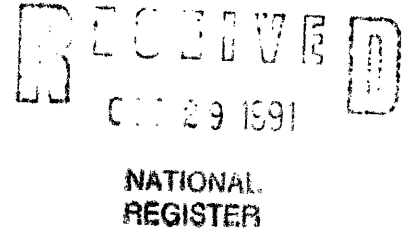


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Multiple Property Documentation Form**



This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

NEBRASKA POST OFFICES WHICH CONTAIN SECTION ARTWORK (1938-1942)

B. Associated Historic Contexts

Government Patronage of the Arts: The Treasury Department's Section of
Fine Arts Program in Nebraska

C. Geographical Data

Twelve Nebraska post offices, located in the following communities, received
Section of Fine Arts murals: Albion; Auburn; Crawford; Geneva; Hebron; Minden;
Ogallala; O'Neill; Pawnee City; Red Cloud; Schuyler; and Valentine.

☐ See continuation sheet

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

Signature of certifying official

Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

Date

E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

Between 1938 and 1942 the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts, generally known as "the Section," commissioned twelve murals for twelve newly-constructed post offices in Nebraska. The post office buildings are being nominated to the National Register at the state level of significance under Criterion A for their association with the Section of Fine Arts program and under Criterion C for the artistic significance of the murals which they contain. Nebraska's Section murals represent a far reaching program of government patronage of the arts. The murals represent the Section's goals of enhancing newly constructed federal buildings with quality artwork and contributing to the nation's cultural enrichment by making art accessible to the general public. The artistic style known as "Regionalism" was used to make art meaningful and appropriate to the communities which received Section artwork. Mural themes were approved and monitored by the Section and utilized local history, industry, agriculture, recreation and landscapes painted in a realistic style. The twelve Nebraska post office murals are distinctive and excellent examples of government sponsored Regionalism. It is possible that the murals may also qualify for National Register listing under Criterion B for their association with or representation of the work of significant artists. The murals may also qualify under Criterion D for potential information they may yield regarding the stylistic development of individual artists and/or groups of artists. Edward Chávez, Kenneth Evett, Eldora Lorenzini, Ethel and Jenne Magafan, Frank Mechau, and Archie Musik, for example, were students and colleagues at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center in the early 1930's. Others, William E. L. Bunn and Archie Musik, were students of prominent Regional artists Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton. National Register listing under Criterion B and or D, however, would require more extensive research to justify significance, which is beyond the statewide scope of this context.

In response to the economic and social crises of the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt immediately established a vast array of public works projects to provide relief for the millions of unemployed in work that would also benefit society. "New Deal" programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Public Works Administration (PWA) had a tremendous impact on the American landscape in the form of public buildings, roads, bridges, and parks. Programs were also established to provide employment for artists in work that would make art accessible to greater numbers of Americans and thus contribute to the nation's cultural enrichment. The government patronage of the arts which occurred through the New Deal has been called the greatest and most comprehensive in the nation's history (Park and Markowitz, 1984).

Through New Deal programs such as the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP: 1933-1934) and the WPA Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP: 1935-1939), thousands of artists were employed. In 1934, the Section of Painting and Sculpture (renamed the Section of Fine Arts in 1938) was organized under the auspices of the Treasury Department to provide murals and sculpture for the many federal buildings constructed during the New Deal era. Through its Branch of Public Buildings and the Office of Supervising Architect, the Treasury Department oversaw the construction of public buildings and set aside approximately one percent of construction costs for artwork. The Treasury Department also established the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) which was in existence from 1935-1939. Unlike the Section, TRAP utilized artists eligible for relief, similar to the PWAP and the WPA/FAP.

