

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name SNOW CAMP MUTUAL TELEPHONE EXCHANGE BUILDING  
other names/site number Snow Camp Telephone Exchange

### 2. Location

street & number West side SR 1004, 0.2 mile South of SR 1005  not for publication  
city, town Snow Camp  vicinity  
state North Carolina code NC county Alamance code 001 zip code 27349

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	1	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		1	0 Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.  See continuation sheet.

*William S. Fair*  
Signature of certifying official Date 5-4-89

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- 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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE organizational

DOMESTIC single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC single dwelling

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: One-over-one House

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/fieldstone

walls Wood/weatherboard

roof Metal/steel

other Brick (chimneys)

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The Snow Camp Mutual Telephone Company Building is a small, vernacular, two-story frame structure occupying a lot of just over two acres at Snow Camp, a rural community of scattered houses of various periods centered on the intersection of secondary roads 1005 and 1004 in southern Alamance County. The weatherboarded structure is square in plan, resting on a stone foundation and sheltered by a pyramidal roof of galvanized metal. The two-story block, which was built by 1915, is flanked on the north and west sides by one-story gabled wings with German siding, added when the building was converted into a dwelling house in 1927. In 1986 a one-story kitchen addition connected the two wings on the back side.

A one-story shed porch fronts the east side of the main two-story block, supported by square posts connected by a simple wood balustrade. The porch floor is a concrete slab. The porch configuration and roof may be original, though the lower elements are probably mid-20th century repairs. An engaged porch sheltering the south side of the west wing was enclosed in 1986.

Windows are centered on most elevations of the main block and wings, most having two-over-two sash in plain frames. The windows on the east and north sides of the north wing appear to have been recycled from the second floor north and west sides of the main block when the wings were added in 1927. A hanging brick flue, which served the second floor woodstove, pierces the peak of the pyramidal roof. A second brick flue rises between the main block and the north wing. A common bond, single stepped shoulder brick chimney stands at the west gable end of the west wing, which was the kitchen wing when built in 1927.

The interior plan of the main block is one room over one room; the telephone operator worked at the switchboard on the second floor and equipment was stored on the first. An enclosed stair rises in one flight along the south wall. The two 1927 wings are also each one room. Walls throughout are finished with plain horizontal boards. Ceilings are similar, though the second floor ceiling is finished with narrow boards. A simple post-and-lintel mantel fronts the

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fireplace in the west wing; four-light square windows flank the fireplace. Square batten doors were installed (replacing the windows) on the north and west walls of the second floor during the 1927 improvements to give access to the attics of the two wings.

The 1986 addition containing the new kitchen and bath was designed to complement the wings. It is also covered in German siding and has six-over-six sash windows.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
Communications

Period of Significance  
ca. 1915-1927

Significant Dates  
ca. 1915

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
Unknown

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

Summary: The Snow Camp Mutual Telephone Company Exchange Building is significant as a rare, perhaps unique, material vestige of an important development in early 20th century North Carolina rural life -- the introduction of telephone communications. In the early years of the telephone industry, sparsely populated rural areas were generally ignored by profit-motivated private telephone companies because of the low return on investment in costly cable and equipment. By 1914 citizens of Snow Camp, as in many rural communities in the state and nation, organized a mutual telephone company in which subscribers pooled resources and shared the costs of the installation and maintenance of service. While most mutuals operated out of private residences or country stores, the Snow Camp subscribers joined to build a small two-story frame building on donated land to house the exchange facilities. Operations continued out of this building until 1927. About 200 subscribers made payments based on quarterly operating and maintenance costs. After the demise of the company and the eventual absorption of Snow Camp into the private telephone networks, the building was converted into a tenant house with the addition of two one-story wings. Today it is the only structure known in the state to have been built expressly to serve a rural telephone cooperative, and survives as the state's most vivid material reminder of the era of rural self-help in the formative years of telephone communications. It is eligible for the National Register under criterion A for this association.

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Historic Context: The Development of Telephone Communications in  
Rural North Carolina, 1870-1930

The first telephone exchange in North Carolina was opened by Western Union in Raleigh on September 20, 1879,<sup>1</sup> three years after Alexander Graham Bell patented his invention of electronic voice communications. Small exchanges appeared in most of the state's larger towns in the last two decades of the 19th century. In 1900 there were 44 telephone companies in operation in North Carolina, the largest of which were Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company, Interstate Telephone Company, and American Telephone and Telegraph Company, which together provided service in 14 of the most urbanized of the state's 100 counties.<sup>2</sup> The remainder were small independents serving small towns and some rural areas.

