

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 96000934

Date Listed: 8/22/96

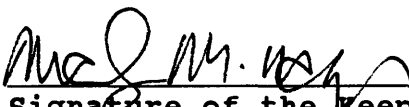
Dickson Post Office
Property Name

Dickson
County

TENNESSEE
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

for 
Signature of the Keeper

9/12/96
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 5

This nomination is amended to show that this former post office is now in private ownership.

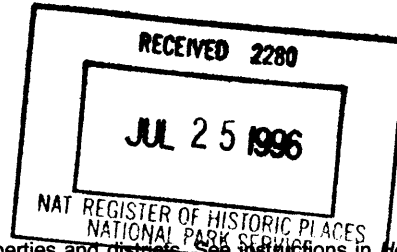
This change was confirmed by the Tennessee SHPO

DISTRIBUTION:
National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

934

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Dickson Post Office

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 201 West College Street N/A not for publication

city or town Dickson N/A vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Dickson code 043 zip code 37055

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Herbert L. Hagan 7/27/96
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, TN Historical Commission
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

M. J. M. [Signature]

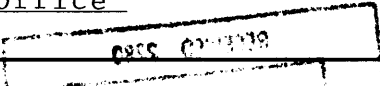
8/23/96

Dickson Post Office

Name of Property

Dickson, Dickson Co., TN

County and State



5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Post Office

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT / Not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Government International Style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

roof OTHER: Composition

other CONCRETE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is: N/A

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Politics/Government

Architecture

Art

Period of Significance

1937-1939

Significant Dates

1937, 1938-39

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Simon, Louis A., Supervising architect
P.W.A.

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

MTSU--Center for Historic Preservation

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

Dickson, TN 48SW

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 6	4 6 5 0 4 0	3 8 9 2 4 4 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Christopher J. Hetzel

organization MTSU--Center for Historic Preservation date January 9, 1996

street & number 1421 East Main Street telephone (615) 898-2947

city or town Murfreesboro state TN zip code 37132

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Susan Adcock

street & number 201 West College telephone _____

city or town Dickson state TN zip code 37055

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Dickson Post Office, Dickson, Dickson Co., TN

SECTION 7: Description

The 1937 United States Post Office in Dickson, Tennessee is an excellent example of the standard architectural plan for federal post offices constructed by the Public Works Administration (PWA) between 1934 and 1943. The PWA was established in 1934 under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department and the 1926 Public Buildings Act.

Louis Simon, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department from 1933 to 1939, designed the Dickson Post Office in a simplified classical style. Called starved classicism or the Government International style, the post office exhibits the classical elements reminiscent of early federal buildings and influences of the twentieth-century modern and International styles. The classical influences include the building's symmetrical design and the vertical emphasis of its exterior and fenestration. The modern influences are visible in the building's flat, virtually-unembellished exterior and its simple design. The building's interior also exhibits an open plan, reflecting contemporary trends toward functional space and interchangeable work areas. The Dickson Post Office is the only example of this style in downtown Dickson.

The Dickson Post Office is a basic, one-story, square structure with a basement. It has a flat roof and a concrete foundation. The building's exterior wall surfaces consist of sandstone colored brick in the english bond and concrete details. A concrete ledge, or coping, wraps around the building at the roof line. A second, concrete belt course extends around the building approximately two feet below the roof line. A third concrete belt course wraps around the building approximately one foot above ground level. All the building's windows are recessed and are flanked by a two-tiered decorative treatment in the abutting brick work.

The Dickson Post Office's (south) facade consists of five bays with four, three-over-three, double-hung sash windows and a glazed, metal-framed double door. A crown and a fixed, single-pane light exist above the door. The crown contains the words "Dickson Tenn, 37055," and the light is inscribed with the numbers "201." The centrally located door is inset in concrete.

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Dickson Post Office, Dickson, Dickson Co., TN

Two sandstone brick pilasters and two windows flank the door. These windows are also inset in concrete panels. The concrete areas are recessed and extend vertically between the building's two concrete belt courses. Three engraved, transportation motifs exist in the concrete above the door and two flanking windows. A train, airplane, and ship, these motifs are typical of post office insignia in the Depression era. Each method of transportation represented continuity and prosperity as attained through progress. The outer two, three-over-three, double hung windows are slightly narrower than the inner-two windows. They possess wood frames set in concrete, wide concrete lintels, and concrete sills. Eleven concrete steps lead to the main entrance. These steps are flanked by iron handrails and two, rectangular concrete pillars. An original lamp post exists on each pillar. The two lamp posts possess decorative floral motifs.

