

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 (former) United States Post Office
other names/site number Belmont City Hall

2. Location

street & number 115 North Main Street N/A not for publication
city or town Belmont N/A vicinity
state North Carolina code NC county Gaston code 071 zip code 28012

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.)
Jeffrey J. Cross Acting SAPO 10/23/90
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State of 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

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:)	_____	_____

(former) U.S. Post Office
Name of Property

Gaston County, NC
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**

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: post office

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: city hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

STONE

roof SLATE

other WOOD

METAL

Narrative Description

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

(former) U.S. Post Office
Name of Property

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8. Statement of Significance

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.)

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)

Architecture

Art

Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1939 - 1945

Significant Dates

1939

1940

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Simon, Louis A.; architect

Melick, Neal A.; engineer

DeAnna, Peter; artist

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

(former) U.S. Post Office

Name of Property

Gaston County, NC

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 0.6

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

UTM grid 1: Zone 17, Easting 491651210, Northing 389198160

UTM grid 3: Zone, Easting, Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dr. William H. Huffman

organization date 3/1/95

street & number 5045 Beckford Drive telephone 704-364-8237

city or town Charlotte state NC zip code 28226

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

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name

street & number telephone

city or town state zip code

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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The (former) Belmont Post Office is a one-story, Colonial Revival-style brick building with a loading dock that was enclosed during the 1972 conversion of the facility into the Belmont City Hall. Built in 1939 and embellished with a notable period mural, the building was a public works project of the Treasury Department. It was used as the city's post office until 1970, and, after renovations, rededicated as the city hall in 1973. The cornerstone on the southeast corner bears this inscription: "Henry Morgenthau, Jr. / Secretary of the Treasury / James A. Farley / Postmaster General / Louis A. Simon / Supervising Architect / Neal A. Melick / Supervising Engineer / 1939" The former post office building and its grounds are in excellent condition. Although the building was converted to municipal government use over twenty years ago, the exterior and lobby of the interior of the building retain the original look and feeling of a post office building.

Located at 115 North Main Street across from its intersection with Catawba Street, the east-facing former post office anchors the north end of the city's old commercial district. North Main Street follows a natural slope north and south through the commercial district and makes a slight bend to the northwest at the former post office property. To the north of the former post office on North Main Street are residences of varied styles and years of construction which include one-story bungalows and two-story brick Colonial Revival houses. To the south on North Main Street are one-, two- and three-story brick commercial buildings that were built at various times before the 1930s. On the north side of Catawba street at the intersection with North Main Street is the headquarters building of R. L. Stowe Mills. The remainder of Catawba Street contains a mixture of textile mills, one- and two-story commercial buildings and small residences.

The former post office building is situated on the northeastern section of the property, which is trapezoidal in shape with the longest dimension running east and west and slopes gently downward from north to south. On the south side of the building is an east-west driveway that leads to the parking lot in the rear. A concrete sidewalk runs parallel to the street in front of the former post office, from which a wide concrete walk leads to the front entry steps. The front entry sidewalk divides two small grass lawns which are protected by a low chain fence supported by

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small metal posts set in concrete. On the south front lawn are a flagpole and brick community bulletin board, and a small tree is planted in the middle of the north front lawn. Across the front of the building are flowers planted in front of low shrubs, and large shrubs are planted at the corners of the building and on either side of the front entry steps. Low shrubbery is also planted across the south side of the former post office.

The former post office is divided into two main sections, the main block, which is rectangular in plan, and the stepped-back rectangular secondary block. The former loading dock extends west from the center bay of the secondary block and was set on a raised foundation to facilitate mail handling. The main and secondary blocks rest on a concrete foundation, and there is a partial basement below ground under the western half of the main block for the heating plant.

The Colonial Revival-style architecture of the building is expressed by the symmetrical façade with centered entry doors; segmental-arch windows with double-hung sashes set in blind arches; and decorative brickwork. The brickwork is laid up in common bond one-to-five. All four elevations of the main block display excellent decorative brickwork with stone accents.

The main block features a five-bay façade with double-leaf front entry doors with a large, single light each above, and five small panels each below. The entry is reached by seven stone steps bisected by a center metal balustrade and flanked by metal balustrades on both sides. Luminaries with metal posts and flared metal grids protecting frosted globes are placed on each side of the stairs. The doors are flanked by tall side lights which are divided by eight angular muntins; below them are small, recessed panels. Directly over the doors is a large transom, which is made up of eleven triangular pieces of glass. A cast metal eagle, painted gold, is centered over the doors in front of the transom. Each section of the door surrounds is bracketed with round colonettes, which terminate above with two simple fillets which support a wood, segmental-arch with thirteen metal stars evenly spaced across it.

Each of the five façade bays has blind arches with bold brickwork, and each is topped with wide, segmental-arches formed by soldier brick. A corbel table runs all the way around the main block just under the narrow, unbracketed roof

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eaves. The front four windows are segmental-arch eight-over-twelve double-hung sash in wood frames. Below the windows are plain, dark, unpolished stone aprons with molded stone sills. The two-bay north and south elevations of the main block repeat the blind arches of the facade. On the south elevation, the westernmost bay window opening is filled with decorative brickwork, while the easternmost one is filled with double-hung sash that matches that of the facade. The north elevation matches the facade window pattern.

