

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 (former) United States Post Office
other names/site number Federal Building

2. Location

street & number 430 S. Spring Street NA not for publication
city, town Burlington NA vicinity
state North Carolina code NC county Alamance code 001 zip code 27215

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	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>2</u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>3</u>	<u>0</u> 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. Price, Jr. 8-15-88
Signature of certifying official Date

 State Historic Preservation Officer
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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government - post office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

work in progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Moderne

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite

walls brick

roof asphalt

other cast iron

wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Exterior

The former United States Post Office (known today as the Federal Building) in Burlington, North Carolina is located in the central business district, at the southeast corner of South Spring Street and Maple Avenue. Erected in 1936, the essentially unaltered one-story building is a blend of the Classical Revival and Moderne styles. It is a symmetrical structure, eight bays wide and eight bays deep, constructed of common-bond red brick with a granite fascia and ashlar granite foundation. The building is capped by a flat roof. Large, triple-hung wooden sash windows with granite sills and paneled aprons illuminate the four center bays of the north, east, and west facades. These windows, slightly recessed, with six panes in each sash, are principal elements of the building's classical motif.

The front facade faces northwest towards South Spring Street. This main elevation includes two entrances that are located on the east and west ends, separated by four windows. The entries, which have double oaken doors, are vividly and ceremoniously designated by wide bronze surrounds. The surrounds extend over the doorways to enframe panels of gilded cast-iron eagles. Over each of the double doors, the inscription "Burlington, N. C." is carved in the granite. Original ornate cast-iron light fixtures and heavy granite pedestals flank the doorways. At the lower west corner of the front facade is a cornerstone which reads:

Henry Morgenthau, Jr.
Secretary of Treasury
James A. Farley
Post Master General
Louis Simon
Supervising Architect
Neal A. Melick
Supervising Engineer
R. Stanley Brown
Architect 1936

The other three facades are simpler. The side elevations (the east and west sides) have matching eight-bay facades comprising triple-hung sash windows. The four center bays of the east and west elevations project slightly from the main block. The rear

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2

of the former post office is largely utilitarian. It includes not only pairs of long windows, but also smaller windows, and a simple doorway set off-center. An original loading dock flanked by brick walls and topped by a flat roof is attached to the rear facade.

The rear of the lot on which the building stands includes a paved parking area, while the other facades are bordered by strips of grass. Along the front and west elevations are wrought-iron railings that border deep basement wells. The building is set back approximately fifteen feet from South Spring Street and Maple Avenue.

Interior

Although much of the interior was remodeled in 1968, when the post office was moved out, and is currently undergoing a second extensive renovation, the main lobby, which contains a number of notable features, remains essentially intact.

Murals

The most significant elements in the lobby are two large murals (two Contributing Objects) set high along the northeast and southwest walls. Executed in the Regionalist style of their counterparts painted in public buildings across the nation in the 1930s, these murals depict scenes of local significance.¹ The southwest mural shows workers in the slasher room of a textile mill, while the northeast mural illustrates a scene near the Burlington railroad station at the eve of the Civil War.²

Other Interior Features

The lobby also includes an arched ceiling from which are suspended six original bronze light fixtures with glass globes. Two entrance vestibules on the east and west ends are constructed of white oak veneer, and have terrazzo floors and marble and plaster walls. Positioned above each vestibule is an octagon-shaped window. Original post office tables remain attached to the northwest wall, as well as along the building's southwest corridor.

The basement, once used solely for storage, has been completely modernized. It now contains partitioned offices with modern windows, doorways, and lighting fixtures.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

NOTES

1. Karal Ann Marling, Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post Office Murals in the Great Depression, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 9-10. According to Marling, the muralists of the 1930s typically blended a realistic, Regionalistic style with Cubism.
2. The muralist for the former United States Post Office in Burlington, Arthur L. Bairnsfather, discussed the subjects of his murals for the building in a letter to Forbes Watson of the Public Buildings Administration, June 14, 1940. Documentation on the artwork is found in the Public Buildings Service Case File, National Archives, Civil Archives Division, Washington, D.C.

