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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

JAN 16 1990

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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 Tonopah Main Post Office
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 201 Main Street N/A not for publication
city, town Tonopah N/A vicinity
state Nevada code NV county Nye code 023 zip code 89049

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> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> objects
			<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
Historic U.S. Post Offices in Nevada, 1891-1941
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.

Ronald M. Jones Deputy SHPO 11/13/89
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

U.S. Postal Service 1-10-90
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:)

Amy Federman 2/28/90
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

U.S. Post Office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

U.S. Post Office

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Moderne

Other: Starved Classical

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Copper

other Tar composition

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Tonopah Main Post Office is a one-story, buff-colored brick building on a raised concrete basement. The front facade is symmetrical, divided into five bays, and devoid of significant detailing. A centered entry bay with two equally-sized window bays on either side break the otherwise plain facade. Granite steps and landing, flanked by square concrete buttresses, provide access to the entry. Above the entry doors and fronting a transom window is an ornate aluminum grille in which a low-relief sculpted eagle is centered. The facade is terminated by a plain limestone frieze with a slightly projecting molded cornice. A hipped roof, clad with copper, covers the front portion of the building while the rear is covered by a flat built-up tar composition roof. Centered on the ridge of the hipped roof is a square copper and glass cupola.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The front facade (north) is divided into five flat-arched bays: a centered entry bay flanked on each side by two window bays. The bays are slightly recessed from the brick-faced facade and rise to the same height. The entry consists of double aluminum-framed glass panel doors (single light) topped by a nine-light transom window which rests atop a plain transom bar. An ornate painted aluminum grille, in which a flat relief sculpted eagle is centered, is set in front of the transom window. Single free-standing lanterns in a torch motif rest atop each of the entry buttresses.

The window bays are identical to each other and of the same dimension as the entry bay. The bays consist of triple-hung six-light windows of wood sash which are set above a plain sandstone panel. The panel is slightly recessed and rests on the limestone facing of the raised basement wall. A plain limestone frieze extends across the facade between the line marking the tops of the bays to a plain, slightly projecting sandstone cornice. "United States Post Office", "Tonopah, Nevada" is carved into the frieze and centered on

See continuation sheet

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)

Architecture

Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1941-

Significant Dates

Site acq.-1940

Const.-1941

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Simon, Louis A., Supervising Architect/

Federal Government; Dow, L.F. & Co.,

Los Angeles, CA, Building Contractor

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

Though not yet fifty years old, the Tonopah Post Office is exceptionally significant on the state level for architecture and on the local level for politics/government. The design is a duplicate of several other western post offices, but is the only example of its design-type in the state of Nevada. Moreover, it is the only example of Depression era federal architecture in Tonopah. The building is the last federal post office constructed in Nevada before the outbreak of World War II and marks the end of a discrete period of federal design and building philosophy. The building represents the culmination of this period of federal design, which in Nevada begins with the 1891 Carson City Post Office (now state library) and progresses through the Depression. Symbolically, the building represents the linkage between the federal government and the local citizens through their elected officials. Finally, the building is a legacy of the vast public works programs of the Depression and the federal government's efforts to aid local economies.

ARCHITECTURE

The Tonopah Main Post Office is a well-preserved and unaltered example of a small-town, single-purpose post office in the Starved Classical style. The building exhibits the modern or the International design influence in its flat facades and lack of explicitly articulated historical design elements, yet retains Classical symmetry and proportion. Flat brick piers, extending from the exposed basement wall to a broad limestone band, divide the five bays of the facade. These elements are reductions of the pilasters or columns, and the entablature of the Beaux-Arts designs. Ornamentation is stripped and limited to the ornate grille in which is set

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Tonopah Daily News, various articles 1937-1941.
2. Berg, Lucile Rae. "A History of the Tonopah Area and Adjacent Region of Central Nevada, 1827-1941," Master's Thesis, University of Nevada, May 1942.
3. Woodward, James; Garrison, James; Drobbin, Lynn; and Rocha, Guy. "Historic Resources of Tonopah" (National Register of Historic Places Nomination), September 1980.
4. Elliott, Russell R. Nevada's Twentieth-Century Mining Boom: Tonopah, Goldfield, Ely. Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1966.
5. Original Architectural Drawings, 1939.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- 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:
USPS Facilities Service Center
San Bruno, CA 94099-0330

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 0.25

UTM References

A 11 479850 4213110
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

Quadrangle name: Tonopah

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Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 5, 6, 7, and the SE 5' of Lot 8, Block "D", Town of Tonopah.
 The property is at the southeast corner of Main Street and a public alley (Bryan Street extended) and is described as follows: beginning at the north corner, thence southeast 90', southwest 107.8', northwest 90.12', northeast 112.55' to point of beginning.

