NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

21N 5E 18

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

K1 645

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Auburn Post Office

other names/site number Auburn Public Health Center

2. Location

street & number 20 Auburn Avenue NE ___ not for publication

city or town Auburn ___ vicinity

state Washington code WA county King code 033 zip code 98002

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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. I recommend that this property be considered significant
__ nationally __ statewide X locally. (__ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title 2/14/00 Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (__ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

___ entered in the National Register.
___ See continuation sheet

___ determined eligible for the National Register.
___ See continuation sheet

___ determined not eligible for the National Register.

___ removed from the National Register.

___ other (explain:) _____

Auburn Post Office
Name of Property

King County, Washington
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ___ private
- X public-local
- ___ public-State
- ___ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box

- X building(s)
- ___ district
- ___ site
- ___ structure
- ___ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not incl. previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Non-Contributing	
1		buildings
0	0	sites
	0	structures
0	0	objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

U. S. Post Offices in Washington

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT:post office

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

HEALTH CARE: clinic, offices

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

OTHER:Starved Classical

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT SHINGLE

other

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

8. Statement of Significance

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

X
___ **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.

X **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.)

Property is:

___ **A** owed by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

___ **B** removed from its original location.

___ **C** a birthplace or grave.

___ **D** a cemetery.

___ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

___ **F** a commemorative property.

___ **G** less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance

1937-1950

Significant Dates

1937

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Simon, Louis A. / James I. Barnes Company

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(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 Engineering Record#_____

Primary location of additional data:

X State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
X Local government
___ University
___ Other
Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre. (17,587 square feet)

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	10	5 5|8 4|8|0	5|2 3|9 4|8|5	3			
2				4			

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 Jennifer Meisner (adapted by Kent Sundberg, King County Office of Cultural Resources)
organization date September 15, 1999
street & number 3210 Arapahoe Place W telephone (206) 284-4873
city or town Seattle state WA zip code 98199

Additional Documentation

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.)

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

name Seattle-King County Department of Public Health
street & number 999 Third Avenue, Suite 1200 telephone (206) 296-4600
city or town Seattle state WA zip code 98104

Auburn Post Office
King County, WA

Description

The Auburn Post Office building is located in the City of Auburn, at 20 Auburn Avenue NE on the southeast corner of Auburn Avenue and First Street NE. The site is one block north Main Street, Auburn's historic business and commercial center. Auburn Avenue cuts through the plat at a diagonal, creating irregular lots on either side of the street. The Auburn Post Office building is sited parallel to First street on the north; the primary building facade faces west toward Auburn Avenue. The building's northwest corner is set back fourteen feet from Auburn Avenue and its southwest corner set back forty feet due to the irregularity of the site. The site is modestly landscaped with grass in front and curbed planting beds containing trees and shrubs that begin on either side of the entrance and wrap around both sides of the building. Parking is provided along the building's south side and to the rear.

Exterior

The Auburn Post Office is a small, single-purpose post office building. It was constructed in 1937 as a one-story building, 60-feet, 8-inches wide by 83-feet long, including a covered loading platform at the rear and a full basement. The building exterior is red brick with a poured concrete foundation and sandstone trim elements including a wide horizontal band running around the building perimeter just below the cornice, and engaged sandstone piers that call out the main building entry.

The overall building composition is symmetrical. In the center of the primary elevation, five granite steps flanked by original wrought-iron ornamental lamp posts lead to tall wooden double entry doors with transom windows above and large rectangular double-hung wood windows with true divided lights and wooden style and rail panels below on either side. Located on either side of the entry ensemble are gently arched double-hung wood windows with true divided lights and poured concrete sills. These windows, which feature a soldier course of red brick at the headers emphasizing the subtle arch, continue at regular intervals around the sides and rear of the building.

The roof presents itself as a lateral hip in front, surmounted in the center of the ridge by a glass and metal cupola with a weathervane. The rear portion of the building is covered with a flat roof. An east-facing skylight with operable windows runs along the base of the hipped roof. The original roofing material was tile. A raised, covered loading dock was constructed at the rear of the building and adjacent to it a tall brick chimney. A cornerstone located on the northwest corner of the primary facade calls out the building's architect and supervising engineer, as well as the Postmaster General and Secretary of the Treasury in the year 1937.