The building's east elevation, facing North Mulberry Street, has four asymmetrical bays. The far left bay projects from the exterior wall and contains a single, three-over-three, double-hung sash window. The other three bays each contain a single, two-over-two, double-hung sash window. All of the windows possess wood frames set in concrete, wide concrete lintels, and concrete sills. A plaque is set in the east elevation's southwest corner. The cornerstone states that Henry Morgenthau, Jr. was secretary of the treasury, James A. Farley was the postmaster general, Louis A. Simon was the supervising architect, and Neal A. Melick was the supervising engineer when the building was constructed in 1936. The east elevation's basement level has a single, white-painted, glazed metal door, and three, three-over-three, double-hung sash windows. A concrete stairway leads to the basement level along the east elevation's south end. The stairwell contains one of the four windows and the metal door. Three other windows exist in a second excavated section. The windows are each covered with white-painted, metal security bars. A white-painted, metal railing extends around the stairwell and the excavated section. A small lamp, meant to illuminate the stairwell, protrudes from the lower concrete belt course.

The building's north (rear) elevation has five, asymmetrical bays. Two, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows, with wooden frames set in concrete, exist in the two outer bays. They have wide concrete lintels and concrete sills. The building possesses

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a rear extension projecting from the north elevation's three central bays. Three, four-over-four, fixed windows also exist in the north elevation's three central bays above the rear extension's roof line. A tall, square, sandstone brick chimney is located in the extension's southwest corner, between it and the main building. The north elevation's basement level is evident in two excavated sections located on either side of the rear extension. White-painted, metal railings surround the excavated sections.

The rear extension's exterior is similar to that of the main building. It consists of sandstone brick in the english bond and a concrete ledge (coping) around the roof line. A concrete belt course also wraps around the structure approximately one foot from ground level. It continues the decorative pattern of the main building's lower concrete belt course. Both the extension's east and west elevations possess single, three-over-three, double-hung sash windows with wooden frames and concrete sills. The extension's north elevation contains two doors. One is a glazed, single metal door, and the other is a glazed, double metal door. Both doors open onto a rectangular, concrete loading platform. A flat, cantilevered shed roof shelters this platform. The roof extends beyond the platform's edge and is supported by an exposed, white-painted, metal truss system and two, white-painted metal columns. The columns rest on the concrete platform's two outside corners. A small stairway and metal handrail extend off the platform's east side. It and the loading platform are accessed by a large paved parking lot located behind the building.

The Dickson Post Office's west elevation has four asymmetrical bays. The far right bay projects from the exterior wall and contains a single, three-over-three, double-hung sash window. The other three bays each contain a single, two-over-two, double-hung sash window. All of the windows possess wood frames set in concrete, wide concrete lintels, and concrete sills. A concrete stairwell leads to the building's basement level. It is surrounded by a white-painted, metal railing. The basement level contains a glazed metal door leading to the boiler room and a three-over-three, double-hung sash window. A paved driveway leading to the post office's parking lot runs along side the building's west side.

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Dickson Post Office, Dickson, Dickson Co., TN

The Dickson Post Office's interior possesses most of its original elements. It has white painted walls and stained wood. The building's first floor has twenty foot ceilings and is lighted by rows of free-hanging florescent lights. The windows all have white colored blinds, and radiators exist under each.

The Dickson Post Office's main entrance on the facade leads into a rectangular foyer within the post office lobby. A wood ceiling, two stained wood doors, and two stained wood-framed windows enclose the foyer. The two doors have glazing with six panes over a single panel and enter the lobby on the foyer's east and west ends. They have original brass handle bars and brass base plates. Single one-over-one, fixed sash windows exist in the foyer's east and west sides next to each door. The foyer's north side contains a single, four-over-four, fixed sash window flanked by two one-over-one, fixed sash windows. All the foyer's windows sit on a tile wainscotting. Simple, wood carved pilasters separate the doors and windows. The foyer is approximately eight feet high.

The lobby is the building's most decorated space. It is also the only space the public had access to. The rectangular lobby has a molded cornice and a decorative tile floor. The tile continues up the wall to form a wainscot extending around the room. The room's south wall is four bays wide and contains the entrance and three windows. A bulletin board enclosed in glass exists between the two windows on the south wall's west side. The lobby's west and north walls contain large, open spaces for metal post office boxes. Stained wood paneling borders these spaces on the top and bottom. The post office boxes were removed after the post office closed and are now stored elsewhere in the building. The building's main work room is presently visible through these openings. Connected to the main work room, a narrow space exists between the lobby's west wall and the building's exterior wall. Centered in the lobby's north wall, a wood Dutch door leads to the main work room. A large service window flanks this door on the right. The service window possesses its original hand-cranked metal screen. Two vents pierce the lobby's north wall in the upper left and right corners. Metal screens with Greek key detailing around the edges cover these vents. The lobby's east wall contains a centered, stained wood, panelled door containing the words "102/ POSTMASTER." It leads to the postmaster's

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Dickson Post Office, Dickson, Dickson Co., TN

office. Two glass enclosed, wood framed bulletin boards flank the office door on the right and left. The word "BULLETIN" is inscribed in the top frame of each.

