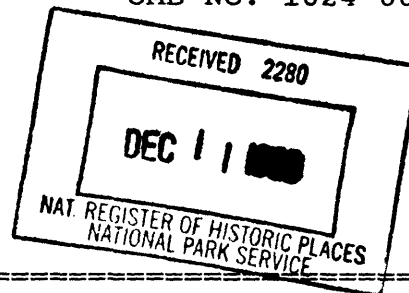


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



1588

=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name Harmon Athletic Field

other names/site number _____

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number North of jct. 12th St. and Creek Ave. not for publication N/A
city or town Okmulgee vicinity N/A
state Oklahoma code 040 county Okmulgee code 111
zip code 74447

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this XX 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 XX 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] 23 November 1998
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 Beth Boland 1/25/99
 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

=====
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

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>5</u>	<u>3</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>7</u>	<u>15</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>12</u>	<u>18</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: sports facility

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: sports facility

=====

7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

BUNGALOW/CRAFTSMAN
OTHER--WPA Standardized Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
roof ASPHALT
walls STONE--limestone

other CONCRETE--bleachers

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 1935-1940

Significant Dates 1936
1940

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

Acreage of Property 6.5 acres

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	231530	3945440	3	—	—
2	—	—	—	4	—	—

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 Dianna Everett, for the City of Okmulgee
organization Everett Research Services date 10 June 1997
street & number 2510 Countrywood Lane telephone 405-348-4272
city or town Edmond state OK zip code 73003-6433

=====
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 Board of Education, Okmulgee I.S.D. #1

street & number 316 E. 8th telephone 918-758-2000

city or town Okmulgee state OK zip code 74447
=====

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

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Harmon Athletic Field
name of property
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SUMMARY:

Harmon Athletic Field is a 600 foot by 562.5 foot complex of structures and buildings primarily built of stone. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) constructed the buildings and structures in the district in 1935-1936, with subsequent WPA construction occurring in 1940. The area surrounding the athletic complex is primarily park land lying in the "bottomland" of Okmulgee Creek. There are scattered residences to the east and south and southwest. Contributing resources to the Athletic Field include: BUILDINGS (5): two ticket booths, two field houses, and a lower-level concessions building; STRUCTURES (7): entry archway, grandstand, football gridiron, flagstone walkways with associated fencing, two stone retaining walls, and stone fencing on the west, north, and east of the gridiron. The design, materials, and workmanship of the stone buildings reflect the influence of the Craftsman style, including low-pitched, usually front-gabled roofs, with clipped gables, unboxed eaves and exposed rafter tails, exposed roof beams, and wide overhangs. Each has the original door and window frames and an asphalt shingle roof in the original style. Varied stonework and surfaces also lends to the feeling of Craftsman style architecture. The limestone walls generally consist of a lower area of rectangular, rock-faced, regularly coursed blocks, under an upper level of smooth-finished, randomly sized and shaped and uncoursed stones. The grandstand is made of smooth-finished concrete.

Eighteen noncontributing resources within the boundaries of this property include: STRUCTURES (15): five new wooden poles containing new athletic lighting (three on north, two on south), a metal scoreboard on the west side, two steel goalposts (one at each end of the gridiron), a six-lane asphalt running track (replaced the original 1936 cinder track at an unknown date), a metal bump gate on the northwest side of the field, three utility poles (two wood, one steel) within the original field house/concessions area south of the grandstand, wooden fencing at the top of the grandstand, and chain-link fencing on the south side of the property; BUILDINGS (3): a metal-building pressbox elevated on steel poles (dating from 1973), and two original upper-level concessions buildings which have been altered.

Alterations to the original buildings and structures are minimal and do not impeach the integrity of the district. The twelve WPA-built contributing resources within the district boundaries generally exhibit a high degree of integrity. The two original noncontributing upper-level concessions buildings have been seriously altered by a 1973 addition of an extension to each building, extending the roofline of each, and the replacement of deteriorated wooden panels in the service windows with new wooden panels. However, the original stone buildings are still clearly intact and the fenestration pattern has been maintained. The contributing lower-level concessions building has been

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slightly altered by infilling the east-side service openings with concrete block. In the contributing buildings, the original wood-panel doors were replaced with steel doors at an unknown but fairly recent date, and windows have been boarded up for security, but all door frames and window frames and casings are original. The removal of a portion of the stone fence and bandshell on the north side of the property is a 1973 alteration. The noncontributing resources are essentially alterations to the district: The original 1936 cinder track was replaced at an unknown date by an asphalt track of the same dimensions. In the early 1930s the stadium boasted two electronic scoreboards, which were retained when the WPA built the new grandstand and buildings, but they are now gone and there is only one manual scoreboard on the site. The goalposts are new, as are the field lights. The addition of a new elevated pressbox, inside the track and next to the gridiron, is also a 1973 alteration to the district.

