

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

=====

historic name United States Post Office

other names/site number Norman Schools Professional Development Center

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2. Location

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street & number 207 E. Gray Street not for publication N/A
city or town Norman vicinity N/A
state Oklahoma code OK county Cleveland code 027
zip code 73070

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6. Function or Use
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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: GOVERNMENT Sub: post office

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: education-related

=====
7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE:Limestone
roof ASPHALT
walls BRICK
STONE:Limestone
TERRA COTTA
other _____

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

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8. Statement of Significance
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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Politics/Government
Architecture

Period of Significance 1933-1950

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8. Statement of Significance (Continued)
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Significant Dates 1933

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Wetmore, James, Supervising Architect, Treasury Department
Christy-Dolph Construction Company, builder

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: N/A

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>14</u>	<u>641790</u>	<u>3898660</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
2	<u>N/A</u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

N/A See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

=====
11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian, for City of Norman
organization Savage Consulting date 31 March 2000
street & number Rt. 1, Box 116 telephone 405/459-6200
city or town Pocasset state OK zip code 73079

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Additional Documentation
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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage
or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Norman Public Schools; Ms. Nancy O'Brian Ed.D., Superintendent

street & number 131 South Flood telephone _____

city or town Norman state OK zip code 73069-5499

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SUMMARY

The United States Post Office in Norman, Oklahoma, is an excellent example of a federally-designed Classical Revival style building. Constructed with a limestone foundation, the building has blond brick walls with limestone ornamentation and a highly decorated terra cotta cornice. The building is one-story, although it includes a mezzanine level and a nearly full basement. The building has a combination hipped and flat roof. The front section of the roof is hipped, while the narrower rear section has a flat roof. The hipped roof is currently asphalt shingled; historically, it had a tile covering. Providing a decorative and functional detail to the roof are three green vents and one blond, brick chimney. The exterior of the building is symmetrical in both ornamental detail and fenestration. In addition to the ornamented, limestone cornice enveloping the building, other ornamental details on the building include arched windows with limestone keystones, limestone medallions and limestone antics. The Palladian-influenced front windows are wood framed, sixteen-over-twelve, double hung with three-over-three sidelights and six light fanlights. The majority of the remaining windows are wood, twelve-over-twelve, double hung. The primary entry consists of a striking, double bronze door set off by green marble columns with Composite order capitals and a black marble entablature. Matching the two windows on either side, the entry is capped with a double brick arch filled with ornamented wood and a six light fanlight. Further highlighting the facade is a terra cotta eagle, centrally located above the entry.

The building is located on the north side of downtown Norman. It is set in a commercial area which, although having undergone some modernization, retains its general feeling. The Norman central business district extends to the east, west and south of the building for several blocks. The majority of buildings are one- and two-story, Commercial style, brick buildings. A couple of blocks to the north of the building is a residential area which was developed probably during the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s. The United States Post Office stands out in the downtown area as the only historic federally-designed federal building and as an excellent example of a Classical Revival style public building.

The building retains a remarkable degree of integrity on both the exterior and interior. On the exterior, the only notable modifications are the addition of a handicap ramp to the loading dock on the east side, removal of the original "United States Post Office" from the front of the building and the placement of a new wood sign off the southwest corner of the building. The freestanding sign proclaims the building's new use as the Norman Public School's

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Professional Development Center. These alterations do not significantly impact the integrity of the building.

The interior of the building has undergone slightly more modification with the general workroom being filled with office furniture which is used to visually divide the room into smaller units. The original post office windows remain in place, as does the historic Postmaster's office. The public lobby is now filled with desks and bookshelves but much of the original character of the area and the historic vestibule are still present. The mezzanine level still retains its historic integrity with the one office retaining its historic door and the restrooms retaining many of their historic features. Additionally, the catwalk around the general workroom with slots to secretly supervise the workers remains intact. Currently, the catwalk area is used as additional storage space. The basement has undergone the most alteration. In addition to housing the mechanical equipment, the basement contains a large conference room which has been modernized with fluorescent lighting and dropped acoustical tile ceiling. Historically, the conference room was used as the civil service examination room. In addition to changes to the ceiling, new doors have been put in for the conference room and new vestibule to the back door of the building. Because much of the original configuration and historic finishes of the interior remains intact, as well as many historic features, the alterations made to the interior do not destroy the historic integrity of the interior. Overall, the building maintains a high degree of integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The one-story United States Post Office in Norman, Oklahoma, has a limestone foundation, blond brick walls, a terra cotta cornice and asphalt shingled, hipped and flat roof. The brick walls are laid in an array of bonds, creating a complex pattern throughout the building. On the southwest corner of the foundation is the building's cornerstone. The cornerstone reads "A.W. MELLON/SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY/James A. Wetmore/Acting Supervising Architect/1932." The terra cotta cornice is highly ornamented on all sides of the building. The cornice is split into two unequal sections. The smaller lower section protrudes slightly farther out than the wide upper section. The lower section is ornamented with an alternating pattern of shields, rosettes and a third, larger ornament created in a combination of scrolls and foliated designs. The larger, upper section is much simpler with only two ornamental designs interspersed among the terra cotta blocks. The larger ornamentation consists of an abstract scrolled and foliated design in a larger, overall

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rectangular, design. The smaller ornamentation is a star shape. The front of the building has a hipped roof, while the narrower rear section has a flat roof. Historically, the building was topped with a tile roof in the front hipped roof section. At an unknown time, the tile roof covering was replaced with an asphalt shingle roof. The material of the rear flat roof is unknown. The roof is functionally ornamented with four vents with green, wood covers and one chimney. The two, larger, centrally located, rectangular vents are the most visible from the front of the building but there is a shorter, rectangular one right above the entry and an intake vent to the east of the larger rectangular ones. The blond brick chimney with a limestone cap is located on the northeast side of the hipped roof.

