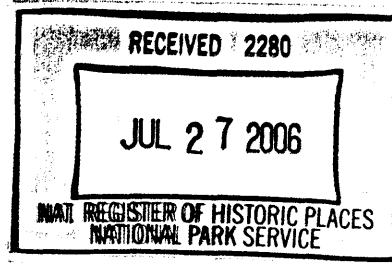


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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name American Legion Hut

other names/site number Rhodes Pritchett American Legion Hut Post 50

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number Tahlequah City Park on the SE corner of intersection of
East Shawnee Street and North Brookside Avenue not for publication N/A
city or town Tahlequah vicinity N/A
state Oklahoma code OK county Cherokee code 021
zip code 74464

=====
3. State/Federal Agency Certification
=====

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 2-24-06
Signature of certifying official Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO
State or 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 or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

=====
4. National Park Service Certification
=====

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register [Signature] 3/24/2006
 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 Keeper Date of Action

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: SOCIAL Sub: meeting hall

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: SOCIAL Sub: meeting hall

=====

7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

 WPA Standardized Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: Sandstone
roof ASPHALT
walls STONE: Sandstone

other CONCRETE BLOCK

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

=====

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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ECONOMICS

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1937

=====
8. Statement of Significance (Continued)
=====

Significant Dates _____

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Works Progress Administration, builder

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

=====
9. Major Bibliographical References
=====

(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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

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

Name of repository: _____

=====
10. Geographical Data
=====

Acreage of Property Less Than One Acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>15</u>	<u>322460</u>	<u>3975910</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
2	<u>N/A</u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

N/A 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 Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian, for City of Tahlequah

organization ARCH Consulting date March 2006

street & number 346 County Road 1230 telephone 405/459-6200

city or town Pocasset state OK zip code 73079
=====

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Rhodes-Pritchett Post #50 American Legion and/or Auxiliary Unit #50

street & number P.O. Box 562 telephone 918-207-7427

city or town Tahlequah state OK zip code 074465-0562

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SUMMARY

The American Legion Hut is located on the southeast corner of the intersection of North Brookside Avenue and East Shawnee Street in the Tahlequah City Park, Tahlequah, Cherokee County, Oklahoma. Through its history, the park has variously been referred to as the Tahlequah City Park or Sequoyah Park. The rectangular, native stone building, built into the base of a bluff, was constructed in 1937 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The building is an excellent example of the WPA Standardized style. The building has a native stone foundation and a side-gabled, asphalt-covered, moderately-pitched roof. The stone entry porch has concrete steps with a simple, central, metal, pipe railing and stone wing walls topped with concrete caps. The stone walls of the porch have rectangular openings and are topped by a dropped, front-gabled, asphalt-covered roof. Only the front, rectangular opening of the porch has a soldier-arched, stone header with a large keystone, identical to the window headers. On the south side of the building is a secondary historic entrance with stone steps, pipe railing and no covering. The primary door is nonoriginal, wood, paneled. The secondary door is metal slab with a large glazed window. The windows in the building are wood, hung, one-over-one and four-over-one ribbon windows. All of the windows have stone sills and decorative, stone, soldier-arched headers with large keystones. Several of the paired windows have been boarded, including both windows on the south side and one window on the west elevation. The windows on the back of the building have also been infilled, as well as being obscured by the cinder-block addition extending the length of the elevation. The covering of the windows on the west and south elevations were likely related to interior modifications to the kitchen and restrooms on the south side of the building. These modifications apparently occurred in the late 1960s. On the north side of the building is a large, stepped, stone chimney. Decorative details include exposed rafters, small wood gable returns, double windows and a projected stone water table.

The cinder-block addition is the most notable alteration to the building. Added prior to 1968, the addition has a low-pitched, asphalt-covered, side-gabled roof which has been built up to be flush with the edge of the historic roof. Like the main building, the addition roof has exposed rafters. The foundation of the addition is concrete. The addition is contained along the rear elevation of the historic building except for a small section on the north side which extends north past the original wall. Following the pattern of the cinder block retaining wall behind the building, the addition jogs westward just past the middle of the building. There are two doors on the opposite ends

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of the addition, both are metal slab with large square lights covered by metal grillwork. The windows in the addition are one-over-one, hung, metal with oversize wood-framed screens. The windows have simple, narrow, projecting, concrete sills.

