

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NR 103-EE

AUG 14 1988

A 12P

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

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Historic Name: Van Buren Post Office

Other Name/Site Number: CW0030

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2. Location

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Street & Number: 22 South Seventh Street

Not for Publication: NA

City/Town: Van Buren

Vicinity: NA

State: AR County: Crawford Code: 033 Zip Code: 72956

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: Public-Federal

Category of Property: Building

Van Buren Post Office

Name of Property

Crawford County, Arkansas

County and State

Number of Resources within Property:

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| <u>1</u>     | _____           | buildings  |
| _____        | _____           | sites      |
| _____        | _____           | structures |
| _____        | _____           | objects    |
| <u>1</u>     | <u>0</u>        | Total      |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art

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**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau



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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic: Government Sub: Post Office

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Current : Government Sub: Post Office

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification:

Art Deco

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Materials: foundation Concrete roof Asphalt  
walls Brick other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance:

Summary:

The Van Buren Post Office is a one-story, rectangular, brick-masonry structure with a full basement; built in 1936, it is designed in a restrained, minimalist interpretation of the Art Deco style of architecture. The structure features a flat roof with parapet. Despite interior and exterior alterations made during the 1960s, the structure still retains sufficient integrity for National Register recognition within the context Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art.

Elaboration:

Van Buren Post Office

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The Van Buren Post Office is a one-story, rectangular, brick-masonry structure with a full basement; built in 1936, it is designed in a restrained, minimalist interpretation of the Art Deco style of architecture. The building features a flat roof with parapet. A concrete cornice surrounds the building, as does a raised concrete foundation. Despite interior and exterior alterations made during the 1960s, the structure still retains sufficient integrity for National Register recognition within the context Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art.

The front, or south, facade of the structure centers around twin aluminum doors; they are topped by a recessed signage panel with raised aluminum letters spelling VAN BUREN/ARKANSAS/72956. The arrangement is completed with a three-pane set of narrow, vertical stationary windows. The door is flanked by pilasters, which are in turn flanked by six-pane, aluminum framed windows with a six-pane arrangement of narrow vertical windows. These are both flanked by another pilaster, a band of brick and an additional pilaster fenestrated by two-over-two, double-hung, aluminum-framed windows in a horizontal format. Above these windows are stylized decorations resembling the cowling and propellers of aircraft, which provide the principal Art Deco element to the building other than its overall symmetry. Between the cornice band and the lip of the parapet are projecting aluminum letters reading: UNITED STATES POST OFFICE. A broad set of stairs provides access to the doors; they are flanked by flat concrete balustrades with metal lamp posts topped by white glass globes. The beginning slope of a handicapped access ramp sits at the west end of the south facade. The lower east end of the south facade features a cornerstone reading: HENRY MORGENTHAU JR., SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY/JAMES A. FARLEY, POSTMASTER GENERAL/LOUIS A. SIMON, SUPERVISING ARCHITECT/NEAL A. MELICK, SUPERVISING ENGINEER/1936.

Continuing around the east facade of the building, moving from south to north, the building is fenestrated with a two-over-two, double-hung aluminum-frame window within a pilaster, three more identical fenestrations without pilaster surrounds, and an additional identical window within a pilaster. Steps to the basement descend below these windows. North of the last window, which marks the rear of the historic section of the building, projects a 1967 brick addition, with no fenestrations.

The rear, or north facade, of the building features a ramp on its easternmost end leading to a loading dock sheltered beneath a shed roof supported at both ends by a one-brick thick wall. From east to west, the dock features a single door with a twin-pane stationary window, a double door with similar windows

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on both doors, and an 18-pane stationary window completes the fenestration on this facade.

The west facade, from north to south, begins with the narrow brick wall forming the west end of the loading dock. It is then fenestrated by two double-hung, two-over-two, aluminum-frame windows set within pilasters and separated by a brick band. Another brick band follows, and the brick chimney then projects upward, separating the rear addition from the historic section of the building. The next fenestration is a two-over-two, double-hung, aluminum frame window within a pilaster, then three sets of eight-over-eight double-hung, aluminum-frame windows separated by brick bands, and finally an aluminum-frame door providing handicapped access at the terminus of the ramp that began at the front of the building. Immediately north of the chimney is a set of descending stairs providing basement access.

