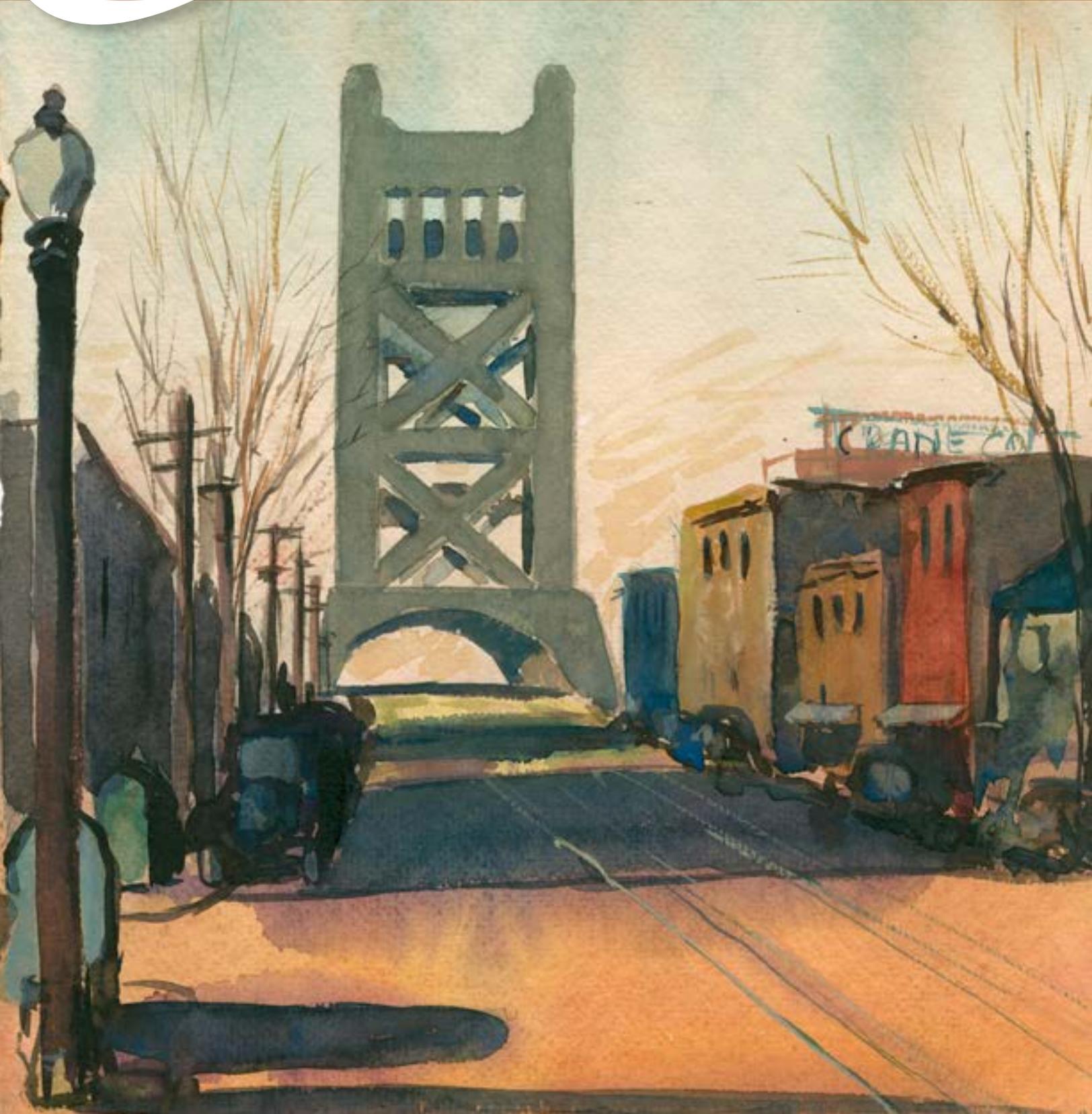


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# Bulletin





# Bulletin

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**Back Cover:** In 1941, Eichler painted the Tower Theatre in Sacramento's Land Park neighborhood shortly after its construction.

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# Alfred Eichler

The Life of an Exceptional  
Architect & Watercolor Painter

*By Bruce A. Marwick*



Alfred W. Eichler (1895–1977) joined the California State Division of Architecture in 1925 as a senior architectural designer. His career spanned thirty-eight years, during which he designed dozens of buildings, bridges, and monuments all over California. Notable examples of his work are Sacramento’s Tower Bridge and the Departments of Employment, Personnel, and Rehabilitation (formerly Education) Buildings on Capitol Mall.