Auburn Post Office
King County, WA

Interior

The original building interior featured an L-shaped lobby, 14 feet wide and extending 46 feet across the front of the building and 32 feet back on the south side. The postal clerk's counter and windows ran nearly the length of the lobby with the post box area located at the south end. A full wall with grilled postal clerk windows separated the public and private functions of the post office. Interior finish materials in the lobby area included Alaskan marble wainscoting, mahogany window and door trim, and terrazzo flooring. The building contained 11 rooms, including restrooms, work rooms and Postmaster's office, and a full basement with storage, fuel and boiler rooms.[1]

Present Appearance

The Auburn Post Office building was purchased by the King County Department of Public Health and remodeled for use as a health clinic in 1964. The building exterior, however, retains a high level of physical integrity. The few exterior alterations executed as part of the 1964 building remodel include construction of a 19-foot long by 22-foot deep brick addition to the rear covered loading dock, which was enclosed with walls; construction of an ADA accessible concrete ramp along the north side of the building leading to a basement entrance; installation of an arched fabric awning over the primary building entrance; and the addition of new building signage.

Overall, the building exterior presents itself much as it did when constructed in 1937, aside from the awning and signage located on the primary facade, both of which could be readily removed and thus do not constitute irreversible alterations. The concrete ADA accessible ramp is well-integrated into the landscaping and screened by planting beds located adjacent to the sidewalk. The 1964 rear addition is unobtrusive and clearly distinguishable from the original building fabric as the red brick cladding is slightly different in color from the original brick and the windows are clearly different in style. The addition is not visible from the primary facade. The building exterior appears to have been well-maintained over time; the brick and stone are in excellent condition, and original wood doors and windows are intact, although some glazing has been replaced with frosted or etched panes. The roofing material has been changed from tile to asphalt shingles but the original cupola still crowns the building.

The building interior was extensively remodeled in 1964 when the building was converted from use its historic use as a post office to its new use as a medical clinic. Spaces were sub-divided to create smaller offices and exam rooms, the lobby/reception area was reconfigured as the wall originally separating the post office lobby area from the back-of-the-house was removed and replaced with a reception counter, and the rear addition was added to create a nurse's work room. Some original interior features in the lobby area and reception area are

[1] "Postoffice Plans Here; Building to Face Auburn Ave.," *The Auburn News*, 18 June 1937.

still intact, including mahogany window trim, side doors and decorative door surrounds, Alaskan marble wainscoting, and an industrial-looking pulley system used to open and close skylight windows above the reception area. In addition, the terrazzo floor has been covered with carpeting, florescent light fixtures hang from the ceiling, and partitions divide the lobby space into several smaller waiting areas. Overall, the building interior, particularly the lobby area, bears little resemblance to its historic use as a post office.

Auburn Post Office
King County, WA

Statement of Significance

The Auburn Post Office is significant under Criterion A as a federal building constructed under the national work relief program sponsored by the Public Works Administration (PWA). President Franklin Delano Roosevelt established the PWA in 1933 in response to the national economic crisis of the Great Depression. With the creation of the PWA, the federal government embarked on a massive public building program designed to find meaningful employment for nearly 13 million unemployed workers. Under the PWA public building program, nearly 40,000 new public buildings were constructed and more than 85,000 existing public buildings were improved during the Depression era.[2]

On the local level, the procurement and construction of the Auburn Post Office was a significant event achieved through extensive involvement of local community leaders and groups, interaction with national elected officials, and considerable support from Auburn's citizenry. The Auburn community closely followed all phases of the building, beginning with the challenges of securing federal funding for the project, through selecting an appropriate building site, through construction of the building, and finally ending with the Auburn Post Office grand opening.

As the City of Auburn's first federal building, the Auburn Post office represented an important link between the federal government and the local community as well as the recognition that Auburn had achieved a level of stability that warranted this public investment.[3] The employment generated by this project was of critical importance to the depressed local economy. Through this and other PWA projects, the federal government showed a commitment to helping improve dire economic conditions. It gave those who worked on it a sense of pride in their involvement in this worthwhile project and Auburn citizens a positive event to follow and celebrate.

The Auburn Post Office also is significant under Criterion C because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of federal post office buildings designed by the Federal Supervising Architect in the "Starved Classical" style that characterized government construction during the Great Depression era of the 1930s. In size, plan, and materials, the Auburn Post Office also represents a particular class of federal building as defined by the Treasury Secretary in 1915. This class of building is characterized by the use of standardized building plans, limited use of the more expensive building materials, and an overarching attention to cost effective construction and practicality to avoid wasteful government spending.[4]

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[2] James H. Bruns, *Great American Post Offices* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press; New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998), p. 94.
[3] H. J. Kolva and Steve Franks, *Historic U.S. Post Offices in Washington 1893-1941, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*, August 1989, sec. F-III, p. 4.
[4] Bruns, p. 74.