Significant interior details include original marble wainscoting, the original door to the postmaster's office, and a mural by E. Martin Hennings titled "The Chosen Site."

As mentioned above, the building has suffered some alterations, most notably a large but compatible addition to the rear of the building and replacement of the original windows with modern, aluminum-framed windows. However, the structure still retains the majority of its configuration and its mural still retains its position above the original postmaster's door, and thus is eligible with local significance within the context of Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art.

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**8. Statement of Significance**  
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Local.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): NA

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Areas of Significance: Politics/Government  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period(s) of Significance: 1936-1940

Significant Dates: 1936-40

Significant Person(s): NA  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect  
Charles H. Barnes of Logansport, IN,  
Builder

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

Summary:

The Van Buren Post Office is associated with the historic context Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art as a U.S. Postal Service Structure containing a mural financed through the U.S. Treasury Department's Section on Fine Arts. As such, it is eligible under Criterion A with local significance for its associations with the Section's efforts to employ Depression-era artists and place art in post offices around the country.

Elaboration:

On November 1, 1935, the Van Buren *Press Argus* announced that a plot of land on the corner of South Seventh and Webster streets would be the site of a new city post office. Postal engineer R.J. Evans visited the town two weeks later to do survey work preliminary to the release of bids. A March 13, 1936, *Press Argus* article noted the completion of plans for the new structure, and an April 17 article announced that Charles H. Barnes of Logansport, Indiana, was

the low bidder. However, all bids, including that of Barnes, were rejected in July because the postal service "considered the bids to high for the work," according to the newspaper. Barnes again submitted the low bid in August and in September received the \$54,223 contract to build the new facility. Among the planned amenities, the Press Argus reported on September 11, were "a mezzanine floor on which will be a room for carriers and employees to rest during off-working hours." A December 11 article notes that mild weather placed construction a month ahead of schedule. (Though no articles were located regarding the building's opening, it presumably was held in 1937.)

Included in the plans for the new Van Buren Post Office was a \$590 allotment for a 12' by 5' mural to hang above the postmaster's door. In August, 1938, Section chief Edward B. Rowan invited artist E. Martin Hennings of Taos, New Mexico, to submit designs for the proposed mural. Hennings never responded, so a follow-up letter was mailed on June 8, 1939, seeking to ascertain the artist's interest in the project. Hennings responded on June 23, saying he never received the earlier letter, noting that "I would have been very interested in making sketches for the mural then, as I am now." A month later, Hennings received blueprints of the wall on which the mural would be hung, and the artist pledged to submit sketches of mural subjects for consideration. On September 7, Hennings mailed Rowan a selection of three pencil sketches in which he "restricted myself, in subject, to the early settlers of Arkansas." The Section chose a concept titled "The Chosen Site" and prepared a contract on October 2, 1939.

Hennings and the Section experienced a number of difficulties in bringing the mural to fruition. The artist submitted his first color sketch on November 22, portraying a pioneer family before a team of oxen pulling a Conestoga wagon. Rowan responded on December 2 that a Section committee found the concept "too sweet for mural decoration," noting that an image of a kneeling mother and child were "particularly disturbing" and "the men are in need of more convincing virility." Hennings responded with a terse December 29 note in which he pledged to make "such changes as I feel will improve the vitality of the mural."

A move to Houston, Texas, delayed submission of a new sketch until March 4, 1940. This, too, was greeted with some concern, particularly a figure of a young man "as he does not seem either to be standing up or sitting down" and a feeling among Section personnel that "the general color of your design does not seem as happy as that of some of your previous paintings." Regardless, Rowan approved a first payment of \$150 to Hennings, which was approved on

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March 28.

Hennings agreed to make the corrections, and on April 16 sought and received permission to expand the 12' by 5' painting to 14' by 6'8" "to fill the entire space" above the postmaster's door. Rowan approved the expansion on April 20, but warned that "blue prints cannot always be relied on for the correct dimensions and it is always well to check this with the space in the building."

Hennings submitted a photograph of his drawing on canvas on June 15 and, noting that "the work has been going a bit slower than anticipated," requested an extension on his contract, which was due to expire June 30. A second payment of \$150 was approved on June 18, and Hennings' contract was extended to September 30 to allow him time to complete and install the mural.