A fresco painted by Edwin Boyd Johnson exists on the wall above the postmaster's office door. It is titled "People of the Soil." The Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture commissioned the mural in 1938. It is five feet high and ten feet wide and is painted directly on the wall. In 1938, "People of the Soil" was the only fresco known to exist in Tennessee.¹ The painting's permanent application subsequently prevented the Postal Service from moving the painting when the post office relocated. Painted in a regional genre similar to that of Thomas Hart Benton, "People of the Soil" portrays individuals in various activities familiar to Dickson County residents in the 1930s. The portrayed individuals represent typical middle to lower class white occupations of a rural community. The painting also contains two African Americans, subjects unusual for post office murals at that time. Johnson expressed racial differences in the figures facial features as well as skin color. The white individuals have large, roman-like noses, while the African Americans have up-turned noses and full lips. With the exception of an intense blue, most of the painting's colors are earth tones.

Moving from left to right, the painting's left half contains half of a gable roofed log cabin. The cabin appears to sit a short distance behind a blonde-haired woman churning butter. She sits on a stool facing left in a three-quarters view. The woman wears a blue dress with buttons down the front and a white collar.

To the right and slightly in front of the woman, a young man carries a burlap colored sack containing bulky objects over his right shoulder. His left arm is raised to support the bag behind his head. The man stands facing the painting's right side, but his torso is slightly twisted, making him appear almost in full view. He has brown hair and wears a khaki, button-down, collared shirt with suspenders and tan pants. The young man wears no shoes.

A black-haired, bearded blacksmith stands to the right and slightly in front of the young man. He wears a blue, short-

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sleeve shirt and a brown apron. Johnson portrayed the blacksmith looking down at his work, while hammering out a horseshoe. The blacksmith holds a horseshoe with tongs in his right hand and a mallet in his left. An anvil sits on a cylindrical block before him.

To the right of the anvil and in the painting's lower center, a blond-haired boy sits on the ground with his right knee against his chest. His other knee rests on the ground. The boy is touching his right foot with his right hand, and his left hand touches the ground, supporting his leaning position. His left hand holds an open book, which rests on the ground to the right. The boy wears a khaki, button-down, collared shirt with a left breast pocket and blue pants. He wears no shoes.

A brown-haired woman sits to the right side of the blacksmith and the young boy. She sits on a stool in three-quarters view facing the painting's right side. The woman wears a green dress with brown shoes. Johnson portrayed the woman peeling potatoes. A large bowl of unpeeled potatoes rests in her lap and her hands are raised to her chest. She holds a small knife in her right hand and a partially peeled potato in her left. The woman is looking down at her work.

Two African American figures stand in the painting's rear, behind the blacksmith and potato peeling woman. An African American man stands in three-quarters view facing the painting's left. He wears a yellow, short sleeve shirt, and his right hand clasps his left arm. An African American woman stands in half view to the right of this man. She appears as if walking toward the painting's left side. The woman carries a hoe over her left shoulder and a bucket of potatoes in her right hand. She wears a wrap on her head, a reddish blouse with white trim, a long blue skirt, and an apron around her waist. Behind the woman to the right, a second log cabin is visible in the distance.

A brown-haired man with a rifle and accompanied by a hunting dog delineates the painting's right side. The man is kneeling on his right knee and faces the painting's right side in three-quarters view. He wears a tan, button-down, collared shirt with a breast pocket and brown pants. He wears no shoes. Johnson portrayed the man placing a ram rod down a barrel loading rifle. A dog

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stands next to the man on the right side with its head turned to face the painting's center. Two trees stand in the background in the painting's upper right corner.

The postmaster's office, located off the lobby's east side, has baseboards and a wood chair rail. The office's west wall contains a doorway leading to the lobby on the left and a second door leading to the main work room on the right. The second door is glazed with a single pane over a single panel. The numbers "103" mark the door's outward side. A wood, two panel door exists on the north wall's far right side. It leads to the postmaster's private bathroom and is marked by the number "104." The bathroom possesses a window in its east wall and has original fixtures (sink and toilet). The floors of the office and bathroom are linoleum tile.

The Dickson Post Office's main work room has hardwood floors and vertical beadboard wainscoting. The ceilings are approximately twenty feet high and have exposed ductwork and rows of hanging, florescent lights. The west wall is four bays wide, but the far left bay is behind the lobby's west wall. The main work room's south wall is the opposite side of the lobby's north wall. The post office box spaces, the two metal vents, the wood Dutch door, and the service window are all visible. A wood panelled partition separates the space behind the service window from the rest of the main work room. Postal workers served customers at the service window in this area.

The partition abuts the east wall of a room enclosure that projects from the main work room's southeast corner. This enclosure includes part of the postmaster's office. The second door to this office (#103) pierces the enclosure's east wall in the space between the service window and the partition. Behind the partition, another doorway in the enclosure's east wall enters a small room that was used as a safe. The safe has a black painted, metal door reinforced by metal bars on the inside. It has a combination lock and is marked by the United States government seal. The enclosure's north wall contains a two panelled wood door on its far left side. This door leads to a small, narrow passage behind the wall that contains several metal ladders. These ladders provided access to the basement and to slits in the enclosure's east and south walls. The postmaster

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used these slits to secretly observe post office workers. An electrical panel exists in the south enclosure's south wall to the right of this door. The main work room's east wall is two bays wide (not including the projecting enclosure) and possesses two windows.

