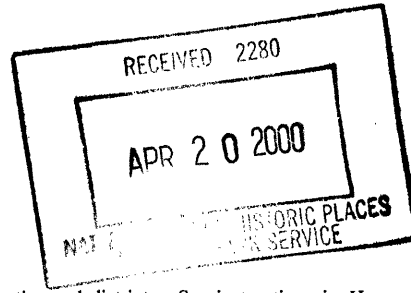


**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**



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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
other names/site number Alamogordo Federal Building

**2. Location**

street & number 1101 New York Avenue  not for publication  
city or town Alamogordo  vicinity  
state New Mexico code NM county Otero code 035 zip code 88310

**3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
Cristance Warner Ramirez March 21, 2000  
Signature of certifying official Date  
U.S. General Services Administration  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
Dorothy Victor 3/9/2000  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
Acting, SHPO  
NEW MEXICO HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION.  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. 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:)  
Edson W. Beall 5-14-00  
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

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

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
0	1	structures
		objects
1	1	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Historic U.S. Post Offices in New Mexico, 1900-1941  
The Historic and Architectural Resources of the New Deal in New Mexico

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
GOVERNMENT	Post Office
GOVERNMENT	Government offices

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
GOVERNMENT	Government offices

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Pueblo

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE  
walls STUCCO  
roof CONCRETE  
other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**  
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets pp. 5-9

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Politics/Government
- Architecture
- Art
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1938-1949

**Significant Dates**

1938 (dedication)

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

- Underwood, Gilbert Stanley—Architect (Los Angeles, CA)
- Simon, Louis A.—Supervising Architect, U.S. Treasury Department
- Firtch, J. J.—Contractor (Dallas, TX)
- Gililand, J. B.—Contractor's Construction Superintendent
- Nichol, William—Government's Construction Engineer
- Hurd, Peter—Artist

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets pp. 10-16.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.) See Continuation Sheets pp. 17, 18

**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
- Name of repository:  
General Services Administration, Greater Southwest Region, Fort Worth, TX



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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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**Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico**

**Narrative Description**

The Alamogordo U.S. Post Office is an attractive, two-story Spanish-Pueblo Revival building that was built in 1938 as a combination post office and federal building. The Spanish-Pueblo Revival architectural style is revealed in the stucco-covered walls with rounded edges; the squared, stepped masses; the parapets; the projecting vigas; the canales; the recessed windows with squared timber lintels and wooden mullions; and the carved wooden doors with recessed detailing. The building was designed by Los Angeles architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood, who worked under the supervision of Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect for the U.S. Treasury Department. The contractor was J. J. Fritch of Dallas, Texas; J. B. Gililand served as the firm's superintendent of construction. The government construction engineer was William Nichol. The structure has been enlarged twice in its history, once in 1961 and again in 1986. These additions, however, have been restricted to the rear of the building, and their design complements that of the original structure. Situated on the northwest corner of New York Avenue and Eleventh Street, the federal building occupies the corner of an area long associated with government and business functions. The Otero County Courthouse occupies the southeast corner and a bank is next door to the federal building, to the north. Green spaces, plantings, sidewalks, walls, and other landscape features characterize the site area immediately surrounding the building.

**PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

*Exterior*

The two-story, Spanish-Pueblo Revival manner Alamogordo U.S. Post Office was originally built in a T-shaped floor plan. It is constructed of masonry walls and has floors and a roof of reinforced concrete set on a concrete foundation. The exterior is stucco-covered with rounded edges and has stepped masses, parapets, projecting vigas, canales near the corners of the building, and recessed windows—many of which are topped by squared timber lintels. The entrance doors are of carved wood with recessed detailing. Windows generally display a four-over-four, double-hung configuration; however, single-light storm windows with reflective glass obscure them. The roof is flat and is constructed of concrete with gravel ballast. In 1961 and 1986, additions were added to the north and west ends, respectively, of the structure (the stem of the "T"); the 1986 addition is a contemporary interpretation of the Spanish-Pueblo Revival manner.

The building's primary elevations are the east, on New York Avenue, and the south, on Eleventh Street. The east elevation can be divided into a northern and southern portion with the northern portion differentiated by a one-story entrance portale. The entrance portale has three symmetrically spaced, large, arched openings. Each opening is graced with a carved wooden gate (center arch) or grille (side openings). The gate and grilles, installed in 1949, have recessed detailing highlighted with red, green, and yellow stains and are topped with wrought iron. Flanking each of the entry arches are small arched openings.

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Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico

## Narrative Description (continued)

Wooden vigas extend from the wall along the top of the portales. The wrought iron letters above the vigas currently read, "Federal Building—Alamogordo, New Mexico," but originally read "U.S. Post Office." Set below the vigas, on either side of the center arch are circular medallions of aluminum with federal insignias. Set back from the entrance portales is the second story, which is divided by five window bays.