The American Legion Hut is located on the north edge of the linear city park which straddles Tahlequah Creek. The building is located at the base of a bluff. The immediate area around the building is grassy with several large trees to the back. The front of the building has a concrete walk running from the concrete sidewalk adjacent to the asphalt road in front of the building. The concrete walk extends to the concrete steps of the main entry and along the north side of the building. In front of the building in the grass, there are two small wood signs in metal frames. The north sign reads "American Legion Post 50" and the south sign says "American Legion Auxiliary Unit 50." South of the American Legion Post 50 sign is a metal flagpole with a large concrete base. South of the hut, outside of the boundaries, is an asphalt-paved area and a building formerly used by the city parks department. West of the building, across North Brookside Avenue, is a small asphalt and concrete parking area.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The one-story, native stone building has a stone foundation and a moderately-pitched, side-gabled, asphalt-covered roof. The ashlar masonry used in the building is set in a broken rangework pattern. The stonework in the building, as common to the WPA, was meticulously laid and is a major decorative features in and of itself. Constructed in the third year of the WPA program, the building is an excellent example of the WPA Standardized style. Some of the defining characteristics of the WPA Standardized style evident in the American Legion Hut are the use of native stone; restrained use of stylistic influences; a large, stepped, stone chimney; decorative details including soldier-arched stone headers with prominent keystones, exposed rafters, small gable returns, projected stone water table and paired windows; a rectangular, side-gabled principal design with a projected, front-gabled, stone entry porch with square arched entrances; and, most importantly, an enduring, rustic, functional fortitude compatible with the trying times of the Great Depression. Notably, the windows feature subtle quoins in the form of three soldier stones separated by stretcher stones on each side. While quoins are frequently found on WPA Standardized style buildings, they are usually located on the corners of the building and are, therefore, more apparent.

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The west elevation serves as the primary facade. The symmetrical wall is broken by the central, projected, front-gabled, stone entry porch. The porch has an asphalt-covered roof with small wood gabled returns. The large, square, center opening has a decorative, soldier-arched header matching the window headers. The smaller, rectangular openings on either side of the porch lack the ornamental header but have stone sills matching those on the windows. The porch stairs are concrete with a metal iron railing dividing the stairs in half. On either side of the steps are stone wing walls topped with concrete caps. The nonoriginal, wood, decorative-paneled door is inset under the porch. The door is flanked by three-quarter sidelights which have been covered with metal grills to prevent breakage and unauthorized entry.

Evenly spaced on both sides of the facade porch are two sets of paired windows. The paired windows on the far south side of the west wall have been covered with wood panels, likely related to the interior modifications to the kitchen area and bathrooms in that portion of the building. The other three sets of windows are composed of paired, four-over-one, wood, hung windows with metal screens. Each set of windows is ornamented with a stone, soldier-arched header featuring an oversize keystone. Along the sides of the windows are also three soldier bricks creating a quoined-effect. All of the windows have continuous stone sills. The only other decorative feature on the facade is the projected, stone water table which extends continuously around the building, including the porch.

The south elevation of the American Legion Hut is also symmetrical. Evenly centered on the wall is a single pedestrian entrance. A single metal door with a large, square, light covers another wood, glazed, paneled door. The entry steps are concrete with low stone wing walls and a simple, metal, pipe railing to the east side. The entry has a simple, narrow, stone header. To the west of the door is the electric meter with lines extending over half way up the wall before the wires connect to one of the exposed rafters and then off to an overhead line. Below the meter box is another utility box which connects to wires below ground. Flanking the door are two window openings. The paired openings have been covered with wood panels, similar to the southernmost opening on the west elevation. The windows were likely boarded when the kitchen and bathrooms were modified on the interior of this side of the building. The soldier-arched window heads and continuous stone sills remain evident. Other decorative details on this wall include exposed rafters, small wood gable returns and the projected stone water table.

Extending the east side of the south elevation is the side wall of the cinder-

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block addition. Evident from the south side is the built-up roof which allows the side-gabled principal roof to extend seamlessly over the lower, side-gabled addition. The upper gable wall of the addition is clad with wood and has a small, centrally located vent. Off of the gable peak is a single, large, metal light. The addition has a single pedestrian entry towards the west side and a single, metal, one-over-one, hung window towards the east. The window has a simple concrete sill and an oversize wood screen. East of the window, along the edge of the south wall, is a telephone box with wires going underground. The entry is a metal slab door with a single light. The door light has been covered with a metal grill to prevent breakage. There is a concrete walk which ramps up slightly to the door. To the west of the walk, at the corner of the original building, is an air conditioning unit set on a concrete slab with the water meter and pipes immediately west of this.

The original rear elevation has been completely covered by the cinder block addition added prior to 1968. The addition extends past the original north wall. At about the point three-quarters northward along the original east wall, the addition noticeably jogs westward, mimicking the concrete block retaining wall to the rear. There are four windows in the south section and two windows in the north section of the addition. The south section windows are evenly spaced and of equal size. The windows in this section are metal, one-over-one, hung with concrete sills and oversize wood screens. The southernmost window in the north section of the addition is smaller than the other windows on the east elevation but is also metal, one-over-one, hung with a concrete sill and an oversize wood screen. The northernmost window in the north section matches the dimensions of the windows in the south section of the east elevation; however, it is two-over-two, metal, hung with a concrete sill and oversize wood screen. Decorative details on this elevation are restrained to the exposed rafters ornamenting the roofline.

