

VLR-4/22/92 NRHP-9/24/92

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 SALEM POST OFFICE

other names/site number Old Post Office; DHR File No. 129-37

2. Location

street & number 103 East Main Street N/A not for publication

city or town Salem N/A vicinity

state Virginia code VA county Salem (independent city) code 775 zip code 24153

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.)

Hugh C. Miller 14 Aug 1992
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources
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:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<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:)	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Salem Post Office
Name of Property

Salem, Virginia
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	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Post Office

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

HEALTH CARE: Clinic

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other _____

Narrative Description

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

Salem Post Office
Name of Property

Salem, Virginia
County and State

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1922-1923

Significant Dates

1922

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Simon, Louis A.

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Salem Post Office
Name of Property

Salem, Virginia
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .7 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	7
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5	8	3	6	2	0
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4	1	2	7	6	0	0
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Zone Easting Northing

2

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3

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Zone Easting Northing

4

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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 Daniel Pezzoni

organization Preservation Technologies, Inc. date February 29, 1992

street & number P. O. Box 7835 telephone 703-342-7832

city or town Roanoke state VA zip code 24019

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 Richard H. Fisher, M. D.

street & number 1921 McVitty Road telephone 703-389-5912

city or town Salem state VA zip code 24153

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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Salem Post Office, Salem, Virginia.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Summary Description

The former Salem Post Office is located at 103 East Main Street in Salem, Virginia. The south-facing post office was built in 1922-23 and is a one-story, Georgian Revival-style building with brick walls laid in five-course American bond. The building has a symmetrical five-bay facade with a pedimented entry, an asphalt-shingled hip roof that contains an attic story, and rear additions dating to the 1950s, 1960s, and 1989-91. Significant interior features include a lobby with skylight, a spiral stair, and many original fixtures and furnishings. The post office was decommissioned in 1985 and converted into doctor's offices in 1989-91. The former Salem Post Office stands in the historic Salem downtown, surrounded by nineteenth- and twentieth-century commercial and institutional buildings, including the National Register-listed Salem Presbyterian Church.

Resource Count

Contributing resources (with date and resource type) in the nominated area include:

1. Post Office (1922-23, later additions) (building).

Building: Exterior

The massing and detailing of the former Salem Post Office are indicative of the Georgian Revival style. A sense of monumentality is created by the one-story facade, which measures slightly over 21' from the first floor level (expressed on the exterior by a limestone water table) to the top of the parapet. Below the aforementioned water table at the base of the building are a number of rectangular barred windows that provide light to the basement. At the west corner of the front facade is a brownstone corner stone bearing the inscription "A. W. MELLON/SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY/JAMES A. WETMORE/ACTING SUPERVISING ARCHITECT/1922."

At the center of the facade is the main entry, flanked by fluted Doric pilasters and surmounted by a Doric frieze with triglyphs and a dentilated pediment. The pilasters, frieze, and pediment are of wooden construction painted white. Underneath the frieze is the inscription "OLD POST OFFICE"

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Salem Post Office, Salem, Virginia.

in incised gold lettering.¹ The original wood and glass front doors and transom were replaced in the mid-twentieth century by aluminum doors; a transom and doors similar to the original were installed during the 1989-91 rehabilitation. The two twelve-over-twelve-sash windows to each side of the main entry (and the three windows on the east and west elevations) are set into shallow round-arched recesses.

Defining the top of the facade is a parapet formed of alternating balustrade sections and brick panels; below the parapet is a cornice with fret bed molding. The balustrades and cornice are of wooden construction painted white. Rising behind the parapet is a hip roof that contains a functional attic story. Originally the sides of the roof were sheathed in green slate shingles; the almost flat top of the roof was sheathed in composition roofing. Now both the sides and top of the roof are sheathed in composition shingles. On the north side of the roof is a long shed dormer. At the peak of the roof is a gabled metal and glass skylight. Next to the skylight is a brick furnace stack.

The 1950s, 1960s, and 1989-91 additions to the rear of the building were designed to harmonize with the styling of the original section. These additions are of five-course American bond brick construction and are lower than the original section. Above the twelve-over-twelve-sash windows on the east and west elevations of the 1950s addition are classically-inspired white marble panels. A small projecting mailing vestibule was removed from the rear elevation of the post office when the 1950s addition was made. On the west side of the 1950s addition is an outdoor stair well leading to the basement. On the east side of the 1950s addition is a modern metal crane used to move furnishings to and from the attic story.