The north and south elevations of the secondary block display the rhythmic divisions of the main block, but with a more varied fenestration. The first and third bays of the south elevation are filled with four-over-four wooden sash, while the sash in the second bay matches that of the main block. The fenestration of the north elevation matches that of the main elevation, except that the windows are not set in blind arches.

The plain brick rear (west) elevation of the secondary block is bisected by the west-projecting one-bay-wide former loading dock. Except for a four-over-four sash window adjacent to the south intersection of the wall and dock, the fenestration of the rear block is symmetrical, with eight-over-twelve segmental-arch sash. The modern glass and aluminum rear door is set into the 1972 brick enclosure east of the loading dock and is accessed by a concrete handicapped ramp and steps. The historic and modern fabric of the former loading dock is differentiated by the slightly shorter height and modern brick of the addition.

The main entrance of the building leads into an airlock that is formed by a well-preserved wood and glass enclosure. Entry into the lobby is through two doors, one on the south and one on the north side of the airlock. Each are single-light wood doors with a single recessed panel below, and have fixed, eight-light transoms above and four-light side lights. On the west side are twenty fixed lights; four-light side lights; a recessed panel below; fluted columns between sections; and a segmental-arch above that matches the segmental-arch over the front entry doors.

The lobby itself is formerly the area where the public conducted its postal business, and it retains much of that look and feel. Terrazzo flooring covers both the lobby and airlock, and marble wainscoting covers the lower half of the plaster lobby walls. A metal plaque is installed on the north side of the airlock on the east wall which reads: "City of

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Belmont / formerly the United States Post Office / This building was purchased / and given to the City of Belmont / by the / Lineberger Foundation, Inc. / for civic usefulness to the / people of the community / Rededicated April 10, 1973."

The south wall of the lobby has a centered, two-panel wood door with architrave surrounds and plain entablature with cornice above. On either side of the door are public notice boards that are glass cases with wood surrounds. Underneath each of the glass cases are small wood desks for addressing and stamping. The entire top one-third of the wall is devoted to the oil-on-canvas mural, "Major Chronicle's South Fork Boys," by artist Peter DeAnna (see Section 8). The painting depicts the Revolutionary War encampment of local troops led by Major Chronicle, who was from a prominent Belmont family, just prior to their participation in the pivotal Battle of King's Mountain. Washington, D.C. artist Peter DeAnna (1920-1980) completed the painting in 1940 in "realist" style. The north wall of the lobby exactly matches that of the south except for the mural. The south wall door leads to the city manager's office (the former postmaster's office), and the north wall door to the mayor's office (probably the former assistant postmaster's office). A door on the north side of the west wall leads to the city council chamber, and a wide center opening in the center of the west wall leads to the public corridor. A change was made to the west lobby wall in the 1972-73 renovations. There were two postal service windows on the south side of the wall, and the second one from the south has been removed and filled in.

Renovations to the secondary block and the loading block took place in 1972. The central public corridor runs from the lobby west to the rear in the center of the building. On the south side of the corridor are administrative offices and the original former post office vault, which is intact. On the north side of the corridor are the city council chamber on the east end, and more city offices at the west end. These spaces were probably the former mail sorting area and administrative offices, respectively. At the west end of the corridor is the new meeting room built into the expanded former loading dock area. A rear hall leads from the central corridor to the south. On the west side of the rear hall are stairs leading down to the original basement where the heating plant is located, and public restrooms are located at

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the south end of the hall. A modern replacement glass and aluminum rear door from the main block leads to a small foyer, which has painted brick walls, ceramic tile floor, and beaded-board ceiling. Another glass and aluminum door on the western side of the foyer leads to the meeting room as noted above. The latter has a modern drop ceiling, wallpapered drywall on the walls, and carpeted floors.

The public corridor and rear hall are finished with plaster walls, are covered with vertical board wainscoting, and have carpeted floors. The remaining walls are plaster, and the ceilings are modern drop ceilings of acoustical tile throughout. The interior doors and windows all have simple wood surrounds.

In 1987, further renovations were undertaken. The greatest change was to expand the council chamber to its present size by incorporating storage areas on the north side of the building into a larger chamber. To accomplish this, three small original walls were removed between the 1973-1987 council chamber area and the north wall, so that the chamber occupied all of the eastern half of the north side of the public corridor. The storage room in the northwest part of the building was converted to an office and map room for a city planning office, and the public toilets in the southwest part of the building were modified for handicapped use. The most recent change took place in 1994-95, when the storage room in the former loading dock was converted to a meeting room, as noted above.

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SUMMARY

The Belmont City Hall is the only Depression-era federal public works project building in the city of Belmont, and its wall painting depicting a local historical scene is unique in the city. It is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C for Architecture as the only example of a federal Depression-era public works project in Belmont; and for Art for containing as an integral part of the building a work of art important to the development, preservation and understanding of a national artist and a representative example of a particular type and style of artistic expression. It is also eligible under Criterion A because of its association with the politics and government of the era of the Great Depression.

Built in 1939 in a visibly prominent place in the town center, the building retains much of its original post office exterior and lobby interior. Money for the project was obtained through the efforts of local Congressman A. L. Bulwinkle through appropriations for the public buildings program of the U. S. Treasury department.

