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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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NATIONAL
REGISTER

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 O'Neill United States Post Office
other names/site number HT13-131

2. Location

street & number 204 North 4th Street N/A not for publication
city, town O'Neill N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Holt code 089 zip code 68763

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>1</u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>2</u>	<u> </u> objects
			<u> </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Nebraska Post Offices Which Contain Section Artwork (1938-1942)
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Bob Pusehenborg DSHPO 4/2/92
Signature of certifying official Date
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register. 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:)
Helena Byrne 5/11/92
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government/Post Office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government/Post Office**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brickwalls Brickroof Asphaltother Limestone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The O'Neill United States Post Office is located at the corner of 4th and Clay Streets, southwest of the Holt County Courthouse in O'Neill, a north-central Nebraska city (1990 population: 3,852). The one-story red brick Georgian Revival style building is a typical example of a Class C or D post office built from standardized plans in the 1930's. The nomination includes one contributing object: a flag pole.

Symmetrical in design, the post office measures approximately 58 by 72 feet. The five bay main facade features a slightly projecting central pavilion with three round arched openings. The main raised entry displays double doors with decorative panels above, swag motifs and a fanlight. The two remaining openings consist of rectangular-shaped window units of multi-paned sash, fanlight and lower decorative panels. Keystones set in brick arches are found above the three main openings. Other fenestration consists of 12-over-12 pane double hung windows with brick jack arches with keystones. Other features include a stone water table, wall cornice, and a parapet wall with stone coping which has a linear carved stone plaque which reads: "United States Post Office O'Neill Nebraska." The building exhibits good integrity; modifications include replacement of the front entry doors and infill of the fanlight windows. Construction began in the fall of 1936 and the building was completed in the summer of 1937 (Holt County Independent, May 28, July 2, 1937).

A mural entitled "Baling Hay in Holt County in the Early Days," by Eugene Trentham is located on the south lobby wall above the postmaster's door which is flanked by wood framed, glass-enclosed bulletin boards. The oil-on-canvas mural which measures 11 by 4 feet, occupies the typical space for murals commissioned by the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts program in a Class C or D post office. The commission was awarded to Denver artist Eugene Trentham in October, 1937, and the completed mural was installed by the artist in May, 1938 (National Archives Record Group 121, Entry 133, Box 61).

Painted in bright blue, gold, and white tones, the mural depicts a group of men stacking and baling hay using a horse-powered baling machine. The vivid, intense colors of the mural, combined with a composition almost entirely limited to one plane, convey a sense of bright sunlight on a hot

 See continuation sheet

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summer's day. The baling machine is partially obscured by the men and horses. In the center foreground, a figure lifts loose hay and another figure presses it into a machine. To the right, a figure leads two grey horses that power the machine; square hay bales emerge from the machine which is partially obscured by a mound of loose hay.

Several figures are located near a one-dimensional wall of stacked bales: one lifts bales and the other drinks water. Two grey horses are to the left of the bales; a man with pitchfork in hand holds the bridle of one while another figure is astride a horse. All of the men in the scene are dressed in identical blue overalls, white shirts and hats. The one-dimensional, single plane of the mural is relieved only in the right background where a wagon pulled by two grey horses is driven by a figure perched on the enormous mound of hay. Beyond the wagon a rounded, indistinct grove of trees frames the scene, provides additional depth, and reinforces a sense of bright sunlight on a summer day.

The lobby interior is in excellent condition and retains its original ceramic tile floor, woodwork and wainscoting. The lobby also appears to retain its original light fixtures of white glass globes suspended on chains. According to Section records, these fixtures were to have been altered a year after the mural was installed by removal of approximately 12 inches of the chains. A varnished wooden vestibule projects into the lobby; it is an original design feature typical of Class C and D standardized post office designs developed in the 1930's. In 1981 the mural was cleaned and restored by an art conservator under contract with the United States Postal Service; it is in excellent condition.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Art
Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1938

Significant Dates

1938

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Trentham, Eugene: Artist
Simon, Louis: Supervising Architect
Marchbank, J. H.: Contractor

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

The O'Neill 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, "Baling Hay in Holt County in the Early Days," was painted by Denver artist Eugene Trentham and installed in May, 1938.