The doors inside the portales, on its west wall, are aligned with the central arch and serve as the primary entrance into the building. The upper half of the double, wooden doors is embellished with glass and carved wooden grilles. The wood of the door has a natural-stain finish with red, green, and yellow stains emphasizing the detailing. Above the door is a wooden grille transom. Paired windows flank the double doors. Identical, six-paneled, wooden doors are situated on the portales' north and south walls. The door on the north wall originally opened into the postmaster's office. Original wrought iron light fixtures are suspended from the latia ceiling. A modern florescent light fixture replaces the wrought iron fixture that originally hung above the central arch. The floor consists of irregular cut flagstone.

The Peter Hurd frescoes, located on the west wall, are a focal point of the portales. A large fresco surrounds the main entrance with two smaller paintings on either end of the wall. The larger fresco depicts an agricultural and herding theme. The agricultural scene, to the left of the entrance door, is of a woman hoeing and a young girl playing in the soil. The caption below the scene reads, "Come sunlight after rain to bring green life out of the earth." On the right side of the door is a fresco of an older man in a shepherding scene. Beneath this scene is a caption in Spanish which, when translated into English, reads, "Come, blessed rain, come caress the thirsty land." A bronze plaque hangs to the left of the fresco, describing the artwork, artist, and completion date. At both ends of the west wall are two frescoes that depict native vegetation. The art work on the north end of the wall portrays a yucca plant. On the south end of the wall is a painting of wild verbena. All three frescoes in the portales were completed by Hurd in 1942. Plexiglas covers serve as protection.

The southern portion of the east façade is the location of a two-story projecting mass with a one-story, square tower that extends above the northeast corner of the mass. The tower has a rectangular opening on each side and a latilla ceiling. A carved wooden balcony with multilight French doors also adorns this section of the building face and is centrally placed at the second floor level. Above the French doors is a squared timber lintel. The wall below the balcony is slightly recessed. Spaced evenly along the southern portion are three single windows. One is arranged to accommodate an interior stair and thus sits higher than the other two. Below this window is a granite cornerstone which reads:

HENRY MORGANTHAU, JR., SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY  
JAMES A. FARLEY, POSTMASTER GENERAL  
LOUIS A. SIMON, SUPERVISING ARCHITECT  
NEAL A. MELICK, SUPERVISING ENGINEER  
GILBERT STANLEY UNDERWOOD, ARCHITECT  
1938

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Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico

## Narrative Description (continued)

The two-story south elevation is eight window bays in length and is defined by two projecting faces. On the east corner is a one-story projecting entrance with paneled, double, wooden doors with single panes of glazing and carved wooden grilles on the upper half. Above the double doors is a carved wooden grille transom that matches the upper half of the double doors. The wood on the door and transom has a natural finish with recessed red, green, and yellow stains. Window bays on the first floor are restricted to three sets of windows west of the entrance and a single window east of the entrance. A wrought iron sconce is also located west of the projecting doorway. There are eight evenly spaced second-story windows. The western end of the elevation projects outward and the far western end steps down to a single-story mass.

The secondary—north and west—elevations primarily face enclosed courts or parking areas and are the sites of the 1961 and 1986 additions. Original sections of these elevations are less detailed than the east and south elevations. The 1961 addition is similar in design to the style of the original and is only one story in height, while the 1986 addition is two stories and is example of contemporary Spanish-Pueblo Revival design.

The original north elevation is single story and steps down at the east corner. Four single windows with squared timber lintels line the wall. Centered among these four windows is a set of paired windows with a squared timber lintel and a vertical wooden mullion. An iron ladder, leading to the rooftop, is situated between the paired windows and the single window to the east.

Extending from the northwest corner of the original building is the 1961 addition, which is recessed slightly from the original north wall and sits lower than the original building. The wall surface of the addition is stucco. At the eastern end of the addition's north wall is a brown metal door with squared timber lintel and a lantern-style light fixture located above the door. Three concrete steps with steel tube railing lead to the door. A brown cornice tops the wall.

The 1986 addition adjoins the west wall of the 1961 addition and extends north and west of the 1961 section of the building. Its massing and proportions are similar to that of the original building. The exterior is clad in stucco with rounded edges, parapets, and canales; however, the canales are restricted to the 1986 addition's west façade. Two types of windows are found on this addition: a square punched style, as well as a window style that exhibits four panes vertically stacked, recessed and angled inward on one side and squared on the other three sides. Employee/service entries are located on the east wall of the addition's northern extension and on the west wall. A loading dock door is present on the south wall; to the west of this door is a smaller, recessed door with concrete steps and steel tube railing. The north wall of the addition has no doors, windows, fixtures, or ornamentation.

The 1961 and 1986 additions conceal the northern portion of the original west façade, which originally contained windows that opened into the postal work area. The remainder of the west façade consists of a U-shaped recessed area in the center as well as the original southern portion of the 1938 building. The recessed area forms a loading dock/mechanical area. The

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Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico

**Narrative Description (continued)**

east-side of the U-shaped recess has steps that lead to a service door on the west wall. The south side of the U-shaped recess is formed by a section of the north wall of the 1938 building. At the southeast corner are stairs that lead downward to the mechanical area, accessed through a set of double doors. Two windows are at the upper level of the wall and one window is at the lower level. A chimney rises near the southwest corner. The southern portion of the west façade (formed by the original two-story section of the 1938 building) steps down a story, revealing two windows at the second level. A radio tower has been erected in the parking lot in front of this portion of the building. The radio tower is a noncontributing structure.