The area surrounding the district has not changed since the time of the selection of the area in the mid-1920s as a location for an athletic field or since the completion of the WPA project in 1936. The buildings and structures comprising Harmon Athletic Field exhibit a high degree of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. This is the only such resource within the city of Okmulgee, and it is the county's largest and most intact stadium complex surviving from the WPA era. As such, it is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

DESCRIPTION:

Harmon Athletic Field is a 600-foot by 562.5-foot complex of structures and buildings primarily comprised of stone. Contributing resources include: BUILDINGS (5): two ticket booths, two field houses, and a lower-level concessions building; STRUCTURES (7): entry archway, grandstand, walkways and associated stone fencing, two stone retaining walls (one on either side of the gridiron), stone fencing on the west, north, and east of the district, and the football gridiron (see map next page).

One enters the complex by passing under a contributing original steel pipe archway, bearing the words "Harmon Field." Beneath it hangs a wooden sign bearing the words "Bulldog Country," with the image of a bulldog. The 24' wide archway is supported by 26" square by 8' 4" high columns made of rock-faced, regularly coursed, rectangular blocks. The archway gives access to two identical small stone buildings, each a ticket booth. (See photos 1 and 2). Each of these contributing buildings has a hipped roof, with asphalt shingles, and exposed rafters under a wide overhang, all minimal features of Craftsman style. The walls are of stone, with a water table dividing them into an upper portion of smooth, random-sized, uncoursed stones, over a lower portion of

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rock-faced, regularly coursed, rectangular blocks. Each booth has an original 1x1 double-hung wood-frame window in the south (front) wall; the east booth has a steel door in its west wall, and the west booth has a steel door in its east wall. Between the ticket booths is a chain-link fence and gate (noncontributing). Connecting each ticket booth to the adjacent field house is a stone wall measuring 5'3" wide by 7'6" high. Chain-link fencing, a noncontributing structure, continues east from the southeast corner of the adjacent east field house and west from the southwest corner of the adjacent west field house.

Slightly behind and flanking the ticket booths are two almost identical 37'6" x 23'6" contributing buildings that were originally field houses (dressing rooms for athletes) but now serve as restrooms (see photos 1, 3, 4, 5). The field houses also exhibit minimal vernacular Craftsman stylistic decorative elements, such as low-pitched, front-gabled roofs with clipped gables, unboxed eaves and exposed rafter tails, exposed roof beams, and wide overhangs. Each has an asphalt shingle roof. Varied stonework and surfaces also lends to the feeling of the Craftsman style. The East Field House has, in its south wall, the letters W P A in dark stone, one over each window. Each field house is constructed of buff-colored, rectangular-cut, rock-faced and regularly coursed native limestone from ground level to a water table just below the windows; the windows have stone sills. From the water table to the eaves and in the end gables the walls are made of smooth stone, random shaped and sized, and uncoursed. Each field house has the original wood-frame windows and wooden door frames, but the doors, originally wood panel, have been replaced with steel units.

The fenestration pattern of each field house is slightly different. In the south wall of the WEST field house (photo 1) are four windows: a 1x1 double-hung window with interior bars, a small horizontal single window with steel mesh screen and interior bars, a 1x1 double-hung window (no bars or mesh), and a small horizontal single window with steel mesh screen and interior bars. The east side of the building (photo 4) has a new steel door and has three small horizontal boarded up single windows with steel mesh screens. The north side of the building has three small horizontal boarded up single windows, with steel mesh screens, and a new steel door, accessed by two concrete steps. The west side of the west building (photo 5) has two horizontal boarded up single windows with steel mesh screen and one 1x1 double-hung window with interior bars. In the southwest corner of the south wall is a metal WPA shield bearing the words WPA/1936. In the south wall of the EAST field house (photo 1) are four windows: three small horizontal single windows with steel mesh screen and interior bars, and one 1x1 double-hung window with mesh and bars. In the southeast corner of the south wall is a metal WPA shield bearing the words WPA/1936. The east side of the building has four boarded up

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horizontal single windows with steel mesh screens. The north side of the building (photo 3) has a new steel door, accessed by two concrete steps, and three boarded up horizontal single windows with steel mesh screen. The west side of the east field house has four boarded up horizontal single windows with steel mesh screen, and a new steel door in the southwest corner. The field houses now serve as restrooms for visitors and the interiors are plain, with plumbing fixtures.