The lobby mural is an oil-on-canvas painting which was part of the federal public buildings art program administered by the Section of Fine Arts of the Treasury Department. Unlike the WPA, which tried to find work for artists on relief, the artwork for public buildings projects was chosen by juried competition. The painting depicts "Major Chronicle's South Fork Boys" in their Revolutionary War encampment. Major Chronicle was from a prominent Belmont family, and he, along with his locally-recruited troops, played an important role in the crucial Battle of King's Mountain, where the twenty-five-year-old major was fatally wounded. The former post office faces the former site of the Chronicle house, and the Chronicle Mills, located several blocks to the east on Catawba Street, was named after the young major. Peter DeAnna (1920-1980), a Washington, D.C. artist, painted the mural in 1940.

The building was used as the town post office until 1970, when the postal service moved to its present location. It was subsequently purchased by the city through a grant from the Lineberger Foundation in 1971. After renovations, it was rededicated as the new city hall on April 10, 1973.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND POLITICS/GOVERNMENT CONTEXT

With the establishment of the United States, the government assumed control of the postal service as other

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countries had done, but in the Constitution made the system more democratic by giving the power to establish post offices and post roads to the Congress. From the time of its founding, the postal service provided many important sources of development in transportation, communications, publishing, and business for the country with the building of post roads, the advent of flat rates, stamps, envelopes, registered mail, and later, rural free delivery, parcel post and postal savings. It also became an excellent source of political benefit, particularly after the office of Postmaster General was given cabinet status under Andrew Jackson in 1829. Since Members of Congress were granted free ranking privileges, they could distribute speeches and campaign materials through the mail. The Postmaster General's position, and the appointment of postmasters throughout the country, were political rewards for important party supporters. Political influence also affected the location of new post offices.¹

As part of its continuing efforts to alleviate the effects of the Depression, in August, 1937, Congress authorized additional money for public buildings projects.² The intent of this appropriation was different from that of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs, which attempted to put citizens on relief to work on public projects. The public buildings program, administered by the Treasury Department, let construction contracts to private contractors through competitive bidding, and operated under the auspices of the Public Buildings Act of 1926.³

Through the efforts of Representative A. L. Bulwinkle of the Tenth District of North Carolina, \$73,000 of the August, 1937 appropriation was allocated for a new post office building in Belmont, N.C. On September 10, 1937, the Belmont postmaster was authorized by the Public Buildings Branch of the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department to seek bids for land for the building. Advertisements for the lot ran in the *Belmont Banner* September 22 and 29, 1937. The land chosen on March 11, 1938 from the various proposals was

¹Beth Grosvenor, "How to Apply National Register Criteria to Post Offices," *National Register of Historic Places, Bulletin 13* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1984), p. 2.

²Third Deficiency Appropriation Act, approved August 26, 1937; also called the Emergency Construction of Public Buildings Act.

³Letter from Director of Procurement, Treasury Department, to D. P. Stowe, 11 March 1938.

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the site of the old J. P. Stowe home on North Main Street across from the intersection with Catawba Street, and \$15,600.00 was authorized for its purchase. D. P. Stowe, the administrator of the J. P. Stowe estate, acted as agent in the transaction. As part of the purchase agreement, the estate agreed to remove all the buildings on the lot, which included the old two-story J. P. Stowe home and six outbuildings.⁴ James P. Stowe (1845-1916) was a Confederate veteran who went into the mercantile business in Belmont in 1891, and built the home around that time.⁵

In April, 1938, the Postmaster General received a letter from Right Reverend Vincent G. Taylor, O.S.B., who was the head of Belmont Abbey. Father Taylor expressed concern about the type of building that would be constructed in Belmont, and hoped that it would be "a building somewhat better than those that have been erected in the small towns of this vicinity." The letter was referred to L. A. Simon, the supervising architect in Washington for all structures in the public buildings program, who assured Father Taylor that

The Division has secured considerable data and photographs indicating the character of the more important buildings in the two including the Abbey and College group and in developing the preliminary drawings for the proposed Post Office every possible consideration will be given leading to the design of a building appropriate to its surroundings.⁶

Since the land was in an estate, the government attorneys determined that the only way to acquire a clear title was through condemnation. In July, 1938, Congressman Bulwinkle wrote to the Post Office Department to ask why construction on the post office had not commenced since he had designated Belmont for a new post office over a year ago, and requested immediate action.⁷ He was politely informed that the plans and estimates were being prepared, and that

⁴Survey by W. T. Cox, engineer, dated September 28, 1937. National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group (RG) 121, Records of the Public Buildings Service, General Correspondence and Related Records, 1910-1939, Boxes 6124 and 6125 [Hereinafter RG 121].

⁵Kim Withers Brengle, *The Architectural Heritage of Gaston County*, City of Belmont, et al, 1982, p. 268.

⁶Letter from L. A. Simon to Father Taylor, 30 June 1938; NARA, RG 121.

⁷Letter from Congressman A. L. Bulwinkle to Smith Purdum, Fourth Assistant Postmaster General, 21 July 1938; NARA, RG 121.

