

Federal Title Building
437 South Hill Street
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CA-2153

HABS
CAL,
19-LOSAN,
59-

PHOTOGRAPHS
HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
FEDERAL TITLE BUILDING

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CAL,
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59-
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CA-2153

1. Location: 437 South Hill Street, Los Angeles, Ca. 90013
2. Present Owner: David G. Houk and Ervin F. Bartel
3. Present Occupant: Vacant
4. Present Use: Vacant
5. Significance: Federal Title Building was designed by Walker and Eisen, a prominent Southern California architectural firm. It is an important part of the Hill Street streetscape, particularly for its association with Subway Terminal Building on the north and Title Guarantee Building on the south. Originally built as a bank/office building, it utilized an extra narrow lot through ingenious and sensitive planning. The lot is twenty feet narrower than the average width of a lot because of resubdivision of the original Ord's Survey. In order to provide both a bank lobby and an elevator lobby on the ground floor, sliding doors were placed between the two. The doors could be closed when the bank was closed, creating a separate elevator lobby for the rest of the building.

An additional feature of interest is the original placement of the fire escape. Los Angeles building code then required that a fire escape be placed on the front of the building. Such a device would have destroyed the visual and architectural continuity of the facade on such a narrow building. To obviate this a narrow four foot recess was made on the north side of the building. From the street opposite the fire escape is virtually invisible.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1927 (City of Los Angeles building permits)
2. Architects: Walker and Eisen

Albert R. Walker and Percy Eisen organized the firm of Walker and Eisen in 1920. The practice prospered and for over twenty-five years they designed numerous structures, public and private throughout Southern California.

Some of the more prominent buildings include the Signal Hill Oil Building, Beverly Wilshire Hotel, Gaylord Apartment Hotel, Wurlitzer Building, National City Bank, Hollywood Plaza Hotel, The Hilton Hotel at Long Beach, the Torrance Public Library, and the Commercial Exchange Building.

The firm dissolved after World War II, shortly before Eisen's death late in 1946.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

- 1922 Leasehold estate for 99 years recorded July 31, 1922, in Book 1235, page 294 Andrew J. Copp and Carrie B. Copp to S. J. Keyse
- 1936 Deed No. 815, recorded March 30, 1936, in Book 14059, page 90 Andrew J. Copp and Carrie B. Copp, joint tenants, to A. J. Copp, an undivided eight-elevenths and to Carrie B. Copp, an undivided three-elevenths
- 1938 Deed No. 827, recorded September 22, 1938, in Book 16095, page 64 Andrew J. Copp and Carrie B. Copp to Andrew J. Copp, Jr., an undivided five-elevenths; to Joseph P. Copp, an undivided five-elevenths; and to Marguerite Bowen Copp, an undivided one-eleventh
- 1956 Assignment of lease, October 16, 1956 S. J. Keyse to 437 South Hill Street Bldg, Inc.
- 1964 Deed No. 1547, recorded January 28, 1964 Marguerite Bowen Copp to Andrew J. Copp, Jr., an undivided one-twenty-second interest
- 1964 Deed No. 1548, recorded January 28, 1964 Marguerite Bowen Copp to Joseph P. Copp, an undivided one-twenty-second interest
- 1969 Notice of Default on leasehold, Instrument No. 3224, recorded December 5, 1969, in Book M 3660, page 888. 437 South Hill Street, Bldg, Inc. to Financial Federation Inc.
- 1970 Trustee's Deed Upon Sale No. 2900, recorded July 16, 1970 (leasehold only) Financial Federation Inc. to Atlantic Savings and Loan

- 1972 Order No. 4195, Superior Court, County of Los Angeles, recorded July 7, 1972 (Case No. P. 572248) Estate of Andrew J. Copp, Jr., to Atlantic Savings and Loan, one-half interest
- 1972 Order No. 218, Superior Court, County of Los Angeles, recorded June 23, 1972 (Case No. WE P-08356) Estate of Joseph P. Copp to Atlantic Savings and Loan, one-half interest
- 1972 Deed No. 219, recorded October 12, 1972, Ethel Hogan Copp as Executrix of Will of Joseph P. Copp, to Atlantic Savings and Loan, one-half interest
- 1972 Deed No. 221, recorded October 12, 1972 Andrew J. Copp, III, and Jayne Feldman Copp, Executor and Executrix of the Will of Andrew J. Copp, Jr., to Atlantic Savings and Loan, an undivided one-half interest
- 1973 Deed No. 251, recorded December 27, 1973 Atlantic Savings and Loan to Albert Levinson and Lilian Levinson
- 1978 Deed No. 78-757548 recorded July 13, 1978 Albert Levinson and Lilian Levinson to David G. Houk, an undivided one-half interest, and to Ervin F. Bartel, an undivided one-half interest

4. Builder: R. Milsap

5. Original Plans and Construction: Not located

6. Alterations and Additions: Minor alterations to the structure include the addition of modern aluminum frame doors and the filling-in of windows on the north side.