On the whole, the state lagged far behind the rest of the nation in the expansion of telephone service. By 1907 North Carolina had less than one phone per fifty people, compared with northeastern states which claimed between ten and thirty people per phone or midwestern states with less than ten persons per phone.<sup>3</sup>

The high costs of start-up capitalization and the low return on telephone installations in more sparsely populated and low-income rural areas made service in the countryside an unattractive investment for the larger profit-motivated private companies. Rural residents desiring the service often had no choice but to pool resources and establish non-profit telephone cooperatives, with subscribers sharing start-up and maintenance costs.<sup>4</sup> Snow Camp, a rural community in southern Alamance County in the North Carolina piedmont, was one of many communities that took this approach.

Telephone company rosters maintained by the State Corporation Commission (forerunner of the State Utility Commission) do not clearly

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin A. Clement, The North Carolina Telephone Story: The First Ninety-Eight Years, 1879-1977. (North Carolina Independent Telephone Association, 1978) p.16. Hereinafter cited as Clement.

<sup>2</sup>Clement, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>John Brooks, Telephone: The First Hundred Years (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 116. Hereinafter cited as Brooks.

<sup>4</sup>Clement, p. 28.

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distinguish between cooperatives and privately owned companies, but it appears that at least some of the 44 telephone companies active in North Carolina in 1900 were cooperatives. The next two decades saw a remarkable growth in the number of companies, which reached a peak in 1922 with 222 operations in North Carolina.<sup>5</sup> An examination of the commission's list for that year shows the words "cooperative" and "mutual" in a number of company names, though the term is left off others known to have been mutuals, such as Snow Camp, and it may not be possible to determine what percentage of telephone service available in North Carolina in the decades of the teens and twenties was offered by mutuals. But in rural North Carolina and all of rural America, it is clear that mutual telephone associations played a critical role in the introduction of the new communications technology, and that the telephone had profound effects on rural society.<sup>6</sup> The new technology broke the hard isolation of farm life by giving people instant access to neighbors and the outside world for help, news, and entertainment.

The decade of the Depression brought an end to most mutuals and smaller independents that had not already been absorbed by larger private companies in the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> The restructuring of the industry after World War II and increased government regulation of service and rates molded the character of telephone service in rural N.C. today. Thirty-three independent private companies now provide service in the state alongside the behemoth Southern Bell.

The material culture of electronic communications is by nature ephemeral; every generation of equipment installations is supplanted by new technology. Some buildings may survive that served as the headquarters or switchboard exchange centers for small companies and rural cooperatives. Exchanges for small rural companies were most often located in the residence of one of the organizing subscribers or in a country store.<sup>8</sup> Surveys in North Carolina over the past 15 years have failed to identify a single property other than the Snow Camp Mutual Telephone Exchange that was built for this specific purpose. Its importance lies in its uniqueness as a physical place directly associated with, and symbolic of, a development important to all of rural North Carolina.

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<sup>5</sup>Clement, pp. 143-150.

<sup>6</sup>Brooks, pp. 116-118.

<sup>7</sup>Clement, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup>Clement, p. 28.

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The Snow Camp Mutual Telephone Company Building

The Snow Camp Mutual Telephone Company was incorporated on March 11, 1914, by local residents David H. Thompson, James H. Roach, Caleb McPherson, Claude F. Coble, H.J. Tiny, and William P. Stout.<sup>9</sup> However, the company is believed to have been informally organized and in operation from the home of Murphy Williams by 1910.<sup>10</sup>

Between 1912 and 1915, Claude Coble, one of the company's founders, donated a parcel of land to the company for the construction of an exchange facility. Subscribers contributed materials, money, or labor to support the community undertaking. The small two-story, two-room frame structure housed the switchboard, operator, and company equipment. It was completed at least by 1915.

Like other telephone cooperatives, the Snow Camp company charged no set rates for service. Expenditures were divided equally among the subscribers, which reached approximately 200 at the height of the company's service, at the end of a quarterly billing period. Six to eight phones were on each party line, with each household having a combination of long and short rings to indicate an incoming call. The switchboard was manned 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A night operator slept upstairs by the switchboard, but subscribers were expected to place only emergency calls after 9:00 p.m.