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his letter was being forwarded to the Treasury Procurement Division.⁸

In August, 1938, William M. Jefferson, the Belmont postmaster, was appointed custodian of the new site.⁹ Although the plans and estimates had been prepared, the condemnation proceedings were not completed until December 31, 1938, when the federal government finally received title to the property.¹⁰ In January, D. P. Stowe was notified to execute the agreement to remove the buildings on the site as stated in the purchase contract. The c.1891 J. P. Stowe home was moved to a lot just to the west of the post office property where it stands today.¹¹

On February 14, 1939, the Treasury Department authorized advertisements for bids on the post office building to be published in the *Belmont Banner*, *Daily Construction Bulletin* (Baltimore, MD), *Dixie Contractor* (Atlanta, GA), *Daily Journal of Commerce* (New Orleans, LA), and the *Port and Terminal* (Whitestone, NY).¹² Bids on the project were opened March 16, 1939.¹³ Of the eight bids received (four from North Carolina and one each from Connecticut, Indiana, Michigan and Virginia), the lowest bidder was L. B. Gallimore of Greensboro, N. C., who bid \$40,900. On April 4, Gallimore was given a contract which called for completion in 210 calendar days after the notice to proceed [April 22].¹⁴ The contractor was reminded to submit for government approval samples of every kind of materials and fixtures to be used in the project.¹⁵ On May 1, Bruce Jones of Statesville, N. C. was directed to be the temporary supervising construction

⁸Letter from Smith Purdum to Congressman Bulwinkle, 22 July 1938; NARA, RG 121.

⁹Letter from the Treasury Department to William M Jefferson dated 20 August 1938; NARA, RG 121.

¹⁰Gaston County Deed Book 358, Page 198.

¹¹Letter from Belmont Postmaster Jefferson to: U. S. Treasury Department, Procurement Division, 8 February 1939; NARA, RG 121.

¹²Advertising Orders, U.S. Treasury Department, Numbers 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935; NARA, RG 121.

¹³Synopsis of Proposals for the Construction of the Post Office at Belmont, North Carolina, U. S. Treasury Department, Procurement Division, Public Buildings Branch, 16 March 1939; NARA, RG 121.

¹⁴Letter of Contract dated 4 April 1939 from the Director of Procurement to Gallimore.

¹⁵Letter from Supervising Engineer to Gallimore dated 7 April 1939; RG 121.

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engineer for the Treasury Department.¹⁶

Construction began on May 8, 1939, and construction engineer Walter C. Rankin was assigned to oversee the project on May 17th.¹⁷ The May engineer's report showed that the ten men employed at the site had excavated the basement, poured the footings, and laid up some brickwork.¹⁸ The June report showed that the work force had increased to twenty-five, the structural steel had been erected, and about half the brickwork was completed.¹⁹ The loading dock was specified as ten feet by ten feet in the original plans, but postal officials decided to lengthen it twelve feet, to measure ten feet wide by twenty-two feet long.²⁰ By the end of October, there were ten men on the job and it was proceeding on schedule.²¹ The construction engineer wired the Treasury Department that the building would be completed November 18th, but would not actually be open to the public until a formal dedication in early December.²²

Patrons were able to start using the new post office the last week of November, and formal dedication ceremonies were held on December 4, 1939.²³ Final inspection of the building by the district engineer from Atlanta, Ga. took place on December 8, 1939. In his report, he characterized the location of the building as "pleasing;" and said of the type of design, "This is the most satisfactory type of small Post Office as to appearance and arrangement."²⁴

The incorporation of murals and sculptures into some federal public buildings was part of the public buildings program, and \$730 (one percent of the project's total allocation) was set aside to commission an artist to execute

¹⁶Letter from Director of Procurement to Bruce K. Jones dated 1 May 1919; RG 121.

¹⁷Letter from Bruce Jones to Supervising Engineer, 11 May 1939; Letter from Supervising Engineer to Bruce Jones, 17 May 1939; RG 121.

¹⁸Progress Report for May, 1939; RG 121.

¹⁹Ibid., June, 1939.

²⁰Letter from Post Office Department to Procurement Div., 19 June 1939.

²¹Progress Report for October, 1939; RG 121.

²²Telegram from W. C. Rankin to W. A. Miller, 9 November 1939; RG 121.

²³Letter from W. C. Rankin to district engineer, 24 November 1939, RG 121; *Belmont Banner*, November 22, 1939, p. 1.

²⁴Letter from Murray M. Davis, District Engineer, to Supervising Engineer, Washington, D.C., 9 December 1939, RG 121.

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a mural for the Belmont post office.²⁵ The public buildings art program was administered by the Fine Arts Section, Office of the Supervising Architect, Public Buildings Administration, Federal Works Agency (FWA), in Washington, D.C. (the public buildings program had been moved from the Treasury Department to the FWA in July, 1939)²⁶ This was a separate program from the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project.

