

NR LISTED

AUG 14 1998

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

AHPP

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1. Name of Property

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Historic Name: Paris Post Office

Other Name/Site Number: LO0017

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2. Location

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Street & Number: 206 N. Elm St.

Not for Publication: NA

City/Town: Paris

Vicinity: NA

State: AR

County: Logan

Code: 083

Zip Code: 72855

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: Public-Federal

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Paris Post Office
Name of Property

Logan County, Arkansas
County and State

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6. Function or Use
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Historic: GOVERNMENT Sub: Post Office

Current : GOVERNMENT Sub: Post Office

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7. Description
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Architectural Classification:

Colonial Revival

Materials: foundation Concrete roof Metal
walls Brick other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance:

SUMMARY

The Paris Post Office is a one story, brick masonry structure designed in the Colonial Revival style of architecture and featuring a full basement. The building is built with an essentially square plan with a small projecting rear loading dock. The entire building is surrounded with a projecting cornice with dentil course and a water table just above ground level. The foundation is of brick atop poured concrete. The eastern portion of the structure is topped by a gable roof; at its center is a cupola fenestrated on all four sides with 12-pane stationary windows. The cupola is topped by a bell cast pyramid roof with a weather vane at its apex. The building's rear section features a flat roof surrounded by a low parapet. The loading dock also features a flat roof and a non-historic flat shed roof extends past the

dock.

ELABORATION

The Paris Post Office is a one story, brick masonry structure designed in the Colonial Revival style of architecture and featuring a full basement. The building is built with an essentially square plan with a small projecting rear loading dock. The entire building is surrounded with a projecting cornice with dentil course and a water table just above ground level. The foundation is of brick atop poured concrete. The eastern portion of the structure is topped by a gable roof; at its center is a cupola fenestrated on all four sides with 12-pane stationary windows. The cupola is topped by a bell cast pyramid roof with a weather vane at its apex. The building's rear section features a flat roof surrounded by a low parapet. The loading dock also features a flat roof and a non-historic flat shed roof extends past the dock.

The eastern, or front, facade features a central, aluminum frame door flanked by wooden half columns. The columns support a lintel accented with a dentil course; this is topped by a recessed arched area with a bronze eagle inset. A set of concrete stairs leads to the front door and a modern concrete handicap-access ramp extends to the south of the stairs. The doors are flanked on both sides by double-hung, 12-over-12 windows. The cornice extends across the front of the building below the gutters; it is emblazoned with the words UNITED STATES POST OFFICE. Below that, to the south of the door, is affixed the word PARIS; to the north are affixed ARKANSAS 72855. A cornerstone in the lower northern corner of this facade is inscribed: HENRY MORGENTHAU JR., SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY/JAMES A. FARLEY, POSTMASTER GENERAL/LOUIS A. SIMON, SUPERVISING ARCHITECT/NEAL A. MELICK, SUPERVISING ENGINEER/1938.

The easternmost part of the north facade is fenestrated by one 12-over-12 double-hung window, followed by two six-over-six half windows within recessed areas large enough to hold full sized windows. They are followed as you go west by two more 12-over-12 double-hung windows. The gable end of the easternmost roof segment is fenestrated by a half oculus window. Below the eastern-most 12-over-12 window and the first six-over-six half window are concrete stairs leading to the basement. There is a single window and a door at the bottom of the stairs; the stair area is surrounded by a low metal railing.

The western facade, going south from the northernmost corner, features a pair

of 12-over-12, double-hung windows. A small projecting "T," with one eight-over-eight window on its northern facade and two such windows on its southern facade, sits next to those windows. A concrete loading dock, covered by a projecting shed roof, extends from the "T." Concrete steps head down from the dock below the single eight-over-eight window. A two-story brick chimney nestles into the T adjacent to the twin eight-over-eight windows; another 12-over-12 window lies south of it.

The southern facade is fenestrated by five 12-over-12 double-hung windows. At the westernmost end a set of concrete steps leads to a window and door at the basement level. The stairwell is topped by a low metal fence. Two additional basement windows are set in a well at the eastern end of the southern facade. The gable end, filled with horizontal wooden siding, is fenestrated with a single half oculus window.

In 1964, the building's lights, heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems were updated. The screen line was modernized in 1968.

