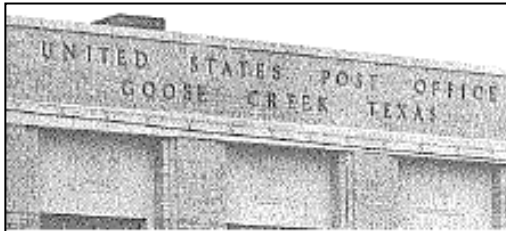


Baytown Post Office

Recorded Texas Historic Landmark – 1988 (Marker Number 10609).

February 2015: This is not an official document. The original narrative was accessed from the Texas Historical Commission because I have been approached to help with an application for an Official Texas Historical Marker (subject marker) for the Post Office in “West” or “Old” Baytown at 3508 Market Street, Baytown, Texas 77520. Since there is already a marker for the “Baytown Post Office,” which is actually the old Goose Creek Post Office (Federal Building, United States Post Office), pictured below, I felt it important to look at the marker file. Having the advantage of being from the Baytown area, and having access to more recent publications and the Internet, I offer the observations cited in the added footnotes to those who have the original application narrative on file.

- Trevia Wooster Beverly, Harris County Historical Commission (1995-)



This signage was on the building prior to the consolidation of the Tri-Cities in 1947. This photo, labeled 1937, was included in the marker application, which was submitted to THC in April 1987.

The photo below is a modern view of the same building.



BAYTOWN POST OFFICE FEDERAL BUILDING

BAYTOWN POST OFFICE FEDERAL BUILDING

by Jean L. Epperson

The Baytown, Texas Post Office Federal Building^A at 220 West Defee was designed and built during 1936-1937.^B It is significant because it is representative of the 1930's depression era federal buildings architecture and because it contains a fresco wall mural reported to be one of only two of its kind in Texas.¹

The original building site was acquired by the Post Office Department on May 7, 1936 from Dr. G. A. and Elizabeth Lilly. The lot was 200 feet by 100 feet or 20,000 square feet, facing south on Defee street, bounded to the west by Gilliard street^C and to the north by Sterling street.² In 1952 an additional tract of land, 205 feet by 100 feet or 20,500 square feet, was purchased for a major building expansion. A strip of land was acquired from the west side of the site by the city for right-of-way, leaving a total of 38,900 square feet of land.³

Construction began on the original post office building in 1936 and was completed by March 1937 when the dedication ceremony was described as a "coming out" party for the eighteen year old community of Goose Creek, now Baytown.⁴ The structure cost \$70,000 and was designed by architect Louis A. Simon.^D The supervising and construction engineers were Neal A. Melick and G. W. Kays and the construction contractor was Lundberg-Richter Company. For the original floor plans see appendix #1.⁵

Two major expansion projects, in 1952 and 1960, more than doubled the size of the building. The first project added additional work-room space to the north side of the ground floor. Air conditioning and a new lighting system were

^A Original sign: United States Post Office, Goose Creek, Texas

^B The cornerstone gives the date of 1936.

^C Gaillard Street.

^D Louis A. Simon (1867-1958).

installed at this time. In 1960 a new two-story Federal Building area was constructed on the east side of the original structure. See Appendix #2. The present building now contains 17,659 net square feet of space. The building is masonry with a yellow brick face, built up tar and gravel roof, and plaster interior walls. The original Post Office section of the building has poured terrazo floors in the lobby, a wooden floor in the old workroom area, and tile floors in the expansion area of the workroom.⁶

A fresco^E wall mural, entitled "Texas Progress"^F was completed in January of 1938 by a California artist, Barse Miller.^G The mural decorates the east wall in the lobby of the Post Office. It was commissioned in 1937 by the painting and Sculpture Division of the United States Treasury Department as part of the Works Progress Administration Federal Arts Program. Eleven feet long and six feet wide,^H the scene depicts the advance of an idealized Texas pioneer. In his left hand he holds a 1938 model of a modern luxury aircraft. His right hand reaches out to grasp the Lone Star of Texas. A covered wagon and an early Southern Pacific locomotive are sketched across the baseline of the mural, suggesting the importance of transportation to the development of Texas.^I Miller received \$610.00 for the commission.⁷

^E Fresco-secco (tempera, egg, and oil on dry plaster).

^F Titled "Texas," the fresco has at various times been incorrectly referred to as "Texas Progress," "Winged Victory," and "Texas Loggers."