The main work room's north wall is five bays wide and contains many openings. The wall's far left bay contains a window. To the right of this window, two adjacent wood, panelled doors lead to rooms in the building's rear extension. The words "109/WOMEN" appear on the left door. It leads to the women's restroom. The restroom ells to the east and contains original fixtures. The right hand door opens to a janitor's closet. The room contains a large, two faucet sink and painted light blue wainscoting. To the right of the janitor's closet, a pair of glazed, metal double doors leads to the rear loading platform through a wide passage in the building's rear extension. A second pair of double doors separates this passage from the outside. Another glazed, panelled wood door exists to the right of the metal double doors in the main work room's north wall. The door is labelled "109." It opens to a second passage that leads from the main work room to the rear loading platform. An open, dog-leg stairwell exists to the right of this door in the building's rear extension. The stairway starts on the stairwell's east wall, stops at a landing, and continues down on the east wall. The stairway has a simple wood balustrade and leads to the building's basement. The far east bay of the main work room's north wall contains a window. A metal ladder leading to the roof flanks this window on the left. Three small, square windows are centered in the north wall near the ceiling.

The Dickson Post Office's basement contains an L-shaped hallway that has white painted walls and light blue doors and moldings. All the basement windows have white colored blinds and radiators exist under each. Coming down the stairway, one enters a small alcove with a tile floor. The alcove's west wall contains a wood door leading to a large storage room. The storage room has a concrete floor, white painted brick walls, and exposed ductwork on the ceiling. The alcove's east wall contains a glazed wood door that is marked "Swing Room." It opens to a room that has a tile floor and a chair rail. Two windows pierce its east wall and one window exists in the room's north wall. The room's south

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Dickson Post Office, Dickson, Dickson Co., TN

wall contains a two panel wood door on its far left side. This door enters the men's restroom. The restroom possesses original fixtures. A second door flanks the men's restroom door on the right. Elevated off the floor approximately two feet, this door leads to the basement level of the secret passage present on the first floor. From this area the postmaster could view postal workers unobserved.

The alcove's south wall contains a pair of wood double doors. These doors open into a hallway that runs south and then ells to the west. The hallway's west wall contains a two panel wood door that leads to the postal inspector's room. The room has linoleum tile floor and exposed ductwork. Its east wall contains an exterior door flanked on the right by a window. An entrance to the secret passage pierces the room's north wall.

Two storage rooms are accessed through wood doors in the hallway's south wall. Both rooms have concrete floors, white painted brick walls, and exposed ductwork on the ceilings. A set of wood, two panelled double doors lead to the boiler room at the hallway's end. The boiler room is L-shaped and possesses a concrete floor and white painted brick walls. It contains the building's original boiler. An exterior metal door flanked by a window exists in the room's west wall.

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Dickson Post Office, Dickson, Dickson Co., TN

SECTION 8: Statement of Significance

The United States Post Office in Dickson, Dickson County, Tennessee is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A and C. The building is significant under criterion A as a post office constructed by the Public Works Administration in 1937. Under criterion C, the building represents a significant period in architectural history, the 1930s. During this period, the United States government established a distinct style of public architecture. It is also significant for art because it contains an unique example of a post office mural commissioned by the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture in 1938.

The 1930s was a decade of increased federal spending under Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal Program. Small towns were often the beneficiaries of this spending through the building of federal buildings, particularly post offices. For many small communities during this time, the United States post office was the only direct contact that citizens had with the federal government. Consequently, the federal government actively commissioned post offices during the 1930s to reassure citizens and generate confidence in the federal government. A post office's construction established the federal government's presence and provided relief to impoverished communities during the Great Depression. It immediately created temporary jobs for the local community and eventually established several permanent positions with the United States Postal Service. Communities likewise associated their post offices with the sense of American Nationalism that president Roosevelt promoted in the New Deal.

The Public Works Administration (PWA) provided funding for the Dickson Post Office in 1937. Congress instituted the PWA in 1933 to stimulate an economic recovery of the building trades. It was authorized to disburse money to both federal and non federal agencies for construction projects of public benefit. The allocation of funds for these projects was previously the responsibility of the Treasury Department, as established by the 1926 Public Buildings Act. Louis A. Simon was supervising architect of the PWA from 1933 to 1939 and strongly influenced the style and design of federal buildings during his tenure. The Dickson Post Office is one of Simon's standardized designs and

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Dickson Post Office, Dickson, Dickson Co., TN

represents the PWA's only architectural activity in Dickson, Tennessee.

