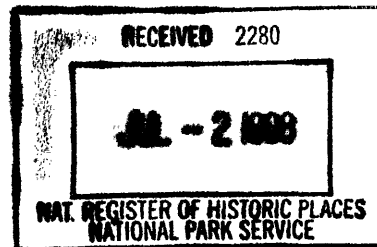


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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

Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art

B. Associated Historic Contexts

Arkansas Post Offices and the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts
Program, 1938-1942

C. Geographical Data

State of Arkansas

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.

John B. ... FPO
Signature of certifying official
USPS

4/10/98
Date

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]
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

8/14/98
Date

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Arkansas Post Offices and the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts Program, 1938-1942

Origins

American interest in art grew steadily in the three decades prior to the Great Depression. Investments in art museums increased from \$15 million in 1910 to \$58 million in 1930. In 1930, there were 167 art museums in the United States - 56 percent more than in 1920. These gains led scientific, industrial, and general museums over the same period. (The New Deal for Artists) The commercial art market likewise flourished, especially in large cities such as New York and Chicago.

This renaissance of American art was effectively ended by the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing nation-wide economic depression. Widespread closing of commercial art galleries left the artistic community in despair. Indeed, a 1933 Presidential commission report concluded "for the overwhelming majority of the American people the fine arts of painting and sculpture.....do not exist." (The Public as Patron, p.10)

While President Franklin D. Roosevelt's various New Deal programs provided relief for unemployed workers of most occupations, specific assistance for unemployed artists was more difficult to obtain. On May 9, 1933, the artist George Biddle wrote his former college classmate, President Franklin Roosevelt, requesting government assistance to organize a group of muralists, sharing common social and aesthetic ideas, to decorate a public building. Biddle hoped that this would garner wide publicity and spur more artistic interest from architects and the public. Biddle had been inspired by Mexican murals of the 1920s that were sponsored by President Alvaro Obregon.

In the Mexican model, young artists were paid a small salary to decorate the walls of public buildings with murals expressing the ideas of the Mexican revolution. The combination of social ideals, artistic freedom, and monetary assistance produced what some critics have acclaimed as the greatest national school of mural painting since the Italian Renaissance. (The New Deal for Artists, p.5) Biddle hoped for similar results in the United States.

Roosevelt, who had employed needy artists when governor of New York, was receptive to Biddle's suggestion and directed him to meet with Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Lawrence

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W. Robert, who served as custodian of federal buildings. Robert and Biddle proposed to decorate the new multi-million dollar Department of Justice Building in Washington, D.C., with murals since the original monies appropriated to embellish the building had not been spent due to depression-induced budget cutting.

Although their plan gained the support of several key federal officials and the first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, it was opposed by the National Commission of Fine Arts, the presidential advisors on art since 1910. (The New Deal for Artists, p.6) This commission insisted that the classical architecture of the Capitol be matched with classically inspired art. Biddle's proposal appeared doomed when the President declined to challenge the Commission.

Undaunted, Biddle continued to look for bureaucratic loopholes and in November, 1933 found an eager ally in another Treasury Department official, Edward Bruce.

Although hired by the Department of Treasury in 1932 as an expert on silver and monetary policy, Bruce had an extensive background in art, having studied under the American painter Maurice Sterne in Italy for six years before a successful ten year stint as an artist. Biddle and Bruce secured the backing of Charles L. Borie, the architect of the Department of Justice Building and the person who would normally choose the decorating artist for the building. Ironically, the Treasury Department refused to allocate funds for the project, so Biddle and Bruce approached Harold L. Ickes, the Public Works Administrator, for a small amount of the \$400 million relief allotment. Ickes was persuaded after a twenty minute conversation and sent a memorandum to Relief Administrator Harry L. Hopkins requesting funds be diverted to the Treasury Department for a project to employ artists. (The New Deal for Artists, p.9)

Confident that the money Ickes had promised would become a reality and he would soon begin painting the Department of Justice Building, Biddle relaxed his lobbying efforts and Edward Bruce emerged as the chief proponent of government patronage of the arts. Unlike Biddle, who initially wanted assistance for a self-appointed group of muralists to express the social ideals of the Roosevelt administration, Bruce envisioned federal involvement as a catalyst that would create a nationwide demand for art. He predicted, "If we can create the demand for beauty in our lives our slums will go. The ugliness will be torn down and beauty will take its place." (The New Deal for Artists, p.10)

