

NPS Form 10-900-b
Wisconsin Word Processor Format

United States Department of Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form



This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

New Submission Old Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

United States Post Office Construction from 1913-1943
State of Wisconsin- Milwaukee District

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

United States Post Office Construction from 1913-1943
State of Wisconsin- Milwaukee District

C. Form Prepared By

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revised by Daina Penkiunas, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1999-2000

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 and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (See continuation sheet for additional comments).

F.P.O. John B... 9/11/00
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau Date

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.

Edson H. Beall Oct. 24, 2000
Signature of the Keeper Date

Wisconsin Word Processing Format (Approved 1/92)

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Section D Page United States Post Office Construction from 1913 to 1943
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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 listing of related properties consistent with the National Register Criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 6 and the Secretary of Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)


Signature of certifying official / Title

July 27, 2000
Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin
State of Federal agency and bureau

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E. Statement of Historic Contexts

(If more than one historic context is documented, present them in sequential order.)

Introduction

This multiple property nomination for post office facilities in that portion of the Milwaukee District of the United States Postal Service (USPS) located in the state of Wisconsin includes those buildings constructed to accommodate a post office, and in some cases other federal offices, in their respective communities. Collectively, these buildings represent a study of the development of the Federal Post Office/Federal Building in Wisconsin in the twentieth century.

Each community included in the multiple property nomination initially received postal service near the time of its founding, locating the post office wherever the local postmaster, a political appointee, either owned or rented space. Thus, the location of the post office moved regularly. As the postal service became more institutionalized and fell under the auspices of the Civil Service system, the federal government began to construct permanent local post offices. The characteristics of these Wisconsin Post Offices/Federal Buildings, as with post offices across the nation, are derived from federal postal policies. These policies were established in Washington, implemented into building designs in Washington, passed onto state districts, and carried through to construction at local levels. The buildings nominated are all representative of that process.

These resources may be considered historically significant in the areas of Commerce, Economics, and Politics/Government as important examples of buildings or parts of buildings associated with the events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our local, state, and our nation's history, specifically buildings and/or elements of buildings constructed under the auspices of the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Works Projects Administration (WPA).

These resources may also be considered significant in the areas of Art and Architecture, as representative examples of buildings or elements of buildings embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, possessing high artistic value, or as the work of a master or significant architect. These buildings possess the stylistic qualities of the Neo-Classical, Art Moderne, Georgian Revival, and/or Classical Revival styles. Many individual post offices also retain artworks from the government arts programs of the 1930s.

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Historical Context

Historically, central governments have organized and maintained control over postal systems, effectively organizing the delivery of mail throughout and between state and local political subdivisions.

In 1639, the Massachusetts General Court designated Richard Fairbank's tavern in Boston as the official repository for incoming and outgoing overseas mail in that colony. This established the first postal facility in what became the United States. Additional post offices were located in taverns, grocery stores, coffeehouses or inns, as these locations were the center of community life. In 1692, Thomas Neale obtained permission from the Crown to operate a postal system in the colonies for a period of 21 years.¹ After Neale relinquished his post in 1699, the Crown appointed a series of people to lead the Colonial postal service. The most notable of these was Benjamin Franklin, appointed in 1753 as Postmaster General for the colonies. Franklin completely reorganized and modernized the system but was dismissed in 1774 for being sympathetic to the Colonists' radical views.²

On July 26, 1775, the Second Continental Congress developed the "Post Office" to provide communication to the colonies during the Revolutionary War. Benjamin Franklin was appointed Postmaster General. The post office was the only agency to remain intact through the Revolutionary War, the Confederation period, and then after the Constitution was adopted. The newly established federal government viewed the post office as the means of conveying knowledge of its laws and proceedings to all parts of the country. The establishment of postal services throughout the country provided an example of our new democracy at work. The new nation placed the power to establish postal facilities in the hands of Congress. Citizens petitioned Congress for postal service. Congress then established post roads and instructed the Postmaster General to provide postal services along these routes.³

In 1785, the post office made the first of many contributions to improve national transportation when it began using stagecoaches on heavily traveled postal routes. Postal revenues were devoted to expanding service to scattered settlements along the frontier. During its early growth period, 1789 -1849, the number of post offices expanded from 75 to 16,749.⁴ When Benjamin Franklin served as Postmaster General in the eighteenth century, he worked to provide faster and more efficient service to a slow

¹ Rita L. Maroney, History of the U.S. Postal Service: 1775-1982 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 1.

² Maroney, 1.

³ Maroney, 3.

⁴ Ellis L. Armstrong, History of Public Works of the United States, 1776-1945 (Chicago: American Public Works Association, 1976).

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developing trade. His effort extended service from Maine to Florida. By 1820, the number of post offices and miles of post roads were approximately quadruple that of 1800.⁵

The operation of the Post Office Department became subject to political patronage as political parties developed in the early 19th century. The postal presence, through its sheer number, distribution, and types of services, provided tangible reminders to otherwise isolated communities of the role and ideals of the central government. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Congress established or improved postal services and facilities throughout the nation. In 1829, Andrew Jackson made the Postmaster General a cabinet-level position. Throughout most of the 19th century, postmasters were political appointments who changed with every new administration. Postmasters were often, therefore, important political activists and local organizers for the party in power. Due to this political vulnerability, as well as their vast number, the postmaster's positions were major targets in the history of civil service reform in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁶

Throughout the nineteenth century, the postal service remained the principal, and for a long time the only, means of long distance communication in the country. It provided both a physical and intellectual link between vast distances as the nation expanded across the continent. This connection proved vitally important as pioneers settled the rural Midwest and onward to the west coast. The post office remained the last link between family and friends of the well-civilized eastern states to a demanding desolate wilderness like Wisconsin.

The Post Office Department also influenced the development of other aspects of our nation's history. In the process of providing and increasing its services, the areas of communication, transportation, publishing, and commerce were further developed. Efforts to increase the speed and efficiency of mail delivery, as well as competition for contracts, encouraged the growth of roads, railroads, shipping lines, and eventually airlines. This also contributed to the development of steamboats. In 1835, the post office signed the first railroad mail contracts. Public demand for fast, continuous postal service caused railroads to begin running trains at night, which aided the growth of passenger service. Congressional franking, special newspaper rates, the acceptance of books for delivery, free delivery for cities and eventually rural areas spurred a boom in the publishing business by offering inexpensive rates and wide distribution of newspapers, journals, magazines, catalogs, and books.

In 1847, the Post Office Department began a period of innovative mail handling, when it introduced postage stamps. In 1850, it added registered mail and began requiring prepayment of postage. Street letterboxes were added in 1858. Thus, the basic form of the modern postal service had taken shape by

⁵ Beth Grosvenor, National Register of Historic Places, Bulletin 13, "How to Apply National Register Criteria to Post Offices" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1984).

⁶ Maroney, 2.

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the Civil War. The growth of the United States stimulated more improvements in the postal system. These included free urban delivery and uniform rates for domestic letters in 1863. The urban delivery service fostered the use of street addresses and mail boxes or door slots in city homes, the building of sidewalks, and the installation of crosswalks, streetlights and signs.⁷

Other important services were instituted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including rural free delivery in 1896, postal savings in 1911, and parcel post in 1913. Rural free delivery, which began experimentally in 1896 and permanently a few years later, was long advocated by farmers to greatly reduce the isolation of rural areas. In Wisconsin, and other states, rural free delivery created a demand for better transportation. Local governments began making outlays for road improvements. In order to qualify for rural delivery service, local governments spent millions of dollars to improve roads between the years 1897 and 1908.⁸

Postal savings banks were authorized in 1911, to encourage thrift, increase the amount of money in circulation, and provide security, especially for those without access to banks. They became particularly popular during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when the government inspired greater confidence in its monetary security than private financial institutions.⁹

Parcel post provided another great convenience to rural areas. In 1913, the parcel post system was established and brought rural residents into the mainstream of American economic and intellectual life with deliveries of newspapers, magazines, catalogs, and merchandise. This service was often unprofitable for private express companies but was inaugurated by the postal service. In 1911, the post office began experimenting with airmail service, establishing the first routes in 1918. This subsequently aided the development of a new form of transportation. Postal requirements and subsidies stimulated airport construction and the installation of safety devices in aircraft and at airports¹⁰

To provide postal service for the expanding population, the post office built structures for receiving, processing and distributing mail. For smaller communities, a special counter in a local store served as the post office. In larger villages or towns, a separate post office building was constructed with a public service counter, workroom for mail processing, and a loading dock. Urban post offices handling large volumes of mail required larger buildings with extensive workrooms, offices, employee facilities, loading platforms, and windows or counters to serve the public. Urban post offices often shared space in federal buildings with courts and branch offices of federal agencies. The Supervising Architect of the Treasury oversaw the design and development of these postal facilities.¹¹

⁷ Maroney, 5.