From the southeast corner of the east field house and from the southwest corner of the west field house a noncontributing chain-link fence extends east/west to fence the property from the street. On the east there is a vehicle gate and an asphalt driveway running northeast/north around the east side of the athletic field; the gateway and driveway are outside the boundaries around this set of resources.

Between the two field houses is a grassy area with a WPA-built contributing twelve-foot-wide flagstone walk leading in from the ticket booth area. This walkway leads through and divides a concessions area that begins ten feet north of the field houses. The walk is demarcated by two low concrete-capped stone walls that lead to the central opening of the grandstand (see photos 3, 4). On each side of this walkway is a grassy courtyard that once served as a concessions area. The outside of each courtyard is demarcated by an eight-foot-wide flagstone-floored ramp, each with low stone walls, beginning ten feet north and approximately 20 to 25 feet east (or west) of each field house. The walls have concrete caps. These ramps provide secondary access openings from the field houses to the grandstand. (Each flagstone path also extends southward, past the field houses, toward 12th Street.) The easternmost and westernmost ramps' walls make a 90 degree turn when they reach the grandstand area and continue east/west for approximately 50 feet to each end of the grandstand, where they make another 90 turn and descend as side walls along the side stairways down the grandstand (see photos 15, 16, 17).

Originally, the two noncontributing WPA concessions buildings (used in the 1950s as pressboxes but now serving as storage buildings) were ten-foot-deep by sixteen-foot-wide stone buildings. The gable-end walls are made of smooth, randomly shaped and sized stone, and below the eaveline the stonework becomes rectangular, rock-faced, regularly coursed blocks. Each concessions building originally had a door in the south side, square service openings on east and west sides, and a wide service opening in the north side. The original wooden top-hinged panels that secured these openings have been replaced at an unknown date by newer wooden panels. The WEST concessions building (see photo 6), with random stonework in the end gables and regular coursing below, and with boxed eaves, was altered in 1973 by the addition of a shed-roofed, wood-frame, wood-paneled extension with four large upper-level pressbox windows and two sets of

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two wide wood-infilled service openings on a lower level. Only the upper level windows have glass because the building functions as a pressbox. In the upper level of the south side a steel door is accessed by a wooden stairway with steel handrail. At ground level, in the stone building, a steel door replaced an original wooden door on the south side; the original north and west service openings are closed by wooden panels.

The EAST concessions building (photos 7, 17), originally a stone building identical to the west building, was also altered in 1973 by the addition of a gable-roofed, wood-frame, wood-paneled extension with unboxed eaves like those in the original stone portion. The original wooden door on the south side of the original section was replaced with a steel door, and the service openings were enclosed with new wooden panels. The extension has two large wide service openings on the south side, two identical on the north side, and one on the west side (all have new wooden panels). There is a concrete pad on this side of the extension, and there are two metal railings at the south side of the pad (not original). Three stone walls of each of the original concessions are still visible. Along the north side of each concessions/pressbox still exists an original low two-foot-high wall; both of the extensions used this existing low stone wall as a stem wall for the new construction.

Between the concessions/low wall and the grandstand is a concrete aisle seven feet wide. The grandstand is separated from the aisle by a noncontributing new wood fence, made of panels of 2 x 12 boards attached to 4" steel posts; the fence is 9'2" in height. Approximately every fifty feet there is an opening into the grandstand.