In a pattern repeated by other mutuals, the Snow Camp company failed to reserve adequate funds for routine maintenance and fell into difficulty as equipment aged and maintenance costs rose, driving up rates. Rate increases were largely responsible for the discontinuation of service in 1927. For some time thereafter, the only phone service in the area was through two phones at local residences that were connected to the Cane Creek Phone Company in Whitney.<sup>11</sup> United Telephone Company of the Carolinas, a private company formed in 1927 from three smaller independents, negotiated for the purchase of Snow

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<sup>9</sup>Certificate of Incorporation no. 11,983, March 12, 1914; Book 3, Page 528, Alamance County

<sup>10</sup>Lynn Gentry interview with Wilma Griffin, February 20, 1987, Snow Camp. Hereinafter cited as Griffin interview

<sup>11</sup>Griffin interview

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Camp that same year<sup>12</sup>; eventually service was restored to the area under the wing of the Southern Bell System.

The survival of the exchange building serves to stimulate the memories of older residents, including those who worked as operator or "central" here, about the early days of rural telephone service. Operator Wilma Griffin recalls:

"There was a window in each of the four sides of the room (the upstairs room) where I worked, so it was always cool even in the hottest weather. In the winter a wood-burning stove furnished heat. The switchboard was upstairs (and) the downstairs room was used for storing maintenance equipment and supplies. Upstairs, in addition to the switchboard, was swivel chair for the operator and two or three straight chairs. A shelf held the water bucket and a dipper. At least once during the day I would go to a neighboring house for a fresh bucket of water. There was also a single bed for the night operator."<sup>13</sup>

Callie Greene Hanford, another operator who was employed by the company during most of its existence, recalls the cooperative spirit surrounding the service and the way it unified the community, adding: "I really enjoyed that work. I liked everything about it."<sup>14</sup> Others remember the importance of the service during the flu epidemic of 1919, when calls for assistance brought a nurse from Greensboro to come help the overworked local physician care for the stricken community.

After the company ceased operation in 1927, the property reverted back to Claude Coble, who, in a typical example of rural resourcefulness, added the two one-story wings in a conversion of the building into a dwelling for tenants on his land. It was later purchased by the Stuart family;<sup>15</sup> today it is owned by Stuart descendents, who

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<sup>12</sup>Clement, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup>Edith Mogle interview with Wilma Griffin, quoted in "Snow Camp Telephone Company Recalled," The City-County Newspaper (Burlington), May 4, 1985.

<sup>14</sup>ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Alamance County deeds, Book 127, Page 381

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have rehabilitated the property and added a compatible new kitchen addition on the back side between the two older wings.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 2.31

UTM References

A 

1	7	6	4	1	6	5	0	3	9	7	2	5	7	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

B 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

C 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

All that parcel of land containing 2.31 acres identified as Lot 43 of Alamance County Tax Map 8-24

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the building and grounds associated with it since its construction.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Michael T. Southern, Staff, and Lynn Gentry, Consultant  
organization N.C. State Historic Preservation Office date February 9, 1989  
street & number 109 E. Jones St. telephone 919/733-6545  
city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27611

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Bibliography

BOOKS

Clement, Edwin A. The North Carolina Telephone Story: The First Ninety-Eight Years, 1879-1977. North Carolina Independent Telephone Association, 1978.

Brooks, John. Telephone: The First Hundred Years, New York: Harper and Row, 1975.

ARTICLES

Mogle, Edith. "Snow Camp Telephone Company Recalled," in The City-County Newspaper, Burlington, North Carolina, May 4, 1985.

INTERVIEWS

Gentry, Lynn. Interview with Wilma Griffin, Snow Camp, North Carolina, February 20, 1987.

