

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

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 an 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 Fredericktown United States Post Office

other names/site number n/a

2. Location

street & number 155 South Main Street n/a not for publication

city or town Fredericktown n/a vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Madison code 123 zip code 63645

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mark A. Miles August 19, 2009  
Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles/Deputy SHPO Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
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

I hereby certify that the 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.) \_\_\_\_\_

Fredericktown United States Post Office  
Name of Property

Madison County, Missouri  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- Public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(check only one box)

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Function**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/post office

**Current Function**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/post office

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement

WPA Moderne

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation limestone

concrete

walls brick

roof other: tar & gravel

other

**Narrative Description**

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

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

Fredericktown United States Post Office  
Name of Property

Madison County, Missouri  
County and State

## 8. Description

### Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Narrative Statement of Significance

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

x See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

## 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 Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

Art \_\_\_\_\_

Politics/Government \_\_\_\_\_

Architecture \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Period of Significance

1937 - 1939 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Significant Dates

n/a \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Cultural Affiliation

n/a \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Architect/Builder

Simon, Louis A./Architect \_\_\_\_\_

Lloyd, Hiram, Building & Construction/Builder \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

Fredericktown Post Office  
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**10. Geographical Data**

Acreege of Property less than one acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/5 7/3/9/0/1/0 4/1/6/0/0/1/0  
Zone Easting Northing

2 / / / / / / / / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

3 / / / / / / / / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

4 / / / / / / / / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)  
(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title see continuation page

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**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**

name/title U. S. Postal Service Attn. Dallan C. Wordekemper, FPO

street & number 4301 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300 telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Arlington state VA zip code 22203-1861

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Fredericktown United States Post Office  
Madison County, Missouri

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### SUMMARY:

The Fredericktown U. S. Post Office at 155 South Main Street in downtown Fredericktown, Missouri is a symmetrical one-story plus full basement, red brick and gray limestone WPA Moderne style building. Constructed in 1936-37 from a standardized plan, the Fredericktown facility features an elaborated raised entrance within an ashlar enframing of pilasters and tall, complex windows. Six of the west-facing building's other windows are topped with stone panels containing bas-relief decorations with an aviation or air mail motif. The building contains its original post office art, a Treasury Section of Fine Arts mural by Missourian James Baare Turnbull titled, "The Lead Belt," installed in 1939. The well-preserved building is highly intact inside and out, and despite a metal-clad addition nominally attached in the rear and handicapped-access changes retains sufficient original features to convey its historic significance as an example of New Deal government architecture. What appears to be the original flagpole is intact off the northwest corner, further communicating the building's federal function.

### ELABORATION:

Located in Southeast Missouri in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains, Fredericktown, population 3,950, is the county seat of Madison County. The Fredericktown U.S. Post Office is located one block south of the Madison County Courthouse (NR listed 12/28/2000).

Measuring approximately 64 feet (façade) by 68 feet (front to rearmost original wall), the post office building has a flat roof with a tar and gravel surface and stands on a foundation of stone and concrete. The foundation consists of two courses of large limestone blocks on the front and adjacent side walls. A modern addition off the northeast corner has corrugated metal walls and is approximately 85 feet long by 32 feet wide. A brick chimney (external to the original building but enclosed within the metal addition) rises from the northeast corner. Five wide steps ascend from the public sidewalk on South Main Street to a broad stone deck in front of the entrance.

A plain limestone belt course wraps the upper portion of the exterior and stone also serves as a coping. The original raised central entrance in the five-bay west elevation was double-leaf with panel doors of wood and glass. In 1965, the original doors were replaced with a single glass/aluminum door, with a wide sidelight and two small, transom-like windows above the door and sidelight. Above the entry, an entablature contains the words FREDERICKTOWN MISSOURI 63645. A metal American eagle with upright wings—apparently the original eagle from 1937—is perched on a small ledge atop the entablature. A triple window above the entablature consists of a tall middle window flanked by narrower side windows. Flanking the entryway, large window units of multiple sash are framed within four wide limestone pilasters with streamlined capitals. Two flanking units of double-hung 6/6 windows, framed with limestone, are within the outer brick-faced wall segments. A stone panel with an aviation

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design—a bas-relief propeller against a stylized background of cylinder heads and eagle wings—is above each of these windows.

The south elevation contains three symmetrically arranged narrow windows with ashlar surrounds and aviation motif panels identical to those in the west elevation. The north elevation originally contained five windows, with an ashlar surround and bas-relief panel above the westernmost window only, and the other windows set within the facing brick. A few years ago, the second window from the front on the north was converted into a handicapped-accessible entrance. On the north and south elevations are concrete stairways with simple black pipe safety railings leading to the building's full basement.

The east (rear) elevation consists of staggered or stair-step walls containing a few narrow windows. A nearly flat roof covers the original concrete mailing platform where double swinging doors facilitate ingress and egress. Another door west of the double doors serves as a carrier entrance.

The basement, constructed from concrete blocks and poured concrete, is divided into eight rooms used today primarily for storage and to house the building's mechanical systems.

In 1965, the Fredericktown Post Office underwent an updating. The original front doors and Art Deco light standards flanking the main entry are believed to have been replaced at this time with the existing doors and multi-globe lamps. At the same time, "ventilating skylights" were removed when an air conditioning system was installed on the roof.

In ca. 2002, a handicapped-accessible entrance was constructed on the north end of the post office with concrete entry ramps beginning on the west elevation. Although budgetary constraints did not allow for limestone to match the original foundation, the look of the limestone was closely duplicated in poured concrete. Handrails of plain black pipe were installed on either side of the ramp, duplicating the building's original railings. A handicapped-accessible entrance was created by removing the second window on the north elevation and installing a push button-activated door. While of low profile, the ramp and access door impact integrity somewhat but this was a necessary alteration to a public building.

As the volume of mail increased, the Postal Service began transporting much of it by tractor-trailer truck. While this saved money, the sheer size of the trucks created a hazard at post offices laid out like Fredericktown's. Drivers had to back into the post office parking lot from East College Avenue and then maneuver their trailers at a right angle to access the original mail platform. The trucks sometimes jack-knifed, causing delays and damage. In ca. 2004, postal architects designed a simple steel and wood frame, corrugated metal clad building that could be easily attached to the northeast corner of the original structure (and just as easily removed).

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Fredericktown United States Post Office  
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Because its concrete floor is at the same level as the original loading platform, which it abuts, the addition allows trucks to back directly across the parking lot for loading and unloading. Two large entrances in the south side of the addition face the driveway entrance, and a wide entry door accesses it from the dock. From most angles the addition does not appear to be attached to the original building, and in fact it is connected by just six bolts.

### Interior:

Upon entering the post office through the main west entrance, customers enter a boxlike, paneled wood and glass vestibule with a marble base. The vestibule's original wood and glass doors are intact on the north and south sides. Entering through the south vestibule door, among other things customers see the exterior of the postmaster's office with the historic oil on canvas mural by James Baare Turnbull spanning the width of the south lobby wall above it. In the right corner is an original hardwood trestle-design work table for use by patrons. On the wall flanking the postmaster's door are two locking wood and glass bulletin boards. Lower walls in the lobby are paneled with veined, polished marble slabs from Ste. Genevieve, Missouri. The lobby floor is terrazzo. Turnbull, a Missouri native, created his mural in 1939 under the Treasury Department's Treasury Relief Arts Program (TRAP), enacted during the Great Depression and later renamed the Treasury Department's Fine Arts Program. Products of the program are commonly referred to as Section artwork. Turnbull's mural, "The Lead Belt," is in its original location above the postmaster's door which was typical for Section artwork in New Deal post offices like Fredericktown's.