Auburn Post Office
King County, WA

The PWA-Depression Era Building Program

From the early days of federal building programs, between 1893 and the 1920s, construction of federal buildings, including post offices, moved forward at a moderately rapid pace. According to a 1916 report by Treasury Secretary William McAdoo, between 1900 and 1916, the nation spent approximately $180 million for public buildings. Spending and construction of federal buildings tapered off in the early 1920s, and then came to a complete halt during World War I. In fact, only 122 post offices were built by the federal government between 1921 and 1930.[5] In 1926, the Public Buildings Act was passed, establishing the foundation for future federal building programs that were specifically designed to provide economic recovery. By expanding the scope and consolidating the funding of post office construction, the Public Buildings Act of 1926 set the groundwork for the massive federal buildings programs of the 1930s.[6]

From the onset of the Great Depression in 1929-30, a new era of government building was initiated with the development of the Public Works Program, which was designed to stimulate economic recovery and provide work for the nation's unemployed, almost a third of whom were in the building trades. During the 1930s, the number of public buildings being constructed increased dramatically. Between 1931 and 1939, 1,584 post offices were constructed across the nation--three times as many as had been constructed in the previous fifty years.[7]

Although the 406 post offices constructed under the PWA program constitute a relatively small portion of the approximately 34,000 PWA construction projects that were completed or underway in virtually every county of the nation by 1939, they were among the most visible and important to the general public.[8] In his book, *Great American Post Offices*, James H. Bruns writes,

> With the nation reeling under the devastating impact of the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt realized that the Post Office Department was the visible form of the federal government in every community. The postal service's activities were the only ones that touched the individual and collective lives of the local residents, the social interests of the overall community, and the business concerns of every neighborhood; and, he recognized the role that post office construction could play in revitalizing America during the Great Depression.[9]

In this way, President Roosevelt's New Deal administration sought to make the national government's presence felt in even the smallest and most remote communities. Usually sited near the center of town, on a street running

[5] Kolva and Franks, sec. E, p. 60.
[6] Ibid, sec. E, p. 60.
[7] Ibid, sec. E, p. 60.
[8] 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, Fall 1984), p. 4.
[9] Bruns, p. 94.

In this way, President Roosevelt's New Deal administration sought to make the national government's presence felt in even the smallest and most remote communities. Usually sited near the center of town, on a street running perpendicular or parallel to Main Street, slightly set back from the street, the relatively modest rectangular brick post office buildings of this era brought to the city or town "a symbol of government efficiency, permanence, service, and even culture."[10]

Funding of the Auburn Post Office

In 1931, a federal house document listed all public projects that were in contention for a piece of the total federal funding of $504,000,000 that had been set aside under the various emergency appropriations that were enacted in the early 1930s with the goal of relieving country-wide unemployment. On the list were thirty projects in the state of Washington that had been allocated a total of $415,000,000 in funding through various legislative acts between 1926 and 1931. Washington's list included 21 post offices. The Auburn Post Office was included on the list of cities that were 'allocated to be appropriated.'[11]

In 1931, Auburn was identified as a city that qualified for a new federal post office building. Regardless of the fact that $85,000 was set aside for the building at that time, it took several years of lobbying local elected officials by community leaders before the Auburn Post Office was actually funded. Finally, in 1935, congress appropriated an additional $58 million for public buildings; during this round of funding Auburn was allocated $72,000 for a new post office.

A new federal post office had been the objective of the Auburn Chamber of Commerce for several years, and the Chamber and other local leaders worked diligently to garner support from elected officials. In 1936, local newspapers reported that after years of effort, the Auburn Chamber of Commerce, which obtained signatures from no less than 90% of local post office patrons on a petition calling on the government for a new building, would finally enjoy the fruits of its labor. The *Auburn News* reported, "U.S. Senators Bone and Shwellenbach have repeatedly pledged their support of the project."[12] Similarly, the *Auburn Globe Republican* reported, "Congressman-elect John Coffee expressed his favorable consideration for a new post office building in Auburn, offering in a letter to the Auburn Chamber of Commerce to 'help to bring to completion the

10 Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), p. 8. Park and Markowitz explore one of the New Deal art programs created under the WPA, between 1934 and 1343, which commissioned murals and sculpture for federal buildings including 1,100 post offices throughout the country. The goal of this program was to make art part of the daily life of American citizens, and the means for realizing this vision were the eleven hundred post offices, places where art would be seen daily by ordinary citizens conducting the normal business of their lives. The Auburn Post Office was not among the buildings selected to contain artwork commissioned under this program.

