

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE
FIELD REAL ESTATE AND BUILDINGS OFFICE

P.O. Box 69069 / St. Paul, MN 55169-0069

DATE: July 9, 1985

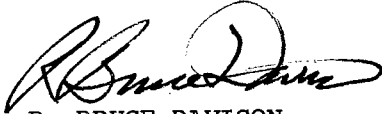
OUR REF: CER4:RBD:KFrahm:kf

SUBJECT: Historical Significance
St. Paul, MN 55101

TO: • Acting Manager
• Design and Construction Branch

File Copy
Br. Mgr. has a

Attached please find the historical Significance Survey file for the above facility. The SHPO indicates that this facility is not eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.



R. BRUCE DAVISON
Manager
Real Estate Branch

Attachment
File



Historic, Architectural & Archeological Significance Survey

1. General Information

a. Facility Name United States Post Office	b. Historic/Original Name United States Post Office	
c. Finance/Subloc. No. 268360-G01	d. Site Size (Sq. Ft.) 537,225 sq. ft.	e. Lot, Block Lots 1-12, Bk. 30
f. Property Address (Include county & ZIP code) 180 Kellogg Blvd., Ramsey County, St. Paul, MN. 55101-9998	g. Building Size (Sq. Ft.) 1,129,000 sq. ft.	h. Building Size (Dimensions) 284'x290' on west
	i. Is Building Open to Public? yes	
j. Address of Office with Building Records (Name and address of field office, region, etc. with official file.) Field Real Estate and Buildings Office P. O. Box 69069, St. Paul, MN. 55169-0069	k. Original Use of the Building U. S. Post Office and federal building	
	l. Present Use U. S. post Office and federal building	

2. Property Appearance

a. Description of General Area (Describe neighborhood, historic district, land use & direct or indirect effect upon other building of historic interest. If more space is needed, attach additional sheets.)

see attached

b. General Condition of Property (Site and Building)

see attached

c. Description of Building Material (Roofs, walls, foundation, interior features, floor and ceiling, etc.)

see attached

d. Description of Floorplan (Attach drawings if available.)

see attached

e. Description of unusual or unique subterranean features (Basement, tunnels, vaults, shelters, etc.)

see attached

3. Architectural History

a. Date Designed 1931-32	b. Date Construction Began May, 1934	c. Date Building Completed Septmeber, 1934	d. Date Restored/Renovated 1939, 1961, 1978, 1984
e. Original Owner (Name & Biographical Data) United States Government		f. Original Builder (Name & Biographical Data) Fleisher Engineering and Construction Company (see item #4 for more information)	
g. Original Architect (Name & Biographical Data) Lambert Bassingdale (1934) Louis A. Simon (1939) see item #4 for more information		h. Other Significant Participants (Names, relation to building, biographical data) see item #5	
i. Restoration Architect or Designer (if building has been restored/renovated) Ellerbe and Co. and Brooks Cavin (1961)			

4. Architectural Significance

Identify type, period, method of construction, artistic value, significant and distinguishable entity (See National Register criteria, 36 CFR 60.4, Criteria for Evaluation).

see attached

5. Historical Significance

Identify the broad patterns of American history (National, state or local level) or historic persons with whom the property is associated. (See National Register Criteria.)