The 1960s and 1989-91 additions form the rear (north) elevation of the building. This elevation has five pairs of six-over-six sash windows (three of which were formerly loading dock doors), an entry with sidelights, and a portico with cylindrical fluted metal columns, turned balusters, and a flat roof. The portico was created in 1989-91 to mask a handicap access ramp. The roof of the portico incorporates a 1960s cantilevered metal awning. At the east end of the 1960s addition is a sliding glass door opening onto a smaller porch (originally a loading dock dating to the 1960s) with a 1989-91 balustrade.

Building: Interior

The front entry leads through a small vestibule with a marble floor and early bulletin boards and radiators, through a second set of glazed doors, and into

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Salem Post Office, Salem, Virginia.

the principal interior space of the post office: the lobby. The lobby is a rectangular space measuring approximately 27' by 15' in size and 14'-3" from floor to ceiling. The room retains most of its original fabric with a number of minor alterations dating to 1941 and later years. The lobby features a white marble terrazzo floor with a border of black Virginia marble and pink Tennessee marble, a pink Tennessee marble base board, a paneled oak wainscot with a molded chair rail, and plastered walls and ceiling with a molded plaster cove cornice. In the center of the ceiling are glass panes that formerly directed day light into the lobby from the skylight above (these glass panes have been floored over). Day light then filtered from the brightly-lit lobby into adjoining spaces through large pivoted-sash obscure-glass windows set into the upper halves of the lobby walls (these windows now have opaque backings).

The lower halves of the lobby walls are taken up by doorways into adjoining spaces, banks of metal and glass lock boxes, letter and parcel drops, a directory in a glass case, and a counter window with a brass grille. The original doorways lead to the former postmaster's office, the former janitor's closet, and the basement stair; two modern doorways lead to a reception area and a back hall. The doorways are hung with wooden doors with obscure glass panels (the modern doorways are hung with recycled old doors). Several doors, letter drops, and the counter window retain their original gilt lettering: "POSTMASTER", "SPECIAL DELIVERY", "STAMPS", etc.

Originally the lobby had several banks of lock boxes along the north walls; later an alcove was created at the northwest corner of the lobby to accommodate additional lock boxes. Presently there are two banks of lock boxes on the north and west walls of the lobby. The lock boxes in the alcove were removed after the post office was decommissioned in 1985; consequently, during the 1989-91 rehabilitation the alcove walls were sheathed in high-quality wood paneling. In the middle of the lobby are two wooden pedestal writing desks that are original to the lobby. The desks have round wood and glass tops and built-in ink wells. Also in the lobby is a wooden letter bin now used as a magazine rack.

The offices and work room surrounding the lobby originally had 14'-3" ceilings. During the 1989-91 rehabilitation a second-story storage area was created in these spaces, and the formerly open work room was partitioned into offices and examination rooms. Despite these alterations to the secondary spaces of the post office, many original finishes such as maple flooring and high tongue-and-groove wainscoting survive. Also intact are the postmaster's office in the southeast corner of the building and the money order and registry office in the southwest corner. In each of these offices are

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Salem Post Office, Salem, Virginia.

reinforced concrete vaults with lower and upper compartments. The steel doors to the vaults bear painted United States seals. Also in these offices are modern metal spiral stairs that provide access to the second story. The northwest corner of the work room retains its original 14'-3" ceiling. Rising in this space is an original steel spiral stair manufactured by the A. M. Mason Safety Tread Company. The stair rises from the basement to the attic story. Rising from the basement stairwell to the attic is a ladder that was used by postal inspectors to access three surveillance shafts. These shafts enclose ladders accessed from the attic and are located in the postmaster's office, the money order office, and the work room. The shafts have one-way glass windows at various heights that permitted postal inspectors an unobstructed view of the employees at work.

The attic story of the post office was used until 1985 as a swing room for the postal employees. Surviving from this original function are lockers and a bathroom with slate toilet and shower stalls. The swing room and the formerly unfinished remainder of the attic were made into an apartment during the 1989-91 rehabilitation. The light shaft below the skylight was converted into a studio.

