

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction 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 an 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 Rocky Ford Post Office

other names/site number 50T.935

2. Location

street & number 401 9th Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Rocky Ford [N/A] vicinity

state Colorado code CO county Otero code 89 zip code 81067

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] 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 [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [] nationally [] statewide [X] locally. ([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title: Georgina Croteau, State Historic Preservation Officer, Date: 10/4/07

Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.

([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)
Signature of certifying official/Title: FPO, Date: 11/20/07

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE FACILITIES HEADQUARTERS
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- [X] 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
[] See continuation sheet.

Signature of the Keeper: Edson H. Beall, Date of Action: 1.16.08

Rocky Ford Post Office
Name of Property

Otero County/ Colorado
County/State

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 count previously listed resources.)

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

Name of related multiple property listing.

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

New Deal Resources on Colorado's Eastern
Plains

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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/ Post office

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/ Post office

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th & 20th CENTURY REVIVALS:
Classical Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick
walls Brick
roof Asphalt
other

Narrative Description

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

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Rocky Ford Post Office
Otero County, Colorado

Section number 7 Page 1

(New Deal Resources on Colorado's Eastern Plains MPS)

DESCRIPTION

The Rocky Ford Post Office is located at the north corner of the intersection of 9th Street and Swink Ave. Located in Otero County in southeastern Colorado, Rocky Ford is known for its melon production and seed industry. Grass lawns are located on the southeast and southwest sides of the building. Paved drives and parking areas are located on the northeast and northwest sides. A grocery store is located northeast of the post office on the same block. A stone memorial to George Swink sits in the adjacent grocery store parking lot. (Swink was one of the first settlers in Rocky Ford and his house was demolished to make way for the post office.)

The Rocky Ford Post Office is a one-story plus basement Classical Revival building. The rectangular plan, flat-roofed building measures 70' x 60'. It rests on a hollow tile and brick foundation. It is clad in multi-hued brown brick laid in a stretcher bond with brick quoins. A course of soldier bricks forms a stringcourse at the basement level. There is a yellow sandstone stringcourse above the windows and a simple stone cornice at the top of the wall. Brick jack arches and sandstone slip sills frame the window openings. The building retains its original multi-light, wood-framed windows. The window surrounds are also wood.

The southeast facade features a distinctive Classical Revival entrance, constructed of yellow sandstone with a broken-scroll pediment, urn, rosettes, and simple pilasters (photo #2). A rectangular transom and sidelights with leaded glass surround the opening. The entry is approached by broad, concrete steps and/or a handicap-accessible ramp running along the facade from the entry to wrap around the south corner. Metal letters located above the entry read "United States Post Office, Rocky Ford, Colorado 81067." Decorative metal lampposts topped by round globe fixtures are located on either side of the entrance and on the southwest side of the building. There are four, 12-over-12 wood-framed sash windows.

The southwest side is visually divided into two sections, with brick quoins framing the southern end where the post office lobby is located and minimal decoration at the rear where the post office work space is located (photos #3 and #4). There are three windows in this section with two, 12-over-12 sash windows and one smaller 4-over-4 sash window. Below the three windows are blank openings at the basement level. Painted wood panels are located beneath the larger windows. The projecting stone stringcourse is continued in brick. The western portion of the southwest facade has four 8-over-8 sash windows with 4-light transoms located above them. Beneath the windows are four, 8-light fixed windows at the basement level.

On the northwest side (rear), a flat-roofed awning covers a loading dock and entryway (photos #5 and #6). Historic photographs show that the awning and loading dock are original. The loading dock is centered on the building. At the loading dock there are double metal doors framed by 6-over-6 wood-framed sash windows. An 8-over-8 sash window with a 4-light transom is located on either side of the dock. A chimney is located at the north corner.

The northeast side of the building is divided like the southwest side (photos #7 and #8). The front section has three 12-over-12 sash windows with wood panels beneath and blank openings on the basement level. The rear section has one 12-over-12 sash window with a recessed brick panel above and three 8-over-8 sash windows with 4-light transoms above and basement-level windows below. The appears to be the original configuration; brick in the recessed panel matches the surrounding brick and does not appear to be later infill.