11 Kolva and Franks, sec. E, pp. 67-68.

12 "Treasury Calls for Bids on Postoffice Sites in Auburn," *The Auburn News*, 20 November 1936.

construction and erection of the post office,' adding that 'it would appear that this matter could be expedited after he returns to the national capitol and the building rushed to completion, as Auburn certainly merits serious consideration on the post office situation.'"[13]

Site Selection and Significance

On November 20, 1936, the Federal Treasury Department called for site proposals for the new federal post office in Auburn. A total of 18 proposals were submitted in nearly every section of town adjacent to the business district. Prices on the property offered for sale ranged from $800 to $12,000. At a public meeting held to discuss the potential sites, the Post Office Inspector listed the government's criteria for a suitable site: the plot of land had to be large enough to afford ample room around the building because the government carried no fire insurance and thus would not place a building within forty feet of another building; soil and elevation were important to consider in regards to avoiding water in the basement; future growth of the city should be considered as the new building would be constructed to last for 50 years or more; and finally, because the government would build a "very attractive, ornamental building, it should be placed where it would show to the best advantage, in close proximity to the main business section of town."[14]

On January 27, 1937, the Auburn News reported that six lots in the Ballard Addition at the corner of Auburn Avenue and First Street Northeast were selected by the U.S. Treasury Department as the new post office site. The property was offered for sale by Arthur C. Ballard at a purchase price of $4,900. The site had an Auburn Avenue frontage of 108.4 feet and 154.94 feet on First Avenue. The back of the property was 100 feet wide, extending 196.8 feet along the newly created alleyway between Main and First Streets. The opening of First Street between Auburn Avenue "C" Street Northeast had been considered by City Council for some time, and with the selection of this site for the federal building, it was to be opened immediately. The selection of the Ballard property as the post office site met with hearty approval due to its close proximity to the central business section of town, and the ample customer parking anticipated with the opening of First Avenue.[15]

The site of the new Auburn post office is significant as it relates to the early settlement of Auburn, as well as Auburn's postal service history. The homestead of Dr. and Mrs. L.W. Ballard, one of the first residences in town, was built on this site in 1881. Dr. Levi Ballard and his son Charles were among the first settlers in the valley and were instrumental in laying out the first townsite of Slaughter (later called Auburn) in 1886. Ironically, Dr. Levi Ballard also was one the town's first postmasters, in fact, he was the first postmaster to

13 "Treasury Dept. Asks Bids for P.O. Location," *Auburn Globe Republican,* 20 November 1936.
14 "Public Hearing Held in Regard to P.O. Site," *The Auburn News,* 11 December 1936 and "Postal Department Scans Sites for New Building," *Auburn Globe Republican,* 11 December 1936.
15 "Lots in Ballard Addition Selected for P.O. Site," *The Auburn News,* 22 January 1937.

establish a post office within the town limits, at his homestead on this very site.[16] From the end of Dr. Ballard's term as postmaster in 1887, to the siting of the new permanent federal post office building in 1937, Auburn's post office moved five times through the tenure of 16 post masters. That Auburn's first permanent post office building was to be built on the grounds of city's first post office over 50 years earlier made the homecoming to the Ballard site even more fitting, contributing to a sentiment of pride in the community and its history.

Construction and Opening of the Auburn Post Office

The construction and subsequent opening of the Auburn Post Office were events followed with great interest by the Auburn community. Progress on nearly every phase of construction, from laying the foundation, bricking the walls, and building the roof, through installing the interior fixtures and finishes, was diligently covered in front page stories in the two local papers.