The cinder block addition extends north past the original north wall; the wall, however, wraps only slightly onto the north elevation. Within the extension area, there are no openings on the north wall and a single pedestrian entry on the west side. The slightly-off-center entry contains a metal slab door with a large light covered by a metal grill. The side-gabled roof of the addition is clearly visible on the extension. As on the south wall of the addition, the cinder block wall is relieved by a small wood-clad gable area with a vent, located high on the wall. The west side of the extension is ornamented with exposed rafters.

The historic north elevation has no openings. Centrally located on the wall is

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a large, stone chimney. The chimney has a wide base which steps inward for four courses about a quarter of the way up. The top of the chimney has been heightened with two stacked bricks and a narrow concrete cap. Decorative detail on the north elevation consists of exposed rafters, small gable returns and the projected water table.

ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS

The American Legion Hut has been minorly altered by the covering of three windows, replacement of the front door and raising of the chimney. These alterations do not interfere with the overall ability of the building to convey its significance. A more substantial change to the building is the rear cinder-block addition. The addition was constructed prior to 1968 as it is visible in the history of the post written that year. As the addition covers only the back elevation, it does not significantly impact the ability of the building to convey its historic characteristics. Overall, the American Legion Hut retains a good degree of integrity, including the characteristics of location, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and association.

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SUMMARY

The American Legion Hut in Tahlequah is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in Tahlequah, Cherokee County, Oklahoma. Additionally, the building is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C as an excellent example of a WPA Standardized style community building. Constructed in 1937 by local workers employed by the WPA, a New Deal-era make-work relief agency, the building has served continuously as the meeting hall of the local chapter of the American Legion. The WPA program not only bolstered the local, state and national economies through much of the Great Depression of the Thirties but also contributed a lasting legacy to Oklahoma's built environment. A natural fit for the aims and purposes of the WPA program was the construction of meeting halls for the American Legion. A national organization with chapters in numerous communities, the American Legion provided a social and civic organization for veterans starting with the "Great War" in the second decade of the twentieth century.

BACKGROUND

The city of Tahlequah was initiated in 1839 following the removal of the Eastern band of the Cherokee tribe from sections of Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama. While members of the Western band of Cherokees moved to what is now southeast Oklahoma beginning in 1828, the forced removal of the Eastern branch of the tribe began in late 1835 and was complete by 1839. That same year, Tahlequah came into existence as the new capital of the Cherokee nation.¹

Although construction of homes and businesses started immediately, the city was not surveyed and platted until 1843. Despite the lack of rail connections, the community quickly flourished, becoming the commercial, as well as political, center of the Cherokee Nation. In 1852, the town incorporated under Cherokee law, becoming the first incorporated town in Indian Territory. While the town thrived through the 1840s and 1850s, the 1860s proved to be a decade of

¹D.C. Gideon, Indian Territory: Descriptive Biographical and Genealogical, Including the Landed Estates, County Seats, etc., etc., (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1901), 171. See also W. David Baird and Danney Goble, The Story of Oklahoma, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 130-131 and 140-141.

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disruption for Indian Territory. With the Cherokee tribe divided between the Union and Confederate efforts, sympathizers on both sides fled Tahlequah and the Cherokee Nation. With pro-Union families taking refuge in Kansas or congregating at Forts Gibson and Smith, pro-Confederate families sought refuge along the Red River. During the war, the Cherokee government buildings in Tahlequah were burned, as were homes across Indian Territory. Furthering the cost of war, at the conclusion of the conflict, the Cherokee Nation, along with the other Five Tribes, were forced to negotiate new treaties with the United States government. Although not as harsh as originally feared, the Reconstruction Treaty of 1866 required the Cherokees to cede title to lands in Kansas and control of the eastern one-third of the Cherokee Outlet to the federal government.²

With a new capital building constructed by 1870, the Cherokees slowly regained political and economic stability. As a precursor to the Territorial Fair and the subsequent State Fair, the Cherokee Nation began holding an annual national fair in Tahlequah in 1870. These popular gatherings attracted ranchers, farmers and others interested in showing their livestock, farm products, crafts and handiwork.³

As the Cherokee capital, Tahlequah continued to flourish through the remaining decades of the nineteenth century. In the late 1880s, the Cherokee Female Seminary, opened in the early 1850s near Park Hill, burned. The school was then moved to Tahlequah with an impressive building, Seminary Hall (NR 1973), being constructed. The school has had a lasting impact on Tahlequah as it has provided a continuous educational institution for the community to the present time. Shortly after statehood, the school became Northeastern State Teachers' College and, subsequently, Northeastern State University. In addition to being an educational boon for Tahlequah, the school has also served as an economic mainstay for the town. For example, growth of the school in the 1930s helped sustain the town during the trying years of that decade.