Service bays A-D occupy the east interior wall. In the northwest corner is a trestle design work table similar to the one outside the postmaster's office. The public lobby is L-shaped with the base of the L turning right on the north end of the lobby. Service bays E and F are located in this north segment. The original brass post office boxes fill the south and east walls. Two matching locking wood and glass bulletin boards flank the handicapped entrance in the north wall. Above the service bays are decorative metal security bars.

Behind the public space, the work area for postal employees remains very similar to its original setup. On the east end of the work area, a "lookout area" can be accessed by ladder. The original vault is still operational. Prior to the installation of air conditioning in 1965, two original ventilating skylights were present over the west side of the work area. The building was originally heated with a coal furnace and boiler for the radiator system. Nearly all of the original furniture in the work area remains, along with additional shelving and tables added as the postal system evolved.

"The Lead Belt," Turnbull's framed oil and canvas mural depicting life in the Fredericktown area, measures approximately 10 feet by 5 feet. Painted in a range of colors, the well-composed

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Turnbull mural depicts a variety of local images—an artistic style known as Regionalism and in the realistic mode of, for example, well-known Missouri artist Thomas Hart Benton whose 1936 murals decorate the State Capitol in Jefferson City. Agriculture and the community's long history of mining lead, silver and other metals are foremost in the Turnbull mural, while a modern skyline features the local water tower and the steeple of St. Michael's Catholic Church, along with other buildings. The right foreground is dominated by a plowman turning the soil behind a pair of struggling horses in a hilly field parallel to a dirt road which curves around toward the skyline at the upper left. The sky is filled with fluffy clouds and billowing smoke from, apparently, the Mine La Motte (as it was historically known) lead mill and the smokestack from a cobalt mine. Hand-hewn fence posts line the road, and the horses are framed by a modest sized, well-foliated tree. Other trees, spindly and leafless, stand at the base of a mountain of tailings. What appears to be a mining superstructure is in the background. Another group of trees, perhaps an orchard, is part of the more distant agrarian landscape.

The mural fills the horizontal space above the postmaster's door with inches to spare. It also appears to be a perfect fit for Fredericktown in terms of the community that it depicts.

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Figure 1

Fredericktown Post Office, June 12, 1937



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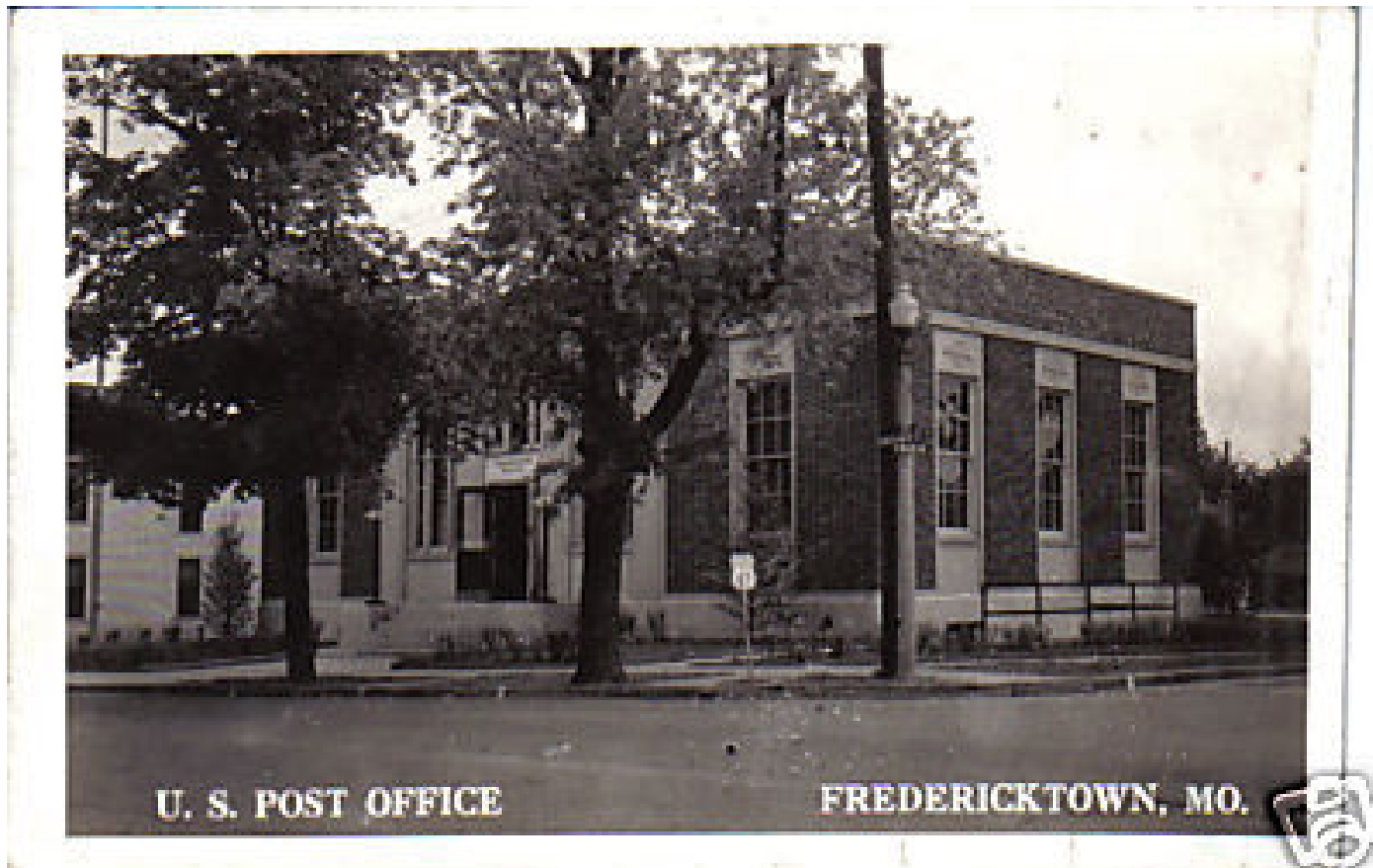
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Figure 2

