

Presented by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors

LEGACY

JOSEPH JACINTO MORA



MONTEREY COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Alisal and Church Streets
Salinas, California

A CELEBRATION OF SCULPTURES

In 1936, Architect Robert Stanton began work on a new county courthouse. He contracted with Jo Mora to embellish the three story building with his sculptures. Mora's theme was based on four distinct cultural periods in Monterey County's history: Native American, Spanish, Mexican and the United States.

Positioned over the **Church Street entrance**, is the figure of Justice, sword in right hand, balance scale in left. Background decoration makes reference to four regimes: California in the command of Indian peoples, under the Spanish, under Mexico and as part of the United States. Above the head of Justice, and partially concealed by her raised arm and sword, is the eagle and great seal of the United States. The coats of arms of Royal Spain (to left) and Mexico (to right) are supported by Native American figures.

The rest of the sculptural campaign at the courthouse is drawn entirely from Monterey County's historical regimes.



Heroic heads are engaged at regular intervals between the first and second story windows on the exterior street side and courtyard walls. The Salinas Community Arts Council in 1970 cited

sixty-two heads that represent twenty-three persons in the following order: Indian Man, Indian Woman, Cabrillo, Viscaïno, Soldier with Viscaïno, Portola, Cuera (armed horse soldier, many of whom traveled with Portola), Catalonian Volunteer (also a soldier type with Portola), Junipero Serra, Anza, Spanish California Man, Spanish California Woman, Mestizo Man, Mestizo Woman, American Trapper, Yankee Skipper, Fremont, Sloat, Pioneer Man, Pioneer Woman, Stockman, Modern Youth and Modern Young Woman.

To enter the **western section** of the building, visitors must pass into the courtyard through one of the five open portals flanked by two-story high striated columns. Inside the court, six strongly **vertical columns** visually unify the three stories of the western portals. Column caps on the six piers are adorned with friezes which depict Native American, Spanish and American periods of California history. The Native American epoch is dramatized by Indian hunters and native game animals. Neophytes engaged in mission agriculture and the introduction of domestic livestock occupy the Spanish era friezes. The American period is represented by cowboys with stock and horses,



fisheries and a farmer with a tractor.

Located behind the western wing columns, and above doors which allow entry to the ground floor, are five travertine marble **relief panels**. Left to right these reliefs represent five distinct eras in the history of Monterey County: the Indian period, the Spanish period, the mission period, the American period, and recreation in modern (1930s) Monterey County.

The panel on the far left, representing the Indian epoch is dominated by an Indian with bow and arrow. Behind him are other warriors or hunters in the upper register and native Americans performing domestic tasks in the lower register.



Portola on horseback is featured on the second panel. He is surrounded by Spanish dragoons and the ships of Cabrillo and Viscaïno.



The center panel shows a Franciscan friar of the mission period surrounded by Native Americans harvesting grain and loading it into carts.

To the right is a trapper with his long rifle on horseback. A covered wagon and clipper ships represent the United States' western movement.

Modern (1930s) Monterey County is celebrated on the far right with recreational activities such as tennis, golf, sport fishing, rodeo and polo.

Additional embellishments include small **bronze plaques** mounted on the courthouse doors. Four motifs are repeated: Native American hunting, gathering, fishing, and the arts.

A **fish pond**, now used as a planter, is the focal point of the courtyard. This is the only eye level decorative feature of the entire ensemble, thus drawing the attention of the average pedestrian visitor to the courthouse. More bronze work (again representing the same four cultural periods: Native American, Spanish, Mexican and American) enhances a central column.



The Monterey County Courthouse was financed by a Federal Works grant (45% or \$202,000 of the \$450,000 total cost) and bond issues supported by local taxpayers. From concept to completion the courthouse in Salinas was undertaken in a timely manner, for after deciding in June 1935 to go ahead with the project, Monterey County scheduled the bond issue for an August 15th election. Bonds were issued the following January. Construction began March 16, 1936. The building was completed October 19, 1937 and dedicated October 30, 1937.

During construction, county business was conducted in the old courthouse while two U-shaped wings designed by Robert Stanton of Pebble Beach and Charles F. Butner of Salinas were constructed around the older 1879 two-story stone edifice. When the new building was occupied, the older

one was removed from the present courtyard.

Stanton's modern three story concrete building was designed to blend with the existing sheriff's office, immediately west of the courthouse on Alisal Street. Ease in maintenance was a consideration, so exterior walls are natural colored, sandblasted concrete that requires no painting. Celebrated technical features of the new structure included earthquake resistant construction and thermostatically controlled heating and air conditioning.



The converted fish pond located in the central courtyard of the Monterey County Courthouse in Salinas.