see attached

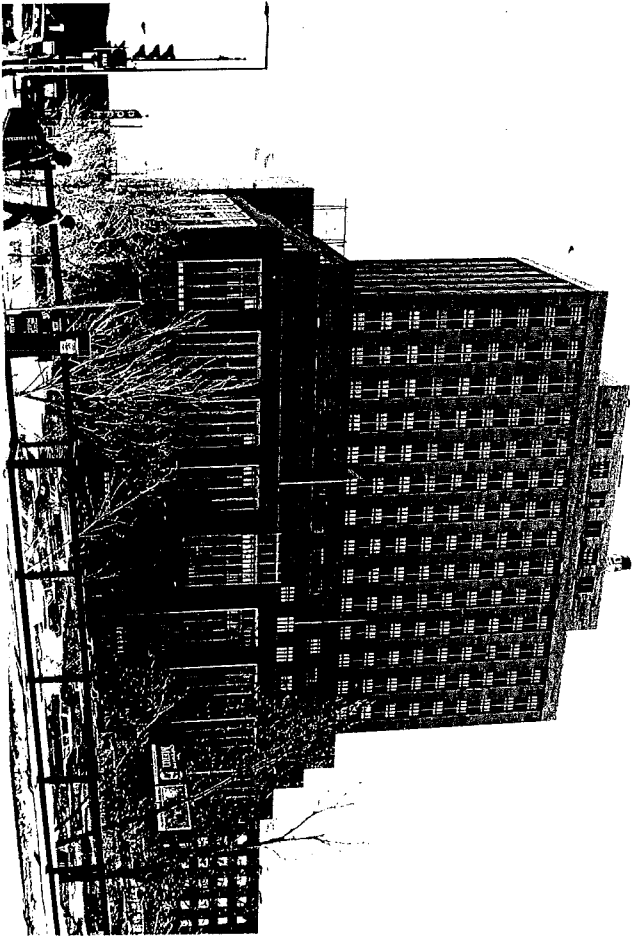
6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Should this property be nominated to the National Register? Yes No

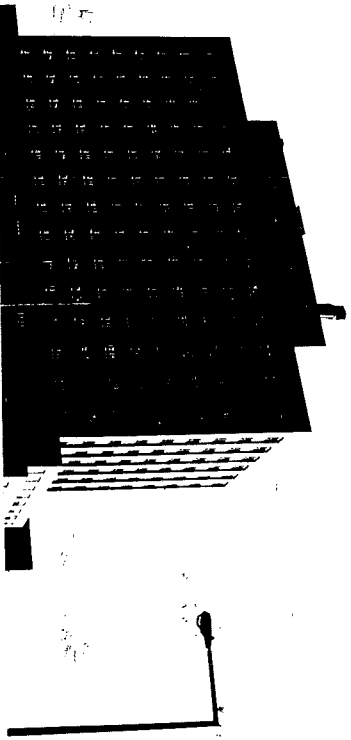
Give a brief statement to support your recommendation.

see attached

Prepared by Signature Dr. Norene A. Roberts <i>Norene A. Roberts, Pres.</i>	Final Recommendation by Signature <i>Wayne C. Christensen</i>
Title Pres. Historical Research, Inc.	Date 2/7 '85
Title Contracting Of	Date May 1, 1985
cer, Real Estate Br.	



Exterior facing SW (front facade)



U. S. Post Office and Custom House
St. Paul, Minnesota, page 1

2a. Description of General Area:

The Post Office and Customs House is situated on the north bank of the Mississippi River, one block south and west of the St. Paul Union Depot. It is on the southwest corner of Kellogg Boulevard and Sibley Street. The original building of the Post Office faces north on Kellogg, with the 1961 addition on the river side visible from Warner Road. A parking garage is located on the east side of Sibley connected to the main building by a skyway. The east side of the block on which the Post Office is located was the site of the "Commercial Station" Post Office prior to 1934 (at 190 E. Kellogg Boulevard). The Post Office and Customs House is not located in a historic district.

Map 1 (attached) shows the architectural and historical sites already designated in the downtown area of St. Paul. This map and the accompanying list is taken from the final report of the St. Paul and Ramsey County National Register survey, conducted in 1981-1982. On this map, the Post Office and Customs House is designated as Site #63. The lists accompanying this map show each site and its status (already designated, on the National Register, eligible for local listing on the St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission list, or site of major significance). The Post Office and Customs House was assessed as an "additional site of major significance" by the St. Paul survey.

Map 2 shows the extent of the Lowertown Heritage Preservation District in downtown St. Paul. This is a local district designated by the St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission. Since the St. Paul HPC is a certified HPC in Minnesota, all properties in the district which are contributing to the district are on the National Register of Historic Places. As can be seen from the shaded area of Map 2, the St. Paul Post Office and Customs House is just outside and on the southwest edge of the Lowertown Heritage Preservation District. The district was approved as a local district by the St. Paul City Council in the spring of 1984. It consists of 44 buildings primarily of warehouse construction, 4 to 7 stories tall, in a variety of styles popular between 1880 and 1920.