The Section of Fine Arts, the largest and most comprehensive program to provide art for federal buildings, awarded contracts on the basis of anonymously-

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submitted designs. The Section's greatest impact was undoubtedly in 1,100 new post offices constructed during the 1930's which received murals (Park and Markowitz, 1984). Many of these buildings were small "Class C and D" post offices, a classification based on construction costs. Constructed from standardized plans, the one-story rectangular shaped buildings with Georgian Revival, Colonial Revival, or Modernistic architectural details, are recognizable in small towns and cities throughout the country. Murals were installed in the public lobby located upon entry through the main door to the right or left directly above the postmaster's door in a space that generally measured 6 by 12 feet. By being placed in prominent and essential community buildings, post office murals fulfilled the Section goal of making art accessible to the American public.

The Section promoted Regionalism as an artistic genre appropriate for murals in public buildings such as post offices. Associated with artists such as Grant Wood, John Stuart Curry, and Thomas Hart Benton, Regionalism celebrated the American scene with place specific themes that had a universal appeal--local agriculture, industry, the family, and scenes of daily life--executed in a realistic style. According to Section directors Edward Rowan and Forbes Watson: "Fine murals, concerned with the locality. . . placed in public buildings, stimulate local culture. Through these wall pictures, everyday scenes, familiar objects, industries. . . achieve a new dignity." (Rowan and Watson, 1936).

Federal buildings were generally selected to receive Section artwork once the building was 75 percent completed, a time frame which determined whether or not funds were available for artwork. In accordance with the Treasury Department's reservation of one percent of building construction costs for art, commissions ranged from \$570 for small post offices to \$2,000 for larger federal buildings. In Nebraska, the twelve Section murals are all located in smaller Class C or D post offices and the commissions ranged from \$570 to \$1,300.

If money remained from building construction, the Section announced a competition and artists anonymously submitted designs. Although local participation occurred during the program's early years through juries that included local citizens, most competitions were announced through the Section's Bulletin, distributed to artists, art schools, and galleries throughout the country. Although it claimed that local communities participated in the selection process, final decisions were a Section prerogative. During the program's nine years of existence, from 1934-1943, only 190 competitions were held and 850 commissions awarded. The Section, therefore, established a pool of qualified artists and designs that were used to award commissions.

One of the largest and most publicized Section competitions occurred in 1939 through the "48 States" competition, held to provide a mural for a new post office in each state. The winning designs and post office locations were announced in a December, 1939, issue of Life magazine. Most of the winning designs, although

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submitted for a specific post office, were placed in completely different locations, often to the bewilderment of the community. A mural design selected for Nebraska, for example, had been designed for a post office in Arizona. Prior to its placement in the Schuyler post office, Section Chief Edward Rowan informed the artist that certain design elements, notably cactus, would have to be changed to make the mural appropriate for Nebraska.

After submitting a successful design for a competition or being directly solicited, the Section notified artists to submit preliminary mural sketches for a particular post office. Artists were informed of the commission amount and payment schedule and were usually provided building blueprints that indicated the space allocated for artwork. In a process developed to monitor mural quality and content, artists received payment in three parts: one-third after preliminary sketches were submitted and approved; one-third following submittal of a full-size cartoon; and the remainder when the artwork was installed and photographed.

The contract system resulted in what one historian has called a "correspondence course" between artists and the Section (Marling, 1982). Under Section Chief Edward Rowan, the proposed artwork was critiqued at every stage. Submittal of acceptable "preliminary sketches" was the first hurdle for the artists. To develop a design appropriate for a specific locality artists were encouraged but not required to visit the area and the specific post office. In some cases the small amount given for a commission and the staggered payment schedule made such a visit impossible. Whether or not they visited the actual locality, however, artists made an effort to familiarize themselves with the area through correspondence with the local postmaster, librarian, or through research.

Upon receipt of several proposed sketches based on research and/or site visit, Section officials selected a design. Most artists submitted a minimum of two sketches and usually a description of proposed themes. Edward Chávez, for example, visited the area before he submitted sketches of a Nebraska landscape and pioneers building a sod house for the Geneva commission. Both designs would have been appropriate for the locality but the Section notified him to proceed with the sod house theme. Section Chief Rowan and his assistants also critiqued preliminary sketches and made suggestions regarding composition and specific details. Eldora Lorenzini who received the Hebron commission, for example, had received approval for a theme of buffalo stampeding a train. Rowan criticized the "anatomical lessons" of the bison in her sketch and the depiction of a skinned buffalo; such elements did not represent "good taste for the decoration of a post office."

