

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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

1. Name of Property

Historic name Western Public Service Building

Other names/site number Consumers Public Power District Bldg; Nebraska Public Power District Bldg; SF11-112

2. Location

Street & number 1721 Broadway Not for publication

City or town Scottsbluff Vicinity

State Nebraska Code NE County Scotts Bluff Code 157 Zip code 69361

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Laura Sanner
Signature of certifying official

6/17/04
Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.

see continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.

see continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

Linda McClelland

10/15/04

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

Western Public Service Building

Name of Property

Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- x Private
Public-local
Public-state
Public-federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- x Building(s)
District
Site
Structure
Object

Number of Resources within Property

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

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for Buildings, Sites, Structures, Objects, Total. Values: 1, 1.

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce: Utility Business

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Vacant/Work in Progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement: Art Deco

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation Concrete

Walls Terra Cotta & Brick

Roof Flat-tar & seal coated

Other

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.)

- x 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.
x C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Commerce: Utility Service

Period of Significance

1931-1954

Significant Dates

1931

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Everett L. Goldsmith, Architect

Ernest Leafgreen, Builder

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
Previously listed in the National Register
Previously determined eligible by the National Register
Designated a National Historic Landmark
Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location for additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local Government
University
Other
Name of repository:

Western Public Service Building

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Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

Table with 7 columns: Zone, Easting, Northing, Zone, Easting, Northing. Includes entries for 1, 2, 3, 4 and a note to 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 Nancy Haney, Independent Historian
organization
street & number 192726 Preston Road
city or town Lyman
date March 15, 2004
telephone (308) 247-2888
state NE zip code 69352

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/title Roger Frank, Frank Enterprises, Inc.
street & number 3609 Bison
city or town Scottsbluff
telephone (308) 632-3551
state NE zip code 69361

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form.

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Western Public Service Building

Name of Property

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The Western Public Service Company Building is located in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, the largest community in Nebraska's panhandle (2000 Pop. 14,732) approximately 400 miles west of Lincoln, the Nebraska state capital, and approximately 100 miles northeast of Cheyenne, the Wyoming state capital. Platted in 1900, Scottsbluff is in the North Platte River Valley. Flat river plains dissected by dramatic hills and bluffs dominate the surrounding countryside. Scotts Bluff National Monument rises several hundred feet above the surrounding plain west and south of the community.

Scottsbluff is primarily laid out in a grid pattern, and the Western Public Service Company Building is positioned within the central business district on the southeast corner of Eighteenth Street and Broadway, Scottsbluff's main street. The Lincoln Hotel (NRHP 1998) is three blocks south, Scottsbluff Carnegie Library (NRHP 1981) is one block east and the Midwest Theater (NRHP 1997) is located in the same block, just six buildings south. Typical for its time and place, Scottsbluff's business district consists primarily of low-rise commercial and institutional buildings, built and modified over an extended period. All about the sidewalks, use similar materials and have similar proportions and scale. Integrity of these buildings ranges widely, with the most serious alterations generally occurring on the street level storefronts.

Description

Designed by Scottsbluff architect, Everett L. Goldsmith, the 50' X 110' Western Public Service Company Building is constructed of reinforced concrete on a steel frame over a full basement. The most prominent architectural feature is the terra cotta sheathing of the two public façades, the west and the north. The large cream-colored terra cotta tiles have an uneven finish in the glazing, and are laid to resemble regular coursed ashlar with a short return on the unadorned south and east façades.

The front of the building is divided into three bays by four stylized pilasters projecting from the wall surface. These pilasters terminate at the fourth story level with flat relief reeding formed into the terra cotta tiles. These pilasters are repeated on the building's north side. At the street level, the right bay is filled with the building's main entrance emphasized with stylized fascines capped with laurel wreaths on either side of the entrance. The recessed, beveled entry is highlighted with pilasters having plain bases, elaborately molded bas-relief floral shafts and floral capitals that frame a corbelled arch opening. A fanlight window rests above two steel-framed, double lighted doors. Directly above the doorway molded into the terra cotta tiles is the name, "Western Public Service Co."

The north bay at the street level was built with an angled cutaway door behind the supporting corner pilaster. This entrance opened into the display rooms and the company's local office. The entrance was removed during a subsequent c.1960 remodel that put storefront windows in the openings on both the west and the north, enclosing the entry and making a flush storefront identical to the middle bay on the front and second bay on the north side. The early photographs show stained glass transom windows over the storefront windows; however these must have been removed at the time of the entry door remodel and were replaced with solid panels. A flat metal awning projecting above the two front windows was also added at that time.

