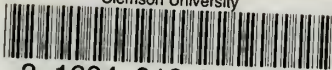


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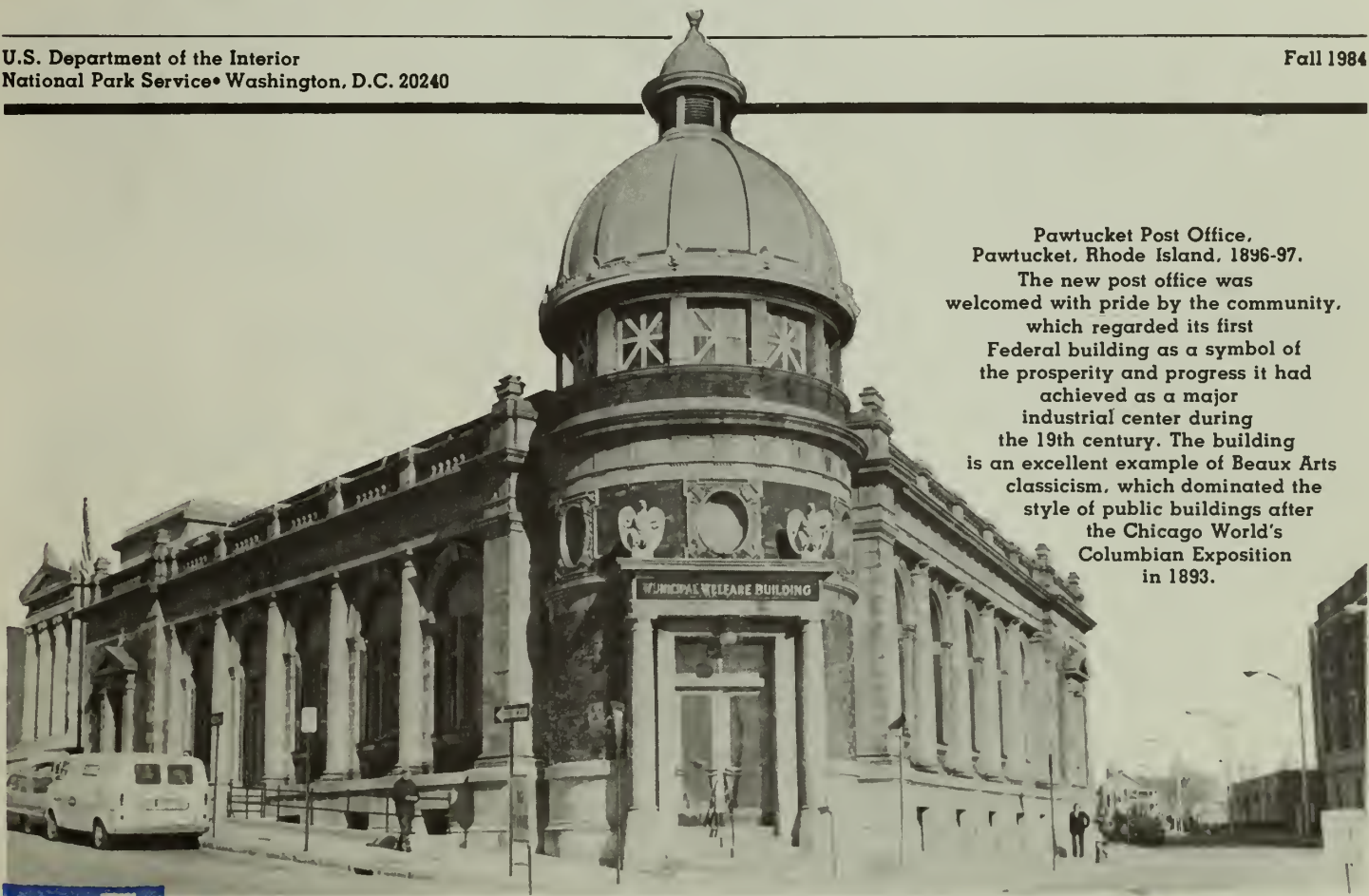
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Pawtucket Post Office.
Pawtucket, Rhode Island, 1896-97.
The new post office was welcomed with pride by the community, which regarded its first Federal building as a symbol of the prosperity and progress it had achieved as a major industrial center during the 19th century. The building is an excellent example of Beaux Arts classicism, which dominated the style of public buildings after the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.



HOW TO APPLY NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA TO POST OFFICES

by Beth Grosvenor • Historian • National Register

Introduction

In recent years, common concerns have emerged in determining which examples of buildings associated with governmental and civic institutions are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Such institutions provide important, sometimes essential services, and for that reason are found in or near almost every community in the country. These institutions cannot always be identified specifically with a particular historic period, development,

or event, but because their services form a part of each community's identity, they help determine its values, and the course of its history. Therefore, buildings which house important institutions, such as post offices, hospitals, town halls, or other similar buildings, often possess historic significance. Problems arise in evaluating particular examples of institutional buildings, which are generally recognized to be a significant type. This occurs when the evaluations do not include an examination of the role of the institution

within the specific historical context, an analysis of the ability of a particular building to represent that role, or an evaluation of the architecture of the building within the context of the overall architectural development of the community.

Post offices are the buildings about which questions have most often been raised. As a result, the National Park Service conducted a study of various factors in the establishment, role, and design of post offices in order to establish a consistent policy for applying the National

Register criteria for evaluation to these buildings. The study considered the history of post offices prior to 1939, the year that the public buildings functions were removed from the Treasury Department and merged with the Federal Works Agency. This cut-off also accommodates the major Federal programs of the Depression, and marks a period after which Federal involvement in civilian construction began to be superseded by preparations for war. The following guidance for evaluating the significance of post offices using National Register criteria resulted from this study, and is intended to assist anyone evaluating the eligibility of post offices for inclusion in the National Register, and to suggest an appropriate approach for evaluating other similar resources.