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Rocky Ford Post Office
Otero County, Colorado

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(New Deal Resources on Colorado's Eastern Plains MPS)

On the interior, a wood and glass vestibule is located at the entrance (photo #9). The lobby area has multi-hued brown tiled floors and wainscoting (photo #10). The lobby features a mural, located at the south end above the postmaster's office (photo #11). It is entitled "The First Crossing at Rocky Ford" and depicts the first settlers arriving at Rocky Ford. The workroom has a maple floor and wood wainscoting.

Integrity

The post office retains a high degree of integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Minor alterations have been made to the design of the building with the construction of a handicap ramp at the south corner. The integrity of the interior design and materials is exceptional; all the original finishes, many of the furnishings, and the original artwork is intact.

Rocky Ford Post Office
Name of Property

Otero County/ Colorado
County/State

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 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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
- # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

POLITICS/ GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Periods of Significance

1935-1957

Significant Dates

1935

Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

U.S. Treasury Department, Office of the Supervising Architect

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:
Colorado Historical Society

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Rocky Ford Post Office
Otero County, Colorado

Section number 8 Page 3

(New Deal Resources on Colorado's Eastern Plains MPS)

SIGNIFICANCE

The Rocky Ford Post Office, constructed between 1935 and 1936 by the Public Works Administration (PWA), is being nominated under the *New Deal Resources on Colorado's Eastern Plains Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF)*. The Rocky Ford Post Office meets the registration requirements of one property type delineated in the MPDF—*Civic and Government Buildings (subtype: Post Offices)*.

The Rocky Ford Post Office meets Criterion A for its significance in the area of Politics/Government for its association with President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal legislative agenda as a project of the PWA. The construction of new post offices was a way for the federal government to aid the economy by spending money on materials and construction crews. This was the only PWA project in the city of Rocky Ford. The project provided Rocky Ford with its first purpose-built post office. It has been the only post office in Rocky Ford since it opened in 1936.

The Rocky Ford Post Office meets Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an example of a small federal building designed by the Treasury Department's Office of the Supervising Architect. The Classical Revival style is simple and restrained, an excellent example of a federal building constructed during the Depression. The symmetry, massing, and formal appearance of the building clearly identify it as a federal building. It is the only federal building in Rocky Ford. This standardized federal design sets the post office apart from New Deal projects constructed by the WPA in southeastern Colorado. These work relief projects were predominantly designed in the Rustic Style and emphasized masonry craftsmanship. PWA projects such as the post office used purchased materials and professional construction crews as opposed to the unskilled workers quarrying or manufacturing the materials for WPA projects. The interior of the post office retains an exceptionally high degree of integrity, with its original finishes and layout intact. The interior is an outstanding example of the standard interior plan of a 1930s era post office.

The period of significance begins in 1935 when construction commenced and ends in 1957. Although the post office remains in use, the period of significance ends in 1957 in order to comply with the National Register's fifty year rule.

Historical Background

In June 1933, the Rocky Ford Chamber of Commerce held a special meeting to try to secure a federal appropriation to construct a purpose-built post office for their town. This was proactive of the community leaders since the Public Works Administration (PWA) had just been established that month. The PWA awarded Rocky Ford a project to construct a post office in November 1933, in large part due to the efforts of Congressman John A. Martin who helped secure the appropriation. It was one of 408 post offices constructed by the PWA from 1933 to 1939.

The lot purchased by the government for the post office belonged to the Swink family, one of the earliest and most prominent families to settle in Rocky Ford. George Swink established a general merchandise store and trading post on the Arkansas River in the early 1870s. The trading post site became the city of Rocky Ford, named for the rocky ford on that particular section of the Arkansas River. Swink would serve as Postmaster from 1875 to 1884 and as a State Senator from 1892 to 1900. Swink moved his family and store to the current Post Office site in 1876. He first built three

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Rocky Ford Post Office
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rooms in 1877 and expanded the house to include ten rooms over the following two years. The house was still owned and occupied by the Swink family, although George Swink had passed away, when the government purchased it.