In a letter dated November 3, 1939, Peter DeAnna, a nineteen-year-old Washington, D.C. artist, was invited to submit designs for the Belmont post office mural. This invitation was based on "competent sketches submitted in the Bethesda, Maryland Post Office mural competition."²⁷ DeAnna was not awarded the Bethesda commission. In a letter dated the following day, the Supervising Architect informed the Belmont postmaster that DeAnna secured the commission to supply a post office mural there and suggested DeAnna be apprised of suitable local subject matter.²⁸

Two designs for the mural were submitted to the Section of Fine Arts: The first was a scene depicting a Catawba Indian village, with women tanning hides and carrying grain, while men built a hut and planted and stored the grain.²⁹ The other was the representation of Major Chronicle's encampment prior to engaging in the Battle of King's Mountain. Edward B. Rowan, the Assistant Chief of the Section of Fine Arts, found the Indian sketch ". . . the most unusual in subject matter and treatment," and suggested that DeAnna proceed with a two-inch-scale color sketch. Rowan went on to praise DeAnna, and wrote, "Congratulating you on your achievement, for I am pleased to tell you that I personally see indications of continued growth in your work. . ."³⁰

However, as was the usual practice, a committee of local citizens comprised of Harold Lineberger, Mrs. W. B. (Minnie

²⁵Memorandum to the Commissioner of Public Buildings dated 27 September 1939, RG 121.

²⁶Ibid., dated 5 February 1940, RG 121; also see note 38.

²⁷Letter from E. B. Rowan, Section of Fine Arts to DeAnna, 3 November 1939, RG 121.

²⁸Letter dated 4 November 1939, RG 121.

²⁹Sue Bridwell Beckham, *Depression Post Office Murals and Southern Culture: A Gentle Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 226.

³⁰Letter from E. B. Rowan, Assistant Section Chief, Fine Arts Section, 22 November 1939, RG 121.

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Stowe) Puett and Rev. C. P. Bowles reviewed the sketches and selected the Major Chronicle scene as the most suitable.³¹ The mural, which is twelve feet wide and five feet two inches high, was designed to be installed in the lobby over the door to the postmaster's office. DeAnna's contract began January 2, 1940 while he was still nineteen years old, and he traveled to Belmont to work on the project.³² By early July, 1940, the mural was completed. DeAnna had just turned twenty a few days earlier. In a letter dated July 3, 1940, Edward Rowan wrote to the Belmont postmaster that "From photographs the mural appears to be a real addition to the decoration of the building."³³ Final payment for the mural was sent to DeAnna on August 14, 1940.³⁴

The Depression-era building on North Main Street was used as the city's post office from the time of its dedication in December, 1939, until Labor Day, 1970, when the office was moved to its present location at 208 Glenway Street.³⁵ The 1939 building remained vacant until it was bought with the aid of a grant by the Lineberger Foundation by the City of Belmont in April, 1971.³⁶ It was refurbished and adapted for use as the city hall for the City of Belmont, and rededicated on April 10, 1973.³⁷

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The Office of the Supervising Architect was established in the Treasury Department in the 1850s to oversee the design and construction of federal buildings. From that time until James Knox Taylor served as Supervising Architect (1897 to 1912), favored architectural styles for federal buildings styles tended to be those promoted by the particular supervising architect. Taylor, however, brought some

³¹*Belmont Banner*, June 19, 1940, p. 1.

³²Memorandum to the Commissioner of Public Buildings from the Section of Fine Arts, 13 February 1940.

³³Letter from Edward Rowan to the Belmont postmaster, 3 July 1940.

³⁴Letter to DeAnna from Commissioner of Public Buildings, 14 August 1940.

³⁵Interview with Dean McCarn, former Belmont postal worker by William H. Huffman, 31 March 1995.

³⁶Gaston County, NC, Deed Book 1054, p. 373, 5 April 1995; the purchase price was \$55,000.00; The Lineberger Foundation was founded by the Lineberger family, who are a prominent long-time textile family in Belmont.

³⁷Plaque in lobby of the city hall.

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important changes to the office. He believed that federal buildings should be sophisticated representations of democratic ideals and be constructed of the highest quality materials. He also preferred styles that drew from classical or early American traditional sources. Design commissions for larger projects were usually awarded to private architects, but designs for smaller projects, including many of the post offices, were individually drawn by the office of the Supervising Architect.³⁸

James Knox Taylor's architectural practices were continued by his successor, Louis A. Simon (1867-1958). A graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Simon joined the Office of the Supervising Architect in 1896, became head of the architectural division in 1905, and Supervising Architect in 1934. When he reached compulsory retirement age in 1937, President Roosevelt issued a series of executive orders to extend his service until 1941. After his retirement, he became a consultant to the supervising architect's office, and was the head architect for the Roosevelt library in Hyde Park, N. Y. As with James Knox Taylor, Louis A. Simon also felt that classical and early American architectural styles best reflected American democratic ideals. It is said that no one in American history has had such a long and broad influence on courthouses, post offices and other government buildings across the country than Louis A. Simon.³⁹

A section of the 1913 Public Buildings Act required a community to generate at least \$10,000 in postal receipts to qualify for a new post office building. Commensurate with this requirement was the policy of the Treasury Department that linked the size and ornamental quality of a post to the value of the real estate and postal receipts. As a result, large cities could still build massive and elaborate postal facilities, but those in small towns would be an "ordinary class of building."⁴⁰ At the same time, the office of the

³⁸Ibid., p. 3.

³⁹The Washington Post and Times Herald, May 12, 1958, p. B2; undated [1958?] typescript biographical sketch, American Institute of Architects, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁰Grosvenor, p. 3.