Construction of the post office building also was important because it provided much-needed jobs to the depressed local economy. The Procurement Division of Public Buildings' call for construction bids was advertised in June of 1937. A total of $79,000 was allocated for the project, of which $4,900 was deducted for purchase of the site, leaving $74,100 for building expenses.[17] An eastern contracting firm, James I. Barnes of Springfield Missouri, submitted the low bid of $57,037 and was awarded the contract, narrowing beating out two Seattle firms. Upon his arrival in Auburn in August of 1937, superintendent of construction for the James I. Barnes Company, R.H. Hughes, estimated six or seven months to complete the building. Upon his arrival in Auburn, he stated emphatically that "practically 100% local help would be used to construct the building."[18] Because the chosen bid was well within the appropriated $74,100 for building construction, no delay was expected in starting construction.[19]

Building construction was celebrated with great fanfare at no less than three public ceremonies. The groundbreaking ceremony was held on August 16, 1937. The *Auburn News* reported a good- sized gathering of Auburn citizens and dignitaries to witness the groundbreaking. Mayor Les Gove moved first shovel of dirt, then expressed appreciation at taking part in a project which meant so much to the city. Judge I.B. Knickerbocker, who was closely connected with the negotiations for the new post office, upon being introduced by W.A. Smith, President of the Auburn Chamber of Commerce, "told of the long drawn out proceedings and the concerted effort of all organizations in the city which finally resulted in Auburn being selected as one of the cities for a new federal building."[20] Building superintendent R.L. Hughes stated that "Auburn is to have an exceptionally

16 Ibid and Mary G. Wilkinson, "History of the Auburn Post Office," *Auburn Globe Republican*, 25 March 1938, pp. 1 and 5.
17 "To Open Postoffice Bldg. Bids July 9th," *The Auburn News*, 4 June 1937.
18 "Eastern Firm Low Bidder on P.O. Building," *The Auburn News*, 16 July 1937.
19 "Construction Supt. for P.O. Building Arrives," *The Auburn News*, 13 August 1937.
20 "Start Work on New Postoffice Building," *The Auburn News*, 20 August 1937.

fine building...many cities this size and larger have received less pretentious buildings."[21] Hughes added that government inspection was as critical on a building of this class as one that would cost two million dollars.[22]

The next milestone to be celebrated in the Auburn Post Office's construction was the laying of the cornerstone. Both the *Auburn News* and *Auburn Globe Republic's* October 15, 1937 issues heralded the expected arrival of United States Postmaster General, the Honorable James A. Farley lay the corner stone and officiate the ceremony. Approximately 2,000 citizens attended the ceremony, at which Farley spoke of the importance of the postal department to the business world and of the large building program that had been entered into by the treasury and postal departments. Congressman John M. Coffee and Mayor L.J. Gove also spoke on the occasion. Students from the junior and senior high schools were dismissed to attend the program, the high school band played several selections and presidents of various organizations were on the podium during the ceremony.[23]

Between October of 1937 and January of 1938, numerous reports on the building's construction and materials appeared in the local papers. From brick laying starting for the building's walls, the expected completion date of the roof, installation of interior finishes, and arrival of furnishings, to the erection of the 40-foot flag pole and the completion of "the climaxing ornamental effect when the weathervane was installed atop the cupola," Auburn citizens were kept apprised of every phase in the building's progress. Readers were even informed that brick cladding and terracotta trim for the building were supplied by Gladding McBean Company of Seattle.[24]

Finally, after months of anticipation, a large, front page photograph of the completed building was featured in the March 25, 1938 edition of the *Auburn News Tribune*, with the headline reading "Open for Public Inspection Tuesday Night." Under the auspices of the Pioneer Daughters of Slaughter and Auburn Chamber of Commerce, the completed post office building was to be opened for public inspection. The event was commemorated with keepsake photos of building handed out courtesy of the National Bank of Washington Auburn Branch, which also provided decorations and entertainment including drum and bugle corps, bands and an orchestra.[25] On April 1, 1938, the *Auburn Globe Republican* reported:

> Approximately 2500 people passed through new building during the open house. Visitors swarmed the building from the boiler room and storage vaults in the basement to the workrooms, swing room,

21 Ibid.
22 "Break Ground for New P.O. Structure Here," *Auburn Globe Republican,* 20 August 1937.
23 "Farley to Lay Cornerstone Here," *The Auburn News,* 15 October 1937, and "Farley Scheduled to Lay new Postoffice Cornerstone at 11:55 o'Clock This Morning, *Auburn Globe Republican,* 15 October 1937.
24 "Farley Speaks to 2,000 Here at P.O. Rites," *Auburn Globe Republican,* 22 October 1937.
25 "Open for Public Inspection Tuesday Night: Auburn's New Postoffice Building," *The Auburn News,* 25 March 1938.

lighting fixtures and the abundance of artificial light. Throughout the inspection comments were heard on the quality of the construction work.[26]

Standardized Post Office Building Designs

As early as 1913, with the passage of the Omnibus Public Buildings Act, the federal government instigated a plan to control wasteful spending by appropriating construction funds for new post offices only in locales where government business or the convenience of the people justified their construction, stipulating that no new post office buildings would be authorized for communities with postal receipts totaling less than $10,000 per year.

