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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

JAN 17 1990

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).

1. Name of Property

historic name Portales Main Post Office other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 116 W. First Street city, town Portales state New Mexico code NM county Roosevelt code 041 zip code 88130

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes checkboxes for private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal, building(s), district, site, structure, object, and counts for contributing and noncontributing resources.

Name of related multiple property listing: Historic U.S. Post Offices in New Mexico, 1900-1941

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. Signature of certifying official: U.S. Postal Service Date: 1-23-89

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. Signature of commenting or other official: Office of Cultural Affairs, Historic Preservation Division, State of New Mexico Date: 1-2-29-88

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: entered in the National Register. determined eligible for the National Register. determined not eligible for the National Register. removed from the National Register. other, (explain:). Signature of the Keeper: Beth Boland Date of Action: 2/23/90

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Post Office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Post Office

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Brick

roof Tar composition
other Limestone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Portales Main Post Office is a single-story red brick building on a raised basement. The basement walls, footings, and floor slab are reinforced concrete; steel framing provides structural support. The facade is flat, symmetrical, divided into five bays, and devoid of significant detailing. A centered entry bay with two window bays (all flat-arched) on either side break the otherwise plain facade. Granite steps and landing flanked by square limestone buttresses provide access to the double-door entry. Limestone window and door surrounds, decorative panels above the entry and immediately flanking window bays, plain panels beneath the sills, lintels, and belt courses provide detailing. The entire facade is completed by a plain brick parapet, topped with limestone coping. Behind the parapet is a flat roof of built-up tar composition.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The front facade (southeast, facing West First Street) is divided into five bays, a centered entry bay and flanking window bays. The entry bay and immediately flanking window bays are of equal size. These bays are recessed slightly and extend from the top of the basement wall to a limestone belt course. The entry consists of double metal doors with a single glass panel in each. A plain transom bar is above the doors with a three-light transom window above. Narrow limestone-surrounds flank the doors and transom window and extend to a limestone panel, in low relief, of an airplane. The immediately flanking window bays are configured identically to the entry bay. The panels above the windows, however, depict a locomotive and an ocean steamer. The sash is double-hung metal with three-over-three lights (wide center light with narrow side-lights). Beneath the sash are flat sills and plain limestone panels.

The end window bays extend from the top of the basement wall to a line extending from the top of the sash of the interior bays. Narrower than the center bays, the sash is

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also double-hung metal with three-over-three lights (equally-sized and vertically-oriented). Flat limestone lintels and sills with plain limestone panels beneath provide detailing.

Extending across the front of the three center bays are the main entry stairs flanked by square concrete buttresses. The seven steps and landing are granite. The buttresses are limestone; affixed to them are free-standing bronze lanterns (the original globes have been replaced). Three wrought-iron railings ascend the stairs.

The southwest facade (facing South Avenue A) is flat with the same horizontal detailing as the front: brick from grade to a wide belt course, a water table course (both limestone), brick main floor walls, a limestone belt course, brick parapet, and limestone coping course. The front and rear portions are projected slightly (one brick width) relative to the balance of the facade. Each contains a single window bay that is configured identically to the end bays of the front. The rear bay, however, is enclosed with brick (original construction). The central portion of the facade is divided into four bays. All are the same size as the front and rear, but the sash is double-hung wood with nine-over-nine lights. Further, the bays are topped with a brick soldier course rather than a stone lintel.

The northeast facade consists of the original front portion and a projecting wing, added to the rear portion in the late-1960s (plans dated 4/7/66). With the same detailing as the walls and end bays of the front facade, the front portion is divided into three equally-spaced bays. A single metal pedestrian door is between the rear bay and the addition. The addition, which projects about nine feet from the original facade, has the same detailing as the original except that the limestone is replaced by cast concrete. Four window bays divide the addition. They are unframed and contain fixed, two-light aluminum sash windows.