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The new relief project, named the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), was allocated \$1,039,000 from the new Civil Works Administration (CWA), which had been created to administer the \$400 million transferred from the Public Works Administration. Although under the supervision of the Treasury, the PWAP was bound by CWA policies and regulations. (The New Deal for Artists, p.10)

Under the administration of Edward Bruce, the PWAP provided relief for 3,750 painters, sculptors, and printmakers that produced over 15,000 works of art before funds were exhausted in June 1934. (The Public as Patron, p.10). In September of that year, George Biddle reflected upon the positive impact of the program he helped create and noted that the PWAP had "made America art conscious as never before...It has made the artist conscious of the fact that he is of service to the community, that he fills a necessary function in our society." (The Public as Patron, p.10) Ironically, Biddle never painted for the PWAP. Government lawyers ruled that relief money could not be used for the Department of Justice Building murals since funds for the decoration of that building had already been separately approved by Congress.

As part of the first national work relief effort, the CWA, the Public Works of Art Project was meant only as short-term emergency relief. When the depression continued, support for new, more permanent programs increased. Consequently, the New Deal spawned several new arts projects. The Federal Art Project (FAP) operated under the supervision of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) from 1935 to 1943. As the largest of the new government arts programs, the Federal Art Project primarily focused its efforts in the larger cities (where the majority of artists resided) and employed artists already on relief rolls to produce art for state and municipal governments and institutions. (Democratic Vistas, p.6) The Treasury Department directed another relief program for the decoration of 1,900 nearly artless federal buildings, which, at that time, were built and administered by the Treasury. Funded by a grant from the WPA, the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) sought only "good" artists on relief and was subsequently dubbed "the Ritz" of relief programs by *Time* magazine. (The Federal Presence, p.372) From 1935 to 1939, TRAP artists completed 89 murals, 65 sculptures, and 10,000 easel paintings and prints.

Before TRAP had been conceived, however, an important new non-relief art program was created by the Treasury Department, the Section of Painting and Sculpture.

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The Section

The Section of Painting and Sculpture, known simply as "The Section," did not originate exactly as planned. Toward the end of the PWAP, Edward Bruce proposed that a permanent "Division of Fine Arts" be established within the Treasury Department and requested President Roosevelt to reserve one percent of the construction cost of each new federal building for their art decoration. (Democratic Vistas, p.6) In addition, an initial seed grant of \$100,000 would be allocated from the PWA for the division to produce a pictorial record of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps, PWA projects, national parks, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. (The New Deal for Artist, p.36)

This proposal never materialized, largely because of a rift between Henry Morgenthau and Ickes precluded funding from the PWA, and the somewhat less ambitious Section was organized by Secretary of Treasury Morgenthau on October 16, 1934. (Democratic Vistas, p.6)

According to Morgenthau's official announcement, the formal mission of the Section was:

To secure suitable art of the best quality for the embellishment of public buildings;

To carry out this work in such a way as will assist in stimulating, as far as practicable, development of art in this country and reward what is regarded as the outstanding talent which develops;

So far as consistent with a high standard of art, to employ local talent;

To endeavor to secure the cooperation of people throughout the country interested in the arts and whose judgement in connection with art has the respect of the Section in selecting artists for the work to be done and criticism and advice as to their production;

In carrying out this work, to make every effort to afford an opportunity to all artists on the sole test of their qualifications as artists, and, accordingly, to encourage competitions wherever practicable, recognizing the fact, however, that certain artists in the country, because of their recognized talent, are entitled to receive work without competition. (Public as Patron, p.12)

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The new Section was appended to the Office of Supervising Architect, which prepared drawings, specifications, and cost estimates for new buildings, under the Public Buildings branch of the Treasury. Funding for the project did not come from a guaranteed one percent reservation on the cost of each Building for art as Edward Bruce had hoped, but rather the one percent amount was used only as a guideline. In practice, the Section staff would review new federal building plans and confer with the architect regarding artwork for the building. If both parties agreed to the proposal and it was subsequently approved by the director of the Procurement Division, then the Section would receive a portion of the construction cost, usually one percent, but often less. (The New Deal for Artists, p.37) In cases where the actual construction cost exceeded the estimated cost, no artwork was assigned. Consequently, no buildings were scheduled to receive artwork until 75 percent completed.