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)

Government
Architecture
Art

Period of Significance
1936-1940

Significant Dates

1936
1940
1968

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Significant Person

NA

Architect/Builder

Simon, Louis--Supervising Architect
Brown, R. Stanley--Architect

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

See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 1

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary Statement

The (former) United state Post Office in Burlington, North Carolina, constructed in 1936, with significant murals illustrating local history completed in 1940, is eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C. Under Criterion A, it is significant as the first tangible federal government presence in the city. The structure is associated with the upsurge in public-building construction by the federal government following the Public Buildings Act of 1926, and especially with the Depression-era public works projects of the 1930s. Under Criterion C, the building is typical in size, style, and quality of execution to small-city post offices erected nationwide in the 1930s. Furthermore, this carefully composed building, exhibiting a blend of the Classical Revival and Moderne styles, is distinguished by its notable interior wall murals. Designed by Southern artist Arthur L. Bairnsfather, these murals treat the railroad--Burlington's reason for existence--and the textile mill--the backbone of its economy--while being rare examples of this form of artwork in North Carolina.

Criterion Consideration G

Although the Bairnsfather murals are not yet 50 years old, they are associated with the well-known Depression-era public mural program, which is over 50 years old.

Historical Background--The Federal Presence

Due largely to the lobbying efforts of North Carolina congressman William B. Umstead, in January of 1936 the federal government purchased the lot at the southeast corner of South Sparing Street and Maple Avenue in Burlington for the purpose of constructing a post office.¹ Completed during the ensuing year, the new facility illustrated the vigorous efforts of the federal government's Public Works Administration to construct appropriate public buildings nationwide during the Depression.² Burlington needed a new and larger post office, for despite bank failures and labor unrest in the city's cotton textile mills, Burlington's population grew by 26 percent in the 1930s, reaching 12,000 by the end of the decade.³ In

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 2

accordance with federal construction policy requiring public buildings to be economical and efficient as well as well-designed, the new facility reflected a standardized style and plan.⁴ The plans were prepared by R. Stanley Brown, a staff architect for the Office of the Supervising Architect, United States Treasury Department, Public Buildings Administration. Between 1933 and 1941, the Supervising Architect was Louis Simon, whose name, like Brown's, is inscribed in the building's cornerstone.

Elements of Style

Thus, the former post office, with its symmetrical, red-brick facade, eight bays on each side, and restrained ornamentation, typifies the class of post office that the federal government considered appropriate for cities of Burlington's size and volume of postal receipts. Although a granite veneer was briefly considered, more economical brick construction was finally chosen.⁵ However, economy was not the ultimate arbiter of design. The building's exterior features an array of carefully composed decorative elements, notably the rich, bronze trim and gilded cast-iron eagles set above the oaken doors. Granite was used for the fascia and foundation, as well as for the window aprons, thus defining the dimensions of the facade and highlighting the classically-inspired sash windows. While the structure's symmetry, triple-hung windows and red brick set a classical tone, the clean, simple lines and neat geometric decoration, clearly visible in the front fence and more subtly revealed in the bronze light fixtures by the main doorways, reflect the Moderne influence.

The building's quality of materials, attention to symmetry and scale, and overall decorative scheme are representative of a number of 1930s post offices completed in small cities across North Carolina. For example, the cities of Canton, Lumberton, Reidsville, Morganton, and Wadesboro all boast Depression-era post offices reflecting similar high-quality materials, craftsmanship, and stylistic treatment. Each is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁶

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

The Murals

While representative of government buildings erected across the state and the nation during the Depression, the former post office in Burlington stands out as one of the few public buildings in North Carolina having interior wall murals of the period.⁷ These murals are exemplary of this government-sponsored artform, the purpose of which was to make original, quality art accessible to the broad American public.⁸ Located on both walls of the structure's main lobby, the two oil-on-canvas paintings represent the realistic, Regionalist style. Their themes, including a bustling textile mill and an antebellum railroad scene, represent the economic reasons for the city's existence and were meant to exude optimism using local subject matter readily comprehensible to residents.⁹ Burlington developed around repair shops for the state's first major railroad, and in the late nineteenth century became a major textile mill center.