Noteworthy interior details include the original wooden vestibule, marble wainscoting, original post office boxes, and original counters, doors, and memo cabinets. The most prominent interior feature is a mural, titled "Rural Arkansas" by Joseph P. Vorst.

The Paris Post Office is in very good condition and retains the majority of its historic fabric.

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: A

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): NA

Paris Post Office
Name of Property

Logan County, Arkansas
County and State

Areas of Significance: Politics/Government

Period(s) of Significance: 1938-40

Significant Dates: 1938-40

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect
J.J. Fritsch Construction Co., Dallas,
Texas, builder

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

SUMMARY

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

ELABORATION

In August, 1937, Congress passed an appropriation bill providing a \$23 million lump sum for construction of public buildings. Included in the allocation was \$75,000 for a new post office for Paris, the seat of the eastern district of mountainous Logan County. A month later, Postmaster General James A. Farley and Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau officially allocated the money for site acquisition and construction. Specifications called for a corner lot measuring 120 feet wide and 170 feet deep or an

interior lot with a 145-foot frontage and 170-foot depth. Twelve bids on nine different sites were received by the October 4, 1937, deadline.

In mid-November, First National Bank of Paris received notice that its proposed sale of all of Block 11 of the Lyvissa Waddill addition, across from the Methodist-Episcopal Church, South (NR 6-20-95), was accepted as the site of the new post office. John H. Harris of Fort Smith, the assistant U.S. district attorney, delivered a \$6,250 check to seal the deal in April 1938.

In August 1938, the post office department notified the J.J. Fritsch Construction Co. Of Dallas, Texas, that their bid of \$47,000 for construction of the Paris Post Office was accepted, that they were to begin construction immediately, and that the building was to be completed within 240 days. Work began within two weeks under the direction of Joseph E. Millett of Laplace, La., a construction engineer for the Treasury Department.

The building was completed during the week of April 20, 1939, with postal employees occupying the top floor and the county extension service office occupying the basement area. The *Paris Express* described the new building for its readers: "The Entrance vestibule and lobby have a terrazzo floor with marble wainscot. The postmaster's private office has a hardwood floor and has a natural oak finish. Above the vault is the spy room for the postal inspector [which] can only be entered through the postmaster's office [and] has a view of every part of the work room."

The new Paris Post Office was selected as the location for a mural through the Treasury Department's Section on Fine Arts through that agency's "48 States Competition." The winning selection, by German-born Joseph P. Vorst, of St. Louis, Mo., was to be the most controversial in the Section's activities in Arkansas.

Vorst's winning sketch is described by Karal Ann Marling thus: "The sketch showed a mean, bleak home place, as familiar in its way as a typical Iowa small town. Beneath a glowering sky, a ragged Negro, rooted to the soil by his ponderous boots, listlessly cultivates a scrap of scrubland with a manual tiller. A couple of spavined mules can barely muster enough energy to watch. His cabin, listing toward the dirt road that marks the central axis, is a ramshackle hovel, roofed in peeling tarpaper. As if to comment on domestic blight, the birdhouse in the yard lolls at a crazy angle on its pole, sounding a note of picturesque decay heightened by the piquant gaiety of a clump of sunflowers blooming nearby. The branches of a dying tree claw at the heavens like desperate fingers."

Reaction to the selection was fast and negative, exemplified by an October 28, 1939, letter from *Paris Express* editor John Guion to Congressman Fadjo Cravens: "Arkansas has been the butt of jokes for many years, I do not believe in perpetuating this attitude by placing a painting of this type upon the walls of our most prized building, the post office. Every citizen contacted has expressed an opinion conforming to my own."

Cravens, noting in an October 31 letter to Fine Arts Section Director Ed Rowan that "other similar protests have been received from citizens of Paris," asked "if you would advise me if it is not possible to have the present award set aside and a new selection made."

Rowan diplomatically broached the subject with Vorst in a November 6 letter in which the bureaucrat wrote that he "felt at liberty to state that the selection was based primarily on artistic achievement and that therefore you [Vorst] would be willing to reconsider subject matter appropriate to the locale." Vorst responded five days later that he "frankly ... was a bit surprised myself" by the reaction to his drawing. "Although, truthfully, whether the Arkansas Parisiens wish to admit it or not, I made the sketch from life during my recent visit to Paris and it is authentic." Vorst added that he was in contact with the Paris postmaster and wrote that "steps are being taken to please the Paris citizens, but not, I may added, at the sacrifice of genuine Art. Naturally, if restrictions are too great, or unreasonable demands too insistent I will not be able to do the work. After all, I came to this country partly to attain artistic freedom."