The rear facade consists of the same materials and detailing as the front and sides. The addition, which extends about eleven feet from the original building, covers all of the original facade except for twenty feet of the east corner. Two original windows remain--both are double-hung six-over-six wood sash--one at mezzanine level and one at

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first floor level. The original rearward-opening dock was removed and replaced by a brick-enclosed loading dock. Two overhead wood-panel doors provide access to each side and a single door provides access to the end. A metal marquee projects over the side loading areas. Three equally-spaced window bays (identical to side of the addition) are in the wall northeast of the dock extension.

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)

Politics/government

Art

Period of Significance

1937-1941

Significant Dates

Site acq.-1936

Const.-1937

Addition-1966

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Louis A. Simon, Supervising Arch-

itect/Federal government

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

Although the Portales Post Office has received an addition it retains good design integrity as a small town single-purpose post office. The design of the building, which can be termed Starved Classical, is a standard design that was frequently used throughout the West. The same design, in fact, was used in Truth or Consequences and Deming. The building was the first and is the only federally-constructed post office in the city. And, it is symbolic of the federal government's recognition of the city's regional importance. Constructed during the massive federal public buildings programs of the Depression era, it is a legacy of the government's response to that national economic emergency. The Post Office is in an ensemble of buildings that represent the three levels of government in the city. To the east side is the modern Portales City Hall (1962) and across West 1st Street is the Roosevelt County Courthouse (WPA, 1939, Art Deco). The lobby of the post office contains a mural, "Buffalo Range," executed by Theodore Van Soelen, a prominent Santa Fe artist. Completed under the Section of Fine Arts, it too, carries a strong association with the relief programs of the Depression.

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

As Portales first and only federally-constructed post office, the building is locally significant under Criterion A. It represents the link between the federal government and the local community, and functions as both a symbol and as an agency of the federal government. The building further symbolizes the massive public building programs of the 1930s which were intended to assist communities during a period of national economic emergency. Perhaps most importantly, it

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Portales Valley News and Portales Tribune (Portales), various issues, 1931-1937.
2. Borroughs, Jeam M., Ed. Roosevelt County History and Heritage. Portales, NM: Bishop Printing Company, 1975.
3. Construction Progress Photographs - September 24, 1936 - April 21, 1937 (monthly).
4. Original Floor Plans - 1936, Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect.
5. Remodel/expansion Floor Plans - 1966.

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:

USPS Facilities Service Center
San Bruno, CA 94099-0330

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 0.48

UTM References

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 Zone Easting Northing

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Quadrangle name: Portales

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The site is legally described as Lots 7, 8 & 9, Block 15, Original Town of Portales. The property is on the north corner of West First Street and South Avenue A, with 140 feet of frontage on First and 150 feet of frontage on A.

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Boundary Justification

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

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title H.J. "Jim" Kolva, Project Manager; Steve Franks, Research Assistant
 organization Institute for Urban & Local Studies date September 1988
 street & number West 705 1st Avenue telephone (509) 458-6219
 city or town Spokane state WA zip code 99204

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is a legacy of the efforts of local citizens through their elected officials in Washington to get a gift from Uncle Sam.

As the local Portales newspaper wrote at the time: "... while the federal government is passing post offices 'round to aid in reemployment, Portales should show a united front in presenting its claim for such a building."

Further, in his remarks at the dedication of the post office, Congressman John J. Dempsey stated that: "It is due to your progressive work and evidences of rapid and substantial growth in recent years that the government saw fit to place this building here."

The Post Office is also in the civic center of the community. Apparently, the land for the Post Office was donated by local citizens to provide a center for government. The square across West 1st Street is occupied by the Roosevelt County Courthouse and the property east of the Post Office contains the Portales City Hall.

ART

The Portales Post Office and the mural it contains is significant under Criterion A for its historic association with the federal government's New Deal public arts programs. The mural is also significant under Criterion C as an integral part of a building that represents a significant type, period, and style of artistic expression. Finally, the building is eligible under Criterion D because of its information potential relating to artistic expression and techniques of the period, and social history of its locality.

The mural, "Buffalo Range," is in the lobby over the postmaster's door. It was completed by Theodore Van Soelen in 1938. Approximately 5' X 12', oil on canvas, the mural depicts a herd of buffalo. In the foreground is a small group atop a low rise, perhaps exploring the spring grasses. Scattered members of the herd graze the flat plain to the horizon, above which rise afternoon storm clouds.