The south elevation of the United States Post Office, fronting onto Gray Street, is the facade of the building. This elevation is the most highly ornamented. The symmetrical facade is broken into three sections. The westernmost and easternmost portions are identical while the larger central portion is unmatched on the building. The two flanking sections of the facade include one centrally located, twelve-over-twelve, wood frame, double hung window. Each window has an ornamented, flat, limestone lintel. On either end of the lintel are small, limestone rosettes. Marking the center of the lintel is a limestone, oval-shaped, keystone. Above the window is a three-part stone ornamentation. The rectangular flanking ornamentations are a combination of scrolls and foliated designs. The center decorative detail is oval shaped and contains a *fleur-de-lis* design with round dots around the inside edge of the oval.

The highly decorative center portion of the facade juts out slightly from the sides. All of the fenestration in the central portion is within arched openings, in contrast to the remaining windows and doors on the building which all have flat lintels. The double brick arches are marked by limestone springer stones with rosettes and limestone keystones. The keystones, in the traditional wedge-shape, are detailed with a double vertical design. The central entry is flanked by two Palladian-influenced windows. The windows are wood framed, sixteen-over-twelve, double hung with three-over-three, wood framed, double hung, sidelights. The dividing members between the window and sidelights are shaped like columns with short Doric capitals and a entablature which extends to the bottom of the brick arch. The windows have a large, wood sill which is separated into three panels matching the sections of the window. Set into the sill panels is green marble matching the marble of the columns on the entry. Topping the windows within the brick arch is a six-light fanlight.

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The remainder of the arched area is filled in with wood. The larger, outer edge of the wood is in a waved pattern while the inner edge is an alternating pattern of a round dot with three bars. Flanking the windows on both sides at about mid-window height are rectangular, limestone ornamentations in a chain diamond pattern. The facade is further ornamented with six limestone cat antics. Regularly spaced between the arched openings of the central portion of the south elevation, the antics are a relatively unusual decorative detail for federal buildings in Oklahoma.

The entry on the United States Post Office in Norman is also a highly decorative, opulent feature. The above grade entry is accessed by a wide six-step stair with short, rectangular wing walls. Sitting on the wing walls are elaborate, brass, freestanding lights. The brass light fixtures accent the brass, narrow, double doors of the entry. The doors are topped by a two-light brass transom window. The transom window features etched glass. The doors are flanked by striking, green marble columns with Composite order capitals. Behind the columns are green marble pilasters. Topping the columns and pilasters is a black marble entablature. The frieze of the entablature features a fret design topped with a dentil band. Matching the other openings in the central portion of the facade, the entry is topped with a double brick arch. The arch is filled with a six-light fanlight and decorative wood identical to that found in the window arches. Centrally located on the facade, immediately above the entry, is a terra cotta eagle. With wings extended, the eagle is highlighted by a yellow, half-circle behind it. Below the eagle, in the limestone cornice, a break is noticeable in the ornamentation of the lower portion of the cornice. Originally, this area would have contained the words "United States Post Office." Although it is unknown when the letters were removed exactly, it was probably about the time that the Norman Public School system took over the building in the mid-1960s.

The west elevation fronts onto Peters Avenue. The west elevation is divided into two sections. The north section of the west side is set significantly back to the east as compared to the south section. The cornice in both the north and south section is ornamented identical to the cornice on the front of the building. The south section of the west elevation contains four symmetrical windows. The windows are wood framed, twelve-over-twelve, double hung windows. Similar to the outside windows on the facade, the windows have flat, limestone lintels. The lintels are decorated with rosettes on both ends and an oval-shaped keystone. The windows have narrow, limestone sills. Above each of the windows is an oval shaped ornament which contains a fleur-de-lis design with round dots around the inside edge of the oval. These ornaments

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match the central decorative detail above the outside windows on the facade. Off of the northwest corner of the south portion of the west elevation is an ornamental, metal railing, painted white. The railing extends in a straight line to nearly the north side of the building before turning out to the west. Another railing extends from the sidewalk east to the northeast corner of the building. The railing protects a basement entrance to the building. The basement door on the east elevation is a double, plank door, painted green. A metal handrail has been added to facilitate access to the basement door. The north wall created by the setback of the east elevation contains one window, matching the windows on the south portion of the east wall. Also identical to the windows on the south portion is the oval shaped ornamentation with a fleur-de-lis design above the window. The north portion of the east elevation contains a pattern for four, symmetrical openings; however, there are only three actual windows. The fourth window on the south side of the north portion is merely a brick outline of an opening. The outline matches the dimensions of the three windows to the north with a limestone piece at sill height. The three windows in this portion of the building are wood framed, twelve-over-twelve, double hung with a four-light transom. The windows have narrow, limestone sills with no discernible lintels.