Rowan supported Vorst's stand for artistic integrity in a November 16 letter in which he pledged that "this office, under no circumstances, wishes an artist to undertake work which is not consistent with his aesthetic convictions."

Vorst traveled to Paris and met with a "committee of leading citizens, including the Postmaster, Editor, and Banker" and "they were all very happy over the gathering and we parted very good friends." Vorst apparently held no hard feelings over the controversy. In the December 15, 1939, letter in which he described his meeting with the Paris elders, the artist exulted: "Experiences like these make me love this country of ours more and more. Where else in the World could one find the earnestness, the serious interest shown by one and all in every move of the government, local, state, and Federal, even in the choice of a subject for the village Post Office. Everyone has a voice and uses it. May we never lose our Democracy!"

Paris Post Office

Name of Property

Logan County, Arkansas

County and State

A second letter 13 days later described Vorst's new sketch for the Paris Post Office: "At the left is an up-to-the-minute stock farm, in the center a cotton gin, at the right the process of weighing cotton, at right background picking cotton, at central left background a mine." This scene, Karal Ann Marling notes, is the antithesis of the original drawing: "The mural is packed with houses, barns, stables, and gins, all of them spanking new, freshly painted, and soundly roofed. ... Of the fourteen figures shown in the painting, thirteen are intensely busy, including the Negro weight recorders who are working despite the fact that their designated angle of space adjacent to the postmaster's door jamb forces them to lie down on the job. The potbellied foreman is the one exception. And he, like the proud Paris committee beaming with pleasure at their new, up-to-the-minute post-office mural, is assessing the panorama of accomplishment spread before him."

The new design passed muster in Washington; a contract to pay Vorst \$740 for creation and installment of the Paris mural was prepared on January 2, 1940. Vorst's preliminary design was accepted on February 5, a full-sized "cartoon" was approved on February 20 and by March 5 installation was cleared with the local postmaster. Vorst submitted photographs of his completed work for Section approval on March 29; Rowan sent approval, with a few considerations for minor improvements, on April 3, 1940.

Vorst notified Rowan on May 17, 1940, that the mural was successfully installed, and Rowan authorized final payment to the artist on July 3. Vorst's painting, "Rural Arkansas," "has gloriously met with the approval of all the citizens of this city," Paris Postmaster W.F. Elsen informed Rowan in a June 27 letter.

The Paris Post Office remains a remarkably intact expression of Depression-era Colonial Revival design in a government building. It's historic value is only enhanced by Joseph P. Vorst's vibrant painting "Rural Arkansas," a tribute as much to the spirit of compromise that led to its successful completion and installation as to the 1930s boosterism that crafted its subject matter.

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

Paris Post Office
Name of Property

Logan County, Arkansas
County and State

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Paris Express, August 19, 1937; September 16, 1937; October 7, 1937; November 18, 1937; April 14, 1938; September 1, 1938; September 15, 1938; April 20, 1939; April 27, 1939.

Arkansas Gazette, September 10, 1937.

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

Marling, Karal Ann, *Wall to Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

Park, Marlene, and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.

Previous documentation on file (N.S.):

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

Primary Location of Additional Data:

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

Paris Post Office
Name of Property

Logan County, Arkansas
County and State

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A 15 433660 3905700 B _____
C _____ D _____

Verbal Boundary Description:

Beginning at a point formed by the intersection of the western edge of North Elm Street with a perpendicular line running parallel with the buildings southern elevation and located approximately 50 feet to the south thereof, proceed westerly along said line for approximately 200 feet; thence proceed northerly along a perpendicular line for approximately 200 feet; thence proceed easterly along a perpendicular line for approximately 200 feet to its intersection with the western edge of North Elm Street; thence proceed southernly along said edge to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification:

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

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11. Form Prepared By
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Name/Title: Mark Christ/Communications and Development Director

