

Case Research

Historic Significance and Integrity Assessment Report for Listing First U.S. Post Office Building on the Scottsdale Historic Register

First U.S. Post Office Building
3944 N. Brown Avenue, Scottsdale, Arizona
Scottsdale Historic Register No. SHR-00-4
Resolution No. 5550

Background

In July of 1999 the City Council adopted Resolution No. 5324 and Ordinance No. 3242 which established the Scottsdale Historic Register, the City's official list of historic and archaeological resources with special significance in the United States, Arizona and Scottsdale history, architecture, archaeology, engineering or culture. The first group of properties to be considered for designation were those properties that had previously received HP overlay zoning under an earlier City Historic Preservation (HP) program. The building popularly known as the "Porters" was originally constructed as First U.S. Post Office Building. It was zoned HP in 1983. The property is owned by Margie and Robert Meadows and is located at 3944 North Brown Avenue on parcel 130-23-112.

Historic Context: Early Town Building, 1908 – 1933

Scottsdale's historic development followed a pattern typically found in Western communities. Like other Arizona cities and towns, the provision of a reliable water supply was critical to sustaining the community's viability after its initial settlement in the late 1800s. With the construction of Granite Reef Dam in 1908, followed by Roosevelt Dam in 1911, Scottsdale shared in the population boom that transformed the Salt River Valley. A main line rail connection to the national railway system completed into the Valley in 1924 provided further impetus for growth and development. During this period Scottsdale grew slowly, but steadily, as a small market town principally providing services for families involved in agricultural pursuits.

Within the core of the original Scottsdale town site are several extant buildings that represent this early period of the community's development. The dates of their construction, the types of buildings, their uses as well as their locations illustrate the traditional pattern of community development that occurred in Scottsdale, Arizona and throughout the nation in the early twentieth century.

Description

The building was constructed in 1929 and is a two-story structure originally of unpainted, red brick with a flat roof. The building is built right on the sidewalk with no setback on a lot approximately 60' wide by 55' deep or about .075 acres.

A small parapet roof crowns the front facade and corbelling creates two recessed sign board areas at the roof's cornice. Initially there were two doors that served as entrances to the first floor level which led into the postal facilities. These doors flank a large opening that is now partially glazed and boarded at the top but retains its original concrete sill. The locations of the first floor window openings on the south side of the building are visible but have also been infilled. A separate outside staircase on the south side of the building provided access to the second floor that was leased as two rental apartments and later used for a doctor's office. The second floor doorway and window openings have been modified to look like window openings after the stairs were removed. In 1949 the building was painted red when it was converted to a retail use. During this same period, the original door openings were infilled with brick and single pane fixed windows with wood surrounds. In 1952, a one-story addition was added to the north and rear sides of the building.

History

Delivery of mail is an important service to all communities, even the most rudimentary. Scottsdale, like others, housed its postal operations in a variety of stores in the Main Street area beginning in 1897. In 1928 construction began on the first building dedicated to this use. The simple structure, substantial with its masonry construction but modest in its form and detailing, is typical of the public buildings built in small towns during this time. Having sufficient volume to require separate facilities attests to the prosperity of the twenties in Scottsdale and the expansion of its downtown and the growing population it served. From the time of its construction until after World War II, when growth necessitated a larger facility, the building was a hub of community activity as patrons came to check the twice-daily deliveries from Phoenix. Its conversion to a Western theme retail establishment and the associated alterations also is representative of the influences that shaped the development of Scottsdale's downtown during the post war period.

Significance

Porters is historically significant as the first federal building in Scottsdale. Its construction for the exclusive use of the federal mail system attests to Scottsdale growth as a community and its prosperity. For over two decades the modest post office was a public building serving as a hub of community activity. It continues to be an important commercial establishment of the downtown.

Architecturally the building is significant as one of the few remaining examples of an early 2-story modest rectangular brick commercial storefront typical of buildings at this time. The physical character of the building still conveys the integrity of its original brick storefront construction.