Historical and Architectural Development of Postal Services and Post Office Construction

Historically, governments have maintained control over postal systems, since the effective organization and control of society depend upon the ability to communicate. In America, the new United States Government also assumed control over mail service, but incorporated democratic principles by constitutionally placing the power to establish post offices and post roads in the hands of Congress. The establishment of postal service throughout the country provided an example of democracy at work: citizens petitioned Congress, which established post roads and instructed the Postmaster General to provide postal service along the routes. By 1820, the number of post offices and miles of post roads were approximately quadruple that of 1800. In addition to providing tangible reminders to otherwise isolated communities of the role and ideals of the central government, post offices, through their number, distribution, and types of services, represented many politically advantageous opportunities to Members of Congress. Using their franking privileges, Congressmen could widely and inexpensively distribute speeches and campaign materials, and they could also gain political support from the press by purchasing space for notices concerning postal business. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries,



Copperas Cove Stagestop and Post Office, Copperas Cove vicinity, Texas, 1878. This fine example of vernacular stone construction in Texas is the only surviving structure from the original town of Copperas Cove. It served many functions, beginning as a stage relay station and post office.

Congressmen sought favor from constituents through the establishment or improvement of postal services and facilities in their districts.

With the development of political parties in the early 19th century, like other aspects of democracy, the operation of the Post Office Department became subject to political manipulation. After gaining cabinet level status in 1829 under Andrew Jackson, the Postmaster General served as a major distributor of rewards to party supporters through appointments to thousands of postmaster positions. Postmasters were often, therefore, important political activists and local organizers for the party in power. The political vulnerability of the postmaster positions, as well as their large numbers, made them major targets in the history of civil service reform in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Throughout the 19th century, as the principal, and for a long time the only, means of long distance communication, the postal system provided both a physical and intellectual link between great distances as the nation expanded across the continent. In the process of providing and increasing its services, the Post Office Department also influenced the development of aspects of the nation's history other than communications, including transpor-

tation, publishing, and commerce. Efforts to increase the speed and efficiency of mail delivery and competition for government contracts to carry mail encouraged the growth of roads, railroads, shipping lines, and eventually airlines. Congressional franking, special newspaper rates, the acceptance of books for delivery, and free delivery for cities and eventually rural areas spurred a boom in the publishing business by offering inexpensive rates and wide distribution of newspapers, journals, magazines, catalogs, and paperback books. Mail order businesses benefited from reduced rates for catalogs, rural free delivery, and parcel post service.

Through the use of flat rates, stamps and envelopes, registered mail and money orders, and free delivery for larger cities, the basic form of modern postal service had taken shape by the Civil War, but important services were instituted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including rural free delivery, parcel post, and postal savings. Long advocated by farmers, rural free delivery, which began experimentally in 1896 and permanently a few years later, greatly reduced the isolation of rural areas. Between 1897 and 1908, local governments spent millions to improve roads in order to qualify for rural delivery

service. This service also resulted in a drastic reduction in the number of post offices in small communities, in which commercial establishments had sometimes been supported by necessary periodic visits of rural citizens to pick up mail. Parcel post, inaugurated in 1913, provided another great convenience to rural areas, which were often unprofitable for private express companies. Postal savings banks were authorized in 1910 in order to encourage thrift, increase the amount of money in circulation, and provide security, especially for those without access to banks. They became particularly popular during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when the government inspired greater confidence than private financial institutions.

The United States postal system was initially created to be a self-supporting service organization, but the two goals have often been incompatible. The types and frequency of postal services, improvements, and innovations have varied according to the priorities of each Administration. Similarly, the buildings constructed for use as post offices have reflected various government philosophies. From the establishment of the Office of Supervising Architect of the Treasury in the 1850's until the 1890's, Federal buildings style tended to follow the favorite style of the incumbent Supervising Architect. During the tenure of James Knox Taylor (1897-1912) as Supervising Architect of the Treasury, the Federal Government promoted the concept that government buildings should be monumental and beautiful, and should represent the ideals of democracy and high standards of architectural sophistication in their communities. Taylor preferred styles derived from classical or early American traditions, and, believing that Federal buildings should be built to last, emphasized the use of high quality construction materials. Private architects worked on many of the larger projects, but the Office of the Supervising Architect produced most smaller buildings, including many of the post offices. In either case, the buildings were individually designed; Taylor firmly resisted suggestions that designs be standardized.

After 1913, Federal construction policy changed in response to concerns over the cost of public build-

