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**6. Function or Use**

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

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

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)  
  
Moderne

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

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walls Concrete

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roof Other: tar & gravel

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other Concrete

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The Ogallala United States Post Office is located at the northeast corner of Spruce and East 3rd Streets in Ogallala, the county seat of Keith County, in western Nebraska (1990 population: 5,095). The one-story concrete Modernistic style building, constructed in 1937-1938, is an excellent, well-preserved example of a Class C or D post office built from standardized plans in the 1930's. The nomination also includes three contributing objects: two ornamental lamp posts located on either side of the front entry and a flag pole.

Symmetrical in design, the five-bay rectangular building measures 60 by 50 feet and is of reinforced concrete construction. The words "United States Post Office, Ogallala, Nebraska" are carved into the parapet wall above the raised central entry. The main entrance is flanked by two pairs of newer window units set in the recessed bays; the upper portions of the windows have been filled in. Similar fenestration is found on the north and south facades. Ornamental concrete motifs consisting of a plane, locomotive, and ship are set in panels above the main entry door and adjacent window units. The flat roof has a composition tar and gravel surface. The building exhibits good integrity; modifications include replacement of the front entry doors and minor interior alterations. Construction began in August, 1937, and the completed building was dedicated on March 29, 1938 (Keith County News, March 31, 1938).

A mural entitled "Longhorns," by Frank Mechau is located on the south lobby wall above the postmaster's door which is flanked by wooden, glass-enclosed bulletin boards. The mural measures 4 feet by 12 feet and occupies the typical space for artwork commissioned by the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts program for a small Class C or D post office. The Ogallala commission was awarded to Colorado Springs artist Frank Mechau in April, 1938, and the completed mural was installed by the artist in October of the same year. (Keith County News, Oct. 6, 1938).

Painted in muted green, grey, and brown tones, the mural depicts a cowboy driving a herd of longhorns. The cattle occupy almost the entire foreground of the mural with crowded shapes that suggest the enormity of the herd. In the right foreground a cowboy wearing chaps rides a white horse with a flowing mane. The artist utilized elongated shapes for the horse and cattle, particularly in the animals' heads which imparts a sense of motion. The cowboy is almost devoid of features which emphasizes the

See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

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landscape and directs the viewer's gaze into the scene. In the background, the broad sweep of the landscape, painted in grey and green muted tones, is relieved only by rounded, treeless hills on the horizon that reinforce the sense of the vast Great Plains.

The lobby interior is in good condition and retains its original tile floor, wainscotting, and woodwork. Soon after the mural was installed, the Section authorized the Ogallala postal employees to replace original light fixtures to visually accommodate the mural. It is not known when the light fixtures were replaced. Currently the lobby has enclosed, fluorescent fixtures suspended from the ceiling. A varnished wooden vestibule projects into the lobby, an original design feature typical of Class C or D post offices built from standardized plans 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

1938

Significant Dates

1938

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Mechau, Frank: Artist

Simon, Louis: Supervising Architect

Beckenhauer Bros.: Contractor

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

The Ogallala 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 mural, entitled "Longhorns," was painted by Colorado Springs artist Frank Mechau and installed in October, 1938.

The oil-on-canvas mural measures 12 by 4 feet and is located on the south lobby wall directly above the postmaster's door in the typical space for Section artwork installed in Class C or D post offices. The mural is an excellent example of artwork commissioned for new post offices through the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts program from 1934-1943. Painted in muted green, grey, and brown tones, the mural depicts the vast Great Plains landscape with a lone cowboy and a herd of longhorns. The mural's historical theme associated with the American West, painted in a realistic style, make it an excellent example of government sponsored Regionalism.

In April, 1938, Colorado Springs artist Frank Mechau received a notice from the Section of Fine Arts inviting him to submit designs for the Ogallala, Nebraska, mural on the basis of previous Section commissions. The letter cited the commission amount, \$670, and payment schedule: one-third after preliminary sketches were approved; one-third upon approval of a full-size cartoon; and the remainder when the completed mural was installed and photographed. The letter included blueprints with dimensions of the mural space. The Section advised the artist to visit the post office and develop a subject appropriate to the building or to the Ogallala area. Mechau immediately accepted the commission and informed Section Superintendent Rowan that he would begin to develop preliminary sketches.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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

Keith County News, March 31, 1938; Oct. 6, 1938.

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.

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

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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2	7	1	7	8	0
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4	5	5	6	2	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 Lots 5, 6, Block 6, Original Town, Ogallala, Keith County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes that parcel of land which has been historically 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

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 2

In May, 1938, Mechau gave a lecture in Lincoln, Nebraska. He reported to Rowan that he had spent several hours talking to Mari Sandoz, author of Old Jules, and learned that Ogallala was the end of the Chisholm Trail, "where the trek of the longhorns ended in feeding, dehorning, and shipping." Mechau informed the Section that following additional historical research, he would develop a use the theme of a cattle drive for the Ogallala mural. A month later Mechau wired the Section for approval to use Longhorn sketches originally submitted for a Dallas, Texas, mural competition. The Section granted approval, but requested that the original sketches or photographs be submitted to the Washington office. Mechau sent the required material which was officially approved in July, 1938.

In August, Mechau submitted the full-size cartoon for Section approval. Rowan informed him that he could proceed but made several suggestions regarding the composition, particularly the cowboy in the foreground. A month later, Mechau wrote that the mural was nearly finished and changes had been incorporated into the design. The completed mural was installed by the artist in September, 1938 (RG 121: Entry 133; Box 61; Keith County News, Oct. 6, 1938).

At the time he painted the Ogallala mural Frank Mechau was an instructor at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. His students and colleagues included artists who also painted Nebraska post office murals: Edward Chávez (Geneva), Kenneth Evett (Pawnee City), Eldora Lorenzini (Hebron), Ethel Magafan (Auburn), Jenne Magafan (Albion), and Archie Musik (Red Cloud). Assisted by his students Edward Chávez, Jenne and Ethel Magafan, he also painted murals through the WPA's Federal Arts Project in the mid 1930's. Mechau received Section commissions for post office murals in Texas, Colorado, and for the Post Office Department Building in Washington, D.C. The recipient of three Gugenheim fellowships, Mechau was head of the Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture departments at Columbia University from 1939-1943 and during World War II was an artist/correspondent for Life magazine. Mechau's work is part of the permanent collections of numerous institutions including the Museum of Modern Art and the Detroit Institute of the Arts. In 1946 Mechau died suddenly of a heart attack; he was 43 years old. (Falk, 1985).

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

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   9   Page   2  

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