On September 13, Hennings wrote that "I have finally finished my painting 'The Chosen Site' for the Post Office of Van Buren, Arkansas." Rowan gave permission for installation on September 23, and a month later the artist supervised its installation by Van Buren decorator J.B. Davidson. "It does look splendid in place, and all who have seen it, seem to like it." Hennings' assessment of the local reaction appeared to be correct, according to an undated *Press Argus* article mailed to Rowan by Van Buren Postmaster E.W. Deering. The author notes that "Mr. Hennings was greeted with cordial praise for his work that depicts a pioneer family that has found its site for a new home." The article also notes that the model for the mural's adult male figure was Taos gas station attendant Tony Martinez, whose "Mexican features, of course, were Americanized on the canvas." A final payment of \$290 was approved on November 26, completing the process of what was apparently Hennings' sole work for the Section.

The Van Buren Post Office is associated with the historic context Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art as a U.S. Postal Service Structure containing a mural financed through the U.S. Treasury Department's Section on Fine Arts. As such, it is eligible under Criterion A with local significance for its associations with the Section's efforts to employ Depression-era artists and place art in post offices around the country. Despite some 1967 alterations to the post office building, it still retains its overall appearance and its associations with the Section of Fine Arts and its efforts to bring a large-scale mural to the Van Buren Post Office.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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Van Buren *Press Argus*: November 1 and 15, 1935; March 13, April 3, April 17, June 5, July 17, August 28, September 11, and December 11, 1936.

Falk, Peter Hastings, ed. *Who Was Who in American Art*. Madison, CT: Soundview Press, 1885.

U.S. Treasury Department's Fine Arts Section materials, National Archives

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreege of Property: Less than one

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UTM References: Zone Easting Northing      Zone Easting Northing

A 15 377500 3921990      B      \_\_\_\_\_  
C      \_\_\_\_\_      D      \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal Boundary Description:

Beginning at a point formed by the intersection of the northern edge of South Seventh Street with a perpendicular line running parallel with the building's eastern elevation and located approximately 200 feet to the south thereof, proceed northerly along said line for a distance of approximately 200 feet; thence proceed westerly along a perpendicular line for approximately 200 feet; thence proceed southerly along a perpendicular line for approximately 200 feet to its intersection with the northern edge of South Seventh Street, thence proceed easterly along said edge to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification:

This boundary contains all of the property historically associated with this property that retains its integrity.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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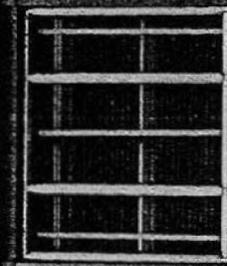
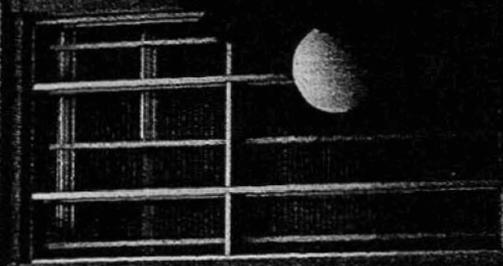
Name/Title: Mark Christ, Community Outreach Director

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: 1-7-98

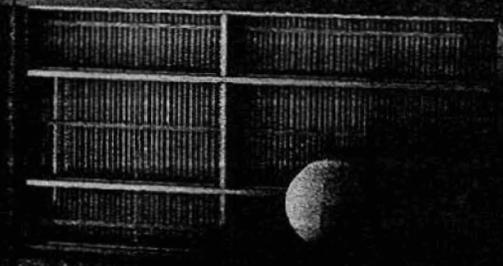
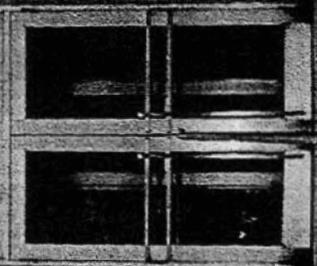
Street & Number: 1500 Tower Bldg., 323 Center St. Telephone: (501) 324-9880

City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72201

UNITED STATES POST OFFICE



VAN BUREN  
ARKANSAS  
72956





PROPERTY RIGHTS CIVIL RIGHTS  
The American People are entitled to the right of privacy in their homes and in their personal lives. This right is guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. It is the responsibility of every citizen to protect this right. The American People should be vigilant in their defense of this right. The American People should be vigilant in their defense of this right.

POSTMASTER

This tax season  
why give too much  
to the Fed?  
Fed's