The rear of the building has an ornamented cornice similar to that of the other elevations. One difference from the south and east elevations is the lack of the star ornaments in the upper part of the cornice. The north elevation of the building has one, centrally located, basement entry. The entry is a double, wood and glass, panel door. The basement entry is protected by a metal railing, also painted white. The highlight of the north elevation is the first floor fenestration pattern. Beginning on the west side of the north elevation, there are two, single, twelve-over-twelve windows with four light transoms. To the east of these, are three sets of double, twelve-over-twelve windows. Each window in the set has a four-light transom. East of the double windows is a single, twelve-over-twelve window with a four-light transom. All of these windows have narrow, limestone sills and no lintels. The westernmost opening on the north elevation consists of two windows. Both windows equal the overall dimensions of the other windows on the north elevation. The two windows are six-light casement windows with a wood middle piece.

The east elevation is similar in shape to the west elevation but the fenestration pattern is slightly different and the north portion of the east elevation contains the building's loading dock. Similar to the north elevation, the upper part of the cornice on the east elevation does not have any star ornaments. The south portion of the east elevation contains three

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windows and one window outline. The windows match the windows in the south portion on the west elevation. Additionally, the windows' decorative detail, including the ornamented limestone lintels, narrow limestone sill and the four oval, limestone, ornamentations above each window, matches that of the south portion of the west elevation. The decorative detail is also included on the brick outline, which matches the dimensions of the other windows on the south portion of the east elevation. The north wall created by the set back of the north portion of the east wall contains two windows. Both of these windows are short, eight-over-eight, double hung, wood framed with narrow limestone sills. The north portion of the east elevation contains the building's loading dock. The loading dock was an important part of the building's ability to function as a post office. Currently, the loading dock has minimal use. The loading dock does not extend the full width of the north portion of the east elevation. On the first floor, there is one pedestrian door in the southern corner of the north portion. The door is wood and glass, paneled with nine lights. Above the door is an eight-over-eight window with narrow limestone sill. The remaining area of the north portion of the east elevation is nearly equally divided by a metal awning over the loading dock between the first floor and mezzanine level. The awning is supported by six metal poles. Below the awning are three double, wood and glass, swinging doors. Each door has four lights. Hanging from the awning in about the middle of the dock are three metal light fixtures. The above grade loading dock has a brick base and a concrete cap. On the north side of the dock is a short set of concrete stairs. Off the southeast side of the dock is a handicap ramp with a metal railing. The ramp is a nonhistoric modification to the building but it was done in such a manner and location that it does not affect the historic integrity of the building. Above the awning, are three eight-over-eight windows matching the window to the south.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

Although no longer functioning in its historic capacity, the United States Post Office in Norman retains a remarkable degree of integrity. The original design and many of the historic finishes remain apparent on both the first floor and mezzanine level. The basement has undergone slightly more modification but the original configuration remains in place.

Entering through the main entry, one enters a small wood and glass enclosed vestibule. Eighteen-light doors are located on the east and west sides of the vestibule which give way to the grand lobby. Although the lobby is now filled with desks and bookshelves, much of the original finishes and features remain

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intact. The marble floor and counters, high ceiling and wainscotting remains, as does the actual post office windows and counters. The lock boxes are no longer in place. Behind the lobby to the north is the general workroom. The workroom is now carpeted, drop fluorescent lighting has been added and the room is filled with desks, bookshelves and other office furniture. However, the openness of the room remains, along with the wainscotting and historic doors. In the southeast corner of the first floor is the postmaster's and his assistant's offices. Both of these rooms remain relatively intact, disregarding modern furniture and equipment.

Centrally located on the east side of the workroom are the stairs to the mezzanine level. On this level, there is only one office on the northeast side. The historic door to the office remains intact. South of the office, up a few more stairs, is the restroom. The majority of features and finishes, including the tile on the floor and mid-way up the walls and the marble shower stall, remain intact in the bathroom. West of the hallway between the office and restroom is the narrow catwalk used to secretly supervise postal workers. The catwalk remains unaltered, including the slots through which the supervisor could watch the workers. Currently, the space is being used for storage.

Also centrally located on the east side of the workroom are the stairs to the building's basement. The configuration for the basement remains essentially unchanged. However, the civil service examination room has been modernized for use as a conference room with a drop ceiling, fluorescent lights and carpeting. Additionally, new doors to the conference room and a new vestibule with double, modern doors has been added to the basement door just outside of the current conference room.

ALTERATIONS

The exterior of the United States Post Office remains nearly unchanged. The only modifications made to the exterior of the building include removal of the original "United States Post Office" from the facade cornice, the addition of a handicap ramp to the southeast side of the loading dock and the placement of a new wood sign off the southwest corner of the building proclaiming the building's current use. None of these alterations significantly impact the ability of the building to convey its historic function as a federal building.

