



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 determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction 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 an 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 United States Post Office Watonga

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 121 North Noble Avenue [N/A] not for publication

city or town Watonga [N/A] vicinity

state Oklahoma code OK county Blaine code 011 zip code 73772

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Signature of certifying official/Title: Bob Seubler, State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: 10-20-08

Oklahoma Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title: Federal Preservation Officer
Date: 10/28/08

United States Postal Service
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- [X] 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
[] See continuation sheet.
[] other, explain
[] See continuation sheet.

Signature of the Keeper: [Signature]
Date of Action: 4/17/09

United States Post Office Watonga
Name of Property

Blaine County, Oklahoma
County/State

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
(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

Oklahoma Post Offices with Section Art

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Post Office

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Post Office

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
REVIVALS: Colonial Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK
walls BRICK
roof ASPHALT
other _____

Narrative Description

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

United States Post Office Watonga
Name of Property

Blaine County, Oklahoma
County/State

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.)

Property is:

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

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
ART

Periods of Significance

1936-1941

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

SIMON, LOUIS A., SUPERVISING ARCHITECT
MAHIER, EDITH, MURAL ARTIST

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 of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Oklahoma Historical Society/SHPO

United States Post Office Watonga
Name of Property

Blaine County, Oklahoma
County/State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 14 553020 3966765
 Zone Easting Northing

2. Zone Easting Northing

3. Zone Easting Northing

4. Zone Easting Northing

[] 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 Alyson Greiner / Associate Professor of Geography

organization Oklahoma State University

date 7/19/2007

street & number 225 Scott Hall

telephone 405-744-9169

city or town Stillwater

state OK

zip code 74078

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name United States Postal Service

street & number 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW

telephone 800-275-8777

city or town Washington

state DC

zip code 20260-3100

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127, and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**National Register of Historic Places
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Blaine County, OklahomaSection number 7 Page 1**DESCRIPTION**

The United States Post Office in Watonga, Oklahoma was built in 1936 and occupies the southwest corner of the intersection of North Noble Avenue and First Street. It is a brick-clad building designed in the Colonial Revival style with one and one-half stories and a basement. The part of the building that includes the public lobby has a gable roof, while the back part of the building which is not accessible to the public has a flat roof. The front of the building faces east and the gabled roof parallels Noble Avenue. As viewed from the back or northwest side, the outline of the building shows three main sections (front, middle, and back) each successively tapered and not as wide as the front portion of the building facing Noble Avenue. All sides of the building are decorated with a soldier brick plinth. Concrete coping and a wooden cornice—both painted white—mark the flat-roofed sections of the building. The post office building is effectively surrounded by a band of concrete on all sides. There is a wide sidewalk in front of the building, but except for a few plantings on the front there is no other vegetation near the building.

The east elevation or front of the building is symmetrical. The centerpiece of the façade is the decorative detail above the entrance, including the keyed round arch fanlight. The entrance consists of double metal doors, sidelights, and a transom. A short flight of steps, flanked by lampposts and two semicircular brick planters, leads to the entrance. The brick cladding around the entrance is slightly recessed, and concrete blocks placed at the same level as the bottom of the fanlight interrupt the brickwork and create the effect of pilasters adjacent to the sidelights. Four 9 x 9 double-hung windows span the east elevation and continue its symmetry. At the top of the wall a white wooden panel that stretches nearly the length of the building bears the following words, in black lettering: "UNITED STATES POST OFFICE WATONGA OKLAHOMA 73772." Above this panel and following the roofline is a cornice decorated with dentils. Cornice returns extend around the northeastern and southeastern corners of the building.

There are a total of eleven windows from the front to the back of the building along the north elevation. Near the gable peak there is a small fanlight below a keyed round arch. The window glass in it has been replaced with wood in-fill. Below this there are seven windows in a row. Two 9 x 9 double-hung windows dominate the gabled part of the building. These are followed by two short and slender 2 x 2 windows, one on the back side of the gabled part of the building and the other on the flat-roofed section, then a pair of 9 x 9 double-hung windows, and around the corner of this section of the building one more 9 x 9 double-hung window. The interior space of the back part of the building has been divided into two stories. There is one 1 x 1 double-hung window on the first story and there are two 6 x 6 double-hung windows in the half-story above. A long I-shaped concrete ramp provide access to the loading dock at the back of the building. A stone-lined drainage channel parallels First Street and actually separates the post office lot from the road. Three short concrete bridges provide crossings for pedestrians and one of these doubles as a site for drive-up mailboxes.

The south elevation is also dominated by the fenestration, but it is not a mirror image of the north elevation. There is a small fanlight with a keyed round arch near the gable peak on the front section of the building. Originally, there were two 9 x 9 double-hung windows below this, but just one remains. The other window space has been altered to provide an additional entrance into the public lobby that is wheelchair-accessible. A metal door with a glass slab has been added along with a wheelchair ramp. Three large 9 x 9 double-hung windows dominate the middle section of the south elevation, and there is a fourth window in the same style just around the corner from these. There is a chimney stack in the corner where the middle and back sections of the building meet. The second story of the back section of the building is marked by two 6 x 6 double-hung windows. There is a vent in the wall below one, and

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a door providing side-access to the loading dock at the back of the building.