Fredericktown Post Office, ca. 1950s



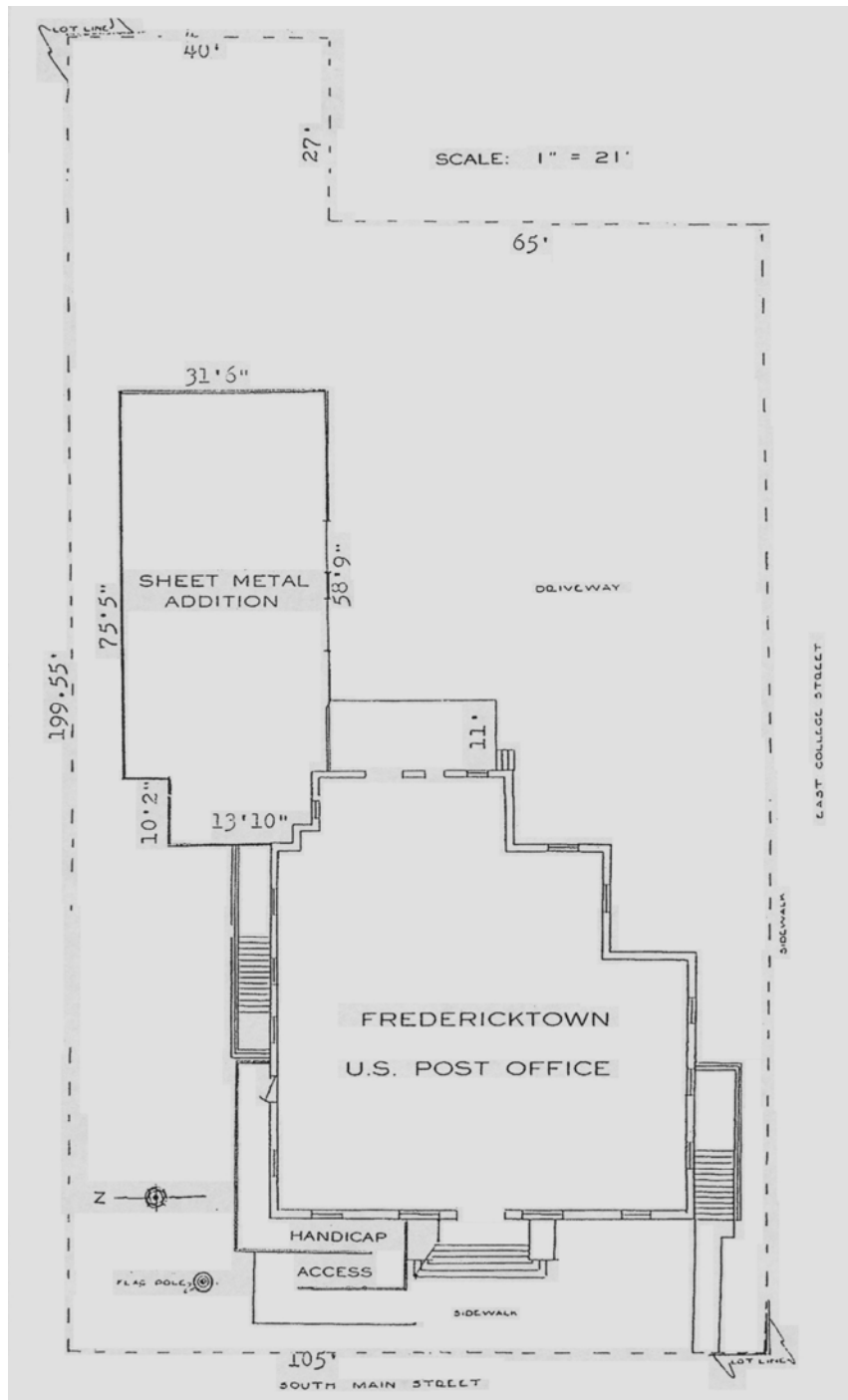
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Figure 3: Fredericktown Post Office Site Plan



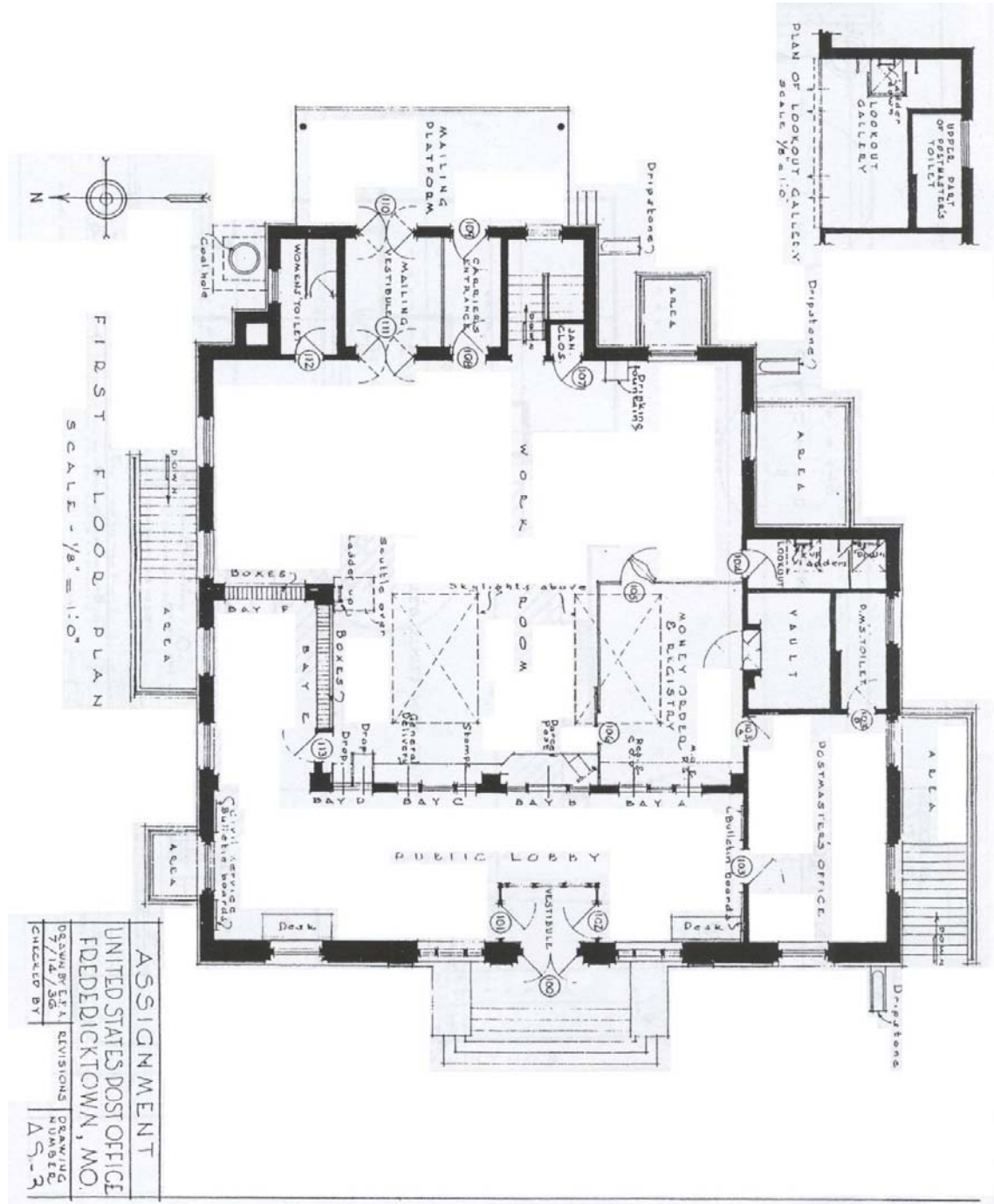
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Figure 4: Original First Floor Plan