^G Barse Miller was born on January 24, 1904 in New York; he died in 1973. For biographical information and achievements, see http://www.sullivangoss.com/barse_Miller/ (accessed Jul 2014).

^H Eleven feet long and six feet tall

^I "focuses on the development of transportation, takes the form of a fantastic allegory. A shirtless, winged giant wearing a raccoon-skin cap dominates the mural. The towering figure – the personification of Texas progress – with his head in the clouds holds a toy-like airplane in one hand as if to launch it. At the base of the mural, early forms of transportation used to deliver the U.S. mail, including a mule-drawn covered wagon and an early steam locomotive, parade before the giant. In the upper right of the mural, a stars-and-stripes emblem suggests a postage cancellation mark." *The Texas Post Office Murals*, pg. 24, by Philip Parisi (College Station TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

Austin art historian, Buie Harwood, was interview in 1984 about the mural. She said, "Although about 65 Federal Art Project murals were completed in Texas, all but two were painted on canvas." The other fresco is in the downtown^J San Antonio post office on East Houston Street^K and was done by artist Howard Cook.⁸ Harwood continued, "The (Baytown) mural is important because it documents a certain time period in art history. The painting and the period are unique because they represent the federal governments most successful attempt to assist large numbers of individual American artists."⁹ The mural is in need of repair and plans are being made to conserve and restore it.^L

The discovery of oil on Tabbs Bay near the mouth and on the east bank of Goose Creek caused an influx of people into the area and the first^M Post Office was established in 1914 and named "Goose Creek." The oil town which mushroomed on the spot was called "Old Town" and the Post Office building was located in a store building near the water front. The first^N postmaster was Edward C. Slaughter.^{10, O} The hurricane of 1915 caused much damage to the little oil settlement. This disaster, along with the bringing in of gushers which drenched everything nearby with oil, forced the business men to move inland and establish a second community. Another group of citizens moved still further into the prairie and built a third town. Thus by the early

^J U.S. Post Office and Federal Courthouse

^K at number 615

^L "In poor condition, faded, flaking, nearly invisible." Parisi, *The Texas Post Office Murals*, pg. 24. See Addendum 2.

^M Prior to that time, a Mrs. Bell owned the first store in the area, which also served as the post office. *From Humble Beginnings, 75th Exxon Anniversary* (Baytown: Exxon), pg. 25. Note that the listing given by Jim Wheat in Addendum 3 lists [Mr.] Wesley M. Bell, 21 Jan 1913; Ezra H. McKay, 14 Apr 1916; and Eddie C. Slaughter, 27 Aug 1917, as postmasters at Goose Creek.

^N third

^O Henson, pg. 82, regarding stores, states "The Goose Creek post office opened in 1914 in another store with Edward C. Slaughter as postmaster." See Addendum 3 for information taken from Jim Wheat's *Postmasters & Post Offices of Texas, 1846 – 1930*.

1900's there were three communities in the area; Old Town, now non existant;^P Middle Town, later Pelly; and New Town, later Goose Creek.

The Post Office was relocated by Postmaster Slaughter from Tabbs Bay up the hill to Middle Town in February 1917.^Q The new wooden building fronted on the county road, was eight foot square and contained 600 lock boxes for the convenience of the public. Then on January 18, 1919 the building was loaded on a flat wagon and hauled by mule team to Defee Street in New Town to sit beside the rail road track.^R Tradition says that the little Post Office was stolen by the residents of New Town so that their town could be incorporated but the unromantic truth is, it was moved for accessability to the railroad for mail delivery.^S Sometime later, the Goose Creek Post Office was moved to the Guaranty State Bank building on Texas Avenue.^{11,T}

In the years that followed Pelly was given a Post Office of its own. Still later after the establishment of the Humble refinery^U and residential development in that vicinity, a third Post Office was granted and named "Baytown."^V

^P nonexistent? Or was this Bay Town (Baytown)?

^Q Edward C. "Eddie" Slaughter was appointed postmaster on August 27, 1917.

^R The Dayton-Goose Creek Railway (D-GC), a steam road, was built between those two towns in 1918. In August 1919 the D-GC was extended to Baytown, and the moving of crude oil and petroleum products by rail had to make the roundabout 64-mile-long route through Dayton to reach Houston and its connecting railroads. The D-GC rapidly became the most profitable shot line in the State. *Houston North Shore* by Charles C. Robinson and Paul L. DeVerter II (© 1999. Central Electric Railfans' Association).

^S See Addendum 3.