The Dickson Post Office is an example of the architectural style that characterized PWA buildings. In The Federal Presence (1978), Louis Craig defines this style as the "Government International style." Others call it "starved classicism." PWA designs combined classical designs of nineteenth century federal buildings with elements of more modern styles, particularly the International style. People claimed that classical designs were historically correct and expressive of democratic values. However, they also favored the functionalism and reduced decoration of modern designs. Proponents of modern architecture viewed buildings as space enclosing envelopes that provided open, interchangeable work areas for the needs of modern mass organization. The Dickson Post Office exhibits these characteristics in its exterior design and the large, open space of its main work room.

The Dickson Post Office is artistically significant because it contains a mural painted by Edwin Boyd Johnson. Titled "People of the Soil," the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (later the Section of Fine Arts) commissioned the painting in 1938. Similar paintings appeared in twenty-two Tennessee post offices. However, few of these commissions remain in their original positions as placed by the artists. Many now exist in more modern postal facilities. The Dickson Post Office remains in its original location because it is a fresco and could not be moved when the post office relocated on November 11, 1991.

An order from the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, Jr. established the Section of Painting and Sculpture in 1934. Directed by Edward Bruce, it was one of two agencies that replaced the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). The other organization was the Work Projects Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP). Founded in 1933, the PWAP secured high quality sculpture and mural decorations for federal buildings and provided work for unemployed artists. It was discovered, however, that the PWAP's disparate goals were irreconcilable. As a result, two independent art programs replaced the PWAP in 1934. The WPA/FAP succeeded the PWAP by providing economic relief to impoverished artists through government commissions, while the

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Section of Painting and Sculpture assumed the PWAP's role of producing high quality art for federal buildings. The federal government disbanded both programs in 1943 due to the financial demands of World War II.

The Section of Painting and Sculpture applied New Deal ideas to government patronage and the creation of public art. Essentially conservative, it preserved the notion of the artist as an entrepreneur. During the Great Depression, artists competed for individual commissions from the Section and signed contracts for the completion of particular murals and sculptures. The Section hired artists based upon artistic skill rather than financial need because the Section's leaders wanted to make art an intrinsic part of American culture. They believed that high quality art naturally appealed to people of all sorts, particularly if it related to their daily lives. The Section also sought quality artists from a commission's region or locale and recommended that artists depict subjects of local interest. Particularly in the South, where entries were fewer in number, qualifications often required artists to have lived two to five years in an area. These requirements helped alleviate tensions between local, regional, and national interests.

The selection and commissioning of a post office mural was a long and complicated process. After the announcement of a new post office's construction, a community's postmaster and civic leaders wrote to the Section of Painting and Sculpture to request a commissioned artist. One percent of a federal building's construction cost was set aside for its decoration. The Section selected artists for post office mural commissions through open, anonymous competitions. However, competitions for specific commissions only occurred when a commission was worth \$1,500 or more. Typical commissions averaged \$700, and the Dickson Post Office mural commission was worth \$610. For these smaller commissions, the Section selected artists from groups of individuals that had entered a competition, submitted good designs, but had not won. Edwin Boyd Johnson, for example, received the Dickson Post Office mural commission because he had submitted competent designs for the Vicksburg Post Office mural competition and was a Tennessee native. The Section officially invited Johnson to submit designs for the Dickson Post Office mural in June, 1938.

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Edwin Boyd Johnson was born in Watertown, Tennessee on November 4, 1904. He grew up in Nashville and attended Watkins Institute. Johnson later moved to Chicago, IL and graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago. He also studied at the National Academy of Design in New York City, the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna, Austria, the Atelier de Freque of Paris, France, and the Ecole Egyptienne des Beaux Arts in Alexandria, Egypt. Johnson displayed his work at many prominent exhibitions and won several awards. However, he claimed to be an independent worker and unassociated with unions and other cliques. Besides the Dickson Post Office mural, Johnson received two other post office mural commissions from the Section of Painting and Sculpture. He painted "Air Mail" (1937, fresco, destroyed) in Melrose Park, Illinois and "The Old Days" (1941, oil on canvas) in Tuscola, Illinois. Johnson also entered competitions for post office commissions in Wausau, WI, Burlington, NC, and Evansville, IN.

Per the Section's recommendation, Johnson visited Dickson, Tennessee in July 1938. He then submitted three, required preliminary sketches of the proposed mural. The first sketch was titled "People of the Soil" and depicted a family group with a boy on a horse. The second sketch was titled "Tennessee Pioneers" and portrayed a family group of early settlers. Titled "Rural Free Delivery," the third sketch showed a postman on a horse surrounded by a family group. Of the three sketches, Johnson favored "People of the Soil" over the others. The Section subsequently reviewed the three sketches and approved any one of them for the Dickson Post Office. Edward B. Rowan, Superintendent of the Section, specifically gave Johnson permission to pursue the creation of "People of the Soil." However, he suggested that Johnson receive the opinion of Hugh Reeves, postmaster of the Dickson Post Office. Rowan believed that "Rural Free Delivery" proved more acceptable to the community.