A connector extends at the second level from the south wall of the 1986 addition to the opposite west wall of the original building, crossing over the loading dock. Seven two-over-one pane windows are evenly spaced across the corridor's west-side. Each window sits between stepped stucco brackets that descend from the projecting parapet.

A small lawn exists on the northern end of the east elevation along with trees and plants. The southern portion of the east elevation maintains a southwestern appearance with small trees, shrubs, and plants (including yucca plants) growing in a rock garden. A flagpole mounted on a circular concrete base sits in the rock garden near the sidewalk leading to the entrance portales. A sidewalk with plantings and shrubs borders the south elevation.

The north and west façades are bordered by a stucco-covered, concrete block wall. Paving in front of the north and west elevations provides parking and courtyard areas. On the northeast corner is an iron gate opening into a narrow courtyard. Extending from the concrete wall is an aluminum awning. The west façade contains parking and loading areas.

*Interior*

The Alamogordo U.S. Post Office's original (1938) interior consisted of the postal lobby, postal workroom and offices, other federal tenant offices, corridors, and building service areas. As the spatial needs of the post office increased, the post office abandoned the building for a newly constructed postal facility in 1961. The former postal lobby was then subdivided into four office spaces. Alterations to the lobby area, originally the most architecturally enriched of the interior spaces, have resulted in the loss or concealment of original fabric. Some features, however, are still intact.

The former postal lobby (50 feet long by 14 feet wide) stretched almost the entire length of the first floor and was entered through both the Eleventh Street and New York Avenue entrances. The Eleventh Street entrance—composed of half-light, double, wooden doors—opened into a small entry lobby which then opened into the southern end of the former postal lobby. This entry lobby retains its original quarry tile floor, the tiles of which form an octagonal circular pattern with a square tile in the center. The original wooden plank-and-viga ceiling has been removed or concealed by an acoustical tile ceiling. The walls are of painted plaster. A natural-finished, paneled, wooden door with incised green and red bands and



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**Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico**

**Narrative Description (continued)**

carved detailing is situated on the west wall of the entry lobby. This door opens into one of the first floor offices. A stairhall penetrates the east wall. In the stairhall, the quarry tile floor pattern changes to a simple square pattern, and the ceiling is ornamented with vigas, planking, and a beam that separates the stairhall from the staircase. The handrails, balustrades, and newel of the staircase are of natural-finished, carved wood. Detailing, such as incised bands, diamond shapes, and rosettes with red and green stains further enhance the balustrades and newel. On the wall opposite the staircase, a wooden plank door with a vent provides access to a small storage closet.

The New York Avenue entry lobby is accessed through the exterior entry portico on the east façade. It also retains features of its original design including quarry tile floor, plaster walls, and wooden vigas and plank ceiling. Wood wainscoting on the south wall and a reception desk on the north wall, while not original, are compatible with the design of the entry lobby area. A paired, four-over-four, double-hung window is situated on the east wall just north of the entry lobby. The window is framed by natural-finished wooden trim, which is further enhanced by incised green and red bands.

When the postal service departed in 1961, the postal lobby was altered to accommodate new federal tenants. Mailboxes and teller windows were removed, and the lobby was subdivided into four smaller offices. Acoustical ceiling tile was installed, concealing the original wooden vigas and plank ceiling. The ceiling tile has since been removed; however, the floor-to-ceiling partition walls continue to inhibit full view of the ceiling. The original quarry tile floor, set in a pattern of squares with borders, has been largely obscured by carpeting. A large postal workroom originally occupied the space behind the postal lobby. Like the postal lobby, this area has been reconfigured into four offices and a mechanical room.

The remainder of the first floor is occupied by offices, corridors, and mechanical space. Changing tenant needs have resulted in the reconfiguration of many of the original offices and corridors. As a result, finishes are typically contemporary and include carpeted or vinyl tile floors, fluorescent lighting, painted plaster or drywall walls, and modern, flush, wooden doors.

The second floor, which encompasses both the original building and the 1986 addition, has also been renovated and is largely contemporary in appearance. Most of the original finishes, with the exception of wooden window bases and window sills, doors, and chair rails, have been removed or concealed. This floor currently provides office spaces for the U.S. Forest Service.