^T The first town of Goose Creek came into being before World War I with the discovery of the Goose Creek oil field. A typical oil field town, derricks were so numerous that Goose Creek moved to another site and became incorporated in 1919. Left without a name and for a while without a post office, the original townsite of Goose Creek became the incorporated city of Pelly in 1920. "History Highlights," *The Baytown Sun*, Sunday, February 15, 1987, p. 1-D.

^U Humble Oil Company's refinery was established in January 1917.

^V The local telephone book, July 1939, has two "United States Postoffice" listings: Baytown, 630 and Goose Creek, 189W. The telephone directory for September 21, 1950 showed United States Government Offices; Post Office Baytown Main Ofc at 220 W Defee 6917

Consolidation of the Tri-Cities, Goose Creek, Pelly and Baytown, took place on February 15, 1947 and the new city was called Baytown. The Post Office department designated the Goose Creek Office as the main^W Post Office and the Baytown^X and Pelly offices were made sub-stations. The main post office was then called the Baytown Post Office.^{12, Y}

The United States Postal Service in Baytown moved into new facilities at 601 West Baker Road and sold the property and building at 220 West Defee to the City of Baytown in 1985.¹³ The City has successfully employed adaptive reuse of the historic building, leasing the Post Office portion to the Bay Area Heritage Society to be utilized for the Baytown Museum and making a City Hall Annex of the balance.^{14, Z}

The City of Baytown, by ordinance, has designated a Building Conservation District in the down-town area to encourage the preservation and restoration of the structures.¹⁵ The old Post Office lies within this district. A resolution was also passed by the city declaring the historic significance of the former United States Post Office Building because of its unique architecture and age.¹⁶

Post Office Baytown Sta A at 3508 Market 6918

Post Office Baytown Sta B [no address shown] 3-1489

^W Designated as central station.

^X According to the Postal Service's "USPS Owned Facilities Report" for Texas, the building that houses Station A of the Baytown Post Office, located at 3508 Market Street, was occupied on June 1, 1936.
<http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/foia/readroom/ownedfacilitiesreport.htm> (accessed February 11, 2015)

^Y The Main Office at 220 West DeFee Street (GSA Institution number 0017) was transferred to the U.S. Postal Service under the authority of the Postal Reorganization Act. The effective date of the transfer was June 30, 1971.

^Z Under the care and control of the Bay Area Heritage Society of Baytown, it is now known as the Baytown Historical Museum. The City pays all utilities and upkeep on the building but does not participate in oversight.

NOTES

¹ United States Post Office Department Report, "Historic Significance Survey Report - Federal Building and United States Post Office, Baytown, Texas 77520." Dallas Field Real Estate and Buildings Office, P.O. Drawer 239, Dallas, Texas 75221-0239. Hereafter cited as Postal Report; *Baytown Sun* Newspaper, August 20, 1984.

² Deed from Gordon A. Lilly and Elizabeth V. Lilly to the United States of America, May 14, 1936, Vol. 1018, p. 99, Harris County Deed Records. Dr. Lilly was a local physician.

³ Ibid. Postal Report.

⁴ *Tri-Cities* Newspaper March 27, 1937.

⁵ Ibid. Postal Report.

⁶ Ibid. Postal Report.

⁷ *Baytown Sun* August 20, 1984.

⁸ Personal communication Jean Shepherd, Director Baytown Historical Museum and I. Elizondo, Manager of United States Post Office Buildings of San Antonio, February 18, 1987.

⁹ Ibid. *Baytown Sun*, August 20, 1984.

¹⁰ Margaret S. Henson, The History of Baytown (Baytown: Bay Area Heritage society, 1986), 82; Postal Report.

¹¹ Ibid. Henson, 85-92; *Baytown Sun* August 20, 1984.

¹² *Baytown Sun*, January 22, 1981; Henson, 130-133.

¹³ Deed from United States Postal Department to the City of Baytown, November 15, 1985, film code K306 449, Harris County Deed Records.

¹⁴ Lease agreement City of Baytown with Bay Area Heritage Society, November 14, 1986 for use of the Post Office section of the building for museum purposes. Office of the Baytown City Clerk.

¹⁵ Baytown City Ordinance #4182, June 27, 1985.

¹⁶ Baytown City Resolution, March 12, 1987.