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: October 14, 1997

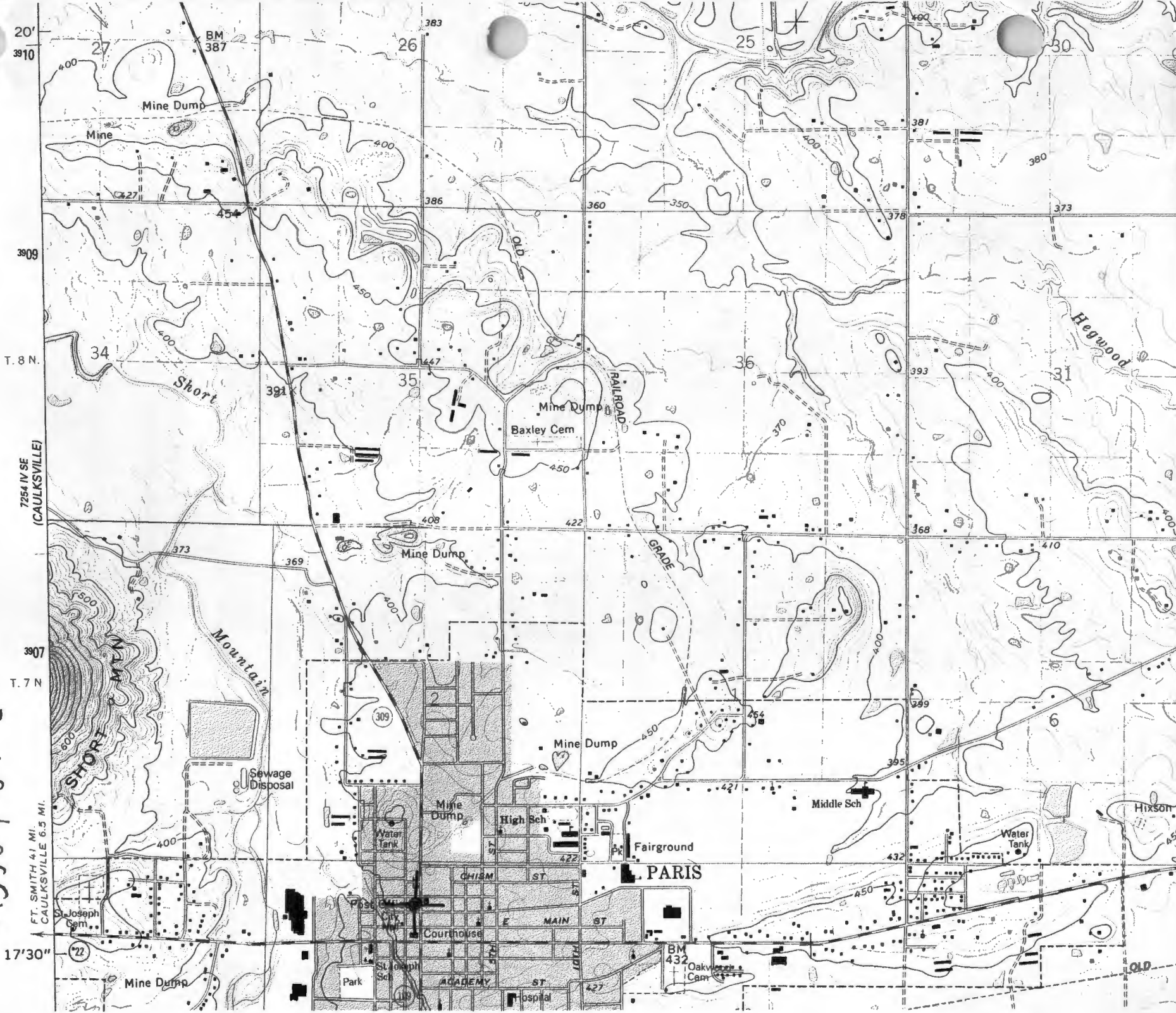
Street & Number: 1500 Tower Bldg., 323 Center St. Telephone: (501) 324-9880

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





UNITED STATES POST OFFICE
ALBANY
ALASKA
1958



Paris Post Office
 Paris, Logan County, Ark
 15/433660/3905700

7254 IV SE
(CAULKSVILLE)

FT. SMITH 41 MI.
 CAULKSVILLE 6.5 MI.

T. 8 N.

T. 7 N.

17°30"