ALAMANCE COUNTY RECORDS

Deeds

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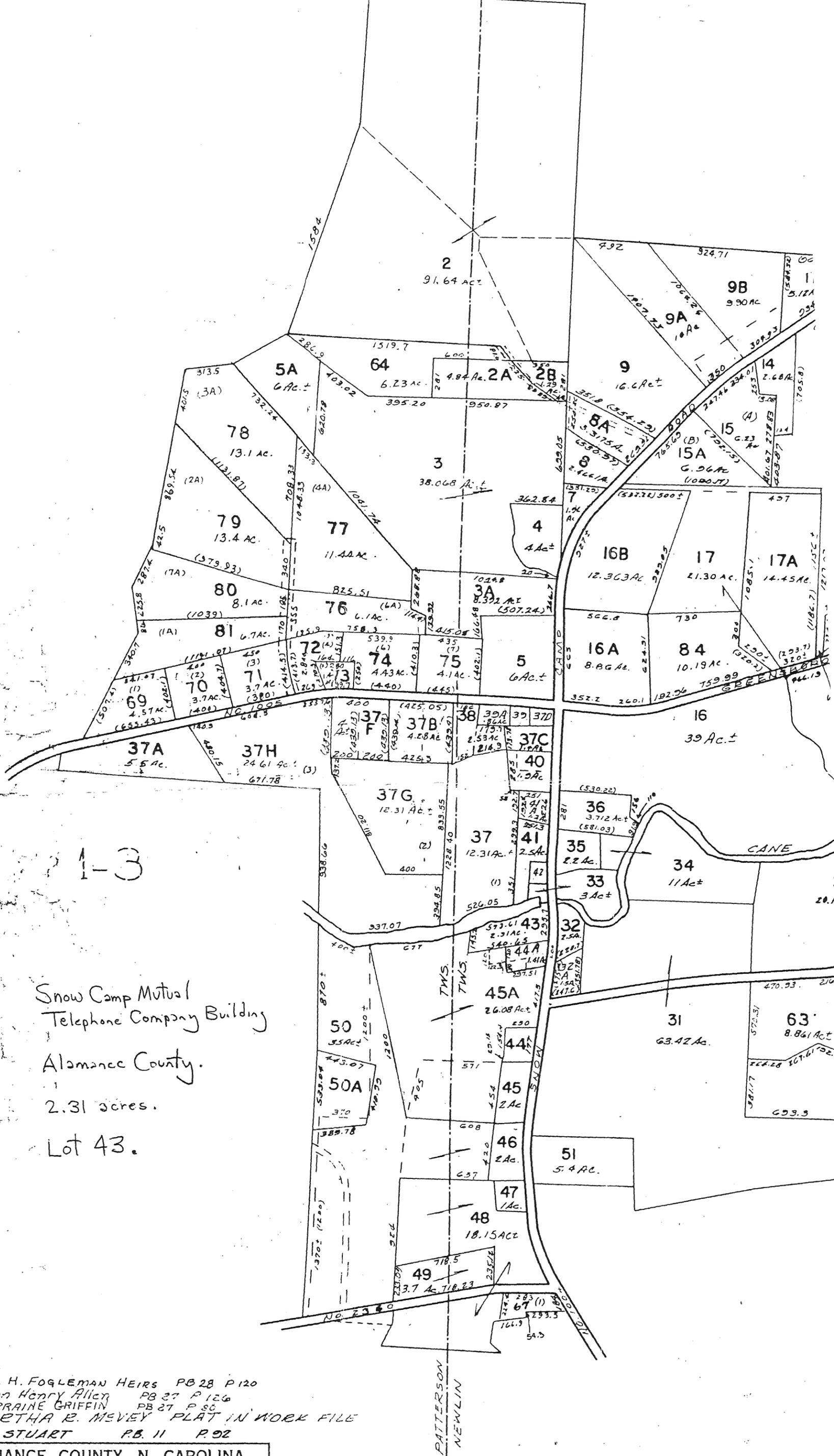
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PHOTOGRAPHS

Snow Camp Telephone Exchange Building  
Snow Camp  
Alamance County, North Carolina

All photographs by Michael T. Southern, taken August 1986. Negatives  
at N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, N.C.

1. Overall exterior view, looking southwest. Neg. # 86.8.514
2. Overall exterior view, looking northwest. Neg. # 86.8.512
3. Overall rear exterior view, looking northeast. Neg.# 86.8.493.
4. Mantel and wall in first floor west wing, looking west. Neg.  
# 86.8.502
5. Second floor interior view, looking southwest. Neg. # 86.8.507.



1-3  
 Snow Camp Mutual  
 Telephone Company Building  
 Alamance County.  
 2.31 acres.  
 Lot 43.

W. H. FOGLEMAN HEIRS PB 28 P 120  
 John Henry Allen PB 27 P 126  
 LORRAINE GRIFFIN PB 27 P 50  
 MARTHA R. MEVEY PLAT IN WORK FILE  
 O.C. STUART P.B. 11 P. 92

ALAMANCE COUNTY, N. CAROLINA	
P.Z.P. 113415 SHEET NO.	TOWNSHIP
8-24	NEWLIN
	DATE: 1959
	SCALE: 1" = 660'
ALEXANDER JOHNSON & ASSOCIATES - DECATUR, GA.	