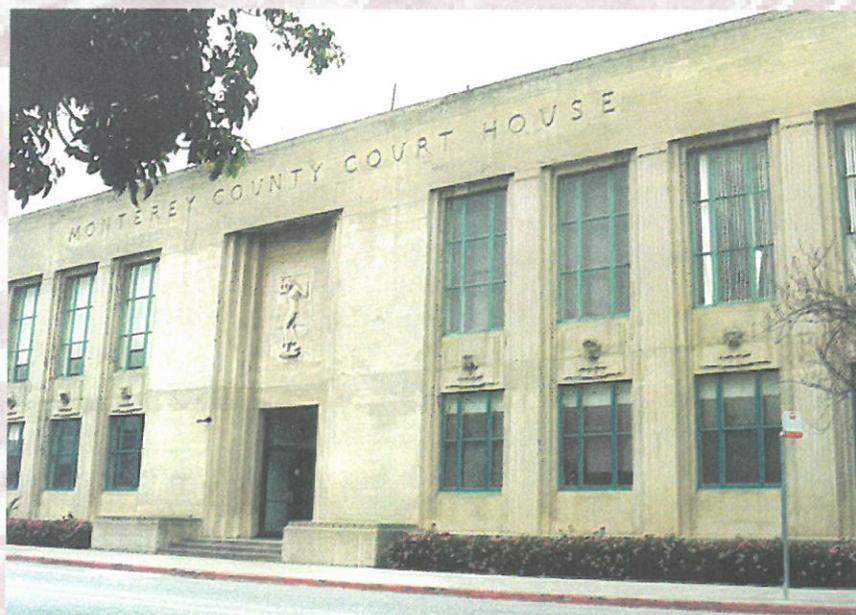
In addition to funding public works, New Deal policies designed to alleviate economic hardship sponsored the arts at an unprecedented level. During the late 1930s, Salinas was the beneficiary of four public art projects.

Maynard Dixon painted a cowboy mural, no longer extant, on a cement wall at the Salinas Rodeo Grounds in 1936.

Two wood reliefs by Richard O'Hanlon hang at either end of the post office lobby on Alisal Street. Completed in 1938, these works were funded under the Treasury Section of fine Arts.

A black granite panther, the mascot of Hartnell Community College, was sculpted by

Raymond Puccinelli. Financed under the Federal Art Project of WPA, it was unveiled in 1940.



Monterey Courthouse in Salinas - East View

The largest federally funded project in Salinas is the county courthouse where a portion of the total budget was designated for the sculptural campaign of Jo (seph) Jacinto Mora.



Joseph Jacinto Mora

(1876 - 1947)

Jo Mora was born on October 22, 1876 in Montevideo, Uruguay, to Spanish born Domingo Mora and his French wife, Lura Gaillard Mora. Domingo Mora saw no future in Uruguay for his sons Jo and Luis, so he moved his family to New York City. There he opened a studio where Jo's and Luis' earliest training took place.

Jo Mora was one of California's most gifted artists. He worked as a sculptor, painter, muralist, jeweler, illustrator, cartographer, cartoonist, author and actor. His travels throughout the west as a cowboy and as a chronicler of the Navajo and Hopi tribes inspired his work.

Jo Mora's formal studies were at the Art Students' League and Chase's School in New York and later at Cowles Art School in Boston. Upon leaving school, Jo Mora worked in Boston as a newspaper illustrator and cartoonist. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Mora settled in San Jose, California after spending time in Baja and Sonora, Mexico and in New Mexico where both the Hopi and Navajo tribes left significant impressions upon him. Most analytical observers of Mora's artwork believe his experiences among the Hopi and Navajo are reflected in his heroic artistic representation of indigenous North American peoples.

Jo Mora married Grace Alma Needham on January 6, 1907. Shortly thereafter, his parents came west to live at his ranch in the Santa Clara Valley. Subsequently Jo and his father worked jointly, using the signature "D. and J.J. Mora". It was not until Jo alone completed their unfinished commissions after his father's 1911 death, that Mora was



fully drawn into the occupation of sculptor. In 1913, Mora relocated his studio to San Francisco. Mora moved to the Monterey Peninsula in 1921 and is probably best known for his bronze and travertine sarcophagus of Father Serra at the Carmel Mission.

Jo Mora completed many notable sculptural campaigns. In addition to Salinas's Monterey County Courthouse and the King City High School Auditorium, some of his other successes include the 1913 interior of the Los Angeles Examiner building (Julia Morgan, architect); the 1918 Brete Harte Memorial (bronze bas relief) featured on the exterior of the Bohemian Club, San Francisco; the 1921 Serra Sarcophagus (travertine marble), San Carlos Mission, Carmel; and the heroic classified Greek pediment (terra cotta) at the Don Lee building, San Francisco Stock Exchange.

Assorted minor works are as varied as maps and menus; illustrated children's books (*Animals of Aesop*, *Reynard the Fox*, *Anderson's Fairy Tales*, published by Dana, Estes and Company.); *Animaldom*, a cartoon strip for the Boston Sunday Herald and syndicated associations; and the design for the 1925 federal fifty-cent piece commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of California statehood.

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Ann R. Myhre, January 1998

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