

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

APR 25 1991

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Colfax Main Post Office

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number South 211 Main Street N/A not for publication

city, town Colfax N/A vicinity

state Washington code WA county Whitman code 075 zip code 99111

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>      </u> buildings
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> sites
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> structures
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

Historic U.S. Post Offices in Washington, 1893 - 1941

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

[Signature]  
Signature of certifying official

1-11-90  
Date

U.S. Postal Service  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

[Signature]  
Signature of commenting or other official

12/15/89  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

Autonicele Bee 5/20/91

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

[Signature] Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

U.S. Post Office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

U.S. Post Office

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Georgian Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

Terra cotta

roof Tile

other Tar composition

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Colfax Main Post Office is a one-story red brick building on a raised basement. Resting on reinforced concrete footings, the basement walls are brick with additional support provided by reinforced concrete piers. Brick is also used for the main floor walls which are framed by structural steel. The vertically-emphasized front facade is divided into five bays--three semi-circular-arched bays in a projecting central salient, one flat-arched bay in each of the flanking wings. A terra-cotta entablature, upon which rests a brick parapet, terminates the facade. Rising behind the parapet is a green quarry-tile-clad hipped roof with three dormers.

### PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The front facade (west, fronting on Main Street) is symmetrical and divided into three sections. Articulation of the three-bay central salient is provided by its slight projection and rusticated brick quoins at its corners. The flanking end wings each contain a single bay. The exposed basement wall is faced with red brick and is separated from the brick-faced main floor by a creme-colored terra-cotta water table. The main floor wall is terminated by a simple entablature consisting of a molded terra-cotta architrave, a plain terra-cotta frieze over the central salient and plain brick frieze over the wings, and a projecting terra-cotta cornice. A solid parapet rests atop the cornice. The parapet is brick except for three terra-cotta panels which are aligned over the main floor bays. The hipped roof rises behind the parapet and contains three pedimented dormers aligned over the three central bays.

The three bays of the central section of the front facade consist of the central entry bay and flanking window bays. All are topped by semi-circular brick arches with terra-cotta keystones. A header course forms the intrados and vertically-aligned stretchers form the extrados. The arches are rest on rectangular terra-cotta springers.

See continuation sheet

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The entry consists of double aluminum-framed glass doors (originals replaced). An aluminum transom bar separates the doors from a seven-light transom window which is framed in an arcade motif. An ornate marble entry architrave surrounds the doors and transom. It consists of half-round fluted pilasters on a flat marble field which support a full entablature. Simple acanthus leaf Corinthian capitals top the columns. An incised fretwork of alternating diamonds and arch segments decorate the entablature architrave. In the frieze are the incised letters "Post Office" with raised rosettes at each end. Corbeled brackets support the molded cornice. Above the entablature is a fan window with nine lights in the inner arch and eight lights in the outer arch (divided by a thickened arch segment).

Access to the entry is provided by six granite steps and a granite landing. Square granite buttresses, upon which rest free-standing cast-iron lanterns, flank the stairs and landing.

A single Palladian window is on each side of the entry bay. As mentioned, the bay arches are identical in size and design to the entry bay. The central section consists of a lower twenty-light hung section with a fixed, fifteen-light upper section which extends into the inner arch of the fan window (identical to the fan window over the entry). Fixed, six-light sidelights flank the central section. The bottoms of the windows are framed with molded terra-cotta sills, with a molded terra-cotta panels beneath (three sections corresponding to the widths of the window sections).

Each of the flanking end wings contain a single flat-arched window bay. They are smaller than those of the central salient and framed with voussoired brick arches and flat terra-cotta sills. The tripple keystones within the arches area also terra cotta. The windows are double-hung, wood sash with ten-over-fifteen lights. A five-light transom window is set above. Rectangular terra cotta panels with bas-relief garlands are set above the window bays.

The north facade is flat and dominated by the loading platform. Its use of materials and detailing is the same as the front. The concrete loading platform is open and covered by a flat metal roof with projecting marquee. (The

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platform was extended to the west in 1961.) Five steel posts support the roof. The portion of the facade within the platform area contains two double loading doors (metal with glass panel) and an eight-over-eight-light, double-hung wood sash window. Outside the platform area in the building's north-west corner is a single window bay. Its detailing and sash are identical to the end bay of the front facade. A recessed terra-cotta panel (unadorned) is above the window. Four windows (corresponding to mezzanine level) are set above the platform roof. The wood sash are double-hung with eight-over-eight lights. Flat brick soldier course arches frame the windows and extend to the terra-cotta architrave.

The south facade is flat and divided into four bays. The materials and detailing are similar to the front and north facades. The window bays and sash are identical to those of the end wings of the front facade. Recessed terra cotta panels (unadorned) are aligned above each of the window bays.