The interior of the building has been more modified, in keeping with its new function as a education-related center. On the first floor, the interior has been filled with desks and bookshelves, which serves to fill much of the

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historic visually open space. However, the majority of historic finishes and features, including the original postal counters and windows, have been maintained. The mezzanine level is basically unchanged. The basement, specifically the civil service examination room, has been more significantly altered. However, this space is of secondary importance to the first floor which was the primary public space of the building.

Overall, the United States Post Office in Norman has retained a remarkable degree of integrity. This includes the aspects of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association. The Norman Public School system has done a commendable job of keeping the building in use, while maintaining its historic character.

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SUMMARY

The United States Post Office in Norman, Oklahoma, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. The building is eligible under Criterion A for its association with the federal government at the local level. The post office provided an impressive federal presence in the town, as well as federal postal services. Under Criterion C, the building is an outstanding example of a federally-designed Classical Revival style government building in Norman.

BACKGROUND

Similar to many towns in central Oklahoma, Norman's origins date back to 1889 and the first Oklahoma Land Run. However, Norman has a brief pre-1889 history as a stop along the branch line extended through Oklahoma by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway beginning in 1884. The railway station, and subsequently the city, was named for a government engineer who had camped in the vicinity of the present site of the town in 1872.¹ Although there were only a few railroad buildings at Norman Station, one of the lasting impacts of the original railroad occupation of the site was the town's Original Townsite plat. Railroad officials took upon themselves the duty of preparing a townsite plat which reflected their own interests. As such, unlike many Oklahoma towns, Norman's townsite does not follow the traditional grid pattern espoused by the federal government. Instead, Norman's Original Townsite was laid out in relation to the railroad rather than to the points of the compass. Later development of the city followed the more traditional grid pattern, creating a noticeable jog between the original town and subsequent additions.

On April 21, 1889, the site that would become the town of Norman was open prairie, devoid of anything save a railroad track and cluster of railroad buildings. By nightfall, April 22, Norman had mushroomed to a town of five hundred and numerous temporary shelters. The Santa Fe Railway turned over its plat to the first townsite company that arrived. Rather than remarking the lots of the new town, the townsite company embraced the railroad's development plans and construction was quickly underway.

¹Institute of Community Development, University of Oklahoma, "Norman, the University City: Community Resources," (Norman, Oklahoma: Community Development Committee of the Norman Chamber of Commerce, 1949), 5.

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Although Congress provided regulations for the land run, they failed to authorize a territorial government for the Unassigned Lands. Over a year after the land run, Congress finally passed the Oklahoma Organic Act on 2 May 1890. This act organized the government of Oklahoma Territory, in addition to other important matters. Under the act, the first seven counties of the future state of Oklahoma were created. Cleveland County was one of these first seven counties created in Oklahoma Territory.² Norman was designated the county seat of Cleveland County.

Norman experienced a relatively stable population growth through the first half of the twentieth century. By the time Oklahoma was officially granted statehood in 1907, Norman's population stood at 3,040. Three years later, the population stood at 3,724, a gain of nearly seven hundred residents. In 1920, Norman claimed just over five thousand residents. The 1920s proved be a major decade of growth for Norman. City population nearly doubled from 5,004 in 1920 to 9,603 in 1930. Gaining slightly less than 2000 residents in the ensuing decade, by 1940 Norman's population stood at 11,429. The 1940s also bought an explosion in the number of Norman residents so that by 1949, city population reached 20,180. It must be remembered, however, that these numbers did not accurately reflect the number of people actually living within the city due to the number of college students residing in the town on a temporary basis.³

Two major state institutions greatly influenced the maturation of the city throughout this time period, continuing to the present. The "most important factor in the growth" of the town was the location of the University of Oklahoma in the city. The University opened its doors in September 1892 in a building on Main Street. By 1948, over eleven thousand students attended the school which included nearly one hundred buildings on a main campus of nearly three hundred acres on the southwest side of Norman. The second state institution which affected the development of the town was the Central State Hospital. Opened in 1915 in a previously privately owned mental institution, Central State Hospital became the state's largest mental treatment center by the late 1940s. In addition to operating its own farm and dairy, the hospital

²Arrel Morgan Gibson, Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries, 2nd edition (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 176-178.

³Institute of Community Development, "Norman, the University City," 8.

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also ran canning plants, a laundry, mattress factory and furniture factory. In all by 1949, the hospital was valued at over four million dollars with 111 buildings spread over an area of 820 acres.⁴

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Like all moderately sized towns, Norman required a number of public buildings to serve community needs, such as a city hall, county courthouse and federal building. However until 1933, Norman did not have an official federal building to conduct federal business in. From 1889 to 1933, the United States Postal Service in Norman, the primary federal agency conducting business in the town, operated out of rented facilities. Although adequate, Norman sorely felt the need for a federal building which would reflect the permanence and prominence of the community.

