

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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SEP 08 1989

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 Neodesha United States Post Office

other names/site number Same

2. Location

street & number 123 N. Fifth Street

not for publication

city, town Neodesha

vicinity

state Kansas

code

KS

county Wilson

code

205

zip code 66757

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>	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
Kansas Post Offices that Contain Treasury
Department Section Artwork, 1936-1942

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.

Ramon Power State Historic Preservation Officer February 28, 1989
Signature of certifying official Date

Kansas State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official

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.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Bob Boland

10/17/89

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Government: Post Office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Government: Post Office

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)20th Century Revival: Classical
Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone: limestone
walls Brick

roof Other: tar and gravel
other Stone: limestone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Neodesha United States Post Office (c. 1935-1936) is located at 123 N. Fifth Street in Neodesha, Wilson County, Kansas (pop. 3,414). The one story, flat roofed red brick building has an eastern facade orientation. The building measures approximately sixty-six feet from north to south and fifty-two feet from east to west. A transomed double door pierces the center of the building's facade. Steps lead up to the doorway. A pair of large, multi-paned windows flank the doorway. Limestone surrounds decorate all three openings. A smaller, multi-paned window pierces the outer bays of the facade. Similar fenestration is employed on the lesser elevations. The building sits on a limestone block foundation and is surmounted by a limestone cornice. This post office is an example of a smaller class C or D standardized design type that was repeated throughout the country during the 1930s.

The mural "Neodesha's First Inhabitants" was installed on the north wall of the lobby above the postmaster's door and the two bulletin boards that flank it. This is the traditional location of Section artwork in the smaller class C and D post offices. "Neodesha's First Inhabitants" is a tempera on pressed wood board mural that depicts the friendly relations between the Osage Indians of southeastern Kansas and the early white settlers. On the right side of the canvas Chief Little Bear waves to Dr. T. Blakeslee, a physician responsible for much of the peacefulness between the two cultures. Chief Little Bear holds a peace pipe in his left hand and waves to Blakeslee with his right. Little Bear's wife and daughter stand behind him. Blakeslee, mounted on horseback, waves back. On the left side of the canvas the Indian tribe works busily in front of their teepees, carving canoes, making pots, tanning hides, drying meats, and carrying wood. A field of grain grows close to the left corner of the canvas. Rows of corn slope down the rolling hills toward the white settlement. In the background, Steffen paints two log cabins and a stagecoach travelling along the wagon road. Steffen employs a primary palette of greens, browns, and pinks for the mural.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1

The mural was installed on July 25, 1938. It measured 11'10" by 5'4" before installation and has a small moulding frame around it. In May, 1971 Marion Iserman of Denver restored the mural. The paint was flecking off because the mural was done on wood board instead of canvas, which the Section recommended. Iserman cleaned the painting with mild detergents and touched it up. Surprisingly, the condition of the mural was assessed as slightly defective in August, 1973. In February, 1983, Anton Rajer, Assistant Curator at the Nelson Atkins Museum in Kansas City, Missouri cleaned and restored the mural. It is in good condition.

The lobby floors retain their original tiles and the wainscoting retains its original panelling. The other woodwork, such as the postmaster's door, the surrounds, and the bulletin board surrounds, which are originally varnished, has been painted. The original hanging light fixtures have been replaced with almost flush mounted fluorescent lights. The lobby does not have a projecting vestibule.

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)

Art
Politics/Government
Social History

Period of Significance

1938
1938
1938

Significant Dates

1938
1938
1938

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Steffen, Bernard J.: Artist
Simon, Louis: Supervising Architect

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

The Neodesha United States Post Office (c. 1935-1936) is being nominated to the National Register as part of the Kansas Post Office Artwork (1936-1942) Thematic Resources nomination at the local and state levels of significance under criteria A and C for its historical association with the Treasury Department's Section program and for the artistic significance of the mural that it contains. The mural, "Neodesha's First Inhabitants", was painted by New York City artist Bernard J. Steffen (1907 - ?) in 1938.

"Neodesha's First Inhabitants" is a tempera on pressed wood board mural that depicts the friendly relations between the Osage Indians of southeastern Kansas and the early white settlers. On the right side of the canvas Osage Chief Little Bear waves to Dr. T. Blakeslee, a physician responsible for much of the peacefulness between the two cultures. Chief Little Bear holds a peace pipe in his left hand and waves to Blakeslee with his right. Little Bear's wife and daughter stand behind him. Blakeslee, mounted on horseback, waves back. On the left side of the canvas the Indian tribe works busily in front of their teepees, carving canoes, making pots, tanning hides, drying meat and carrying wood. The Indians are portrayed as extremely industrious, exemplifying the hard work ethic. Steffen idealizes them through their intent concentration and muscular bodies, making them larger than life. A field or grain grows close to the left corner of the canvas. Rows of corn slope down the rolling hills toward the white settlement. In the background, Steffen paints two cabins and a stagecoach travelling along the wagon road. Steffen employs a primary palette of greens, browns, and pinks for the mural. "Neodesha's First Inhabitants" is representative of the historically based, representational social realism that was funded under the Section program.

The extent of community involvement in the development of the subject material and presentation of the mural is not clear in the Neodesha

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Falk, Peter Hastings. Who Was Who in American Art. (Madison, CT: Soundview Press, 1985).

General Services Administration. Treasury Department Section Records - Kansas Post Offices. Neodesha, Kansas.

Neodesha Register, 21 July 1938.

Park, Marlene and Gerald Markowitz. Democratic Vistas. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984).

Wichita Eagle-Beacon, 22 May 1972.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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:
Kansas State Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

A 1 5 | 2 6 2 7 1 0 | 4 1 4 4 2 8 0
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____ | _____ | _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description The nominated property is located on the east 15' lot 9 and all of lots 10, 11, 12; Block 35 in Neodesha, Kansas. The property is bounded to the east by Fifth, to the north by Indiana, to the south by an alley and to the west by adjacent property lines.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire parcel that is historically associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Martha Hagedorn-Krass, Architectural Historian

organization Kansas State Historical Society date February 28, 1989

street & number 120 W. 10th telephone 913-296-5264

city or town Topeka state Kansas zip code 66612

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 2

case, however, the Section reassigned the commission to Steffen after local pressure to hire a native son was expressed. In addition, Steffen's father was the Neodesha postmaster at the time. Steffen was awarded the commission on the basis of competent sketches submitted in a Section competition. Steffen received the contract for the mural on March 28, 1938 and the mural was installed on July 25, 1938. "Neodesha's First Inhabitants" was installed on the north wall of the lobby above the postmaster's door and the two bulletin boards that flank it. It measured 11'10" by 5'4" before installation and has a small moulding frame around it. Steffen received \$520 for the commission. The Neodesha Post Office is an example of one of the many smaller class C or D type post offices that received Section artwork in Kansas.

Steffen was a native son who had moved to New York City to pursue his painting career. He studied painting under S. Macdonald-Wright, Earnest Lawson, Boardman Robinson, and Thomas Hart Benton. Steffen later made his home in Woodstock, New York.

Please see the Kansas Post Office Artwork (1936-1942) Thematic Resources cover nomination for additional information.