

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED FEB 12 1986
DATE ENTERED MAR 14 1986

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Great Falls Post Office & Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

Great Falls Post Office & Courthouse

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

215 First Avenue North

NA NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Great Falls

NA VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2

STATE

Montana

CODE

30

COUNTY

Cascade

CODE

013

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thematic Group	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

U.S. Postal Service, Western Regional Headquarters

STREET & NUMBER

850 Cherry Avenue

CITY, TOWN

San Bruno

NA VICINITY OF

California

STATE

94099

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Cascade County Assessor's Office

STREET & NUMBER

415 Second Avenue North

CITY, TOWN

Great Falls

STATE

Montana

59401

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic Resources of Great Falls

DATE

1984

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Montana Office of Historic Preservation

CITY, TOWN

Helena

STATE

Montana

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE <u>NA</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Great Falls Main Post Office is three stories in height with a two story addition on its west side (1937). The raised basement is reinforced concrete, which along with steel framing supports the above-grade structure. Brick is used to face the facades with trim provided by sandstone. The original portion of the building is symmetrical, with a projecting central salient. The central section contains three segmental-arched entry bays and aligned over the entry bays are round-arched multi-light windows which extend through the second and third floors. The flanking wings are divided into four bays each. The Second Renaissance Revival design is identified by horizontally rusticated brick on the first story, with smooth finish above. The variation in window treatment from floor to floor and enriched projecting cornice.

The west wing was added in 1937, and is consistent with the original structure in design style, detailing and materials. However, it disrupts the symmetry of the original building, but not to the degree that it severely detracts from the character or quality of the original building. Additions were also made to the northwest and northeast corners of the building in 1967. Both are modern and inconsistent with the original, but are not obtrusive with respect to primary view corridors.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The foundation and basement walls consist of concrete (1937 and 1968 additions), and sandstone and brick (original building). Sandstone is also used for facing on the above ground basement wall, window sills and lentils, belt courses, and coping. The above ground stories are constructed of a light buff colored brick. Terra cotta is used for the entablature. Granite is used for the entry stairs of the original building and 1937 addition. The roof is flat, built-up tar composition.

The original building is three stories in height and symmetrical in front elevation. The front facade

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1. Sanborn Map 1900, sheet 23 and 1929, sheet 22.
2. Great Falls Daily Tribune, various articles 1906-1912.
3. Floor Plans, 1912.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.89 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 2	4 7 7 1 8 0	5 2 6 1 3 1 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 1-3, West 45 feet of 4 and lots 8-14, Block original townsite
 The site is "L" shapes with 350 feet of frontage along First Avenue
 North, 150 feet of frontage along Third Street, 320 feet along Second
 Avenue North.
 Site size = 82,250 sq. ft.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
NA	NA	NA	NA
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
NA	NA	NA	NA

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

H.J. "Jim" Kolva

ORGANIZATION

Institute for Urban and Local Studies

DATE

September, 1985

STREET & NUMBER

W 705 1st. Avenue

TELEPHONE

(509) 458-6219

CITY OR TOWN

Spokane

STATE

Washington

99204

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES___ NO___ NONE___

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is National State Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

James T. Coe

TITLE

Director, Office of Real Estate

DATE

02/06/86

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

See continuation sheet for listing DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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(south) is divided into three equally spaced sections with the center section (main entry vestibule) projecting nine feet from the flanking wings. The center section is divided into three bays while the wings each contain four bays. Granite stairs with flanking buttresses extend along the entire section. Free-standing cast iron lamps (with palmette motif base) rest atop the buttresses. The center of three entry bays on the first floor and three large windows (aligned above the doors) which extend from the top of the first floor to the middle of the third floor.

The entries consist of double aluminum framed, glass doors with single paned glass sidelights. A single light transom window is set above the doors and sidelights. A molded terra cotta door head projects slightly from the facade and suggests a marquee. A seven-light transom covered with a wrought iron grille is located above the door head. Each entry is framed by a segmented arch with brickwork that suggests rusticated stone voussoirs. Horizontal rustication of the brick extends across the entire front and end facades of the first floor.

A molded sandstone string course separates the first and second floor levels. The second to third floor windows over the entry doors are 18-over-18 light double hung wood sash. Wrought iron balconies are set along the bottom of the windows. A molded transom separates the double hung lights and multi-paned fan light. A semi-circular sandstone arch frames the windows. Slightly projecting, flat brick pilasters with simple sandstone bases and capitals separate the window bays. The pilasters support a simple terra cotta entablature, decorated with fretwork along the dentil band and block modillions beneath the cornice. A simple parapet rests atop the cornice. This motif is extended along the entire front and end facades.

The sections of the original front facade flanking the center section consist of the same materials and

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essentially the same design motif as the previously described center section. These wings are each divided into four bays with the second and third floor windows aligned directly over the first floor windows. The first floor windows are 8-over-8 light, double hung wood sash. The windows are framed with a flat arch (vertical brick pattern) and sandstone sill and are slightly recessed. The second floor windows are 15-over-15 light, double hung wood sash framed by sandstone lintels and sills. The third floor windows are 8-over-8 light, double hung wood sash. The second and third floor window bays are slightly recessed and divided by vertical brick piers. The entablature and parapet are identical to that previously described for the center section.