The oil-on-canvas mural which measures 11 by 4 feet, is located on the lobby wall directly above the postmaster's door in the typical location for murals installed in a Class C or D post office. The mural is an excellent example of artwork commissioned for post offices through the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts from 1934-1943. Painted in intense blue, gold, and white tones, the mural depicts a group of men baling hay with a horse-powered baling machine. The mural's local agricultural theme executed in a realistic style make it an excellent example of government sponsored Regionalism.

In October, 1937, Denver artist Eugene Trentham received a notice from the Section inviting him to submit designs for the O'Neill, Nebraska, post office mural. Trentham was selected for the commission on the basis of designs submitted for a Virginia mural competition. The letter cited the amount of the commission, \$570, and the payment schedule: one-third after preliminary sketches had been approved; one-third after a full-size cartoon was approved; and the remainder after the mural was installed and photographed. The letter also informed the artist that the mural would have to be completed by May 31, 1938. Included with the notice were building blueprints and dimensions of the mural space. Trentham immediately accepted the commission and informed Assistant Section Chief Rowan that he would begin work on preliminary sketches.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Gilbert, Dorothy B., ed. Who's Who in American Art. Vol. IV, 1940-1947. (Washington, D.C.: The American Federation of Arts, 1947).

Holt County Independent. Aug 21, 1936; May 28, July 2, 1937.

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.

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

Acreeage of property Less than one acre.

UTM References

A

1	4
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5	2	8	9	7	0
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4	7	0	0	6	0	5
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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 21 through 27 & south 1/2 of alley on north side of lot 27, Fahy's Gillespie subdivision lots 14, 15, 16, Block 9, Original Town of O'Neill, Holt County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

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

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carol Ahlgren, Architectural Historian

organization Nebraska State Historical Society date August, 1991

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city or town Lincoln state Nebraska zip code 68501

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Section records do not indicate whether or not Trentham visited O'Neill; he may have simply written to the postmaster and town librarian for appropriate themes. In February, 1938, Trentham submitted his preliminary sketches of "Baling Hay in Holt County in the Early Days." The design was approved and the Section informed the artist that he had achieved a "rather charming pattern" with unusual color.

In April, 1938, the Section reminded Trentham that his contract was approaching its end and that he should submit a photograph of the full-size cartoon. In May, Trentham submitted a photograph of the half-finished mural and Section officials critiqued the work. The artist was informed that the mural appeared to be progressing satisfactorily but it was suggested that one of the horses and a central figure did not seem "entirely realized," and that the spatial relationships were not completely convincing. Several weeks later Trentham corrected the problems and installed the mural. O'Neill postmaster Agnes Sullivan wrote to the Section that the public had made "very favorable" comments.

Eugene Trentham, a Tennessee native, was listed as a painter and teacher in Who's Who in American Art (1940-47; 1953). The O'Neill mural represents his only post office commission under the Section of Fine Arts program. From 1935-1939, however, Trentham was an artist in the Mural and Easel Painting Division of the WPA Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) in Denver. During that time he was selected by the WPA/FAP administrators to prepare an essay for inclusion in an anthology concerning the program's accomplishments, written by the painters, sculptors, muralists and administrators who were involved. The book, Art for the Millions, was not published until 1973.

Trentham's essay included a description of the source of inspiration for his art: "an impression that has always fascinated me. . .the vision of color one gets on a hot summer day when the sun's rays are beating down on different colored surfaces and textures," (O'Connor, ed., 1973). The O'Neill post office mural is an excellent example of Trentham's use of color and his fascination with light. In 1939, he received a Guggenheim Fellowship; during the 1930's and '40's, his work was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art and the World's Fair (1939). In 1940, Trentham joined the faculty of the University of Texas at Austin.

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

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O'Connor, Francis V. Ed. Art for the Millions: Essays From the 1930's by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project. (Greenwich CT: New York Graphics Society, Ltd., 1973).

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