Three steel-framed casement windows fill the second, third, and fourth story openings on the front façade. On the north façade there are five casement windows back of the north facing storefront bays and there are ten windows per story to fill the second, third and fourth story openings. Each window is divided into six lights of unequal size. These are new windows set into the original openings and are close replicas of the originals. These replacement windows do not diminish the overall strong integrity of the building exterior.

Under the second story casement windows, ornamental vertical bars of varying lengths form scallops that create a horizontal wave pattern. This decorative work recurs on the first and last bay on the north side. The space below the other north facing second story windows is filled with a horizontal tile band with floral and sunrise bas-relief decoration.

An elaborate ornamental frieze formed of bas-relief terra cotta tiles is at the crest of the building. Large tiles have a quarter rising sun in each bottom corner. Two outward facing acanthus leaves support a symmetrically leafed rosette that dominates the middle of the tile. Other stylized leaves and buds fill in the remainder of the space. Parallel bands of 6-inch decorative tile frame the large tiles on the top and bottom. The frieze extends across the entire width and length of the building on the west and north

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facades. On June 20, 1997, "lighting blasted a chunk of brick off the top [northwest] corner"¹ of the building. During the rehabilitation this will be restored.

The south and east sides of the building are composed of cream-colored brick pierced by symmetrically placed windows with terra cotta sills. On the south side, the front one third of the building abuts a two story commercial building that becomes one-story for the back two thirds. The Western Public Service building jogs north approximately 8' to accommodate the fire escape exits from the second, third and fourth stories. The elevator shaft extends approximately 10' up from the roofline at the inside corner of the jog. On the east side of the building off the alley is the back entrance and access to the freight elevator. A white brick covered chimney is attached to the southeast corner. Three horizontal bands of terra cotta extend the lines of the crest to the east side and serve to tie it to the highly ornamental north and west facades.

Upon entering the building one is struck by the integrity of the interior spaces. The original terrazzo floor, the walnut-stained birch cabinetry, woodwork and paneling from Grand Rapids, Michigan and the coffered ceilings with original light fixtures remain. The main office is located through the doors to the immediate left. This room was the location of the company's local office and bill paying desk. There are four rooms in back of the main office, all with the original woodwork and cabinetry. One was the local superintendent's office, one was used as the display area for the newest electrical equipment and household appliances, and the other two were for meter testing and a laboratory.

Returning to the front entry, the lobby is entered through two original doors with leaded-glass panels of stepped pyramids that resemble the outline of a skyscraper. The original brass push bars on the doors show the "semi-futuristic" styling of the Corbin hardware found throughout the building. The lobby exhibits a terrazzo floor and walnut-finished panels of birch on the lower part of the wall. Above the paneling, incised plaster resembling large building blocks extends to the coffered ceiling. At the back of the lobby the elevator entrance is located next to the terrazzo stairway that leads to the upper floors.

The terrazzo-floored and wood paneled corridor of the second floor lead to the executive offices and conference rooms at the front of the building. Other offices are located along the hallway toward the back of the building. All of these rooms retain the original wood paneling, light fixtures, doors and hardware. The third floor was built as the general accounting rooms and private office of the company treasurer, while the engineering department and the statistical department occupied the fourth floor. These two floors now reflect office design popular during the 1970s.

The Western Public Service building maintains a very high degree of integrity of design, workmanship, location, setting, materials and feeling of the period. The building is an important landmark for the city, a visual anchor in the central business district of Scottsbluff. It is one of the most refined examples of the Art Deco style of commercial architecture in the region.

¹ *Star-Herald*, June 21, 1997

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SIGNIFICANCE

Built in 1930-1931, the Western Public Service Company building in Scottsbluff is a locally prominent landmark that derives its significance from two principal areas: commerce and architecture. The historical importance of the building under Criterion A lies in its association with the development of electric power supply in Scottsbluff that grew to encompass surrounding towns in western Nebraska and eastern Wyoming. The building housed the headquarters, offices and retail sales of the electric company's business. The Western Public Service Company was bought by Consumers Public Power District in 1942 as public power companies began buying the privately owned electric companies in the state of Nebraska. Later Consumers Public Power District merged with three utilities becoming a part of the larger Nebraska Public Power District, a public corporation and political subdivision of the State of Nebraska. Nebraska's is the only state that is served entirely by publicly owned power companies. The period of significance for this property begins in 1931 with the construction of the building and extends to 1954, 50 years prior to today.

The embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of the Art Deco Style make the Western Public Service Company building significant under Criterion C. The four story rectangular-shaped building is an excellent example of this style not readily found in small town Nebraska, and the building retains exceptionally high exterior and interior integrity.

Criterion A: Historical Significance

Like many towns along the north side of the North Platte River, Scottsbluff came into existence as a result of the extension of the Burlington Railroad built through the North Platte Valley. In December 1899, the Lincoln Land Company, a Burlington subsidiary, laid out the Scottsbluff town site and the railroad track reached the town site in February of 1900. There was a bridge across the river at the town site connecting it to Gering, the county seat of Scotts Bluff County, founded in 1887. Scottsbluff promoters believed that the town of Gering would relocate across the river because of the railroad and some of Gering's merchants and townspeople did, but the majority stayed put waiting for the promised Union Pacific Railroad extension to be built. It was not until 1911 that U.P. reached Gering and by that time the population of Scottsbluff had outstripped Gering. The U. S. census for 1910 records 1,746 as the population of Scottsbluff while Gering's population for that year was only 627. The population of Scottsbluff exploded between 1910 and 1920 to 6,912, an increase of 296%, and by 1930 it had increased to 8,465, a 122% increase.

"Riding on the back of the Burlington RR, the town progressed slowly until 1904. Then came the era of the big ditches, the construction of the big [Interstate] and Tri-State irrigation canals. These projects brought several thousand construction workers into the valley...[T]he Great Western Sugar Co., in 1910, completed the erection of a beet sugar factory in Scottsbluff...[and] frame buildings were beginning to be replaced by brick stores, many of which are still in use. Concrete sidewalks began to replace the wood walks, and an electric light system started replacing the gas lamp about the same time."²

Development of Electric Service

On February 18, 1909, the Scottsbluff village board granted an electric franchise to Clarence J. Morley and James C. Caine of Denver, Colorado. "They built a shed south of the tracks, installed a [stationary] steam engine and small generator and called it the Scottsbluff Electric Power Company. They set cedar posts along Main Avenue and some of the residential streets to carry the old iron wire transmission lines. The original plant was about the size of a fair sized farm lighting system."³ "The service was fairly good in the day time, when few lights were needed, but when people began snapping on their new lights, the bulbs would give off only a dull red glow...[local residents remember] infuriating experiences in the Crystal theatre when the lights would go off in the middle of the picture, and sometimes stay off so long that the audience would go home in disgust."⁴ By 1910 the company went broke with debts of approximately \$9,500. In 1911 the Scottsbluff Electric Power Co. was sold to A. B. Cross and Fred H. Roberts who established the Cross and Roberts (C & R) Electric Company with Fred Roberts as the driving force.

² Young, Robert, "The Story of Scottsbluff in Brief" *Scottsbluff and the North Platte Valley*, Scottsbluff, Nebraska: Star-Herald Printing Co. 1950) 7-8.

³ Moomaw, Leon A., *Pioneering in the Shadow of Chimney Rock*, (Gering, Nebraska: Courier Press, 1966) 243.

⁴ *Star-Herald*, August 7, 1950.

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Fred H. Roberts had grown up in Norfolk, Nebraska and after his schooling he worked as an electrical helper at the sugar factory in Norfolk. He spent fifteen years at the factory, advancing up the management ladder, and when that factory closed in 1907, Roberts went to the sugar factory at Sterling, Colorado becoming its superintendent. Upon visiting Scottsbluff when the Scottsbluff sugar factory was being established, Roberts learned that the town needed a better electrical plant. He "interested A. B. Cross, a cattle buyer for the sugar company and on March 18, 1911 they obtained a 20-year franchise from the village board with an agreement to install a modern, efficient plant and new pumping equipment for the water works to cost not less than \$15,000."⁵...Shortly after the purchase, the local newspaper had an advertisement that read:

"For Sale!

The building now occupied by the Electric Light Plant is for sale cheap to anyone wishing such a building will do well to call and see me before buying new material.