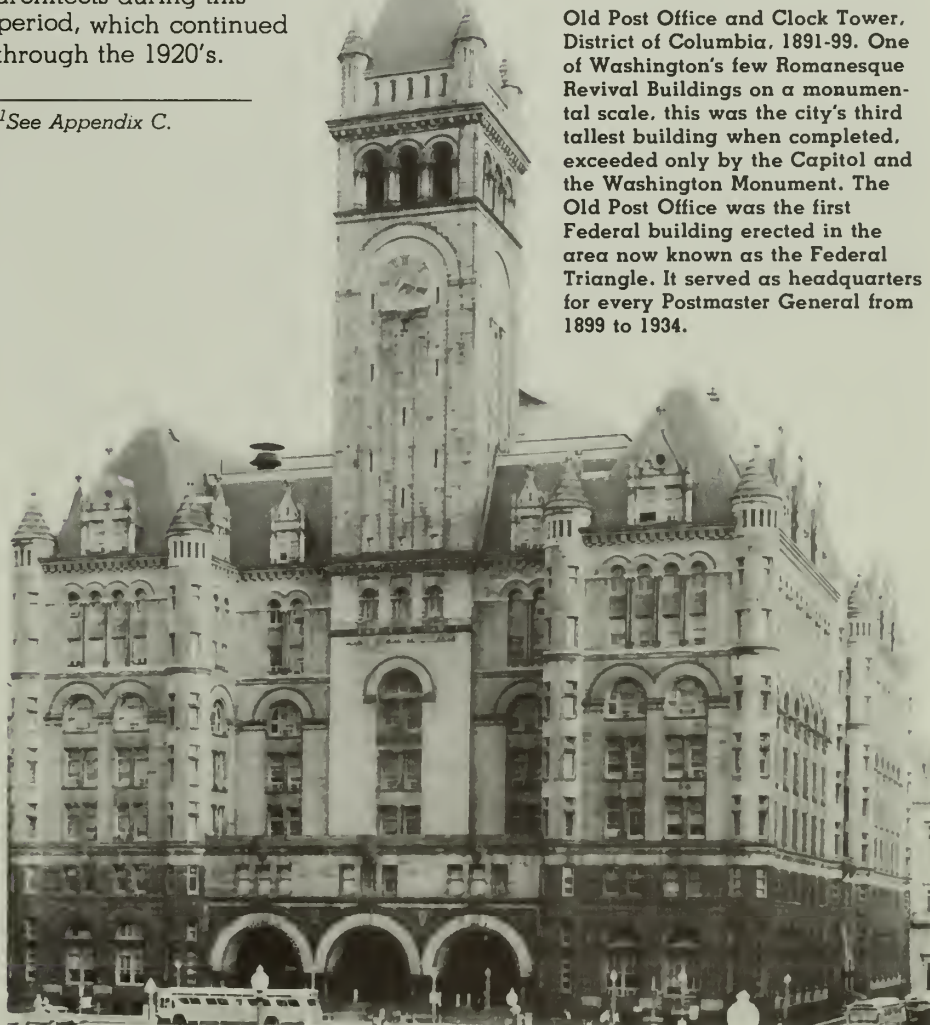
ing projects and controversy over whether all the buildings authorized by Congress were truly needed. The 1913 Public Buildings Act, which authorized the construction of a large number of public buildings, also prohibited the construction of new post office buildings in communities whose postal receipts totaled less than \$10,000. In the interest of economy and efficiency, the Department of the Treasury instituted a classification system under which a post office's structural and ornamental quality were functions of the value of real estate and postal receipts in the city where it was to be located. First class post offices in large cities would still be monumental and elaborate, but for a small town, the standards specified an "ordinary class of building, such as any businessman would consider a reasonable investment."¹ In contrast to the earlier policy of designing post offices individually, the Supervising Architect's office used the same design and floor plan whenever possible, and rarely employed private architects during this period, which continued through the 1920's.

¹See Appendix C.

The emphasis on economy and efficiency continued during the Depression, when the government rapidly expanded its public works program as a means of stimulating economic recovery and providing work for the unemployed, almost one third of whom were in the building trades. The number of public buildings constructed in the 1930's increased dramatically. Approximately three times the number of post offices were built in this period as had been built in the previous 50 years. The construction of these post offices was funded through a number of different programs and authorizations, but remained the responsibility of the Treasury Department until 1939.

Nearly a quarter of the post offices built during this period were authorized by the Public Works Administration (PWA), established in 1933 to oversee the planning and construction of Federal and non-Federal public works projects. The planning required by the 1926 Public Buildings Act and the 1931 Federal Employment Stabilization Act enabled

Old Post Office and Clock Tower, District of Columbia, 1891-99. One of Washington's few Romanesque Revival Buildings on a monumental scale, this was the city's third tallest building when completed, exceeded only by the Capitol and the Washington Monument. The Old Post Office was the first Federal building erected in the area now known as the Federal Triangle. It served as headquarters for every Postmaster General from 1899 to 1934.



the PWA to begin its program with a minimum of delay by starting with Federal projects such as post offices. The Bureau of Labor Statistics maintained statistics on employment, wages, cost of materials, and other data on PWA projects. Although the 406 post offices built under this program composed only a small portion of the approximately 34,000 PWA construction projects completed or in progress in virtually every county in the nation by 1939, they were among the most familiar to the general public. Despite the desire to complete projects rapidly, the PWA also stressed the importance of high quality in order to ensure "public works of an enduring character and lasting benefits," according to its 1939 report.

The government once again employed private architects after 1930,

Federal Office Building, Seattle.

Washington, 1932-33. In addition to being the city's first building designed especially for Federal offices, this was one of the first Modernistic-styled buildings designed by the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department. The innovative use of cast aluminum spandrel panels beneath the windows was the first extensive use of aluminum on the West Coast. Much of the interior Art Deco ornamentation remains intact.

but this practice was ended with an order of June 29, 1934, that all remaining Federal buildings be designed by the staff of the Office of the Supervising Architect. The Treasury Department determined that it was not economical for private architects to handle small architectural projects. It was felt that the expeditious placement of buildings under contract and the putting of men to work in the shortest time possible facilitated employment in the construction field, and outweighed the benefits of procuring designs from a comparatively small number of architectural firms. A limited number of private architects were associated with the Treasury Department's building program on a consulting basis. In March of 1939, however, in likely response to the improved employment picture, the Treasury Department reversed its policy and decided to select private architects by means of regional competitions. This new policy was barely announced when the public buildings program was removed from the Treasury Department in July of 1939 and merged into the Federal Works Agency. Although some variations to the facades were allowed, standardized interior plans were well established

by this time, and outlined in a publication entitled, "Instructions to Private Architects Engaged on Public Building work under the Jurisdictions of the Treasury Department."² The most commonly used styles were the Colonial Revival style or a simplified classical style blending modern and classical elements, characterized by symmetrical massing and plain surfaces.