The Post Office and Customs House on Kellogg helps to frame or anchor the Lowertown Heritage Preservation District at the southwest edge by its size and location. To the west of the Post Office Kellogg Boulevard becomes more open, with several parking lots and open green spaces, and the downtown area shifts to more modern buildings of post-1920 construction.

2b. General Condition of Property:

The property is well maintained and in good condition. The brass elevator doors are routinely polished in the lobby, and the public spaces are clean and neat. The feeling on the part of postal authorities that the upper floor metal framed windows had to be replaced in 1984 was the result of one which fell out. These original windows were large casements common to the Art Moderne architectural style. Since they could be opened, there was something of a hazard for people working in offices on the upper floors of the tower. The condition of the other original windows in the building is difficult to assess.

2c. Description of Building Material:

The building as completed in 1934 is of steel frame construction faced in yellow Mankato dolomitic limestone quarried by T. R. Coughlan Company of Mankato and cut by Breen Stone & Marble Company of Kasota, Minnesota. The dark grey polished granite base of the building was quarried and cut by the Royal Granite Company of St. Cloud, Minnesota. Exterior trim is stainless steel, with dark aluminum window spandrels. The basements and floors are concrete (22,000 cubic yards of concrete) poured by Bracker Construction Company of Minneapolis. Poured concrete foundations go down 40 feet below street level. Walls are insulated in Gimco fireproof rock wool pneumatically installed by Lampland Lumber Company of St. Paul. Walls and ceilings are plaster. The mail receiving room in the basement has a wooden "BLOXONEND" strip-type end grain wood block flooring. The lobby has white stone Tennessee marble blocks. The other floors have hardwood Bruce unit hyphen wood block flooring and resilient tile flooring (St. Paul Pioneer Press, Sept. 22, 1934, p. 10). Hallways and stairways are 18" squares of terrazo with a darker contrasting border and brass division strips. Bathrooms had pink Kasota marble stalls, wainscot, and trim. Woodwork is oak and the a brass railing surmounts the oak banister on the stairways in the building. The doors, door frames, and elevator doors on the 1939 addition (floors 12-15) are metal, a departure from the hardwoods used on the original 1934 floors. The lobby had Tennessee Travernelle clear marble floors, walls faced in Maryland Cardiff Green Marble, and bronze grilles, with polished black marble baseboards (1932 Architectural plans on file in post office). Revolving doors into the lobby are walnut with walnut trim. Elevator doors are brass. Except for acustical tile ceiling panels in some offices, the eighth floor, and the lobby, most of the original materials are intact. The 1961 south addition to the main building which was designed by Ellerbe and Company is also steel frame construction, plaster interior walls, and stone faced exterior which closely matches the original building. Roof materials are unknown.

2d. Description of Floor plan:

Original blueprints are available in the Post Office, Real Estate Services Division, Room 820, from Postal Service architect Steve Hauser. Copies of a cross-section of the 1934 building and 1961 addition and general site plan are attached. As originally built, the U. S. Post Office and Customs House was 11 stories tall with a basement and two sub-basements. In the lowest sub-basement was the heating plant and mechanical equipment, with mail handling facilities in the upper sub-basement and in the basement. The upper sub-basement also had a pistol range for the Internal Revenue Service. The first 5 floors were devoted almost entirely to post office activities. The 6th to 11th floors housed other federal and governmental agencies. The penthouse accommodated elevator machinery, ventilating equipment, and other service facilities with some uncompleted office space. A truck tunnel and large belt conveyors for mail handling were located under Sibley Street connecting the building with the Union Depot. The conveyors could take stacks of mail from the depot basement directly to the 5th floor of the post office building. At the rear of the basement was the truck loading dock and the United States Customs inspection dock.