The rear facade (east) is flat and faced with brick and trimmed with terra cotta (same as other facades). Five window bays divide the facade: three large bays grouped in the center and a single smaller bay at each end. The larger bays are framed with brick (flat arch) and terra-cotta sills. The wood sash consists of an upper (fixed) sixteen-light section and lower twelve-light section (hung) with fixed seven-light sidelights on each side. Plain recessed concrete panels framed by brick headers are aligned above each of these window bays. The smaller end windows are double-hung wood sash with eight-over-eight lights. They are framed by flat voussoired brick arches and flat terra-cotta sills. The hipped gable ends of the "U" shaped roof are visible above the solid brick parapet.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1932-1941

Significant Dates

Site acq.-1917

Const.-1932

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Wetmore, James A., Acting Supervising  
Architecture/Federal Government

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Colfax MPO is a well-preserved and an essentially unaltered example of a single-purpose small-town post office in a Georgian design motif. The design is the only example of its type in the city and is well-executed in its use of brick with marble and terra-cotta detailing. As the city's first and only federally-constructed post office, the building symbolizes the recognition by the federal government of Colfax's regional importance. Further, it represents the efforts of local civic organizations, through their elected officials in Washington, to obtain a federal building. Finally, it is a legacy of the massive public buildings programs undertaken at the initial stages of the Depression era.

ARCHITECTURE

The Colfax MPO was developed from standardized plans developed by the Office of Supervising Architect (Chehalis received a similar building in 1934). In the early stages of the Depression, Beaux-Arts design still ruled the Office. This building, in the Georgian motif, reflects the transition from the Beaux Arts in that its facade is relatively flat but is liberally detailed with historical design elements. The buildings of the mid- to late-1930s reflected the International style and its simplified modern design. Notable facade detailing includes Palladian windows, garland-embellished terra-cotta panels over the windows, and fluted terra-cotta panels in the brick parapet. The rhythm and scale of the arched central bays define the importance and formality of the building. The pedimented dormers contribute to its stateliness. As the only example of its design type in the city and as a well-crafted early-Depression-era building, it is locally significant under Criterion C.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

1. Colfax Gazette; various articles 1912 - 1917, 1929 - 1932.
2. Original Building Plans; 1931.
3. Construction Progress Photographs; 3 November 1931 - 1 September 1932.
4. Erickson, Edith. Colfax 100 Plus, 1981.
5. Webber, Bert, ed. Postmarked Washington: Asotin, Spokane, Whitman. Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1987.
6. Matthews, Henry. "Colfax Main Street Historic District." (National Register of Historic Places Nomination), February 1986.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

USPS Facilities Service Center  
San Bruno, CA 94099-0330

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 0.31

UTM References

A 11 472300 5191480  
 Zone Easting Northing

B              
 Zone Easting Northing

C              
 Quadrangle Name: Colfax South

D            

Quadrangle Scale: 1:24,000

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 4, 5 & 6, Block 10, Colfax Original. The site is on the Northeast corner of Main Street and Stevens Street. Beginning at the Southwest corner, thence N150', E90', S150', W90' to point of Beginning.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the property originally purchased by the federal government for the post office site.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title H.J. "Jim" Kolva, Project Manager; Steve Franks, Research Assistant  
 organization Institute for Urban & Local Studies date March 1989  
 street & number West 705 1st. Avenue telephone (509) 458-6219  
 city or town Spokane state WA zip code 99204

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## POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

The building represents the initial stage of a significant era in federal post office construction. Hundreds of towns across the nation received, for the first time, post office/federal buildings constructed by Uncle Sam. Small towns, such as Colfax, received post offices developed from standardized plans. This standardization became even more pronounced as the Depression deepened so as to expedite building construction and provide jobs for the local unemployed. As the case in Colfax, most of the post offices constructed under this program were the first manifestation of the federal presence in the communities. Further, the buildings represented the collective efforts of local civic organizations and their congressional representatives to gain that presence in brick and stone.

The citizens of Colfax had waited nearly two decades for a building to go with the site that had been appropriated on March 4, 1913 and purchased on October 25, 1917. The intervention of World War I and a re-evaluation of federal funding policies had postponed the dreams of a federal building. The news of the building was a welcome change to dismal economic news when the Chamber of Commerce received a letter in February of 1930 detailing the new post office. Congressman J. W. Summers had worked hard to gain the building. In 1931, after the winning building contractor had been named, the Chamber again lobbied Congressman Summers as well as senators Wesley Jones and Clarence Dill. Now they wanted terra cotta instead of sandstone for facade detailing.

