

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JUL 31 1975
DATE ENTERED	SEP 5 1975

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Red Cross Canteen (the nation's first)

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Rock Island Depot

—NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

El Reno

— VICINITY OF

No. 6

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Oklahoma

40

Canadian

017

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Canadian County Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

Rock Island Depot

STATE

CITY, TOWN

El Reno

— VICINITY OF

Oklahoma

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of the County Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

Canadian County Courthouse

STATE

CITY, TOWN

El Reno

Oklahoma

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Red Cross Canteen Survey

DATE

1975

—FEDERAL —STATE  COUNTY —LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Canadian County Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

El Reno

STATE

Oklahoma



# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> _PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> _ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> _COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> _LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> _RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> _1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> _ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> _CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> _LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> _SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> _1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> _AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> _ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> _LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> _SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> _1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> _ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> _EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> _1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> _ART	<input type="checkbox"/> _ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> _MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> _THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> _1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> _COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> _EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> _PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> _TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> _1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> _COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> _INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> _POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> _OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> _INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1918 - 1919

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Let urban cynics sniff at the quality of life in rural areas. Let cosmopolites shrug their shoulders in bemused bewilderment at simplistic patriotism. Let sophisticates scoff at the selfless outpouring of time and effort, by ordinary work-a-day citizens, on behalf of an ideal. El Reno's trail-blazing Red Cross Canteen refutes all such hollow gestures and dramatizes the common-sense, self-help approach to problem-solving that characterized the American frontier and, to a very real extent, still characterizes the American spirit today.

\* \* \*

When the United States went to war in 1917 the nation became a beehive of military activity. To the railroads went the task of transporting, not only needed military supplies, but also the hundreds of thousands of young men who were to use them. As the division point of a major railroad, at a major junction of its east-west and north-south lines, El Reno soon became one of the Southwest's busiest rail centers. Here engines and crews were changed, aged and over-taxed equipment repaired to keep the supply of men and materials rolling.

Delays, of course, were inevitable. The community soon became aware of the need for a place where en route military personnel could find something to eat, drink, and relax. And the good ladies of the TBA - a local bridge club - promptly decided to provide just such a rest-stop facility. Thus was born, in early 1918, the idea for what has since become known as the Red Cross Canteen. A local Red Cross chapter had been organized here the previous year. The TBA suggestion envisioned erection of a building to provide headquarters for assembling supplies needed by the some 1,000 servicemen aboard each of the many troop trains passing through El Reno.

In true frontier fashion, the Rock Island donated old telegraph poles and carmen from the line's El Reno shops gave of their time and skills to erect the log-cabin style building. It was dedicated August 1, 1918, with members of the local Woodmen of the World (WOW) lodge in charge. Fittingly enough, Congressman Scott Ferris was the principal speaker and a resident priest, Father R. Stephens, gave a brief address. Constance Cromer and Malcolm E. Phelps, prominent El Reno doctor, participated in flag raising ceremonies. And volunteer Red Cross workers were soon dispensing to passing troops cookies, sandwiches, cigarettes, candy, snuff, harmonicas, writing paper, and other items ... including turpentine!

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Files of the El Reno Tribune and the American, El Reno's two newspapers, local Red Cross chapter records, and interviews with old-timers ... all put together in an unpublished manuscript by H. Merle Woods, American publisher and long-time El Reno resident.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY One Acre  
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 1	5, 9, 4, 4, 3, 5	3, 9, 3, 2, 2, 1, 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Kent Ruth, Deputy

ORGANIZATION

Oklahoma Historical Society

DATE

July 1975

STREET & NUMBER

Historical Building

TELEPHONE

405/884-5456

CITY OR TOWN

Oklahoma City

STATE

Oklahoma

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

*[Signature]*

TITLE

State Preservation Officer

DATE

28 July 75

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*[Signature]*

DATE

9/5/75

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

*[Signature]*

DATE

9-2-75

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*[Signature]*

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

Red Cross Canteen (the nation's first)

No complete records exist. But available figures show that between June 1918 and October 1919 no less than 30,717 soldiers, 205 sailors, 7 marines, and 8,366 draftees were served, along with 15 Red Cross nurses and 156 sick and injured personnel.

The idea of a rail-side canteen spread like wildfire, fueled by appreciative officers and men who sent back cards and letters praising the Red Cross for its fine service. The Canadian County unit became aware of the great demand, soon added a kitchen to the original facility. Meanwhile, similar canteens were being opened at principal rail centers across the country.

After the war the need for the canteen disappeared and it was closed. Some years later the hut was moved to Legion Park, where it served for a time as headquarters for the Boy Scouts. Then, abandoned, it deteriorated to the point where its destruction as an eyesore was advocated. In the meantime, however, the Canadian County Historical Society had been organized and the historical significance of the structure was becoming generally recognized. Mrs. Marie Dambach, a World War II canteen worker, eventually bought the dilapidated structure, and a campaign to return it to the Rock Island station grounds began. The old depot, meanwhile, had been converted into the Society's museum and the old canteen was moved back to the depot grounds for restoration. This time the Oklahoma legislature provided some funds, but much of the work itself was still volunteer - including that of carpenter Karl Dittmer and El Reno Mayor Earle Penwright.

The restored Red Cross Canteen was rededicated June 7, 1975 - fittingly enough, as a Bicentennial celebration. Mildred Morris, one of the original 1918 staff members, was on hand to show visitors through the historic building. It is now a part of the Canadian County Historical Society museum complex.