⁸ Maroney, 5.

⁹ Maroney, 5.

¹⁰ Maroney, 5.

¹¹ Maroney, 5.

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Post Office Construction- Pre-1913

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the federal government leased space in all but the largest cities. Federal construction of a post office required an individual Act of Congress. Under this policy, each post office was individually designed for its specific site and local needs. The common style for these buildings was Neo-Classical or another monumental style which met the perceived expectations of the public for public architecture. However, the turn of the century saw a significant change in this policy. The Treasury built only 16 post offices in the entire decade of the 1890s. In 1900 alone, 29 were constructed due to an increasingly vocal public demand for local postal facilities.¹²

The increase in construction was made possible by a change in Congressional authorization procedures. In 1902, the first Omnibus Public Buildings Act was approved, leading to the authorization of 150 projects. The Omnibus Act gave Congress the tool it needed to authorize several buildings in numerous Congressional Districts with a single floor vote. The legislation had the practical value of allowing a number of Congressmen to get post office or federal facilities for their districts without a great deal of individual attention being drawn to the project.¹³ By March 1913, two more Public Building Omnibus Acts had been approved. Each authorized the Supervising Architect to produce facility plans, but construction funding still had to be authorized by separate legislation.¹⁴

The use of the Omnibus Bill had a substantial effect on federal construction. By 1912, the number of federally owned buildings had grown to 1,126. Over 200 of the 727 federal buildings put up in the years 1900-1912 were post offices. The Omnibus funding policy was a highly political instrument, resulting in political abuses. Federal buildings, including post offices, were often built according to strategies that would be most beneficial to Congressmen and Senators at election time. Buildings were sometimes put up where there was no need, while other agencies, with acute needs, made do with rented quarters.

In the period prior to 1913, design philosophies depended on the styles of the day and the personal beliefs of the Supervising Architect. Prior to the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893, federal architecture was a mix of styles extending from the temple styles of Greek Revival to the European eclecticism of the French Second Empire. In the early 1890s, the Romanesque Revival style became popular, as seen in the Old Post Office building in Washington, D.C. and at the Federal Building in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

¹² Maroney, 5.

¹³ Grosvenor, "How to Apply National Register Criteria."

¹⁴ Lois Craig, Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics and Symbols in U.S. Government Buildings (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 26.

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The Columbian Exposition changed much of that design philosophy. This monumental undertaking included the creation of a large number of pavilions designed by prominent architects of the period. These designers created a great "white city, " employing Beaux-Arts and Neo-Classical styles. These styles were adopted by the City Beautiful movement, which emerged from the Exposition and became the standard for federal architecture over the next 30 years.

Throughout this period, James Knox Taylor was the Supervising Architect of the Treasury (1897-1912). Influenced by these events, Taylor directed a return to classicism by the federal government. Taylor agreed with the proponents of the City Beautiful movement that public architecture should be monumental and beautiful, thereby uplifting the common man and creating a powerful image of the federal government in local communities. As a part of this philosophy, Taylor believed that federal buildings should be built to stand the test of time and, therefore, high quality materials were emphasized, as was the use of skilled craftsmen.¹⁵

In 1903-1904, Taylor conducted an experiment. Projects under \$500,000 were put out to competitive bids from architects in the vicinity of the project. Taylor concluded from the study that the projects were of insufficient scope to attract skilled architects. Accordingly, he kept the design of most buildings, including most of the small post offices in the Department after 1904.¹⁶ The issue of using outside architects was controversial. The American Institute of Architects had lobbied Congress to get the Tarsney Act to authorize the Supervising Architect to use private architects in 1893. Unfortunately, Taylor decided, based on his study, to go against the intent of the Act. There was no further attempt to authorize the use of outside architects until the mid 1920's.

1913-1932

Taylor stepped down in 1913. With his departure, there was a movement to change building practice. The new Supervising Architect for the years 1913-1914 was Oscar Wenderoth. Wenderoth continued the Taylor philosophy of individual designs, while Congress devised a new system of construction. Wenderoth seemed to favor the monumental styles.

Changes in policy were made in the Public Buildings Act of 1913, which authorized the construction of a large number of public buildings, as the two previous Omnibus bills had done. However, the Act also created an economic standard by which to judge which communities could get new post offices and which would not. It also called for the development of standardized designs and design

¹⁵ Louis Melius, The American Postal Service: History of the Postal Service from the Earliest Times (Washington, D.C.: 1917), 26.

¹⁶ Armstrong, History of Public Works of the United States.

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components. In the interest of economy and efficiency, the system mandated a post office's structural and ornamental quality as functions of the value of real estate and postal receipts in the city where it was to be located. This prohibited the construction of a large number of post office buildings in communities whose postal receipts totaled less than \$10,000. First class post offices in large cities would still be monumental and elaborate. However, for small towns, the standards specified an "ordinary class of building, such as any businessman would consider a reasonable investment."¹⁷

The Public Buildings Act of 1913 also created a Public Buildings Commission chaired by the Secretary of the Treasury, William McAdoo. The commission focused on issues related to the efficient design and construction of federal postal facilities. The Commission agreed that monumental architecture should be reserved for larger cities, while smaller communities should get more utilitarian facilities.¹⁸ Its report was submitted to Congress in 1914, and the recommendations implemented into a new federal building policy in 1915 known as the McAdoo Classification System.

The McAdoo Classification System

The device to accomplish standardization for federal building policy of post offices in 1915 was a four-class system known as the McAdoo Classification System. The core of the classification system was that the level of annual postal receipts determined the "character" of the building (i.e., the costliness of the materials in the building). The system uses the terms first class and second class to refer to the size of city populations. It is outlined as follows:

Class A

Definition: Buildings that include a post office of the first class with annual receipts of \$800,000 or over; the site forming part of a city development plan or situated on an important thoroughfare of a great city; improvements on adjoining property reaching the higher valuation of metropolitan real estate.

Character of Building: Marble or granite facing; fireproof throughout; metal frames, sashes and doors; interior finish to include the finer grade of marble, ornamental bronze work, mahogany, etc. Public spaces to have monumental treatment, mural decorations; special interior lighting fixtures.

Class B

Definition: Buildings that include a post office of the first class with annual receipts from \$60,000 to \$800,000; valuation of adjoining property somewhat below the higher valuation of metropolitan real estate.

¹⁷ Melius, 32-33.

¹⁸ Melius, 35-37.

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Character of Building: Limestone or sandstone facing; fireproof throughout; exterior frames and sash metal; interior frames, sash and doors wood; interior finish to exclude the more expensive woods and marbles; ornamental metal to be used only where iron is suitable; restricted ornament in public spaces.

Class C

Definition: Buildings that include a post office of the second class with annual receipts over \$15,000; real estate values satisfying only a limited investment for improvements.

Character of Building: Brick facing with stone or terra cotta trimmings; fireproof floors, non- fireproof roof; frames, sashes and doors wood; interior finish to exclude the more expensive woods and marbles; the latter used only where sanitary conditions demand, public spaces restricted to very simple forms of ornament.

Class D

Definition: Buildings that include a post office having annual receipts of less than \$15,000; real estate values satisfying only a limited investment for improvements.