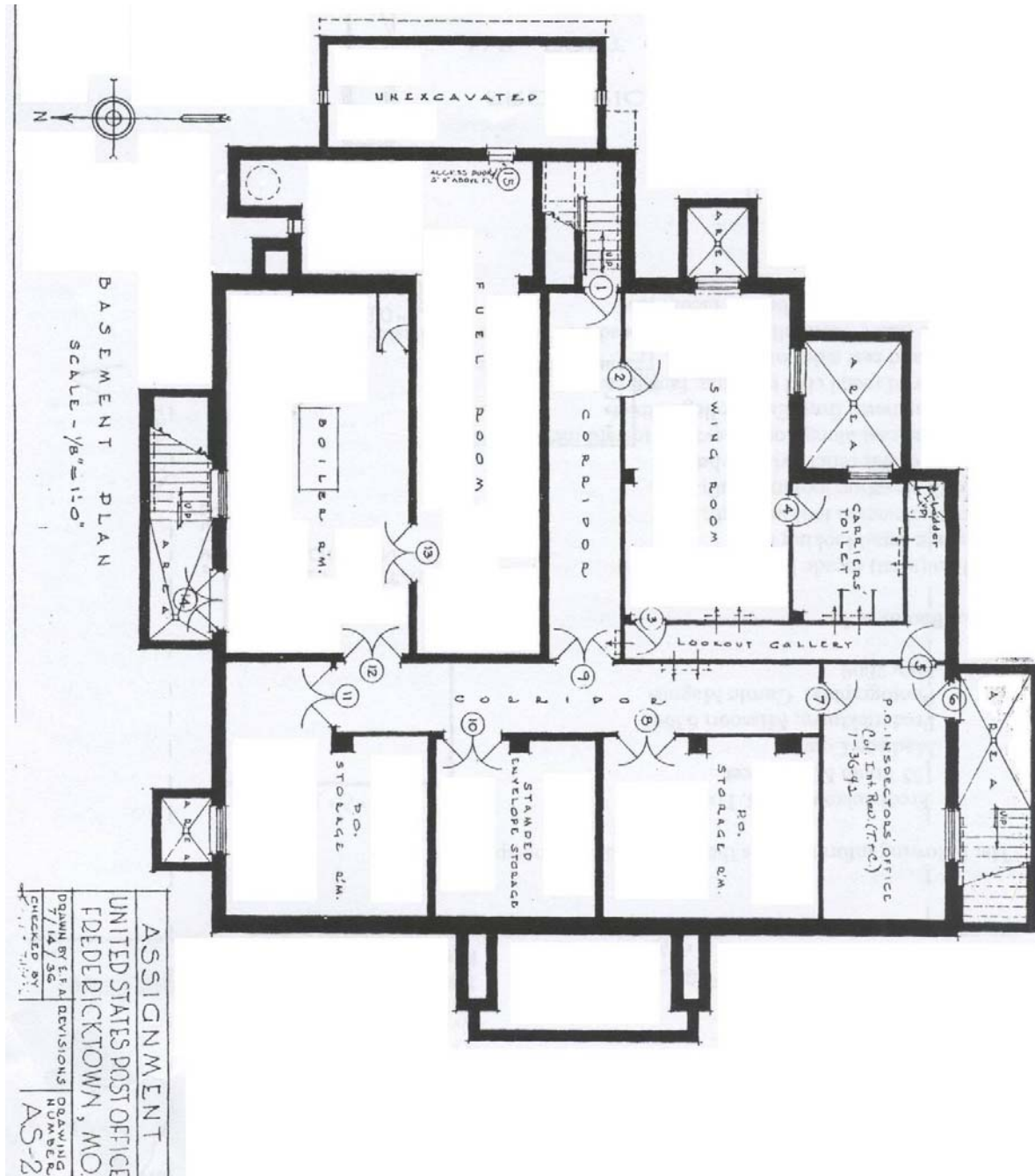
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Figure 5: Original Basement Floor Plan







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### SUMMARY:

Constructed from a standardized plan in 1936-37, the brick and limestone Fredericktown U.S. Post Office is eligible for listing in the National Register with local significance under Criterion A for Art and Politics/Government and under Criterion C for Architecture. The Fredericktown Post Office contains its original "Section" mural by Missouri artist James Baare Turnbull, "The Lead Belt," as commissioned by the U.S. Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts Program in 1939. These murals, generally showing Americans at work or leisure within a local context, represented an attempt by the federal government to democratize art by placing it in public buildings, thereby making it more accessible to all people. The Turnbull mural is the only example of New Deal art in a public building in Fredericktown. The WPA-Moderne style facility, apparently a Class C grade post office according to McAdoo's 1915 Classification System for Federal Buildings,<sup>1</sup> represents an interesting period in the history of government architecture when hundreds of such buildings were constructed in smaller communities throughout the U.S. Despite being of relatively modest design, the Fredericktown Post Office is a good and well-preserved example of public architecture, successfully conveying the dignity and formality of the federal government through such details as an elaborated entrance within an ashlar enframing of pilasters and tall windows, and stone panels with an aviation or air mail design in bas-relief on three sides. The period of significance runs from 1937 when the building was completed through 1939 when the Turnbull mural was installed in the south lobby over the postmaster's door, where it remains today.

### ELABORATION (Part I):

The village of St. Michael, which predated the establishment of Fredericktown by a few years (and which today is located within the Fredericktown city limits) had Madison County's first post office beginning in 1819. Madison County had been organized one year earlier, in 1818, and the following year Fredericktown was designated the county seat. Soon selected over St. Michael as the post office site for its area, Fredericktown has had 30 postmasters to date beginning with Thomas Moseley, Jr. who was appointed to the position on April 14, 1821. Madison County has had 41 different post offices over the years, but only those at Fredericktown and Marquand (southeast of Fredericktown) are operational today.<sup>2</sup> Through all this time, and in

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Treasury Department, *Annual Report on the Finances, 1915*, as cited in *National Register Bulletin 13: How to Apply the National Register Criteria to Post Offices*, p. 24. Class C was the category for post offices of the second class with receipts of at least \$15,000. Class C post offices have brick facing with stone trim, as does the facility at Fredericktown.

<sup>2</sup> "Post Offices in Madison County, Missouri." Available online at: <http://www.missouripostalhistory.org/ma121fn.htm> (Accessed 13 January 2009)

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fact beginning in the 1700s before there was a St. Michael much less a Fredericktown, and well into the 1950s, the area's primary industry was lead mining.

In the Fredericktown area, post office sites have included a drug store, a general store, a restaurant, the circuit clerk's office, a log house, a shoe shop, a hotel and an adobe house.<sup>3</sup> For nearly 17 years beginning in October 1920, the Fredericktown Post Office was located in the Philip Cohen building on East Main Street. That was its last location prior to moving into the nominated building on May 1, 1937.

When a town was selected to receive a New Deal post office (some 1,100 were constructed across the U.S., the vast majority of which were small Class C or Class D buildings like the one at Fredericktown), a field officer was dispatched to identify and evaluate potential sites. Among other things, prevailing patterns of architecture were noted and public opinion was solicited. In 1935, in selecting a location for the Fredericktown Post Office, officials undoubtedly sought a location that was convenient to the downtown business district and which would not be unduly disruptive to the local economy. At the time, established businesses were located on both sides of East and West Main streets, within a block of the courthouse square. The area north of the courthouse, a flood plain, probably was not considered. South Main Street one block south of the courthouse, however, was higher ground and only a couple of residential structures and garages were involved: a frame two-story boarding house and a two-story brick residence. No commercial properties would need to be demolished, and the lots were of sufficient size to accommodate the proposed new post office while allowing for future expansion. So, selecting the site in the 100 block of South Main Street appears to have been a relatively easy decision.

Construction—from a standardized design by federal architect Louis A. Simon and federal engineer Neal A. Melick—began on June 28, 1936 and lasted approximately 10 months. The building contract was awarded to the Lacontour-Parsons Construction Co., of St. Louis, who subcontracted with the Hiram Lloyd Building & Construction Co., also of St. Louis. Forms for the footings were in place by August 28, 1936, and construction of the first floor was under way by October 27, 1936. With minor exceptions, the Fredericktown Post Office was complete and in use by May 1, 1937. The grand opening and dedication ceremony was on October 15 of that year. Among the dignitaries invited were 8<sup>th</sup> District Congressman Clyde Williams (who had been influential in obtaining the facility for Fredericktown), U.S. Postmaster General James A. Farley and Senator Harry S. Truman.<sup>4</sup> Whether all or any of these particular invited guests attended the dedication was not determined, but in any case the post office with its PWA Moderne style architecture was a first for Fredericktown and it almost certainly provided a morale boost during a time when the country was greatly troubled. Virtually all of the other

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<sup>3</sup> Dedication program for Fredericktown Post Office, October 15, 1937.

<sup>4</sup> Dedication program for Fredericktown Post Office, 15 October 1937.

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buildings in town were of more traditional styling and had been locally designed and constructed. Probably the main exception was the Madison County Courthouse, which was designed by nationally-known architect Theodore Carl Link (NR 12/28/00).