²Ibid., 173. See also Baird and Goble, The Story, 170-185 and The WPA Guide to 1930s Oklahoma, (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1986), 258-259 and 418.

³Arrell Morgan Gibson, Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries, 2nd edition, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 135-136.

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Following the turn-of-the-century, Tahlequah's population grew to number about 2,000. Electricity, a public water works and public sewer system quickly enhanced the town's amenities. With the advent of Oklahoma statehood in 1907, Tahlequah became the county seat of Cherokee County. Three years later, the number of residents in Tahlequah reached a high of 2,891. By 1920, with losses of residents from both service in the "Great War" and the devastating influenza epidemic of 1918, Tahlequah's population fell to 2,271. Rebounding slightly, in 1930 Tahlequah claimed just under 2,500 citizens. Growing noticeably over the ensuing decade, by 1940, Tahlequah's population reached just above the three thousand mark to 3,027.⁴

Shortly after World War I ended, a group of soldiers who served in the American Expeditionary Forces in France met in Paris to organize a veterans group, in part to aid troop morale. Two months later, a second meeting in St. Louis resulted in the adoption of the name "American Legion" for the group. A "patriotic, mutual-help, war-time veterans organization," the American Legion quickly had chapters throughout the country, including Oklahoma, and was chartered by Congress on September 16, 1919.

Just three days prior to the American Legion receiving its Congressional charter, the Rhodes-Pritchett Post No. 50, Department of Oklahoma received its charter. Composed of thirty-six local men, the post was named for the first two Cherokee County WWI casualties. Jesse M. Rhodes, attached to Company A, 358 Infantry, perished at sea on February 5, 1918 with the sinking of the S.S. Tuscania. One day short of his 25th birthday, Rhodes' body was interred at the Elmwood Cemetery in Wagoner, Oklahoma. Tony Pritchett, a full-blood Cherokee, was with the 16th Artillery of the 4th Division. Born about 1888, Pritchett died on the field in a battle in France on September 11, 1918. Receiving full military honor, Pritchett was buried in the American Legion plot of the Tahlequah City Cemetery.⁵

⁴The Cherokee County Democrat-Star, (Tahlequah, Oklahoma), 15 January 1937. See also Meacham and Associates, "Historic/Architectural Reconnaissance Survey, Tahlequah, Oklahoma" (Available Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; 1997), 22-26.

⁵Lorena L. Travis, "For God and Country: Golden Anniversary, American Legion, Rhodes-Pritchett Post No. 50, Tahlequah, Oklahoma." (N.P., 1968), n.p.

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HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Like most of Oklahoma, Tahlequah depended on the surrounding agriculture community for much of its economic base. By the turn-of-the-century, the town also benefitted economically from the presence of the local educational institution and another revenue source that today is summed up as tourism dollars. Due to the combination of the three, Tahlequah held its own through the first decades of the twentieth century. However, increasing economic pressure was felt in Tahlequah beginning in the mid 1920s due to the nationwide downward trend in agriculture. Despite the growing signs of a major recession throughout the decade, especially within agricultural communities such as Tahlequah, the depression manifested itself largely with the 1929 Wall Street stock market crash. The Great Depression lasted for over ten years, resulted in prolonged massive unemployment and the worst depression in American history. Following the Wall Street collapse, the recession steadily grew for three years, culminating in 1932. While conditions did not improve after 1932, they ceased the marked downward spiral of the preceding years. The economic stimulus provided by President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies and wartime industries finally brought the country out of the depression by about the early 1940s.⁶

During the depression, both rural and urban areas suffered. Unemployment in urban areas created an unprecedented dependence on public welfare which city and state governments were unable to maintain. This inability to sustain urban families resulted in significant homelessness and malnutrition across the nation. Rural areas in the South and Midwest were doubly burdened, enduring not only economic hard times but also a decade-long drought. The "Dust Bowl" of the 1930s, comprising a line of states from the Dakotas to Texas including Oklahoma, devastated farming conditions. Due to declining domestic and foreign markets, overproduction of crops continued to lower farm good prices. In a nationwide trend, many farmers unable to make a living took to the road, searching for a more profitable future.⁷

As a predominately agricultural state, the depression of the 1930s particularly devastated Oklahoma. During the three year period of 1936 to 1938, 500 to 600

⁶Richard N. Current, etal, American History: A Survey, 2 vols. (New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 2:703-705.

⁷Ibid., 708.