The 1913 Act also authorized the creation of the Public Buildings Commission, which was chaired by Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo, who in 1914, strongly recommended to Congress that buildings be standardized in order to reduce construction costs. In his annual report of 1915, McAdoo stated that buildings were to be less costly but durable, simple, and architecturally desirable. McAdoo's sentiments were that, instead of being exceedingly expensive and wasteful of space, government buildings needed to be practical, cost effective, and built for the right price for the specific site.[27] In contrast to the earlier policy of designing post offices individually, an effort was made to use the same design as frequently as possible, with variation in floor plans only if unusual, specific need arose. To further reduce costs associated with building designs, the Supervising Architect's office became responsible for the design of nearly all federal buildings during this period; rarely were private architects employed.[28] The policies dictating standardizing of plans and construction of cost-efficient public buildings continued throughout the 1920s..[29]

As part of his plans for streamlining government spending on building construction, McAdoo established a system of building classes that dictated the size, design, and materials to be uses for a particular building in a particular locale. The Auburn Post Office fell into McAdoo's classification of a Class C post office, which, by his definition, included post offices of the second class with receipts of $15,000 or over, and of the first class to $60,000 receipts; valuation of the surrounding property was that of a second class city. In character and materials, Class C buildings were to be "faced in brick with stone or terra cotta trimmings, fireproof floors, a non-fireproof roof, window frames, sashes and doors made of wood, and interior finish to exclude the more expensive woods and marbles; the latter used only where sanitary conditions demanded. Public spaces were to be restricted to very simple forms of ornament."[30]

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[26] "New Post Office Building Ready for Inspection Here Tuesday: Program Arranged," *Auburn Globe Republican*, 1 April 1938.
[27] Bruns, p. 74.
[28] Grosvenor, p. 3.
[29] Kolva and Franks, sec. E, p. 9.
[30] Grosvenor, p. 14.

expensive woods and marbles; the latter used only where sanitary conditions demanded. Public spaces were to be restricted to very simple forms of ornament."[30]

The government once again employed private architects after 1930, but the practice was ended with an order of June 29, 1934, that the staff of the Office of the Supervising Architect design all remaining Federal buildings. The Treasury Department determined that it was not economical for private architects to handle small architectural projects. It was felt that the expeditious placement of buildings under contract and putting men to work in the shortest time possible to facilitate employment in the construction field outweighed the benefits of procuring designs from a comparatively small number of architectural firms.[31]

In 1937, the Secretary of the Treasury reported that standardization had been successful in achieving its goals of efficiency and stimulating employment. Standardizing building designs resulted in vast savings in time and cost of drawing and specification production, greatly expediting the process for placing projects out for public bid. According to the 1937 report, "The buildings which have been constructed from these type designs have proved economical and satisfactory. The policy of preparing drawings and specifications permitting to the greatest practicable extent the use of materials and products native to the localities has resulted in stimulating employment and spreading the benefits of the building program."[32]

Post Office Building Style

Throughout history, post office buildings have been designed to project the federal government's self-image of monumentality and stability on those it governed. In small towns such as Auburn, the federal post office may provide one of the few, if not the only opportunity for the government to project this image. For this reason, regardless of relatively modest budgets, the government consistently employed traditional classical design forms and used quality materials to reinforce the idea of a strong and stable government.[33]

Although the individual design of post offices constructed in the State of Washington between 1893 and 1941 vary, the are all rooted in classical design principles, and therefore display common characteristics. According to H. J. Kolva,

> The typical post office is a rectangular box, ranging from one to three stories in height with the first floor set on a raised platform (basement) three to five feet above grade. The facades are flat with nominal