F. H. Roberts"⁶

On May 26, 1911 this article appears, " The old electric light plant has been dismantled, and on its site is arising the modern stone and steel structure that will henceforth house the generators and engines, etc., of the best equipment that money can buy. Mr. Roberts has the pole line pretty thoroughly overhauled, and by July first expects to 'turn on the juice.'"⁷ Roberts "installed big diesel engines, and made 140 service connections to business houses and private residences. Pressed by the village board and the public, and over-eager himself, Roberts started up the plant before installation was complete, with the result that the engine exploded and nearly wrecked the entire enterprise."⁸ After repairs were made, the company operated with reasonable success adding Gering to its area of service in 1912. Roberts bought out the interests of his partner in 1913. More equipment was installed and an artificial ice plant and a steam heating plant were added to the enterprise. "By 1915 the value of the plant was estimated to be worth \$100,000."⁹

Inter-Mountain Railway, Light & Power Co./ Western Public Service Co.

Roberts sold the business on March 1, 1916 to the Inter-Mountain Railway, Light & Power Company of Colorado Springs, Colorado. "The new owners are said to be a \$3,000,000 company...and now have plants in operation in Chadron, Crawford and Hastings this state, the latter place having a system connecting several towns; at Laramie City, Wyoming, and Las Animas and Lamar, Colorado."¹⁰ F. M. Huffman, a former employee of C & R Electric became superintendent. The company announced that it would extend its service to Minatare, Nebraska and on to Bayard, Nebraska by the end of the year. However, the Inter-Mountain Company was soon in trouble; coal shortages began to develop due to World War I and the company had trouble getting enough coal to maintain a constant electrical output. One night at the hospital an operation was being performed on a prominent businessman and the lights went out. Soon to follow was the company's announcement that it would have to shut down the plant part time because of the coal shortage. "Public patience broke and a mob headed for the light plant with full intention of hanging the Superintendent." [A local businessman intervened and] "coal was secured and steady electric current was provided."¹¹

After World War I, Inter-Mountain took a big step to improve its service. They made extensive improvements to the buildings and installed "Big Bertha," a 600 kilowatt generating unit. " 'Superpower' had come in, resulting from improvements in generating equipment and transmission lines that made possible stepping up power output from 2,300 to 22,000 volts. The plant at

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Scotts Bluff County Republican*, consecutive issues between April 21, 1911 and May 26, 1911.

⁷ *Ibid.*, May 26, 1911.

⁸ *Star-Herald*, August 7, 1950.

⁹ Moomaw, Leon A., *Pioneering in the Shadow of Chimney Rock*, (Gering, Nebraska: Courier Press, 1966) 243.

¹⁰ *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*, February 24, 1916.

¹¹ Moomaw, Leon A., *Pioneering in the Shadow of Chimney Rock*, (Gering, Nebraska: Courier Press, 1966) 244.

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Scottsbluff began to integrate surrounding town electrical systems, extending to Bridgeport, Broadwater, Melbeta and McGrew."¹²

By 1922, the Inter-Mountain Railway, Light & Power Company took notice of the tendency of utility companies to put the word "public" into their titles, so the name was changed to Western Public Service Company. "With the Scottsbluff operation getting bigger and bigger, [company president] E. C. Van Diest, moved the headquarters of the company to Scottsbluff, with general offices over the (now) Gambles store."¹³ This was on the second story of a building directly across from an empty lot at the corner of 18th Street and Broadway. The local Scottsbluff office was located at 18 E. 16th Street. The company's business went along smoothly for a couple of years, but then "began to have serious trouble with its profits and loss statement, which were turning redder and redder every month, and in August, 1925, it [Western Public Service] was sold to Stone and Webster, a Boston holding company with many and varied interests."¹⁴

Stone and Webster was a national engineering-consulting company that serviced utilities through management contracts, often taking partial payment in stock, which it distributed to its New England investors. It organized holding companies for no other purpose than to acquire utilities for the purpose of getting their security business. In 1925 it formed a new national holding company, Engineers Public Service Company, to control its public-utility companies through stock ownership. Western Public Service Company was placed under the control of Engineers Public Service Company that was in turn under the control of Stone and Webster. The Western Public Service Company name continued to be used on the regional level.