Leadership of the Section was comprised of three men, Edward Bruce (1879-1943), Edward Rowan (1898-1946), and Forbes Watson (c.1880-1960). As Chief of the Section, Bruce formulated general policy and constantly lobbied Morgenthau and President Roosevelt for permanent status and funding within the federal government. Assistant Chief Rowan handled the day-to-day artistic and administrative decisions while Watson functioned as art critic and Section publicist. Otherwise, the staff consisted of nineteen people, including secretaries, a carpenter, and two photographers. (Democratic Vistas, p.7)

With few exceptions, artists were selected through regional competitions. Once a federal building was selected to receive Section artwork, the Section appointed a regional competition chairman, who then formed a jury and mailed announcements to area artists. Competitions were also advertised in the section's free *Bulletin*, which reached over 8,500 artists by 1941. The artists submitted anonymous sketches which were judged on the regional level and then submitted to the Section for the final decision. Runner-ups could also receive commissions in this system.

Advantages to the competition system included the discovery of new talent and preliminary quality control- "poor" artists were eliminated before they could do bad work. Disadvantages were revealed when many well-know artists refused to compete, contending that their previous work and reputation testified to their abilities. Other criticisms centered around the considerable time and cost of materials expended by the majority of artists who never received commissions. Still, the competition system proved successful from the Section's viewpoint. From 1934 to 1943, 190 competitions yielded 850 commissions.

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Artists who received commissions had to sign a contract requiring several stages of preparatory work. In the first stage, the artist submitted black-and-white sketches and a color sketch on the scale of one inch to one foot. Next, the artist submitted a "cartoon", a black-and-white drawing of the same size as the finished work. The third and last stage involved finishing, installing, and photographing the mural. A third of the commission was paid at each of the three stages. (Democratic Vistas, p.120-121) In the last stage, the postmaster was asked to report if the mural was satisfactory, and the final payment was made only after his recommendation. (Public as Patron, p.17)

Artists were encouraged to visit the town and post office to develop suitable designs. Unfortunately, the combination of a relatively small commission, the staggered payment schedule, and distance between artist and post office made such visits improbable. Indeed, Ludwig Mactarian of Manhattan, New York, did his research for the Dardanelle, Arkansas, post office mural in the photo files of the New York Public Library. In a letter to Rowan, Mactarian explained, "I should like to go out there to do some study, but, unfortunately, I haven't the money for the train fare." (Wall-to-Wall America) In these cases, the artist would normally speak or correspond with postmasters, newspapers, and local historians to ensure the authenticity of the mural.

H. Louis Freund of Conway, Arkansas, was able to easily visit his assigned post office in nearby Heber Springs, Arkansas. Still, local research could be quite exhausting as Freund recounted, "It has meant going to the Heber Springs area several times, interviewing many of the old citizens, searching here, there and yonder for accurate costumes, leafing through the files of old magazines, digging about in all that vast collection of photographs, advertisements, and other source material which any artist must collect and file away for future reference." Freund's resulting mural was entitled "From Timber to Agriculture." (Democratic Vistas, p.18)

This contract system resulted in reams of correspondence between the artists and the Section. Assistant Chief Rowan critiqued proposed artwork at every stage. Correspondence between Rowan and Bertrand Adams regarding the Siloam Springs, Arkansas, post office mural is illustrative of how the Section influenced not only the final appearance of the mural but also the artist. Adams, a native Iowan, had difficulty settling on a theme for the mural, and his first three idea sketches were rejected for not meeting the standards of quality. When his redesigned two-inch scale color sketch was refused because of color, drawing, composition, and depth, Adams contemplated forfeiting the commission. A letter from Rowan on June 27, 1939, encouraged

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Adams to continue, and a successful design, "Lumbering in Arkansas," was eventually installed. Rowan's constructive criticism and encouragement was responsible for Adams, a part-time painter and part-time farmer, to pursue painting as his sole career. (Public As Patron, p.24)