Character of Building: Brick facing, little stone or terra cotta used; only first floor fireproofed; stock sash, frame, doors etc. where advisable; ordinary class of building such that any businessman would consider a reasonable investment in a small town."¹⁹

The use of the McAdoo system from 1915 to 1934 was so successful that it remains largely intact today. James Wetmore, the Supervising Architect of this period, noted that the new classification system resulted in "equitable treatment," which was no small accomplishment in matters as politically heated as post office construction.²⁰

In 1916, a particular building type was standardized for 30 communities across the nation, of which 27 were contracted for. This demonstrated that the new standardized system speeded construction and cut costs. Wetmore noted, however, that costs still varied according to local markets and locations; the costs for these similar buildings ranged from \$38,000 - \$57,000.²¹

After the brief transition period from 1912-1915, federal building policy changed to one of standardized design. The McAdoo System determined the size and materials of individual buildings. The system offers some assistance in assessing individual buildings as part of this nomination. The records provided by the USPS do not refer to this system or give any such classification to any one of the buildings surveyed. However, if one were to attempt to impose this system on the buildings surveyed, one would conclude that none of the buildings surveyed were in Class A; that the Sheboygan

¹⁹ Melius, 35-37.

²⁰ Melius, 40-41.

²¹ Melius, 40-41.

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and South Milwaukee might be considered Class B; while the remainder of the buildings would be considered Class C or, in the majority of cases, Class D. Therefore, the characteristics of the resource can be judged with the knowledge of the types of design and material constraints the building was constructed under.

During Supervising Architect James Wetmore's tenure (1915-34), seven of the currently nominated Wisconsin-Milwaukee District Post Offices were constructed. This administration seemed to favor classical styles of architecture. While the Neo-Classical seemed the favorite, Georgian Revival was also used in Wisconsin.

World War I

Though the new policy of standardized design was successfully launched, World War I limited its practical effect. Few new projects were begun during the war, when federal construction was halted to put all resources into the war effort, although several existing projects were carried through to completion. At the end of the war, the Country tried to return to a peace economy. However, no new Omnibus Bills were passed and a limited number of individual projects were started before 1926. This national pattern was also experienced in Wisconsin where federal construction on postal projects slowed until the late 1929s.

1926-1933

The federal building program did not really begin again after World War I until Congress passed the Public Buildings Act of 1926. This legislation contained three principal provisions. The Secretary of the Treasury and the Postmaster General were directed to conduct a nationwide survey of the need for postal facilities. The intent was that new facilities would be based upon need rather than political influence. Secondly, the Supervising Architect was now allowed to consult private architects in "special cases." The staff of the Supervising Architect had previously handled all projects, since James Knox Taylor decided in 1904 to effectively bar private architects from federal construction projects. Finally, the act provided that standardization would continue.²²

The results of the building needs survey was as follows:

- That the \$100 million allocation in the Act of 1926 be doubled.
- That at least two new buildings be constructed per state.
- That no buildings should be constructed where postal receipts were less than \$10,000.²³

²² Melius, 40-41.

²³ Melius, 40-41.

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As the Depression took hold after 1929, President Hoover worked with the Congress to increase allocations for the building program in both 1930 and 1931. However, it took the election of the Roosevelt Administration to substantially expand the program.²⁴ This pattern was followed in Wisconsin as well.

1933-1939

Although public works spending as a means to aiding recovery from the Depression began under the Hoover Administration, Roosevelt's New Deal is credited with using the federal building program to that end. These efforts were formalized in 1933, when the Public Works Administration (PWA) was formed to give formal structure to the recovery effort.

The purpose of the PWA was to oversee the planning and construction of federal and non-federal public works projects. The PWA started by focusing on federal projects such as post offices. Because of the planning already completed under the 1926 legislation, these projects were able to start up quickly. The PWA built 406 post offices in the years from 1933 to 1939; this number represents more than one eighth of the total 3,174 PWA construction projects built.²⁵ Congress authorized a number of New Deal programs, which were used to fund the construction of post offices. In addition, funds for post office construction came from the Relief Program authorized by the Emergency Relief and Construction Act of July 21, 1932; the Emergency Construction Program under the Appropriation Act of June 1934; and the Building Program for the District of Columbia, authorized by the Act of 1926.²⁶ Under Supervising Architect Louis A. Simon's tenure (1935-41), 24 of the nominated Milwaukee District Post Offices were constructed. This administration seemed to favor classical styles of architecture, although many of the postal buildings were greatly influenced by the new interest in modernism. While the Georgian Revival style seemed the favorite, many buildings possessed Modern abstractions of Classical Revival design elements. Several post office buildings, designed later in the period, are Art Moderne in style.

These post offices were among the most familiar government buildings to the general public. Despite the desire to complete projects rapidly, the PWA also stressed the importance of high quality in order to ensure "public works of an enduring character and lasting benefits."²⁷

As is characterized by recovery programs, there was a Depression-fueled sense of urgency. The program's goals were to construct buildings as quickly as possible, and to employ as many people as

²⁴ Grosvenor, 3.

²⁵ Roberts, E-15.

²⁶ Roberts, E-15.

²⁷ Grosvenor, 3.

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possible. This, of course, was to be done with the smallest number of dollars. The standardized design policy of 1915 was well suited to this high-speed, efficient process. Any drawing that did not have to be produced moved a project faster. Avoiding construction glitches caused by design changes or misdrawn plans also helped. Simplified ornamentation meant less drawing time. While facade variations were allowed, standardized interior plans were well established and utilized. A publication entitled "Instructions to Private Architects Engaged on Public Building Work under the Jurisdiction of the Treasury Department" listed these standards. The most commonly used styles were the Colonial Revival style or a simplified classical style mixing modern and classical elements. All of the styles can be characterized by symmetrical massing and plain surfaces.²⁸

Two additional developments arose for postal building programs: 1) multiple funding sources; and 2) decoration of building interiors with art work by artists paid through government relief efforts. The art program also had multiple funding sources.

To stimulate the economic recovery, the government rapidly expanded its public works program. This provided work for the unemployed, many of whom were in the building trades. The Bureau of Labor Statistics maintained statistics on employment, wages, cost of materials, and other PWA project data. During the 1930s, the number of public buildings constructed increased dramatically. Nearly three times the number of post offices were built in this period as had been erected in the previous 50 years. The Treasury Department retained responsibility for post office construction funding until 1939, utilizing a number of different programs and authorizations to fund the program.²⁹

The public buildings program, authorized in the Act of 1926, which had been using some private architects, ended with a government order on June 29, 1934. The new order directed all federal buildings to be designed by the Staff of the Office of the Supervising Architect. The Treasury Department, consulting only a small number of private architects on small architectural projects, determined this process inefficient. The in-house process outweighed the benefits of hiring a comparatively small number of consultants by expediting building contracts and quickly putting more men to work.

In March of 1939, as the employment picture improved, the Treasury Department reversed its policy and decided to select private architects by means of regional competitions. This new policy was barely announced when the public buildings program was removed from the Treasury Department and merged into the Federal Works Agency in July of 1939.³⁰

²⁸ Grosvenor, 4.

²⁹ Armstrong, 327.

³⁰ Armstrong, 327.

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1939-1943

The years 1939-1943 included no change of significance to the study. Post office construction continued until 1942, when the American entry into World War II virtually halted all building activity. The few facilities finished in the years 1942-1943 were completions of old projects. The style of architecture remained the same, as did the Supervising Architect's commitment to standardized design.

The Murals Program

From 1934 to 1943, the Roosevelt Administration supported public art with a series of programs designed both to support unemployed artists and artisans, and to improve the character of the public buildings their works were placed in. These programs employed over 10,000 artists, producing a total of 100,000 paintings, 18,000 sculptures, 13,000 prints, and over 4,000 murals.³¹ Many of the post offices from this period in Wisconsin have murals or sculptures produced by artists under the auspices of these programs. Eighteen of the remaining post offices in the Wisconsin Milwaukee District continue to have this artwork on display.

The goal of the New Deal arts program was to bring art to the American people in accessible locations. George Biddle, an artist and former classmate of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, spearheaded the early movement to obtain funding. A public mural experiment in Mexico inspired Biddle to attempt the same thing in the United States. Joining forces with Edward Bruce, a Treasury Department official, Biddle obtained funding for a public arts program from Public Works Administrator Harold Ickes. Bruce emerged as the chief promoter of public funding for artists and named the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP).