Government-designed post offices of the period were relatively simple, symmetrical buildings that apparently came in three basic styles: Colonial Revival with a cupola, Georgian Revival with a cupola, and PWA Moderne (a kind of stripped-down classicism that might also be called Classical Moderne), as the one at Fredericktown. Architectural historians Thomas Carter and Peter Goss prefer the term PWA Moderne for this latter type, a design "influenced by the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles or...inspired by Beaux Arts Classicism and the Neoclassical. Generally associated with governmental buildings, [the style] may also be seen in some commercial buildings. These formal, symmetrical buildings with their Classical roots...contain Art Deco and Art Moderne details that give them an updated appearance." Carter and Goss cite the following characteristics, most of which are represented by the Fredericktown Post Office: symmetrical façades, smooth wall surfaces, flat roofs, plain and narrow cornices, projecting pavilions, vertical molded ornamentation, Art Deco decorative motifs, framed entrances, piers (usually without capitals), and metal sash.<sup>5</sup>

Because of their relative smallness and standardized design, the Fredericktown Post Office and other post offices of the New Deal era were cheaper to build and the Treasury Department's Public Buildings Branch could locate them in communities that were previously ineligible for federal buildings because of their small size. Apart from the mural which was valued in a different way, being the recipient of such a building is thought to have given the citizens of Fredericktown a greater sense of involvement in their country's growth and development.

Why the Fredericktown Post Office has six stone panels with an aviation motif instead of something else was not determined, although someone obviously made this decision since other New Deal post offices in the Moderne style had panels depicting ships and trains as well as aviation. These three motifs (were there others?) were sometimes, and probably often, combined. A New Deal post office at LaPlata in Macon County has panels featuring all of these motifs (NR listed, in the La Plata Square Historic District, 11/20/08). The aviation motif was undoubtedly inspired by the emergence of commercial aviation during the 1930s, along with the Post Office's popular air mail service. Southeast Missouri's other New Deal post office with a Turnbull mural, located at Jackson in Cape Girardeau County, is of a different design and lacks panels with any sort of motif (NR listed, in the Jackson Uptown Commercial Historic District, 2/01/06).

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Carter and Peter Goss, *Utah's Historic Architecture, 1847-1940* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), p. 177.

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Fredericktown United States Post Office  
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### ELABORATION (Part II):

As America struggled during the Great Depression (13 million people were out of work at the start of the decade and at least 9 million were still unemployed by 1934),<sup>6</sup> the federal government searched for ways to provide work for needy people in all walks of life. Under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the U.S. government for the first time became a patron of the arts on a large-scale, subsidizing the work of thousands of artists. Several projects were designed specifically to help needy artists survive the 1930s and early 1940s. The largest such program was the Works Progress/Works Projects Administration's Federal Art Project which lasted from 1935-1942. Most of the art produced under the WPA/FAP program went to cities and states, however, rather than to federal installations such as post offices. The Treasury Department also had a program to help artists on relief (the Treasury Relief Art Program, aka TRAP) and the art produced under it was placed in existing federal buildings. But Treasury's Section of Painting and Sculpture, later called the Section of Fine Arts, was the program that provided decorations expressly for New Deal post offices such as the one at Fredericktown.<sup>7</sup> The Section of Fine Arts (aka The Section) was also different in that its objective was not so much to provide employment (Section artists did not have to prove need) as to make art more accessible to the general population, while being inspirational and promoting closer ties between local communities and the federal government. Although controversial subject matter was not sought for the postal murals, it was not totally avoided. According to Park and Markowitz:

We forget how few people in the 1930s had ever seen an original painting and how extraordinary was the effort to place murals and sculpture in communities of every size. While today this art may seem aesthetically bland and politically innocuous, it was not so at the time. What appears now to be a conventional "realistic" work or a period piece was likely to have been at the time of its creation the cause of heated and prolonged critical controversy. And what seems to be an innocent subject, like farmers or industrial workers, had a different meaning when farmers were dumping their milk to raise prices and workers were fighting police to establish unions....On the one hand, the Section was a national program consciously promulgating national ideals. On the other hand, the national ideal included within it regional pride, local concerns, and grass roots participation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John A. Garraty, *The American Nation: A History of the United States*, Fourth Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 649-661.

<sup>7</sup> *Postal Preservation*, Vol. 1, No. 2, September 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), p. xvii.

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The Postal Service, which owns and controls the New Deal arts collection, estimates that some 1,000 murals and 200 sculptures remain which were commissioned specifically for post offices from 1934 to 1944.<sup>9</sup>

In Missouri, 32 works of art were produced by 27 different artists under the Treasury Department's Fine Arts Program. Most were oil on canvas murals as at Fredericktown, and all but one of them was placed in a post office—most or all of which apparently were of New Deal vintage. The non-post office artwork consisted of a mural for the Wellston Public School in St. Louis. (Fine examples of New Deal artwork in Missouri include the 1936 murals of Thomas Hart Benton, probably Missouri's best known painter, in the Capitol at Jefferson City. Benton's murals were painted on a grand scale—his theme was no less than the History of Missouri—but his work was funded by the Missouri Legislature rather than the Fine Arts Program.) James Baare Turnbull, with a mural in the Jackson U.S. Post Office as well as the one at Fredericktown, was among half a dozen artists who created artwork for two different Missouri post offices.

Section artwork for post offices was required by the Treasury Department (which built and administered post offices at the time, with one percent of new building construction costs reserved for artwork) to represent a theme of local history, industry, commerce, agriculture, recreation or landscape. There were great diversities of style, but the post office art had to be realistic (representational and precise rather than overly abstract) and it absolutely had to depict its region. Many of the commissioned artists were either Regionalists or Social Realists, but numerous other "schools" were represented as well. The artists recognized that public art needed to be more positive than other, more personal forms of art, at least if their work was to be funded, so post office art of the period does not represent details that are truly sordid or depressing. The Section officials "encouraged a positive view of society and a faith in the importance of peaceful social change, expressed in such themes as the dignity of work, the pleasure of leisure, the bounty of rural life, the importance of family cohesiveness, the value of community, and the diversity and drama of urban life. What they accepted was a wide range of artistic abilities and divergent political views on the part of the artists."<sup>10</sup>

The titles of the Missouri post office murals indicate the regional nature but not necessarily the social content of the art which was produced from 1936-1942: "Time Out" by Joseph P. Vorst, Bethany, 1942; "Winter Landscape" by Jessie Hull Mayer, Canton, 1940; "Flora & Fauna of the Region" by Edward Winter, Cassville, 1941; "Harvest" by Joe Jones, Charleston, 1939; "Wheat Framing & Chicken Hatcheries" by H. Louis Freund, Clinton, 1936; "Coon Hunt" by Richard Haines, Clinton, 1942; "Pony Express" and "Stage Coach" by Edward Buk Ulreich, Columbia, 1937; "Husking Corn" by Joe Jones, Dexter, 1941; "Picnic, Lake of the Ozarks" by Frederick

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<sup>9</sup> *Postal Preservation*.

<sup>10</sup> Park and Markowitz, pp. 178-179.