What is less known about Eichler was his passion for watercolor painting. Throughout his life, Eichler traveled the cities and backroads of California looking for vintage buildings to paint. He stated in a *Sacramento Bee* article in 1959, “I’m most interested in the early architecture of California. I’ve taken my sketch pad all over Sacramento and the Mother Lode country looking for houses that have what I call the ‘spirit of the West.’”

Eichler created dozens of watercolor paintings over his lifetime. Some were displayed in art shows, some were sold, but the majority were held as a collection by Eichler. Towards the end of his architecture career he realized that the painting collection needed to find a home. What follows is the story of Eichler’s remarkable life and how his substantial collection of watercolor paintings were preserved at the California State Library.



Above: Artist Alfred Eichler posed in front of the historic Wells Fargo building at the gold rush town of Columbia. This well-preserved building provided the inspiration for his watercolor painting.

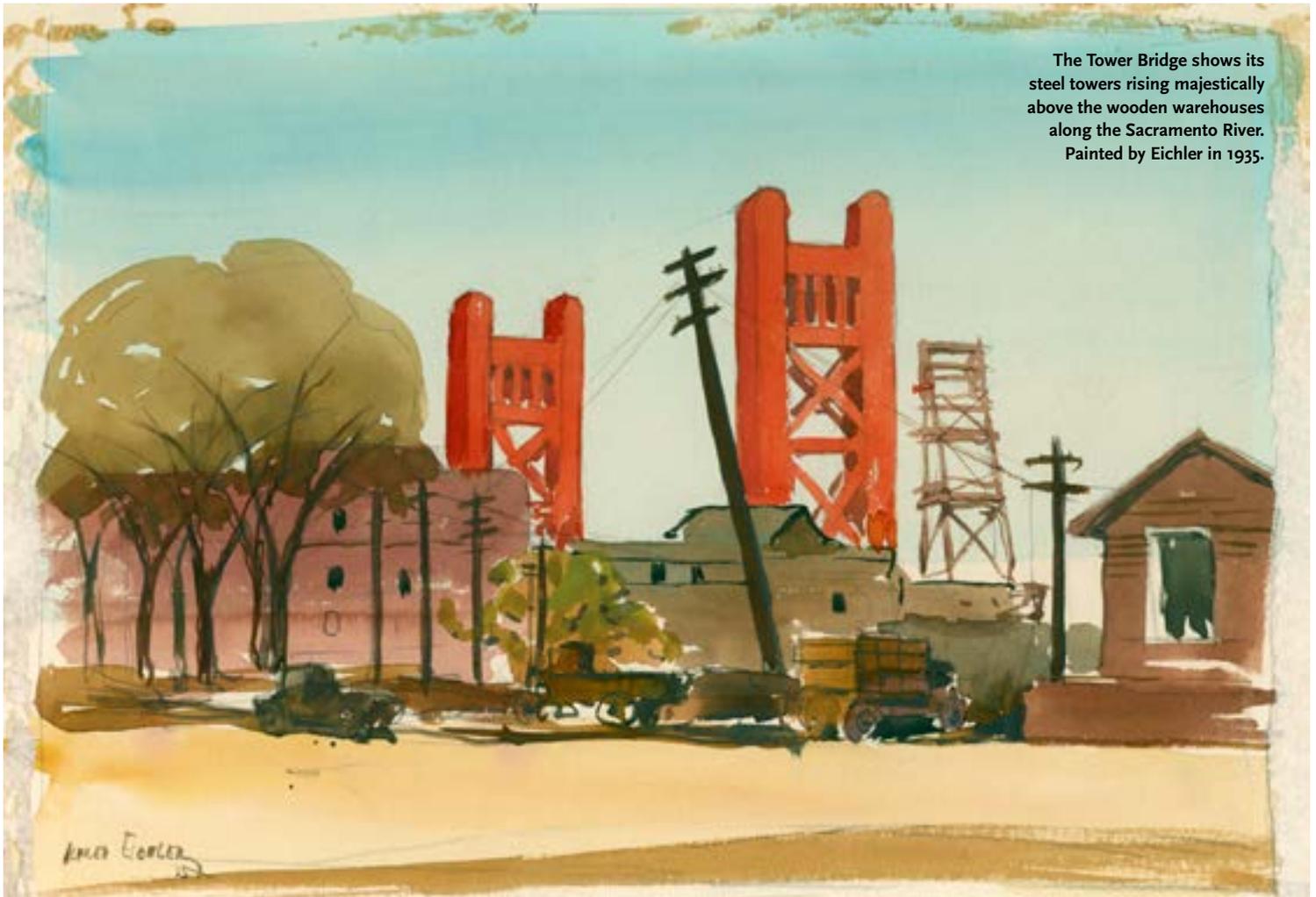
Left: In 1941, Eichler painted the Tower Theatre in Sacramento’s Land Park neighborhood shortly after its construction.