A promotional brochure for the North Platte Valley published in 1927 states in its description of Scottsbluff, "The Western Public Service Company furnishing light and power to many of the valley towns, maintains its Northern Division offices here, looking after their interests in four states where they have properties located."¹⁵

By 1929 the company had outgrown its office space so it selected the E. L. Goldsmith Architect Company of Scottsbluff to design the Western Public Service Company's new office building to be built on the empty lot at the corner of 18th Street and Broadway. It was to incorporate the local office and engineering section as well as the company's general headquarters offices. The building's general contract was let on July 26, 1930 and Ernest Leafgreen was selected as the general contractor. When finished the total cost was \$123,567.23.¹⁶

The Western Public Service Company Building opened on March 30, 1931, one month before New York City's Empire State Building. Many pages of the *Scottsbluff Star Herald* newspaper were devoted to the new building. In one article written by Elizabeth Hughes Thies, she states, "New York has its Chrysler building, and Detroit its Book tower. After all, grandeur is more or less comparative, but civic pride is the same everywhere. Scottsbluff has its Western Public Service Building."¹⁷

Another newspaper article that accompanied the opening of the building gives a better understanding of the company:

"...The Western Public Service company has in the territory it serves, a program of expansion (that) has been taking place ever since the present management took control. Beginning with the transfer of the general offices of the company from Colorado Springs to Scottsbluff, in August, 1925, up to the opening of this new structure, a period of extensive growth has been experienced such as is seldom paralleled by any company. The expansion...has kept abreast of the growing territory it serves. In 1925 there were approximately 150 employees as compared with 500 at the present time, over 90 of whom are residents of Scottsbluff and are housed in the new building.

¹² *Star-Herald*, August 7, 1950.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *The Scotts Bluff Country: "America's Valley of the Nile"* (Scottsbluff Star-Herald, Scottsbluff, Nebraska, 1927) 7.

¹⁶ "Appraisal Electric Light and Steam Heating Property, Scottsbluff, Nebraska, 1933. Western Public Service Co. records.

¹⁷ *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*, March 29, 1931.

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Here have been constructed 1,500 miles of high tension transmission lines to inter-connect the various plants operated by the company, thus to insure more than one source of power to practically all of the 125 communities served in Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming and Missouri.

The capacity of the generating plants has been increased from 10,000 horsepower to 25,000 horsepower and, through interconnection with other utilities, additional power supply is made available to patrons.

In 1925 there were 12,275 customers being served as compared with 26,100 customers now, and electric lines are being built into the rural territory as rapidly as they are justified....

The 1931 budget calls for new construction of over one million dollars, half of which will be spent in western Nebraska. The new building will serve as the nucleus toward furthering the policies of the company and adequately care for the demands of its customers."¹⁸

In 1931 the management of the Western Public Service Company in Scottsbluff was composed of men who had all been transferred from other divisions by the parent company, Stone and Webster. Company President G. W. Swift came from Louisiana division of the Gulf States Utilities company; General Superintendent, F. C. Taylor had been with the power division of construction organization of the Stone and Webster Engineering corporation; Division Superintendent W. P. Venable was transferred from the Virginia Electric and Power company; Sales Manager M. T. Anthony came from the Missouri Service company; and Company Treasurer D. J. Graham and Purchasing Agent O. C. Olsen both came from the Puget Sound Power and Light company.

Western Public Service Company was expanding its territory in 1931 as well. The North Central district along the upper Middle Loop valley in Nebraska was formed and added to the company. 40 miles of new transmission line was constructed and a new generating plant at Seneca served Thedford, Seneca, Halsey and Dunning. Two hydroelectric developments were put into operation, and service to South Dakota and Kansas were added.¹⁹ By 1933 the company's Scottsbluff holdings alone (the electric property, the steam heating system and the farm lines) were valued at \$1,001,734.26.²⁰

However, all was not well on the national scene for Stone and Webster as there were rumblings of public opposition to private holding companies that consolidated and dominated the power industry. "In 1932 Congress passed a law that permitted the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to loan funds to public groups for irrigation and hydroelectric projects. The next year, despite fierce opposition from private power companies that denounced the scheme as socialism, the Nebraska legislature authorized the formation of public power and irrigation districts as governmental agencies with power to borrow money backed by revenue bonds. Soon Nebraskans formed public power districts in Columbus, North Platte, and Hastings. [At the same time] a series of rural public-power districts were formed to distribute electricity to the farms of the state."²¹

Farmers had been at a disadvantage for electric service until then unless their farm was located directly along power lines that connected the towns and cities. In 1930, there were 12,675 small electric plants on the farms of the state, and 5,278 farms were connected with lines operated by power companies.²² In 1935 under the leadership of Nebraska Senator George W. Norris and Texas Congressman Sam Rayburn, the Rural Electrification Administration was created. It provided federal loans for publicly owned rural electrification systems to build power generation and delivery systems for the rural population.