Arthur L. Bairnsfather was the muralist for the building, contracted in 1940 by the North Carolina Section of Fine Arts, Federal Works Agency.¹⁰ Born in Kentucky in 1883, and educated at the Cincinnati Art Academy, he received commissions for his murals and portraiture throughout the South.¹¹ Bairnsfather painted a mural, "The Harvest" (1939), for the United States Post Office in Monroeville, Alabama, as well as portraits for the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa; Alabama College in Montevallo; the Museum of the Fine Arts Capitol in Jackson, Mississippi. Bairnsfather was awarded the Portrait Prize in 1929 at the Museum of Fine Arts in San Antonio, Texas, and was listed in Who was Who in American Art in 1985. For 15 years he maintained a studio in New York City, illustrating books and periodicals and doing national advertising.¹²

Conclusion

It is difficult to assess the direct impact of the former United States Post Office on subsequent building in Burlington, though it was one of a small collection of commercial buildings designed in the classical style in the business district during the 1930s.¹³ Certainly this former public facility, commanding a spacious lot at one of Burlington's major downtown intersections, was among the city's most prominent buildings when it was constructed. Converted to an all-purpose federal

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

office building when a new post office was erected in 1966-1967, the structure underwent interior remodeling to accommodate a host of small offices. In 1986, Roche Biomedical Laboratories acquired the property. Roche is currently renovating the interior, though keeping the original exterior and lobby essentially intact.

NOTES

1. Alamance County Register of Deeds, deed book 111, p. 446; Burlington Daily Times-News, June 9, 1936. The lot, 165 by 200 feet, was purchased for \$20,000 from Lawrence and Elizabeth Holt.
2. See, for example, Ellis L. Armstrong, ed., History of Public Works of the United States: 1776-1976, (Chicago: American Public Works Association, 1976).
3. Allison Harris Black, An Architectural History of Burlington, North Carolina, (Burlington: City of Burlington, 1987), p. 86.
4. A brief, concise history of United States post offices, including the classification scheme employed by the federal government in designing post offices according to postal receipts, can be found in Beth Grosvenor, How to Apply National Register Criteria to Post Offices, Bulletin 13, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, fall 1984). See, in particular, Appendix C.
5. Burlington Daily Times-News, June 9, 1936.
6. Suzanne Pickens Wylie, "National Register Nomination for the Morganton Downtown Historic District, Morganton, North Carolina," Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1986; Allison Harris Black, "National Register Nomination for the Reidsville Historic District, Reidsville, North Carolina," Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1986; E. Virginia Oswald, "National Register Nomination for the Old Main Post Office, Canton, North Carolina," Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1979; David R. Black, "National Register Nomination for the Wadesboro Post Office, Wadesboro, North Carolina," Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1986.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 5

7. Although no formal survey has been conducted of wall murals commissioned by the North Carolina Section of Fine Arts, Federal Works Agency during the Depression era, it is the consensus of the staff of the Survey and Planning Branch of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History that relatively few exist. In addition to the former post office in Burlington, murals are known to survive in post offices in Chapel Hill and Reidsville, North Carolina.
8. For the most complete published history of Depression-era murals, see Karal Ann Marling, Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post Office Murals in the Great Depression, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).
9. Arthur L. Bairnsfather, muralist for the former United States Post Office in Burlington, described the subjects of his murals in a letter to Forbes Watson of the Public Buildings Administration, June 14, 1940. Public Buildings Service Case Files, National Archives, Civil Archives Division, Washington, D.C. Specifically, Bairnsfather wrote that the textile mill scene was a slasher room, where warp threads are sized, from the "Avondale Mills." A mill by this name, however, is not known by local historians, and it may have been located elsewhere in North Carolina. Bairnsfather used one of the last two remaining buildings from the North Carolina Railroad Company shop complex, the 1870 roundhouse (National Register 1984) for the railroad station in the mural on the northwest wall. His objective, he wrote, was to reconstruct the "atmosphere of the period of 1861." The muralist's subject matter reflected important themes in Burlington's history, for Burlington, a major cotton textile mill center, was founded in 1855-1861 as a repair center for the main trunk railroad line, the North Carolina Railroad, which ran east-west from coast to Piedmont.
10. Public Service Case File, The Burlington Post Office, National Archives, Civil Archives Division, Washington, D.C.
11. Who was Who in American Art, ed. by Peter H. Falk, (New York: Sound View Press, 1985), p. 28.
12. Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