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hours each year of "sun-obscuring dust" ravaged the southern plains state. By 1939, due to drought conditions and erosion, it was estimated that twenty-five percent of Oklahoma's soil was lost to production. Furthering Oklahoma's agriculture crisis were the large number of tenant farmers in the state. In 1930, sixty-two percent of Oklahoma farmers were tenant farmers, representing the highest rate of tenancy in the Midwest. With no tangible ties to the land, tenant farmers were essentially a dispossessed people searching for sufficient economic means to subsist. Thus, they moved frequently and often lived at below poverty standards. Their plight was compounded during the depression years by the drought conditions which reduced farm incomes even further, leaving them with little choice but to resort to the relief system or migration out of Oklahoma.⁸

Agriculture, however, was not the only industry in the state greatly impacted by the depression. The oil market, another major economic force in the state, collapsed as factories and mines shut down. The price of oil fell from a \$1.30 a barrel in 1930 to about a \$.01 per barrel in 1932. This resulted in the closing of wells at an unprecedented rate, 21,603 wells in 1931 alone. Statewide, oil and natural gas production fell by about thirty percent, a significant economic drop. Unemployment in the state was at an all-time high. By May 1936, 242,000 workers statewide were without jobs. Due to the inclement economic conditions, migration out of Oklahoma became so intense the term "Okie" became a popular name for the dispossessed workers searching for work in other states, particularly California.⁹

As with other communities in Oklahoma, falling prices of cotton and corn, among other crops, severely impacted Tahlequah's economy. These local losses were compounded by the "...chronic poverty of the Cherokee minority," as well as the economic crisis at the state and national level. By September 1934, there were 2,831 families in Cherokee County receiving direct relief. This accounted for

⁸Richard W. Fossey, "'Talking Dust Bowl Blues" A Study of Oklahoma's Cultural Identity During the Great Depression," The Chronicles of Oklahoma LV:1 (Spring 1977), 14, 22. See also W. David Baird, "Final Report: WPA Structures Thematic Survey (Phase III), (Stillwater, Oklahoma: Oklahoma State University, 1987): 5.

⁹Gibson, Oklahoma, 220. See also James Ware, "The Sooner NRA: New Deal Recovery in Oklahoma," The Chronicles of Oklahoma LIV:3 (Fall 1976), 341; and, Baird, "Final Report," 5.

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sixty-eight percent of the county population. Dropping ten percent over the ensuing year, 1,995 families in the county remained on the "dole" in September 1935. Within Oklahoma, Cherokee County had one of the highest relief percentages in the mid-1930s.¹⁰ With local and state relief agencies increasingly strained beyond capability, the majority of counties in Oklahoma and nationwide were in need of some type of federal relief to alleviate chronic unemployment and its results.

In efforts to stimulate the national economy and assist citizens in distress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt legislated twenty-nine different acts between 1933 and 1939. The bills were structured to sustain various parts of the economy. The majority of acts sought to provide some type of relief for the unemployed. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) originated in May 1935 when the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935 replaced the 1933 Federal Emergency Relief Act. Believing that "work rather than direct relief should be the keystone of Federal policy with respect to needy employables," the 1935 act authorized a new program of federal relief employment, building upon earlier New Deal programs such as the Civil Works Authority and the work program run by the Federal Emergency Relief Act. In 1939, the Federal Works Agency incorporated the Works Progress Administration, renaming it the Works Projects Administration. The WPA continued in operation until 1943, at which time the economic stimulus provided by the wartime industries lessened the need for the WPA and the federal monies allocated to the WPA were required elsewhere.¹¹

During its eight year existence, the WPA worked on two principal types of projects: service projects and engineering and construction projects. Numerous projects of both categories were undertaken in Oklahoma and Cherokee County. Service projects employed clerical, technical and professional workers of both sexes. Types of programs undertaken by the WPA as service projects included adult education, nursery schools, library services, recreation programs, museum projects, music projects, art programs, writers' projects, theater programs, research and public records projects, sewing projects, school

¹⁰Dr. Mary Jane Warde, National Register Nomination for the "Tahlequah Armory," (Available Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: May 1993), page 12-13.

¹¹Final Report on the WPA Program, 1934-1943 (Washington, D.C.:U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 7.

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lunch projects, among various other social service projects.¹²

Engineering and construction projects, however, comprised the majority of WPA employment, about seventy-five percent until the spring of 1940. Construction projects were selected on the basis that they provided "useful work to the unemployed at a given time and place," the end result was of functional use to the community and that a sponsor be available. The construction of public utilities, recreation facilities and public buildings accounted for about a third of all engineering and construction projects. Public utility projects included water and sewer systems and sewage disposal plants. Recreation facility projects primarily consisted of work undertaken on city parks and included construction of numerous swimming and wading pools with related bathhouses across the state. Public building projects involved WPA labor on education and recreation buildings, hospitals, military and naval buildings, prisons and state, county and city government buildings. Nationwide, the WPA constructed and improved numerous airports and airways, city halls, courthouses, libraries, community buildings, municipal and school auditoriums, highways and streets, parks, cemeteries, armories, schools and natural resource conservation facilities as a part of their engineering and construction projects.¹³

The WPA work force was drawn from the unemployed living within the project area. Workers were qualified to work on WPA projects by the local Public Welfare Department, working through the National Reemployment Service. WPA employment was restricted to only one family member, usually the head of the family. Initially, the age requirement for workers was set at sixteen years, however, this was raised to a minimum of eighteen years in 1938. Although there was not a maximum age limit, agencies generally did not hire persons over sixty-five years of age due to their eligibility for Social Security. Congress made no restriction on the employment of non-US citizens during the first year of the WPA's existence. Following several acts which progressively restricted the employment of aliens by the WPA, in 1939, Congress prohibited the employment of aliens on WPA projects and each worker was required to sign an affidavit affirming their US citizenship. A hiring preference was not instituted until the ERA Act of 1937 which gave preference to the employment of veterans, which was reinforced in 1941 with the added requirement that the

¹²Ibid., 59-71.