The U.S. Treasury Department's Office of the Supervising Architect designed the post office. This agency designed most federal buildings from the mid-1800s to the end of the 1930s. The office's work ranged from grand courthouses in urban settings to small post offices in communities across the United States. The office had a staff of mostly anonymous architects working under the direction of a Supervising Architect. During the 1920s and 1930s, the American Institute of Architects (AIA), opposed the office, arguing that private architects could design superior buildings. While the government hired private architects to consult on some larger buildings, smaller buildings continued to be designed by the office, which was seen as more economical. During the 1930s, the federal government sought to boost the economy and provide employment through the construction of federal buildings. This increase in federal construction encouraged the production of standardized plans to speed the design process. Louis A. Simon became Supervising Architect in 1934 after almost four decades working with the office. Considering the large number of building plans produced by the Office of the Supervising Architect, there is no way that Simon personally designed all the federal buildings constructed under his direction. However, most of the small post offices constructed during this period share a common layout, and Simon may have provided a basic plan that staff architects could modify for individual buildings. Though Simon was likely not directly involved with the most of the designs produced by the office, he does seem to have set the general character of the works produced. A contemporary architect described Simon's work as "characterized by an effort toward simplicity and restraint and the attainment of pleasing results, by a studied consideration of mass and proportion, rather than by excess of elaboration or non-functional expression."¹ Henry Morgenthau, the Secretary of the Treasury under President Franklin Roosevelt, believed that during mid-1930s "there has resulted a real evolution in the architecture of federal buildings, in that extravagance in design, waste in space, unusual individualistic idealism, and delays in the prosecution of the work, have been largely avoided."² He described the work of the Office of the Supervising Architect as having "dignity and originality, economy in design, with strict adherence to the utilitarian purpose for which the building is to be used."³

Plans for the construction of the Rocky Ford Post Office were available in late 1934 and bids on construction opened. The building was to have the most modern of amenities. The first phase of the project was the demolition of the 1877 Swink House. The PWA anticipated the project to take 6 months to complete.

Unlike the work-relief model of the WPA, the PWA was a "pump primer" program designed to help the economy by spending money on construction. Local merchants benefited from the purchasing of materials for the project. The first order for material to be used in the new post office was placed in February 1935 with the local firm of Green & Babcock to supply 700 barrels of cement. PWA projects bid out projects to construction firms rather than hiring off the relief rolls as the WPA did. However, the *Rocky Ford Gazette Topic* reported that local labor would be used as much as possible.

Initial construction of the post office began in March 1935, but the discovery of the water level at 18 inches below the bottom of the main building footings delayed the construction. A raft foundation was

¹ Lee, Antoinette J., *Architects to the Nation* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2000), 260.

² *Ibid.* 268

³ *Ibid.* 268

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used to prevent the building from sinking, and construction again commenced in August 1935. The building was completed in March 1936. The estimated final cost of the project was \$55,000.

With the Great Depression, fewer people could afford to patronize the arts, severely impacting the careers of artists. The Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts provided employment by sponsoring artwork in federal buildings. Many of the post offices constructed during the Depression were decorated with murals or other artworks commissioned by the Section of Fine Arts. Funds for artwork were based on 1% of the total appropriation for the building's construction. The government hired Victor Higgins to paint a mural above the postmaster's office at the south end of the lobby. It memorializes the early river crossings at Rocky Ford. The painting is on canvas, finished in 1936 shortly after the completion of the Post Office. The title of the piece is "The First Crossing at Rocky Ford" and depicts a Conestoga wagon with a woman driver starting into a river while a man on horseback leads.

Higgins was born in Indiana to an Irish farm family. His first paintings decorated the interior of his family's barn. In 1899, at age 15, Higgins left for Chicago to study art. He worked a variety of jobs to pay for tuition at the Chicago Art Institute. In 1914, Higgins moved to Taos, New Mexico, becoming part of the Taos Art Colony. He achieved great success over the next two decades, exhibiting his work widely (including the Luxemborg in France and the Venice Biennale) and being elected to the National Academy.