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Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico

## Narrative Statement of Significance

Overall, the Alamogordo U.S. Post Office retains a high degree of integrity in its setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. While modifications have occurred, they have not impacted the building's ability to convey its historic significance as a federal building nor its architectural significance as an excellent example of a Spanish-Pueblo Revival manner public building. The building was designed by Los Angeles architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood, who worked under the direction of Louis Simon, Supervising Architect for the U.S. Treasury Department. Unlike post offices built during the same period in Deming, Portales, and Truth or Consequences, the design of the Alamogordo post office was not based on standardized plans. Additionally, its Spanish-Pueblo Revival architecture reflects a regional style appropriate to New Mexico and employed by the state government for a number of New Mexican public buildings. As one of more than 1,000 public buildings built under the auspices of the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department during the 1930s, the Alamogordo building is an example of the government's use of federal construction projects to stimulate employment during the Depression. On a local level, the building is symbolic of the federal presence in Alamogordo and of the role the building has played in the lives of its citizens. Situated on the northwest corner of New York Avenue and Eleventh Street, the federal building occupies the corner of an area long associated with government and business functions. The building is also significant for its association with the New Deal public arts programs as its portales provided the canvas for several murals painted by prominent New Mexico artist Peter Hurd.

## ARCHITECTURE

The Alamogordo U.S. Post Office is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as an excellent example of Spanish-Pueblo Revival designed architecture. Gilbert Stanley Underwood, a private Los Angeles architect, designed the building under the supervision of the U.S. Treasury Department. This style is revealed in the building's stucco-covered walls with rounded edges; squared, stepped masses; parapets; projecting vigas; canales; recessed windows with squared timber lintels and wooden mullions; and carved wooden doors with recessed detailing.

Of the 14 federal post offices built in New Mexico between 1900 and 1941, three were built in the Spanish-Pueblo Revival manner: the Santa Fe Post Office and Federal Building (1922), the former Carlsbad Post Office (1935), and the Alamogordo U.S. Post Office (1938). While other post offices were built in Gallup, Silver City, Deming, Portales, and Truth or Consequences, these buildings tended to be either more Spanish Colonial Revival or Classical Revival in inspiration. Alamogordo citizens and the Treasury Department both expressed an interest in using a "western Pueblo" or "Spanish style" for the design of the post office (*Alamogordo News* 22 July 1937:1 and 4 November 1937:1). Statements from U.S. Representative J. J. Dempsey, following a visit to Alamogordo in November 1937, reflected public sentiment: "I am glad, however, that plans have not yet been submitted, for I have learned today that local people want a Pueblo or Spanish style of architecture" (*Alamogordo News* 4 November 1937:1).

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**Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico**

**Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)**

On a state level, the New Mexico State Planning Board, which first met in 1934, selected the “Spanish-Indian style” architecture as the appropriate style for public buildings. While the planning board decision did not directly apply to the construction of federal buildings, it set a standard in the state. During the meeting, one of the board members predicted, “in future development of New Mexico the usual and local type of architecture [Spanish-Indian] is bound to play an important role” (Kammer 1994:30). The decision, which came at a time when New Mexico was about to receive a deluge of New Deal monies, affected public building projects in almost every community in the state (Kammer 1994:30).

Gilbert Stanley Underwood, the architect for the Alamogordo building, was one of a number of architects across the country who were awarded commissions to design federal buildings during the 1930s. Underwood designed several other notable federal buildings including the Los Angeles Federal Courthouse, an 18-story WPA Moderne-style structure. He is also known for the rustic hotels and lodges he designed in several National Parks—Yosemite, Bryce Canyon, and Zion—during the 1920s.

**POLITICS/GOVERNMENT**

The Alamogordo U.S. Post Office is eligible for inclusion in the National Register under Criterion A for its association with the federal government at the local level and with the federal construction programs designed to relieve the economic emergency of the Depression years. From 1936, when a site was selected and appropriations made for its construction, through 1949, the building provided both federal services and a federal presence in Alamogordo. It was one of seven post offices constructed in New Mexico between 1933 and 1941, a time period in which the federal government authorized emergency appropriations to alleviate nationwide unemployment. Although the economic impact of the construction of the building on the city of Alamogordo is not clear, an *Alamogordo News* article in April 1938 reported that the contractor’s superintendent of construction, J. B. Gililand, hoped to employ local men throughout the contract when possible (*Alamogordo News* 28 April 1938:1).

**ART**

The Alamogordo U.S. Post Office is also eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A for its historic association with the federal government’s New Deal Public Arts program. Well-known New Mexico artist, Peter Hurd, was commissioned by the Treasury Department’s Section of Fine Arts in 1940 to produce murals for the newly built federal building in Alamogordo. The resulting works, three large frescos in the entry portales, were completed two years later at a cost of \$1,450. The murals, themselves, are also eligible for the National Register under Criterion C as an

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Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico

## Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

integral part of a building that represents a significant type, period, and style of artistic expression. Fresco, a painting technique involving the application of watercolors to wet plaster, was introduced to Hurd by fellow artist Diego Rivera.

Hurd's murals drew from the imagery of the region. One portale mural depicts a yucca, and another a wild verbena. The center mural, which spans the doorway, has an agricultural and herding theme. According to the *Alamogordo News* (16 April 1942:1), Hurd's work on the Alamogordo murals attracted "much attention," including that of Peter Stackpole, associate editor of *Life* magazine, who was sent by his magazine to photograph the murals upon their completion in April 1942. Alamogordo postmistress, Mrs. Albert Burch, recalled in a *New Mexico Magazine* article in 1977 that Hurd was not a temperamental artist. She noted that while painting his frescos, Hurd not only listened to but also often followed the suggestions of local townspeople (*New Mexico Magazine* January 1977:36).