#### EDITOR’S NOTE

Bruce A. Marwick is the Walking Tour Director and former Vice President for the Sacramento Art Deco Society. He spent many years as a marketing and graphic design professional in Los Angeles and Sacramento. His interest in Alfred Eichler stems from a presentation he created in 2017 titled, “3 Art Deco Artisans of Sacramento, Taliabue, Polifka & Eichler.”

The Tower Bridge shows its steel towers rising majestically above the wooden warehouses along the Sacramento River. Painted by Eichler in 1935.



### THE ROAD TO BECOMING AN ARCHITECT AND AN ARTIST

One must first look at Eichler's early years to appreciate his remarkable accomplishments. He was born in Missouri in 1895, the oldest son of Dr. Alfred and Laura Eichler. The family moved to San Francisco in 1896 where his father became a surgeon at St. Joseph's Hospital. Young Alfred excelled as a student who enjoyed doing art. His future was full of potential until age thirteen when he contracted spinal meningitis and became deaf.

Eichler continued his studies at St. Ignatius High School and College in San Francisco. The Jesuit priests of St. Ignatius pushed Eichler in the face of his disability. He learned to read lips, but never learned to use sign language as it was discouraged in the early part of the twentieth century. Eichler's big break came when he apprenticed with the architectural firm of F.D. &

H.A. Boese in San Francisco at age sixteen. He stayed at the firm from 1911 to 1916 learning the necessary skills to become an architect. Eichler secured a position as a civilian architect with the U.S. Navy in Washington D.C. from 1917 to 1918.

While on the East Coast, Eichler attended classes at prestigious art schools, such as the Corcoran School of Fine Arts in Washington D.C. and the Arts Student's League in New York City. Eichler undoubtedly saw, and was influenced by, the art he saw on the East Coast. The painting style of the period was much looser and freer than the technical drawings he did as an architect. One could imagine that Eichler developed his love for watercolor painting during this period.

### RETURNING TO THE GOLDEN STATE

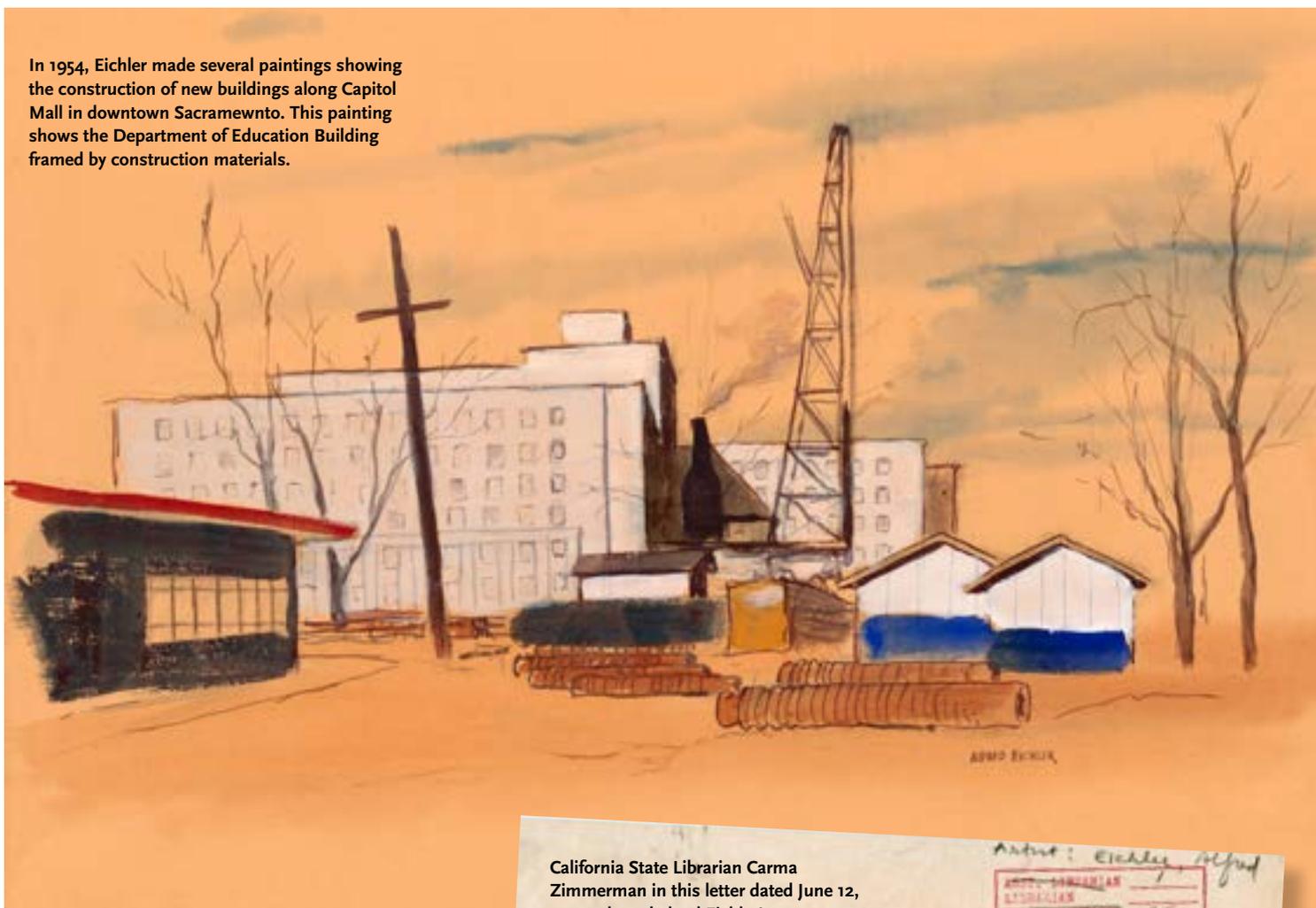
Alfred Eichler returned to California and decided to continue his career in Los Angeles. He worked for several highly regarded