While the Section ostensibly promoted the artist rather than a particular school of painting, there were in fact only a few styles that were acceptable to the section for murals. According to *The Public As Patron*, Contemporary Realism, also known as American scene painting, was the only truly acceptable style, and the subject matter had to realistically interpret local history, post office scenes past and present, or "vignettes of daily life." (p.14) A related movement, Regionalism, was also associated with the mural program. Regionalism, led by artists such as Grant Wood, John Stuart Curry, and Thomas Hart Benton, celebrated American scenes that had universal appeal such as local agriculture, industry, and family. The Section also sought to instill national ideals and values; however, local citizens could often not see beyond inaccurate details in murals depicting their history, and the Section came to realize that people cared most about the local environment that they knew best. (Democratic Vistas, p.19)

Without any direct ties to the local community, the "Air Mail" mural in Piggott, Arkansas, represents the national ideal of mail delivery, which was appropriated by the New Deal and tied to the idea of democracy. Artist Dan Rhodes commented on the mural, "I feel the Air Mail is of unusual significance to the smaller and more isolated community, linking them as it does with the most distant centers. I have tried to convey the sense of stream-lined power which is behind the mail service." (Democratic Vistas, p.61) While it is doubtful that any new DC3s, the craft depicted in the mural, ever touched down in Piggott or northeast Arkansas, local citizens were still reminded that behind the mail service was the streamlined power of the federal government.

The majority of the 1,118 Section-decorated buildings were post offices. (The New Deal for Artists, p.66) In Arkansas, most post offices that received murals were small, standardized-plan buildings with the mural or sculpture placed at one end of a long, narrow lobby, in a space about 6 ft. by 12 ft. above the postmaster's doorway, which was flanked by bulletin boards. The space was naturally lighted by windows on the side representing the front facade of the post office, and the artwork was often obscured by an entrance vestibule and hanging light fixtures.

In 1938, the Section of Painting and Sculpture was changed to Section of Fine Arts and made a permanent division of the Treasury Department. However, in July 1939 a federal reorganization caused the Public Buildings branch and the Section to be transferred from the Treasury into the

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new Federal Works Agency, which also contained the WPA and the FAP. This invalidated the Section's permanent status that had recently been given by Morgenthau, and the Section attempted to increase public awareness of the work. One of the programs geared toward national publicity was the Forty-Eight States Competition. The June 1939 *Bulletin* announced that one small post office in each state would be selected to receive a mural, and an open competition would be held to select artists. Judging took place in Washington, where 1,477 entries, the most ever tallied in a Section event, were reviewed by an august committee consisting of national art experts Maurice Sterne, jury chairman, Henry Varnum Poor, Edgar Miller, and Olin Dows. The winning designs went on exhibit around the country and were reproduced in *Life Magazine* in December 1939. The mosaic of forty-eight postage-stamp-size reproductions of the prize-winning sketches were contained in a three-page spread under the headline, "This is Mural America for Rural America." (Wall-to-Wall America, p.81)

Problems occurred when a post office was awarded a winning entry intended for another post office in a vastly different geographical and cultural region. For example, the citizenry of Eunice, Louisiana, objected loudly to their winning design, that of a deserted army base in Marfa, Texas. In these cases, the sketches were changed to reflect the local surroundings.

In January 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt eliminated non-defense budget spending, and post office art ended the following year. The Section of Fine Arts closed in July 1943 and was not reinstated after the war. Its impact on art in America is difficult to measure. Edward Bruce always referred to an appreciative letter received from Postmaster Basil V. Jones of Pleasant Hill, Missouri. Jones had written, "In behalf of many smaller cities, wholly without objects of art, as ours was, may I beseech you and the Treasury to give them some art, more of it, whenever you find it possible to do so. How can a finished citizen be made in an artless town?" (Democratic Vistas, p.72) During its operation, the Section helped make "finished citizens" in twenty Arkansas towns, where eighteen murals and two sculptures were commissioned.

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F. Associated Property Types

I. Name of Property Type: United States Post Offices with Section Art

II. Description: All of the United States Post Office structures in this nomination were built between 1936 and 1939. All are of brick masonry construction and of an essentially square plan, with original t-shaped loading docks, some of which have since been enclosed or added to in order to provide additional working space for postal employees. Stylistically, they include renditions of the Colonial Revival and Art Deco styles of architecture, often with minimal, stylized detail. Each of the nominated structures includes a wall mural or sculpture financed through the U.S. Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture.

