools built under the PWA for children with physical disabilities, Sunshine had 18 classrooms, a courtyard, and a therapeutic pool. There are small stages in the dining rooms, a gymnasium on each floor, and rooms for art and music. To provide a cheerful atmosphere, colorful decorative tiles were used throughout. The patio provided a play area in which the children could move about freely in their wheelchairs. Today the building is used as



Sunshine School, one of many special schools built for children with physical disabilities. Photo: Gray Brechin

offices for community services and an alternative school.

17. Federal Building

50 United Nations Plaza

San Francisco architect Arthur Brown, Jr., who also designed the Opera House and the Veterans Building, designed the granite Federal Building at the Civic Center. Constructed between 1934 and 1936 under the PWA, the recently restored building contains an interior courtyard. Cast-stone arches frame the lobby. The original bronze elevator doors and other historic elements remain. The building has been designated a National Historic Landmark.

18. Cow Palace

2600 Geneva Avenue, Daly City

The city had appropriated funds for a livestock pavilion, but as the Depression worsened, enthusiasm for the project stalled. A 1935 newspaper headline asked, "Why, when people are starving, should money be spent on a palace for cows?" The name stuck. The WPA put thousands of laborers to work building the Cow Palace, completed in 1941. That year, the arena hosted the first Grand National Livestock Expo, Horse Show and Rodeo, as it has ever since.

ALPHABET SOUP

The New Deal spawned an "alphabet soup" of federal programs to provide jobs to millions of unemployed Americans.

Described here are:

CCC

Civilian Conservation Corps (1933–1942)

FAP

Federal Art Project (1935–1943)

PWA

Public Works Administration (1933–1943)

PWAP

Public Works of Art Project (1933–1934)

WPA

Works Progress Administration (1935–1943)



Sargent Johnson working on the frieze for George Washington High School, 1936. Photo courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library