Many of the post offices constructed during the 1930's were adorned with murals or other forms of artwork commissioned by the Federal Government. Of the four government programs supporting graphic arts during the Depression, the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (later the Section of Fine Arts) was the principal sponsor of art for Federal buildings, primarily post offices. Funds for artwork were based on 1% of the total appropriation for the building's construction. Unlike the other major program, the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project, the Section's program was one of patronage rather than relief and stressed qual-

²There may be no surviving copies of this publication, but it is discussed in the September 1933 issue of *Architectural Forum*, pp. 222-230.



ity over mass production. Artists were selected through blind competitions, whose standards encouraged realism as the most appropriate style and scenes of everyday American life as suitable subjects. Placement of the commissioned murals and sculptures in public buildings resulted from the desire of leaders in the Administration to make original, quality art accessible to those who otherwise had little or no opportunity to see it. Local reactions to the newly installed works ranged from enthusiasm and pride to indifference or criticism over the choice or interpretation of subject matter. Sometimes works sparked sharp controversy.

Evaluating a Post Office For the National Register of Historic Places

To qualify for listing in the National Register, a property must have significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture, and retain integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Determining whether or not a particular property, such as a post office, possesses these characteristics can be accomplished by following six steps designed to reveal whether or not the post office represents one or more significant themes in American history, and whether or not the post office possesses characteristics that would make it a good representative of those themes. This approach may be used by those conducting a survey to identify significant post offices as well as for evaluating a specific post office. In the case of a survey, steps 2-4 would precede steps 1, 5, and 6. These steps are:

1. *Obtain information about the specific post office based on physical inspection of the building and on documentation of its history.*
2. *Identify the appropriate historic themes within which the post office should be evaluated. Each theme should consist of a geographical context, a particular cultural or historical development within the geographical context, and a specific time frame. Themes must be significant in American history, as demonstrated by scholarly research.*

3. *Outline the characteristics the post office should possess to be a good representation of each theme. It should be possible to organize these characteristics according to the National Register criteria: what physical features are necessary to represent a type, period, or method of construction? What associations suggest significance within a town's pattern of economic development?*³
4. *Evaluate the types of integrity that are important for each characteristic, and list the features that the post office should retain to possess that type of integrity.*
5. *Determine if any aspect of the post office's history or present condition might place it into a category of properties not generally considered eligible for the National Register, and therefore requiring special justification.*
6. *Apply the list of characteristics, types of integrity, and any special considerations to the post office under evaluation.*

1. Obtain Information

The first step in evaluating a potential historic property is to identify the type, functions, and history of the property being considered. The basic information to obtain for a post office, which falls into the National Register category "building," includes dates of design and construction, architect(s) and builder(s), construction materials, style, the class of the post office, and period of service. The researcher should also learn whether or not the building has been altered (interior or exterior), and when these alterations occurred; whether it was designed and built specifically for use as a post office or became a post office later in its history; whether it was combined within another type of building such as a courthouse or Federal office building; and the names and periods of tenure of the postmasters. Additional information may be important, including the local introduction of innovations such as rural free delivery and parcel post, the location of previous post offices in the community, the

availability of additional services besides mail delivery at the post office, and pertinent information on works of art.

2. Identify Historic Themes

Once the "biography" of the post office has been compiled, the next step is to identify the historical, geographical and temporal context within which the history of the post office falls. It is necessary to learn the important historical events and patterns that influenced the community and State where the post office is located, as well as important general themes in the development of the nation. It is helpful to check with the State Historic Preservation Officer and local historical and preservation professionals and organizations, as they may have already evaluated the significance of the post office, may have established themes within which post offices can be judged, and can recommend important source materials.⁴ The areas and times where the role of the post office overlaps the significant trends of the community, State, or nation provide the themes within which to determine whether the post office is eligible for National Register listing. Therefore, a "theme," as defined for the purposes of evaluating a property for the National Register, consists of an important historical factor or development, a defined geographical area, and a specific time frame.

Geographical context is an extremely important consideration in evaluating any type of property for the National Register. Properties listed in the National Register must possess significance when evaluated in relationship to other properties locally, statewide, or nationally. The geographical context provides the perspective for studying appropriate architectural and historical developments. It also defines the areas within which to identify other resources with similar characteristics if this is necessary. The information required to demonstrate the significance of a post office will vary according to whether it is significant to the community, the State, or the entire nation. It may not be necessary, for example, to describe the

³See Appendix A for National Register Criteria for Evaluation.

⁴We also recommend referring to pp. 30-32 of the National Park Service publication Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning for suggestions for sources of information on local history.

development of local architectural styles for a post office that is significant as an important prototype for Federal design standards nationwide. This information is essential, however, if the post office has no distinction on the State or national level, but is a significant example of its architectural style in its community. The three levels of significance are not mutually exclusive; a post office may be significant on any or all levels. Information concerning appropriate historical or architectural developments must be provided for each geographical context within which the post office may be significant.

Local significance is often difficult to evaluate because there may be many similar properties in the area or in other communities throughout the State or the country. Whether or not the property under consideration is significant to its community depends on the historical development and architectural character of that community as well as on the attributes of the property. A 1930 Colonial Revival post office might be historically or architecturally significant in one town where the style is

rare, while a nearly identical one could be undistinguished in another area where there are numerous better examples. That is why it is essential to learn the historic events and trends that are important to the locality of a post office before trying to determine the qualities that would make it significant. Historic factors important to the community may include national or State developments, but the post office must be more than merely a local example of a property associated with these developments. The way in which the post office is significant to the community, State or nation in representing these particular historic themes must be clearly stated.