The contributing concrete grandstand (photos 8, 9, 18, 19), descending from the pressbox area to the track and field below, is 96 feet deep by 242 feet long. It is 31 tiers high, with an eighteen-inch-high rise per tier; each tier is 3' deep, and has concrete bench seats elevated on stubs. The benches are deteriorating, making the internal steel reinforcing bars visible in many places. The grandstand has four seating sections, divided by three sets of concrete steps. There are also concrete steps at each end of the grandstand. On the east and west sides of the grandstand is a sloping four-foot rock wall made of rock-faced, regularly coursed stone. At the bottom of the stands is a similar rock wall with a set of concrete steps at each end and one in the center, leading down into the athletic field. The center opening has a chain-link gate. Below the wall is a drainage ditch and grassy area, between the wall and the asphalt running track. The track is approximately ten feet from the grandstand. There are no apparent alterations to the grandstand.

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On each side of the grandstand are 45-degree sloping areas, fourteen feet deep, faced with smooth, randomly shaped and sized stones that form retaining walls (see photos 8 and 10); these are contributing structures. On the east side of the grandstand, this wall extends for 114 feet east of the stands and joins with a curving stone fence that bounds the east side of the athletic field (photo 19). Above the slope, connected to the grandstand, is a 75 foot by 30-foot-deep concrete platform with a handrail on the north and a five-foot-high concrete wall on the south. On the west side of the grandstand, a sloping retaining wall extends for 101 feet, breaking off at a twelve-foot-wide by fourteen-foot deep stone-floored ramp that has thirty-inch-high side walls. To the west of this begins a 58-foot-long, vertical stone wall, placed to retain the slope. This eight-foot-high wall is made of smooth, randomly shaped and sized stone above three ranks of rectangular, rock-faced, regularly coursed blocks. This wall makes a 90 degree turn to the north and extends to join with the ground-level concessions building (photo 20). In this part of the wall, at ground level, a small stone arch was created over a shallow ditch that drains the field area. (The ditch runs the length of the field just below the grandstand. About six feet along its far west side, the ditch is rock lined; the rest has deteriorated.) These areas adjacent to the grandstand do not appear to have been altered.

The contributing rectangular concessions building, originally a "team building," (see photos 11 and 12) is made of rock-faced, randomly sized and shaped stones above four ranks of rectangular, regularly coursed blocks. Its flat roof is a low pediment. In the east wall there is: a (new) steel door; two very wide service opening (altered at an unknown date by removing the wooden panels that covered the openings and infilling with concrete blocks); and another (new) steel door. There are no windows on the north or south. The building's west wall, which actually sits nine feet outside the stadium proper, has two centrally placed, horizontal single windows, bricked in and screened with steel mesh, flanked by two square windows, also bricked in and screened with steel mesh, but the 3x3 frames remain in place.

The noncontributing asphalt track and gridiron fill up the interior of the athletic field area (see photo 13). The asphalt track replaced an 1936 original cinder track at an unknown date and is a noncontributing resource. The gridiron, sodded by the WPA in 1936, has not been repositioned, and it is counted as a contributing resource.¹

Along the west, north, and east of the field, the area is bounded by a two-foot-thick, eight-foot-high, approximately 1,100-foot-long contributing stone fence that extends in a shallow curve from the north wall of the lower concessions stand around the north side of the field to the east, engaging the

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grandstand at the northeast corner (photos 14, 20). The fence is made of smooth, randomly shaped and sized stone above three ranks of rectangular, rock-faced blocks. About 300 feet of the north side of this fence was reduced to a height of approximately one foot in 1973 when two new metal buildings--new field houses--were constructed on the site of an original northside band shell (photo 21).² The steps up into the dressing room still exist in the low wall. Because 75 percent of the full-height fence still exists, it is counted as a contributing resource. The new metal buildings are outside the boundaries drawn around this set of resources because all traces of the former building have been erased except for the steps that punctuate the remainder of the fence. Access to the track and field was and still is on the northeast side, via an original opening in the fence, now having a hinged, steel-pipe bump gate.

The eighteen noncontributing resources within the boundaries of this historic property include: STRUCTURES (15): five new wooden poles containing new athletic lighting (three on north, two on south), a metal scoreboard on the west side, two steel goalposts (one at each end of the gridiron), a six-lane asphalt running track (replaced a cinder track at an unknown date), a metal bump gate on the northeast side of the field, three utility poles (two wood, one steel) within the original field house/concessions area south of the grandstand, and chain-link fencing on the south side of the property; and the stone fencing on the north side of the district; BUILDINGS (3): a metal-building pressbox elevated on steel poles (dating from approximately 1973) inside the track (see photo 13), and the two altered upper-level concessions buildings. Bleachers and wooden platforms placed against the west fence are portable equipment, not permanent or attached fixtures.