architects, including Myron Hunt, the designer of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles and the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. In 1922, Eichler successfully became a certified licensed architect.

In 1925, the California State Division of Architecture (CSDA) hired Alfred Eichler, where he was to remain for almost four decades. Eichler had found an employer who appreciated his unique talents. He designed buildings in a variety of architectural styles, including Beaux Arts, Arts and Crafts, and Italian Revival. He created exquisite presentation drawings using ink pens, color pencils, chalk, and gouache (opaque watercolor). Eichler was such a talented artist that many of his fellow architects asked him to illustrate their designs.

Eichler became a respected architect in the CSDA during the 1930s and 1940s. He was assigned ever larger projects, such as designing the master plan and build-

In 1954, Eichler made several paintings showing the construction of new buildings along Capitol Mall in downtown Sacramento. This painting shows the Department of Education Building framed by construction materials.



California State Librarian Carma Zimmerman in this letter dated June 12, 1959 acknowledged Eichler's generous donation of his watercolor paintings.

Artist: Eichler, Alfred

ARTIST	1
EXHIBIT	
EXHIBIT NUMBER	✓
EXHIBIT DATE	
EXHIBIT OFFICE	
EXHIBIT FILE	3-11-59

June 12, 1959

Mr. Alfred Eichler  
2717 Barkness Way  
Sacramento, California

Dear Mr. Eichler:

I have been looking at the watercolors you have just presented to the State Library, and I want you to know how happy we are to receive them.

When they arrived, the California Section set them on a long shelf and held an impromptu exhibit. A number of people saw them, and all were impressed by the sharpness and detail you have been able to put on paper. The buildings seem particularly realistic.

They are all a beautiful group which will be of particular interest to the California Section not only for their artistic merit but for their historical value as reproductions of many Sacramento west-end and better late buildings rapidly disappearing.

It was generous of you to place your work in the State Library, and we appreciate your thinking of us.

Sincerely yours,

Carma E. Zimmerman  
State Librarian

CRZ:l  
Draft: ABO

ings for the California School for the Deaf in Berkeley. By 1949, Eichler had been promoted to supervisory architect. Yet, the stresses of life began to build up, and he turned to painting as therapy from the daily challenges of his professional life.

### THE ALFRED EICHLER PAINTING COLLECTION

Alfred Eichler donated his painting collection to the California State Library in June 1959. There are seventy-five pieces in the collection and they date from the 1930s to the 1950s. Many of the paintings are of buildings which had been lost to urban redevelopment during the 1950s.

The Prints Room of the Stanley Mosk Library and Courts Building displayed sixty-three of Eichler's paintings in a one-man-show in November 1959. Eichler had displayed his paintings in the Prints Room before, but this was by far the largest exhi-