The west elevation is the narrowest side of the post office building; it is also the only section of the building to have two stories. There are two 6 x 6 double-hung windows on the second story. The first story contains the loading area, which was conceived and built as an integral part of the first floor. Between the first and second stories a full-width flat roof anchored by three metal rods provides additional cover for the work area. There are five basic ceiling lights over the work space and a mechanical lift on one side of the loading dock.

On the interior, a three-sided wooden vestibule with rounded corners projects into the lobby area. The mural, *Roman Nose Canyon* was painted by Edith Mahier and hangs on the wall to the right as one enters the lobby. The mural was painted in oil on canvas. Unlike many other post office murals, this one does not stretch the full-width of the wall. Nevertheless, its slightly smaller size makes it an excellent fit for the wall space above the postmaster's door. Molding decorated with a dentil-like pattern provides additional embellishment to the ceiling area. Two rows of hanging fluorescent lights have been added and now hang in front of the mural. The main portion of the floor consists of gray terrazzo tiles which give way to a band of darker gray tiles on the edges adjacent to the walls. All of the interior walls have gray marble wainscoting. Much of the original woodwork surrounding the counter area remains, but there have been some alterations in part because the entire counter area is no longer used for postal transactions as it once was and also for security purposes. Security concerns have also resulted in a division of the interior of the lobby itself. Specifically, a glass and metal floor-to-ceiling partition has been built to separate the commercial/sales area of the lobby from the round-the-clock publicly accessible post office boxes.

In Mahier's mural the Cheyenne Chief Henry Roman Nose stands in the front and center holding a rifle. To the right are his wife and family and to the left three other Cheyenne cross the rocky terrain on horseback, approaching a nearby stream. Directly behind Chief Roman Nose is a Conestoga wagon and a family of settlers who have also stopped for water. A man milks a cow while horses graze behind the wagon. In the distance three other white men scan the horizon, their backs to the Cheyenne. The mural depicts the rugged terrain of the canyon where Roman Nose lived between about 1856 and 1917. Mahier's use of bright oranges and reds draws attention to the Cheyenne and adds vibrancy to the mural's landscape.

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Blaine County, OklahomaSection number 8 Page 1**SIGNIFICANCE**

The United States Post Office in Watonga is significant within the Multiple Property Nomination, "Oklahoma Post Offices with Section Art." When built in 1936, the post office became another product of the New Deal public works program and it was targeted to receive artwork through the Section, a Depression-era program that commissioned artists to create artworks for the decoration of public buildings. Edith Mahier, an art professor at the University of Oklahoma, received the commission for the Watonga post office mural. Following the installation of the mural *Roman Nose Canyon* in 1941, it became the center of a local controversy involving the depiction of Native Americans. The post office in Watonga is significant in two areas. The mural designed and painted by Mahier constitutes an integral part of the building and is a good example of the work of an important local artist. In the area of politics/government, the Watonga post office also represents important New Deal policies related to the construction and decoration of public buildings. Consequently, Criteria A and C are the applicable National Register criteria.

Historical Significance:

Edith Mahier was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1892. She received a Bachelor of Design degree from Newcomb Memorial College School of Art in 1916 and accepted a professorship in the art department at the University of Oklahoma (OU) the following year. Around 1926, Susie Peters, Kiowa Field Matron, showed the drawings of the Kiowa artists to Mahier, who then encouraged Oscar Brousse Jacobson to enroll the men in special classes at OU. She instructed a number of Native artists in the following years, including Acee Blue Eagle and Dick West. Mahier's experience with Native American design inspired her to collaborate with her sister, Frances Brandon, on a fashion line for Nieman-Marcus of Dallas. The Native-inspired designs gained in popularity throughout the 1940s and prompted her to showcase successive lines in annual fashion shows. This led the OU administration to transfer her to the School of Home Economics in 1950s, where she completed her tenure.

Her Watonga Post Office mural, *Roman Nose Canyon*, is perhaps the best known of all New Deal murals in Oklahoma. Mahier skillfully incorporated local history and contemporary tourism in *Roman Nose Canyon*. It depicts both the Cheyenne's confrontation with American settlers following the land run, and the surrounding landscape of Roman Nose Canyon, which had been the winter camp for the Cheyenne and was quickly becoming a contemporary destination for campers and naturalists. In the mural, Chief Henry Roman Nose stands at center with his wife, children, and fellow tribal members nearby. Roman Nose, or properly translated "Arched Nose," was one of the most prominent Cheyenne leaders during the Indian Wars of the 1860s. He was noted particularly for his headdress made with one buffalo horn and a train of black and red eagle feathers, which Mahier chose to omit in favor of a single feather. The Cheyenne, who have come to water their horses, encounter settlers who have also come to water their livestock. For Mahier, the confrontation spelled the end of traditional Cheyenne life and she penned the following narrative of the scene: "The settlers, also in search of water, have stopped their covered wagons near the stream, while they scan the horizon envisaging the gypsum pits, the flourishing wheat fields, and their future city with its churches, school, homes and business houses. The young Indian stands holding his rifle, his defiance gone, but in its place wonder, ... for he is old enough to realize that he may never achieve those honors which his father and grandfather held dear; that he must find his place under a new system" (quoted in Silberman 1988, 388).