An evaluation of State significance requires a similar knowledge of the appropriate historical and architectural developments within the State in order to evaluate a property on that level. Because post offices that are significant on the State level are often important examples of standardized Federal designs, it may be necessary to be familiar with the designs used in a particular State, or even to initiate a survey of post offices in the State before

evaluating the significance to the State of an individual post office. This type of information may also be necessary in assessing artwork designed for post offices. Data and photographs should be consistent for all buildings throughout the State and will provide a comparative framework for identifying standard and unusual architectural designs and important characteristics of the artwork. The information can also be useful in determining the relationship between Federal policy and State or regional history.

The histories of the postal service in America and of Federal construction policies provide a chronological framework for assessing individual post offices, and place them in the context of national historical patterns. These factors, as well as the broader historical and architectural movements in this country should be considered in evaluating possible national significance for a post office. A post office which may not be nationally distinctive may be significant to its community or State as an important representative of a nationally significant theme. In these cases, the appropriate local or State context must be established.

There are many ways in which a post office may be significant for its role in the historical development or its relationship to the architectural character of a community, the State, or the nation. Theoretically, a post office, in its role as a post office, could represent significant themes in almost all of the areas of significance used by the National Register.⁵ Identified themes must be significant in American history on the local, State, or national level, as demonstrated by scholarly research. Listed below are some of the themes that post offices could represent in their role as communications centers. Time frames are not included as they would vary according to the particular post office, locality, and relevant historic factors. In addition, of course, a post office could represent a theme by virtue of associations totally unrelated to its design or function as a post office. These themes should also be considered when judging a post office's historic or architectural significance.

⁵See *National Register nomination forms; How to Complete National Register Forms; and How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, for lists and definitions of areas of significance used by the National Register.*



Jennings Post Office, Jennings, Louisiana, 1915. Representing a degree of stylistic sophistication unexpected in a small town in rural Louisiana as early as 1915, the Jennings Post Office is noted for its progressive design in a commercial center otherwise characterized by more modest vernacular buildings.

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE	LEVELS OF SIGNIFICANCE	RELATED THEMES
Architecture:	Local	the architectural development and character of the area the symbolic impact or influence of public or governmental architecture the work of an important architect
	State	same
	National	same the evolution of Federal design policies
Art:	Local, State and National	the access to and influence of art by and on the area's citizens the development of artistic creativity, technique, and philosophy the work of an important artist the perception of the area's culture and values as portrayed by the artwork
Agriculture:		See "Commerce"
Commerce:	Local, State and National	the development of the area's business or any specific business, and its influence on the social, economic and political life of the area the career of a prominent businessman
Communications:	Local	the influence of the methods and technological advances of communications systems on the area see other areas of significance
	State	same
	National	same the history of the U.S. Postal Service
Community Planning and Development:	Local	periods of growth and prosperity in the area's population and economy the evolution of the physical growth and design of the community the establishment and influence of community planning agencies
	State	the impact of State laws, policies, or events on community planning and development
	National	the impact of national laws, policies, or events on community planning and development
Economics:	Local	the factors influencing economic stability or crisis in the area see "Commerce"
Education:	Local, State and National	the development and organization of educational systems and facilities in the area
Exploration/Settlement:	Local	the events influencing or constituting the initial or an important exploration or surveying of an area the founding of a community factors influencing settlement and settlement patterns
	State	same
	National	same the advancement of the frontier Federal visibility and influence in the frontier see "Commerce" and "Economics"

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE	LEVELS OF SIGNIFICANCE	RELATED THEMES
Politics/Government:	Local	the administration, impact, and perception of local, State, and Federal Government services and institutions the role and conduct of political parties
	State	same
	National	the relationship of the Executive and Legislative Branches in the administration of government the history of party politics the growth, abuse, and reform of the Federal civil service system the history of public works programs and policies
Sculpture:		see "Art"
Social History:	Local, State and National	the establishment, development, and role of social institutions
Transportation:	Local, State and National	the development and role of transportation facilities in the area

3. Outline Characteristics

After information on a specific post office has been outlined and the appropriate significant themes identified, it is possible to determine the characteristics the post office should have to be a good representative of each theme. It is not sufficient to show that the post office relates to a particular theme, or even to describe the role the post office played within that theme, although these are important steps in the evaluation. It is also essential to identify the significance of the post office's role within each theme. Characteristics may consist of historic associations, architectural features, or potential to impart information. The characteristics should be organized according to National Register criteria.⁶ Some of the characteristics by which a post office might represent a significant theme are listed below. Not all of these characteristics will apply to every post office. As stated above, the characteristics that a particular post office must possess to be eligible for National Register listing will depend on the history of that post office and the important themes with which it can be associated. Also, because it is impossible to enumerate specific characteristics without knowledge of

specific themes, the following list outlines general characteristics that might qualify post offices for listing in the National Register. These characteristics should be much more specific when applied to an individual post office. For example, the features that make it a good example of an architectural style, or the



Knoxville Post Office, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1932-33. Sometimes the interior of a building may be as significant or more significant than its exterior. The Knoxville Post Office displays elaborate Art Deco detailing in its lobby, which is one of the most significant interior spaces in the city.

aspects of a city's period of growth represented by the post office must be clear. Because each post office and its related themes will be different, examination of a particular post office and its themes may reveal additional or different characteristics than the following ones.

