

Minneapolis Post Office

1933, 1978, 1988

The Minneapolis Post Office, a striking example of Moderne Art Deco architecture, was completed in 1933 at a cost of \$4.5 million. The post office building extends along the west bank of the Mississippi River from the Hennepin Avenue bridge east to the Third Avenue bridge. The first post office in Minneapolis, built in 1854, occupied the same site as the current post office.



The building was designed by French-born Léon Eugène Arnal. After serving in the First World War with the French Army, he moved to the United States and taught at the University of Minnesota School of Architecture. Gottfried Magney, a University of Minnesota architecture graduate and Wilbur Tusler, graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Architecture, formed a partnership – Magney &



Tusler -- in 1917. Léon Arnal was the chief designer for the firm. While employed at Magney & Tusler, Arnal designed the Minneapolis Women's Club in the Loring Park neighborhood, The Foshay Tower, and the Minneapolis Post Office.

In 1939, Donald Setter joined the firm as third partner. Eventually, Magney & Tusler became known as Setter, Leach and Lindstrom.

Arnal's design for the post office is classic PWA Moderne Art Deco, a style that was used during and after the Great Depression in relief projects sponsored by the Public Arts Administration (PWA). The style was often used in structures that have a monumental feel – post offices, train stations, courthouses, libraries, and public schools. Common elements of the Moderne Art Deco style include the use of pilasters – vertical columns that usually project out from the wall-- symmetrical forms, flat stone, and vertical, recessed windows.



*Site of the future Minneapolis Post Office, May 20, 1930.
In rear, Third Ave bridge and Stone Arch Bridge.
Hennepin County Library*

In April 1932, it was reported that there would be delays in beginning construction, as the office of the supervising architect in Washington DC “was filled to more than capacity with [projects in] New York, which has precedence over the Minneapolis post office.” The *Minneapolis Tribune* reported that work would not commence until June 1, 1932, or later.

The day after Christmas 1932, the supervising architect of the United States treasury department opened the forty bids offered for the construction of the post office. In December 1932, the contract for supplying

the Kasota stone for the building was awarded to Breen Stone and Marble Company of Kasota, Minnesota. Seventy-five men were kept employed in the Kasota quarry through October 1933, working on the post office project.

In January 1933, construction began. Caissons were set into the river-side bed rock. The work continued around the clock, with three shifts of thirty-three men each managing the work. The steel skeleton was first put into place, followed by 83,600 cubic feet of Mankato gray stone.

As the *Minneapolis Tribune* wrote on November 28, 1933, "The most modern features are imbedded in plans for the interior. Among these are such things for the four-story building as 11 elevators, soundproof walls, and the latest devices for managing the postal business, including a rifle range for guards who must become expert shots." The rifle range was included in the basement of the building.



Minnesota Historical Society



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Peepholes were installed in the main corridor so the mail inspectors could observe employees at work and protect the mail. The postmaster's office was built as a three-room suite lined with walnut.

The final sections of stone were laid in place in November of 1932. When completed, the post office building faced Pioneer Square Park across the street, today the home of The Churchill Apartments.

The interior of the post office is largely untouched from when the building opened in 1933. Teller cages and fixtures are bronze, the floors are marble terrazzo and the walls are sandstone. The overhead 350-foot bronze chandelier that runs the length of the lobby is believed to be the longest light fixture in the world.





In the late 1970s, a seven-level parking ramp and loading dock were built on the west side of the post office building.



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The facility was expanded again in the late 1980s, as the amount of mail passing through the post office increased, and additional parking and truck loading space was needed. The Postal Service purchased land between the post office and the Mississippi River, on the backside of the building. An area was enclosed for the staging of postal trucks.



Tony Webster

The pilasters included on the First Street side of the building were wrapped around the building and along the back, giving the building an appearance from the river side that resembles the front of the building.

The Minneapolis Post Office continues its original use today, with a regular schedule of mail trucks entering and exiting the now enclosed truck loading area.