Thus, as a legacy of the Depression era federal building programs and the link between the people of Colfax and their elected representatives in Washington, D.C., the building is locally significant under Criterion A.

## LOCAL CONTEXT

Colfax, with an estimated 1987 population of 2,820, is the county seat of Whitman County. In the southeastern corner of the state, Whitman County is one of the nation's leading wheat growing areas. Colfax is the governmental and trade center of the county.

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Colfax was settled on July 10, 1870 by James A. Perkins and Thomas J. Smith who took up claims between the north and south branches of the Palouse River. H. S. Hollingsworth joined Perkins after Smith moved on. The settlement was first called Belleville and then changed to Colfax in honor of Vice President Schuyler Colfax. More settlers entered the area in the fall of 1871. A sawmill was established which, in turn, attracted more settlers. Whitman County was formed in 1871 with Colfax as county seat. The first post office was established on 15 March 1872; Anderson Cox served as the first postmaster. In September 1873, the town was incorporated. Fires destroyed most of the downtown in 1881 and 1882; approximately 500 residents inhabited the town at that time. The town, which experienced progress and prosperity for its first 20 years, was severely impacted by the depression of 1892 and floods in 1893. By the turn of the century Colfax again showed growth and had a population of 2,121. By 1903 the town claimed a population of 3,500 (at which it peaked). By 1920, however, its population dropped to 3,027. In 1929, at the onset of the Great Depression, Whitman County warehoused one-third of the wheat in the state. Wheat prices fell and farm wages declined sharply between 1930 and 1932. Bank savings dropped and the county's total assessment dropped 17%. In 1931, other than the post office, fewer than \$20,000 worth of building permits were issued. By the Spring of 1933 the worst of the local depression was over and the economy showed some improvement. The economy improved through World War II and the 1950s and 1960s were decades of new building and civic improvements. The city's population, however, has remained stable, in the range of 2,600 and 2,800 since the decline of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1980 Colfax had a population of 2,780.

The Colfax Main Post Office is near the south end of the city's central business district and fronts on Main Street, the city's primary business street. Stevens Street (formerly Brewery Street) forms the southern boundary of the post office site. Single-family houses are across the alley to the east. A service station is across Stevens Street to the south. Commercial buildings are across Main Street to the West. The two-story brick IOOF Hall (1913) is adjacent to the north.



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COLFAX MAIN POST OFFICE

The procurement and construction of the Colfax Main Post Office was reported in the Colfax Gazette between 1930 and 1932. In early 1930, the Gazette reported the optimism of local businessmen about the prospects of the new year. The optimism was based on the increased amount of wheat in production and higher wheat prices. In addition, a new \$150,000 hotel was proposed for construction in the city.

On May 2, 1930, the Gazette reported that a letter had been received from Representative John W. Summers who relayed that final action on the proposed office building would be taken up in Congress during December or January. In a July 18th article, Colfax Postmaster A. H. Eldridge stated that the realization of the much-talked-about post office was getting closer. Data was being assembled for congressional hearings regarding new post office construction. It was expected that a new building would be approved for the city as soon as the government construction policy included cities in the size range of Colfax. The article added that the government had owned a site for a post office in the city for the past ten or twelve years (purchased on December 22, 1916). The call for a survey of the government lot was reported on November 28th. An article of December 26th, which recounted the past year's building activity, reported that building permit values were equal to 1929. The \$40,705 in building permits, however, had been primarily for improvements of existing structures.

In January 1931, the Gazette reported that the 1930 census indicated a decrease in the city's population--there were 245 fewer residents than 1920 (2,749 compared with 2,994). The population of the county had also declined, from 31,323 in 1920 to 28,014 in 1930. The decline was attributed to the increased use of farm machinery and increased size of farms, thereby decreasing the need for labor. On February 28th, J. R. Good of the Chamber of Commerce received a letter from Congressman Summers announcing that an appropriation for the new post office had passed on February 19th. Given the city's size and postal receipts, the chief government architect called for a one-story building with basement. It would have a floor area of approximately 4,000 square feet to

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be faced with brick and trimmed with either stone or terra cotta. The Gazette, on May 8th, reported that Mr. Summers had received a telegram from the Office of the Supervising Architect. The wire, which stated that the post office construction contract was expected to be let in August, was read by Summers before the Chamber of Commerce meeting. A July 24th article again reported that bids for the post office would be called in August. In response to an inquiry made by Postmaster Eldridge, Congressman Summers indicated that the working drawings were completed and specifications were under preparation. On August 21st, the call for bids was announced in the Gazette. A description of the proposed building was included. The Hedeem Construction Company of Seattle was the lowest of 15 bidders, with bids of \$69,900 for sandstone trim and \$70,481 for terra-cotta trim. The Chamber of Commerce committee requested that Congressman Summers and senators Dill and Jones work for terra cotta.