After a shaky start and disagreements on the quality and style of the artists, Bruce insisted that the publicly funded art interpret the “American scene.” As a result the goal of the PWAP “was a permanent record of the aspirations and achievements of the American people.”³² In the four and a half months of its existence in the spring of 1934, the PWAP employed 3,749 artist who produced 15,663 pieces of art and craft, of these approximately 400 were murals.³³

By October 1934 Bruce had a new project to employ artists. In September of that year, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and Bruce agreed to spend a portion of new federal buildings’

³¹ Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 5.

³² Richard D. McKinzie, The New Deal for Artists (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 23.

³³ McKinzie, 27.

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construction costs on decoration administered by the art unit, not the architect. Approximately 1% of the building was to be reserved for murals, sculpture, or both. In reality, not all buildings contained artwork. If actual costs for construction exceeded the estimate, the building did not receive art. Consequently, some architects were reluctant to create spaces for murals or sculpture that may not be included.³⁴ As a result of the interest in public art, a new Section of Painting and Sculpture became part of the Office of the Supervising Architect in the Treasury Department. In 1938 the Section of Painting and Sculpture became the Section of Fine Arts. One year later the entire building department with the art unit was transferred from the Treasury Department to the new Federal Works Agency, Public Buildings Administration.

According to Edward Bruce, the Chief of the Section of Fine Arts in 1940, the aim of the Section of Fine Arts was to “secure murals and sculpture of distinguished quality appropriate to the embellishment of Federal buildings.”³⁵ Art for public buildings was determined through competitions, often judged at the local level. The largest competition was nationwide and anonymous; this was the 1939 Forty-Eight State Mural Competition; 48 mural panels to be executed for designated post offices, one in each state. Nine hundred seventy-two artists submitted 1477 designs. Overall, the Section held 190 competitions and awarded 1,371 commissions. Artists who did not win a competition, but whose work demonstrated high quality, were recommended to the Section for appointment. As a result, most of the commissions without a competition went to artists who had submitted designs in previous competitions.³⁶ All work completed under the Section was judged solely on quality; there was no element of relief in the Section’s selections.³⁷ The majority of Section-decorated buildings in 1083 cities were post offices. In many communities throughout the country the resulting commissions were the first and only original art in the area.

Artists entering competitions knew the kind of artwork that was expected - American or local themes, uplifting, realistically depicted. The administrators of the Section of Fine Arts also believed that the general public would accept only realistic art and identifiable themes. Therefore, most of the artists sponsored through the government programs presented works in the Regionalist School. This was an approach that art historian H.W. Janson defined as one that “sought to revive idealism by updating the American myth . . . largely in Midwestern terms.”³⁸ The Regionalists differed from the other predominant group of the Depression era, the Social Realists, whose art depicted the despair of the times and often dealt with issues of social reform. When an exhibition of mural designs from the Section of Fine Arts was held at the National Gallery of Canada in 1940, the two works representing Wisconsin commissions depicted regional themes. Paul Faulkner’s “Winter Sports” from the

³⁴ McKinzie, 38.

³⁵ Exhibition of Mural Designs for Federal Buildings (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1940), 4.

³⁶ McKinzie, 54.

³⁷ Exhibition of Mural Designs, 4.

³⁸ H.W. Janson, History of Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1986), 718.

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Kewaunee Post Office, as its title implies, depicts boys and girls skiing and sledding. Charles Thwaites' "Threshing Barley" from the Chilton Post Office was described as carrying "all of the virtues of Wisconsin painting: interest in the activities of the ordinary workman, the handsome earth colors, and the dignity of labor."³⁹ Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz note that the murals painted in the Midwest abound with scenes of local history, farming and industry. They observe that in these commissions "one feels that if America is going to recover from the Depression, it will do so on the strong backs and strong convictions of these workers and farmers."⁴⁰ These observations hold true in a number of Wisconsin post office murals, such as the one in Chilton, or Charles Thwaites' "Making Cheese" in Plymouth, or Schomer Lichtner's series of murals in the Sheboygan Post Office. Lichtner was the only artist in Wisconsin to receive a commission from the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP). TRAP was a short-lived program funded by the WPA designed to fund work by artists on relief. By the conclusion of the government patronage program for the arts, 35 post offices in Wisconsin received commissions.⁴¹ Of these artworks, only three were not murals.

The Supervising Architect's Office

The Office of the Supervising Architect was responsible for the construction of Federal buildings. From 1895 to 1933, the Office reported to the Treasury Department. In 1933, the Treasury Department was reorganized and the Supervising Architect's office was shifted to the Procurement Branch of the Division of Public Works of the Treasury. In July of 1939, the public buildings program was removed from the Treasury Department and merged into the Federal Works Agency.

The list below identifies the Supervising Architects and Acting Supervising Architects between 1895 and 1947:

Heads of the Office of the Supervising Architect. 1895-1947

William Martin Aiken	1895-1897
James Knox Taylor	1898-1912
James A. Wetmore (acting)	1912-1913
Oscar Wenderoth	1913-1915
James A. Wetmore (acting)	1915-1934
Louis A. Simon	1935-1941
George Howe	1942
Murray M. Davis (acting)	1942
George Howe	1943-1945
Jesse E. Stanton	1946-1947

³⁹ Exhibition of Mural Designs, 23.

⁴⁰ Park and Markowitz, 93-94.

⁴¹ The number is from a list compiled by Park and Markowitz in Democratic Vistas, pp. 232-233.

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The most significant change affecting post office design is reflected in the changes in Supervising Architects - the switch from a policy of individual designs for federal buildings to a policy of standardized design. James Knox Taylor was Supervising Architect from 1898 to 1912. Taylor, an architect, firmly believed in the old system of individual design. Many of the designs from the Taylor years are fully ornamented, "high art" designs. In comparison to later standardized designs, his are quite ornate. After Taylor, the Supervising Architect position was more administrative, often being held by a non-architect. James A. Wetmore (1912-13; 1915-1934) was educated as a lawyer and it was during his tenure that the formal classification system of building type known as the McAdoo System was adopted. While Wetmore was supervising architect, seven Milwaukee District Post Offices were built. Louis A. Simon (1935-1941) was trained as an engineer.⁴² During his tenure 24 Milwaukee District Post Offices were constructed. Examples of the post offices of the Simon era are primarily functional. The architectural style and detailing are incidental to the basic functional layout of the building. Only one Milwaukee District Post Office was constructed during Oscar Wenderoth's (1913-1915) administration.

In the early 1920's, the Office was divided into a Technical Branch and an Administrative Branch. The Technical Branch included a division responsible for project costs and accounting; a drafting division, including a superintendent who greatly influenced design practices; a structural division; a mechanical engineering division; and a repairs division. With the reorganization of the early 1930s, the Office no longer reported to the Secretary of the Treasury. In 1933, it became part of the Public Building Branch of the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department. The office was restructured into four divisions: the Supervising Architect; the Supervising Engineer; the Chairman of the Board Award; and the Chief of the Legal Section. By the early 1930s, the office made a transition from a small office under a dominant architect to what was in effect a large, bureaucratized architecture firm.⁴³ In 1939, the office became part of the Federal Works Agency, Public Buildings Administration. Then, beginning in 1948, it came under the General Services Administration, Public Buildings Administration.

Location Strategies

In siting post offices, criteria reflected the use of the facility and the manner in which it was designed to function. Post offices that included other federal offices or courts were often located near other governmental buildings in the community. Single-function post offices built prior to the 1930s were often located on or near Main Street near the railroad station to facilitate movement of mail to and from trains. Later developments became more truck and auto-oriented and were located near the downtown,

⁴² Park and Markowitz, 5.

⁴³ Park and Markowitz, 5.

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but perhaps a block or two from Main Street. This made the post office easy to find, but also allowed better access to truck activity.

Based on the McAdoo Classification System, new 1930s post office were to be constructed in communities of established postal service. The size, style, materials, and detailing were related to the annual receipt assets of this established service.

This placement is reflected in the Milwaukee District Post Offices. All of the post offices are located in their respective community's commercial business district, as reflected on the individual nomination forms.