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St. Paul, Minnesota, page 3

Post Office activities were divided among the first five floors of the building. On the main (first) floor the lobby stretched along the entire front (Kellogg Boulevard) side of the building, with passenger elevators to the upper floors at the east end of the building. The lobby accommodated all the services provided to the public: Post Office cashier, stamps, general and special delivery, and postal savings. To the rear of the lobby were carrier quarters and other facilities for handling mail. The 2nd and 3rd floors contained facilities for handling outgoing mail and parcel post. The 2nd floor also had a private dining room and cafeteria. The 4th and 5th floors housed the railway main terminal mailrooms where all the mail destined for Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Wisconsin, Illinois, northern Michigan, Iowa, and Montana came through the Twin Cities and was handled and resorted. The mail terminal in the new building took over these functions from space formerly in the Union depot.

The 6th floor was devoted entirely to the Internal Revenue Service, with related offices on the 7th floor and room for the Prohibition Administrator, Industrial Alcohol, laboratory, files and legal sections, and under cover agents' offices. The 8th floor housed the offices of the U. S. Engineering Department and the U. S. Geological Survey. The 9th floor officed the Civil Service Department. The 10th floor had the U. S. Customs offices, the Customs Agency Service, and a wood panelled Naturalization courtroom. The 11th floor was initially unassigned office space. And the Penthouse/roof had a stormwarning tower and other equipment for the U. S. Weather Bureau (1932 architectural plans, filed at the post office).

The building functions and configuration is somewhat altered today. In 1939 floors 12-15 and a penthouse were added to the tower. This space now houses the St. Paul District Corps of Engineers offices. The 16th floor has a Corps recreational area with running track and weight room. The 17th is actually the top of the penthouse and houses exhaust/air conditioning, and the mechanics for the lobby elevators. The cafeteria is now on the 5th floor as are the Customs offices. The 6th floor is used for postal stack sorting, storage, and offices. The 8th floor housing the Real Estate Services division of the Postal Service was remodelled in 1984. On the eighth floor walls are now sheetrock or plaster covered by burlap wall covering; ceilings have been lowered and are acoustical panels; door openings have been replaced by various types of new doors; and the original terrazo floors in the corridors were left untouched.

In 1961 Ellerbe and Company added a large 6 story rear addition which has given the mail operations more space for trucking area and workrooms.

In 1978 the dock and parking facility on the east side of Sibley Street was built. Concourse and train sheds of the old Union Depot were converted to post office use, and a parking ramp was constructed. Design work was done by Setter, Leach, and Linstrom.

2e. Description of unusual or unique subterranean features:

There are no known prehistoric archeological sites connected with the Post

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St. Paul, Minnesota, page 4

Office property according to the files of the State Historic Preservation Office. Early histories of St. Paul and Ramsey County do not mention unique subterranean features here. However, the postal service notes active springs under the building. According to the St. Paul Dispatch, the building was erected over a bog. Pumping the course of an underground stream using three pumps running 24 hours a day cost the Government \$45 a day during construction (St. Paul Dispatch, April 1, 1933, page 1).

4. Architectural Significance:

St. Paul's U. S. Post Office and Customs House is not the best example of the Art Moderne style in the downtown, but it is one of the major Art Moderne buildings in the city. St. Paul erected the Post Office, the City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse (15 W. Kellogg Boulevard), the First National Bank Building (Minnesota and 5th streets), and the Women's City Club (305 St. Peter Street) between 1931 and 1934. These Moderne buildings with their warm cream-colored smooth cut stone exteriors give St. Paul an architectural character quite different from Minneapolis.

There is no doubt but that the City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse, designed by Holabird and Root in 1931-32, is a superior design to the St. Paul Post Office building. Holabird and Root designed the city hall with relief sculptures by Lee Lawrie (who also produced sculptures for Rockefeller Center). Interior murals were done by John Norton (who as a teenager had worked with Purcell and Elmslie and with Frank Lloyd Wright). The War Memorial Concourse in the city hall is a striking space with 41 foot high ceiling and the white onyx sculpture "Peace Memorial" by Carl Milles. In overall exterior coherence, integrity, and design the city hall is far superior architecturally to the U. S. Post Office and Custom House.