Hugh Reeves favored "Rural Free Delivery" and wrote to Johnson suggesting specific additions and changes to the original sketch. As a result, Johnson capitulated and submitted a required, color sketch of "Rural Free Delivery" to the Section rather than one of "People of the Soil." Nevertheless, Johnson expressed his extreme dissatisfaction with this selection in a letter dated August 18, 1938. His comments reflect the common tensions that

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existed between the artist, local citizens, and the Section during such commissions. Each interest typically had a different understanding of what was good art. Johnson eventually appealed to Reeves to change his opinion, arguing the need for high aesthetic quality. In a letter to Reeves dated August 19, 1938, Johnson wrote, "Since the mural is to be viewed by many people of varied professions and personalities, I cannot stress too much the importance of selecting a design that will meet with the approval of those who have devoted their lives to the study and appreciation of the Fine Arts." Johnson considered "Rural Free Delivery" a second rate design.

Having received an indifferent response from Reeves, Johnson submitted a color sketch of "People of the Soil" to the Section and then completed a full size cartoon of the painting. This sketch was revised from his earlier proposal, no longer portraying a family group with a horse. Johnson received authorization to start the mural in late October, 1938 and work began in early November. He completed the painting on December 14, 1938. After the painting's completion, Johnson requested the placement of special light fixtures in the post office lobby. The existing fixtures apparently hung too low and obstructed the painting. The building's maintenance staff solved the problem by raising the existing lights thirty-six inches. The Section later entered Johnson's preliminary sketch into the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art's annual Exhibition.

¹ "People of the Soil," Subject for Painting at Postoffice," The Dickson County Herald, December 1938; and undated newspaper article in the Marianne Bevil Papers, Gore Center, Middle Tennessee State University.

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SECTION 10: Geographical Data

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Dickson Post Office consists of a single building and less than one acre of surrounding property as identified in the marked Parcel 9-D on the attached Dickson County Tax Map 103N.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property contains all the extant historical property associated with the Dickson Post Office.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Dickson Post Office

Dickson Co., TN

Photos by: Carroll Van West
MTSU Center for Historic Preservation

Date:

Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission
2941 Lebanon Road
Nashville, TN 37243

South (front) facade and east elevation, facing northwest
1 of 15

South facade, facing north
2 of 15

South facade, detail of decoration, facing north
3 of 15

East elevation, facing west
4 of 15

North elevation, facing south
5 of 15

West elevation, facing east
6 of 15

Lobby, first floor, facing east
7 of 15

Lobby, first floor, facing northwest
8 of 15

Lobby, first floor, facing south
9 of 15

Lobby, first floor, detail of east wall, facing east
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Postmaster's office, first floor, facing north
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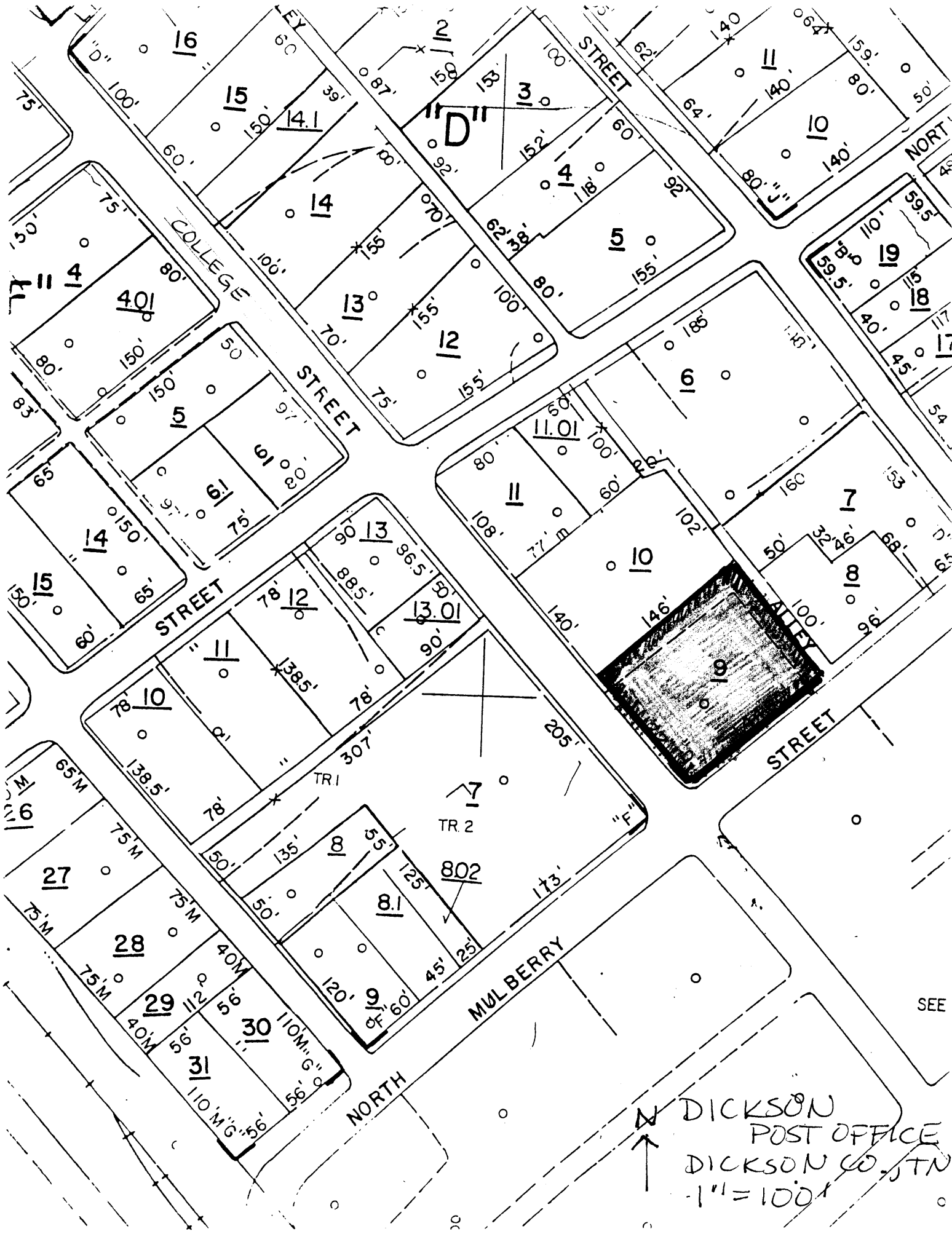
Dickson Post Office, Dickson, Dickson Co., TN