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Supervising Architect began to standardize plans and designs, and all but stopped using private architects.⁴¹

These policies continued through the Depression, even as the government greatly stepped up the public works programs to provide work and help revive the economy. During the 1930s, about three times as many post offices were constructed as had been put up in the fifty years prior to the decade. Approximately twelve hundred post offices were built under Depression-era programs.⁴²

At the time of its completion, the Belmont post office building was reported in the local press to be "the only post office of this type that has been completed in the South."⁴³ The only others of this type known at that time were two under construction in Wallace, N.C. and Bishopville, S.C.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, records at the time of construction were not kept according to the architectural style of post offices, but it seems likely that others of this kind were built in various places and that they were all built according to one of the standard designs of the Office of the Supervising Architect.

ARTISTIC CONTEXT

The Department of the Treasury's Section of Painting and Sculpture, which became the Section of Fine Arts, was the major sponsor of art for all federal buildings during the Depression. From 1934 to 1943, one percent of the money allocated for all new federal buildings was set aside for artwork.⁴⁵ The other main Depression-era art program, the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration functioned as other WPA projects in that its purpose was to try to sponsor projects suitable for artists on relief. The Treasury's public buildings program, on the other hand, wanted both high quality construction and art for its buildings. Commissions from the Section of Fine Arts were awarded through a system of blind competition. The Section of Fine Arts believed that realism was the language of the public and therefore it was mandated as the style most appropriate to depict scenes from American life and history.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³*Belmont Banner*, November 22, 1939, p. 1.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵park and Markowitz, p. 6

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Most American artists of the 1930s were realists, although there was great variety within that style.⁴⁶

The overall purpose of the program was to make high quality original art available to ordinary citizens who were not otherwise likely to be able to view such works.⁴⁷ The New Deal art programs had two other goals as well: one was to integrate artists into the social and economic life of the country, and the other was aimed at creating a national culture.⁴⁸ In the words of Robert Bruce, head of the Section of Fine Arts,

Our objective should be to enrich the lives of all our people by making things of the spirit, the creation of beauty part of their daily lives, by giving them new hopes and sources of interest to fill their leisure, by eradicating the ugliness of their surroundings, by building with a sense of beauty as well as mere utility, and by fostering all the simple pleasures of life which are not important in terms of dollars spent but are immensely important in terms of a higher standard of living.⁴⁹

Thus the benefit to the government from the art program would be "in material wealth, in happiness, contentment and well-being [of all citizens]." ⁵⁰

As President Roosevelt related in his address at the dedication of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., he believed that New Deal arts projects would help make art both accessible to the ordinary citizen and integrate it into part of their daily lives, instead of being something foreign and apart from their usual existence. He said:

But recently, [the people of this country] have seen in their own towns, in their own villages, in schoolhouses, in post offices, in the back rooms of shops and stores, pictures painted by their sons, their neighbors. . . They have seen, across these last few years, rooms full of paintings by Americans, walls covered with all the paintings of Americans - some of it good, some of it not good, but all of it native, human, eager and alive - all of it painted by their own kind in

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 138.

⁴⁷Grosvenor, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁸Park and Markowitz, pp. 5 and 183.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 5

⁵⁰Ibid.

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their own country, and painted about things they know and look at often and have touched and loved.⁵¹

From 1934 to 1943, when the program was discontinued because of World War II, The Section of Fine Arts commissioned some 1200 murals and 300 sculptures.⁵² In North Carolina, forty-three murals, reliefs, sculptures and oil on canvas paintings were installed in post offices in the state. All were completed during the years from 1937 through 1941, and all but three are extant.⁵³ In Gaston County, there are two post office murals: one is an oil on canvas in Gastonia (the county seat), "Cotton Field and Spinning Mill," 1938, by Francis Speight, an important North Carolina artist. The other is Belmont's DeAnna representation of "Major Chronicle's South Fork Boys."⁵⁴

Peter DeAnna achieved some measure of recognition in his own lifetime. He was born June 28, 1920 in Cardale, PA and in 1931, he moved with his family to Washington, D.C. Following graduation from high school in 1937 he won a scholarship to Corcoran Art School in Washington, D.C., and in 1938 was the youngest painter to be awarded a government mural commission.⁵⁵ The latter was for the post office in Ellicott City, Maryland, for which he did two scenes, "Building of Ellicott Mills", and "Landscape of Ellicott City."⁵⁶

During his war service from 1942 to 1946, he painted murals in service clubs and was an illustrator for the Army newspaper. After the war, he moved his family to New York, where he studied for eight years at the School for Art

⁵¹From address dedicating the National Gallery of Art, March 17, 1941; Park and Markowitz, pp. 6 and 183.

⁵²Historian, Office of the Postmaster General, "New Deal Art in the United States Postal Service," February, 1992.

⁵³Park and Markowitz, p. 222.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Jack Boul, *Peter DeAnna: Two Washington Painters* (Charlotte, NC: Mint Museum of Art, 1986), p. 44 [Catalogue of an exhibition held June 14 - August 24, 1986 at the Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC.].

⁵⁶Ibid.; Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), p. 213. The Ellicott City, Md. and the Belmont mural are the only post office commissions DeAnna received.