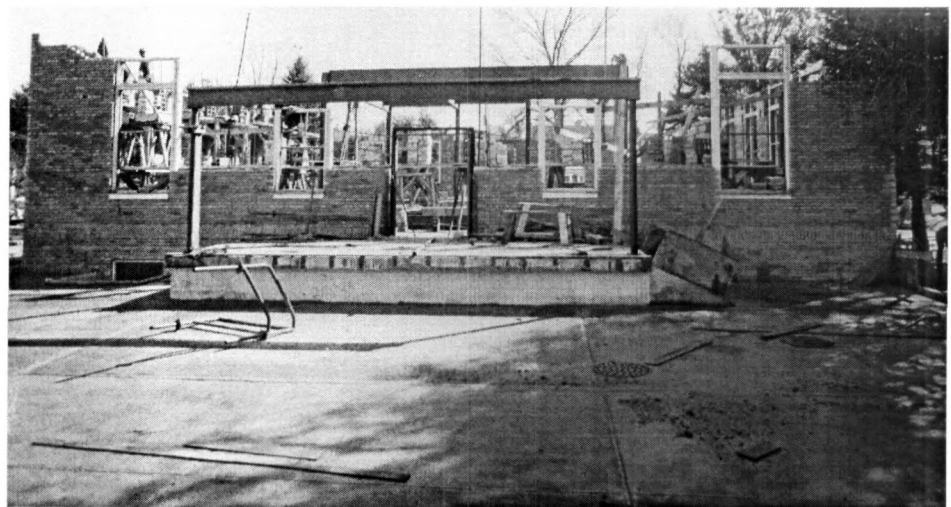
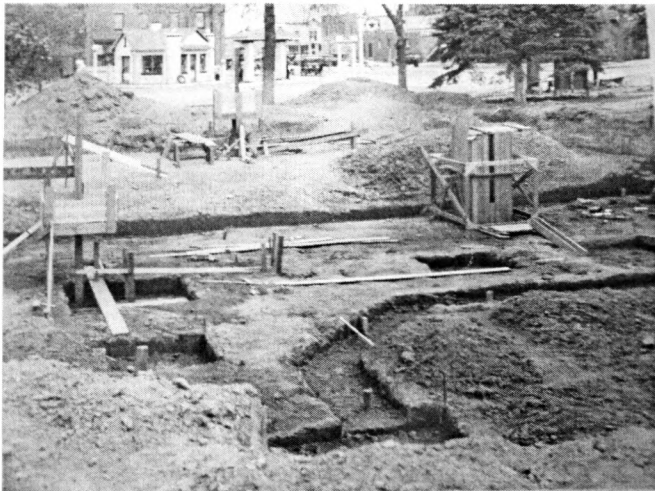
Some residents from Fowler attended the open house in March 1936 to "see if Uncle Sam had made an improvement commensurate with the needs of that city, and they found that he had." They reported that the building was "attractive and commodious." The *Fowler Tribune* also reported that "Uncle Sam is a fiend after lights and plumbing. The new building has electric outlets everywhere, and the plumbing is all that could be desired." The article lauded the post office as "one of the best and most modernly equipped structures in Colorado with every convenience to care for each phase of service."

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Otero County, Colorado

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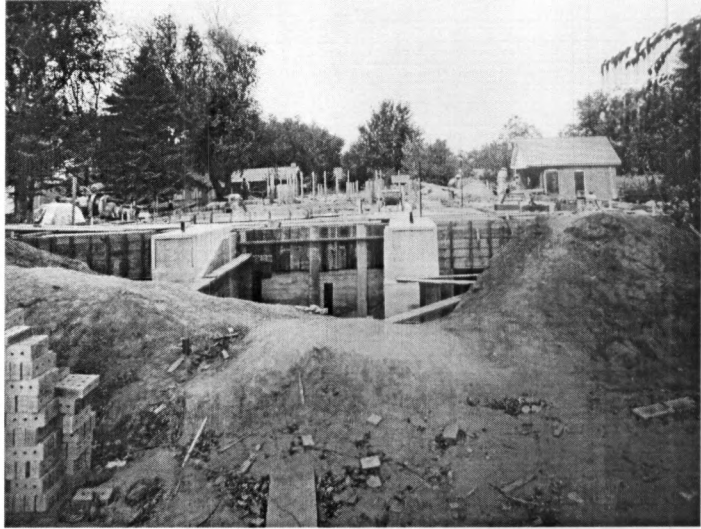