Hurd, a New Mexico native, resigned his commission at West Point Military Academy to pursue his love of painting in the early 1920s. He attended classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and painted under the guidance of celebrated artist W. C. Wyeth of Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. In addition to the Alamogordo U.S. Post Office, Hurd painted murals in the post offices in Big Spring and Dallas, Texas. Some of his other works are displayed in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the National Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The Alamogordo U.S. Post Office benefited from federal programs designed to renew national optimism and to provide jobs for the unemployed during the Depression. The development of murals, to be displayed in public buildings, was one of these programs. The first federal New Deal arts program was the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP); the PWAP, however, was intended to only provide short-term relief to unemployed artists. It ended in June 1934 but was replaced in 1935 by the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) and the Federal Art Project (FAP). The latter program operated under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and was the largest of the new government programs, providing art to state and municipal institutions and governments. Although funded by the WPA, TRAP operated under the Treasury Department and employed artists to decorate federal buildings built and administrated by that department. Under this program, artists completed 89 murals, 65 sculptures, and 10,000 easel paintings (Christ 1997).

A year before TRAP, the Treasury Department had a non-relief art program known as the Section of Painting and Sculpture. This program later evolved into the Section for Fine Arts. The new section was the program primarily responsible for the murals and sculpture found in post offices throughout the country. Its intent was to create art that reflected the themes and style of the American scene. Buildings selected for art were chosen by the section staff, who conferred with the project's architect, and then submitted proposals to the procurement division. Since about one percent of construction monies would be used for funding a building's art, projects near or at construction budget were not candidates. Commissions were awarded through regional competitions in which artists submitted anonymous sketches.

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**National Register of Historic Places  
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**Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico**

**Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)**

Successful sketches were then submitted to the Section for Fine Arts for final approval. Between 1934 and 1943, 190 competitions yielded 850 commission (Christ 1997). In July 1939, both the Treasury Department and the Section for Fine Arts were reorganized under the new Federal Works Agency. The Federal Works Agency operated the Treasury Department's building and art program until 1943. Eight New Mexico post offices were the recipients of New Deal federal art commissions during the Depression: Alamogordo, Clovis, Deming, Gallup, Truth or Consequences, Portales, Roswell, and Raton.

**LOCAL CONTEXT**

Alamogordo, the county seat of Otero County, is located in southern New Mexico in the Tularosa Basin. It was established in 1898 when the El Paso and Northwestern railroad reached the town. The railroad's owner, Charles Eddy, was instrumental in the community's founding. He planned a town with tree-lined irrigation ditches and wide thoroughfares. It was the large cottonwood trees envisioned by Eddy that gave the town its name, "alamo gordo," a Spanish term meaning "fat cottonwood" (Banks 2000).

The ranching, lumber, and railroad industries supported the community's economy into New Mexico's statehood in 1912. Healthcare also served as an important economic pursuit. The dry and favorable climate attracted individuals with respiratory ailments; this in turn spurred various physicians to set up clinics and offices in the town. Alamogordo's development, however, was slow, and by 1920 its population was just over 2,500. First the drought of 1923-1925 and soon thereafter the Depression resulted in significant economic hardships for the still young community. When at its height, the town had five banks. One of the banks failed during the drought; the remaining four held on until the Depression, when they too failed. Railroad business declined as passengers dwindled. The sawmills, however, continued to be the mainstay of the local economy (Townsend and McDonald 1999). The life of the community became almost centered around the sawmill whistles—morning, noon, and the end of the day.

While things may have seemed bleak in the 1930s, a number of important events took place in Alamogordo during the Depression. White Sand National Monument, seven miles south of Alamogordo, opened in 1934. This event added a new dimension to Alamogordo's economy, that of tourism. Roosevelt's New Deal also added to Alamogordo's economy as well as to its built environment. The Alamogordo U.S. Post Office was the largest of a number of New Deal-funded projects undertaken in the city. Smaller projects included road, water, and city park improvements, the addition of facilities and landscaping at the school for the blind, school construction, and road improvements at White Sands National Monument.

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Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico

Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

## LOCAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE ALAMOGORDO U.S. POST OFFICE

In Washington, D.C., Representative J. J. Dempsey and Senator Carl Hatch worked together to ensure that Alamogordo received appropriations for a federal building. At the local level, the chamber of commerce worked diligently to secure the appropriation. The *Alamogordo News* reported in June 1936 that J. L. Lawson, a member of the chamber of commerce, had received a telegram from Dempsey in which Dempsey stated that he believed a federal building for Alamogordo would be authorized immediately. Lawson wired back, reiterating the need for a federal building in Alamogordo, to which Dempsey replied:

Relative to your telegram, have been advised I may select one location in New Mexico for a federal building at this time. You may say to the Commercial Club and people of Alamogordo that I am designating Alamogordo [*Alamogordo News* 4 June 1936:1].

