

News Release

Nebraska State Historical Society
P.O. Box 82554
Lincoln, NE 68501

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jessie Nunn (402) 471-4775

The following property was officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The **National Register of Historic Places** is the nation's inventory of properties deemed worthy of preservation. It is part of a national program to coordinate and support local and private efforts to identify, evaluate and protect the nation's historic and archeological resources. The National Register was developed to recognize historic places and their role in contributing to our country's heritage. For more information on the National Register program in Nebraska, contact the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office at (402) 471-4787 or visit www.nebraskahistory.org.

LINCOLN COUNTY NORTH PLATTE

The **North Platte US Post Office and Federal Building** was officially entered on the National Register of Historic Places on March 4, 2009.

The following is an excerpt from the National Register of Historic Places nomination form:

The North Platte U.S. Post Office and Federal Building is significant at the local level under Criterion A under the area of government, and under Criterion C for its architectural significance. The building demonstrates the growth of governmental services at the local level, and helps represent an important period of growth and prosperity in North Platte. From the beginning of its construction in 1911, in addition to providing services in a growing city located along main transportation and trade routes, this building served as a federal presence in North Platte and the regional area. Architecturally speaking, this Italian Renaissance Revival building was built in a style that is unusual for western Nebraska, but is not particularly common in the eastern parts of Nebraska either. As such, it is an interesting example of the style that is worthy of preservation.

The North Platte U.S. Post Office and Federal Building is located in Lincoln County. North Platte was historically and remains the largest population center in Lincoln County, with a current population of 24,079 according to 2007 U.S. Census records. The city is also the county seat. North Platte is the largest community in western Nebraska, and serves as a commercial hub for the surrounding counties. North Platte was established along the Union Pacific railroad by General Grenville M. Dodge in 1866. As soon as the railroad was completed to this point, a post office was established, with William Healy as the first Postmaster. Over the years, the post office was housed in various locations. In an 1889 advertisement for the City Pharmacy, the pharmacy indicated it was located three doors north of the post office. The 1907-1910 City Directories indicate the post office was located at 422 North Dewey Street.

In 1908, Congress appropriated \$110,000.00 for the construction of a federal building in North Platte, Nebraska. The North Platte city council was asked by the Department of the Interior what effect a future viaduct over the railroad would have on proposed building sites. All of the proposed building sites were in the area of the 5th Street and Locust Street intersection. After discussion, the council concluded that a future viaduct would make the land more valuable; however there seemed little chance of obtaining funding for a viaduct. The letter also asked for recommendations regarding the choice of sites for the building. The council was loathe to make a choice on behalf of the government, and made no recommendation. The U.S. government purchased the Woodhurst property for \$9,000.00. General contract papers indicate that the building cost \$88,475.00 to build. Construction began soon after the contract was let on May 13, 1911, and the building was completed July 26, 1913.

During the period in which the post office was being built, Congress enacted legislation that established a postal savings system in post offices, to be effective on January 1, 1911. The goal of the legislation was to get money out of hiding in mattresses, attract the savings of immigrants to the country accustomed to similar savings programs in their home countries, provide safe depositories for people unsettled with the idea of private banks, and to furnish more convenient locations for the deposits of workers, since post offices' hours more closely mirrored the working day of the average worker in America than traditional banks. The postal savings program would pay 2% interest per year with a minimum deposit of \$1, and a maximum deposit of \$2,500. Slow to gain acceptance, by 1929, \$153 million was on deposit. Savings grew to \$1.2 billion during the 1930s and peaked at \$3.4 billion in 1947. After World War II, banks' interest rates improved and offered better guarantees, diminishing the appeal of the postal savings program. In 1966, the post office stopped accepting deposits on existing accounts, and the system officially ended in 1967.

Newspaper articles in North Platte began advertising the availability of this service during the period of the building's construction, between 1910 and 1913. The *North Platte Telegraph* advertised that deposits would be accepted at the new federal post office as soon as it was completed, and that this was a fine service that the community could look forward to taking advantage of. It seems likely that the presence of the large safe on the second floor was installed for the purpose of securing the funds deposited with the post office.