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Otero County, Colorado

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Christman, Abbey. "Las Animas Post Office." Architectural Inventory Form. On file in the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado.

Ewing, Robert A. "Victor Higgins, 1884-1949." Traditional Fine Arts Organization website.
<http://www.tfaoi.com>

Lee, Antoinette, J. *Architects to the Nation: The Rise and Decline of the Supervising Architect's Office*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

"New Post Office for Rocky Ford." *La Junta Daily Democrat*, November 18, 1933.

"New Rocky Ford P.O. Building to be Ready Feb. 1." *Rocky Ford Gazette Topic*, November 22, 1935.

"Plans Arrive for Rocky Ford Federal Building." *Rocky Ford Gazette Topic*, November 9, 1934.

Rocky Ford Post Office files. 401 9th St., Rocky Ford, CO.

"Rocky Ford is Seeking New P.O. Building." *La Junta Daily Democrat*, June 16, 1933.

"Rocky Ford's New Post Office is Now in Use." *Fowler Tribune*, March 20, 1936.

Wolfenbarger, Deon. "New Deal Resources on Colorado's Eastern Plains," National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, 2005. On file in the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado.

"Works Starts on Federal Building March 20th." *Rocky Ford Gazette Topic*, March 1, 1935.

"Work Stopped on Rocky Ford Post Office." *Fowler Tribune*, April 26, 1935.

Rocky Ford Post Office
Name of Property

Otero County/ Colorado
County/State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 13 612311 4212496 (NAD27)
Zone Easting Northing

2. Zone Easting Northing

3. Zone Easting Northing

4. Zone Easting Northing

The UTMS were derived from heads up digitization on Digital Raster Graphic (DRG) maps provided to OAHP by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Abbey Christman (for property owner)

organization Colorado Preservation, Inc. date 2/23/07

street & number 333 W. Colfax Ave. Suite 300 telephone 303-893-4260

city or town Denver state CO zip code 80204

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name U.S. Postal Service Western Facilities Service Office [contact: Mike Ward]

street & number 160 Inverness Drive West, Suite 400 telephone 303-22-6557

city or town Englewood state CO zip code 80112-5005

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Block 79, lots 5-6, City of Rocky Ford

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This includes all the land historically associated with the post office.