13. Allison Harris Black, An Architectural History of Burlington, North Carolina, p. 86. Both the Morris Plan Bank at 420 South Spring Street and the Hermick Building at 445 South Spring Street were built in the 1930s with facades illustrating classical motifs.

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:

Public Service Case File, National Archives
Civil Archives Division, Washington, D.C.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property .76

UTM References

A

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

B

Zone				Easting				Northing						

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is outlined in pencil on the enclosed Alamance County Tax Map, 012A. The lot is 165' x 200'., being Block 33, Parcel 16.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The property constitutes the entire lot historically associated with the (former) United States Post Office.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard Mattson date 3-30-88
organization Preservation Consultant telephone 919-478-4234
street & number Rt 1 Box 547 state NC zip code 27882
city or town Spring Hope

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

Bibliography

Alamance County Register of Deeds. Deeds and Lease Records.

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Black, David R. "National Register Nomination for the Wadesboro, North Carolina Post Office," Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1986.

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-----"National Register Nomination for the Reidsville Historic District, Reidsville, North Carolina," Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1986.

Burlington Daily Times-News.

Falk, Peter H., ed. Who was Who in American Art. New York: Sound View Press, 1985.

Grosvenor, Beth. How to Apply National Register Criteria to Post Offices. Bulletin 13. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, fall 1984.

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

Oswald, Virginia. "National Register Nomination for the Old Main Post Office, Canton, North Carolina," Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1979.

Public Service Case File, The Burlington Post Office, National Archives, Civil Archives Division, Washington, D.C.

Wylie, Suzanne Pickens. "National Register Nomination for the Morganton Downtown Historic District, Morganton, North Carolina," Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1986.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 12 Page 1Identification of photographs

1. (former) United States Post Office
Burlington, North Carolina
Richard Mattson, photographer
January 15, 1988
N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
front facade, looking SE
2. (former) United States Post Office
Burlington, North Carolina
Richard Mattson, photographer
January 15, 1988
N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
front and southwest facades, looking SE
3. (Former) United States Post Office
Burlington, North Carolina
Richard Mattson, photographer
January 15, 1988
N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
rear and southwest facades, looking north
4. (former) United States Post Office
Burlington, North Carolina
Richard Mattson, photographer
January 15, 1988
N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
light fixture at front entrance, looking SE
5. (former) United States Post Office
Burlington, North Carolina
Richard Mattson, photographer
January 15, 1988
N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
Mural on southwest wall in lobby, looking SW
6. (former) United States Post Office
Burlington, North Carolina
Richard Mattson, photographer
January 15, 1988
N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
Mural on southwest wall, and southwest vestibule, looking SW