Theodore Van Soelen was born in St. Paul, MN in 1890. He studied at the St. Paul Art Institute and Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. For health reasons he moved to the Utah-Nevada mountains, then, in 1916, to Albuquerque where he

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worked as a commercial illustrator. In 1922 he moved to Santa Fe where he remained until his death in 1964. He was a member of the National Academy of Design and exhibited at the Carnegie Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Art, Los Angeles Museum of Art, and other locations throughout the nation. His murals are in the following buildings: Grant County Courthouse (Silver City, NM) and Waureka (OK) and Livingston (TX) post offices.

The mural was completed under the auspices of the Federal Works Agency Section of Fine Arts. Federal sponsorship of visual arts programs began in 1933 when President Roosevelt authorized the development of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). This and subsequent programs were intended to provide work-relief for artists. After the demise of the PWAP program in June 1934, the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) was established in July 1935. The Section of Painting and Sculpture, later the Section of Fine Arts, was established in October of 1934 by the Treasury Department. This was the program primarily responsible for murals and sculpture found in post offices throughout the country. Commissions were awarded on the basis of anonymous competitions without reference to artists need. In July of 1939, after reorganization of the Executive Branch, the entire building program of the Treasury Department and the Section were transferred to the new Federal Works Agency. The Section of Fine Arts-Federal Works Agency operated the program until June of 1943 when the activities of World War II shifted priorities.

The Section, which was administered in Washington, dealt directly with the artists, and selected artists through national and regional design competition. The Section sought the best decorative art that it could find for designated federal buildings. The intent of the program's administrators was that the work would reflect the themes and styles of the American scene, with a hope that it would strike a responsive chord in the general public. Although the program is attributed with having fostered an American Regionalism, art critics could never find a coherent body of work that was truly Regionalist or representative of particular sections of the country. The work that was created did, however, portray the American Scene in the form of localized subject matter. Further, the work resulting from the programs tended to pursue an inoffensive middle ground of style and content which was sometimes viewed as producing limp platitudes rather than

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strong statements. This resulted from the requirement for final approval from Washington as well as compliance with local preferences. The strife or dark side of the Depression was not portrayed, but instead the nostalgic and positive events of the American Scene were depicted.

Eight New Mexico post offices received murals under various New Deal Arts programs: Alamogordo, Clovis, Deming, Gallup, Hot Springs (now Truth or Consequences), Portales, Roswell, and Raton. In addition, there are Depression-era murals and other artworks in numerous other public buildings throughout the state, which contribute to New Mexico's rich legacy of Southwestern art.

There is another PWA mural in Portales, in the Administration Building of Eastern New Mexico University. Painted by Lloyd Moylan of Albuquerque and Taos, the mural represents the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Portales is the county seat of Roosevelt County in east-central New Mexico. Agriculture, dairying, and education provide the base for the local economy. Principal crops are peanuts, potatoes, wheat, sorghum, corn, and cotton; Portales is also the home of Eastern New Mexico University. In 1980 Portales' population was 10,750 (it had a 1988 estimated population of 12,500).

Long before there was a town called Portales, about six miles southeast of the present city there was a series of cave-openings from which flowed streams of water. This site was known as Portales Springs, and was famous as a watering-hole along the Fort Sumner Trail. (The name was given to the site because the caves resembled the porches of Spanish adobe houses, and "portales" is the Spanish word for porches.) The first permanent settler of the area, a cattleman named Doak Good, arrived in the area about 1880 and settled near Portales Springs.

In 1896 or 1897 "Uncle" Josh Morrison arrived and set-up a one-room store at Portales Springs. In 1898 when the railroad was being constructed through the area from Roswell, Morrison moved his store to the tent settlement near the

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tracks to become the first businessman in what became the new town of Portales. Portales grew quickly from a rough settlement to a cattle loading point and center for the cowboys from the surrounding ranches. (And "Uncle" Josh became the town's first postmaster.)