North Platte achieved another highlight in its growth and development in 1964 when a new post office and federal building were built at a cost of \$1,479,000.00, located at 300 East 3rd Street. When the 1913 Post Office and Federal Building became vacant, they were transferred to Junior College District #1 via a Quit Claim deed, and the building was remodeled to suit its new purpose. The building became home to the North Platte College with an enrollment of 215 students the first year. The first floor housed the library and the science labs; the second floor held class rooms, the teachers' lounge, dean's office, and a book store, and the third floor housed more class rooms and teachers' offices. In May 2000, the junior college that had become the Mid-Plains Community College sold the building to Six Dimension, LLC, which in turn seventeen months later donated the building to the city of North Platte, in hopes it would be preserved as the new City Hall. While this plan has not come to fruition, current plans call for the building to be used as an arts center.

James Knox Taylor: Architect

The North Platte U.S. Post Office and Federal Building was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style under the auspices of James Knox Taylor, the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department from 1897 to 1912. After receiving his training from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Taylor began his work as a temporary draftsman in the office of the Supervising Architect in 1895. He was appointed to chief draftsman by 1897 and was appointed to Supervising Architect later that same year. As Supervising Architect of the Treasury, Taylor headed a group of architects in charge of designing federally funded buildings nationwide. Taylor's office was responsible for the design of plans for most small federal post office facilities, while the larger design projects were often contracted to outside, private-sector architects. During Taylor's tenure, the Federal government promoted the concept that government buildings should be monumental and beautiful, and should represent the ideals of democracy and high standards of architectural sophistication in their communities. The North Platte U.S. Post Office and Federal Building reflects these turn of the century ideals, representing American democratic values and architectural sophistication.

Italian Renaissance Revival

The Italian Renaissance Revival style is found in early 20th century buildings throughout the country, but is considerably less common than its other contemporary styles. It was primarily a style that was executed in architect-designed landmark buildings in metropolitan areas prior to World War I, such as the example we find in North Platte. The details that are common to most Italian Renaissance Revival buildings are essentially borrowed from buildings in Italy. Most characteristic are the tall first story windows, with smaller windows as one looks up the elevation of the building. Roofs commonly are hipped, with broad overhanging eaves, and decorative brackets underneath. Masonry or masonry-veneered walls are universal, and the buildings usually have decorative cornices and belt courses.

In the case of the North Platte U.S. Post Office and Federal Building, many of these distinctive characteristics are in evidence. The hipped roof retains its clay tile covering, another feature typical to the style. The broad eaves are embellished with decorative brackets and marble diamonds in the cornice. The windows vary in size, from almost floor to ceiling on the first floor to much more diminutive on the third floor. Additionally, the first floor windows are arched, a slightly scaled back nod to the style. Most striking, perhaps, is the change in wall texture on either side of the stone belt course, achieved through the differing courses in the brick masonry, a nod to the common rusticated masonry common to the first floors of more elaborate stone examples. Above the belt course, the six pilasters, four curved and two squared, that separate the windows into bays provide the impression of what might have been a recessed arcaded porch on a domestic example of the style.

Only eighteen Italian Renaissance Revival buildings are surveyed in the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, which contains over 70,000 records of historic properties within the state of Nebraska. Of those eighteen, all but the post office building in North Platte are located in eastern Nebraska. Eleven of the eighteen are found in Omaha, and four are located in Lincoln, Nebraska's largest metropolitan areas. The Italian Renaissance Revival as a style is rare outside our largest cities, making the example in North Platte perhaps all the more significant.

The North Platte U.S. Post Office and Federal Building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its significance under Criterion A in the area of government, and for its architectural significance under Criterion C. The building served its community for a period of over fifty years, processing the mail, providing a safe if conservative rate of interest for savings for the working man, and a location for signing up for the Civil Service, in addition to many other functions of government. Architecturally speaking, the building was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style, a style that is altogether rare in Nebraska, but unheard of in western Nebraska. Its elaborate façade and bracketed eaves speak to the sophistication and grandeur that Supervising Architect James Knox Taylor thought that architecture should lend to federal buildings. The period of significance extends from the year the building was built, 1913, to fifty years before the date of this nomination, 1959. It is locally significant for the services that it provided to North Platte.