The smaller but refined design of the Women's City Club, also planned in 1931, also has more integrity and fewer alterations than the Post Office and is the work of Magnus Jemne. By comparison with these two contemporary Art Moderne buildings, the St. Paul Post Office is a poor third architecturally.

Lambert Bassingdale (1875-1945), a native of Racine, Wisconsin, practicing locally in St. Paul, was selected to design the post office in 1931 by the Treasury Department. He asked and was permitted to bring in as consulting architects the famous Chicago firm of Holabird and Root. Bassingdale practiced in St. Paul from approximately 1914 until his retirement in 1942. Before coming to St. Paul he helped in planning the Cook County Courthouse and City Hall in Chicago, the Chicago, Northwestern Terminal, and the Union Railway Terminal in Kansas City. Most of his work was done for railroads. Arriving in St. Paul, he was an associate architect for the St. Paul Union Depot and the Great Northern Station in Minneapolis. He went on to design offices for the Great Northern Railroad and the Northern Pacific Railroad, the Hotel Lowry, the Midway Hospital, the St. Luke's Nurses Home, and the New Wilder Day Nursery. He also planned all six of the Northern Pacific hospitals (the one in St. Paul in 1918 with Carl Buetow) and the Northern Pacific Nurses Home in St. Paul (St. Paul Dispatch, February 18, 1931, page 1; and Northwest Architectural Archives biography files, University of Minnesota).

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It is probable that Bassingdale, when awarded the design contract for the St. Paul Post Office was so impressed with the Holabird and Root design of the year before for City Hall that he determined to ask the Chicago firm to join him in designing the new postal facility. Bassingdale, however, has left no local records of his reasons for inviting Holabird and Root on the project.

The general construction company which erected the building was Fleisher Engineering and Construction Company of St. Paul. Samuel Fleisher noted that his company had also erected the following buildings: Minnesota Building, Commodore Hotel (in St. Paul), LaSalle Building, Oak Grove and Buckingham hotels, Lagoon, State, and Century theaters, Roosevelt, Marshall, Washburn, and Lincoln high schools (in Minneapolis), City and County building (Denver), Court House (Superior, Wisconsin), Dade County Court House (Miami, Florida), Walter Reed Hospital (Washington, D.C.), and other large buildings in Chicago, Cleveland, Tampa, Indiana, Iowa and elsewhere. Once construction delays were solved, the St. Paul post office went up in record time: one year from award of contract (St. Paul Pioneer Press, September 22, 1934, page 10).

One of the innovations in the St. Paul Post Office design was the windows. The long vertical lines of the windows achieved by the dark aluminum window spandrels also served to conceal steam piping. According to the St. Paul Pioneer Press, "The continuous window mullions and spandrels were made hollow so that radiator risers and takeoffs can be run within them. The mullions and spandrels then were blown full of rock wool, which at once insulated the piping completely and made the entire construction about the windows non-conductive. The hazards of condensation in metal window construction are practically eliminated when treated in this manner" (September 22, 1934, page 10). Windows on the 8th floor and above were replaced in 1984, and the original window spandrels were sawed off the tower and replaced by new metal spandrels which have gone far to destroy the integrity and original feeling and style of the building.

The St. Paul Post Office and Customs House has no murals. There is an interesting story, however, in connection with a mural which Dr. A. A. Van Dyke, Postmaster, commissioned after the building was opened in 1934. Van Dyke, without authority from the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (later called the Section of Fine Arts) and with no monies allocated for murals for the new building, took it upon himself to use his influence in Washington and commissioned a local St. Paul artist, Wilbur Hausener, to paint a large canvas for the postmaster's office. This, in itself, was irregular since the program to provide murals stipulated that art works were to be displayed in the public spaces of post offices. In fairness to Postmaster Van Dyke, the Section of Painting and Sculpture was one of patronage rather than relief, and in this, Van Dyke may have thought there would be no problems in hiring Hausener. In any event, Hausener painted a canvas measuring some 5' x 18 or 20' long for Van Dyke's office. The subject of the painting was a history of communications through the ages. It depicted a modern 1930s skyscraper post office building similar but not identical to the St. Paul facility. Flanking the building, the canvas depicted post office activities and tasks, including ways of shipping the mail via rail and boat. Along the outside edges of the canvas were historical methods of communication, including a figure of an Aztec runner. Van Dyke was unsuccessful in having