B. Historical Context: Construction of this building was part of the overall shift of business and commerce to the Pershing Square area in the late 1920's. The location next door to Subway Terminal Building must have seemed ideal and worth overcoming the disadvantages of the extra-narrow lot size. Federal Title is not represented in any other survey of historic buildings of Los Angeles and little is known of building tenants. The building is being refurbished in 1980, presumably to let for office uses. It is currently vacant.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The Federal Title Building is built in a rectangular plan, and is designed in a manner which was originally interpreted as a modern adaption of the renaissance style. A more recent analysis would however, seem to indicate that the design is actually either an eclectic combination of WPA modern and Gothic/Commercial or more generally an adaption of the Zig Zag Moderne. The building is ten stories in height and has a basement. Major architectural features include a central main entrance, and three window bays divided by vertical concrete ribs. The building is largely unaltered, and the original architectural form and design intent are clearly evident.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The building is located on a lot of .146 acres. The frontage is 40' and the depth is 159'.
2. Foundations: The foundations are of reinforced concrete.
3. Walls: The walls are of reinforced concrete. The entrance facade is articulated by three window bays separated by vertical concrete ribs and metal spandrel panels. The building facade terminates in three arched bays with keystone above the tenth story. The side walls are flat, and are articulated by irregular window placement. The north elevation has a metal fire escape.
4. Structural System, Framing: The building is of fireproof construction with a steel frame and reinforced concrete, and a joist system of floors and hollow tile partitions.
5. Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkheads: none
6. Chimneys: none
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: The entrance facade is articulated by applied decoration including inscribed and sculpted bas-relief panels, a central arched entrance surrounded with keystone, and two flanking openings with a flat configuration and ornamentation. The doors are of metal construction and are flat in configuration.

- b. Windows and Shutters: The windows are flat in configuration and are of metal frame construction. They are arranged in three painted vertical bays on the entrance facade. They are of both sash and tilt frame design with both small pane and plate glass.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, Covering: The roof is, with the exception of a machinery housing above the tenth story, flat in configuration with composite covering.
- b. Cornice, Eaves: There are anthemions above the tenth story of the entrance facade. These features formally terminate the design of the facade in lieu of a cornice.
- c. Dormers, Cupolas, Towers: none

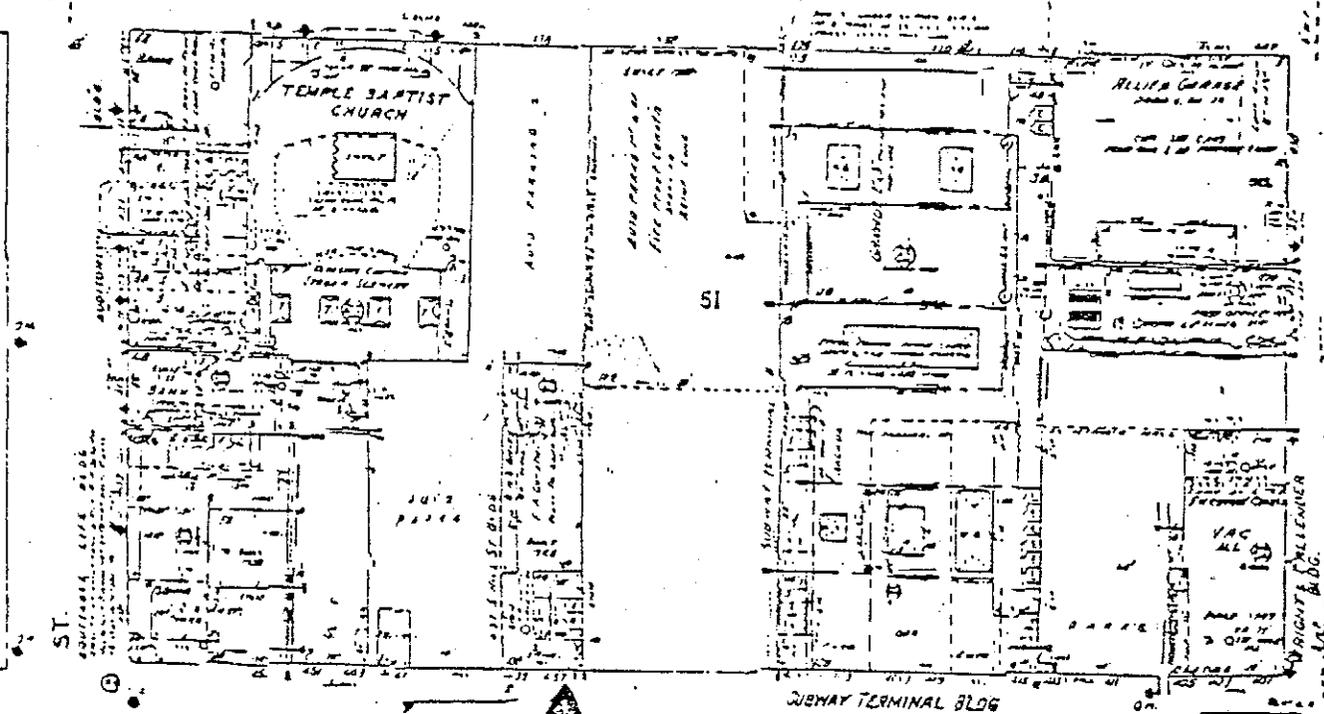
- C. Description of the Interior: Since this submission refers only to exterior recordation of the structure, only a brief description of interior details is included.