The chamber of commerce also received a telegram from Senator Carl Hatch who reminded the citizens of his efforts and, at the same time, exercised some caution regarding final approval of appropriations:

As you know I have consistently and vigorously urged the construction of the federal building at Alamogordo. I have been assured unofficially that it will be constructed if and when funds are available. However, the appropriation bill is still in conference and until it is reported and concurred in by the House it is not certain that funds will be available. . . . Until the bill is actually enacted into law it is not definitely certain whether funds will be made available, and until official action is taken by the Treasury Department it is not definitely known where the building or buildings will be constructed. However, I feel I can also assure you that the federal building will be constructed at Alamogordo if and when funds are made available, and from all appearances the funds will be available [*Alamogordo News* 4 June 1936:1].

Although the appropriation bill had not yet been passed, on July 13, 1936, Alamogordo postmistress, Frances Burch, and Lincoln Forest Assistant Supervisor, L. A. Brisbin, began opening bid proposals for the future site of the building. According to the newspaper coverage, at least six bids were received for properties ranging in price from \$2,500 to \$10,000. Burch was to hold the bids until the proposed properties were evaluated by an inspector who would then forward his recommendations to Washington, where post office authorities would make the final decision (*Alamogordo News* 16 July 1936:1).

Citizens of Alamogordo learned on July 25, 1936, that the Treasury and Post Office departments had approved an appropriation bill for a federal building in Alamogordo. Representative Dempsey had notified the chamber of commerce and the editor of the *Alamogordo News* of the welcome developments (*Alamogordo News* 25 July 1936:1). Five days after the announcement in the newspaper, it was reported that Postal Inspector J. L. Cooper had completed his assessment of nine proposed building sites. Cooper, who worked in Denver, had spent ten days visiting and evaluating the sites.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

Before leaving, he commented to a news reporter that he had “been here so long, met so many people, and inspected so much of the locality, that he felt almost like a resident” (*Alamogordo News* 30 July 1936:1). In addition to physically assessing the properties, Cooper collected data on population figures, postal receipts, and property values and transfers. But just as importantly, Cooper sought the opinion of Alamogordo residents, and though their answers varied, he determined that most of the citizens of Alamogordo preferred a site that was identified in the paper as being located “from the laundry to the filling station on the corner.” Residents favored the site because it “harmonized with the setting of our public buildings, was near to the center of the business district as well as close to the center of the population” (*Alamogordo News* 30 July 1936:1). Ironically, however, the owners of these properties offered no proposals for the sale of the land.

Not until October 29, 1936, was it announced that the Treasury-Post Office interdepartmental committee had chosen the property at New York Avenue and Eleventh Street. The *Alamogordo News* reported that “the joint Treasury-Post Office Committee accepted Wednesday the proposal of Mrs. L. M. Arnold for a site 150x150 feet at a price of \$2500” (*Alamogordo News* 29 October 1936:1).

Two months later, Representative Dempsey, prior to a trip to Washington, assured the public that he would investigate the progress of federal building project (*Alamogordo News* 17 December 1936:1). Soon after Dempsey’s statements it was reported that the former owner of the property, Mrs. Davis, had received word that a government engineer would soon arrive to inspect the building site (*Alamogordo News* 24 December 1936:1). Engineer C. E. Davis arrived in Alamogordo soon after the New Year’s holiday. During his visit he told the local paper that he would be determining local wage scales of all types of building craftsmen as well as identifying building materials produced locally that might be used in construction (*Alamogordo News* 7 January 1937:1).

Several months passed with no word regarding the progress of the building plans. Attorney J. L. Lawson inquired with the Office of Procurement in Washington and received a reply stating that “some delay had been experienced in getting the federal building at Alamogordo started” (*Alamogordo News* 22 July 1937:1). The difficulties apparently stemmed from an effort to produce architectural plans in harmony with western architecture, to which the *Alamogordo News* replied, “Whatever that may mean” (*Alamogordo News* 22 July 1937:1).

The plans, which were expected in September, had yet to arrive by early November. This surprised Representative J. J. Dempsey who was passing through Alamogordo at the time. In a comment to the *Alamogordo News* (4 November 1937:1), Dempsey said, “I am glad, however, that the plans have not yet been drawn and submitted, for I have learned today that local people want a Pueblo or Spanish style of architecture.” Ironically, specifications must have been near completion as it was announced on November 18 that bids were being accepted for construction of the building (*Alamogordo News* 18 November 1937:1).

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Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico

## Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

In early 1938 the *Alamogordo News* ran several conflicting articles about the awarding of the contract for the construction of the building. According to a January article, the construction firm of "J. P. Fritch" had been unofficially selected as the contractor for the federal building. The firm, which was from Dallas, had been the low bidder (*Alamogordo News* 6 January 1938:1). Just over a month later, however, the paper reported that the contract had been re-awarded to the second lowest bid when the low bidder requested to be relieved from the contract (*Alamogordo News* 17 February 1938:1). The second lowest bid was reported to be that of "J. J. Frisch" of Dallas. Obviously, there seemed to be different stories as to how J. J. Fritch had been selected as the contractor, as well as confusion concerning the correct spelling of the firm's name.