Although the Section claimed that the public was patron for the numerous post office murals it sponsored, local communities ultimately had no control over whether they received a mural or its content. While artists often selected themes based on suggestions received during a visit to the locality, area residents had no real influence on determining final design. The public did, however, comment on the

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completed art after it was installed. Nebraska's twelve post office murals were generally received with great enthusiasm by local residents with the exception of the Valentine mural.

The hundreds of post office murals commissioned by the Section utilized several major themes: the frontier and settlement era; the Postal Service, the family, and local agriculture, industry, recreation, and landscapes (Park and Markowitz, 1984). The government-sponsored Regionalism is apparent in Nebraska's post office murals: seven of the twelve are associated with the frontier or settlement era. Mural themes range from Ogallala's "Longhorns," which represents area cattle drives on the old Chisholm Trail. Crawford's mural depicts westward migration with a wagon train fording a stream; the artist identified its north-western Nebraska setting with the inclusion of Crow Butte, a prominent local landmark. "Pioneers Building a Sod House," the Geneva mural, was a theme appropriate for much of Nebraska or the Great Plains. Similarly, the Red Cloud mural utilized three panels to illustrate the advent of white settlement, the movement of the Indian tribes west, and cowboys loading cattle into pens. Hebron's mural, which depicts a stampeding herd of buffalo stopping a train, was allegedly an actual historic incident in the area. It too, however, has a larger association with Great Plains settlement.

Two of the Nebraska's frontier-associated murals were suggestive of specific localities. The Valentine mural depicts the arrival of settlers with the distinctive hills of north-central Nebraska in the background. The artist included an unusual border pattern which featured brands from area ranches. Perhaps the most ambitious and thoroughly researched of the frontier themes was William E.L. Bunn's recreation of Fort Kearney for the Minden mural. When the mural was commissioned in 1938, the historic fort was not extant. Through historic photographs, research, and consultation with the locals, Bunn recreated a scene of fort buildings and representations of the travellers who passed by the fort.

The remaining five murals, with the exception of Schuyler, depicted scenes associated with local agriculture. As the "48 States" competition mural selected for Nebraska, Schuyler's mural was not specifically designed for its location. The original design, however, was altered to make the landscape suitable and appropriate in its Nebraska location. The Auburn, O'Neill, and Albion murals depict local agriculture: a threshing machine and crew at work, a group of men baling hay, and a farmer with a herd of cattle on a winter evening. The three agricultural murals are evocative illustrations of farming and the seasons. Kenneth Evett's "Auction" in Pawnee City represents a variation to the agricultural theme. Evett's mural is a complex and sophisticated composition depicting people at a farm auction.

The artists who received commissions for Nebraska post office murals represent a diverse and talented group. Several artists, Ethel and Jenne Magafan and Edward Chávez, were in their early twenties; Glenn Newell was 70 years old when he received

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the Crawford commission. Many of the artists had been employed in other New Deal art programs: Eldora Lorenzini had previously worked as an illustrator and lithographer for the WPA's Index of American Design project. Eugene Trentham, Edward Chávez, the Magafan sisters and Frank Mechau had all been employed with the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP).

Several of the artists were students and/or colleagues at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center: Edward Chávez, Kenneth Evett, Eldora Lorenzini, Ethel Magafan, Jenne Magafan, Frank Mechau, and Archie Musik. Edward Chávez worked with Frank Mechau on mural projects for the PWAP in Colorado Springs. Two of the twelve Nebraska artists studied with prominent 1930's Regional painters: William Bunn was a student of Grant Wood; and Archie Musik studied with Thomas Hart Benton. With the exception of Eugene Trentham, Eldora Lorenzini, Kady Faulkner, and Glenn Newell, the Nebraska post office mural artists received additional Section commissions.