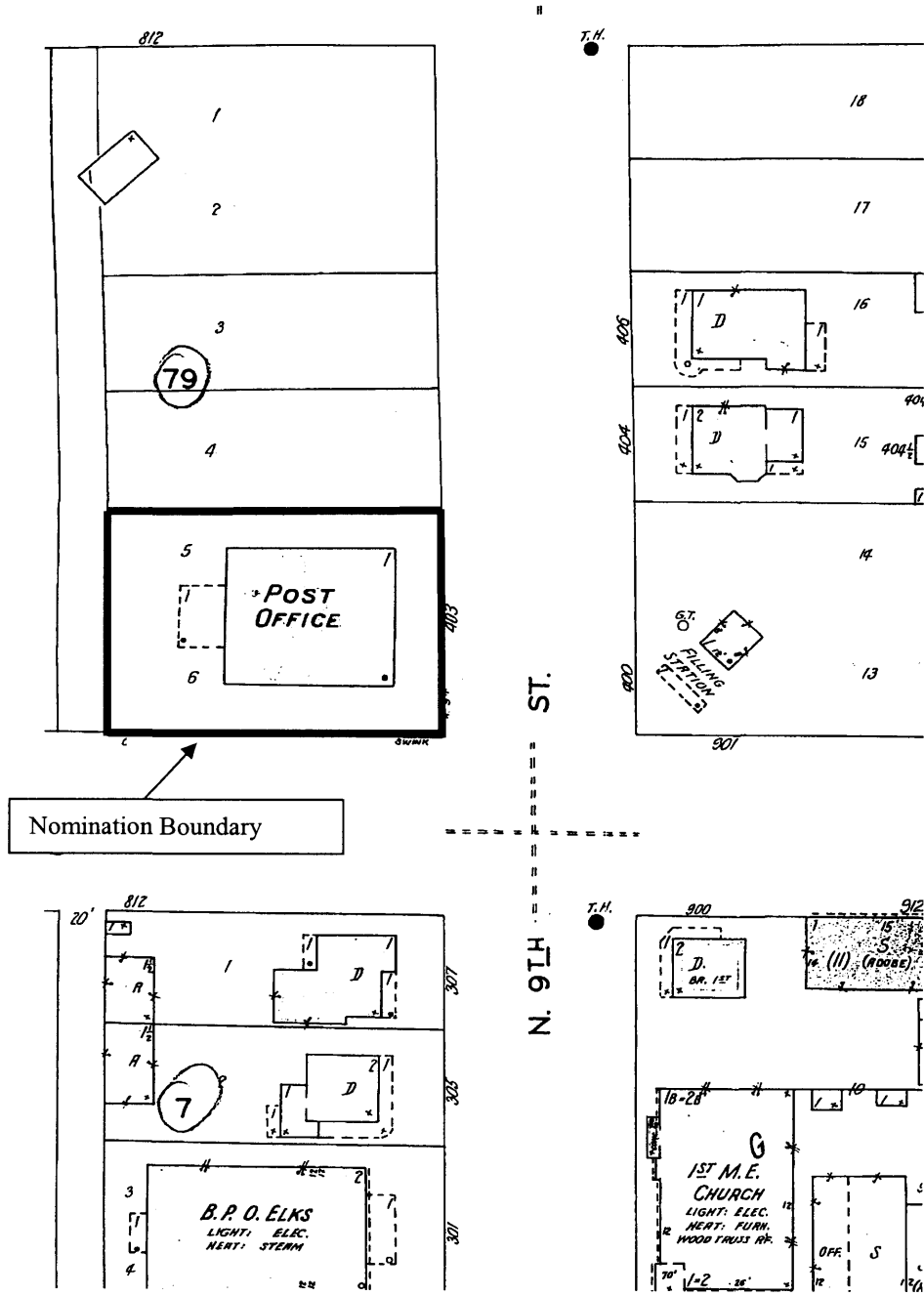
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Map showing property boundaries
(Source: Sanborn, September 1929, Revised May 1936)



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Otero County, Colorado

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PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to all photographs:

Name of Property: Rocky Ford Post Office

Location: Rocky Ford, Otero County, Colorado

Photographer: Abbey Christman

Date of Photographs: 19 June 2006

Negatives: Digital files submitted to National Register, Washington, D.C.

