

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

SEP 16 1989

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 Oswego United States Post Office

other names/site number Same

2. Location

street & number 819 4th Street

not for publication

city, town Oswego

vicinity

state Kansas

code KS

county Labette

code 099

zip code 67356

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
Kansas Post Offices that Contain Treasury
Department Section Artwork, 1936-1942

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.

Karen Powers State Historic Preservation Officer March 1, 1989
Signature of certifying official Date

Kansas 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.
 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:)

Carey Shue 10-17-89

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)

20th Century Revival: Classical
Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brickwalls Brick

roof Asphaltother Limestone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Oswego United States Post Office (c. 1938-1939) is located at 819 4th Street in Oswego, Labette County, Kansas (pop. 2,218). The one story, gable roofed, red brick building has an eastern facade orientation. The original building measures approximately sixty-one feet from north to south and fifty-eight feet from east to west. In 1971 a twenty-three foot by seventy-one foot addition was added to the east side of the building. A double door pierces the center of the original building's facade. A classical wooden architrave surrounds the doorway. Steps lead up to the doorway. Two pairs of large, multi-paned windows surmounted by limestone lintels and underscored by limestone sills, flank the doorway. Similar fenestration is employed on the lesser elevations of both the original unit and the addition. The facade of the addition is not fenestrated but is marked by the outlines of windows achieved brick coursing and limestone corner blocks. A limestone and/or cast stone course defines the watertable of both building units. A wooden classical entablature graces the upper wall of both buildings. A fanlight pierces each of the original building's gable ends. A wooden cupola surmounts the center of the original building's roof. The addition has a flat roof. This post office is an example of the smaller class C or D standardized design type that was repeated throughout the country during the 1930s.

The mural, "Farm Life", was installed on the west wall of the post office lobby above the postmaster's door and the two bulletin boards that flank. This is the traditional location for Section artwork in the smaller class C and D post offices. "Farm Life" is a tempera on canvas mural depicting the four seasons of farming life. A bull, cow, and calf are pictured on the left corner of the canvas, representing breeding and springtime. A farmer chops wood in the left center "panel" during a cold, grey winter day. Golden wheat waves in the summer wind on a slightly overcast day in the center "panel". The right "panel" shows a farmer feeding hogs on a warm summer day. A windmill and white frame house stand behind the woodchopper. A red, bow arch roofed barn stands behind the wheat, abutted on the right by a glazed tile silo. Two trees frame the background, bare on the early spring and winter side and sparsely leaved on the right side. The outer edges of the

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1

sky and the bottom edge of the canvas fade out into the wall, the clear distinction between the end of the mural and the beginning of the wall is purposely blurred. The sky is grey and cloudy on the winter side, changing to clear and blue on the summer side. Larter employs a primary palette of blue, red, brown, and gold for the mural.

The mural was installed on July 31, 1940. It measured 12'10" by 4'6" before installation and is surmounted by a cornice. In August, 1973 the mural was assessed having a slight defect. This defect may still exist as it does not appear that the mural has ever been restored.

A varnished, wooden vestibule projects into the lobby, cutting off some view of the mural. This is a traditional design feature found in most of the post offices included in this nomination. The floor retains its original terrazzo tiles and the wainscoting retains its original marble panels. The postmaster's door and bulletin boards retain their varnished wooden surrounds. The original hanging light fixtures have been replaced with almost flush mounted fluorescent lights.

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
Social History

Period of Significance

1940
1940
1940

Significant Dates

1940
1940
1940

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Larter, Robert E.: Artist
Simon, Louis: Supervising Architect

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

The Oswego United States Post Office (c. 1938-1939) is being nominated to the National Register as part of the Kansas Post Office Artwork (1936-1942) Thematic Resources nomination at the local and state levels of significance under criteria A and C for its historical association with the Treasury Department's Section program and for the artistic significance of the mural that it contains. The mural, "Farm Life", was painted by Topeka, Kansas artist Robert E. Larter (1910 - ?) in 1940. Because the mural is less than fifty years old, criteria consideration G, which allows for exceptional significance in the case of properties achieving significance within the past fifty years, is also a factor. The National Register has identified post offices containing Section artwork as being exceptionally significant if they retain integrity from their period of significance.

"Farm Life" is a tempera on canvas mural depicting the four seasons of farming life. A bull, a cow, and a calf are pictured on the left corner of the canvas, representing breeding and springtime. A farmer chops wood in the left center "panel" during a cold, grey winter day. Golden wheat waves in the fall wind on a slightly overcast day in the center "panel". The right "panel" shows a farmer feeding hogs on a warm summer day. A windmill and white farm house stand behind the woodchopper. A red, bow arch roofed barn stands behind the wheat, abutted on the right by a glazed tile silo. Two trees frame the background, bare on the early spring and winter side and sparsely leaved on the right side, as if it was dying. The outer edges of the sky and the bottom edge of the canvas fade out into the wall, the clear distinction between the end of the mural and the beginning of the wall is purposely blurred. The sky is grey and cloudy on the winter side, changing to clear and blue on the summer side. "Farm Life" is a collage, emphasizing the man's role as provider. Larter employs a primary palette of blue, red brown, and gold for the mural. These colors are used by themselves for separate units, such as the white house, the red barn, the gold

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Fresno Bee, 20 February 1941.

General Services Administration. Treasury Department Section Records - Kansas Post Offices. Oswego, Kansas.

Oswego Democrat, 26 July 1940.

Svedlow, Dr. Anthony V. (Mulvane Gallery, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas). Personal interview with Martha Hagedorn-Krass, January 8, 1988.

Topeka Capital, 22 September 1940; 15 March 1941.

Wichita Eagle-Beacon, 22 May 1972.

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:
Kansas State Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

A 15 312620 4115360
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is located on lots 13-17; Block 24, Oswego, Kansas. The property is bounded to the south by 4th Street, to the west by Illinois, and to the north and east by alleys.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire parcel that is historically associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Martha Hagedorn-Krass, Architectural Historian
 organization Kansas State Historical Society date March 1, 1989
 street & number 120 W. 10th telephone 913-296-5264
 city or town Topeka state Kansas zip code 66612

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 2

wheat, and the blue sky. Larter's farmers seem larger than life, representing all farmers and the dignity therein. "Farm Life" is representative of the regional, social realism that was funded under the Section program.

The extent of community involvement in the development of the subject material and presentation of the mural is not clear in the Oswego case. Larter received the commission as a result of an honorable mention in the St. Louis Post Office Section competition. Larter received the contract for the mural on April 1, 1940 and installed the mural on July 31, 1940. "Farm Life" was installed on the west wall of the post office lobby above the postmaster's door and the two bulletin boards that flank it. It measured 12'10" by 4'6" before installation and is surmounted by a cornice moulding. Larter received \$750 for the commission. The Oswego Post Office is an example of one of the many smaller class C or D type post offices that received Section artwork in Kansas.

Larter graduated from the Yale University School of Fine Arts in 1934 and taught art in the Newark, New Jersey public schools before joining the faculty of Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas. Larter taught oil painting, costume design, stage and interior design, and public school art at Washburn University, and was on the faculty at the time that he was awarded the Oswego commission.

Please see the Kansas Post Office Artwork (1936-1942) Thematic Resources cover nomination for additional information.