National Architectural Styles: 1890s-1940s

The most popular architectural styles found in post office design from the late 1890s to the early 1940s included: Richardsonian Romanesque, Beaux Arts, Neo-Classical, Renaissance Revival, Art Deco, and Art Moderne, International, and the sub-groups of the period revival styles popular during the 1920s through the early 1940s. These include design elements and massing associated with or borrowed from the Colonial Revival, Greek Revival, Federal, Georgian styles, and the Spanish Revival.

There has been no study of the distribution of major post office styles in the United States. Nor was it clear there was a deliberate policy on the part of Supervising Architect to choose designs to match regional tastes or types of construction.

Wisconsin Architectural Styles

The most individual designs for post offices can be found in the period before 1912, marking the ending date of Supervising Architect James Knox Taylor's administration, known for its individual designs. After 1915, the McAdoo System dictated a more standardized design.

During the early period, 1890-1912, post office architecture was one of three predominant styles: Neo-Classical, Renaissance Revival, and Colonial Revival. The architecture in the early years of this period is more "architecturally correct" in details, massing, rooflines, and proportions than in later years. Only two Milwaukee District Post Offices built during this period remain.

The period 1913-1930 saw design become more standardized but the styles remained monumental. Four extant Milwaukee District post offices were built during this period. In 1914, a post office was constructed in Delavan, Wisconsin in which the Neo-Classical style of architecture was utilized; in 1915, a Neo-Classical post office was erected in Merrill, in 1916, a Neo-Classical post office in Antigo and, in 1930, a Neo-Classical post office was erected in Marshfield.

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In the years 1930 to 1946, the Supervising Architect's Office designed most of the post offices in existence today. These facilities were designed based on standard plans. A typical base structure was developed to be reused, while additional interchangeable exterior details and interior finishes were added by project. No particular styles were chosen over others. Once a style was selected, it then became a factor of classification (McAdoo System) that dictated the level of detailing and choice of materials; higher postal revenues equaled greater building expense, including size, materials, and level of detailing. In the Wisconsin-Milwaukee District examples remaining, the major stylistic base features are of the Art Moderne and Colonial Revival styles. As the influence of the time was "modern architecture," even the classical styles had modernist interpretations. Twenty-four Milwaukee District Post Offices were built during the period 1930-1946 that remain in service. Of these, seven are Neo-Classical, one is Art Deco, ten are Georgian Revival, and six are modernist versions of the Classical Revival style of architecture.

Historic Theme Evaluation Criteria

The following chart has been developed to cross-reference the important characteristics the 32 Milwaukee District Post Offices that remain in service must possess to be a good representation of each theme. The post office's role has been identified for its significance within each theme in Section F.

Criteria Evaluation Chart

Areas of Significance

Related Themes

Architecture

- the architectural development and character of the area
- the symbolic impact or influence of public or governmental architecture
- architectural style or construction method
- the evolution of federal design policies
- projection of federal government imagery

Art

- the access to and influence of art by and on the area's citizens
- the development of artistic creativity, technique, and philosophy
- the perception of the area's culture and values as portrayed by the artwork

Commerce

- the development of the area's business or any specific business, and its influence on the social, economic, and political life of the area

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Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the history of the U.S. Postal Service
Community Planning and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• periods of growth and prosperity in the areas population and economy• subsequent physical development of Central Business District• the evolution of the physical growth and design of the community• the impact of national laws, policies, or events on community planning and development
Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the factors influencing economic stability or crisis in the area
Politics/ Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the administration, impact, and perception of local, state and Federal Government services and institutions• the relationship of the Executive and Legislative Branches in the administration of government• the history of public works programs and policies
Social History	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the establishment, development, and role of social institutions
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the development and role of transportation facilities in the area

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Important Dates⁴⁴

- 1775- First Postmaster General under Continental Congress
- 1789- First Postmaster General under Constitution
- 1794- Post Office Act
- 1829- Postmaster General became cabinet post
- 1838- Congress declared all railroads post routes
- 1847- Postage stamps
- 1860- Pony Express
- 1863- City delivery service
- 1864- Railway post office service
- 1864- Money orders
- 1896- Rural free delivery service
- 1902- First omnibus public buildings law
- 1910- Policy to build post offices near railway stations
- 1911- Postal savings
- 1913- Parcel post
- 1913- Public Buildings Act
- 1913- Public Buildings Commissions established to standardize public building construction
- 1918- Airmail
- 1926- Public Buildings Act (Keys-Elliot Act)
- 1931- Federal Employment Stabilization Act required advance planning by federal construction agencies
- 1933- National Industrial Recovery Act established Public Works Administration
- 1933- Public Works of Art Project
- 1934- Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (later called Section of Fine Arts)
- 1935- Emergency Relief Appropriation Act established Works Progress Administration (later called Works Projects Administration)
- 1938- Ramspeck-O'Mahoney Act put all postmasters within Civil Service and limited their political activity

⁴⁴ Grosvenor, 14.

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F. Associated Property Types

Name of Property Type

The buildings in this nomination represent a chronology of a single building type: the Wisconsin Federal Post Office. This includes both free standing, federally owned post offices, which is the most common, recognizable, and highly visible building type associated with Post Office development, and federally owned shared facilities that include a post office. To be considered for eligibility the building must have been constructed as a federal post office.

Property Type Description

This multiple-property nomination is for United States Post Offices found throughout that section of the state of Wisconsin located in the Milwaukee District. Collectively, these buildings represent a chronology of the development of the federally owned Post Offices in the state. In Wisconsin and across the country, the construction of postal facilities saw its greatest growth during the period 1913-1943, with peak development arising from Depression-era public works projects. The buildings of this period are similar in plan and massing and utilize a limited number of styles. These similarities represent a clearly identifiable type of building. While these buildings performed a daily function in business and government, they represent a symbol of civic pride and status to members of the community. This intangible characteristic is evident in all the buildings nominated here, and intrinsically provides significance for all post office resources. While not every post office possesses the full significance shared by the whole building type, individual physical characteristics are demonstrated under each specific building description, which provide additional significance to the individual resources.

Period

The period of significance is 1913-1943. This period was significant to post office construction as many new government programs were implemented that had a direct influence on building construction and design. Several building acts by Congress authorized postal construction, a new classification system dictated standardized design, and several Supervising Architects held office, each influencing design based on their own background and beliefs. Period movements also influenced postal construction. The Chicago Exposition moved many Architects toward monumental design. Colonial Revival design expressed post W.W.I patriotism. The modern movement changed design philosophy based on new methods of construction and a new design aesthetic. During the period of significance, the nation experienced an economic Depression. During this stagnation, the federal government encouraged public works spending as an aid to Depression recovery. These programs provided jobs for the unemployed in various fields affecting postal construction. The period also saw two World Wars, during which building construction virtually halted.

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Between 1913-1931, at least five Wisconsin-Milwaukee District post offices were begun. These are Delavan, Merrill, Antigo, South Milwaukee, and Marshfield. Between 1932-1940, the period of the Depression recovery program, at least 25 post offices were constructed. These include Berlin, Chilton, Clintonville, Columbus, DePere, Edgerton, Elkhorn, Hartford, Kewaunee, Lancaster, Medford, West Allis, Neillsville, Park Falls, Plymouth, Prairie du Chien, Reedsburg, Shawano, Sheboygan, Sturgeon Bay, Two Rivers, Waupaca, Waupun, West Bend, and Whitewater. These projects are associated with federal relief programs, responding to the economic hardships of the Great Depression. The use of common architectural designs, or modules, is noted in a number of instances, especially in those buildings designed and built in the 1930s. This consistency of design and the use of one basic design in several locations is an example of the McAdoo system described in Section E, which brought order, consistency and cost savings to postal construction.

Significant Architect

With only one or two exceptions, as noted on the individual nomination forms, the Office of the Supervising Architect in Washington, D.C. designed all the postal buildings during the period of significance. Teams of federal architects designed these buildings.

Building Classification

When assessing National Register significance based on representation of an architectural style, consideration must be given to the McAdoo classification system, which limited the elaboration of details and choice of materials. The McAdoo Classification System determined the size and materials of individual buildings. Under the system, a new building's structure and ornamental quality are a function of the existing postal receipts in the community in which the post office is to be located. A base plan was often developed and used for several individual post offices. From this base, a number of architectural styles could be assigned to the facade with little alteration to the plan, thus providing order, consistency and cost savings as each plan was reused.