The basement of the post office is utilitarian in character with painted brick walls, exposed plumbing, linoleum tile over concrete floors, and a segmental-arched doorway with a diagonal tongue-and-groove door. The basement originally contained a boiler room, a fuel room, and a janitor's closet as well as additional storage and work space. One corner room of the basement is now used as an archives containing documents pertaining to the post office and memorabilia such as a striped apron and early postal signage.

The 1950s, 1960s, and 1989-91 additions to the rear of the post office are plainly detailed on the interior. The 1950s addition has a high tongue-and-groove wainscot with plaster walls and ceilings above; a 1961 conveyor that extends into the basement; and a 1989-91 hallway that divides the addition into two halves and connects the lobby to the rear entrance. Several 1950s loading dock doors were enclosed when the 1960s addition was made. In the 1960s addition is a sweet shop that was installed in 1989-91.

Site Features

Leading up to the post office from the sidewalk on Main Street are a set of steps and a semicircular platform. The steps and platform are flanked by concrete and limestone cheeks and two concrete lamp post bases. The two cast iron lamp posts date to the 1920s and have round glass globes, fluted, tapered shafts, and Grecian ornamentation. As part of the 1989-91

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Salem Post Office, Salem, Virginia.

rehabilitation the cheeks and lamp post bases were given a rough-cast white finish and the deteriorated concrete steps and platform were repaved in brick. The uppermost platform adjacent to the front entry retains its original light gray granite pavement.

Next to the front steps is a concrete post for a former mail box that was installed in the 1930s. Off the southwest corner of the post office is a flag pole (originally a flag pole was mounted on the roof on axis with the front entry). Behind the post office is a parking lot that took its present form during the mid-twentieth century. The parking lot is divided into a lower level adjacent to the post office and an upper level on Clay Street at the north end of the lot. The spaces for the postmaster and other employees in the lower parking lot are still labeled in black and white paint. Flanking the Market Street entrance to the lower parking lot are two sandstone pillars that formerly stood as fence posts on the Marsteller property at 115 Mountain Avenue in Southwest Roanoke; another sandstone pillar and a bench made from a slab of marble stand in the yard on the east side of the post office. The posts and bench were placed on the property during the 1989-91 rehabilitation and were given a rough-cast white finish.

Endnotes

1. Originally this inscription read "U. S. POST OFFICE"; it was changed during the 1988-91 rehabilitation.

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Salem Post Office, Salem, Virginia.

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The Salem Post Office is one of Salem, Virginia's principal twentieth-century public buildings, and historically served as an important symbol of the federal government in the city. Built in 1922-23, the monumental one-story brick building with its restrained classical detailing is a notable local example of the Georgian Revival style. On the interior are an original spiral stair and a lobby with many early fittings. To the rear are additions dating to the 1950s, 1960s, and 1989-91. The Salem Post Office was designed in 1917 under the superintendence of Treasury Department architect Louis A. Simon, but construction was postponed until a Republican-appointee became Salem postmaster. Federal policy and national, state, and local politics played an important role in the delayed construction of the post office and its sudden realization in 1922. Decommissioned in 1985, the post office was sensitively rehabilitated as doctor's offices in 1989-91.

Justification of Criteria

The Salem Post Office is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The post office is eligible as a notable local example of the Georgian Revival style, and for the many interesting interior features associated with the building's historic function. The period of significance coincides with the period of the construction of the post office: 1922-1923.

Historical Background

Postal service was initiated in Salem shortly after the town's establishment in 1802.¹ Railroad and industrial development during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to population growth in Salem and subsequently to the need for expanded postal service. In 1907 Salem's post office was upgraded from third to second class status, and the town's civic leaders began to agitate for a new post office building.² In 1912 Congressman Carter Glass assured the town that it would have a new post office within the year, but local disagreements over where to site the new facility and Treasury Department resistance delayed site acquisition until late in 1916.³ With the

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Salem Post Office, Salem, Virginia.

nation's entry into World War I and the accompanying material shortages, increased labor costs, and funding disruptions, construction of the new post office was delayed an additional five years.⁴