The bank interior is largely intact. Walls of the lobby are in travertine. Walls of the banking room are in caen stone. The beams and girders over the banking room have been used as decoration, having been covered with a surface of concrete and tinted and stenciled.

D. Site:

- 1. General Setting and Orientation: The building is located in a densely built urban context with buildings of a similar or larger scale surrounding the property. The building is however, highlighted by the fact that it is flanked by two parking lots. It is oriented on an east to west axis, and is entered from the east on Hill Street.
- 2. Historic Landscape Design: none
- 3. Outbuildings none

S. OLIVE

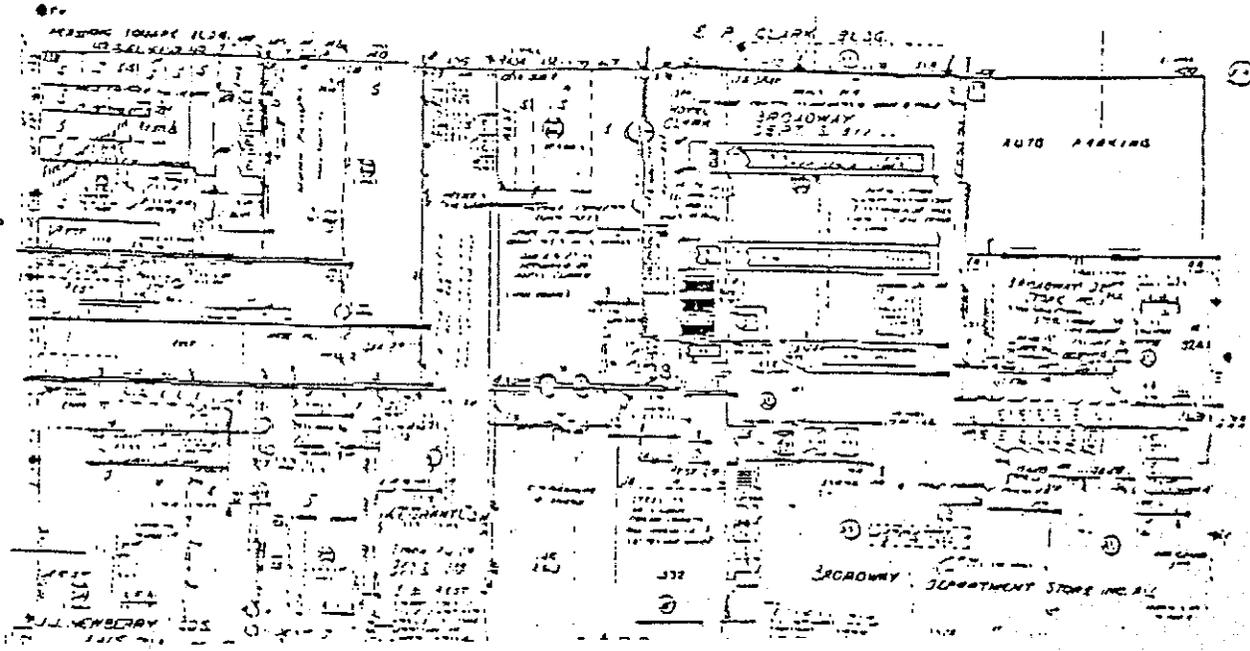


52

S. HILL

30 ft wide

W. 5TH



PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibilography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

City of Los Angeles, Department of Building
and Safety, Building Permits

City of Los Angeles, Department of Planning,
Land Use Planning and Management System

County of Los Angeles, Recorder's Office,
Official Records of the County of Los Angeles

2. Secondary Sources:

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(G. W. Baist Co., Philadelphia, Pa.: 1905)

Hatheway, Roger G., "Historic Building Survey:
Request for Determination of Eligibility"
(Los Angeles Downtown People Mover Program:
January, 1979).

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Sanborn Map Company, Los Angeles Fire Insurance Maps
(New York: 1883, 1927, 1958).

Southwest Builder and Contractor, July 27, 1927 p. 62

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Works Projects Administration, Los Angeles Drawings
(Los Angeles: 1939).

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Senior Transportation
Planner
Roger G. Hatheway,
Consulting Research
Historian
Los Angeles Downtown
People Mover Authority
October, 1980

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Los Angeles Downtown People Mover Project, supported by a demonstration grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, is proposing to build an automated, grade-separated transit system in downtown Los Angeles.

A portion of the route as proposed would run along the west side of Hill Street in front of Federal Title Building, approximately 23 to 30 feet above the level of the sidewalk. Locating the DPM in front of the building will not require alterations to the structure, but will create a new visual element in front of the structure.