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Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the property originally purchased by the federal government for the post office site.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title H.J. "Jim" Kolva, Project Manager; Steve Franks, Research Assistant
 organization Institute for Urban & Local Studies date February 1989
 street & number West 705 1st Avenue telephone (509) 458-6219
 city or town Spokane state WA zip code 99204

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the entry. The copper-clad hipped roof is topped by a square cupola--a copper base, centered copper louvers flanked by four-light glass panels, and flat copper cap. A weather vane is set atop the cap.

The east facade is flat and divided into two sections--the front section projects about two inches from the plane of the rear. Each section contains two window bays identical in design and detail as those of the front facade. Sandstone faces the exposed basement wall, frieze above the window bays, and cornice. Brick faces the remainder of the facade. The hipped roof overlies the front section and the flat built-up tar composition roof covers the rear.

The west facade is almost identical to the east facade. It differs in that the second window bay from the front is filled with brick (original construction) and one small one-over-one light double-hung sash window flanks each side of the bricked-in window.

The rear facade is similar in design and use of materials as the front, except that it includes a brick-enclosed concrete loading platform. Two window bays, identical to those of the front and sides of the main building, flank each side of the platform. A smaller vertically-aligned window with one-over-one, double-hung wood sash occupies the western corner. Extending rearward, the platform is slightly offset from the center of the building. The platform opens to the west with two metal overhead loading doors and a single metal pedestrian door. In the east side is a single metal pedestrian door, and angled toward the St. Patrick Street is a loading platform with a single metal overhead door. The end of the platform is solid brick. Covering the platform is a metal-clad shed roof which slopes to the west and overhangs the platform loading area. (The original loading platform was extended in the mid-1980s. Changes include the addition of the second loading door on the west side, the angled loading door in the southeast corner, and the shed roof.)

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a low-relief eagle sculpture (also standardized) which rests above the entry doors. Although the building is given an American Colonial flavor by use of a hipped roof and cupola, the design is modern.

The design represents the culmination of the evolution of federal design in the vastly expanded public buildings programs beginning at the turn of the century. The buildings prior to 1920 were designed in the Beaux-Arts tradition. Those buildings of the early 1930s carry over this tradition, yet begin to show the transition to the modern. The Classical influence remains clear and the historical detailing retains its definition, however the facades become flatter and tend toward simplicity. Federal architecture after the mid-1930s evidences greater refinement and attention to the modern influence. This is strongly evident in the Tonopah Post Office which represents the end of the design revolution, which essentially ended at the onset of World War II. As such, it is a significant element in the state's legacy of federal architecture and integral to the group of post offices included in this thematic nomination. Therefore, the building has statewide significance under Criterion C.

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

As Tonopah's first and only federally-constructed post office, the building is locally significant under Criterion A. The quest for the post office and the appropriation and construction phases were important local events that were covered extensively by the local newspaper, which included detailed articles on the appropriation and design-selection processes used by the government. The Tonopah Main Post Office also represents the link between the federal government and the local community, including the efforts on the part of local citizens, through their elected representatives in Washington, D.C., to secure a federal building. At the cornerstone-laying ceremonies the Tonopah postmaster spoke of the post office as a building that would: "stand as a monument to the providence and liberality of our federal government, to the perserverance [sic] and energy of our congressional delegation and to the optimistic and progressive spirit of the people in our community." Another speaker that day noted of the building, which would open for business on the day Pearl Harbor was bombed, that: "A wave of dictatorship is

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now sweeping Europe.... We are thankful for this gift of our nation to this community which will stand as a monument to the democratic form of government."

LOCAL CONTEXT

Tonopah, the county seat of Nye County, is in west-central Nevada, midway between Reno and Las Vegas. Mining, nearby military facilities, tourism, and retail trade provide the base for the local economy. In 1980 Tonopah's population was 1,952.

The origins of Tonopah date back to May of 1900 when prospector James L. Butler discovered a rich mining district in the San Antonio Mountains. Butler's historic discovery led to the founding of the town of Tonopah at the foot of the rich ore-producing hill called Mount Oddie (as well as to the recovery of Nevada's economy after a twenty-year depression following the decline of the great Comstock lode). Only seven months after Butler's initial discovery, the townsite of Tonopah was surveyed.