4. Evaluate Integrity

In addition to meeting criteria A, B, C, or D, a property must retain its historic integrity. Historic location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association must be considered in determining whether a post office retains enough of its important features to convey its historically significant appearance or associations.⁷ Precisely what features an individual post office must have to possess integrity depends on the themes selected and the reasons the post office is significant within those themes. Post offices, like all properties, change over time. The retention of integrity depends upon the historic period of significance, and the nature and degree of alteration since that period. Once the appropriate significant themes and the reasons for the post office's significance have been determined, it is possible to establish whether the

⁶See Appendix A, *CFR Part 60, How To Complete National Register Forms, or How To Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation for definitions of the criteria.*

⁷See *How To Apply National Register Criteria for definitions of the seven types of integrity and a more detailed discussion of how to apply them.*

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE**POSSIBLE CHARACTERISTICS**

Architecture:

- A. influenced the architectural tastes of the public or the development of architectural design in the community, State, or nation
influenced or reflected the attitude of citizens concerning their government
 - B. is a good or characteristic example of an important local, State, or national architect or builder
 - C. is a good example of an architectural style in the community, State, or nation
is a good example of a style adapted to local or State building traditions, materials, or scale
is a good example of public or monumental architecture in the community, State, or nation
is a rare example of an important building or architectural tradition, style, period, or policy in a community, State, or the nation
contains good examples of design features, facilities, or equipment distinctive to its design and use as a post office
illustrates the transition from one stylistic influence to another
-

Art:

- A. reflects attitudes of the public, government, or other identifiable groups about the beneficial influences of access and exposure to art
contains as an integral part of the building an example(s) of artistic expression that had a significant impact or influence on the actions or attitudes of citizens in the community, State, or nation
 - B. contains as an integral part of the building a good example(s) of the work of an important local, State, or national artist or craftsman
contains as an integral part of the building a work(s) of art important to the development, preservation, or understanding of an important local, State, or national artist or craftsman
 - C. contains as an integral part of the building a good example(s) of a particular type, period, or style of artistic expression
 - D. contains as an integral part of the building artwork that reflects in an important or unique way the life and/or attitudes of citizens in the community, State, or nation
-

Commerce:

- A. initiated or is associated in another important way with the introduction of a postal service that had a specific identifiable effect on the development of an important local, State, or nationwide business or enterprise
introduced or represents a postal service that had a significant impact on the way citizens or businesses procured or exchanged goods in a community, State, or the nation (eg: the relationship between parcel post and catalog sales)
 - B. is associated with a postmaster, businessman, or other person whose experience with the postal service had an important influence on a local, State, or national business
-

Communications:

- A. represents the introduction or evolution of an important service, technological advance, or other development that influenced communications systems operated in a community, State, or the nation
represents events or patterns of events that had an important influence on the policies and philosophies of operating the postal service or other communications system in a community, State, or nation
represents a significant period or distinctive method of communication in a community, area, State, or the nation
 - B. is associated with a person who had an important influence on the development of the postal service
is associated with a person whose experience with the postal service influenced a significant achievement in another area of communications
 - C. represents, through its design elements, the goals or achievements of the postal service
-

Community Planning and Development:

- A. represents an important period of growth, prosperity, consolidation, optimism, depression, or other significant period in the history of a community, area, State, or the nation
is or was perceived as a symbol of community pride and achievement in a particular accomplishment or period of its history
represents the early establishment, development, or location of government, civic, and/or business centers of a community
represents influences on the development of community or State planning departments
 - B. is associated with someone whose experiences with the postal service influenced significant achievements in community development
-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE	POSSIBLE CHARACTERISTICS
Economics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. represents goals, policies, practices, services, or other factors influencing or intended to influence significant periods of economic stability, crisis, or fluctuation in the community, State, or nation B. is associated with someone whose experience with the postal service influenced significant achievements in the economy of the community, State, or nation
Education:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. introduced or represents the development of services that had a significant effect on the development of the educational system of the community, State, or nation B. is associated with someone whose experience with the postal service influenced significant achievements in the educational system of the community, State, or nation
Exploration/Settlement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. represents factors that influenced the exploration, founding, settlement, or settlement pattern of the community, area, State, or nation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> represents events that contributed to the advance of the frontier represented or symbolized stability or governmental control in a new community, area, or State introduced or represents postal services or other factors that influenced major demographic trends of the community, State, or nation
Politics/Government:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. served as an important center of government administration and services in a community or area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> represents an early or important period of governmental or postal service in the community, area, State, or nation represents important events or periods in the history of political parties, influence, or activity in the community, State, or nation represented or symbolizes the democratic aspects of the Federal government in the community represents events or patterns of events in the relationship between the President and Congress represents events, patterns of events, or periods in the history of the Federal bureaucracy and civil service reform represents important policies or periods in the history of public works and public works programs in the community, State, or nation represents Federal assistance, stability, control, power, interference, or other influence in the community or State B. is associated with the career of an important political leader in the community, State, or nation C. is a good example or prototype of Federal design and construction standards and policies
Social History:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. served as the center for significant social services other than mail pick ups and delivery in the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> represents an important social center that can be demonstrated to have had a significant impact on the patterns of life in the community or area
Transportation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. represents or reflects a specific period of local or State efforts to improve roads, bridges, and other transportation facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> represents significant events or policies that influenced the development of transportation facilities and technology, such as roads and highway systems, railroads, shipping, and aircraft B. is associated with persons whose policies or achievements influenced the development or course of transportation facilities and technology

post office is significant for its original or altered character. Although it is not necessary that a post office retain all the physical features it had during its period of significance, or that it possess all seven types of integrity, it must retain the essential physical features that enable it to convey its past identity and character and therefore its significance. The features a post office should retain to possess types of integrity important for its significance should

be added to the list of characteristics necessary for meeting National Register criteria.