Prior to 1902, federal buildings were authorized on a building-by-building basis. Beginning in 1902, Congress began authorizing the construction of multiple federal buildings through omnibus acts. The omnibus public buildings acts saved considerable time in Congress because it allowed for authorization of a large body of projects in one vote. However, the omnibus bills also allowed for considerable political abuse. Political influence often dictated the size, ornamentation and location of the buildings, rather than actual operational needs. Often viewed as federal "presents," the buildings confirmed to the town's residents the importance of their community and the power of their Congressional delegation.⁵

During the 1910s, the Norman Chamber of Commerce bemoaned the fact that "Norman is the largest city in the district that has no federal building." However, they believed that the politicians then in Congress, including senators Gore and Owen and congressman Ferris, Thompson and Weaver, were all favorable to the location of a federal building in Norman. Additionally, Congressman Ferris,

⁴Ibid., 5.

⁵H.J. Kolva and Steve Franks, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Historic U.S. Post Offices in New Mexico 1900-1940," (September 1988), E-5.

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benefiting from the positive vote of Cleveland County residents, had "promised Norman that he will work and vote for a federal building for the city."⁶

In 1928, newly elected Republican Congressman, U.S. Stone, stated his intent to act on his campaign promise of a federal building for Norman. Stone asserted that he would "...not cease in my attempts until I have procured the building." Stone felt that he could "...secure the building with the support of the Oklahoma delegation at Washington, and the men sent from this state will support me." Further, Stone believed "...I will be in favor with the administration, so..., with the support of the people in my district, I can get what the district needs."⁷

By the end of February 1929, "Norman's dream of a federal building" was finally nearing reality. At that time, the Public Building Committee, composed of the Secretary of the United States Treasury and the Postmaster General, recommended a new building program which included \$110,000 for a federal building at Norman. As recommended, the building program was to provide \$398,000,000 for 571 projects nationwide. Oklahoma was set to receive over three million dollars for thirteen projects. Norman was ranked sixth on the list, behind Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Okmulgee, Ponca City and Bartlesville.⁸

Norman's postmaster, G.D. Graves, immediately recommended that the Chamber of Commerce begin to acquire options for suitable buildings sites for consideration by the federal government. Graves asserted that in doing so, construction of Norman's building would possibly be speeded up. He believed that due to the proximity of Norman to Oklahoma City, that if Norman was ready when construction of Oklahoma City's addition began, "The government architects and engineers could supervise the Oklahoma City and Norman projects at the same time, thereby saving considerable money." Graves also exhorted local citizens

⁶Vernice Earle Danner, "Norman, Oklahoma: The University City," (Norman, Oklahoma: Vernice Earle Danner under the direction of the Norman Chamber of Commerce, n.d.), n.pg.

⁷The Norman (Oklahoma) Transcript, 9 November 1928.

⁸Ibid., 28 February 1929.

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to "...agree on a suitable site and not permit a fight to develop over the location such as has delayed projects in other towns."⁹

Acting on Graves' suggestion, in mid-March 1929, Norman's Chamber of Commerce appointed a federal building committee. The committee was authorized to gather information on suitable sites and "...take such other steps as are necessary to impress upon the treasury and postoffice (sic) departments, as well as congressional leaders, the necessity for early action here." The federal building committee, as appointed by R.W. Hutte, President of the Chamber of Commerce, included G.D. Graves as chairman, L.C. Giles and Harvey Cobb. At the same time, Senator W.B. Pine from Oklahoma, confirmed that the federal building program would "be carried out as fast as the treasury department can develop an organization to handle it."¹⁰

In June 1929, it was suggested that the new federal building be located on the same block as the Cleveland County Courthouse. Other uses for that area include a proposed parking lot.¹¹ No further action occurred in the development of plans for the new federal building until December 1929. At that time, Congressman U.S. Stone introduced a bill for several federal buildings in Oklahoma. The building at Norman was included, although the bill appropriated \$500,000 for the building, a significant increase from the original proposal of \$110,000. At the time the bill was introduced, Norman residents were unsure of the connection between Stone's bill and the federal building program previously approved by the treasury and post office departments. By the end of the month, the bill's introduction was linked to President Hoover's recommendation to enlarge federal building activities in an effort to halt the downward economic spiral the nation was entering.¹²

The local newspaper announced at the end of December 1929 that a hearing had been scheduled in Washington, D.C., for early January 1930. The purpose of the hearing, held by the interdepartmental committee of the treasury and post office departments, was to discuss the proposed increase in funds allocated to

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., 17 March 1929.

¹¹Ibid., 20 June 1929 and 23 June 1929.

¹²Ibid., 12 December 1929 and 27 December 1929.

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the Norman project. Additionally, it was hoped that a presentation by representatives of the Norman Chamber of Commerce would hasten construction of the building. R.W. Hutte, president of the Chamber of Commerce and Dr. W. Bizzell, president of the University of Oklahoma, were selected to represent the city's interests. Previous to the hearing, the Cleveland County Commissioners were asked to "take action" on the proposal of six months prior for the county to sell the northeast quarter of the courthouse block to the federal government.¹³ Apparently, the county commissioners did not vote favorably on this proposal because no further mention is made of it and the federal building was not built on that site.