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the federal government pick up the tab, and Hausener was never paid for his work. The mural sat in a St. Paul garage until brought to the attention of Tom O'Sullivan, Curator of paintings for the Minnesota Historical Society several years ago. O'Sullivan brought the mural together with the St. Paul Companies who bought the piece, had it cleaned and restored, and placed in their St. Paul headquarters building near the Landmark Center in St. Paul where it hangs today (Tom O'Sullivan, interview, Minnesota Historical Society). Mr. O'Sullivan has a file on the mural in his office at 690 Cedar Street in the Audio-Visual Department of the Minnesota Historical Society.

5. Historical Significance:

St. Paul's U. S. Post Office and Customs House appears to be more significant historically than architecturally. It was the largest postal facility building in Minnesota, housed many of the federal offices, and was the first construction contract let by the Democratic administration of Roosevelt (according to the St. Paul Pioneer Press, September 22, 1934, page 10). Until the Ft. Snelling Federal Building was built to house federal offices, the U.S. Post Office and Customs House in St. Paul was considered the location of the Federal presence in the state. The building was also constructed in record time: between May and October 1, 1934. The size and design, as well as its functions, broke tradition with past post office buildings. The postmaster, Dr. A. A. Van Dyke, claimed at the grand opening celebration on September 22, 1934 that the business of the St. Paul post office was the largest business in the city. From the post office over 77,376 buildings in St. Paul received mail daily. The annual payroll was 9 million dollars, a figure which included payrolls for all rural carriers in Minnesota. All mail for the 10th District was routed to the building. Offices for all post office inspectors for the Northwest were located there. The postal savings deposits annually amounted to over 7 million dollars at St. Paul's new facility and the central accounting office for the whole state was located there amounting to over 37 million dollars annually. The building was the main office for the over 1,200 people employed by the post office and approximately 300 employees of the other federal agencies in the upper floors of the building (St. Paul Pioneer Press, September 22, 1934, page 10).

The early 1930s were politically charged times. Gangsters were in control of St. Paul, the Lindberg baby had been kidnapped, and, despite the Civil Service examination regulations, the Republicans had been in office in Washington, D. C. since the administration of Abraham Lincoln in the 1860s. When Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected over President Hoover in 1932, the Republicans were worried. A new St. Paul post office had been approved in 1931 under President Hoover's administration and the Republican postmaster had had a cosy deal with the old administration under the Republican system of political patronage. Everyone anticipated a shake-up when F. D. R. began his term as President in 1933.

The following story of the St. Paul Post Office would have been enhanced if the St. Paul Dispatch had been available during this study. The only copies of this newspaper in Minnesota have been sent out for microfilming by the Minnesota Historical Society and will be unavailable for six months or so.

U. S. Post Office and Custom House
St. Paul, Minnesota

The tale of the new St. Paul Post Office begins with the Commercial Station located on what is now the site of the west half of the present building in twelve and a half days in 1934 (St. Paul Pioneer Press, September 22, 1934, page 10). Before construction of the St. Paul Post Office, the usual practice in cities with no government post office building built specifically for the purpose was to lease space from private companies. The counterpart today would be an entrepreneurial "nitch" in the Federal laws. It was an understandable practice for the times. But it opened the way for abuses.

