

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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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 Geneva United States Post Office
other names/site number FM05-126

2. Location

street & number 202 North 9th Street N/A not for publication
city, town Geneva N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Fillmore code 059 zip code 68361

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>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>3</u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>4</u>	<u> </u> objects
			<u> </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
Nebraska Post Offices Which Contain
Section Artwork (1938-1942)

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.
[Signature] DSAP 4/2/92
Signature of certifying official Date
Director, Nebraska 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:)

entered in the National Register
[Signature] 5/11/92
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)

Colonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Copper

other Limestone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Geneva United States Post Office is located at the southeast corner of 9th and H Streets, one block north of the central business district of Geneva, the Fillmore County seat, in southeastern Nebraska (1990 population: 2,310). The one-story five-bay Georgian Revival style building, constructed in 1939-40, is an excellent, well-preserved example of a Class C or D small post office built from standardized plans developed in the 1930's. The nomination also includes three contributing objects: two ornamental lamp posts located on either side of the main entry, and a flag pole.

The post office building, symmetrical in design, measures approximately 63 by 60 feet and features a ridge hipped roof with a central wooden cupola, complete with weather vane. The roof retains its original copper tiles with snow guards; the rear flat portion of the roof is composition tile. The raised central entry features a brick segmental arch, fluted Doric columns, entablature, and transom window. An elliptical pediment above the entrance features a stylized aluminum eagle. Two pairs of 12-over-12 paned double sash windows with limestone lintels flank the main entrance; similar fenestration is employed on the north and south facades. Limestone was also used in the building's beltcourse and watertable. On the east (front) and south facades, below grade area ways with granite steps and iron railings provided light and ventilation to the lower level. The building exhibits good integrity; modifications include replacement of the front entry doors and minor interior alterations. Constructed from standardized plans developed in the 1930's, the building is similar to the Auburn Post Office (NH01-56). Construction began in October 1939; the building was officially dedicated on August 28, 1940 (The Nebraska Signal, Aug. 22, 29, 1940).

A mural entitled "Building a Sod House," by Edward Chávez, is located on the south lobby wall above the postmaster's door which is flanked by wood framed, glass enclosed bulletin boards. The mural, which measures 13 feet 8 inches by 5 feet 8 inches, occupies the typical space for murals commissioned by the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts program in a small Class C or D post office. The mural frames the postmaster's door which extends approximately 8 inches above the top of the bulletin boards. The irregular shape of the mural space caused by projecting doorways and bulletin boards is typical of the physical building features that Section artists had to take into consideration. The Geneva commission was awarded

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to Colorado Springs artist Edward Chávez in January, 1941, and the completed mural was installed by the artist in September of the same year (The Nebraska Signal, Sept. 18, 1941).

Painted in green, brown, and blue tones, offset by shades of sepia and white, the mural depicts settlers in the process of building a sod house. In the immediate foreground, two men prepare to raise the building's ridgepole which is a tree trunk shorn of branches. The ridgepole extends across the mural. In the right foreground, a man in a white shirt and suspenders prepares to lift the pole onto the t-shaped crook of a tree trunk; at his feet is a grasshopper plow, a type used by Great Plains settlers to cut sod. In the left foreground a man bends to lift the other end of the ridgepole and a woman in a long dress stands behind him with her arms around a little girl. In the background another figure holds the reins of three horses pulling a load of sod on a wooden sled; the reins extend across the scene. Immediately behind the figures is a half-raised sod wall with a completed door frame made of branches. The treeless expanse beyond the half-finished soddy are further defined by the outline of the doorway, which frames the view and reinforces the mural's historic theme of Great Plains settlement.

The lobby interior is in excellent condition and retains its original terrazzo tile floor, marble wainscoting, and woodwork. Sometime after the mural was installed, the original light fixtures were replaced. Currently, the lobby has enclosed, fluorescent lights flush to the ceiling which do not obstruct the mural. A varnished wooden vestibule projects into the lobby; it is an original design feature typical of small Class C or D post offices built from standardized plans developed in the 1930's. In 1981 the mural was cleaned and restored by an art conservator under contract with the United States Postal Service; it is in excellent condition.

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

Period of Significance

1941

Significant Dates

1941

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Chavez, Edward: Artist
Simon, Louis: Supervising Architect
White, R. B. & Son: Contractor

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

The Geneva United States Post Office is being nominated to the National Register as part of the Nebraska Post Offices Which Contain Section Artwork (1938-1942) multiple property nomination at the state level of significance under Criterion A for its association with the United States Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts program (1934-1943) and under Criterion C for the artistic significance of the mural it contains. The Geneva post office mural entitled, "Building a Sod House," was painted by Colorado Springs artist Edward Chávez and installed in September, 1941.