By 1902 Portales had a two-room school, a drug store, two general stores, three wagon yards, a restaurant, a barber shop, and seven saloons. Due to the presence of the railroad and the availability of water, homesteaders began pouring into the area. In 1903 Portales was one of the largest cattle loading points in the U.S. and it became the county seat of the newly created Roosevelt County. The first county sheriff was hired, churches were organized, and Portales began to evolve from its "wild west" period into a stable agricultural community. It was incorporated as a town in 1909 and by 1910 had a population of 1,292. Its population dropped to 1,154 in 1920 before rising to 2,519 in 1930 and to 5,104 in 1940. Eastern New Mexico University opened in Portales in 1934 and the new County Courthouse was completed in 1939.

The Portales Main Post Office is on the northeast corner of West First Street and South Avenue A. Adjacent to the east is the City Hall (1962, brick). Across the alley, rear of the post office, is a brick commercial building. Across Avenue A to the west is a movie theater (modern, 1 story) with a parking lot and commercial buildings further north. The WPA Roosevelt County Courthouse (1938) is across First Street from the post office and occupies the entire block. One-story retail stores and offices surround the other three sides of the square.

LOCAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE PORTALES MAIN POST OFFICE

"Portales Asks for Federal Building" reported the Portales Valley News on January 8th, 1931. The Chamber of Commerce had raised the issue, which had been taken up by State Senator R. G. Bryant with U.S. Senators Bratton and Cutting. The post office was currently in the First National Bank. On July 2nd the News reported that Portales' post office receipts had increased 11 percent over 1930. On July 23rd it was reported that Roosevelt County tax valuations had increased \$73,357 over 1930. The paper noted that "regardless of the fact that merchandise has dropped from 20 to 25

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percent in price and nearly all merchants have reduced their stocks, it shows an increase of \$3,258." But while the number of cattle and sheep had increased, their valuation had decreased. On December 31, 1931, in a end of year news summary, the News noted that Roosevelt County had been "allowed" \$227,000.27 for road construction, Portales had experienced one of the best dairy and livestock shows in its history, and a giant still had been "captured" at Melrose.

"Garner's Bill Passes House; Includes \$70,000.00 for Portales Post Office Bld." headlined the News On June 9, 1932. The "\$2,300,000,000 Garner plan for helping the unemployed" had been sent to the Senate by a House vote of 218 to 183. Over a year later, on December 21, 1933, the News urged unification regarding the post office issue:

... while the federal government is passing post offices 'round to aid in reemployment, Portales should show a united front in presenting its claim for such a building.... And in this connection, no local fight should enter in the location of such a building.... the first consideration is to impress congress with the fact that Portales needs a post office building, and that all work for the securing of an appropriation for this purpose.

On January 5th, 1934 it was reported that Senator Bronson Cutting had telegraphed that a new post office for Portales was still being considered, but had not been approved. An article of May 12th announced that due to "the economy program of the administration the Portales post office has received a severe cutback on operating expenses"; as a result, the general delivery window would be closed Wednesdays at 12 noon. (The paper observed that "While this will be a serious handicap to those who do not have boxes it is the orders of the federal government and has to be followed.") Also that day it was reported that the first unit of the Eastern New Mexico Normal" (school) had been completed and classes would begin on June 4th. In addition, Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker had been seen in Portales three days earlier, having lunch in a local cafe.

On May 24th the News published a letter received from Senator Carl A. Hatch regarding Portales' proposed new post

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office. Hatch wrote that the project had been approved by the post office and treasury departments and was being considered by the Public Works Administration, and that he was "keeping in close touch with this application and endeavoring to expedite it as much as possible." The News advised: "senators from New Mexico should be contacted and urged that this matter be given immediate consideration." Over a year later, on Thursday, June 27th, 1935 it was reported that legislation had passed the previous Friday granting Portales \$83,000 for a post office. The paper wrote that the "fast growth of Portales has made the present postoffice so congested that it seriously hindered business" and that "the Portales Chamber of Commerce has worked faithfully to secure this appropriation." In addition, post office officials had recently been in Portales "making a survey, as to post office location and also as to the need of free [mail] delivery in the city."