By the time the Norman delegation left for Washington, the group had grown to five members. The group consisted of Harvey Cobb, son-in-law of Congressman U.S. Stone, Frank Cleckler, representative of the University alumni Association, R. W. Hutte, president of the Chamber of Commerce, R.H. Cloyd, representative of the Kiwanis Club, and R.V. Downing, representative of the Rotary Club. The delegation left Norman "...armed with information furnished by the Chamber of Commerce, G.D. Graves, postmaster, and University Officials, explaining fully the growth of Norman and the need of a federal building."¹⁴

The delegation returned to Norman with the belief that their mission had been successful. The delegation also brought the news that of the nine federal buildings to be built in Oklahoma in the next eight years under the federal building program, only three cities would be included in the three-year building program being prepared in 1930. Of the nine Oklahoma towns slated to receive a new federal building, Ponca City topped the list with the largest postal receipts of the nine cities. The towns of Frederick and Hobart were also favored contenders because sites for the federal buildings had already been acquired. However, the Norman delegation was bolstered by their assumed success in showing the interdepartmental committee that Norman was "...growing as rapidly.." as other cities and that its "...growth is steady rather than due to an oil boom or other temporary causes."¹⁵

¹³Ibid., 27 December 1929.

¹⁴Ibid., 31 December 1929 and 5 January 1930.

¹⁵Ibid., 13 January 1930.

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In late April 1930, Norman residents received word from Washington, D.C., that work on the Norman federal building could begin in the next two years. A dispatch from Washington stated that President Hoover had submitted a supplemental estimate for the public buildings program which included \$160,000 for a federal building in Norman. Indicative of the possible success of the Norman delegation, it was believed that Norman had been put in the two-year building program in replacement of the town of Hobart. The Chamber of Commerce planned to continue to try and enlarge Norman's appropriation so that a combined post office and federal geological center would be constructed.¹⁶

Within days of the latest announcement, the local newspaper proclaimed that "Norman Federal Building Fund to be Available Soon." Congressman U.S. Stone indicated that Congress was expected to pass the federal building bill recommended by President Hoover by 15 May 1930. Funds for the purchase of the site was then expected to be immediately available. Stone also reiterated his efforts to get the federal government to move the branch survey office from Muskogee to Norman on the grounds that Norman was

"...more centrally located for the survey activities in both Oklahoma and Texas oil fields, and that its location (in Norman) with the Oklahoma Geological survey and the University schools of geology and petroleum engineering would also be a distinct advantage."¹⁷

These efforts obviously proved unsuccessful as the federal building eventually constructed at Norman did not include a survey office.

Stone's announcement proved to be overly optimistic concerning the possible time frame. The bill containing the Norman federal building appropriation was not reported to the House of Representatives until 11 June 1930. Congress did not pass the bill until shortly before their 3 July 1930 adjournment. President Hoover then signed the bill a day or so later. Within days, the post office department informed Congressman Stone that money for the Norman project would be available in "...a few days."¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid., 23 April 1930.

¹⁷Ibid., 27 April 1930.

¹⁸Ibid., 11 June 1930 and 10 July 1930.

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The next step in construction of the Norman Post Office was selection of a site for the new building. Initially, it was believed the site was required to measure at least 100 feet by 140 feet. Additionally, it was desirable for the site to be near the center of the central business district but cost and the potential neighbors were also important considerations.¹⁹

The treasury department began receiving proposals for building sites on 23 July 1930. The department sought sites which contained at least 30,500 square feet with frontage of at least 170 feet on an important street. Additionally, the department hoped to acquire a corner lot. Because lots in the Norman business district measured only 140 feet in depth, it was necessary to increase the frontage of the property to 218 feet. As such, the government was faced with purchasing nine lots, although the specifications were worded so that eight lots might meet the minimum requirements. It was immediately noted that several potential sites were located on both Comanche and Gray streets.²⁰

By mid-August 1930, eight sites were under discussion, although none had been formally submitted. By the deadline of 21 August 1930, ten sites were submitted to the Office of the Supervising Architect of the treasury department. Price of the sites ranged from \$6,500 for the lots owned by W.L. Gibbs at the southeast corner of Symmes Street and Porter Avenue to \$85,000 for a site located on the northwest corner of Peters Avenue and Comanche Street owned by Carey, Lambard, Young and Company. Priced in the middle of the range was the site on the northeast corner of Peters Avenue and Gray Street, owned by E.L. Ambrister. Asking price for this site was \$35,000.²¹

By early October 1930, I.D. Porter of Dallas, district engineer and acting site agent, was in Norman to inspect the proposed sites. A final decision concerning a recommendation to Washington, D.C., for the site was expected before Porter left town. It was anticipated that the site would then be immediately confirmed.²²

¹⁹Ibid., 10 July 1930.

²⁰Ibid., 15 July 1930.

²¹Ibid., 15 August 1930 and 22 August 1930.

²²Ibid., 7 October 1930, 8 October 1930 and 12 December 1930.