ALTERATIONS:

The twelve WPA-built contributing resources within the district boundaries generally exhibit a high degree of integrity. The lower-level concessions building has been altered by infilling the east-side serving windows with concrete block. In all of the buildings, both contributing and noncontributing, the original wood-panel doors were replaced with steel doors at an unknown but fairly recent date, and windows have been boarded up for security, but all door frames and window frames are original. The removal of a portion of the stone fence on the north side of the property is a 1973 alteration, but 75 percent of the fence remains intact. The noncontributing resources are also essentially alterations to the district in the 1973 construction.³ The two original upper-level concessions buildings have been altered by the 1973 addition of an extension to each building and the replacement of deteriorated wooden panels in the service windows. The original stone buildings are still clearly intact, but the roofline has been extended to

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cover the addition. The original 1936 cinder track was replaced at an unknown date by an asphalt track of the same dimensions. In the early 1930s the stadium boasted two electronic scoreboards, which were retained when the WPA built the new grandstand and buildings, but they are gone, and there is now only one manual scoreboard on the site. The goalposts are new, as are the field lights. The addition of the new elevated pressbox, inside the track and next to the gridiron, is an alteration to the property.

The area surrounding the athletic complex is primarily park land lying in the "bottomland" of Okmulgee Creek. There are scattered residences to the east and south and southwest. This has not changed since the time of the selection of the area as a location for an athletic field in the mid-1920s or since the completion of the WPA project in 1936. The buildings and structures comprising Harmon Athletic Field exhibit a high degree of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. This is the only such resource within the city of Okmulgee, and it is the county's largest and most intact stadium complex yet surviving from the WPA era. As such, it is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

ENDNOTES

1. Okmulgee Daily Times, 27 September 1935, 17 November 1935.
2. Dan Morgan, Athletic Director, Okmulgee Public Schools, interview by Dianna Everett, 4 June 1997.
3. Ibid.

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SUMMARY:

Harmon Athletic Field is eligible under Criterion A within the economic context of Works Progress Administration projects in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, for 1935-1936 and under Criterion C within the architectural context of WPA building style and methodology locally and statewide. The buildings and structures of Harmon Athletic Field are excellent representatives of Works Progress Administration activity in the Okmulgee community. The athletic field complex was built in 1935-1936 and 1940 by area men working for the WPA as drought relief clients and by local unemployed men who qualified for work relief. The project brought \$50,000 into the economy of Okmulgee, Oklahoma, by employing dozens of previously unemployed, unskilled workers for more than six months. The buildings at Harmon Athletic Field are also significant architecturally as an intact example of WPA architecture and vernacular interpretation of the Craftsman style. The materials, native limestone quarried locally, and the workmanship, evident in the stonework and masonry, reflect both the goals of the WPA Building Program in Oklahoma and the practical considerations of using unskilled labor to construct public buildings. Three other large WPA-built projects remain intact in Okmulgee. This include the Okmulgee National Guard Armory (1937), the NYA Building (Recreation Center/Senior Center, 1939), and the Okmulgee Livestock Pavilion (1941). Of these, only the buildings at Harmon Athletic Field exhibit architectural details influenced by Craftsman architectural style. Harmon Athletic Field is able to convey appropriate feeling and association within these contexts and is therefore historically significant within the local context of Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE:

Oklahoma suffered severely during the initial years of the Great Depression, 1929-1933. In a predominantly rural state, where in 1930, 65.7 percent of the population lived in rural areas, and twenty-seven of the state's seventy-seven counties had no towns of more than 2,500 persons, drought, general agricultural failure from 1932 through 1938, and a downturn in the petroleum industry exacerbated the general economic depression. Rural communities, towns, and cities, which functioned as agricultural or petroleum service centers, consequently foundered.