Main work room, first floor, facing east
12 of 15

Main work room, first floor, facing northwest
13 of 15

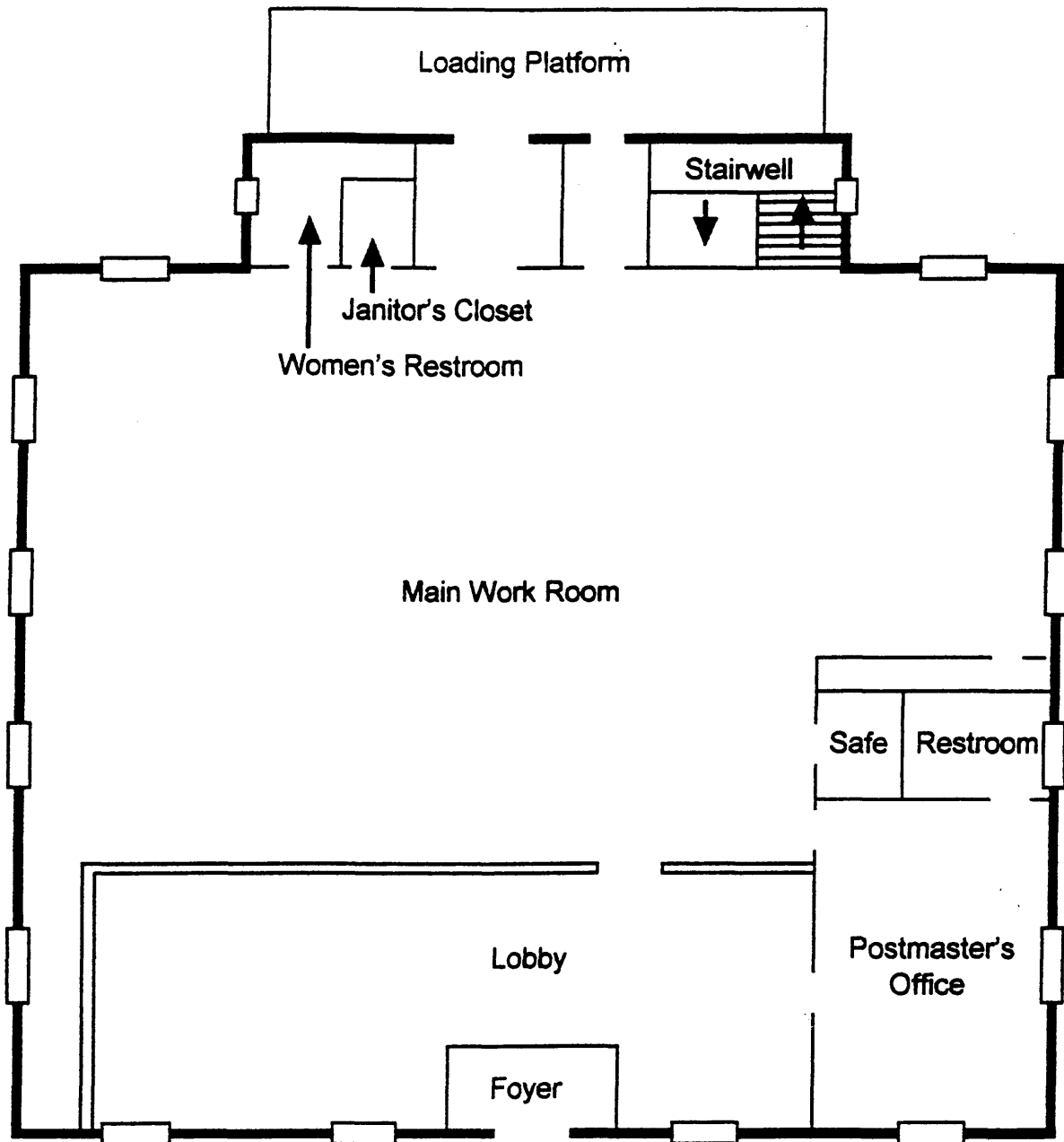
Women's restroom, first floor, facing north
14 of 15