The 1937 addition consists of a wing added to the west end of the original structure. The wing is two stories in height and is nearly identical in design to the first and second floors of the original building. A single entry, identical to the entry bays of the original building, is centered in the wing's front facade. Granite stairs with aluminum hand railings provide access to the doors. Cast iron lanterns (torch motif) with milk glass spherical globes are attached to the facade on either side of the entry.

The west facade consists of the 1937 addition to the front (south) and 1968 addition to the rear (north). The side facade of the 1937 addition is identical in design treatment as the front. Five window bays divide the facade in a symmetrical arrangement. The 1968 addition is one story in height and utilizes a light buff colored brick and sandstone as the primary materials, but is modern in design. The facade consists of three vertically oriented modern windows divided by white concrete millions adjacent to the rear of the 1937 addition, a flat brick wall section, and 14 vertically oriented windows divided by white concrete millions and flat brick rear corner. The windows are aluminum framed smoked glass. Brick panels are set

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below the windows between the concrete millions. The basement wall which extends to the brick panels, wall, and millions, is faced with sandstone. Sandstone is also used for the cornice.

The east facade is dominated by the original building with the single story 1968 addition recessed to the rear. The facade is divided into five symmetrically arranged bays. The facade design is identical in treatment to the front, with a rusticated brick pattern on the first floor and flat brick pilasters separating the second and third floor window bays. The first floor entry is centered and identical in detail to the front entries. A concrete ramp has been added to the north side of the entry to allow handicapped access. The 1968 addition to the rear is similar in design to that previously described on the west facade.

The rear facade of the first floor is dominated by the 1968 addition which covers the original. The mailing platform (single story) is divided into 11 loading bays which consist of concrete platform and aluminum doors. A light buff colored brick faces the wall. The roof is flat, built-up tar composition with metal flashing. The second and third floors of the original building are visible above the addition and are essentially the same as the previously described facades.

The basement includes storage, maintenance rooms, and offices. The materials of the original basement consist of concrete floors, brick and concrete walls, and plaster ceilings. The basement portion of the 1937 addition consists of poured concrete floor, walls, and ceiling. Offices in this portion and in the 1968 addition have either carpeted or vinyl asbestos tile on the floors, plaster walls, and acoustical tile ceilings. The halls of the 1968 addition consist of vinyl asbestos floors, plaster walls, and acoustical tile ceilings. Restrooms consist of quarry tile floors, plaster walls with ceramic tile wainscoting, and plaster ceilings.

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The first floor includes the lobby, work room, and offices. The lobby floors are terrazzo with marble edging (gray). A green marble base strip runs along the wall. Red oak is used for wainscotting (7-foot). post office box framing, and door and window trim. The walls are plaster and the ceiling acoustical tile (dropped from the original ceiling). The offices generally consist of vinyl asbestos tile floors and carpeted floors, plaster walls, and acoustical tile ceilings. Red oak is used for trim in the offices of the original building. The work room of the original and 1937 addition consists of hardwood floors, plaster walls, and plaster ceilings. The floor of the 1968 addition is asphalt plank with a portion carpeted.

The second and third floors consist of offices and the federal courthouse. The hallway floor consist of terrazzo with marble edging. The walls are plaster with marble base strip and oak trim and the ceiling is acoustical tile. The offices consist of vinyl asbestos or carpeted floors, plaster walls, and acoustical tile ceilings. Oak is used for trim. The second floor courtroom (extends into third floor) has a carpeted floor, plaster walls with red oak wainscotting, and plaster ceiling. The ceiling beams are decorated with fretwork and running wave pattern molding. Plastic grilles (12' by 2') over fluorescent lights are located in the recesses between the crossbeams. Red oak is also used extensively for trim and furniture.

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POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

As the city's first federally constructed post office, it secured the position of Great Falls as a host to federal activities in the north-central area of Montana. The building came during the city's most significant growth era and is a legacy of the federal government's recognition of the city's regional importance. The securing of appropriations for the building, site acquisition, and construction were significant events in the city's progress. These activities involved the action of local citizens and their elected officials. The local importance of the building is given testament by the donation of a portion of the site in order to ensure construction. The addition of the west wing to the building in 1937 signified further growth of the city and also coincided with the P.W.A. Civic Building of the same period.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Great Falls, the county seat of Cascade County, located in central Montana, is the state's second largest city with a metropolitan area population of 75,500 (1980). The city is the service center for the area's farming, livestock, and mining activities.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition passed through the Great Falls area and portaged the falls in 1805. Issac Stevens and John Mullan led military reconnaissance missions through the area in the mid-1800s. Paris Gibson settled in the area in the early 1880s, platted the City of Great Falls in 1883, and was appointed the first postmaster on July 10, 1884. The Great Northern (Montana Central Railroad), at the direction of James J. Hill, reached Great Falls in 1887. Great Falls was incorporated in 1888 and Paris Gibson was elected its first mayor. After rapid growth stimulated by the coming of the railroad and mining/refining activity, the community experienced an economic downturn in the early 1890s (related to national financial crisis and

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railroad strike). The diversity of the local economy allowed Great Falls to spring back and growth resumed.