The oil-on-canvas mural, which measures 13 feet 8 inches by 5 feet 8 inches, is located on the south lobby wall directly above the postmaster's door in the typical location for murals installed in Class C or D post offices such as Geneva. The mural is an excellent example of artwork commissioned for post offices through the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts from 1934-1943. Painted in green, brown, and blue tones, the mural depicts a group of settlers in the process of constructing a sod house. The mural's historical theme associated with settlement of the Great Plains, executed in a realistic style, make it an excellent example of government-sponsored Regionalism.

In January, 1941, Colorado Springs artist Edward Chávez received a notice from the Section inviting him to submit designs for the Geneva, Nebraska, post office mural. Chávez was selected for the commission on the basis of designs he submitted for a Social Security Building mural competition. The letter cited the amount of the commission, \$750, and the payment schedule. Chávez would receive approximately one-third after preliminary sketches had been approved; one-third after a full-size cartoon was approved; and the remainder after the mural was installed and photographed. The letter also informed the artist that the mural would have to be completed within eight months. Chávez immediately accepted the commission and informed Assistant Section Chief Rowan that he would visit Geneva to develop preliminary sketches.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Chávez, Eduardo, correspondence to the author, March 20, 1991.

Marling, Karal Ann. Wall-to-Wall America. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. Record Group 121: Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Public Building Service. Entry 133: Case Files Concerning Embellishments of Federal Buildings, 1934-1943. Box 61: Nebraska.

Optiz, Glenn B., ed. Mantle Fielding's Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors & Engravers. (Poughkeepsie, NY: Apollo, 1986).

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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre.

UTM References

A

1	4
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6	1	8	3	5	0
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4	4	8	7	0	0	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is described as the east 1/2 of Lot 30 and all of Lots 31, 32, Original Town of Geneva, Fillmore County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes that parcel of land which has historically been associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carol Ahlgren, Architectural Historian
organization Nebraska State Historical Society date August, 1991
street & number 1500 R Street telephone (402) 471-4773
city or town Lincoln state Nebraska zip code 68501

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In January or February, 1941, Chávez visited Geneva to develop sketches which were submitted for Section approval in March, 1941. Chávez proposed two designs: a "typical" Nebraska farm scene with cows grazing near a haystack; and "early pioneer homesteaders building a sod house." The later subject he said, had been selected because of its historical significance to the state: "the sod house typifies the early settler on the Nebraska prairie." Section officials chose the sod house design and were apparently especially pleased with its quality. Rowan praised the composition of the design and added: "I personally thought you should be congratulated on your achievement."

When Chávez submitted the color sketch a few months later, his work was again approved but Rowan suggested that the left foreground figure be "restudied" to correct arm-torso proportions. The problem was corrected and the required photograph of a full-size cartoon was submitted in July, 1941. A month later the Geneva mural received final approval from the Section and was installed by the artist in September, 1941 (The Nebraska Signal, Sept. 18, 1941). A Geneva post office employee informed Rowan that he had heard many favorable comments from the public who considered it a "fine addition to the decorations of the building."

Chávez, along with twin sisters Jenne and Ethel Magafan, studied at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center under Frank Mechau and Boardman Robinson. Ethel and Jenne Magafan and Mechau also painted Section murals for Nebraska post offices: Albion, Auburn, and Ogallala. From 1935-1937, prior to the Geneva commission, Chávez assisted Mechau with Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) murals. In addition to the Geneva, Nebraska mural Chávez received Section commissions for post offices in Colorado and Texas.

A nationally prominent artist, Edward (Eduardo) Chávez has been described as one of the "truly outstanding" 20th century Mexican-American artists (Quirarte, 1973). The paintings, graphics, and sculptures produced during his long career have been exhibited throughout the United States and in Brazil and Italy. His works are in major museum collections including the Library of Congress, the Museum of Modern Art and the National Academy of Design. Chávez has also taught or served as artist in residence at such institutions as Colorado College, Syracuse University, and the Art Students League of New York. Currently he lives in Woodstock, New York; he reported that his experience with the post office mural projects of the 1930's and 1940's was a rewarding and interesting aspect of his career.

For additional information, refer to the Nebraska Post Offices Which Contain Section Artwork (1938-1942) multiple property form.

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

Pikes Peak Vision: The Broadmoor Art Academy, 1919-1945. Exhibit catalog. Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1989.

Quirarte, Jacinto. Mexican American Artist. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1973).

Whiffen, Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles. (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1969).