On April 7, 1938, the *Alamogordo News* reported that work on the federal building was scheduled to begin within the next few days. Both the government construction engineer, William Nichol, and the contractor, J. J. Fritch, had arrived and were in the process of making arrangements to begin the project, which was expected to be completed within a year. Shortly after, work was proceeding rapidly according to J. B. Gililand, the contractor's superintendent of construction (*Alamogordo News* 28 May 1938). Excavation work was reportedly complete and poured concrete walls would be in place within the next week.

On August 11, 1938, plans were finalized for the August 13 dedication of the new federal building. According to the *Alamogordo News* (11 August 1938:1), "Mrs. Frances Burch, Alamogordo postmistress, this week has completed plans for ceremonies surrounding the laying of the cornerstone in and the dedication of Alamogordo's federal building, which is nearing completion." Plans for the ceremonies were reported to include addresses by Mayor C. F. Loggains and Postmistress Burch. Representative J. J. Dempsey, who had been invited to attend, was to be given the honor of laying the cornerstone.

Actual occupation of the federal building by tenant federal agencies did not occur until December 28, when the Forest Service, the Border Patrol, and other agencies moved into the building. The post office, however, was not scheduled to occupy the building until January 3, 1939, according to the *Alamogordo News* (22 December 1938:1).



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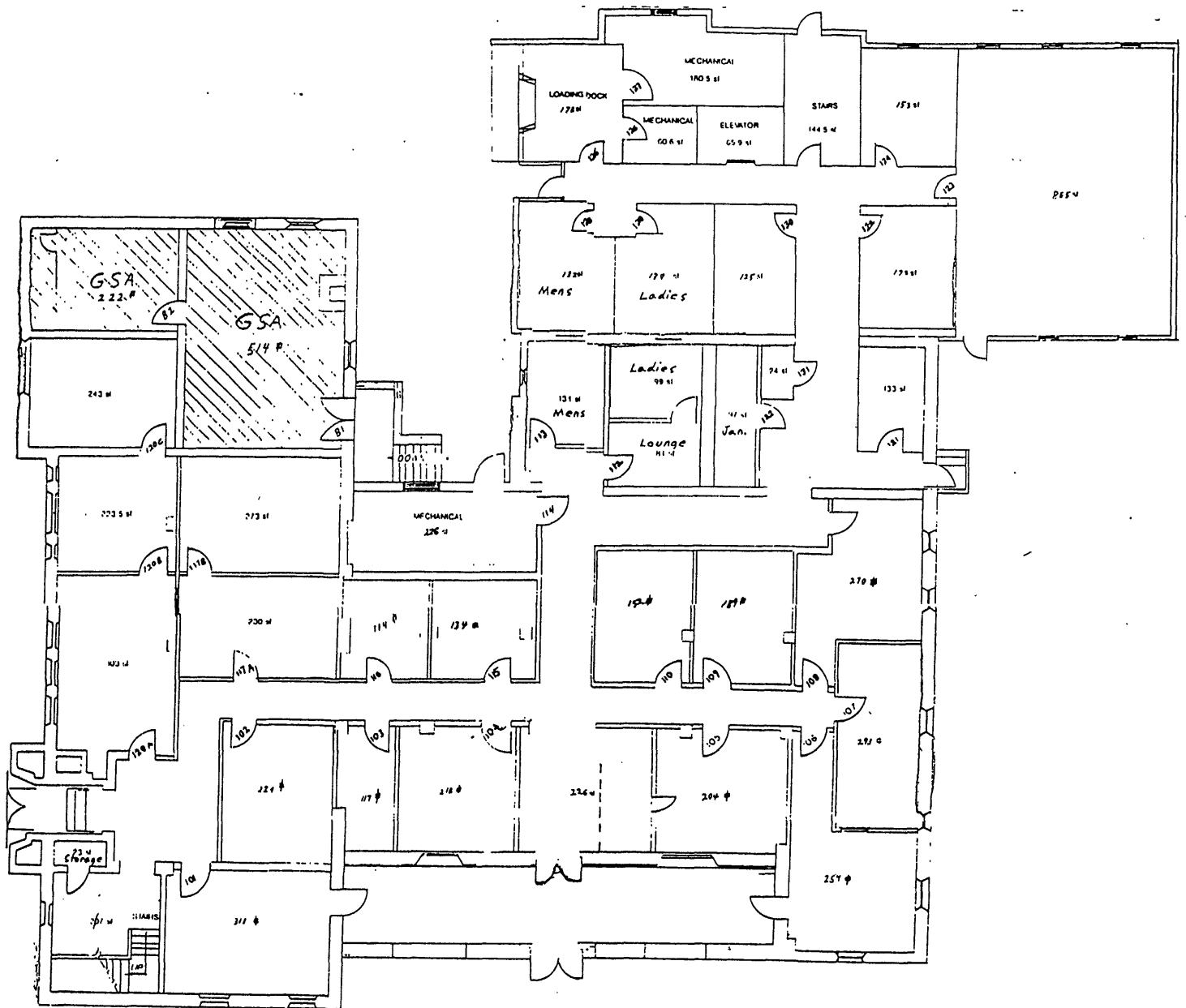
**Alamogordo U.S. Post Office  
Otero County, New Mexico**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