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Shane, Eldon, 1941; "The Lead Belt" by James Baare Turnbull, Fredericktown, 1939; "Industrial Activity of the City" by Jac T. Bowen, Higginsville, 1942; "Loading Cattle" by James Baare Turnbull, Jackson, 1940; "Missouri Livestock" by Emma Lou Davis, La Plata, 1939; "Pastoral" by Ted Gilien, Lee's Summit, 1940; "Family Group" by Carl C. Mose, Maplewood, 1942; "Contemporary Life in Missouri" by Joseph Meert, Marceline, 1938; "Products of Missouri" by James McCreery, Monett, 1939; "Spring Pastoral" by Joseph Meert, Mount Vernon, 1940; "Memories of Marion County" by James Penney, Palmyra, 1942; "The Clemens Family Arrives in Monroe County" by Fred G. Carpenter, Paris, 1940; "Back Home: April 1865" by Tom Lea, Pleasant Hill, 1939; "La Gui-Annee" by Martyl Schweig, Ste. Genevieve, 1942; "History of the Region" (12 panels) by Gustaf Dalstrom, St. Joseph, 1941; "Cycle on History of Region" by Edward Millman, St. Louis, 1942; "Cycle on History of Region" by Mitchell Siporin, St. Louis, 1942; "The Wheelwright" by Dan Rhodes, St. Louis (Clayton branch), 1942 [moved to Des Moines, Iowa]; "The Louisiana Purchase Exposition" by Trew Hocker, St. Louis (University City branch), 1940; "Old Levee and Market at St. Louis" by Lumen Martin Winter, St. Louis (Wellston Public School), 1939; "Saturday Afternoon on Main Street" by Lawrence Adams, Sullivan, 1942; "Aspects of Rural Missouri" by James Penney, Union, 1941; "Corn Harvest" by Joseph P. Vorst, Vandalia, 1939; and "Agriculture & Varied Industries" by H. Louis Freund, Windsor, 1938.<sup>11</sup> The average allotment for a mural to fill the space above a postmaster's door was \$650-\$750.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1920s and later when they began working in the U.S., Diego Rivera and other Mexican pro-Revolution artists are thought to have influenced the American Social Realists in terms of their mural style—although limited wall space (about 5 feet by 12 feet, on average) in the post offices kept the Section artists from developing any truly grand themes.<sup>13</sup> Turnbull was a Social Realist, and his "Lead Belt" mural can be seen today as social as well as artistic in its intentions. Employing a style not that far removed from Missouri master muralist Thomas Hart Benton's, Turnbull produced a mural which movingly depicts the conflict between the mining industry and tranquil nature—a pastoral scene with a plowman and his team of horses in the right foreground and a stark, eroded landscape with withered trees and billowing smoke heading straight for the Fredericktown skyline in the left rear; a curving road is a powerful visual element, attesting to the artist's strong sense of design.

In 1942, an anonymous writer for the New York *Herald Tribune* described Turnbull as having "a blunt, direct style of painting, combined with occasionally good color and a general air of

<sup>11</sup> *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal*, by Park, Marlene & Markowitz, Gerald E., Available online at: <http://www.wpamurals.com/missouri.htm> (Access date: 1 May 2009).

<sup>12</sup> "WPA Murals." Available online at [www.wpamurals.com/48 states.htm](http://www.wpamurals.com/48%20states.htm). (Access date 27 February 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Park and Markowitz, p. 161.

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Madison County, Missouri

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warm understanding for share croppers, cotton pickers and alert, determined factory workers that makes his contribution to art altogether agreeable.”<sup>14</sup>

Competitions were held in order to select the Section artists, but initially Missouri was not included in them because for various reasons in the mid-1930s it lacked the prerequisite WPA art program. As late as 1935, Missouri had a quota of only seven artists who were authorized to provide creative work for the WPA. Turnbull was not one of them, but in 1936 after becoming director of the Missouri Artists Congress he went to Washington and urged the Treasury Department to authorize the project. When the WPA’s Federal Art Project was finally instituted in Missouri, Turnbull was appointed its director as well—but he resigned four months later, reportedly because the administrative duties left him too little time for painting.

Interested artists began the process of getting a commission by submitting a prospectus to one of the open, regional competitions (there were also national competitions). Restrictions were attached to entries. For example, artists were required to spend time in the region served by the post office, speak with local residents, and gather enough folklore and local history to determine how best to depict the area in a mural; artists who already lived in the region had a distinct advantage. If Section officials liked the prospectus, artists were asked to submit sketches anonymously for review; selected work was critiqued by program administrators during its creation. For an approved mural, the artists typically were paid \$20 per square foot in three installments.<sup>15</sup>

Upon stepping down as director of Missouri’s WPA art project, Turnbull obtained an assignment for the Fredericktown mural.<sup>16</sup> Fredericktown Postmaster Phil Cohen announced Turnbull’s selection in April 1939. Cohen said he would confer with the artist to determine the type of mural to be drawn, and indicated that something historic probably would be appropriate. He welcomed suggestions from patrons of the local facility.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately Turnbull, a native of Maplewood, Missouri, a St. Louis suburb where he was born on October 27, 1909, was awarded two commissions for post office murals in Southeast Missouri, the other being “Loading Cattle” for the Jackson post office in 1940.

As required, Turnbull met with townspeople to obtain their ideas and suggestions, but he went much farther than that. He also visited miners on the job, spent hours in a mineshaft and rode the

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<sup>14</sup>*New York Herald Tribune*, May 24, 1942.

<sup>15</sup> Interview of Martyl Lansdorf, muralist whose work was placed in the Ste. Genevieve U.S. Post Office in 1942, cited in Ellen M. Ryan, “Redefining America: Artists, Society and the Post Office Murals and Sculpture of Southeast Missouri 1939-1942” (Master’s thesis, Southeast Missouri State University, 2006), pp. 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> *Record Press*, Ulster Co., New York, 27 June, 1963, and St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, 1 August 1937.

<sup>17</sup> *Madison County Press*, 19 April 1939, p. 1.

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“bucket” to gain insight into their work.<sup>18</sup> Turnbull’s Fredericktown experience was an excellent example of an artist interacting with society in order to create more meaningful work. After completing his research into the history of Fredericktown, he returned to his Maplewood studio to begin work on the mural. Turnbull’s vibrant-colored artwork is estimated to have cost the government about \$600, which apparently was slightly less than average.<sup>19</sup> A year later in 1940, Turnbull was one of the winners in a national competition for his dramatic oil on canvas mural “Loading Cattle,” still displayed in Jackson, the seat of Cape Girardeau County. Jackson had been a major shipping point for cattle in Missouri, and the residents were proud to get such a mural—especially since they nearly had to settle for a different artist’s mural of cattle merely grazing.<sup>20</sup> Although “Loading Cattle” remains in Jackson, it has been moved to a 1984 post office about three blocks from the New Deal building, where it hangs directly above the service bays in the front lobby. The Jackson mural’s original home is no longer a post office and instead houses the local chamber of commerce.

Turnbull's formal art schooling included the St. Louis School of Fine Arts and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. During World War II, as an Abbot war artist-correspondent, he was one of four artists (one of the others was Thomas Hart Benton) assigned to paint scenes of the U.S. amphibious forces in the Philippines (the Lingayen Gulf Invasion of 1945). Their work, titled “Amphibian Warfare,” is now in the Defense Department Archives in the Pentagon. Other Turnbull artwork is represented in permanent collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Springfield Museum; the University of Arizona; the Phillips Memorial Gallery; the Louisiana Marine Hospital; the Peabody College Gallery and the Walker Gallery. In the 1950s, Turnbull and his wife, Peter, moved to Woodstock, New York, where he sculpted and created mobiles as well as painted.<sup>21</sup> Apparently Turnbull’s work is still highly regarded. He was an early American realist, according to Karen Gysin of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. In 2006, a Depression-era work by Turnbull titled “Breastfeeding” was among a display of what Gysin described as “impassioned and powerful images deploring war, poverty, and the devastation wrought by inhumane political regimes...Highlights include the gouache ‘Breastfeeding’ (1939), a stark description of rural American poverty by WPA artist James Baare Turnbull, and Pablo Picasso's magnificent 1937 etching ‘Weeping Woman,’ one of the many

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<sup>18</sup> “A Little Journey to the Studio of James Turnbull, Artist, Who Painted Local Post Office Mural,” *Madison County Press*, 29 November 1939, pp. 1, 4.

