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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. 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. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property
   historic name Minden United States Post Office
   other names/site number KN04-007

2. Location
   street & number 410 North Minden Street
   city, town Minden
   state Nebraska
   code NE
   county Kearney
   code 099
   zip code 68595

3. Classification
   Ownership of Property
   private
   public-local
   public-State
   public-Federal
   Category of Property
   building(s)
   district
   site
   structure
   object
   Number of Resources within Property
   Contributing
   Noncontributing
   building(s) 1
   buildings
   district
   site
   structures
   objects
   Total 4
   Name of related multiple property listing:
   Nebraska Post Offices Which Contain Section Artwork (1938-1942)
   Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
   0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification
   As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
   Signature of certifying official
   Date
   Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
   State or Federal agency and bureau
   In my opinion, the property does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
   Signature of commenting or other official
   Date
   State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification
   I, hereby, certify that this property is:
   entered in the National Register.
   determined eligible for the National Register.
   determined not eligible for the National Register.
   removed from the National Register.
   other, (explain:)
   Signature of the Keeper
   Date of Action
Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Minden United States Post Office is located at the corner of Minden Avenue and 4th Streets in Minden, the Kearney county seat in south central Nebraska (1990 population: 2,749). The one-story buff colored brick and limestone Modernistic style building, constructed in 1936-1937, is an excellent example of a Class C or D post office built from standardized plans developed in the 1930's. The nomination also includes three contributing objects: two ornamental lamp posts located on either side of the main entry, and a flag pole.

The post office is a five-bay symmetrical building which measures 64 by 74 feet. The raised central entry with transom and flanking window units of multi-paned sash are framed with limestone trim. The two outside units of 6-over-6 paned double hung windows are also framed with limestone trim and show airplane propellers carved in the stonework over the windows. Similar fenestration is found on the east and west facades. Stone trim is also used in the beltcourse and coping. The words: "United States Post Office" in large aluminum letters are anchored to the brick above the main entrance. "Minden, Nebraska" in bronze letters and a decorative aluminum American eagle are located directly above the entry. The flat roof has a composition tar and gravel surface. The building exhibits good integrity; modifications include replacement of the front entry doors and minor interior alterations. Construction of the post office began in July, 1936, and the completed building was dedicated in May, 1937. (The Minden Courier, May 27, 1937).

A mural entitled "1848--Fort Kearney, Protectorate on the Overland Trail--1871" is located on the south lobby wall above the postmaster's door which is flanked by wooden glass enclosed bulletin boards. The mural, which measures approximately 13 feet by 6 feet, occupies the typical space for murals commissioned by the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts program for a small Class C or D post office. The Minden commission was awarded to Iowa artist William E. L. Bunn in August, 1937, and the completed mural was installed by the artist in January, 1939 (The Minden Courier, Jan. 12, 1939).

Painted in predominantly blue-green and white tones offset by a full range of colors in various details, the mural represents the artist's recreation of Fort Kearney, based on extensive historical research. Delineated in precise, sharp lines and forms reminiscent of Grant Wood's
artistic style, the mural depicts the approximately 20 buildings associated with the fort. The precise geometric shapes of the white military buildings surround a parade ground which is located slightly off-center. In the foreground five linear rows of pioneers, wagons, and animals symbolize the history of transportation and westward migration associated with the Fort. The five rows depict hundreds of highly detailed figures and wagons: pioneers, cowboys, freighters, soldiers, and Mormons with handcarts. The wagons include conestogas, prairie schooners, Studebakers, stagecoaches, and carts, one with the words, "Pike's Peak or Bust" painted on its side.

Beyond the precise shapes of fort buildings, the vivid blue-green landscape simply fades into the horizon. The lack of additional elements in the background conveys a dream-like quality and a sense of vast space. At the time the mural was painted, Fort Kearney was a site with depressions where buildings had been and enormous cottonwood trees planted by the soldiers. Bunn acknowledged that his scene was an artistic recreation when he stated that, "at some time in its history, all of the buildings pictured were a part of the fort" (The Minden Courier, Jan. 12, 1939).