The Section of Fine Arts was phased out in 1943 when Congress did not appropriate funds for its continuation. Like other New Deal programs, the Section had gradually diminished due in part to an increasing emphasis on the War effort. Although it did not become a permanent government agency as its administrators and supporters had hoped, the Section's accomplishments during its nine year history were tremendous. Every state and U.S. territory had received at least one sculpture or mural in a federal building. Some states such as California and New York received close to 100 murals or sculptures, while others, such as North Dakota, received four post office murals. Nebraska's twelve Section post office murals, like their counterparts throughout the country are important, distinctive examples of a unique and far-reaching program of government patronage of the arts.

F. Associated Property Types

I. Name of Property Type Post Offices Containing Section Artwork

II. Description

The twelve Nebraska post offices which contain Section of Fine Arts murals are the small Class C or D type built from standardized plans in the 1930's. The buildings are characterized by a symmetrical five-bay composition, one-story rectangular forms with raised central entrances. Stylistically, the buildings exhibit Georgian Revival, Colonial Revival, and Modernistic architectural details. Exterior walls are brick or concrete with variations in decorative trim and details. Roof shapes include flat, gable, ridge hipped or a combination. The use of standardized designs developed by the federal government in the 1930's is apparent in the twelve Nebraska post

III. Significance

The Nebraska Post Office Section artwork represents an intact collection of period murals that are located throughout the state. Twelve post offices, which contain fourteen murals, are being nominated to the National Register at the state level of significance under Criteria A and C for their historical association with the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts program and for the artistic significance of the murals they contain.

The Nebraska post office murals represent the Section's goal of making art accessible to the general population by reserving one percent of new building construction budgets for art. The Section provided employment and encouraged artistic development for both beginning and established artists, including women and minorities. Of the program's 850 commissions, only approximately one-sixth were awarded to women and minority artists. The

IV. Registration Requirements

Nebraska post office buildings which contain Section artwork qualify for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places if they retain integrity from their period of significance. To be eligible for listing, the post offices which contain Section artwork must exhibit exterior and interior integrity. The interior lobby space must exhibit a high degree of integrity and the Section mural must be intact in its original location. All twelve of the Nebraska post offices which received Section murals fulfill these registration requirements.

☒ See continuation sheet

☐ See continuation sheet for additional property types

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

Between 1975-1989 the twelve Nebraska post offices which contain Section murals were documented for inclusion in the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey (NEHBS). Five of the buildings: Crawford, Pawnee City, Schuyler, Albion, and Auburn were initially documented through architectural/historical surveys undertaken by the United States Postal Service. In 1989, through a federal grant from the National Park Service, the post offices were photographed by Jeffrey Bebee under contract with the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office. Documentation included black and white interior views and color negatives for each mural and interior lobby space, a description of its condition, and black and white exterior views of each post office. Color photographs of the murals were featured in the Spring, 1990, issue of Nebraska History.

Preparation of the multiple property nomination included research and compilation of background and historic context data. Primary and secondary sources were consulted including Wall-to-Wall America by Karal Ann Marling (1982), Democratic Vistas by Park and Markowitz (1984), and Art in Federal Buildings, Vol. I: Mural Designs, 1934-1936, by Edward Bruce and Forbes Watson

☒ See continuation sheet

H. Major Bibliographical References

Bruce, Edward and Forbes Watson: Art in Federal Buildings. An Illustrated Record of the Treasury Department's New Program in Painting and Sculpture. Vol. I: Mural Designs, 1934-1936. (Washington, D.C.: Art in Federal Buildings, Inc., 1936).

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

Gilbert, Dorothy B., ed. Who's Who in American Art. Vol. IV: 1940-1947. (Washington, D.C.: The American Federation of Art, 1947).