Also in 1935 the Federal Trade Commission's investigations and revelations of the powerful holding companies led to passage of the Public Utility Holding Company Act (PUHCA) of 1935. This act required the Securities and Exchange Commission to break up holding companies that owned utility companies scattered across the nation. With this anti-trust regulation, Stone and Webster was forced to leave its subsidiary, the Engineers Public Service Company which in turn had to divest itself of regional companies it owned; but this took some time. Stone and Webster remained at the helm of the Western Public Service Company

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Western Public Service Co. records, "Appraisal of Electric Light and Steam Heating Property," 18.

²¹ Luebke, Frederick C., *Nebraska: An Illustrated History*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 292-293.

²² Condra, George Evert, *Geography, Agriculture, Industries of Nebraska*, (Lincoln, Chicago, Dallas, New York: The University Publishing Company, 1934) 271.

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until January 1942. In the meantime the company improved the service in Scottsbluff by building the Bluffs Station at 815 First Avenue and installing a 2,500 kilowatt turbine in 1940.

Consumers Public Power/Nebraska Public Power

In Nebraska, the public power districts that had formed in Columbus, North Platte and Hastings had branched out to build an interconnected complex of dams, canals, reservoirs, hydroelectric plants, and power lines spread across the state. In 1940 those three power-generating districts organized the Nebraska Public Power System. In 1939, a Consumers Public Power authority that was independent of the power-generating districts was created to buy out competing privately owned utilities.²³ By early 1942 Consumers Public Power District had purchased all of the privately owned electrical utilities in the state except for the Nebraska Power Company serving the city of Omaha and vicinity that was purchased by the Omaha Public Power District.²⁴

"On January 2, 1942 Consumers Public Power District acquired all of the Nebraska properties, and a minor extension into South Dakota, of the Western Public Service Company. These properties were located in thirty counties in the western part of the state. The Western Public Service Company was a subsidiary of the Engineers Public Service Company, Inc., and it served 19,709 customers. Its purchase was financed by the sale of \$8,300,000 in revenue bonds. It was then organized into the district's Western Nebraska Division."²⁵ The Western Public Service Company building in Scottsbluff remained as the headquarters for western division of the Consumers Public Power District. The letters "Electric Company" were superimposed over the Western Public Service Co. name on the building, although most people called it the "Consumers Building."

The Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) was formed January 1, 1970, as the result of the merger of three Nebraska electric utility entities: Consumers Public Power District, the Platte Valley Public Power & Irrigation District and the Nebraska Public Power System.²⁶

Both the regional and the local offices of NPPD continued to operate out of the "Electric Company" building, although now it became the "NPPD Building." The number of regional employees working in the office gradually diminished because these jobs were transferred to the general office in Columbus, Nebraska. The local office remained in the building, but the upper floor offices were rented to other entities. In March 2003 the local office was combined with the newly remodeled facility at NPPD's Bluffs Station on First Avenue in Scottsbluff, and the building was sold to Frank Enterprises of Scottsbluff.

Criterion C: Architectural Significance

The Western Public Service Company building is significant for its architectural merit. Although its structure is essentially a rectangular box, the details and ornamentation exemplify the elements identified with the modernistic movement and most especially the Art Deco style. It is a notable and regionally rare example of this architectural style.

"Art Deco architecture was an architecture of ornament, geometry, energy, retrospection, optimism, color, texture, light and at times even symbolism." "What made buildings Art Deco... was their generally non-structural decorative elements." "A wide range of Art Deco municipal and federal structures were built, among them town halls, state and national capitols...(including) the highly influential municipal structure –Bertram Grosvenor Goodhues's Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln (c.1920-32)." ²⁷ Architect E. L. Goldsmith had studied at the University of Nebraska during initial building of the Nebraska State Capitol and perhaps that influenced his design for the Western Public Service Company building. His other major buildings in the area prior to then--the Minatare High School, 1926; the Kimball County Courthouse, 1928 (KM04-070); and the Sioux County Courthouse, 1930(SX04-002)--had been of the Classical Revival style.