"Post Office Building Approved" proclaimed a banner headline on August 15th, 1935. "Portales long dream of a federal post office is to come true at last" the News announced. Telegrams had been received from Carl A. Hatch, John J. Dempsey, and Dennis Chavez stating that funds had definitely been approved. Part of Senator Hatch's telegram read: "Am definitely assured approval final and bids for site will be called for this week." The paper wrote: "For many years the citizens of Portales have been faithfully working on the project, and it has met many snags." It noted that the building had been approved a year earlier but no funds were provided.

[There is a gap in available Portales newspapers from August 15th, 1935 to September 29th, 1936; in addition, the newspapers quoted also change during this period.]

On November 24th, 1936 the Portales Tribune reported that the town's Rotary Club had given a Thanksgiving program, "expressing thanks for the growth and success of Portales." Speakers expressed appreciation for Portales' "solid steady growth ... rather than the boom type" and spoke of the town being a "home, school and church center."

"Construction at Post Office Will Be Completed Soon" declared a Tribune headline of February 9th, 1937. Masons,

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plumbers and electricians were "hard at work" on the building, and the general contractors were "pleased with the rapid progress which marked the efforts of the workmen thus far." Portales postmistress Lillian Howard had also received the first consignment of furniture for the building. On March 5th the Tribune published an account of an "observant reporter" who had inspected the building and its progress. The extensive report noted, for example, that "Great care has been used in the finishing and tiling of the building and when completed it will present a very attractive appearance." Another article of April 20th ("Post Office Is Nearly Thru") described the interior in detail, even noting what the window openings and letter drops were labeled. The Tribune boasted: "Interested parties who have inspected other recent post office buildings declare the Portales structure to be built roomier, more convenient, and more beautiful than others they have seen."

An article of April 27th discussed Portales' "out of date" county courthouse building. The paper wrote that many felt a new building was needed "to keep up with the present trend of advancement." The paper wrote:

Portales, recognized as one of the fastest growing towns in the state and Roosevelt county called the most progressive at present, is seeing new buildings going up almost daily.... Right across the street from the present court house has been constructed a new postoffice building larger than any such building for a town the size of Portales, than any town in the southwest.

One of Portales' new buildings, the new gymnasium-auditorium at its junior high school, was described in an article of May 14th, which also noted that the Portales high school was graduating its largest class ever: 74 students.

"OPEN HOUSE HELD AT NEW POST OFFICE SUNDAY FOR PATRONS" headlined the Tribune on Tuesday, May 18th. Hundreds of people had attended the open house and inspected the building the previous Sunday; the post office had moved to its new location on Saturday. The paper noted that there were 639 post office boxes, 50 less than in the old building, and wrote: "It is hoped this shortage will be met by the establishment of city delivery some time in the near future." On

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June 1st the paper reported that Congressman John J. Dempsey would be in town on Saturday, June 5th to dedicate the new post office building. A committee was "getting started on plans to make the occasion a gala event."