Functional Post Office Types

The post office function either stands alone or is combined with other federal functions. The various combinations can be classified by type:

- Single Purpose Post Office- These are found most often in smaller towns, and serve strictly as post offices or post office sub-stations.
- Combined Post Office and Federal Office- It was common practice to combine offices for various federal agencies with the post office in regional centers. Often, these buildings were the first

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and only federal building in town. These facilities are generally only slightly larger than single-purpose post offices.

- Combined Post Office, Federal Office, and Federal Court- In these facilities, usually constructed in major cities, the post office function was generally incidental to the overall purpose of the building. Federal Courts often occupied most of the space, though other federal agencies were often included.
- Large Post Office or Annex- Constructed in the late 1930s and 1940s, these buildings were situated in major metropolitan centers and handled enormous volumes of mail. Occasionally, the buildings provided space for other federal agencies, but their primary use was as a post office.

The Milwaukee District Post Offices are primarily of the Single Purpose Post Office type. There is one post office that is a combined Post Office and Federal Office. This building is located in Park Falls and housed the Chequamegon National Forest headquarters on the second and third floors.

Architectural Styles

All of the Wisconsin post offices reflect one of the national architectural styles prevalent during the period of significance. Throughout most of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, each post office was individually designed for its specific site and local needs. The common style for these buildings was Neo-Classical or another monumental style which met the perceived expectations for public architecture. After a brief transition period from 1912-1915, federal building policy changed to one of standardized design, characterized by the conservative design effort typical of many buildings erected by the United States Government in the early half of the 20th century.

During the Depression, the Public Works Administration began spreading the new modernist trends in style. But the general public was a bit uncomfortable with modernism or internationalism. In an effort to search for past stability, the Period Revivals, primarily Georgian and Classical Revival styles, were revived for public architecture with their reassuring images of security.

In Wisconsin, the styles for postal facilities were largely limited to the Art Moderne, Neo-Classical, and the Colonial Revival styles.

Modernist:

The Modernist styles became increasingly popular in the 1930s when streamlined ships, airplanes and automobiles were presented to the public. The Art Deco style was popularized in the Paris Exhibition of 1925. The American Art Moderne style derived from this. The Art Moderne style received national acclaim when the Chicago Tribune held a competition for its own headquarters building in Chicago.

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While the Art Deco design won second place, Eliel Saarinen's modernist vision received public praise and this new style became the latest architectural fashion.⁴⁵

The modernist styles were most popular from 1920 to 1940. The Art Moderne style, like its predecessor, Art Deco, is an expression of the 1930s industrialization period and its celebration of technology. As modernist trends appeared, the change in technology facilitated a change in aesthetics. The materials used in the modern era truly relied on new construction practices- steel and concrete.

The Art Deco was the first of the modernist styles, common in public and commercial buildings in the 1920s and early 1930s. Characteristics of the Art Deco are a smooth wall surface articulated with details that express verticality. These hard edges suggest machine precision. The smooth wall surface is achieved with poured concrete and often finished with stucco. Zigzags, chevrons, shallow fluted columns, and other stylized geometric forms were added to facades as decorative elements.⁴⁶ Towers or other vertical elements emphasize the style's verticality trait. Granite and terra cotta were popular facing materials, and ornamental metals such as bronze were used on both exterior and interior detailing.⁴⁷

After 1930, Art Moderne became the style of choice. This style is more volumetric, streamlined, and totally devoid of any historic references. Characteristics of the Art Moderne are a smooth wall surface articulated with details that express horizontality. The effects of the Art Moderne were achieved through horizontal lines (grooves or lines in walls), emphasized with flat roofs (small ledge or coping and horizontal balustrade elements at the roof line) and narrow bands of windows. The facade of the Art Moderne is usually asymmetrical.⁴⁸ The materials utilized for this style were chosen for their characteristic of achieving strength as well as shape- poured concrete construction and cast concrete ornament. Glass block, concrete, and stucco were materials frequently used to achieve a smooth wall surface and rounded corners. Aluminum and stainless steel were used for door and window trim in 1930s construction.⁴⁹

Period Revival Styles:

Borrowing from past motifs and styles, the Period Revival styles became popular from 1900 to 1940, with their greatest popularity during the 1920s. A second rebirth in the style is seen after World War II. The use of the term "Period Revival," should more appropriately include the specific style employed in the representation.

⁴⁵ Virginia and Lee McAlester, A Field Guide to American Houses (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 321-324.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Wisconsin Architectural Styles," Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986), 2-18

⁴⁸ McAlester, Field Guide, 321-324.

⁴⁹ Carole Rifkind, A Field Guide to American Architecture (Penguin Books, 1980), 220-221.

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The European models for period styles were almost exclusively built of solid masonry. This material proved vital in its monumental expression of public architecture. Elaborate patterns of decorative stonework or brickwork were exposed on the facades. The palette of the city beautiful was light and bright: white or light-gray marble, limestone or cast stone, buff-toned brick, or white vitreous-glazed brick. Specialty metals such as bronze, steel, alloys, copper, and brass were used for ornament. Following the first World War, pastel colored terra cotta and unglazed brick in soft yellow and russet tones were used for a rich tapestry like effect. Also popular were limestone used as a facing material.⁵⁰ The "period revival" styles are drawn from purer historical precedents, whereas the more eclectic "modern" revival styles eschew these earlier models and include an architect's creative interpretation of the mannerisms of the initial style.⁵¹

Neo-Classical:

The revival of interest in the classical ideals is primarily the influence of the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. The Exposition reintroduced classical themes, classical elements, and boasted colonnaded buildings arranged around central courts. The style emphasized historical interpretations of European styles. This highly publicized event presented this new style to the people and thus became the latest fashion throughout the nation. This movement resulted in the nation's unprecedented production of classical details presented in Neoclassical style buildings. The Neo-Classical style of architecture was particularly popular for public, institutional, and commercial buildings. The popularity of the style was during the period 1895-1950.⁵²

Identifying features of the Neo-Classical style include facades dominated by a full-height portico with roof supported by classical columns. The columns typically have Ionic or Corinthian capitals. The building's facade is symmetrical, balanced with windows on either side of a central door. The principal areas of detail elaboration are the columns, cornices, doorways, and the treatment around windows. Fluted column shafts are common. After 1925, unfluted columns became more popular. Doors commonly have elaborate, decorative surrounds based on Greek Revival, Adam, or Georgian precedents. Neo-Classical cornices usually have boxed eaves with a moderate overhang, frequently with dentils or modillions beneath; a wide frieze band is occasionally found beneath the cornice. Windows are rectangular with double hung sashes, with six to nine panes per sash, others have multi-pane or single upper sash and single pane lower sash. Roofline balustrades are also common in the Neo-Classical style.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² McAlester, Field Guide, 321-324.

⁵³ Ibid.

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In Wisconsin, the Neo-Classical style of architecture was utilized for some of the most prominent public buildings, representing monumentality and status. The State Capitol in Madison, the State Historical Society in Madison, and the Milwaukee County Courthouse in Milwaukee are several examples. Carnegie libraries also utilized this style for smaller, yet prominent status. Several Wisconsin library examples include those in Sparta, Bayfield, and Washburn.⁵⁴ Examples of Wisconsin post offices designed in this style include Delevan and Marshfield.

Classical Revival Style:

The term "Classical Revival" refers to the rebirth of interest in the historical styles of architecture. The motifs associated with the various historical styles of this nomination are interpreted as providing a national idiom of some monumentality (the postal presence) or to simply add quaint effect to an otherwise ordinary building mass.

The principal areas of elaboration in Classical Revival architecture are the entrances, cornices and windows. Ornament can be spare and abstract, alluding to precedents in Classical architecture. Identifying features of the style are an accentuated front door, normally with a decorative crown, supported by pilasters, or extended forward and supported by slender columns to form an entry porch. The doors commonly have overhead fanlights or sidelights. Facades normally show symmetrically balanced windows and a center door. Windows are accented with double hung sashes, usually with multi-pane glazing in one or both sashes. Windows are frequently paired.⁵⁵

As this style saw its second rebirth after W.W.II, individual interpretations were added to the classical styles. Architect's interpreted the characteristics of the initial style, and simply added details in a "kit of parts" fashion. Details from two or more of these precedents were freely combined, resulting in many more eclectic versions than purely classical copies.