After the initial discovery of precious metals, Tonopah's economy and population boomed. By the end of 1901 about \$4,000,000 worth of ore had been extracted from the district. Also in 1901 a post office was established, under the name "Butler" (it was changed to Tonopah in 1905). By 1902 Tonopah had two newspapers, a school, telegraph and telephone service, electricity, and a population estimated at between 2,000 to 3,000. Tonopah quickly evolved from a young mining settlement of tents and dugouts into a major mining and financial center with large commercial buildings along its Main Street and hundreds of houses clinging to the hills.

In 1905 the railroad arrived and the Nye County seat was moved from Belmont to Tonopah. By 1906 Tonopah, with a population of nearly 10,000, was Nevada's largest city. By 1907, however, Tonopah's economy stabilized, and from thereafter its history is one of gradual decline with occasional upturns in its economy. Tonopah's decline began indirectly with the San Francisco earthquake in April of 1906, when investment capital from that city dried up. While other investment sources were found, a year later the Panic of 1907 closed two of Tonopah's three banks. Although silver

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production in the area did not decline but only stabilized, thousands of people moved out of the camps and towns of central Nevada, including Tonopah. By 1910 Tonopah's population dropped to 3,900. Between 1920 and 1930 Tonopah's population fell from 4,144 to 2,144, the result of depressed silver prices. Tonopah survived primarily as a supply and service center for the region and as the seat of county government. Its population continued to fall, to 2,471 in 1940 to 1,935 in 1950 to a low of 1,679 in 1960. In 1970 it increased slightly, to 1,716, and it increased again in 1980, to 1,952.

The Tonopah Main Post Office is in the city's central business district and fronts on the south side of Main Street. A public alley forms the western boundary of the Post Office site, and St. Patrick Street forms the rear boundary. Adjacent to the east of the Post Office is a one-story masonry grocery store. Commercial uses are across the alley to the west and across Main Street to the north.

LOCAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TONOPAH MAIN POST OFFICE

"Civic Group in Vigorous Drive For Post Office" reported the Tonopah Daily Times on February 3rd, 1937. The Nye County Improvement Association had sent a "lengthy resolution" to the Post Office Department in Washington, D.C. "urging immediate action" regarding new quarters for the Tonopah post office. Copies of the resolution were sent to Nevada's congressional delegation: Senators Key Pittman and Pat McCarran and Congressman James G. Scrugham. On March 29th the Times reported that Senator McCarran had asked the Post Office Department to investigate the present quarters of Tonopah's post office, which were considered to be inadequate for the amount of mail it handled, and had promised to "again renew his efforts to bring about a change." On April 24th it was reported that the Nye County Improvement Association, while discussing Tonopah's need for a new building, had "went on record to memorialize" Nevada's congressional delegation for their aid. One week later it was revealed that Postal Inspector W. H. Hudson was in town inspecting downtown locations for a new post office (May 1st article). Credit was given to Senator McCarran, the Improvement Association, and local businessmen. (Other news that day included Adolph Hitler's renewed demands for German colonies.)

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On August 21st the Times reported that the Treasury Department had recommended constructing a new \$95,000 post office in Tonopah. While the building was included as part of a long-range construction program spanning ten years (since "sentiment exists in congress for slowing up federal construction"), Tonopah's post office was "expected to be one of the first to be constructed ... because of the urgent need for the building here." And indeed, less than one month later it was announced that the Treasury Department had allotted the necessary funds for Tonopah's project as part of a \$70 million "emergency construction fund" for 319 buildings (September 10th). Credit for the allocation was given to Congressman Scrugham, "who has taken an active interest in the promotion of improved quarters for the local postal service."

On September 14th it was reported that site bids would be requested starting on September 23rd, to be opened in the office of Postmaster R. H. Burdick on October 4th; lots of approximately 21,000 square feet were requested. Additional details were published a week later, on September 21st: of the \$95,000 allotted for Tonopah's post office, \$80,750 was available for construction, with the rest for the site, preparation of plans, "supervisory expense," and furniture and fixtures. Plans for the building would not be started until the site was selected, and would "be done by treasury architects using 'type' plans as much as possible, but designing exterior details to harmonize with both natural surroundings of the site and adjacent structures." It was also noted that the building might have to wait three years for construction, since Congress had only appropriated \$23 million for its \$70 million construction program, and had promised approximately the same amount for the following year.

Just two days later, on September 23rd, 1937 the Times reported that site bids were being requested for the new post office, to be opened on October 4th. The paper detailed the bid process and quoted Congressman Scrugham as stating he would not take part in any discussion regarding the building's location, since he believed "the selection of the best site will be made by government officials and that Tonopah residents are capable of agreeing with these officials on the site." On October 4th it was revealed that six sites had

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been submitted for consideration. One day later a Times article thoroughly detailed the building design selection process, stating that Tonopah's building would "be a product of mass production"--one of 25 "type" plans which "cover three price ranges and in each price range there are styles of architecture suitable for any climate." Tonopah's plans would "be selected from the 25 types as the best suited to the architecture of the Nevada countryside." The paper noted that to save time, only in "special cases" were private architects and different plans used.