By 1900 the population of the city was 15,000, and although population growth leveled off in the first decade, the business district flourished with major building activity. Between 1910 and 1920 Great Falls experienced a significant influx in population as a result of copper refining, electrical power development, railroading, and homestead farmers. This period again showed significant construction in the city's commercial district during which some of the city's most impressive buildings were erected.

Great Falls experienced only moderate growth in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s. After the Crash of 1929 the city's economy stagnated. Although the founding of the College of Great Falls and the infusion of Federal Works Project money in the 1930s aided the economy, the growth rate of the 1920s declined. The Army-Air Corps established East Base in Great Falls in the early 1940s for air transport and later bomber training operations. The base was renamed Malstrom in 1955 and is presently an important element in the nation's nuclear missile defense operations, and an important contributor to the local population and economy.

The Great Falls MPO is located one block north of the city's central business district. The northeast corner of the block in which the post office is located is occupied by the Rolland Apartments (two-story brick, 1916) and the Sparling Hotel (two and three story brick, 1905 and 1913). Both buildings are historically significant. Residential structures are located across Second Avenue north of and to the rear of the post office (1903-1910). The property across Third Street to the east consists of a parking lot and drive-in bank facility. The historically significant Northwest Bank Building (1907-1908) is located on the northwest corner of the First Avenue/Third Street intersection and the

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Rainbow Hotel (1909) with a parking lot to its west is located south of the post office. A service station (1935) and historically significant Lee Forest Garage (1910) are located across Second Street to the west. The post office as well as several of the buildings in its immediate environs are included as contributing structures within the proposed Great Falls Historic District (not yet listed).

LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GREAT FALLS MAIN POST OFFICE

In the local context, the construction of the Great Falls post office was reported in the Great Falls Daily Tribune. Great Falls was experiencing rapid growth between 1900 and 1920. During this period most of the significant downtown buildings were constructed, including those in the immediate vicinity of the post office. A December 13, 1906 article reported that the site for the federal building had been chosen. The proposal of D.D. Lambie and F.P. Atkinson, which offered seven lots on 1st Avenue, was selected out of 11 submitted. A value of \$27,000 was attached to the site, but the owners had donated \$12,000 in land. The proposed post office, estimated at \$200,000, was to be constructed of brick and sandstone.

An article of January 26, 1907 announced that the building site had been settled. The article stated that an appropriation of \$200,000 had been approved in the last session of Congress and that construction was expected to be underway by mid-summer. It was also reported that the building would contain a federal court, customs office, land office, office for Chinese Inspectors, interpreters, and others in the immigration service.

After a year delay, the Tribune reported on January 7, 1908 that the Department of Justice had finally cleared the title. Apparently some problem arose obtaining clear title from the heirs of the Minot estate. The article also stated that Senator Dixon, who introduced

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the bill for the building, and Representative Pray were "highly pleased" at the settlement. Plans were to be drawn immediately. A previous article on January 4th had chastised the "Inexplicable lack of interest and tardiness displayed by the District Attorney's office at Helena" in working to obtain clear title and delaying the project.

On March 31, 1909 it was reported that Great Falls Postmaster E.H. Cooney had received plans of the new federal building for his approval. The article provided a description of the floor plans. A September 1st article announced that the final plans and specifications had been received and that the work would be completed on or before April, 1911. Pressed brick "of the best quality", terra cotta, Oregon pine, maple, and quarter sawed oak would be used. The building would use both electricity and gas. A November article, unrelated to the post office, reported that 1908 had been a banner year for construction and that over one million dollars had been spent on new buildings.

Several articles in 1911 discussed the progress of the new federal building. A January 1st article showed a rendering which showed how the building would look when finished. On October 16th, it was reported that the federal building was nearly completed: "... interior one of simple beauty ... it will be provided with quarters unsurpassed by any city in the northwest and better than any other city in Montana can boast. ... will meet the needs when the city has grown past the 100,000 mark". It was also stated that the simplicity of the building would "forcibly" stand out, but that the simplicity would bring out a beauty that would make a strong appeal to all. A December 17th article also praised Great Falls' first federal building as one in which all the citizens could be proud. A three-quarter page article with photograph described the building's interior and features. "... this city will have one of the most modern and most attractive post offices in the

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Northwest and one unsurpassed in the State of Montana.

Finally, in January 1912, the new federal building was opened. Articles of the 16th, 19th, and 20th, discussed the public reception held on January 19th. The article of January 20th, "Thousands Inspect Federal Building" provide a lengthy description of the building and reported that the building would open for business on Monday. Postmaster E.J. Cooney suttered some minor embarrassment when showing visitors the fine view from the roof -- upon reentry the group discovered that the door was locked, stranding them on the roof.

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