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☒ See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- ☒ State historic preservation office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency

- ☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Specify repository: _____

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offices: Schuyler, Red Cloud, and Crawford are virtually identical buildings as are Minden, Valentine, and Ogallala. A majority of the Nebraska post office buildings also feature contributing objects: flag poles, and decorative, period lamp posts that flank the main entrance.

The post office interiors also indicate a standardized floor plan: each contains a varnished wooden vestibule which projects into the lobby space. The murals are visible to the right or left upon entry to the lobby on the wall directly above the door entering the postmaster's office. The wall space generally measures six feet by twelve feet. One slight variation is found in Red Cloud, which has a three part mural: two panels are located above the lobby service window and the other above the postmaster's door.

Variations to the lobbies are found in decorative details which include marble wainscoting and terrazzo floor tiles, ceramic tile floors and wainscoting, and varnished wooden wainscoting. With the exception of minor alterations such as the addition of carpeting or replacement of original light fixtures, the lobbies have excellent integrity. All Nebraska murals are intact and in their original locations. With the exception of Valentine, the murals were cleaned in 1981 by an art conservator under contract with the United States Postal Service.

Inventory of Nebraska Post Offices Which Received Section Murals:

BO02-004: Albion, "Winter in Nebraska," Jenne Magafan, oil on canvas, installed 1939.

CE14-090: Valentine, "End of the Line," Kady Faulkner, oil on canvas, installed 1939.

CX06-076: Schuyler, "Wild Horses by Moonlight," Philip von Saltza, oil on canvas, installed 1940.

DW04-007: Crawford, "The Crossing," G. Glenn Newell, oil on canvas, installed 1940.

FM05-126: Geneva, "Building a Sod House," Edward Chávez, oil on canvas, installed 1941.

HT13-131: O'Neill, "Baling Hay in Holt County in the Early Days," Eugene Trentham, oil on canvas, installed 1938.

KH04-080: Ogallala, "Longhorns," Frank Mechau, oil on canvas, installed 1938.

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KN04-007: Minden, "1848-Fort Kearney, Protectorate on the Overland Trail-1871," William E. L. Bunn, oil on canvas, installed 1939.

NH01-056: Auburn, "Threshing," Ethel Magafan, oil on canvas, installed 1939.

PW06-117: Pawnee City, "The Auction," Kenneth Evett, oil on canvas, installed 1942.

TY10-008: Hebron, "Stampeding Buffalo Stopping a Train," Eldora Lorenzini, oil on canvas, installed 1939.

WT07-195: Red Cloud, "Moving Westward," "Stockade Builders," "Loading Cattle," Archie Musick, oil on canvas, installed 1941.

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Nebraska murals, therefore, have additional importance: four of the twelve were painted by women and one by a Mexican-American.

During the more than fifty years since they were installed in Nebraska post offices, the Section murals have increased in value as works of art. Since their work for the Section, many of the artists gained national recognition and their work is included in prestigious museums and collections throughout the country. The twelve Nebraska murals are significant examples of government sponsored Regionalism and patronage of the arts which occurred through the Section of Fine Arts program.

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(1936). National Archives records were consulted: Record Group 121: Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Public Buildings Service, Entry 133: Case Files Concerning Embellishments of Federal Buildings, 1934-1943; Box 61: Nebraska. Record Group 121 provided information concerning the process of design review between Section officials and individual artists and in most cases, community response to completed murals.

Newspaper research for each of the twelve Nebraska post offices was also undertaken to provide building descriptions, construction dates, and to a varying degree, information about the artists and community reaction to the completed murals. In response to the Spring, 1990, Nebraska History article about the murals, two of the artists, Eduardo Chávez and Ethel Magafan, corresponded with the State Historical Society; the artists were contacted for additional information.

Twelve Nebraska post offices received Section murals; all of which are intact. The buildings still serve as post offices owned by the federal government with the exception of the former Valentine post office which is now the Education Service Unit Media Center for the Cherry County school system.

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