Over two years would pass before the Times would report: "Tonopah Federal Building Project Is Moving Ahead" (January 25th, 1940 article). The paper reported that, according to District Attorney Lowell Daniels who was clearing title to the selected property, "the delay was caused when the government demanded all former owners of the site selected as the property on Main Street extending north from the Elks club to the Buckman building, relinquish all possession claims." Other news of the time included approval of a \$6,726 WPA grant to repair and remodel the Tonopah public school building (February 10th article), a \$24,578 WPA street improvement grant (March 9th), and much news of the war in Europe. The site selection saga frequently made the pages of the Times, including an article of March 11th which reported that Nevada's congressional delegation had been informed "of the progress made locally and that all have promised their cooperation in urging early action toward the construction work and actual purchase of the site." An article of April 26th reported that the \$4,420 price for the site would be divided between the Tonopah Elks Home Association (\$1,600); the Town of Tonopah (\$2,470); and the United Cattle and Packing company (\$350); (though the town would actually receive only about \$700 since the "property listed as belonging to the town, actually was held by the cattle company and in order to speed up the transaction an agreement was made releasing the property to the town...."). The article concluded by noting:

The United Cattle building has already been vacated by the V. and W. grocery and it is expected that the historic old landmark will soon be razed to make way for the completion of the sale and construction of the new federal building.

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Earlier dispatches from Nevada's congressional delegation declared that construction bids have already been drawn up and that they will be put out shortly after the formal purchase of the site is made.

Finally, on July 6th, 1940 it was reported that the site had been formally purchased that morning after three U.S. treasury checks had arrived and the "required deeds and papers" had been turned over to the government. It was reported that the payment "climaxes a long series of events which followed the original congressional appropriation for the new building.... considerable effort was required in bringing all deeds and rights up to government regulations." The Times concluded by noting that the post office would "be of the story-and-a-half type and will be furnished and equipped in the modern trend."

In other news, Senator McCarran's office in Washington announced on June 6th that a new army air corps bombing range was to be established in Nye County, with Tonopah as the operations base. And on August 21st the Times announced a \$185,000 WPA airport improvement project, as part of the nation's west coast defense improvement program.

News of the construction bids for the post office appeared frequently in the Times, including an article of September 21st which included the following message from Senator McCarran to the secretary of the Nye County Improvement Association: "I regret these delays in getting matters of this kind started, but of course there are many projects on hand all the time and this is just one that must take its turn in the slow processes of the public buildings administration. I will keep the matter constantly in mind...."

The Times soon reported that a "modern adaptation of traditional Colonial architecture" would characterize Tonopah's post office, according to plans that had been received (October 21st article). The article described the building in detail, and noted that construction bids had been requested and would be opened in Washington on November 22nd. On December 10th it was announced that the L. F. Dow Company of Los Angeles had been awarded the construction contract, with its low bid of \$66,666.00 (the lowest of six).

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The new year of 1941 finally brought news of the construction of Tonopah's post office, along with headlines of the war in Europe. In January the contractor was authorized to proceed with construction; he had 300 days to complete the project (January 10th, 1941 article). Contractor Dow stated he would begin construction on approximately February 15th, with local labor used "as far as possible" (January 20th). On March 25th the Times published a drawing of Tonopah's federal building, and the news that the cornerstone-laying ceremony had been changed from April 12th to April 23rd to enable Congressman Scrugham to take part as "grand orator" (work was progressing rapidly on the building, with the basement nearing completion). On April 16th it was announced that the ceremony was now "definitely set" for May 3rd; the Masonic grand lodge of Nevada was in charge of the ceremony and documents and articles were being selected to be placed in the cornerstone.