Colonial Revival:

The Colonial Revival style of architecture is the most common of the Period Revival styles used for post offices. The classical forms of the Colonial Revival style are interpretations of both the Georgian and the Federal styles of architecture. Characteristics of the style are formal, symmetrical facades, rectangular plans and hipped roofs.

Most classical details could be incorporated into the style for architectural embellishment. These include denticulated cornices, elliptical fanlights, sidelights flanking doorways, Palladian windows, broken pediments, and classical columns.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ "Wisconsin Architectural Styles," Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, 2-18.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

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These are the styles reflected in the post offices built in Wisconsin from 1913 to 1943. In the case of earlier examples, such as Delevan, the designs were specific to that particular building, but after the adoption of the McAdoo classification system, and its resulting standardization of design, the individuality of these buildings was reduced. Functionality remained identical, while stylistic embellishments created the appearance of variety.

Artwork

This relates to the presence of examples of public art in the buildings being nominated. This can take the form of exterior pieces such as sculptured lighting fixtures in some of the earlier examples. However, many of the later buildings feature painted murals or interior bas-relief sculptures commissioned under the Public Works of Art project and the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts, all financed under the Depression-era Work Projects Administration (WPA) and Public Works Administration (PWA).

The post offices noted on the chart below contained, as an integral part of the building, an example of public art:

LOCATION	ARTIST	TITLE	MURAL/ SCULPTURE	DATE
Berlin	Raymond Redell	"Gathering Cranberries"	M	1938
Chilton	Charles W. Thwaites	"Threshing Barley"	M	1940
Columbus	Arnold Blanch	"One Hundredth Anniversary"	M	1940
DePere ⁵⁷	Lester W. Bentley	"Giving Thanks"	M	1942
		"The Red Pieta"	M	
		"Nicholas Parret"	M	
Edgerton	Vladimir Rousseff	"Tobacco Harvest"	M	1941
Elkhorn	Tom Rost	"Pioneer Postman"	M	1938

⁵⁷ The murals from this post office were removed to the Neville Museum in Green Bay, Wisconsin in 1999.

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Hartford ⁵⁸	Ethel Spears	"Autumn Wisconsin Landscape"	M	1940
Kewaunee	Paul Faulkner	"Winter Sports"	M	1940
Lancaster	Tom Rost	"Farm Yard"	M	1940
West Allis	Frances Foy	"Wisconsin Wild Flowers-Spring"		1943
		"Wisconsin Wild Flowers-Autumn"	M	
Neillsville	John Van Koert	"The Choosing of the County Seat"	M	1940
Park Falls	James Watrous	"Lumberjack Fight on the Flambeau River"	M	1938
Plymouth	Charles W. Thwaites	"Making Cheese"	M	1942
Prairie du Chien	Jefferson E. Greer	"Discovery of Northern Waters of the Mississippi"	S	1938
Reedsburg	Richard Jansen	"Dairy Farm"	M	1940
Shawano	Eugene Higgins	"The First Settlers"	M	1939
Sheboygan	Schomer Lichtner	"The Lake"	M	1937
		"The Pioneer"	M	
		"Present City"	M	
		"Indian Life"	M	
		"Agriculture"	M	
Sturgeon Bay	Santos Zingale	"Fruits of Sturgeon Bay"	M	1940
Waupaca	Raymond Redell	"Wisconsin Countryside"	M	1940

⁵⁸ This mural was removed in 2000 to the West Bend Art Museum in West Bend, Wisconsin.

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West Bend	Peter Rotier	"The Rural Mail Carrier"	M	1937
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Post Office Murals

The aim of the Section of Fine Arts was to secure murals and sculpture of distinguished quality appropriate to the embellishment of Federal Buildings. Approximately 1% of the total of limit of cost of the buildings is reserved for this decoration. The Section held anonymous competitions, national, regional, state or local, to which all citizen artists of the United States were eligible. A different jury of painters or sculptors, unattached to the Section, judged each competition. The jury members were selected based on experience and knowledge. They were called upon to judge the intrinsic quality of the painting or the sculpture and its relationship to its setting.

Rural America became the site of an American Art competition that up until this time compared to no other in history. If entries won approval the artists had an opportunity to expand their talents into the heartland of America. Art was no longer just for the nation's bourgeois. One of the main reasons for this "Mural America" program was to culturally enhance America's appreciation for art. Another intention was to foster community involvement, an optimistic approach that would attempt to help kick start a country that was on its way out of the Great Depression.

In the U.S. Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts program post offices became the focal point for some of this period's most exciting paintings, sculptures and bas-reliefs. Many of the artisans at this time were unknowns, others were more famous and a handful went on to become celebrated American artists. Focus was put on the confrontation between the mural's content and the people of the numerous rural communities who in return became the ultimate patron.

The artists who were commissioned for these projects were given the opportunity to create a small part of the community with sometimes little understanding for the region. Artists in certain instances would become iconoclasts working toward a common theme or style. In some cases the patrons would first see the proposed work in a periodical or sometimes not even until the work began. These communities either agreed with the content or wanted the motif completely redone. Hence, the people took responsibility in making these murals indigenous to their locale. So, for the first time in history, the average rural American community became the barometer of the public's taste in art.

The murals that were chosen to represent America were generally based on the history of the region, but designs would be changed. Some patrons had been more skeptical than others and murals were altered from a regionalist motif to a more isolated one. Overall the national concept of these murals was again a theme of the times, a movement in time from today (the Depression) to the future, the old to the new. The post office mural was a tool in that it gave meaning to that particular community and

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region; a common peace, familiarity and harmony was brought to life at a moment in history that really had none.

Siting

All of the buildings are within city limits and none has been moved. Almost all of the facilities are sited off the main thoroughfare, within close proximity of a major intersection. It was preferable to locate the building on a corner lot for better visibility and ease of access and parking. Since the postal department policy was to not locate additional ancillary structures with post offices, no additional structures are associated with any of the properties.

With the exception of the Sheboygan Post Office, each building represents the first federally owned post office in its respective community. Although each of these communities received postal service from the time of its founding, the post office was located wherever the local postmaster, a political appointee, either owned or rented space. Thus, the location of the post office moved regularly. As the postal service became more institutionalized and fell under the auspices of the Civil Service System, the federal government began to construct permanent local post offices in smaller communities. The buildings surveyed represent that round of construction.

Although there are certainly episodes where local politics played a factor in siting a post office, the evidence of the USPS files indicates that most of the decisions to construct a new facility were made by post office officials in Washington, citing the volume of postal activity rather than political influence.

Function

Most of the post offices were constructed with the single purpose of serving as a collection and distribution point for mail. None of the post offices nominated have had facilities for public gatherings, local governmental functions or courts. Several of the larger post offices may have housed some other, limited federal function(s), although none do at present. The exception to this rule is the Park Falls Post Office, which had the headquarters of the 850,000-acre Chequamegon National Forest housed in the two floors above the first floor post office.

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Property Type Significance

The Federal Post Office type makes up the only recognizable building type associated within the historic context of post office development in the Wisconsin-Milwaukee District. These buildings fit into two areas of criteria for National Register eligibility. Under Criterion A, the buildings are associated with the events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our local, state, or our nation's history. Under the second, Criterion C, buildings embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, possess high artistic value, or are the work of a master or significant architect. Buildings may also be eligible under Criterion C for the artwork they contain. The specific areas of contribution are outlined as follows:

Criterion A

The following interpretations are applied to Criterion A for eligibility:

- Buildings and elements of buildings which were constructed under the auspices of the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Works Projects Administration (WPA) and which have other significant attributes.

- Buildings which have made a substantial contribution to the history of their community or whose construction was significant to the community.

In nominating the 32 buildings included in this survey, two historic themes become apparent and serve as the basis for evaluating the historic significance of each resource. The first of these themes involves approximately two-thirds of the buildings surveyed, which date from the period 1933 to 1939 and were built during the period of the Public Works Administration. It is felt that construction during the PWA period alone does not constitute NRHP significance, but could contribute to other factors that might meet the significance test.