The Federal government looked for a site for the new post office for some time. The original decision to build a new post office building in St. Paul was made around August, 1926 under St. Paul Postmaster Charles J. Moos' term. Moos commissioned an exhaustive survey which indicated a need for a new post office building (St. Paul Dispatch, August 14, 1931, page 1 (Section 2)). The Commercial Station on the east end of Block 30 had been erected in 1921 by a private firm composed of Jacob Kulp of Chicago and Ray Brown of Indianapolis. The Commercial Station was built exclusively for use as a post office and then leased to the Federal government. Through 1931 and 1932, Representative to Congress Melvin J. Maas, a Republican, waged a campaign against the St. Paul Postmaster Charles J. Moos. Representative Maas lobbied against the whole system of postal leasing arrangements in the country, pointing particularly to the St. Paul Commercial Station lease. Kulp and Brown had a virtual monopoly on post office building rentals and the government was being seriously overcharged. Maas' efforts led to a Senate committee investigation of postal leasing and it was found that the Government had agreed to pay \$120,000 annually for 20 years for the Commercial Station in St. Paul, which was condemned in 1932 for the new post office and appraised at only \$325,254. The owners of Commercial Station, Brown and Kulp, had fixed the building's cost at \$700,000 and the Postmaster owned an insurance company on the side which insured the building at the higher value. Businessmen in St. Paul described the post office lease at "unconscionable" (Dispatch, March 11, 1932, page 1).

Maas broadened his campaign. He fought for the removal of Postmaster General Walter F. Brown because of the leasing abuses (St. Paul Dispatch, August 29, 1931, page 1). Maas led the fight to defeat Moos' Senate confirmation for another term as St. Paul Postmaster in March of 1932 because the company Moos was part owner in provided a half million dollars worth of fire insurance to the owners of Commercial Station when the building and site was worth only \$334,000 (Dispatch, March 4, 1932, page 1). Maas also wanted to put postmaster appointments under Civil Service regulations in order to stop the patronage abuses of the times. Postmasters under Hoover and Coolidge frequently engaged in fundraising and stumping for political candidates and their reward was a synecure in the post office. On another front, Maas was instrumental in seeking an additional appropriation of one million dollars so that the new St. Paul post office building could be built with 11 stories instead of the 7 originally planned. In this effort he was joined by President Hoover (Dispatch, March 5, 1932, page 1).

During the investigations of leasing practices and discussions of how large the new post office should be, construction on the building was delayed.

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The additional appropriation for an 11 story building went through, and construction was finally begun in the Spring of 1934. The post office was built in two halves: the west half first and the east half last. This was done because Commercial Station had to be used while the new facility was being built. When the west half was completed, Commercial Station was razed in a record twelve and a half days. The wrecking company alone hired 200 men and worked around the clock to raze Commercial Station. The post office was a P.W.A. project and provided many construction jobs as well as work for the quarries in southern Minnesota because of the decision to use local Minnesota stone (Dispatch, April 4, 1933, page 2).

The year 1932 was a presidential campaign year. James A. Farley came to St. Paul in December to speak to Minnesota Democrats. Roosevelt had just been elected on the Democratic ticket. Farley, head of the Democratic National Committee, had just been appointed Postmaster General designate. It was the Democrats turn. Farley assured Republicans in April, 1933 that efficient post office chiefs would stay in their jobs until their terms expired (Pioneer Press, April 17, 1933, page 1). But by August, Moos was replaced as St. Paul Postmaster by Dr. Arthur A. Van Dyke, a Democrat. Judging from Van Dyke's handling of the Hausener mural, it is difficult to say if the new postmaster was a significant improvement over his predecessor.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation:

Between the recent window replacements and the large 1961 addition to the 1934 building, the Post Office does not appear to be eligible to the National Register on the basis of architectural integrity. The lobby has been marred by the acoustical panelled ceiling and new lights. Despite this, the Ramsey County National Register survey of St. Paul concluded that the building is "one of Minnesota's most sophisticated examples of PWA Moderne" (Survey sheet, Roll 2, State Historic Preservation Office, Ft. Snelling History Center).

Historically, the St. Paul Post Office and Custom House appears to be eligible, not only because its construction led to a Senate investigation of leasing abuses of the Commercial Station on the same site, but because it is significant on a state level in Minnesota as the largest postal facility and federal building in the state.