<sup>19</sup> “New Mural in Post Office Artist’s Conception of Lead Belt,” *Democrat News*, 23 November 1939, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ellen M. Ryan, in “Redefining America: Artists, Society and the Post Office Murals and Sculpture of Southeast Missouri 1939-1942” (Master’s thesis, Southeast Missouri State University, 2006), pp. 15-17, relates how the Section initially had selected for Jackson a mural by Webster Groves artist Fred Conway, with Turnbull’s mural slated for a Purcell, Oklahoma, post office. When residents of Jackson petitioned the Section to get Turnbull’s mural instead, the Section granted their request.

<sup>21</sup> “New Deal/W.P.A. Artist Biographies.” Available online at <http://www.wpamurals.com/wpabios.html> (Accessed 12 May 2009).

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images he made in response to the Spanish Civil War."<sup>22</sup> Turnbull's work was in excellent company apart from the Picasso. Other artists represented in the exhibit included Paul Klee, Willem de Kooning, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Turnbull died in Jacksonville, Florida, in December 1976. He was 67 years old.

In 1939, in his research of Madison County, Turnbull would have taken note of various things which appeared in his mural. Early impressions would have included the predominant red clay soil and the fact that most of the rural roads were unpaved. Turnbull would have had access to maps showing an incredible number of underground shafts north of Fredericktown from which vast amounts of lead ore had been removed since the early 1700s. By the early 1900s, the main deposits of lead, silver and other ores had dwindled and eventually the mines were shut down, as they were during most of the 1930s, leaving an economic vacuum that remains today. Presumably some of the mining superstructure was intact for Turnbull's eyes, since it appears in the mural although none remains today. The artist would have noted that farming, always important to Southeast Missouri, still provided sustenance at a time when jobs and food were scarce. Turnbull would have seen that while mechanized machinery was available, horse and mule-drawn plows, disks, and cultivators were all that the farmers of Madison County could afford and much of what they accomplished was through "sweat equity." All of these elements, including a church steeple reflecting the fact that since the earliest settlers Catholicism has been an integral part of Madison County, are interwoven in Turnbull's dramatic interpretation of "The Lead Belt." While little is left of the mining community today, a legacy of contamination remains: huge piles of tailings in the middle distance, much like the Turnbull mural depicts.

Today people can still visit the Fredericktown Post Office and many others to view examples of the art styles of the 1930s and early 1940s. The murals also promoted the values of the New Deal, thanks to the oversight of the Treasury Department's Fine Arts Program.

In addition to serving as the local post office, the Fredericktown facility was designated a Civil Defense Shelter from 1952-1962. Rich Miller, a lifelong resident, remembers seeing barrels of drinking water and dehydrated emergency meals stored in the basement of the building, along with cots and blankets. Unlike the Turnbull mural, these supplies have been removed as has a Civil Defense sign identifying the structure as a nuclear shelter.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Karen Gysin, "Body Politics: Figurative Prints and Drawings from Schiele to de Kooning," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN Available online at <http://press.walkerart.org/release.wac?id=3347> (Access date 10 June 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Rich Miller by Carole Magnus, 27 February 2009.

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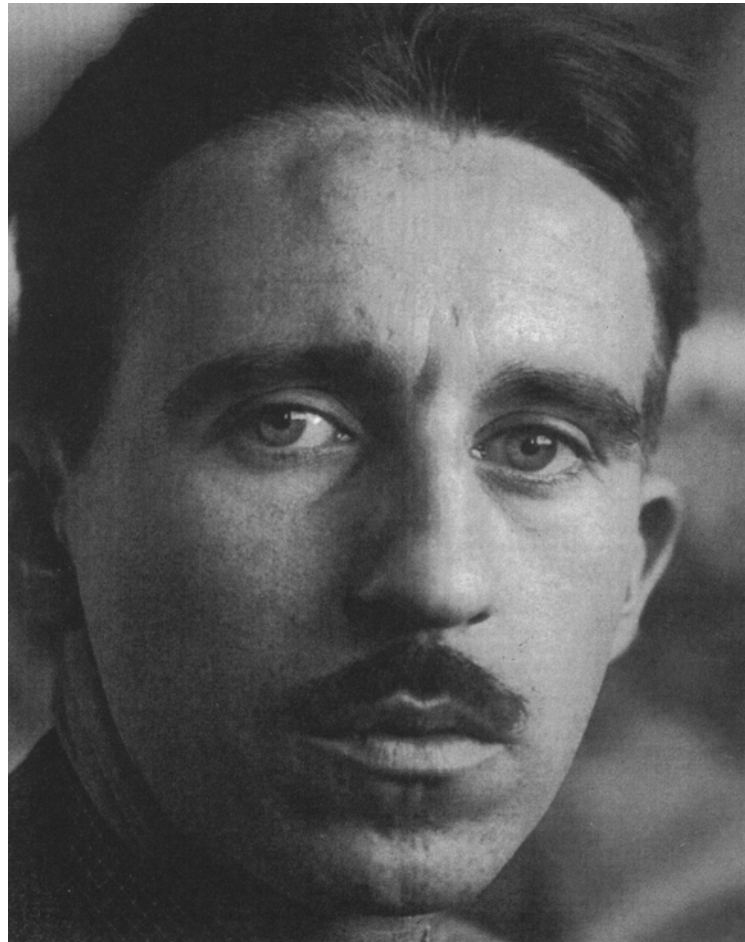
Fredericktown United States Post Office  
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Figure 8

James Baare Turnbull, 1906–1976

Source: Woodstock Artists Association & Museum



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### Verbal Boundary Description

The Fredericktown U.S. Post Office occupies parts of Lots 11 and 12 in the Southeast Square of Fredericktown, Madison County, Missouri. Beginning at the property line at the northeast corner of South Main and East College streets (Point A), proceed in a northerly direction for 105 feet to the north property line, an alley (Point B); then continue in an easterly direction for 199.55 feet to the east property line (Point C); then continue in a southerly direction for 40 feet (Point D); then continue in a westerly direction for 27 feet (Point E); then continue in a southerly direction for 65 feet (Point F); then continue in a westerly direction for 172.55 feet along the East College Street property line to the point of beginning. Also see Site Plan on page 25.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary consists of that parcel of land which has been historically associated with the 1937 Fredericktown Post Office.

### 11. Form Prepared By

- |                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Carole Magnus<br>The Foundation for Historic Preservation<br>1312 Madison 401<br>Fredericktown, Missouri 63645-6951<br>573-576-8528<br>March 6, 2009<br>Original preparer | 2. Roger Maserang<br>Historian/State Historic Preservation Office<br>P.O. Box 176<br>Jefferson City, Missouri 65102<br>573-522-4641<br>July 9, 2009<br>Additional research, writing and editing |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