III. Significance: The significance of the United States Post Office facilities included in this nomination derives chiefly from their importance as manifestations of the U.S. Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture and its efforts to place works of art in rural locations, as well as the Section's goal of employing painters and sculptors during the Great Depression. Only twenty Arkansas Post Offices received Section Art during that agency's relatively short existence, but the art works they brought to towns from Piggott to Lake Village and from Berryville to Paris remain sources of community pride and visual reminders of the heroic efforts the United States government took to provide meaningful labor for all types of workers during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

IV. Registration Requirements:

U.S. Post Offices must meet three basic requirements to be included in this multiple-property listing:

- 1) The buildings must still stand in their original locations
- 2) The buildings must still contain the Section mural or sculpture that establishes their statewide significance under Section A
- 3) The buildings must still retain sufficient physical integrity to remain recognizable as 1930s post offices; subsequent alterations must not overwhelm the buildings' original design.

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

See continuation sheet

H. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- State historic preservation office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency

- Local government
 University
 Other

Specify repository: _____

I. Form Prepared By

name/title Mark Christ/Community Outreach Director
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date 3-24-98
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G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods:

In June of 1996, the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) initiated a context-driven survey of United States Post Offices with art work installed through the U.S. Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture. It was felt that these properties were in danger of insensitive rehabilitation, deterioration, or abandonment for new locations on the outskirts of the small towns in which they were located. It was hoped that by emphasizing the importance of these properties to the understanding and appreciation of Arkansas history during the Great Depression, the AHPP could encourage their continued preservation, protection, use, and adaptive re-use, as well as the conservation and preservation of the murals and sculptures that each building contains.

The project involved significant interaction and cooperation between the AHPP's program areas. The AHPP Special Projects staff identified those structures that received Section art and scheduled survey trips to document and photograph each building and its art work. All phases of the project were coordinated with the National Register of Historic Places staff to determine which of the post office buildings were eligible for National Register recognition. Throughout the course of the project, public input was sought through press releases to media outlets in those areas targeted for survey visits.

The multiple-property listing of United States Post Offices with Section Art is based on a survey of 16 of the 20 post offices known to hold Section art. Of the remaining four, the Siloam Springs Post Office was not surveyed because it was already listed as a contributing structure in the Siloam Springs Downtown Historic District (NR 5-26-95); the mural was removed from the Springdale, Washington County, Post Office and placed in the Shiloh Museum; the mural in the Osceola Post Office was destroyed by fire; and the Pocahontas Post Office mural was removed from the building. The survey was conducted by Mark Christ, then special projects coordinator for the AHPP, and Charles Russell Logan, then special projects historian. They were assisted at various times by college interns Alexander Witsell, Kelly Muldrow, Ben Cox, Jason Rinehart, and Robin Boyce, and by AHPP Administrative Assistant Monica Johnson. Consultant Sandra Taylor Smith prepared the historic context for the project. Christ holds a B.A. in journalism and liberal arts from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Logan holds a B.A. in American history from Connecticut College and an M.A. in American history from New York University. Smith holds a B.A. in history from the University of Arkansas and has 25 years experience in the historic preservation field.

The survey visited 16 post offices with section art. Eleven of those were considered eligible for inclusion in the context, since they had not been moved, still retained their Section art, and retained at least 51 percent of their original integrity, as determined by the professional historians and architectural historians of the AHPP's Survey and National Register staffs. Of the remaining five, four of the post offices were so seriously altered as to compromise their integrity, and the fifth, in Benton, suffered serious alterations to the building and damage to its interior mural. Integrity requirements were based on a knowledge of existing properties and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Eligibility to the National Register of

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Historic Places. For each recorded property, locations were noted on USGS topographical and city maps; photographs, both black and white prints and color slides, were taken of exterior elevations and significant interior details. Computerized inventory forms, complete with plan view drawings, were completed; and research, utilizing primary, secondary and oral history sources was conducted. Any information on research, events or issues not adequately covered in this study should be directed to the AHPP's special projects historian.

These properties represent significant physical reminders of an important period in Arkansas history, a time in which the state was struggling through the Great Depression and looked gratefully to the federal relief programs that provided construction jobs and, later, original art works to adorn the new post office buildings. By publicly recognizing the importance of these resources to the understanding and appreciation of Arkansas history through this project and the accompanying media campaign, the AHPP hopes to encourage the preservation, protection, continued use, and adaptive reuse of these properties.

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H. Major Bibliographical References

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