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However, action did not occur as rapidly as hoped. The site for the federal building was not announced until January 8, 1931. At a cost of \$20,000, the federal government agreed to purchase the site located at the northeast corner of Gray Street and Peters Avenue. Eight of the nine lots purchased were occupied by the Ambrister Gin under the ownership of E.L. Ambrister. A ninth lot, owned by E. Levy and occupied by Thompson's Transfer and Storage Company, was included in the deal at one point but the final sale, as evidenced by the number of lots occupied by the building today, involved only eight lots. Although originally asking \$35,000, Ambrister reduced the figure to \$20,000 in negotiations with the federal government.²³

Progress on the federal building proceeded slowly. In late April 1931, the government hired Willard C. Bradshaw, an engineering junior at the University of Oklahoma, to do a topographical survey of the building site. Bradshaw was to receive \$247.50 for the project which was to be complete by 15 May 1931. Using this information, the government would then begin to develop plans for the building.²⁴

By July 1931, residents and Norman Congressman were anxious to see further development in the construction of the new building. At that time, rumors were circulating the town that the treasury department had offered Ambrister a lease on the site until 1 January 1932 to allow him to operate his gin business. Congressman F.B. Swank contacted the Office of the Supervising Architect, to check the progress of the building. James A. Wetmore, supervising architect, informed Swank that the project "should be on the market in about three months." Senator Elmer Thomas quickly moved to support Congressman Swank in protesting any further delays in beginning construction of the Norman federal building. It is unknown if the Congressional protests were actually instrumental in the progress of the project, however, by early August 1931, the treasury department ordered that the post office site be cleared immediately.²⁵

In late December 1931, the treasury department informed the Norman postmaster that bids for the construction of the building would be opened on 25 January 1932. The final plans for the building were also announced at that time. The

²³Ibid., 8 January 1931.

²⁴Ibid., 30 April 1931.

²⁵Ibid., 9 July 1931 and 16 July 1931.

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plans had been delayed due to a local protest against facing the building west on Peters Avenue with the dock on the north side. The final plans called for a one-story building constructed of stone, brick and concrete, specifically concrete form work, stone base, brick walls and marble and terra cotta trimmings. The roof was to be tile. The building was "...designed along classical lines of architecture." The building was to have a frontage of 110 feet on Gray Street and to be 80 feet deep. A fifteen foot set-back was planned on both street sides of the building with paved areas on the north and east sides. A loading dock was planned for the east side of the building. Standing sixty-five feet tall, the building was to be built four feet above grade.²⁶

The interior of the new federal building was to be equally as nice as the exterior. The main floor of the building was to include a "spacious" lobby with a general workroom immediately beyond that to the north. General delivery, stamp and parcel post windows were to be centrally located with the money order and registry division on the southwest corner and the offices of the postmaster and his assistant in the southeast corner. Nearly seven hundred lock boxes were planned for the new building, an increase of 166 over the previous post office. Employee restrooms were planned over the mail vestibule on the mezzanine level. As originally designed, the basement was to contain the heating plant and fuel storage space. Interestingly, the heating plant was to be able to burn coal, oil, or gas and the lighting fixtures were to be both electric and gas.²⁷

As scheduled, bids for construction of the Norman post office opened on 25 January 1932. The Christy-Dolph Construction Company of Dallas, Texas, submitted the low bid of \$67,800. By 9 February 1932, the Christy-Dolph Construction Company had been awarded the contract. It was hoped that construction of the building would begin within thirty days. Additionally, it was expected that the company would subcontract the excavation, plumbing, heating, electrical and possibly concrete work to local men.²⁸

²⁶Ibid., 27 October 1931, 24 December 1931 and 27 December 1931.

²⁷Ibid., 27 December 1931.

²⁸Ibid., 25 January 1932 and 9 February 1932.

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Also in February 1932, a joint request for a larger basement was made to the treasury department by Congressman F.B. Swank, the Norman Chamber of Commerce and G.D. Graves, Norman postmaster. The original plans for the building called for a basement only large enough to accommodate the heating plant and fuel storage. An additional 1,900 square feet was requested to allow for storage space for postal records and a civil service examination room.²⁹

Work on the Norman federal building was supposed to finally commence on 18 April 1932. Subcontracts were let to Fischer and Son Plumbing Company of Norman for the plumbing and heating; C.C. Cook of Oklahoma City for sheet metal and insulation work; Capital Steel Company of Oklahoma City for structural steel; Monon Stone Company of Bloomington, Indiana, for stone; Stone Mountain Granite company of Stone Mountain, Georgia, for granite; and, Newman Manufacturing Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, for bronze.³⁰ However, work on the building was delayed while word on the enlargement of the basement was awaited.

By 1 May 1932, with no word on the basement proposal, excavation work finally started on the north side of the building. This area was part of the original design so the potential change in plans did not effect it. By mid-May, all work that could be done was nearing completion and the project was facing a complete halt. However, just in time, the new basement plans were approved and work continued full-steam.³¹

By mid-June 1932, the basement was nearing completion. Within a month, the first floor had been laid. By mid-September 1932, the brick work on the building was progressing, as the stone work neared completion. Approximately ninety percent of the exterior brick walls were in place by early October 1932. In early November 1932, work on the tile roof was underway. On 10 November 1932, the terra cotta eagle above the building's entrance had arrived and was put in place. By mid-December 1932, the plaster work on the main floor of the

²⁹Ibid., 12 February 1932.