30 Grosvenor, p. 14.
31 Ibid, p. 4.
32 Kolva and Franks, sec. E, p. 14.

33 Ibid, sec. F-III, pp. 2-3.

articulation, usually less than one to two feet. Articulation is provided by either projecting the central section of the front facade slightly beyond the corners or by recessing the central section relative to the corners. The facades are symmetrical and well proportioned, with the principal entry centered on the long axis in all by rare cases. The entry is flanked by lamps, either free standing or buttresses flanking the entry platform or affixed to the wall. Windows are also symmetrically arranged. The roof is either flat or hipped and in most cases terminates behind a low parapet. Variations in facade treatment are provided by the inclusion of historical architectural elements and by use of materials. Stone is rarely used for the entire facade and is generally limited, as is terra cotta, for use on detailing."[34]

The federal architectural styles of the Depression Era, particularly after 1933, tended toward modernized, simplified buildings. Although post office buildings constructed during this period retained the symmetry and proportions of their predecessors, they were stripped of the architectural ornamentation that characterized the pre-1920 buildings and even those of the first three years of the 1930's. The design was a basic rectangular box with flat facade; detailing suggested Classical elements, but in simplified form. In addition to the various Revival influences, Art Deco was used but even this motif worked with stylized Classical elements. However, these buildings were still of quality construction, using brick, stone, and terra cotta, and they continued to symbolize the stability of the federal government."[35]

Starved Classicism

The majority of post office buildings constructed under Roosevelt's New Deal administration, including the Auburn Post Office, were designed in a style termed "Starved-Classical," because it derived from the Classical style but was stripped of superfluous ornamentation and simplified, in an effort to reduce costs and speed construction. Buildings constructed in the Starved-Classical style featured symmetrical designs with classical proportions, but did away with other popular classical elements, such as bold porticos, columns, and pediments. In style and form these buildings reflect the Roosevelt Administration's propensity for simplicity and thrift. As James Bruns states, "Such thrifty times required frugal fashions and the Starved-Classical form was the ideal thin diet...with this style, utility and economy outweighed exterior opulence.[36]

Responsibility for post offices designed in the Starved Classical style principally goes to Louis A. Simon. Simon was an 1891 Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate who headed up the architectural section of the Supervising Architect's office through the tenure of Supervising Architect James Wetmore from 1915 to

34 Ibid, sec. F-II, p. 2.
35 Ibid, sec. E, p. 15.
36 Bruns, p. 95. The term Starved-Classicism was used by Louis Craig, Director of the Federal Architecture Project for the National Endowment of the Arts, in describing the "modern" architectural style that was derived from the Classical but stripped and simplified to provide, in his terms, "a gaunt, underfed, "starved" classicism, denoted as much by white masonry and the rhythm of wall and window as by vestigial columns"

1933. He replaced Wetmore in 1933, serving as Supervising Architect until 1939. Known as a conservative designer, Simon oversaw the design and construction of the majority of post office projects through the balance of the Depression era.[37]

The cornerstone of the Auburn Post Office confirms that Louis A. Simon was indeed the Supervising Architect responsible for the building's design. In form, style, and materials, the building displays the most elementary characteristics of Simon's Starved Classical designs for a Class C. post office. These characteristics include a one story red brick building featuring a flat facade with five symmetrically arranged bays, the central entry bay containing double wooden doors with sidelights and transom windows above, and stone or concrete steps and the landing with wrought-iron balusters and light standards flanking the entry. Other features include wood windows with cast concrete window sills, and the limited use of stone or terra cotta detailing. All of these building elements and materials reflect the simplicity of the overall design. The Auburn Post Office represents a well preserved example of the materials and craftsmanship of typical of federal construction projects during the Depression Era.

> *The quest for efficiency of plan preparation and rapid construction, and the influence of the international or modern design movement contributed to the creation of the Starved Classical federal building style. The end of the Depression Era also brought the end to this building type. Construction essentially stopped during World War II and the post offices which followed were designed to meet the changing operational functions of modern postal facilities.*[38]

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37 Ibid, p. 95
38 *Kolva and Franks, sec. E, p. 15.*

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Verbal boundary description

City of Auburn, Ballard's Commercial Addition Lots 1-8 fronting Auburn Avenue to the west, First Street Northeast to the north, Auburn Way North to the east, and the alley between Main Street East and First Street Northeast to the south. Tax Parcel

Verbal boundary justification

The boundary includes the original parcel occupied by the historic building.

