

United States Open Air Post Office
400 First Avenue North
HPC #86-03 - Designated May 1986



The Open Air Post Office is an important Mediterranean Revival building in St. Petersburg marking the transition from the city's early Mission period to the rise of Beaux Arts historicism which would make its mark in the 1920s. The post office has served St. Petersburg since dedicated in 1916 and has become a landmark for residents and visitors alike. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975.

The original plans drawn by the government architect in the early 1900s called for a grand building set well above the sidewalk level with many steps leading up to it. Unsatisfied with these plans, Postmaster Roy Hanna submitted his own design which envisioned a street level post office without any steps and open on all sides allowing patrons to access their boxes at any hour. The design of the post office was inspired by one of the icons of the early Italian Renaissance in Florence, the Ospedale degli Innocenti (1424) by Filippo Brunelleschi and contains many ornaments of terra cotta based on Renaissance designs. The design of the building called for loggia open on three sides to give the public access to offices and postal boxes at all times. The facades which face 4th Street and First Avenue North consist of highly ornamental arches, terra cotta piers, column caps, marble columns, granite plinths, stucco spandrels, and terra cotta disks. The frieze is also glazed terra cotta and the roof is covered with Spanish tile. The vibrant colors used along the frieze give the impression of colorful Mediterranean tiles and many varied motifs. The American eagle, gargoyles and varied organic forms, contribute to the intricacy and detail seen at the post office. In 1969, the south wall and south one-third of the east wall were enclosed to allow for indoor service counters, air conditioning, heating and additional postal boxes.

Hanna's plans were drawn by retired architect George W. Stuart (1856-1937) who also drew the 1916 St. Petersburg Yacht Club. Born in Glasgow, Scotland on November 26, 1856, Stuart moved with his family to Geulf, near Toronto, Canada. He was educated at Hellmuth College in London, Ontario and served four years apprenticeship to architects in Toronto. As captain in the 19th Winnipeg Battalion of the Canadian Militia, Stuart fought Sioux and Blackfoot Indians in Canada's last Indian War and was shot in the neck by an arrow, barely surviving. He lived in Winnipeg for four years before moving first to Dallas, Texas, and then Atlanta, until finally taking up residence in St. Petersburg with his wife Marie Cogdon Stuart. In St. Petersburg, in addition to the post office he designed many of the city's homes and larger buildings including the St. Petersburg Yacht Club (1916), and "may have been the architect for other early Mission influenced Mediterranean Revival buildings in St. Petersburg." He lived at 115 3rd Avenue NE from 1912 to 1919 and at 1803 Beach Drive NE from 1920 until his death in 1937.