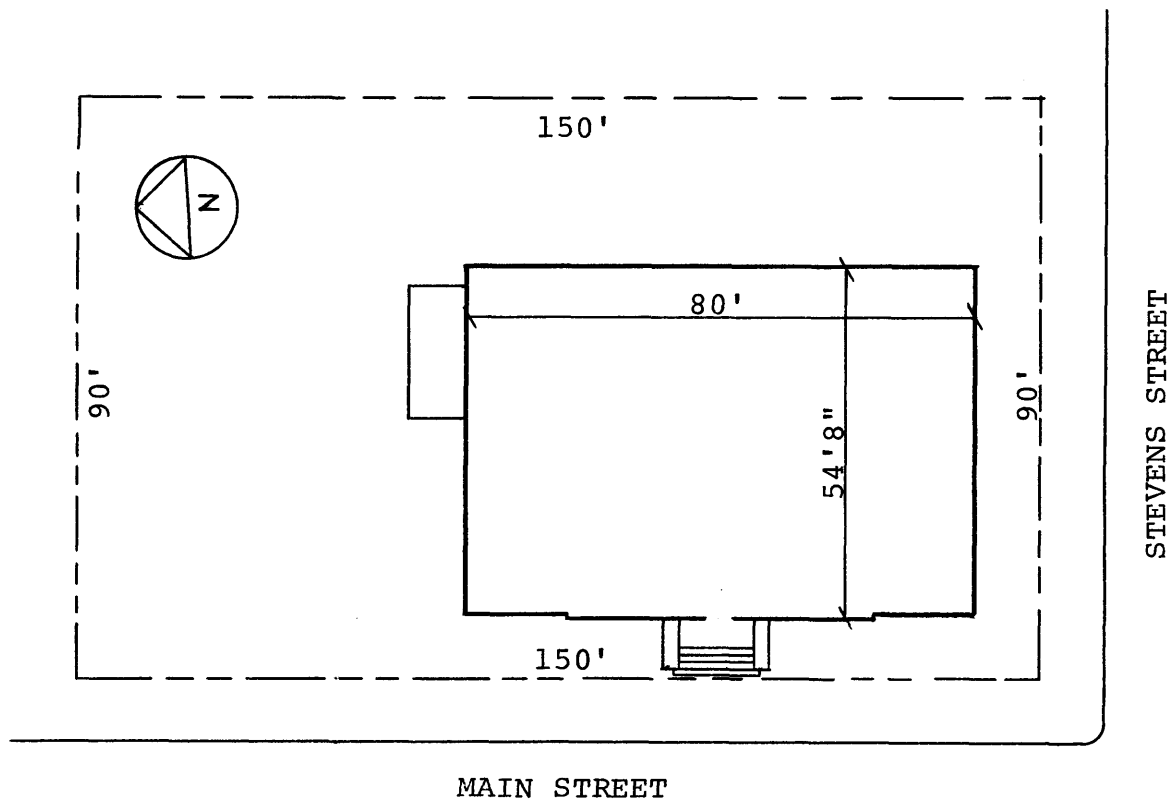
Ground for the building was broken on Tuesday, October 29th. The groundbreaking ceremony featured Postmaster Eldridge in the cab of the steam shovel with a group of local businessmen in attendance. It was expected that excavation would be completed by Saturday, and then timber piles would be driven for structural support. The big news of the day was the opening of a new bridge in the city that would be the last link in the new concrete highway between Colfax and Spokane. Governor Roland H. Hartley attended the ceremony.

The cornerstone laying ceremony was reported on May 27th. H. M. Boone, a pioneer Colfax resident (then residing in Dayton) who had once owned the lots upon which the post office was being constructed, attended the ceremony. The impressive Masonic ceremony was somewhat dampened by a steady downpour of rain. An article of July 8th reported that the new post office would be ready by September 1st and discussed the contractor's progress report and the recent increase in postal rates. The first of September arrived, but the post office opening did not occur as promised. On September 9th it was reported that the furniture was being uncrated and the building would be open on the following Monday. The moving activities and new tenants in the building were reported on September 16th. On September 30th, the building passed final inspection.

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The following information is the same for all the photographs listed:

1. Colfax MPO
2. Colfax, Washington
3. Jim Kolva
4. March 1985
5. Negatives on file at USPS Facilities Service Center, San Bruno, CA.

Photo No. 1 (negative #14)

6. View to southeast

Photo No. 2 (negative #1A)

6. View to east

Photo No. 3 (negative #0)

6. View to northeast