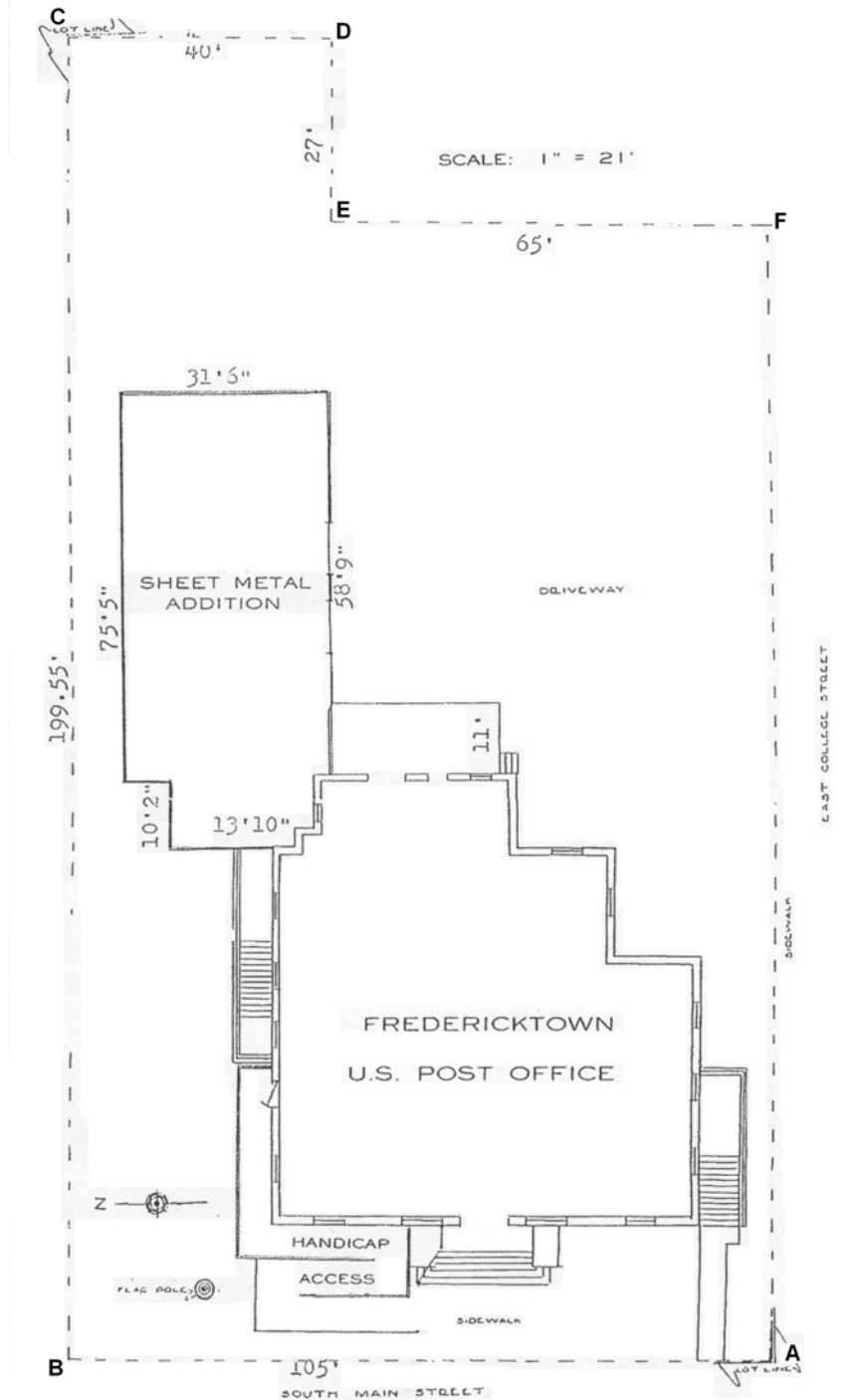
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Figure 9: Site Plan



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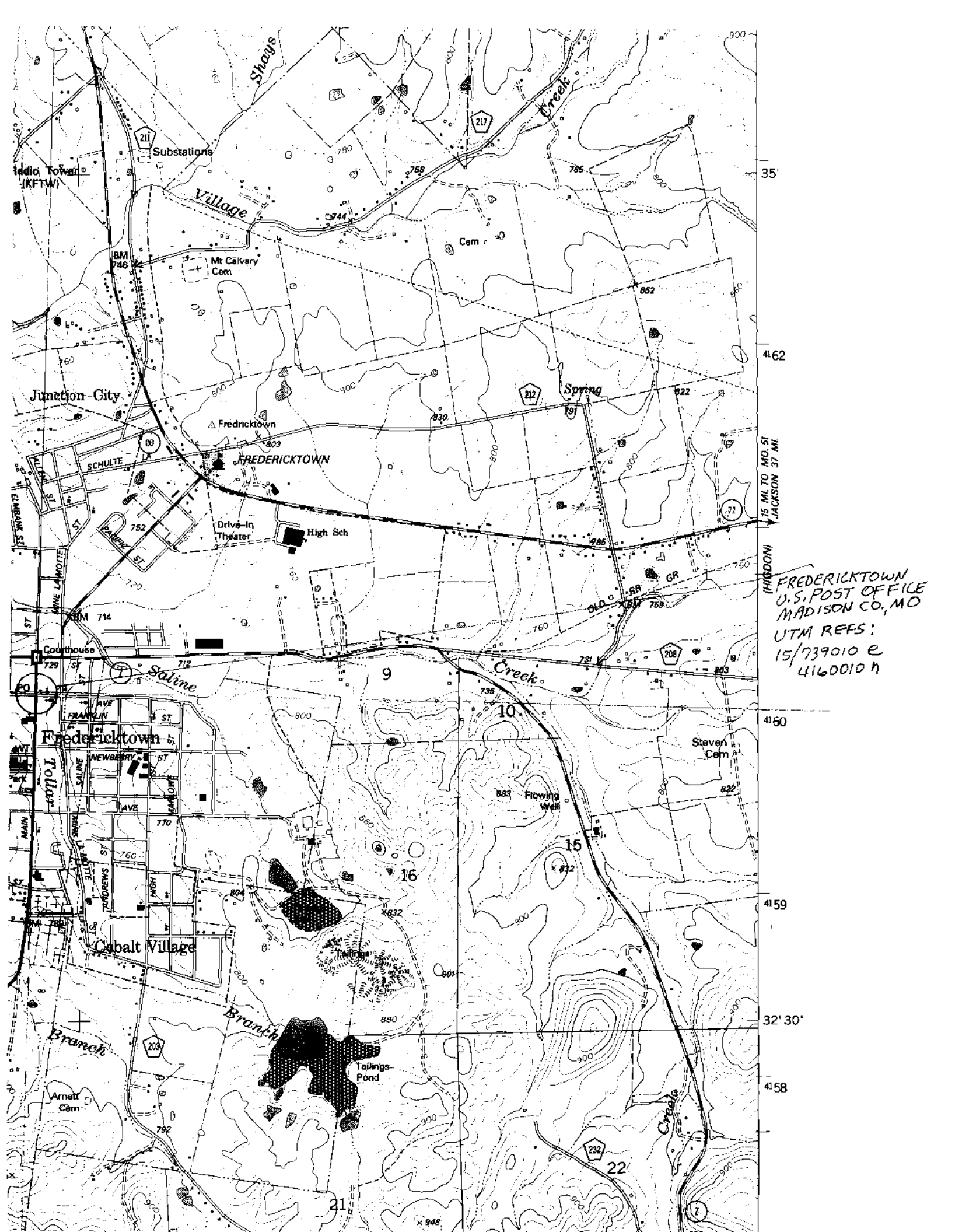
### Photographs

The following information is the same for all photographs:

Fredericktown U. S. Post Office  
155 South Main Street  
Madison County  
Fredericktown, Missouri 63645  
Photographer: Carole Magnus  
May 2009

List of photographs:

1. Main (west) façade looking east.
2. Façade detail looking east.
3. South elevation looking north.
4. North elevation looking south.
5. Detail of bas relief aviation header.
6. Looking east along north elevation toward metal addition.
7. Looking north from East College Street.
8. Interior of metal clad building, facing east.
9. South and east sides of vestibule.
10. James Baare Turnbull mural ("The Lead Belt") above postmaster's office, facing south.
11. Original post office boxes, facing east.



FREDERICKTOWN  
U.S. POST OFFICE  
MADISON CO, MO  
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UNITED STATES POST OFFICE



FREDERICKTOWN  
MISSOURI 63645