Addendum 1. Marker Text taken from the Texas Historical Commission's Atlas
<http://www.thc.state.tx.us/>

Marker Number: 10611

Marker Title: Baytown Post Office

Index Entry: Baytown Post Office

Address: 220 W. Defee

City: Baytown

County: Harris

UTM Zone: 15

UTM Easting: 309452

UTM Northing: 3290883

Subject Codes: buildings; post office; International; design and construction

Year Marker Erected: 1988

Designations: Recorded Texas Historic Landmark

Marker Location:

Marker Size: Medallion & Plate

Marker Text: Built in 1936-37 as the Goose Creek Post Office, this structure served as the area's main postal facility for almost fifty years. Designed by architect Louis A. Simon, the early international style building features an interior fresco mural commissioned as part of the Federal Arts Program of the Works Progress Administration. After the post office moved from this building in 1985, it became the home of the Baytown Historical Museum. Recorded Texas Historic Landmark – 1988.

Addendum 2 – Regarding restoration of the WPA Mural. The restoration project mentioned in this narrative did not go forward as planned. In November 2009, Derek Satchell, then Project Reviewer for the THC, visited with me about the status of the mural project and I received a copy of the original proposal for restoration.

Contact was made by telephone to The Bay Area Heritage Society of Baytown's president, David Jirrells. He very emphatically said the organization had no interest in pursuing the project again.

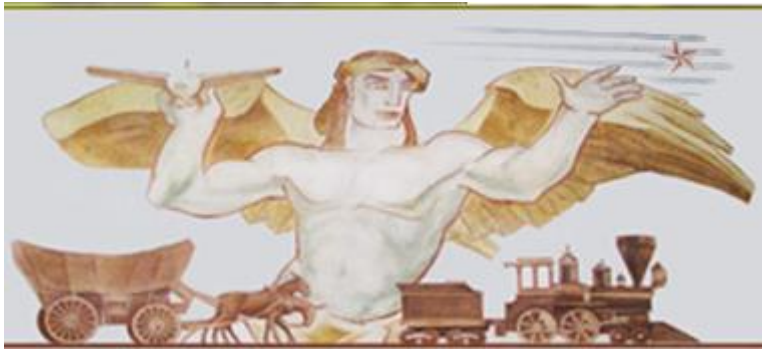
Contact was then made to the Harris County Historical Commission Chairman, Patrick Van Pelt, to see if HCHC could somehow intervene to save the mural. The answer was yes, let's investigate the possibilities.

Contact was made to Para Conservation in Chicago to see if they could still do the job and give us an update estimate of cost. I also contacted the USPS Federal Preservation Officer to obtain permission to move forward with the project.

Knowing that the City of Baytown had funds designated for a portion of the project I contacted Bob Leiper, then Assistant City Manager, to ask if the funds were still available and could they be applied to the new effort. Yes, and they would draw up a new contract for the HCHC.

However, before the contract was signed, The Bay Area Heritage Society of Baytown was notified and they then decided they would do the project after all. When the project was completed, unfortunately no one from the Harris County Historical Commission or the Texas Historical Commission was notified nor invited to attend the unveiling.

The complete file has been placed in the Local History files of the Baytown Historical Preservation Association (BHPA). <http://www.baytownhistory.org/>



Addendum 3. Jim Wheat's POSTMASTERS & POST OFFICES OF TEXAS, 1846–1930
<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txpost/postmasters.html>

BAYLAND (Harris) [at the mouth of Goose Creek where the Bayland Orphans Home was located]
Gregory, Absalom, 31 Mar 1868
Discontinued 15 Jun 1869

BAYTOWN [1] (Harris)
Hageman, Simon, 12 Mar 1859
Discontinued 23 Jan 1867

BAYTOWN [2] (Harris)
Seidel, Wm. H., 12 Aug 1924
Desmond, Louisa H., 16 Jan 1928 (Acting postmaster)
Miller, Carter H., 1 Sep 1928 (Acting postmaster)

GOOSE CREEK (Harris)
Bell, Wesley M., 21 Jan 1913
McKay, Ezra H., 14 Apr 1916
Slaughter, Eddie C., 27 Aug 1917
Boyer, Frank, 23 Jly 1923 (Acting postmaster)
Grant, M. Ardella, 11 Feb 1924
Pringle, Tom, 30 Nov 1925 (Acting postmaster)
Hain, Sam'l. L., 26 Mar 1928 (Acting postmaster)
McElhaney, Florence E., 18 Sep 1929

PELLY (Harris)
Fuqua, Ruth M., 2 Aug 1927

Others in the now Greater-Baytown Area are also listed: Lynchburg, Wooster, etc.