As such, *Roman Nose Canyon* examined the familiar theme of the "vanishing race," which had received treatment in other New Deal murals. Its notoriety came from the sensation that the Watonga

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Chamber of Commerce staged following the mural's installation. Gerald Curtin, owner and publisher of the *Watonga Republican*, organized a nine-day protest in June 1941 involving Chief Red Bird, grandson of Black Kettle, his wife Prairie Woman, and their children. Red Bird expressed his distaste for the mural in state papers through an interpreter Joe Yellow Eyes. The Cheyenne protesters condemned Roman Nose's physique as that of a "Navajo jellybean," his absence of a proper headdress, and his breech-cloth as too short. Mahier responded that "I entered the competition mainly because few Oklahoma artists were participating and they were sending out this way eastern artists who were putting English saddles on Indian ponies. At least I didn't do that." Her anxieties may have been calmed by Curtin's assistant at the *Watonga Republican*, Ernie Hoberecht, who confided: "It's a publicity stunt ... and everyone knows it is a joke. In fact, it'll probably make you more famous than you already are" (quoted in Marling 1982, 279). Indeed, the Cheyenne protest received lighthearted coverage in *The Washington Post* and *Chicago Sunday Tribune* (Silberman 1988, 374-376). Despite her presumed errors in the mural, Mahier was fairly familiar with Native American culture. She even offered to repaint some sections of the mural, but never did.

Summary:

The Watonga post office makes a key contribution to the Multiple Property Nomination, "Oklahoma Post Offices with Section Art." Architecturally, the post office in Watonga provides a very good example of the Colonial Revival style. The exterior of the building remains in excellent condition, and though a few modifications have been made to the interior of the building, they represent an effort to keep pace with the changing service functions and security needs of post offices and constitute minor alterations. As a whole, the post office retains a high degree of integrity and has been in continuous use as a post office for more than seventy years. The controversy that developed after the installation of Mahier's mural—though staged—received brief, national coverage and has made the mural one of the most recognized Section murals in Oklahoma. Because of its association with the New Deal, the United States Post Office in Watonga qualifies for listing in the National Register for Historic Places under Criterion A and because its component parts make it a distinguishable building it qualifies under Criterion C.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Calcagno, Nicholas A. 1976. *New Deal Murals in Oklahoma*. Miami, OK: Pioneer Printing.
- Falk, Peter H., ed. 1985. *Who Was Who in American Art: Compiled from the Original Thirty-four Volumes of American Art Annual—Who's Who in Art, Biographies of American Artists Active from 1898-1947*. Madison, CT: Sound View Press.
- Greiner, Alyson L., and Mark A. White. 2004. *Thematic Survey of New Deal Public Art in Oklahoma 2003-2004*. Oklahoma City: State Historic Preservation Office.
- Park, Marlene, and Gerald E. Markowitz. 1982. *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Rogers, Kathleen Grisham. 1974. Incidence of New Deal Art in Oklahoma: An Historical Survey. Master's Thesis, University of Oklahoma.
- Scott, Barbara Kerr, and Sally Soelle. 1983. *New Deal Art—The Oklahoma Experience, 1933-1943*. Lawton, OK: Cameron University.
- Silberman, Arthur. 1988. Watonga's Day in the Sun, or Trickster Comes to Town, *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 66: 374-391.
- Soelle, Sally. 1984. New Deal Art Projects in Oklahoma, 1933-1943. Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

This property consists of Block 47, lots 1 through 4, Watonga City.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This boundary includes the property historically associated with the Watonga post office.

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PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-14 except as noted:

Name of Property: United States Post Office Watonga
 Photographer: Alyson Greiner
 Date of Photographs: July 17, 2007
 Negatives: N/A; photos are digital TIFFs

Photo No.	Photographic Information
1	View of interior mural; camera facing north
2	View of lobby interior showing metal/glass partition, vestibule, and counter; camera facing north northwest
3	View of interior mural; camera facing north
4	View of interior mural; camera facing north
5	View of lobby interior showing metal/glass partition, vestibule, and counter; camera facing north
6	View of lobby interior showing metal/glass partition, vestibule, and counter; camera facing north northeast
7	View of exterior, east and north elevations; camera facing southwest
8	View of lobby interior showing metal/glass partition, vestibule, and counter; camera facing northwest
9	View of exterior, east and south elevations; camera facing northwest
10	View of exterior, west and south elevations; camera facing northeast
11	View of exterior, west elevation; camera facing east
12	View of exterior, north and west elevations; camera facing southeast
13	View of interior mural; camera facing north
14	View of interior north wall showing mural and postmaster's door; camera facing north northeast