³⁰Ibid., 17 April 1932.

³¹Ibid., 1 May 1932, 17 May 1932 and 18 May 1932.

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federal building was complete, with plastering of the basement and mezzanine floors to occur as soon as the weather warmed up.³²

By mid-February 1933, the building was complete. Acting quickly, the post office moved into the building by 19 February 1933. The work of the post office was not hampered in anyway as one shift of workers received the first shipment of mail in the new building while another group of workers moved the remaining equipment from the old location. Although the postal workers adapted quickly, it was noted that the patrons of the new building experienced some difficulty in "...locating boxes and manipulating the new keys."³³

"A wide expanse of marble tile flooring, shiny lock boxes and bright iron railing" greeted Norman residents when they first entered the new federal building. According to the local newspaper, "The imposing Gray Street entrance leads into an attractive vestibule which extends the entire width of the building." The newspaper further noted that "The ceiling is high, accentuating the impression of spaciousness." Behind the public area to the north was the "...spacious working quarters for the postoffice (sic) employees with every convenience for facilitating speed and accuracy in the postal work." Instead of the marble tile of the public space, the working area had a carved oak floor. So modern was the Norman Post Office, the newspaper continued in its description of amenities, that "...the east side of the building is constructed so that the mail trucks may receive the mail bags from closed quarters without entering the main wing of the building."³⁴

The building continued to serve as the Norman Post Office until 1965. In May 1966, ownership of the building was transferred from the federal government to the Norman school system. From 1966 until 1991, the school district used the building as a warehouse and, subsequently, for storage. In 1991, the maintenance department rehabilitated the building so that in September of that year, the Norman Public School's Professional Development Center opened in the

³²Ibid., 17 June 1932, 14 July 1932, 13 September 1932, 4 October 1932, 3 November 1932, 10 November 1932 and 13 December 1932.

³³Ibid., 12 February 1933, 17 February 1933 and 19 February 1933.

³⁴Ibid., 17 February 1933.

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building. A general assessment is that little was done to the building at this time because it retains an extremely high degree of historic integrity. Presently, the Norman Public School's Professional Development Center continues to operate in the building.³⁵

Business at the United States Post Office in Norman was fairly routine. Nonetheless, the building is significant within Norman for its association with these events because it and they represent the federal government in Norman during the period. Often seemingly a remote entity, the federal government was made a tangible reality in Norman through the construction and use of the United States Post Office.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

As with all federal buildings constructed during the period, the Department of the Treasury in Washington, D.C., was responsible for the design of the Norman Post Office. From 1915 to 1933, "Judge" James Wetmore presided over the Supervising Architect's Office. As Wetmore was a lawyer, he was designated only Acting Supervising Architect. As such, Louis Simon, who joined the Supervising Architect's Office in 1896, and was superintendent of the architectural section from 1905 to 1933, was actually responsible for determining the office's architectural directions during this period. Simon subsequently served as Supervising Architect from 1933 to 1939.³⁶

During the early part of the twentieth century, the Beaux-Arts style returned federal architecture to the classical traditions that the eclectic styles of the Victorian period disrupted. The Classical Revival style shared many characteristics with the Beaux-Arts style. One of the defining differences between the two styles was that the Classical Revival style employed much less opulent decorative detail while maintaining the classical order. The United States Post Office in Norman is an excellent example of federally-designed Classical Revival style architecture. In addition to the classical style entry porch with Composite order, green marble columns topped with a black marble

³⁵Paula at Norman School's Professional Development Center, telephone interview by author, 20 March 2000.

³⁶Lois A. Crag and the Staff of the Federal Architecture Project, The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics and National Design (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1984), 238.

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entablature, other features of the Classical Revival style present on the building include a symmetrical fenestration pattern and Palladian-influenced facade windows. Furthermore, the overall building is representative of the classical order. The limestone foundation serves as the base. The brick walls are the column and the limestone cornice represents the entablature.

Located on the north side of downtown Norman away from other government buildings, the federal building is set off from the other nearby buildings by its imposing style and setting. The building is set back from the sidewalks on the west and south sides. On both the east and north sides of the building are sizeable parking lots. The majority of the buildings in downtown Norman are one- and two-story, Commercial style buildings constructed side-by-side. Thus, the federal building stands out due to its relative isolation. Additionally, the long facade of the building amongst the much smaller standard commercial buildings reinforces the grand feeling of the building.

The United States Post Office in Norman served the community well from its construction in 1933 to 1950, the fifty-year cut off of the National Register. The building is a physical representation of federal government policies and practices at the community level. It is also an excellent example of federally-designed Classical Revival style architecture in Norman.

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Paula at Norman School's Professional Development Center. Telephone interview by author. 20 March 2000.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

Lots 1 through 8 inclusive, Block 15, Original Townsite of Norman, Oklahoma,
Section 30, Township 9 North, Range 2 West.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the United
States Post Office in Norman.



United States Post Office





United States Post Office