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Studies and the Art Students League on the GI Bill.⁵⁷ He returned to Washington in 1954, and in 1955 DeAnna became an illustrator for the Smithsonian Institution and painted in his studio at home when he could. In 1960 he quit his job and devoted full time to painting, but in 1962 financial difficulties forced him to return to the Smithsonian. In 1967, he was commissioned to paint a mural titled "The Pine Barrens" for the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton. The period 1973-1976 was a particularly productive one for DeAnna, when he was encouraged by the reception of his work and painted in what he called an "intimist realist" mode.⁵⁸

At various times DeAnna was represented by the Washington Irving Gallery, New York and the Bernhardt Crystal Gallery, New York. In 1972 the Emerson Gallery exhibited his work with that of Joe Shannon, and in 1979, he had a one-man show at the Studio Gallery. The Hirshorn Museum purchased his "Self-Portrait in Bathrobe" that same year. Peter DeAnna died of cancer on February 14, 1980. In 1986, the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, N.C. organized an exhibition of the works of Peter DeAnna and another realist artist Jack Boul (b.1927) under the direction of artist Joe Shannon.⁵⁹

Francis Speight (1896-1989), the artist who painted the mural in the Gastonia post office, was a North Carolina native who had a distinguished career as an artist and teacher. Born in Windsor, the county seat of Bertie County, he attended Wake Forest University in 1915, and enrolled in the Corcoran School of Art (the same school DeAnna later attended) in 1920. After one term, Speight moved to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. In 1925, the Academy offered him a teaching position where he stayed until 1961, when he became associated with East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C. until his retirement in 1976.⁶⁰ Speight is most known for his paintings of the industrial suburb of Philadelphia called Manayunk and the surrounding area, and of scenes from Eastern North Carolina.⁶¹ Among other collections, his paintings are found in the Metropolitan Museum, New York; the Pennsylvania Academy; the Museum of

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Raleigh News and Observer, April 21, 1985, p. 1E.

⁶¹Henry C. Pitz, "Francis Speight: Painter of the Schuylkill Valley," *American Artist* 24(1960): 28-33, 68-69.

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Fine Arts, Boston; and the Pennsylvania State University.⁶² An exhibition of his paintings was held at the North Carolina Museum of Art in 1961, and in 1985, the North Carolina Art Society held a fundraiser and exhibition in Speight's honor.⁶³

The style of Francis Speight's work has been described as "lyrical realism," and it combines a realistic traditionalism in the manner of 17th-century Dutch artists with modern variations and inventions.⁶⁴ Comparing the work of Speight and Peter DeAnna shows broad similarities within the context of "realism," which was, as noted above, the dominant style of the 1930s. At first glance, it might be difficult to distinguish the work of the two. Both clearly painted representational works in that the subject matter was unmistakable as opposed to abstract; both used varied brush strokes and color to depict mood; and both gave soft edges to their forms to give them a slight impressionistic feel. Speight tended to make his paintings a rich tableau, while DeAnna's generally were more Spartan and simpler in subject matter. While DeAnna preferred to depict the mundane surroundings and activities of ordinary people, Speight loved to do rich landscapes of the areas in which he lived. These similarities and differences can be seen in the two Gaston County post office murals executed by the two artists.⁶⁵

Because of the former post office building's adaptation as the Belmont City Hall, the citizens of Belmont still have the opportunity to view Peter DeAnna's depiction of "Major Chronicle's South Fork Boys" as they conduct their business with the city, just as envisioned by the New Deal Depression-era arts program. The importance of the work derives from the fact that it is an excellent example (and the only one in Belmont) of the New Deal goal of bringing art to the common people in public buildings, and is expressed in a realistic style which was deemed by the government to be the artistic language of ordinary citizens. It is the only public artwork in the county that depicts an important local historical figure. The canvas is also the work of a rising young artist who was commissioned on the basis of work submitted in previous competitions and who went on to achieve a respectable measure of recognition in his lifetime.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³See note 56.

⁶⁴Pitz, "Francis Speight."

⁶⁵Jack Boul, *Peter DeAnna*, op. cit., p. 40ff.; Pitz, p. 28ff.

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BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point being the intersection of the center line of Catawba Street with the center line of North Main Street; running thence in a northwestwardly direction a distance of 48.23 feet to a point in the westerly side of North Main Street for the true point of beginning, said point being the southeast corner of lands now or formerly of W. B. Puett; running thence along the westerly side of North Main Street S $10^{\circ} 27'$ E 134.8 feet to a point in the northerly side of a public alley; thence along the northerly side of said public alley N $80^{\circ} 26'$ W 249.47 feet to a point; thence N $6^{\circ} 45'$ E 116.7 feet to a point in the southerly side of lands now or formerly of W. B. Puett; thence along the southerly side of lands of said W. B. Puett S $80^{\circ} 37'$ E 212.5 feet to the point of beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property includes all of the parcel acquired by the United States by a December 31, 1938 uncontested act of condemnation for purposes of locating a United States Post Office in Belmont, North Carolina.