The second theme investigated involves the role each post office may have played in the historical development of its community. To investigate the significance of that role, research was conducted in the available local and county secondary histories, as well as local newspaper accounts and USPS records. These themes are incorporated into the following discussion.

Communication

As the nation moved westward, efficient means of communication were sought to keep people in touch. The sending of mail provided a cheap, efficient and relatively fast method of communication. The post office provided both a means to collect local news as well as a repository and pick-up point for personal correspondence.

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Community Planning and Development

In no case was the siting of one of the post offices nominated here influential in the development of a community or its commercial district. However, the locations of several postal buildings in this nomination were determined by the proximity of other local government buildings or by being adjacent to major thoroughfares.

Economics

The PWA programs which developed many of the post offices represent the goals, policies, practices and services, devised by the federal government to alleviate the Depression-era economic crisis in local communities. A post office constructed during the relief programs of the 1930s could have contributed to the local economic relief of the Depression crisis. It was the policy of the federal government to encourage the use of local materials as well as local manpower. However, postal records indicate that regional teams of construction workers moved from city to city. They did purchase local materials for construction but the overall effect on the economy of any one community was limited.

Politics/Government

There appears to be a very limited impact on the local community from the construction of these buildings. USPS records indicate that the architects and construction supervisors were federal employees sent to the community to supervise the project. Although local contractors were probably used in some cases, it appears the more general rule was to give a regional contract to a contractor, or group of contractors, who then took their crews from job site to job site. It appears there was relatively little local hiring, although some goods and services were undoubtedly purchased. Under these conditions, it is difficult to make a case for local historic significance based upon Depression era economic relief. The jobs created were important, but stretched beyond the community where the post offices were constructed.

The decision to construct new postal facilities was made in Washington, D.C. The decision was based on existing postal activity rather than local politics. Postal presence was important as a symbol of the Democratic aspects of the Federal Government in the community. The construction of postal facilities in a community represented the government's Public Works effort as Depression-era relief.

A post office may be eligible on a local and state level for its associations with history of the public works programs and policies of the 1930's. A building may be an example of an early multi purpose federal building in the state. A post office may be the only local example of a federal building in a city; however, this alone would probably not make the building eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

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Transportation

The addition of postal facilities had both a cause and an effect on the need for transportation and transportation facilities. As postal facilities increased in number, the need for efficient means of transportation increased. Enhancing transport resulted in new highways created between cities and additional roadways between towns and villages.

Criterion C

The following interpretations are applied to Criterion C for eligibility:

- Buildings that are a particularly good example of an architectural type, style or form.
- Buildings which retain artworks from the government arts programs of the 1930s and the early 1940s and where those works of art retain artistic integrity and where the integrity of the rest of the building has not been seriously compromised. It should be noted that there are cases in which the artwork located on the interior of the building is the primary source of its significance.

Architecture

Several of the recommendations of eligibility are based on the Architectural Criteria related to the type, period, or method of construction. No buildings analyzed were judged to be the work of an acknowledged Master Architect, although a number possess elements that could be considered to possess High Artistic Value. A number of the buildings are excellent interpretations of particular architectural styles as applied to public buildings. The earlier buildings evidence a substantial amount of individuality of design while the later examples tend to cluster around a limited number of design modules.

The post offices, with their designs, represent an image of both the Federal Government and the Post Office Department. The federal government projected its presence in post offices, usually the only federal presence in a community. The buildings were generally large in their proportions, and some were monumental in style. The symbolic impact of these buildings represented civic pride and status in the community. The chosen architectural style of postal facilities influenced the development and style of other civic or commercial buildings in the community. As new styles were introduced in communities, the general public's architectural tastes were greatly influenced.

The evolution of federal design policies is evident in the progress of post office construction through the period of significance. Individual design was seen early in the period, and standardized design was prevalent later in the period. The standardization of design is evident among post office facilities identical in plan, similar in style, but with variations made in the detailing of materials.

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Art

The patronage for public art shown during the 1930s was the first time the federal government chose to support the arts on a substantial scale, reflecting a belief in the beneficial influence of access and exposure to art. The artistic expression generally reflected something of the area's history, culture or values. The Depression-era programs created jobs, allowing artists' creativity, technique and philosophy to develop in an otherwise repressed economy. Representative surviving works from these programs, therefore, become noteworthy.

Post office murals were the only example of the Treasury Department's fine art's programs found in many communities. These murals reflect attitudes of the government about the beneficial influence of art on people.

The iconographic and iconological content of these pieces of artwork have local and regional significance, usually drawing the subject matter from local or regional themes. These pieces of artwork reflect an important or unique way of life and/or attitudes of citizens in the community. Each piece was usually a perception of the area's culture and values.

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G. Geographical Data

All of the nominated post offices are located in the State of Wisconsin and are part of the Milwaukee postal district. The Milwaukee District (now called the Lakeland District) encompasses the post offices in the central and eastern portion of the state of Wisconsin corresponding to zip codes beginning with the following three digit numbers: 530, 531, 532, 534, 535, 537, 538, 539, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, and 549.

H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

A survey of the post offices in the Milwaukee Postal District was undertaken in 1991 as a result of ADA and other improvements proposed by the postal service. After the survey was completed, a list of potentially eligible post offices was developed by consultation between the postal service and the SHPO.

All of the facilities selected for this nomination are in excellent condition and retain substantial integrity. Changes to the original architectural character are due to changing postal services since the time of construction, accommodating increased demand for services, or compliance with legislation on energy conservation or other codes. Service alterations include removal of the postal savings windows and the finance department areas in lobbies. Changes made for increased demand for services include additional lock boxes in the lobby, and additions to work rooms and/or loading docks. Typical energy conservation measures include replacement of windows and lights, and additions to lobby vestibules and entrances. More recent changes have been made to bring buildings into compliance within the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Each building was judged against the Criteria of Eligibility for listing. Following this review, each building is also evaluated for the extent to which it retains the integrity of its original design. The question of integrity is critical to making the final judgement of eligibility. Specific issues of integrity are as follows:

Building Additions - Each building is reviewed for additions to the original composition. Additions must be completed in a manner that does not detract from the original design either through form or in the use of inappropriate materials.

Fenestration - Each building is reviewed for the extent to which original windows and entries have been altered. Unsatisfactory alterations can include changes to the actual proportions, size or orientation of windows including the closing of original window openings as well as changes to window and door treatments such as the removal of original windows and doors and replacement with unsympathetic modern materials.

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Building Materials - Each building is also reviewed for the use of appropriate building materials in making repairs or alterations to the original structure.

Building Elements - Each building is reviewed for the presence of original design elements that may have been removed at some point in its history.

Building Site - Each building is reviewed to determine the extent to which the original building site and landscaping treatments may have been changed over its history.

Registration Requirements

In order to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a Wisconsin Federal Post Office, the facility must be located in the Milwaukee District of the United States Postal Service and have operated as a postal facility.

An example of the property type can be eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A, as a representative example of a building or parts of a building associated with the events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our local, state, or our nations history. In order to be eligible under Criterion A, in the area of Government, an individual post office building and/or elements of the building may be constructed under the auspices of the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Works Projects Administration (WPA).

An example of the property type can be eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C, as a representative example of buildings architecturally significant as embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, possessing high artistic value, or the work of a master or significant architect. In order to be eligible under Criterion C, in the area of Architecture, an individual post office building and/or elements of the building must possess the stylistic qualities of the NeoClassical, Art Moderne, Colonial Revival, and Classical Revival styles indigenous to Wisconsin. Stylistic concerns are not limited to the prevalent styles listed here, and may be broadened to other popular national styles representative of twentieth century architecture, and significant to post office design. When assessing post office architecture against stylistic features, it is important to consider the McAdoo system's limitations on form, materials, detailing, and construction practices. While post office buildings may not represent the best example of an architectural style in a community, each resource should be compared to other examples of that style in the community

In order to be eligible under Criterion C, in the area of Art, an individual post office must retain artworks of high artistic value, created during the government arts programs of the 1930s and the

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integrity of the rest of the building must not have been seriously compromised so as to reflect an appropriate historic setting for the work of art.

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