²³ Firth, Robert E., *Public Power in Nebraska: A Report on State Ownership*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1962) 147.

²⁴ Luebke, Frederick C., *Nebraska: An Illustrated History*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 293.

²⁵ Firth, Robert E., *Public Power in Nebraska: A Report on State Ownership*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1962) 147.

²⁶ "Inside NPPD," Nebraska Public Power District pamphlet, November, 1989.

²⁷ Bayer, Patricia Bayer, *Art Deco Architecture: Design, Decoration and Detail from the Twenties and Thirties*, (New York :Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992) 8,176-177.

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According to the Lincoln city directories, Everett L. Goldsmith trained at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln in the early 1910s, worked as a clerk for architect John R. Smith of Lincoln, and by 1914 was listed as an instructor at Nebraska University. In 1918 and in 1920 Goldsmith was "Superintendent of Construction," at the University of Nebraska. In 1922 he is not listed among the "Architects & Superintendents" in the business section, but rather in the resident list as "architect."²⁸

Goldsmith relocated to Scottsbluff during the next year as his name appears in the Scottsbluff telephone directory in 1923. A later Scottsbluff City Directory lists the E. L. Goldsmith & Co., architects, as having an office in the Weller Building located on Broadway.²⁹ The newspaper article that appeared in 1931 when the Western Public Service Company building opened states, "Mr. Goldsmith has operated as an architect in Scottsbluff for the past eight years, and has furnished the specifications for some of the largest and finest buildings in western Nebraska. Before coming here he was superintendent of construction for the University of Nebraska at Lincoln."³⁰ Goldsmith's architect's fee for the Western Public Service Company building was \$5,607.23.³¹ Ernest Leafgreen of Minatare was awarded the general contract for the construction although a Denver contractor did the steel framework. The terra cotta most likely came from the Denver Terra Cotta Co. although the specific name of the Denver company is not mentioned in the newspapers or records, nor is the name of the company from Grand Rapids Michigan that supplied the woodwork or the New York company that furnished the steel casement windows.

Significance

The Western Public Service Company building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A for its historical significance. It represents the development of electrical service in a small town with extensive growth that expanded to encompass nearly all of western Nebraska and surrounding territory.

The Western Public Service Company building is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for its architectural merit as well. Though not a skyscraper, the Western Public Service Company building exudes that sleek feeling in the small town streetscape. For a utilitarian office building, the Western Public Service Company is a small Art Deco gem with its beautiful non-structural decorative elements including the terra cotta-sheathed facades and reeded pilasters that draw attention upward to the elaborate bas-relief floral and sunrise crown. The ornamental doorway entrance, decorated with stylized floral and geometric patterns in cream-colored terra cotta, and the scalloped features under the window are noteworthy embellishments as well. The intact interior spaces also lend to the attractiveness of the building. The original Art Deco cabinetry and paneling, the light fixtures and stylized hardware, and the terrazzo floors create a strong sense of unity to the period and speak to the overall excellent physical integrity of the building. As a major work of small town architect, it represents an exceptional example of the Art Deco style in rural Nebraska.

²⁸ *Lincoln City Directory*

²⁹ *Keiter Directory Co's Scottsbluff City, Gering City and North Platte Valley Nebraska Directory, 1926-1927*, (Norfolk, Nebraska: Keiter Directory Company Publishers) 63.

³⁰ *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*, March 29, 1931.

³¹ Western Public Service Company records.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

Lots 17 & 18, Block 2, Original Town Addition to Scottsbluff, Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries for the Western Public Service Building include all of the land historically associated with the property.

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Photographs

The following information pertains to the following 9 photographs:

Western Public Service Company
Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska
Photographer: Bill Callahan, NeSHPO
November 2003
Negatives in the collection of the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office

Photograph	Description of Photograph	View
1 of 9	View of Western Public Service Company, front or west façade.	E
2 of 9	View of Western Public Service Company, west and north façades.	SSE
3 of 9	View of Western Public Service Company, north façade.	S
4 of 9	Western Public Service Company, view of primary entrance on front or west façade.	E
5 of 9	View of terra cotta details on cornice, north façade.	S
6 of 9	View of Western Public Service Company, north and east façades.	SSW
7 of 9	View of interior entryway.	
8 of 9	View of first floor public space.	
9 of 9	View of second floor hallway	