Oklahoma's state and local governments were unable to provide much help for citizens, whether urban or rural. Limited relief offered by counties did not alleviate the suffering, nor did meager annual relief appropriations by the state legislature. No public funding was available to maintain the existing infrastructure, and private charity failed to create or to support relief initiatives. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, established in March 1933 by the Roosevelt administration, provided some direct relief, in terms of food, clothing, and small stipends, but until the inception of the Works

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Progress Administration in 1935 only a few Oklahomans received adequate assistance. The urban unemployed and displaced farm families combined to create a situation in which 33 percent of all Oklahoma families were on the direct relief rolls by the time that Roosevelt created the WPA by executive order in May, 1935. By July 1935, there were 127,416 jobless men certified in Oklahoma.¹

The inauguration of the Works Progress Administration in 1935 stands as one of the benchmarks of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" for the United States. Administered on the national level by Harry Hopkins, the program was designed to assist in lifting the nation from the depths of severe economic depression. Make-work projects provided work-relief for literally millions of individual citizens whose lives had been devastated by the near-collapse of the American economy. The infusion of cash into work-relief projects all over the state made a significant economic impact on hundreds of communities. During the seven-and-one-half-year life of the WPA, more than \$10.75 billion were expended, of which Oklahoma received more than \$185 million for projects ranging from school lunch programs, flood control, and archeological excavations, to major construction projects such as armories, highways, bridges, schools, stadiums, and museums.²

Localities competed for WPA funds from the outset. Chambers of Commerce and planning committees drew up specifications to meet three major criteria established by the administration: 1) projects must meet a well-defined community need; 2) each project must be sponsored by a public body, such as a city or county government or school district, which was required to provide from 10 to 25 percent of the project cost in cash and/or materials; and 3) 90 percent of those hired must be unemployed employable workers who were carried on the relief rolls. Compensation was to be based on 130 hours of work for \$21 (later \$23) per month for unskilled labor.³ In June 1935 Oklahoma WPA Director (Gen.) William S. Key estimated that there were already "70,000 employable unemployed" ready to work on his agency's projects throughout the state; by November of that year, 67,973 people were at work for the WPA, and by January 1936, WPA rolls reached an all-time high of 94,281.⁴

WPA projects in Oklahoma included a large number of outdoor recreational facilities, such as tennis, croquet, and shuffleboard courts, baseball and basketball facilities, rifle and archery ranges, roller rinks, golf courses, playgrounds, fair and rodeo grounds, swimming and wading pools, outdoor theaters and band shells, and zoos, as well as football and track facilities. In total, 73 new stadiums were built, with a total seating capacity of 129,457 persons, and 8 stadiums were reconstructed. A total of 94 athletic fields (gridirons) and 92 running tracks were also constructed and/or improved.⁵

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Okmulgee County, a predominantly rural area, had once been part of the Creek Nation. The city of Okmulgee served as the capital of the Creek Nation from 1869 until the dissolution of tribal government at the turn of the century. Agriculture--cotton farming--became an important economic activity. Okmulgee became a prominent service center for the predominantly agricultural and ranching region.

An oil boom beginning in 1907 brought prosperity to the city and county of Okmulgee, and by 1930 the city of Okmulgee had grown into a community of 18,040. Oil production, equipment manufacturing, and processing/refining became a staple of the economy; in 1920 the county produced one-sixth of all the oil produced in Oklahoma, and the town became known as "the hub of industrial Oklahoma."

Depressed oil and agriculture prices in the 1920s and drought in the early 1930s caused an economic decline in Okmulgee County, as elsewhere. Various manufacturing plants also closed down, and unemployment grew.⁶ In an effort at private aid, Mayor D. C. Kennan led local citizens in setting up a "One Per-Cent Club" in which financially sound Okmulgees donated 1 percent of their pay to a fund to aid local families; at one time 150 families benefitted. Private efforts, sadly, were not enough to stop the trend toward joblessness and homelessness in the wake of a major national depression. By September of 1934, 4,006 families, comprising 29.7 percent of the county population, were on direct relief. The WPA had a significant impact, reducing the number of families on relief to 3,178, or 25.2 percent of the county population by September of 1935. WPA jobs employed 503 persons by late December of 1935. In September of 1936, 1,886 persons in Okmulgee County worked for the WPA; by September of 1937, that number had fallen to 1,257. Construction of Harmon Athletic Field was a major portion of this effort.⁷

Between late summer, 1935, and mid-1937, Okmulgee city commissioners had submitted proposals for several WPA projects, including sidewalks, flood control construction at Lake Okmulgee Dam Spillway, an armory, a community building, fairgrounds buildings, and a complete reconstruction of Harmon Athletic Field, the city's athletic field, which then consisted of a sodded gridiron, wooden bleachers for two thousand, electric lights, and two electric scoreboards. The property had been acquired by the Board of Education in 1926 from R. D. Kennedy, of Okmulgee, and William E. Harmon, of New York City. The project for expanding the athletic field with WPA funds was proposed in September of 1935. It was to include site grading and drainage and construction of a 110 foot by 240 foot "concrete grandstand" that would seat five thousand, two field houses, a quarter-mile cinder track, and grounds work on the gridiron