5. Determine the Need for Special Justification

Certain types of properties do not ordinarily qualify for listing in the National Register. These include properties that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed buildings, and properties

that have achieved significance within the past 50 years. These properties will qualify for the National Register if they are integral parts of historic districts that meet the criteria or if they meet other special requirements. A building that has been removed from its original location may be eligible if it is significant primarily for its architectural merits or if it is the only surviving structure most importantly associated with an historic person or



United States Post Office and Courthouse, Albany, Georgia, 1910-12. This post office was completed during the term of Nellie Brimberry, the first postmistress of a major American post office. In 1911, Mrs. Brimberry inaugurated the first air mail flight and struck the first air mail stamp. She also won acclaim in Georgia for securing for the State's pecan growers the privilege of sealing their product in packages that could be dispatched by mail. In addition to its historical associations, this post office represents an excellent example of fine craftsmanship.

event. A reconstructed building is eligible if it has been "accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived."⁸

The most common characteristic among post offices that could preclude acceptance is relatively recent age. In many communities, early post offices were not housed in buildings constructed specifically for postal services, but shared space in residences, stores, or offices. In addition, existing postal facilities have periodically become inadequate in the face of growing populations, increasing services, and advancing technology, and have had to be replaced or consolidated. In the 1930's, post offices became one of the most visible symbols of the Federal government's public works and relief programs. For these and other reasons, thousands of communities contain post office buildings that are less than 50 years old.

Because the National Register deals with "historic" properties, the program provides a working definition of the line separating historic from contemporary periods by establishing a policy that eligible properties should be at least 50 years old. This requirement provides a reasonable historic perspective from which to evaluate properties, and helps ensure that judgments of significance have withstood the tests of time and scholarly analysis and are not merely the results of passing interest or enthusiasm.⁹ Properties less than 50 years old may be accepted if they are exceptionally significant. Exceptional significance does not

⁸See Appendix A, CFR 36 Part 60, How To Complete National Register Forms, or How to Apply National Register Criteria for a full list of properties requiring special consideration.

⁹See "How To Evaluate and Nominate Potential National Register Properties That Have Achieved Significance within the Last 50 Years" (How To #2) for a more detailed discussion of evaluating less than 50-year old properties.

necessarily mean national significance. Properties may be exceptionally significant within their communities or States by virtue of their extraordinary impact in certain periods or fields of history, as rare or exceptionally intact examples of particularly fragile or transitory types of resources, or for their relative age or importance in communities that are young or retain few remnants of their past. Decisions about a property's exceptional significance can be made only after comparing it to other properties with similar associations and qualities within the appropriate geographical context. The reasons why the selected property is considered exceptionally significant must then be explained. This requires knowledge of the area and of the type of property being considered to allow the identification of qualities that distinguish a resource as exceptional among a field of similar properties. Post offices determined not to be exceptionally significant should be reevaluated when they reach 50 years of age.

Major features of a building, either exterior or interior, contribute to the identity and character of the building, and therefore, potentially to its significance, whether or not it might be possible to remove and preserve them separately. Historic woodwork; lockboxes; lighting fixtures; ornamental marble, grillwork, or other materials; artwork; and other features that form integral parts of a post office should be considered in evaluating significance and integrity. In some cases, these features may include equipment, spatial arrangement, and other aspects of the post office's working area. Like all buildings, post offices may be significant solely or primarily for the quality of their interiors. Post offices that are less than 50 years old may contain exceptionally significant artwork. This does not mean that any painting hanging on the wall of a post office could qualify the building for the National Register, but artwork that forms an integral part of the building may possess significance that derives wholly or in

part from its placement within the post office, and may make it eligible for listing. In particular, this may apply to murals that were commissioned by the Federal Government specifically for the buildings in which they were placed, and that were either painted directly on the wall or painted on a base adhered in a fashion intended to make them a part of the wall. Murals, sculptures, and other artwork commissioned as part of the Federal program to support the arts during the Depression and to adorn Federal buildings may be significant in the history of artistic expression, as the works of important artists, as representative examples of Federal policy, for their social impact, or for the information they convey about American -including community -life and culture. The Federal Government kept records on the competitions, artists, subject matter, media, and installation of such works, and they should be available from the National Archives if they cannot be located in local or regional offices. In some States, it may be possible to identify a thematic group of post offices that qualify for the National Register for their examples of Depression-era art. If a post office is being considered for the potential significance of murals or other artwork installed by one of the Federal arts programs of the Depression, the significance of the artwork must be exceptional until it reaches 50 years of age.

6. Evaluate the Property

At this point in preparing for evaluation, the following steps have been completed: the post office has been identified and its history researched; a mental or written outline of the most important historical developments in the community, state, and nation has been made; the areas where and when the history of the post office and the history of the appropriate geographical context overlap have been identified, providing the themes within which to evaluate the post office; the significance of the themes has been established; the ways in which the post office may represent these significant themes have been identified and organized according to National Register criteria; the appropriate types of integrity and the physical characteristics necessary to possess



Post Office, Christine, North Dakota, c. 1895. This building is a good example of the vernacular "Boomtown" architecture typical of North Dakota's earliest years of white settlement. Originally constructed as a residence and commercial establishment, this became a post office in 1923 after Charles Hanson, a prominent local educator, became postmaster and lived with his family in the rear portion.

them have been identified; and a check of the National Register criteria for a list of properties not ordinarily considered eligible and therefore requiring special consideration and justification has been made. It is now possible to evaluate the post office against a list of characteristics to determine if it meets National Register criteria. The list of characteristics consists of the ways in which the post office should represent significant themes, the features necessary to retain integrity, and (if applicable) the additional justification for properties requiring special consideration.