Photographs printed on HP Premium Photo Paper with HP 100 gray photo cartridge

Photo No. Photographic Information

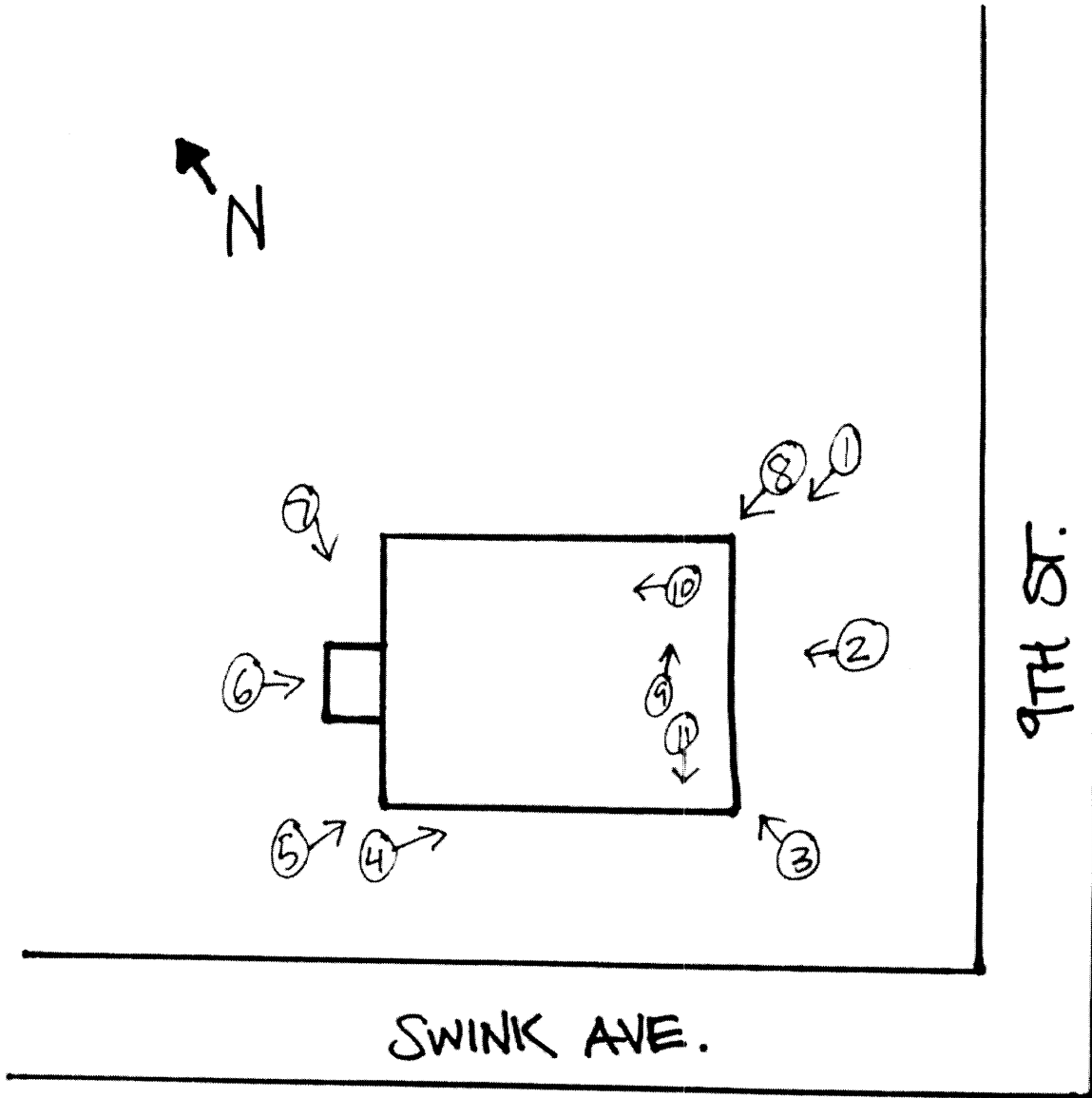
- 1 East corner of post office with Swink Memorial in the foreground. Facing west.
- 2 Southeast side (front) of post office showing Classical Revival entrance. Facing northwest.
- 3 South corner of post office showing handicap ramp. Facing north.
- 4 Southwest side of post office. Facing east.
- 5 Northwest side (rear) of post office. Facing east.
- 6 Loading dock on northwest side. Facing southeast.
- 7 North corner of post office. Facing south.
- 8 East corner of post office. Facing west.
- 9 Interior of post office showing wooden vestibule. Facing northeast.
- 10 Interior of post office showing tile floor and wainscoting. Facing northwest.
- 11 Mural by Victor Higgins. Facing southwest.

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ROCKY FORD POST OFFICE
 PHOTO KEY
 ○→ PHOTO # + DIRECTION

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USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

Rocky Ford Quadrangle, Colorado
7.5 Minute Series

UTM: Zone 13 / 612311 / 4212496 (NAD27)