¹³Ibid., 47-48, 50-52.

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spouse of unemployed veterans and unmarried widows of veterans be given the same preference as veterans. Due to conflicting reasoning, preferential employment based on need was not instituted until 1939. At that time, the WPA established two types of needs: those with no income and those with insufficient income to exist at a subsistence level.¹⁴

The WPA paid a flat "security wage," which was slightly higher than direct relief payments but lower than comparable private employment pay. By 1937, the average pay in Oklahoma was thirty-six dollars a month for unskilled labor. Skilled and semi-skilled workers received higher wages depending on the skill required and the experience of the workman. During its first four years, the WPA offered continuous employment as available within the region. Subsequently, the WPA enforced an eighteen month ceiling on employment. However, the worker was eligible for reemployment after thirty days and a recertification of need.¹⁵

WPA projects were designed to maximize the number of laborers and the length of employment. Thus, the maximum amount of relief was obtained through every project. To facilitate this goal, WPA workers labored continuously on every aspect of the project from clearing the site to manufacturing furnishings. In Oklahoma, the use of native stone for WPA buildings kept project costs low and employed many quarrying and dressing the stone for use. Other materials necessary, such as wood bracing and roof material, were usually obtained locally so as to stimulate the local economy as much as possible.

Although a federal work program, the WPA only facilitated public works projects nationwide. The WPA did not initiate or undertake projects by itself. WPA guidelines required that a "tax-supported public body" sponsor the project which had to result in a permanent and useful addition to the community. The project sponsor typically provided partial monetary support, usually in the form of land and materials, as well as engineering and architectural plans and specifications. The WPA had no fixed percentage of the project cost which the individual sponsor was required to pay. On the average, the cost to the sponsoring agency fluctuated between twenty and thirty percent of the total cost. In addition, the sponsor completed the project if the WPA was unable to

¹⁴Ibid., 17-21.

¹⁵Ibid., 21. See also The Farmer's Weekly Stroud (Oklahoma) Democrat, 19 February 1937.

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and maintained and operated the finished project. Ownership of the project belonged to the sponsor upon completion.¹⁶

The WPA handled the administration of the project and provided the majority of funds to meet wages. WPA regulations capped federal funds for any one project at about \$52,000 to avoid competition with other Depression era programs, especially the Public Works Administration (PWA). Another New Deal public works program, the PWA did not concern itself primarily with aiding the jobless as the WPA did; rather, the PWA's goal was to stimulate business. In order to circumvent this monetary restriction, WPA projects often received several rounds of funding under the guise of additions to the original project. Other projects, for a variety of reasons, also exceeded the WPA allowance.¹⁷

With local economic conditions still markedly depressed, the aid proffered by the WPA was eagerly sought by city and county officials in Tahlequah and Cherokee County. Within months of the formation of the WPA program in May 1935, interested Tahlequah officials, including United States Congressman W.W. Hastings of Tahlequah, were working to secure an armory project for Tahlequah's National Guard unit. At about this same time, the American Legion Post No. 50 and its auxiliary were making plans to construct a headquarters building of their own. Having rented meeting halls for years, the post sought a fixed locale for their "...activities which were expanding at a gratifying rate of success." In mid-1935, the post acquired title to lots on the northeast corner of Delaware and Water avenues on which to construct their building. However, in September 1935, the post and auxiliary agreed to give this land to the state for use in the armory project. In exchange for those lots, the American Legion acquired a location in the Tahlequah city park, also known as Sequoyah park. Built in 1925, the park straddled Tahlequah Creek and was situated just about a block southwest of the original American Legion site.¹⁸

¹⁶"Questions and Answers on the WPA," (Available in the Vertical Files, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Library, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: December 1939), 6-7, 16. See also Final Report, 9-10.

¹⁷Final Report, 9-10. See also "Questions and Answers," 10-12.

¹⁸Ward, "Tahlequah Armory," 13. See also Travis, God and Country, n.p. and Meacham, Reconnaissance Survey, 25.