If the post office has the characteristics listed under the criteria, integrity, and special considerations for properties not generally considered eligible, it is eligible for the National Register. It is not necessary for a post office to have every characteristic on the list, but it must possess one or more characteristics from both criteria and integrity, plus the additional justification if it is required. The number and combination of characteristics necessary to assure eligibility will depend upon the strength of associations or architectural merit, the degree of significance of various themes, and possibly on the number of other resources in the same context with similar associations or physical characteristics. A post office that is an excellent example of its style in the State and retains its principal qualities of design and workmanship should be eligible for the National Register regardless of the existence of other buildings in its style. Similarly, a stylistically undistinguished post office that had a postmaster who, through his appointment as postmaster, played a significant role in local politics, or who introduced postal services having a dramatic effect on local business, and that possesses integrity of location, materials, feeling, and association, should be eligible. A post office that was the most important center of county government administration and service during a specific period, and that retains integrity of location, materials, and feeling, should also qualify. In each of these cases, reasons that the architectural features are excellent, the postmaster's role was significant, or the post office was the most important government center must be specified, not merely assumed from a general statement.



United States Post Office, Des Moines, Iowa, c. 1908-10. The architectural significance of a building is often illustrated through a collection of rich detailing. This doorway and acanthus leaf lantern are part of a post office that represents one of the best examples of classical architecture in central Iowa.

In some cases, a single quality or association under one of the criterion, and the retention of the most important quality of integrity, may be sufficient to demonstrate that the post office is eligible for the National Register. When the quality or qualities of significance, or the significance of the theme, are weaker, however, a combination of characteristics may be necessary to justify eligibility. In marginal cases, it is necessary to compare the post office's qualities of significance and integrity to those of other properties within the same themes to decide which property or properties best represent the significant themes. The post office may or may not surface as the best or one of the best examples of a theme. In some cases, a survey conducted to identify these properties for comparison may reveal a related group of post offices, or post offices and other properties, all of which meet National Register criteria. If the post office is the only identified property in its theme, that will strengthen the case for listing the National Register, but there may be instances where a post office that is the only surviving representative of an important theme fails to possess a strong enough justification of significance or sufficient integrity to

meet National Register criteria. If a post office is determined not to be individually eligible for the National Register, it may still be eligible as part of an historic district that qualifies for listing.¹⁰

APPENDICES

- A. National Register Criteria for Evaluation
- B. Important Dates
- C. McAdoo's 1915 Classification System for Federal Buildings
- D. Recommended Sources

A. Criteria for Evaluation

The National Register's standards for evaluating the significance of properties were developed to recognize the accomplishments of all peoples who have made a contribution to our country's history and heritage. The criteria are designed to guide State and local governments, Federal agencies, and others in evaluating potential entries in the National Register.

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and:

- a. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- b. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- c. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- d. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

¹⁰See How To Apply National Register Criteria for Evaluation for a more detailed discussion of historic districts.

Criteria considerations: Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, or graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

- a. a religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or
- b. a building or structure removed from its original location but which is significant primarily for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or
- c. a birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no other appropriate site or building directly associated with his productive life; or
- d. a cemetery that derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or
- e. a reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or
- f. a property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own historical significance; or
- g. a property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.

B. IMPORTANT DATES

1775—first Postmaster General under Continental Congress
 1789—first Postmaster General under Constitution
 1794—Post Office Act

1829—Postmaster General became cabinet post
 1838—Congress declared all railroads post routes
 1847—Postage stamps
 1860—Pony Express
 1863—City delivery service
 1864—Railway post office service
 1864—Money orders
 1896—Rural free delivery service
 1902—First omnibus public buildings law
 1910—Policy to build post offices near railroad stations
 1911—Postal savings
 1913—Parcel post
 1913—Public Buildings Act
 1913—Public Buildings Commissions established to standardize public building construction
 1918—Airmail
 1926—Public Buildings Act (Keys-Elliott Act)
 1931—Federal Employment Stabilization Act required advance planning by Federal construction agencies
 1933—National Industrial Recovery Act established Public Works Administration
 1933—Public Works of Art Project
 1934—Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (later called Section of Fine Arts)
 1935—Emergency Relief Appropriation Act established Works Progress Administration (later called Works Projects Administration)
 1938—Ramspeck-O'Mahoney Act put all postmasters within Civil Service and limited their political activity

C. MCADOO'S 1915 CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM FOR FEDERAL BUILDINGS

Class A.

Definition: Buildings that include a post office of the first class with annual receipts of \$800,000 or over; the site forming part of a city development plan or situated on an important thoroughfare of a great city; improvements on adjoining property reaching the higher valuation of metropolitan real estate.

Character of building: Marble or granite facing; fireproof throughout; metal frames, sashes, and doors; interior finish to include the finer grades of marble, ornamental bronze

work, mahogany, etc. Public spaces to have monumental treatment, mural decorations; special interior lighting fixtures.

Class B.

Definition: Buildings that include a post office of the first class with receipts from \$60,000 to \$800,000; valuation of adjoining property somewhat below the higher valuation of metropolitan real estate.

Character of building: Limestone or sandstone facing; fireproof throughout; exterior frames and sash metal; interior frames, sash, and doors wood; interior finish to exclude the more expensive woods and marbles; ornamental metal to be used only where iron is suitable. Restricted ornament in public spaces.

Class C.

Definition: Buildings that include a post office of the second class with receipts of \$15,000 or over, and of the first class to \$60,000 receipts; valuation of surrounding property that of a second-class city.

Character of building: Brick facing with stone or terra-cotta trimmings; fireproof floors; nonfireproof roof; frames, sashes, and doors wood; interior finish to exclude the more expensive woods and marbles; the latter used only where sanitary conditions demand; public spaces restricted to very simple forms of ornament.

Class D.

Definition: Buildings that include a post office having annual receipts of less than \$15,000; real estate values identifying only a limited investment for improvements.

Character of building: Brick facing, little stone or terra cotta used; only first floor fireproof; stock sash, frames, doors, etc., where advisable; ordinary class of building, such as any businessman would consider a reasonable investment in a small town.

Note: Taken from the Secretary of the United States Treasury Department's *Annual Report on the Finances, 1915*, (Washington, D.C., United States Government Printing Office, 1915).

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