Swing room, basement, facing south
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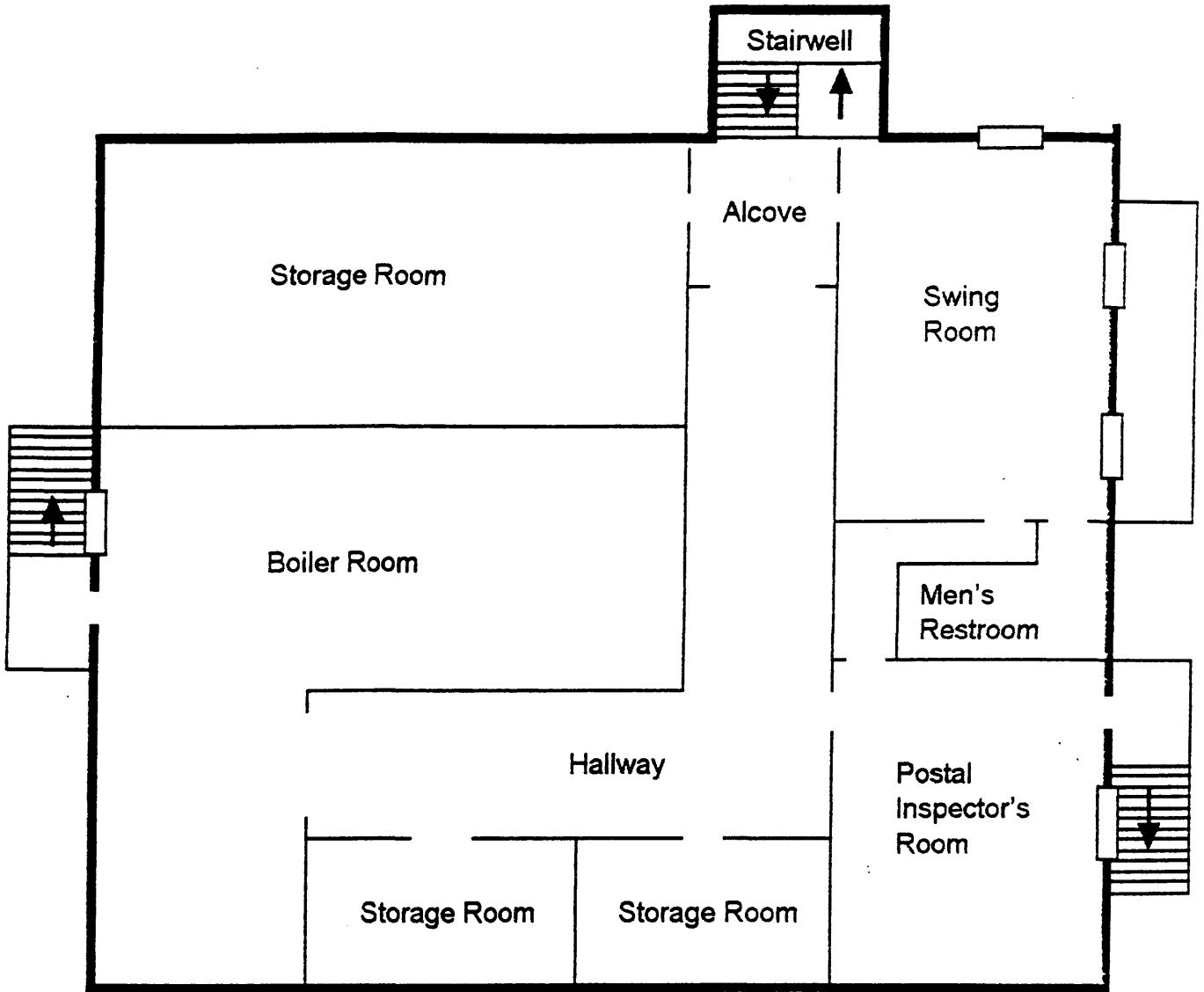
SEE

↑
 DICKSON
 POST OFFICE
 DICKSON CO., TN
 1" = 100'



Dickson Post
Office:
First Floor Plan

Not to Scale



Dickson Post
Office:
Basement Plan

Not to Scale