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Despite having a location, work on the building of a hut for Post 50 stalled for nearly a year. By the end of September 1936, the plans, specifications and blueprints for a community building at the park were submitted to the state-level WPA office for authorization. Calling for a 30 X 60 foot building, the project had an estimated cost of \$6,000. The building, to be constructed over the winter, was to "...be known as the American Legion and Auxiliary community house."¹⁹

Although off to a slow start, the project quickly gained momentum. In mid-January 1937, work started on quarrying the stone for the American Legion Hut in Tahlequah. Rock was to be dressed at the quarry and then brought to the city park. Amenities included in the building were hardwood floors, a fireplace and a kitchen. Cost of the building was placed at \$4,904.98 in June 1937. By August 1937, the Legion Hut was nearing completion. Interestingly, credit for the new building, touted as "...one of the finest in the state...", was not given directly to the WPA. Instead, according to the local newspaper, "City officials, the Auxilliary (sic) and the building committee(,) which is composed of Carter and Littlefield, have made its construction possible." However, in a subsequent article concerning the recent public improvements to Tahlequah, the construction of the American Legion Hut is placed with the other federal projects.²⁰

By the second week in September 1937, only work on the floor and "...a few minor things..." remained to be done to the new building. According to Frank L. Walker, post commander, the total cost of the building and furnishings would stand at approximately \$9,000 when all was complete. Although it was initially thought that the official opening would be held in September, the first meeting of the post in their new hut did not occur until mid-October 1937.²¹

Befitting the organization, the dedication of the building occurred on Armistice Day, 1937. With a large crowd of spectators, including many "World War veterans", the dedication ceremonies were the highlight of the day's

¹⁹The Cherokee County Democrat-Star, 25 September 1936.

²⁰The Tahlequah (Oklahoma) Citizen, 14 January 1937, 5 August 1937 and 2 September 1937. See also The Cherokee County Democrat-Star, 6 August 1937.

²¹Ibid., 9 September 1937 and 14 October 1937.

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events. Described as "...one of Tahlequah's most modern and attractive..." buildings, the hut included a "...huge reception room and a well equipped kitchen," as well as a "huge fireplace" on the north end. Notably, the dedication of the building was included in the newspaper's end-of-the-year report on major events in Cherokee County.²²

While many posts used existing buildings, numerous local units of the American Legion began constructing "huts" shortly after formation of the organization. Intended to house the social activities of the post, the buildings frequently served in a variety of other civic capacities. Additionally, provision for athletic endeavors were commonly included in the buildings. Often located in the downtown area, huts were also frequently placed in municipal parks. Hut construction in Oklahoma continued for many decades with communities across the state constructing buildings of various sizes and costs.²³

The WPA aided in constructing at least seven American Legion Huts in Oklahoma, including the buildings at Tahlequah, Gould, Woodward, Edmond (NR 1993), Miami, Hollis and Wetumka. As per the WPA guidelines, these projects required a "tax-supported public body" as a sponsor. However, as in the case at Miami, the American Legion post could agree to pay the cost of the materials with the work being accomplished by laborers employed by the WPA. With the city providing the land, in the case of both Tahlequah and Miami in the city park, and, thus, meeting its required contribution, the city was able to sponsor the undertaking as a municipal project. This was likely what occurred in Tahlequah as the history of the unit notes that the post contributed bonds in the amount of \$2,700 towards the construction of the building. Technically the owner of the building under the WPA requirements, the city quit claimed the building to the post and/or its auxiliary in 1945 for a dollar.²⁴

The American Legion Hut in Tahlequah is historically significant for its association with the WPA, a critical component of President Franklin D.

²²Ibid., 4 November 1937, 11 November 1937 and 30 December 1937.

²³The Daily Oklahoman, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), various dates, 1921-1949.

²⁴Ibid., 22 September 1935. See also Travis, "God and Country," n.p.

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Roosevelt's New Deal-era program. Nationally from its inauguration in 1935 to its termination in 1943, the WPA expended more than 10.75 billion dollars on a diversity of projects. An additional 2.8 billion dollars was provided by various sponsors on WPA projects. Almost eighty-nine percent of the WPA expenditure was used for wages, with seventeen percent of the sponsors' funds spent on labor costs. Approximately 8.5 million individuals nationwide benefitted from WPA employment at one time or another. At the peak of WPA employment in Oklahoma, January 1936, 94,821 persons were toiling on approved projects. By March 1937, 2,971 projects had been approved with 2,581 of those projects being undertaken by the WPA. At the end of the program in 1943, Oklahoma had received over 185 million dollars from the WPA for a multitude of projects statewide. Sponsors statewide expended almost another sixty million dollars. Combined, the Oklahoma economy was boosted by over 232 million dollars in eight years. The projects represent an investment of more than 415 million hours of manpower earning a total of over 140 million dollars in wages for the state of Oklahoma.²⁵