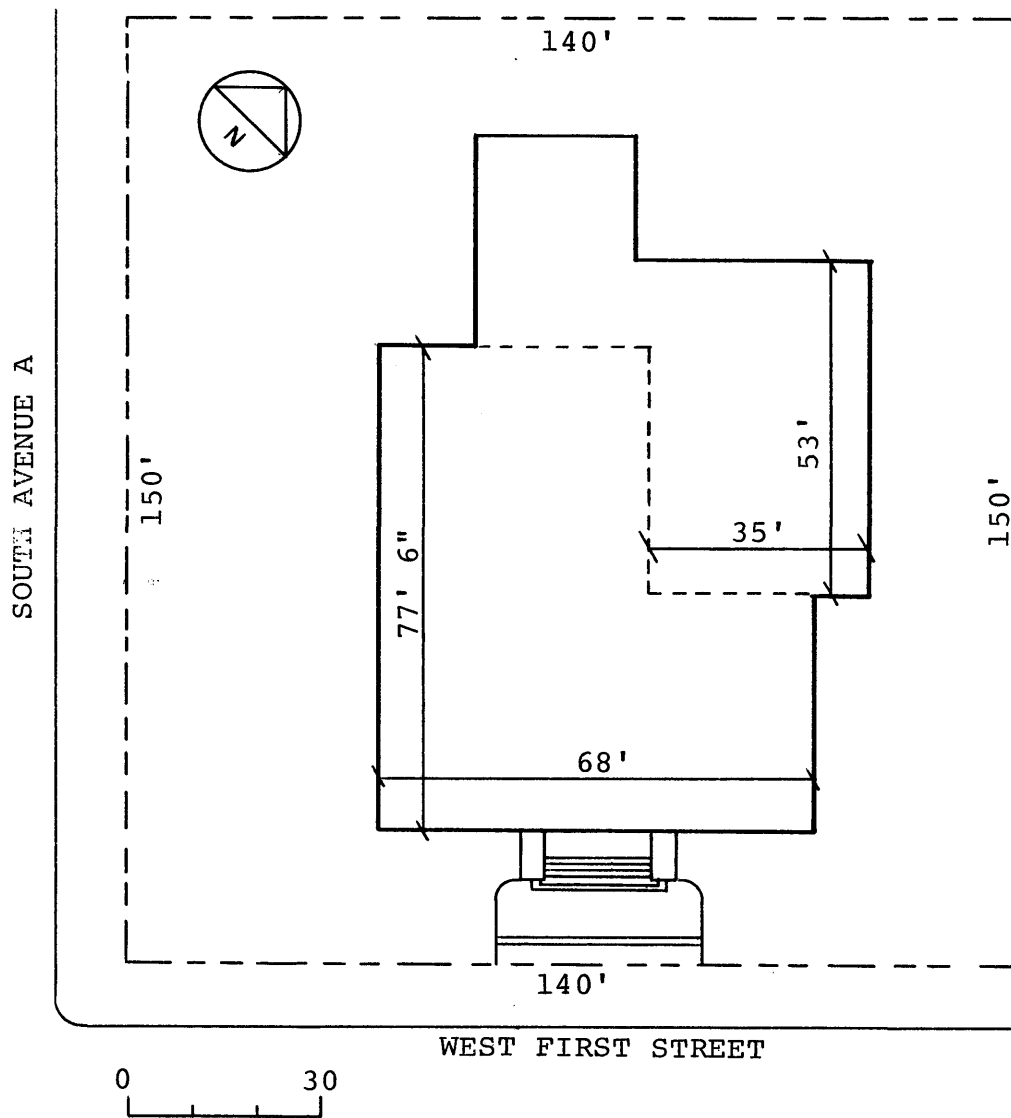
The dedication program was described on June 4th, the day before the event. The program included band music, singing by the Meador Sisters, brief remarks of visiting state and federal officials, and a dedication address by Congressman Dempsey. The paper wrote that Dempsey deserved "considerable credit for securing the federal appointment for the building." An article of June 8th described the impressive event, which included many "prominent citizens of Portales and Roosevelt county who shared honors in securing the building." State Senator Floyd Kennedy, the Tribune reported, "mentioned WPA and PWA projects in Portales. He gave special mention to the projects of the Eastern New Mexico Junior College, the Public Schools, and the forthcoming Court House and Jail project." Cong. Dempsey stated that: "It is due to your progressive work and evidences of rapid and substantial growth in recent years that the government saw fit to place this building here." Dempsey also promised to work for other projects Portales was seeking, particularly city mail carrier service and the courthouse jail project.

Two months later the Tribune reported "POST OFFICE TO RECEIVE MURAL." A mural by Theodore Van Solen, "noted artist of New York," was to be placed over the door to the office of Postmistress Lillian Howard. Van Solen had conferred with Howard and said he had one year to complete the painting and that he was required to submit a sketch before beginning the original work. Howard explained to the Tribune that the mural would depict the historical background of the area and the color scheme would blend with the "wall tints" of the post office. The Tribune concluded by writing: "Postmistress Howard stated that the Portales post office is one of the few in the southwest to receive mural paintings for its walls."

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

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

Photo No. 1 (negative #10A)
6. View to northwest

Photo No. 2 (negative #13A)
6. View to west

Photo No. 3 (negative #16A)
6. View to north

Photo No. 4 (negative #4A)
6. Lobby mural