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itself. On November 17, 1935, the Okmulgee Daily Times headlines announced "City Gets Fine Stadium," and described the many improvements, now including a "kitchen" (concessions area) and "rest rooms" (field houses) for which the WPA would furnish \$22,377. The gateway was to be re-sited 100 feet west of its original location, and the field was to be resodded. The original floodlights were to be retained. The project was to take an estimated six months. The Okmulgee Board of Education furnished \$3,600 in cash for the project, with the city furnishing equipment and materials.⁸ Construction began late in 1935, and the city anticipated hosting a regional track meet at the new facility in April. Construction delays precluded this, however, but by the Fourth of July the stadium was ready for use. A celebration was held there, and six thousand Okmulgees attended a huge fireworks show in the evening.⁹ In late 1939 another WPA project was proposed to add conveniences to the field complex, including a "team building," (now called the lower-level concessions building), a band shell (on north side, now gone), drainage, and a stone fence around the field. This work commenced in May 1940, occupying 92 workers for six months, at a cost of \$23,000 in WPA funds, with the city providing materials and equipment.¹⁰

WPA projects in 1935-1940 propped up the sagging rural economy of Okmulgee County, hard-hit because of extended agricultural depression and severe drought. Major projects in and near Okmulgee city included several farm-to-market roads, two large schools, a community center, and the customary WPA road repair and paving. By May of 1936 more than \$500,000 had been expended for all of the county's 45 WPA projects. Within the city, by May 1937 outdoor recreation projects included park improvements, a rifle range, a rose garden, and Harmon Athletic Field. By June 1937, 2,900 persons had worked for 3,593,218 hours on WPA projects throughout Okmulgee County. Although WPA work declined in 1938-1940, it still provided employment and funds in those years, with the stadium project and the construction of the Okmulgee Stock Pavilion as the major expenditures. The WPA's 1936-40 cost on the Harmon Athletic Field projects was \$45,000, with the city and school board providing its share in equipment and materials. In terms of physical size and complexity, the athletic field was the largest WPA project within the city of Okmulgee.¹¹

In human terms, tens of thousands of person-hours of labor went into the construction of the field. Most significantly, several hundred men were employed on the project. As with most WPA projects, this project was labor-intensive, designed to provide as much work as possible for those on relief rolls. Most of the hours were consumed in hand labor, cutting stone and accomplishing stone masonry work, as well as laying sod and pouring concrete.

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ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:

In several ways Harmon Athletic Field typifies WPA architecture in Oklahoma. The WPA preferred to use locally acquired materials, such as stone, usually quarried locally, or brick, manufactured locally or within the state. The Harmon Athletic Field resources were built of limestone quarried within Okmulgee County.¹²

WPA architectural philosophy prohibited the use of ornate features, intricate structure, and elaborate trim; therefore; WPA buildings and structures tend to be straightforwardly utilitarian. They have a strong horizontal massing, a fortresslike quality, which is often relieved only by simple detailing or by virtue of being a provincial interpretation of a romantic style, such as Craftsman.¹³ The buildings at Harmon Athletic Field suggest a stylistic influence, and their design includes Craftsman elements such as a low-pitched, front-gabled roof with unboxed eaves and exposed rafters, exposed roof beams, and wide overhang. The varied stonework and surfaces also lends a Craftsman-like feeling. Like other WPA buildings and structures, the design and materials of Harmon Athletic Field's buildings reflects simplicity advocated by the federal program. Its rough simplicity also reflects the skills of local designers and supervisors, the minimal funding for design and materials, and the amateur status of laborers who worked as stonecutters, masons, and so forth.

Harmon Athletic Field is the largest of three WPA-built athletic fields in Okmulgee County. Two others, the Henrietta Athletic Field and Stadium, and the Beggs Athletic Field and Stadium, are much smaller and less elaborate, and both have been altered.¹⁴ Harmon Athletic Field symbolizes the WPA's efforts to provide good, state-of-the art design for athletics in the county.