The infusion of this much-needed work and money into hard pressed communities relieved the pressure of the unemployed on local, state and national economies. Over half a million dollars was pumped into Tahlequah's economy in 1935-1937 alone through various building projects sponsored by the federal government. This included nearly \$5,000 for the American Legion Hut; \$325,000 for the Indian Hospital; \$320,000 for two dormitories at the college; \$60,000 for a new post office; \$42,899.86 for the National Guard Armory; \$16,915.12 for the college athletic field; \$23,517.11 for a city sewage disposal plant with an additional \$5,350.44 being spent on sewers; \$64,000 for street paving, sidewalks and dams; and, \$35,000 for the Highway 62 overpass south of town. This did not include the county-wide projects, such as farm-to-market road improvements.²⁶ The buildings constructed by the WPA, such as the American Legion Hut, remain as architectural testimony to the social ills and remedies of the 1930s and early 1940s. These buildings represent the local and national efforts to resist the debilitating effects of the worst depression in American history with a certain fortitude and style.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

²⁵Final Report, 101, 115, and 124.

²⁶The Cherokee County Democrat-Star, 1 January 1937 and 18 June 1937.

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In addition to its historic significance, the American Legion Hut in Tahlequah is also architecturally significant as an excellent example of a WPA Standardized style building. The majority of WPA buildings in Oklahoma, such as the American Legion Hut, reflect a common identity unique to this New Deal era program. Through a similarity in certain modest stylistic and structural characteristics, WPA buildings are easily distinguishable. WPA buildings usually exhibit a high level of craftsmanship, similarity in basic design and restrained use of architectural features and decorative details. WPA buildings also reflect an enduring, rustic, functional fortitude compatible with the trying times of the Great Depression. These varied unifying characteristics can be loosely categorized as the WPA Standardized Style.

Oklahoma WPA projects, like the American Legion Hut, frequently utilized native sandstone or limestone for construction material. The native stone was used in both uncut and cut form. The use of the native stone fulfilled two primary requirements of the WPA: critically, the stone was readily available at an affordable cost; and, use of the stone was highly labor intensive, thus elongating the length of employment available on the project and the number of workers needed. WPA workers procured the stone from local quarries often opened especially for WPA projects.²⁷ The ashlar masonry of the American Legion Hut is set in a rusticated, broken rangework pattern.

Although the majority of workmen on WPA projects were unskilled, a high level of craftsmanship was frequently apparent. The use of native stone for construction material often required an intricate ability of stone masonry. The level of skill apparent in many buildings can be attributed to the underlying premise of the WPA -- extended employment. The WPA program, generally not hampered by oppressive deadlines, allowed the workmen time to improve their skill as the building took shape. Additionally, many WPA workmen developed a previously unrecognized aptitude for the work following employment on one or more buildings. The stonework on the legion hut is particularly notable as an excellent example of WPA workmanship, particularly the quined-effect at the windows.

WPA buildings favored simplification in architectural style. This is partly due to the limited construction experience of many of the project laborers. Nonetheless, the simplification in stylistic features resulted in a rustic,

²⁷Baird, "Final Report," 12-15.

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functional, vernacular style of building loosely categorized as the WPA Standardized Style. Elimination of intricate structural designs, ornate architectural features and elaborate decoration were common attributes of WPA buildings.²⁸ Also identifying were certain decorative details, such as round arched entrances, stone or red brick chimneys, ribbon windows, extended eaves, exposed rafters, chimney pots and quoins. In the WPA Standardized Style, however, utilization of only one or more features was common. Standard WPA features found on the American Legion Hut include a typical rectangular design with a projected gabled entry porch; a large, stepped, stone chimney; decorative details consisting of soldier-arched stone headers with prominent keystones, exposed rafters, small gable returns, a projected stone water table and paired windows with quoins.

One of the fundamental characteristics of the WPA Standardized style was the expression of an enduring, rustic, functional fortitude. The American Legion Hut expresses this quality particularly well, due in part to its location in the city park. Unlike the Tahlequah Armory (NR 1993), another good, local example of the WPA Standardized style, which is set in more of a commercial setting, the American Legion Hut is unfettered by adjacent buildings and roads. The meandering stream nearby and the numerous trees along the bluff to the rear further enhance the rustic feel of the American Legion Hut. Even with the minor alterations to the windows and door and the back addition, the American Legion Hut ably expresses the rustic, functional fortitude common to this New Deal-era building program.

Overall, the American Legion Hut in Tahlequah is an excellent example of the WPA Standardized style. The building is unique within Tahlequah as an example of a community building constructed by the WPA for the local unit of the American Legion, a social and civic organization for veterans. Historically, the building is also significant for its association with the economic impact of the WPA during the trying years of the Great Depression. Without make-work projects such as the building of the American Legion Hut, people living in Tahlequah would have continued to suffer economic hardship without hope of gainful employment.

²⁸Baird, "Final Report," 16-17.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

Lots 1 and 2 in Block 53, Tahlequah Lots, Tahlequah, Cherokee County, Oklahoma.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the American Legin Hut.