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

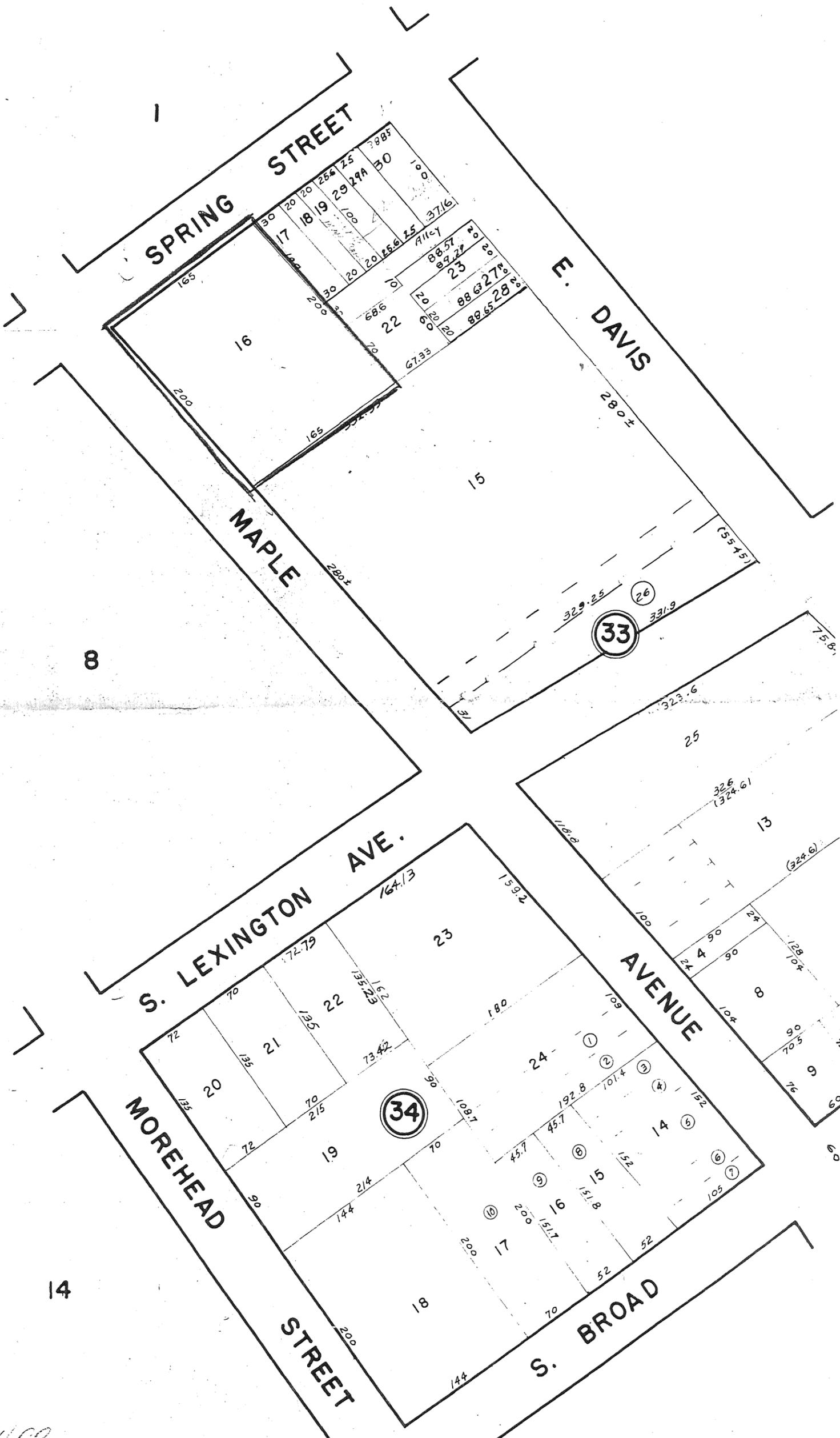
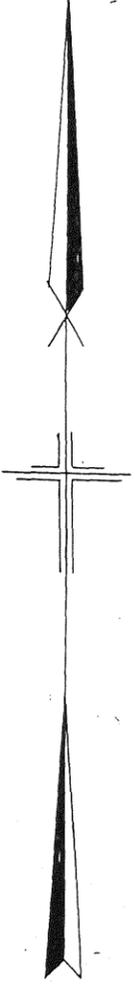
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 1.2 Page 2

Identification of photographs (continued)

7. (former) United States Post Office
Burlington, North Carolina
Richard Mattson, photographer
January 15, 1988
N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
Mural on northeast wall in lobby, looking NE

8. (former) United States Post Office
Burlington, North Carolina
Richard Mattson, photographer
January 15, 1988
N.C. Division of Arhcives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
Southwest vestibule in lobby, looking W



REV 6-19-70

REV 3 12 24 H.P.P.

ALAMANCE COUNTY, N. C.

SCALE	TOWNSHIP	DATE
1" = 100'	BURLINGTON	1948

MAP 012A BLOCKS 33, 34 & 91

REV. 12-2-74

REV. 5-79

REV. 5-78

