

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

SEP 23 1989

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 Seneca United States Post Office  
other names/site number Same

### 2. Location

street & number 607 Main Street  not for publication  
city, town Seneca  vicinity  
state Kansas code KS county Nemaha code 131 zip code 66538

### 3. Classification

|  |   |                                     |                  |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Ownership of Property                              | Category of Property                            | Number of Resources within Property |                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> private                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | Contributing                        | Noncontributing  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-local              | <input type="checkbox"/> district               | <u>1</u>                            | _____ buildings  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-State              | <input type="checkbox"/> site                   | _____                               | _____ sites      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-Federal | <input type="checkbox"/> structure              | _____                               | _____ structures |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> object                 | <u>1</u>                            | _____ objects    |
|  |   |                                     | _____ 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 Powers State Historic Preservation Officer March 16, 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:)

Carol D. Hull 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)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

20th Century Revival: Classical  
Revival

foundation Brick  
walls Brick

roof Metal: aluminum  
other Limestone

**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The Seneca United States Post Office (c. 1938-1939) is located at 607 Main Street in Seneca, Nemaha County, Kansas (pop. 2,389). The one story, ridge hipped roofed, red brick building has an southern facade orientation. The building measures approximately sixty feet from east to west and fifty-eight feet from north to south. A transomed, double door with a classical surround pierces the center of the building's facade. Steps lead up to the doorway. Two pairs of multi-paned windows surmounted by limestone lintels and underscored by limestone sills flank the doorway. Similar fenestration is employed on the lesser elevations. The building retains its original metal roof and wooden cupola. This post office is an example of the smaller class C or D standardized design type that was repeated throughout the country during the 1930s.

The mural "Men and Wheat" was installed on the east wall of the Seneca Post Office lobby above the postmaster's door and the two bulletin boards that flank it. This is the traditional location for Section artwork in the smaller class C and D post offices. "Men and Wheat" is an oil on canvas mural that portrays two farmers harvesting wheat on an overcast day. In the center of the canvas, one man drives a green tractor, pulling a red combine, while the other man attends to the combine. The men are dressed in blue overalls and straw hats, neither visage is revealed as they look down, concentrating on their work. A green corn field angles up against the ripe, golden wheat on the right side of the canvas. Two farmsteads meet the near horizon on either side of the canvas. A stormy, grey and yellow sky broods above the busy men, symbolic of the bad days on the farm during the 1930s.

The mural was installed on February 6, 1940. It measured 12' by 5'2" before installation and is surmounted by a cornice moulding. The mural was not varnished. Jones suggested cleaning the mural with Absorbene, a dry cleaner, and if necessary, turpentine. In 1971 the mural was cleaned and restored by Marion F. Iserman of Denver, Colorado and remains in good condition.

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A varnished, wooden vestibule projects into the lobby, cutting off some view of the mural. This is a traditional design feature found in most of the post offices included in this nomination. The original marble wainscotting, the wooden bulletin board and door surrounds are retained. The original light fixtures have been replaced with hanging fluorescent lights.

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Jones received the Seneca commission after winning the Kansas award in the Forty-eight State Competition. Senecans objected to the preliminary sketch of a wheat harvest that Jones submitted for their review, indicating that northeastern Kansas had a diversified farming economy which included wheat but also included crops such as corn, soybeans, and milo, and various stock farming. Jones deftly incorporated the community's criticisms into his final portrayal. The Seneca Courier Tribune wrote that, "The mural depicts a farm landscape truly enough that it might be taken that Artist Joe Jones of St. Louis had a farming background."

Jones received the contract for the mural on November 1, 1939 and the mural was installed on February 7, 1940. "Men and Wheat" was installed on the east wall of the lobby above the postmaster's door and the two bulletin boards that flank it. It measured 12' by 5'2" before installation and is surmounted by a cornice. Jones received \$740 for the commission. The Seneca Post Office is an example of one of the many smaller class C or D type post offices that received Section artwork in Kansas.

Jones is regarded as an influential social realist painter, in 1935 he was classified among America's most gifted painters of social protest. However, his radical philosophies are not apparent in the Seneca mural, nor in the four other Section commissions that he received between 1938 and 1941. All of these murals show typical agricultural scenes of wheat or corn harvesting, projecting the image of hard working, efficient, self-sufficient farmers into slightly larger than life figures that represent all farmers. These murals were part of a much larger series of threshing and harvesting paintings produced by Jones between 1935 and 1941.

Although Jones was active within the Section program, he also appears to have been an outspoken critic. In 1939 Jones wrote Section leader Edward Bruce that "architecturally the (winning mural) will fit into any thousand of buildings I know - simply because it fits none without mediocrity . . ." He questioned the feasibility of placing murals in small post office lobbies, calling the murals "big easel paintings", not murals.

Jones was a self-taught artist who followed in his father's footsteps as a house painter before establishing himself as a successful artist.

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His work is represented in many private and public collections throughout the country. Jones is responsible for the Section murals in the Anthony, Kansas; Magnolia, Arkansas; Charleston, Missouri; and Dexter, Missouri post offices.

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

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"Speaking of Pictures . . . This is Mural America for Rural Americans,"  
Life Magazine. 4 December 1939.

Svedlow, Dr. Anthony V. (Mulvane Gallery, Washburn University: Topeka,  
Kansas). Personal interview with Martha Hagedorn-Krass, January 8, 1988.

Wilson, H.W. Current Biography, 1940. (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1940).

**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

|      |
|------|
| 1940 |
| 1940 |
| 1940 |

Significant Dates

|      |
|------|
| 1940 |
| 1940 |
| 1940 |

Cultural Affiliation

|     |
|-----|
| N/A |
|     |
|     |

Significant Person

|     |
|-----|
| N/A |
|-----|

Architect/Builder

|                                     |
|-------------------------------------|
| Jones, Joe: Artist                  |
| Simon, Louis: Supervising Architect |
| Dakan, E.S.: Contractor             |

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

The Seneca United States Post Office (c. 1938-1939) 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, "Men and Wheat", was painted by St. Louis, Missouri artist Joe Jones (1901-1963) in 1940. Because the mural is less than fifty years old, criteria consideration G, which allows for exceptional significance in the case of properties achieving significance within the past fifty years, is also a factor. The National Register has identified post offices containing Section artwork as being exceptionally significant if they retain integrity from their period of significance.

"Men and Wheat" is an oil on canvas mural that portrays two farmers harvesting wheat on an overcast day. In the center of the canvas, one man drives the green tractor, pulling a red combine, while the other attends to the combine. The men are dressed in blue overalls and straw hats, neither visage is revealed as they look down, concentrating on their work. A green corn field angles up against the ripe, golden wheat on the right side of the canvas. Two farmsteads meet the near horizon on either side of the canvas. A stormy, grey and yellow sky broods above the busy men, symbolic of the bad days on the farm during the 1930s. Jones takes a scene which is rooted in the local economy of northeast Kansas and elevates it to represent broad aspects of the American democratic tradition, the value of hard work and the integrity of American society. The farmers become slightly larger than life, representing all farmers and the dignity there in. "Men and Wheat" is representative of the regional social realism that was encouraged under the Section program.

**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. Seneca, Kansas.

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

Seneca Courier, 5 February 1940.

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**

Acreeage of property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

A 

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| 4 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 0 |
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Zone      Easting      Northing

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Zone      Easting      Northing

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is located on Lot 6, Block 73 in Seneca, Kansas. It is bounded to the south by Main Street and to the north, east, and 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 March 16, 1989

street & number 120 West 10th telephone 913-296-5264

city or town Topeka state Kansas zip code 66612