While these WPA-built historic resources may not be architectural masterpieces, they served the WPA's purpose--to make work, and to provide outdoor recreational facilities for a population who could not afford expensive forms of entertainment. WPA stadiums and field facilities exemplify the New Deal's practical determination to "do something--and do something now." As David Baird notes in his survey of WPA resources of Oklahoma, WPA buildings are "the architecture of the poor," "mute reminders of the emotional distress and physical pain many Oklahomans suffered during the 1930s and of the enlightened relief effort by the federal government that alleviated much of the suffering."¹⁵ In type, style, scale, materials, and workmanship, Harmon Athletic Field is a fine example of WPA outdoor recreation facilities, structures and buildings that, because of materials and workmanship, as a class are unique when compared to the rest of the built environment, both in Okmulgee and across the state. As such, it is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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ENDNOTES

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2. Baird, "Final Report", 10; "Final Report of the Oklahoma Work Projects Administration, February 27, 1943," Archives of the Work Projects Administration and Predecessors, 1933-1943, Series One: The Final State Reports, 1943 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1987), 1; "Building Construction Report, February, 1943," in *ibid.*, 5-6.
3. "Questions and Answers on the WPA [brochure]," (Washington, D.C.: Work Projects Administration, December 1, 1939), Vertical File, Oklahoma Historical Society; Baird, "Final Report," 11; Kingfisher (Oklahoma) Times, July 9, 1936.
4. Guthrie (Oklahoma) Daily Leader, June 23, 1935; Daily Oklahoman, September 12, 1937.
5. "Final Report of the Oklahoma Works Projects Administration," Works Projects Administration for Oklahoma (typescript, 1943)," Edmon Low Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma, n. p.
6. John W. Morris, "The Smaller Cities," Cities of Oklahoma, ed. John W. Morris (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1979), 11, 16; History of Okmulgee County (N.p.: Okmulgee County Historical Society and Heritage Society of America, 1985), 96, 134; Garry Nall, "King Cotton in Oklahoma, 1825-1839," Rural Oklahoma, ed. Donald E. Green (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1977), 38-43, 51-52.
7. History of Okmulgee County, 283, 286; Daily Oklahoman, September 29, 1935; Okmulgee Daily Times, 27 December 1935, 12 May 1937, 17 June 1937; Daily Oklahoman, September 12, 1937.
8. Okmulgee Daily Times, 17 November 1935; WPA Project No. 1788 and Project No. 5259, "Index to Reference Cards for Work Projects Administration Project Files, 1935-1942," (Washington, D.C.: WPA, c. 1942), Micro T-935, reel 54; Okmulgee Daily Times, 29 August 1935, 27 September 1935; Baird Martin, "Historical, Industrial and Civic Survey of Okmulgee and Okmulgee County," Prepared for American Guide, WPA Writers' Project (May 1936), 105-106.
9. Okmulgee Daily Times, 1 April 1936, 5 July 1936.
10. Okmulgee Daily Times, 8 February 1940, 7 March 1940, 2 May 1940.

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11. Martin, "Historical, Industrial and Civic Survey," 106; "Index to Reference Cards for WPA Project Files."
 12. Martin, "Historical, Industrial and Civic Survey," 104; Work Projects Administration, Community Improvement Appraisal Reports, Edmon Low Library, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, n.p.
 13. Final Report on the WPA Program, 1935-43 (Washington, D.C.: G. P. O., c. 1943), 52; Baird, "Final Report," 15, 21, 23.
 14. Baird, "Final Report," 22-36.
 15. Baird, "Final Report," 17; *ibid.*, 2.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

Beginning at the southeast corner of the East Field House, proceed due South for 10 feet to the Point of Beginning. From this point of beginning, proceed due East for 88 feet; turn due North and proceed 116 feet; turn due East and proceed 176 feet; turn due North and proceed for 446.5; turn due West and proceed for 600 feet; turn due South and proceed for 350 feet; turn due East and proceed 183 feet; turn due South and proceed 212 feet; turn due East and proceed 164 feet to the point of beginning, having described a closed polygon, shaped approximately as a truncated "T".

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The boundary includes all of the resources historically associated with the district's complex of structures and buildings at Harmon Athletic Field. The boundary excludes the 1970s-era metal field houses because they were not present during the district's period of significance and do not contribute to the district's significance.