Details of the ceremony, which was to include civic leaders, the grand lodge, veterans, the Tonopah school band, and "community chorus," were given on May 1st. A parade, leading from the old post office to the new, would start the event; the paper reported that Dr. R. H. Burdick, postmaster, had "issued an invitation to all local organizations, county and local officers, and the general public to join in the line of march." On May 3rd it was reported that the ceremony had proceeded as planned; various speakers gave credit to Nevada's congressional representatives, District Attorney Lowell Daniels, and the Nye County Improvement Association. Telegrams from Nevada's representatives were read and Postmaster Burdick promised that "every patron from the lisping child to those who are gray and bent with age shall receive prompt, courteous and efficient service, with a smile." District Judge W. D. Hatton, delivering the principal address, "pointed out that the continual growth of the structure of our national government is comparable to this building being constructed in Tonopah, and ... that confidence in the future of our county and the democratic system of government is a necessity at the present time." "Grand orator" Geo. A. Montrose also gave an "impressive oration," stating: "A wave of dictatorship is now sweeping Europe.... We are thankful for this gift of our nation to this community which will stand as a monument to the democratic form of government."

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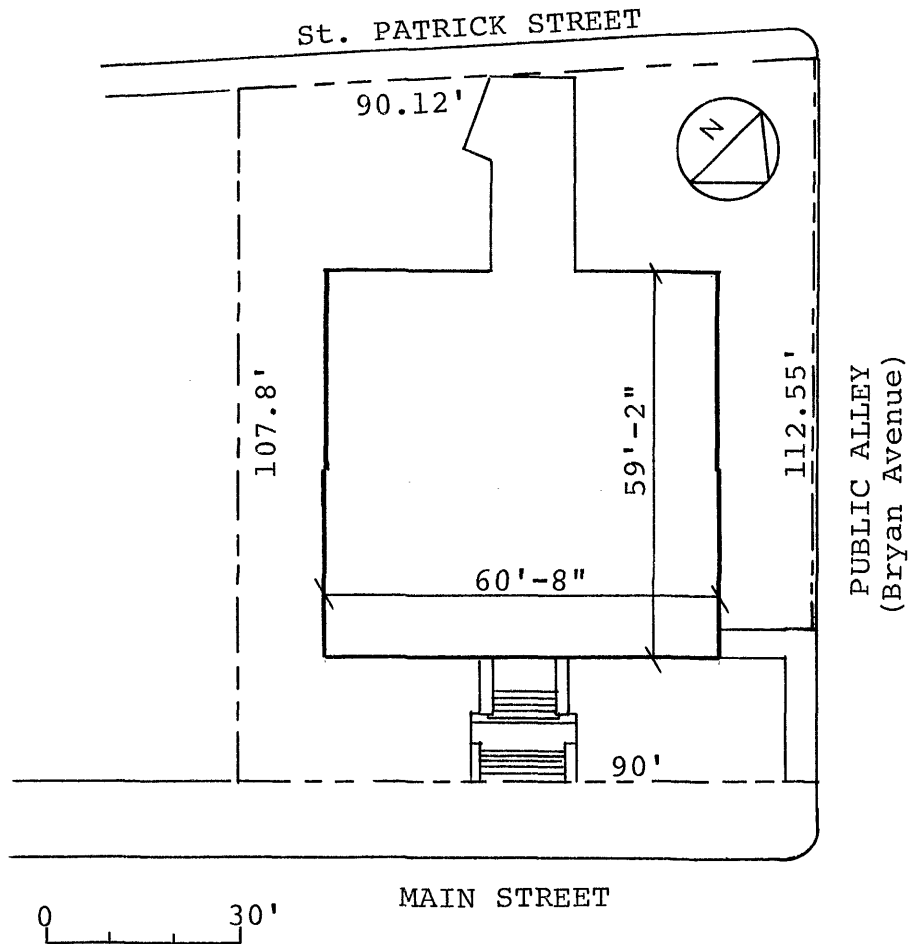
On November 15th it was reported that while the new post office was virtually complete, with interior painting currently underway, due to a delay in the shipment of some equipment the new structure would not be occupied until about January 1st, after the Christmas rush. But on Monday, December 1st it was announced that the building would be open the following Monday, ten months to the day that the first spade of earth was turned to break ground. On Saturday, December 6th the Times reported that the new post office would be open on Sunday for the distribution of post office box keys, and would be open for regular business on Monday. Formal dedication of the new building was to be delayed until more favorable weather, when an "impressive program will be drawn up." But that Monday's paper reported news of a different sort, with the massive headline: "U.S. VOTES WAR" (Monday, December 7 edition).

When the post office opened its doors, it also housed in four basement offices the bureau of internal revenue and the department of agriculture. These offices have continued to be used by various governmental agencies over the years in fulfilling the building's secondary role. At this time, the office of personnel management and investigation occupy the basement.

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The following information is the same for all the
photographs listed:

1. Tonopah MPO
2. Tonopah, Nevada
3. Jim Kolva
4. June 1988
5. Negatives on file at USPS Facilities Service Center,
San Bruno, CA.

Photo No. 1 (negative #37A)

6. View to south