The lobby interior is in excellent condition and retains its original ceramic tile floor, wainscotting, and woodwork. Sometime after the mural was installed the original light fixtures were replaced. Currently, the lobby has enclosed, fluorescent lights flush to the ceiling. A varnished wooden vestibule projects into the lobby, an original design feature typical of small class C or D post offices built from standardized plans in the 1930's. In 1981 the mural was cleaned and restored by an art conservator under contract with the United States Postal Service; it is in excellent condition.
8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally  ☑ statewide  ☐ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☑ A  ☐ B  ☑ C  ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A  ☐ B  ☐ C  ☐ D  ☐ E  ☐ F  ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Art

Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1939

Significant Dates

1939

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Bunn, William E. L.: Artist

Simon, Louis: Supervising Architect

Busboom & Rauh: Contractor

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Minden United States Post Office is being nominated to the National Register as part of the Nebraska Post Offices Which Contain Section Artwork (1938-1942) multiple property nomination at the state level of significance under Criterion A for its association with the United States Treasury Department’s Section of Fine Arts program (1934-1943) and under Criterion C for the artistic significance of the mural it contains.

The mural entitled "1848--Fort Kearney, Protectorate on the Overland Trail--1871" is located on the south lobby wall directly above the postmaster’s door in the typical space for Section artwork installed in Class C or D post offices. The mural is an excellent example of artwork commissioned for new post offices through the Treasury Department’s Section of Fine Arts program from 1934-1943. Painted in predominantly blue-green and white tones, the mural depicts the artist’s recreation of Fort Kearney with precisely delineated buildings and people, animals, and wagons in a linear fashion that symbolize transportation and westward migration associated with the Fort. The mural’s historical theme associated with the frontier era and westward migration, painted in a realistic style reminiscent of Grant Wood, make it an excellent example of government-sponsored Regionalism.

In July, 1937, Iowa artist William E. L. Bunn received a notice from the Section of Fine Arts inviting him to submit designs for the Minden, Nebraska, mural on the basis of previously submitted designs. The letter cited the commission amount, $630, and payment schedule: one-third after preliminary sketches were approved; one-third upon approval of a full-size cartoon; and the remainder when the completed mural was installed and photographed. The letter included building blueprints with dimensions of the mural space. The Section advised the artist to visit the post office to develop a subject appropriate to the building or the Minden area. Bunn immediately accepted the commission and informed Superintendent Rowan of his plans to visit Minden to develop preliminary sketches.

In the fall of 1937 Bunn visited Minden and began historical research. In November, he reported to the Section that he had corresponded with
9. Major Bibliographical References


Previous documentation on file (NPS):
☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:
☐ State historic preservation office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Specify repository:

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property: Less than one acre.

UTM References

Zone Easting Northing

Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is described as lots 7-8, and the south half of lot 9, block 29, original town plat of Minden, Kearney County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes that parcel of land which has been historically associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carol Abligren, Architectural Historian
organization Nebraska State Historical Society
date August, 1991
street & number 1500 R Street
city or town Lincoln
state Nebraska zip code 68501
several historians to develop an appropriate theme. A month later he submitted preliminary sketches of a "military post on the overland trail". He noted that Fort Kearney would provide a theme "vital to the community" given their pride and interest in developing the site into a park. The Section approved his design and complimented him on its "sense of great space."

In January, 1938, Bunn submitted the required color sketch to the Section who criticized his "dull" color scheme and overall composition. In May, Bunn submitted a revised color sketch and informed the Section that he was willing to try again if the design was still unsatisfactory. The Section, however, approved his work and authorized him to proceed with the full-size cartoon. The revised color sketch was selected for inclusion in an Iowa State Fair exhibit of Section work by Iowa artists, and was also exhibited at the University of Iowa. In the meantime, Bunn wrote to ask for a 50-day extension to his original contract; he explained that several historians had found inaccuracies in the design which he wished to correct. Bunn received the extension and an additional one in November but was informed that the mural should be completed after the first of the year. On January 3-4, 1939, Bunn installed the mural and spoke to interested locals who watched and to the Minden Rotary Club. The postmaster reported that the mural "went over very big" and had "revived" interest in the Fort.

A native of Iowa, William Bunn received a B.A. in graphic design at the University of Iowa. While completing his M.A. from the same institution, he served as a graduate assistant in Dramatic Arts and studied mural design under Grant Wood. Bunn also received Section commissions for post office murals in Dubuque and Hamburg, Iowa, and in Kentucky. During the 1930's and 1940's, his work was exhibited at art galleries throughout the country. In 1946 he became Manager of the Design Department of the Sheaffer Pen Company in Iowa.

For additional information refer to the Nebraska Post Offices Which Contain Section Artwork (1938-1942) multiple property form.
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2