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PHOTOGRAPH SCHEDULE

Information applies to all photographs

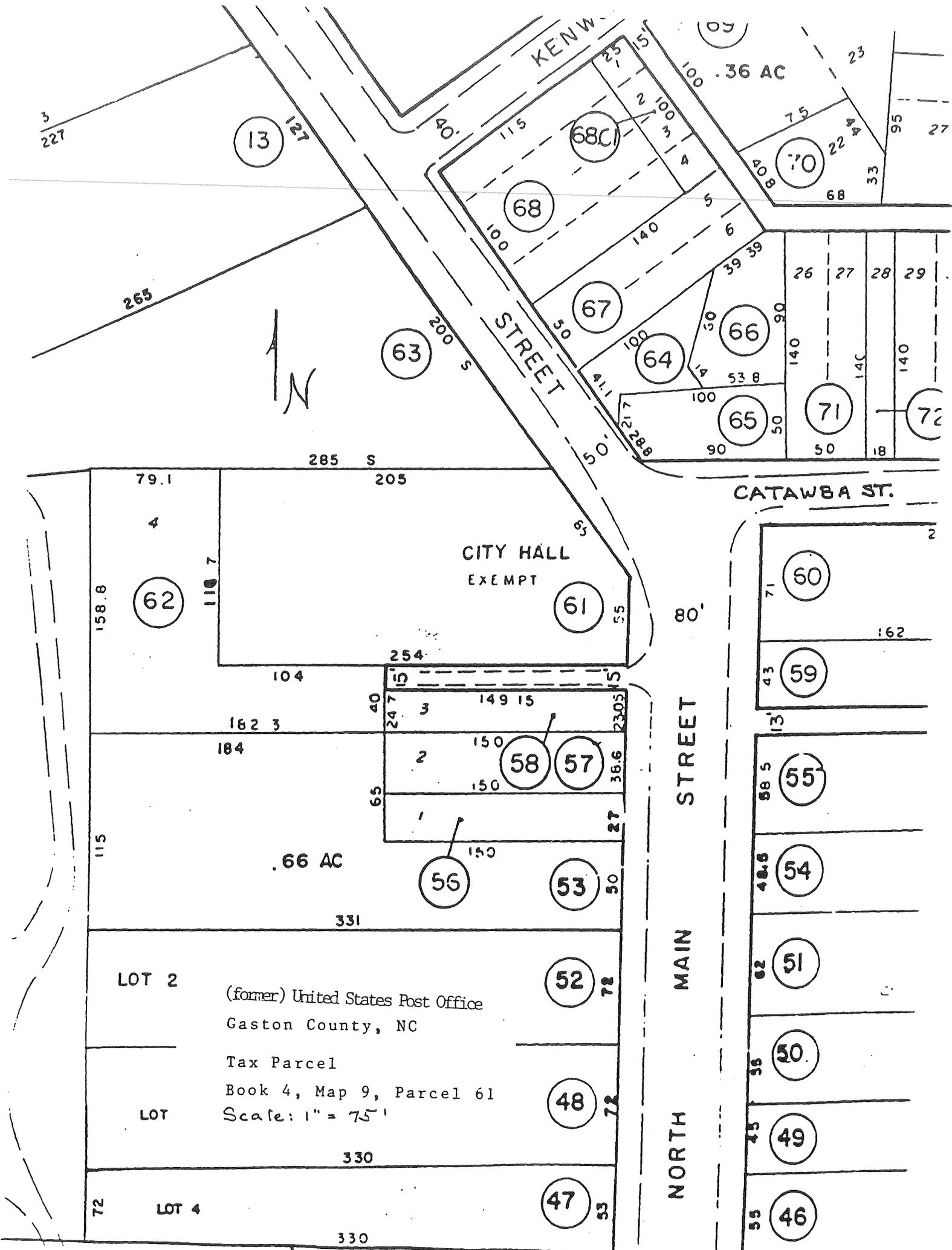
(former) United States Post Office
Gaston County, NC

William H. Huffman, photographer

August 29, 1994

Original negatives on file with North Carolina Division of Archives &
History, 109 E. Jones Street, Raleigh, NC.

<u>Photograph #</u>	<u>Description</u>
1.	Overall view of east elevation, looking west.
2.	View of front entry, looking west.
3.	Window detail on east elevation, looking west.
4.	View of lobby, looking south.
5.	Mural detail.
6.	View of west and south elevations, looking northeast.



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CITY HALL
EXEMPT

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CATAWBA ST.

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LOT 2

(former) United States Post Office
Gaston County, NC

52

51

Tax Parcel

Book 4, Map 9, Parcel 61

Scale: 1" = 75'

48

50

LOT

330

49

72

LOT 4

47

46

330

NORTH MAIN STREET

(former) United States Post Office

Cretton County, NC

Belmont
Belmont Quad

Zone 17
N/3899860 E/A96520

BELMONT QUADRANGLE
NORTH CAROLINA—SOUTH CAROLINA
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

NE/4 CLOVER 15' QUADRANGLE

4854 IV SW
MOUNTAIN ISLAND
LAKE

TH CAROLINA
ND ECONOMIC RESOURCES
H CAROLINA

.LY) 495 496 497 499 1 400 000 FEET (N. C.) 81°00' 35°15'



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CHARLOTTE (U.S. 21) 9 MI.

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CATAWBA

