

Early Settlement

Bakersfield in its original natural state was an alkali delta with sparse vegetation consisting mainly of grasses, cottonwood, and oak trees.

Colonel Thomas Baker purchased the swamp and overflow lands of today's Bakersfield from a company of individuals who held reclamation rights. Drainage was accomplished by constructing irrigation ditches and damming Buena Vista Lake. By providing irrigation, Baker was able to plant crops, harness water power and provide building sites. For settlers, Baker installed a sawmill and do-it-yourself grist mill for grinding grain. In fact, the Holiday Inn Hotel is built atop Baker's field. He also built the first successful kiln to bake bricks for structures. Colonel Baker's greatest ambition was not so much to own land but to make land available to be owned.

Baker showed great foresight in laying out the city. He was the promoter of nearly all public works projects and improvements. Disliking the standard 66 foot street widths of most cities, Baker designed the town streets wider. He followed a classical grid pattern and designated 82.5 feet for street widths and 115 feet for avenues. This is one of Downtown Bakersfield's most distinguishing features. The original town site was developed around the Chester Avenue and 19th Street areas. Around the central commercial core, he laid out several thousand residential lots, added schools, a government center, and properties on the edges of the community for industrial use. This configuration remained successful, and largely intact, into the late 1800's.

The Great Fire of 1889

On July 7, 1889, the worst fire in the history of Bakersfield took place. Most of the downtown area was destroyed. The only structure that was saved was Scribner's Water Tower at the corner of 17th and Chester. As the new city grew out of the ashes, temporary wooden structures, soon were replaced by brick buildings. Most of the bricks were supplied by James Curran who had started the Sandstone Brick Company in 1886.

The Growth and Development of Bakersfield

Several major events occurred that would have a lasting impact upon the future of Bakersfield. In 1899, the Kern River Oilfield was discovered. In 1901 an electric street car service began operating in Bakersfield - one of the first in the western U.S. In 1915-1916 auto stagelines between Los Angeles, Bakersfield and San Francisco began operation. The period between 1925 and 1950 saw Bakersfield experience only modest growth in size, adding only 948 acres to its boundaries. However, Bakersfield experienced growth in other areas. Its population doubled, technology in communications arrived in Bakersfield with television station, reputed to be one of the first, west of the Mississippi River. The year 1924 saw the end of the street car service downtown and almost immediately complaints of traffic congestion and parking problems were heard. The period of 1950-1975 was a period of tremendous growth and expansion. The city tripled in size by adding over 15,400 acres to its boundaries. 1952 saw perhaps the single most traumatic event to affect the Central City since incorporation, the earthquakes. Virtually every major structure in the downtown received some type of damage. Many landmark buildings were damaged beyond repair.

The Historic Preservation Commission invites you to take this walking tour to discover downtown's treasures of the past still with us today.



**BAKERSFIELD
HISTORIC
PRESERVATION
COMMISSION**

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Stepping into the Past

a historic walking tour
of downtown
Bakersfield



_ hosted by
City of Bakersfield
Historic Preservation Commission

1. **Bakersfield Fire Department** (Charles Biggar) 1939
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 2120 H Street - PWA Moderne replaced an aging 1904 two-level red brick fire station.
2. **Fox Theater** (Charles Lee, Charles Biggar) 1930
 2001 H Street - Spanish Colonial Revival with a tall clock and bell tower designed in the atmospheric style Mediterranean village auditorium with electric stars, listed on the local register.
3. **Jastro House** (architect unknown) 1875
 1811 20th Street - Gothic Victorian Cottage house of Henry Jastro, head of the Kern County Land Company & Chairman of the Kern County Board of Supervisors for 24 years.
4. **Standard Oil Building** (Everett Hinshaw) 1917; 1921
 1800 19th Street - Late Second-Renaissance Revival listed on the federal, state and local registers.
5. **Kern County Land Company** (Henry Schultze) 1893
 1712 19th Street - Second Renaissance Revival, a classic listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
6. **Tegeler Hotel** (architect unknown) 1914
 1908 H Street - Originally four levels, with a basement cafe and a roof that was later converted to a garden. A fifth floor was added and then removed after the 1952 earthquake.
7. **Hayden Building** (architect unknown) 1915
 1622 19th Street - Second Renaissance Revival brick structure was the Continental Hotel, listed on the local register.
8. **Old Bank of America** (Swasey and Hayne) 1930
 1931 Chester Avenue - PWA Moderne with some Egyptian Revival features, now Stars Dinner Theater.
9. **Hopkins Building** (architect unknown) 1904
 1916 Chester Avenue - Former site of the original Hockheimer & Co., reconstructed in 1919 after a fire gutted the building.
10. **Woolworth** (architect unknown) 1939
 1400 19th Street - Art Moderne rounded-corner with vertical cement panels; previously Owl Drug Store.
11. **Kress Building** (Edward Sibbert) 1931

1401 19th Street – Bakersfield’s best example of Art Deco constructed of reinforced steel and masonry.

12. **Fish Building** (Charles Biggar) 1938
 1831 Chester Avenue - PWA Modern, Ribbon Style made of reinforced concrete and steel with a deep basement.
13. **Nile Theater** (B. G. McDougall) 1906; 1938
 1721 19th Street - Art Deco/Art Moderne was the Bakersfield Opera House in 1906.
14. **Post Office, Federal Building** (architect unknown) 1925
 1730 18th Street - Mission architecture constructed of masonry and concrete, reinforced with steel, was the official federal government center for many years.



15. **Padre Hotel** (built by John M. Cooper) 1928
1813 H Street - Mixture of architectural styles, predominantly Spanish Colonial Revival Hotel originally constructed with 198-guest rooms.
16. **Vincent's, Padre Garage** (McMahon Development Co.) 1930
1723 18th Street - Mission Revival originally designed as a six-story building, the garage was built for the Padre Hotel.
17. **Porterfield Hotel, Smartt Apartments** (Samuel Smartt) 1911
1715 18th Street - Plastered structure unique type of architecture for Bakersfield.
18. **Amy Holdroyd House** (architect unknown) 1937
1822 17th Street - Several Spanish Colonial Revival houses were built in Bakersfield in the 1910's and 1930's, though very few in the downtown area.
19. **First Presbyterian Church** (George Rible) 1913
1705 H Street - The cornerstone from the original 1913 building remains in the current building completed in 1955 after the 1952 earthquake. Church's roots trace back to 1889.
20. **Bakersfield Californian** (Eissler, Biggar) 1926; 1936

1707 Eye Street - Italian Renaissance Revival an architectural landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1983). Alfred Harrell, the newspaper's publisher from 1897 to 1946, was well respected locally, state and nation-wide.

21. **Kern Co. Hall of Records** 1908; 1940
1655 Chester Avenue - Originally constructed in a Beaux Arts Architectural Style (Train & Williams), the architecture was altered in 1939-40 (Frank Wynkoop) into a PWA Moderne style.
22. **Haberfelde Building** (Charles Biggar) 1927-29
1706 Chester Avenue - A five-level, Sullivanesque structure constructed of masonry reinforced steel.
23. **Sill Building** (Ernest & Franklin Kump) 1939
1500 18th Street - Art Moderne style, three-level building constructed of reinforced concrete and steel.