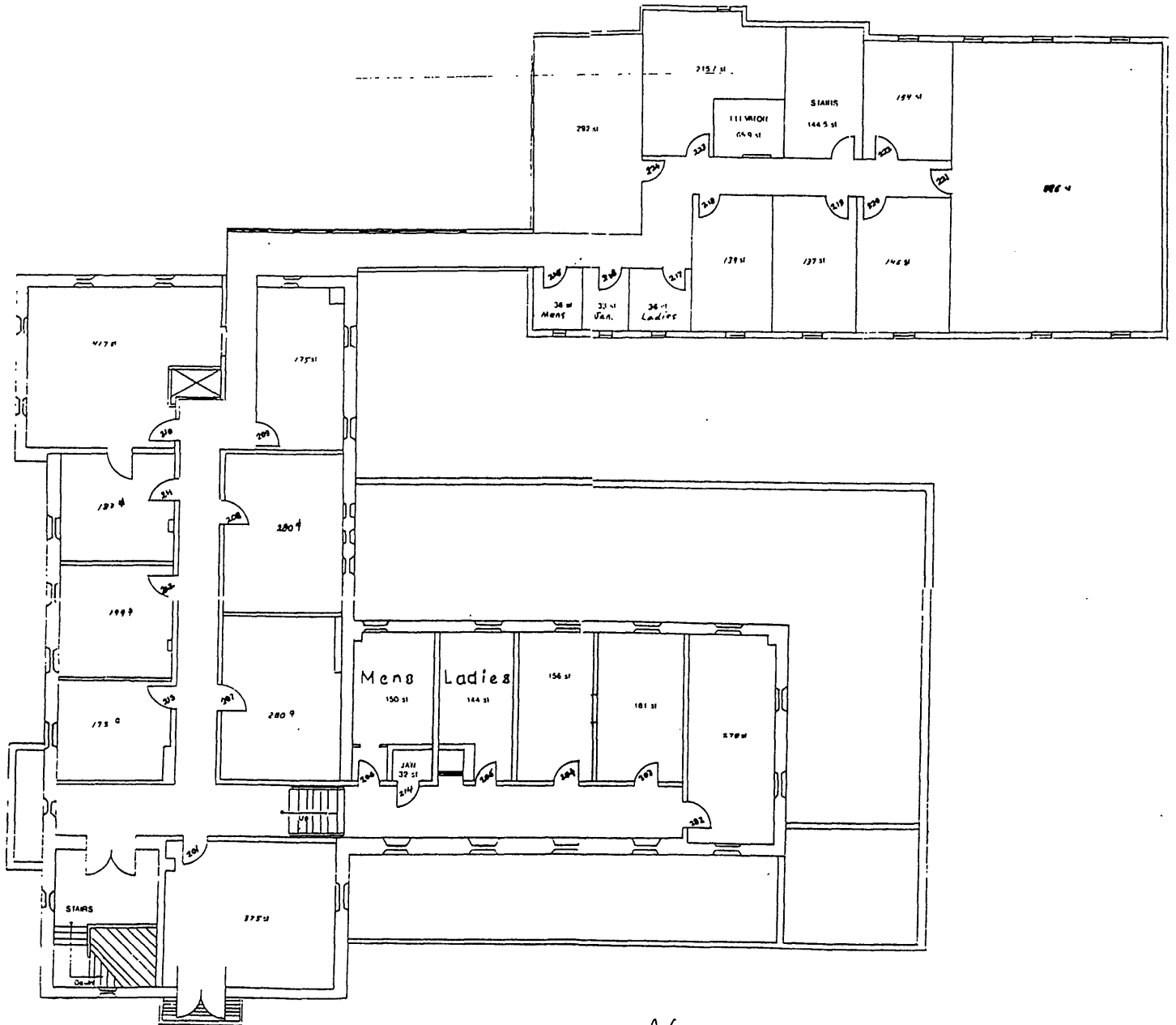
Lots 16 and 17, Block 51, Alamogordo, New Mexico.

**Boundary Justification**

This boundary contains all property historically associated with the Alamogordo U.S. Post Office..



UNITED STATES FEDERAL BUILDING  
 111th & NEW YORK  
 ALAMOGORDO, NEW MEXICO



Second Floor Plan  
 Scale 1/8" = 1'-0"

UNITED STATES FEDERAL BUILDING  
 11th & NEW YORK  
 ALAMOGORDO, NEW MEXICO