



# KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION DEPARTMENT

Center for Historical Research

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### Certification of State Register Listing

The Register of Historic Kansas Places includes all Kansas properties nominated to the National Register as well as lower threshold properties which are listed on the state register only.

Property Name: Grant County Museum Adobe

Address: <sup>300</sup> ~~30~~ East Oklahoma, Ulysses, Kansas 67880

County: Grant County

Legal: Lots 2-11, 13-23, Block 7; Original Town - Ulysses

Owner: Ginger Anthony, Grant County Historical Society

Address: P.O. Box 906, Ulysses, Kansas 67880

National Register eligible \_\_\_\_\_

State Register eligible   X  

This property was approved by the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review for the Register of Historic Kansas Places on October 19, 1991.

I hereby certify that this property is listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places.

Ramon Powers  
State Historic Preservation Officer

Date Oct. 24, 1991

The Grant County Museum Adobe (c. 1937- 1938) is being nominated to the Register of Historic Kansas Places for its historical association with the Works Progress Administration's (WPA) projects in Grant County, Kansas. The Grant County Museum Adobe was constructed with WPA funding as a machine shop for Grant County. The machine shop project represents one of six WPA projects that were funded in Grant County between 1935 and 1938.

The Grant County Museum Adobe is located at 30 East Oklahoma in Ulysses, Grant County, Kansas (pop. 4,653). The one story, building has a southern facade orientation and measures 50 feet from east to west and 154 feet from north to south. The building is composed of two adobe rectangles with a parapetted roof line; a short, one bay, unit projects from the southern facade, fronting the taller, five bay unit. A low-pitch, gable roofed metal building projects from the adobe's rear.

The adobe block building stands on a concrete foundation and is covered with a tarpapered and tarred roof. The adobe walls were composed of adobe blocks laid with mud mortar. When completed, the exterior adobe walls were covered with cement stucco and whitewashed. If vigas were used to support the roof they are no longer visible.

Multi-paned, steel awning windows fenestrate the building on the south facade and west elevation, the west windows have been painted over. Two garage doors pierce the northern bays of the building's eastern elevation. Buttresses support the building on the east and west elevations, defining each bay and garage door opening.

When completed, the building had a cement floor and its interior walls were whitewashed, but not stuccoed. Adobe fireplaces with brick hearths stand in the two front rooms. The building served the county as a machine shop until the mid-1970s. In 1978 the Grant County Historical Society moved into the adobe building, remodeling its interior for a museum. Sheet rock was added to cover the adobe walls and form interior partitions. In the mid-1980s a metal building to the rear of the adobe, increasing the overall dimensions of the structure by one-half.

WPA was established in 1935 to organize "light" public works projects for the able-bodied, unemployed who were on the public relief roles. The WPA never employed more than 3.2 million people in any month and its average monthly earnings were far below prevailing or social security wages. The WPA provided work for over 5 million Americans between July, 1935 and December, 1938, after which date the agency was reorganized and renamed the Works Projects Administration.

Work on the Grant County machine shop began in September, 1937. Under the supervision of Lee King, 22 laborers made adobe blocks for the building. Seven thousand adobe blocks were completed by November, 1937, before the weather became too cold for the adobe to cure. In March, 1938, 26 laborers resumed making the adobe

blocks for the building. Fred Grislier served as the project foreman.

The adobe blocks consisted of mud, straw, horse manure, and water. This combination was mixed together and formed in wooden molds. After the mixture had solidified, the blocks were turned-out of the molds to sun dry for several days on a level surface covered with straw. After several days of drying, the blocks were stood on-end and air-cured for a month or longer. The adobe blocks measured 17 inches deep, 4 inches high, and 10 inches wide.

Lee King was hired by Grant County as the instructor and inspector in making the adobe blocks for the WPA project. King built several other adobe structures in Ulysses, including the Rosel House (c. 1935) and the Forshee House (c. 1936). King had moved to Ulysses from Garden City, Kansas to build the Rosel House, and permanently settled in the community, establishing a contracting and plumbing business. King and many of the laborers hired for the WPA project were of Mexican descent and presumably came to southwest Kansas to construct the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad in the 1910s and 1920s.

Grant County's semi-arid climate and the inexpensive nature of the materials made adobe construction an appropriate choice for the WPA project. King had proven adobe's durability and versatility in his earlier Ulysses buildings. Additionally, making the adobe blocks and building the structure was a labor intensive exercise that provided employment and taught a skill to the laborers that worked under King.

Before the adobe walls were erected, the WPA laborers poured a concrete foundation for the building. The adobe walls were composed of adobe blocks laid with cement mortar. When completed, the exterior adobe walls were covered with cement stucco and whitewashed. The interior walls were whitewashed, but not stuccoed.

In the United States, cement stucco came into use as an adobe surface coating in the early 20th century. The stucco consisted of cement, sand, and water and was applied over a wire mesh that covered the building. The stucco was whitewashed with a mixture of ground gypsum rock, water, and clay. The whitewash acted as a sealer.

By April, 1938 the adobe blocks had been laid, the roof was being sheeted with tarpaper, and the floor was being graded. The cement for the floor was poured subsequently. The machine shop was completed in August, 1938 and was equipped with gas, electricity, and water.

The building was divided into two work offices for the county engineer and staff, a storage room, and a work shop. The offices were located in the short, one bay, unit projects from the southern facade. Grant County's equipment was stored at the building, the

equipment included four road graders, three tractors, two patrols, one elevating grader, and one truck.

The Grant County machine shop was constructed at a total cost of \$12,700. The WPA furnished \$8,000 for local labor and supervision and furnished \$1,460 worth of materials. Grant County furnished \$2,458 worth of materials, spent \$154 for miscellaneous expenses, and paid \$550 to local workmen for extra labor.

By sponsoring this project, the Grant County Commissioners were able to furnish labor for local men for a period of nearly one year. Additionally, Grant County engineer Fred Fowler indicated that the space had been much needed, prior to the construction of the machine shop, the county rented space to store the equipment or left it outside.