Photograph

Photographer: Kent Sundberg, King County Office of Cultural Resources

Date: September 15, 1999

Negatives on file at King County Office of Cultural Resources, 506 Second Avenue, Suite 200, Seattle, WA 98104

Photo: Looking E/SE across Auburn Avenue NE at the front (west) and north facades of the building. The inscribed dedicatory "cornerstone" is visible beneath the leftmost window of the front façade.

AUBURN POST OFFICE

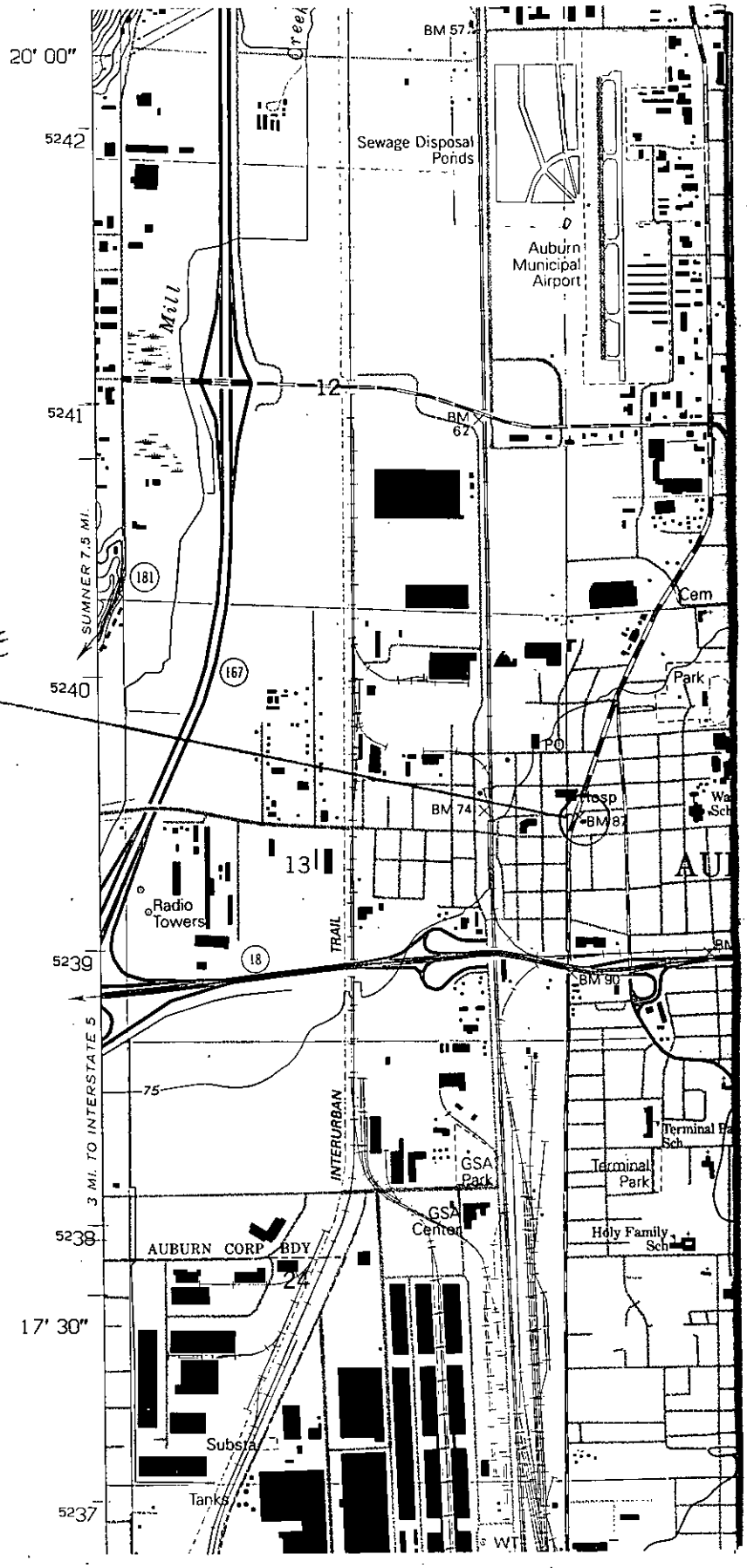
AUBURN, WA

KING COUNTY

UTM Z10

E 558480

N 5239480



AUBURN POST OFFICE
20 AUBURN AVE. NE
KING COUNTY AUBURN, WA