Federal policy and national, state, and local politics played an important role in the delayed construction of the Salem Post Office and its sudden realization in 1922. The years 1915 through 1932 have been described as a period of "retrenchment" for the public building program of the Treasury Department "characterized by both a stream-lining of congressional authorization and appropriation procedures and a drive toward standardization of design."⁵ The retrenchment was in part a response to excesses in the building program prior to 1915, when incumbent congressmen "seeking federal largess for their districts" promoted the construction of heavily ornamented post offices that were often larger than local needs warranted.⁶ These factors led Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson in 1915 to object to spending \$65,000 on a post office for Salem, which then had a population of about 4,000.⁷

The events leading up to the construction of the Salem Post Office in 1922 were highly politicized. In 1915, during the Wilson administration, Democrat John Peter Saul, Sr. was appointed Salem postmaster. Saul was a clothing salesman who was active in Salem's Red Cross efforts during World War I.⁸ From 1915 to 1922, Saul worked diligently to procure the new post office, but ultimately he could not overcome federal resistance. In March 1922, in a "political squeeze play," U. S. Representative for Virginia Bascom Slep arranged Saul's dismissal. According to one commentator:

"Bascom Slep, the Republican patronage dispenser for Virginia, who was chafing that a Democrat was still the postmaster a year after Republican President Warren G. Harding took office, maneuvered to replace Saul even before his term expired."⁹

The Roanoke Times noted that prior to the dismissal a postal inspector "turned in a good report on Saul ... so another inspector, one better trained in politics" was called in to produce the required unfavorable report.¹⁰

Lawyer and industrialist Edward S. Barnitz, "very active in Republican politics in Salem," was installed as acting postmaster on March 6; in November Barnitz was recommended for a permanent post by Representative Slep.¹¹ The swift movement on the construction of the post office that followed Barnitz's appointment must have served to enhance Republican prestige in Salem, although out-going postmaster Saul probably derived some satisfaction from advertising for bids for the post office as one of his last

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Salem Post Office, Salem, Virginia.

official acts.¹² The shell of the post office was completed up to the roof by August 1922; furnishings began to arrive in January 1923; and the building was fully operational by June 1923. It is noteworthy that the Salem Post Office, long held in limbo by the austerity measures of the federal government, was built a year after what was at the time the largest deficit in the history of the United States Postal Service.¹³

The restrained Georgian Revival design of the Salem Post Office is a product of the same federal austerity program that affected the building's construction. During the nineteenth century, the style of federal construction oscillated between classicism and eclecticism. James Knox Taylor, the Treasury Department's Supervising Architect from 1897 to 1912, was responsible for an "official return" to classicism that characterized federal design into the 1930s.¹⁴ In 1915, the Treasury Department took action to curb extravagant pork-barrel building projects by establishing a classification scheme for regulating post office construction. The new policy encouraged standardization and rationalized the federal building program by relating the size and architectural refinement of post offices to the recipient community's population and annual postal receipts. Salem, as host to a second class post office, was entitled to a "Class C" post office characterized by:

"Brick facing with stone or terra-cotta trimmings; fireproof floors; nonfireproof roof; frames, sashes, and doors wood; interior finish to exclude the more expensive woods and marbles; the latter used only where sanitary conditions demand; public spaces restricted to very simple forms of ornament."¹⁵

The Salem Post Office generally adhered in its construction to the 1915 guidelines; for instance, marble and slate appear only on the lobby floor and in the swing room shower. The Salem Post Office took the 1915 economies a step further in its reliance on wood rather than stone or terra-cotta ornament in the front entry surround and parapet. The post office also incorporated standardized guttering, flashing, plumbing, heating, lighting, and parcel drop details.

Surviving construction drawings and the building's corner stone cite James Alphonso Wetmore as the Acting Supervising Architect of the Salem Post Office. A lawyer by profession, Wetmore entered the federal civil service in 1885. From 1915 to 1933, Wetmore served as Acting Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, responsible for the administration of the department's building program but little involved in the design of the post offices built by the department. As noted in his obituary in Architectural

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Salem Post Office, Salem, Virginia.

Forum, "It is a curious fact that although neither an architect nor an engineer, Mr. Wetmore's name ... appears on the cornerstone of more buildings than any other man's in history."¹⁶

The individual most responsible for the design of the Salem Post Office was Louis Adolphe Simon, the Chief of the Architectural Division of the Treasury Department from 1905 to 1933. An 1891 graduate of M.I.T., Simon joined the Treasury Department's architectural staff in 1896. In 1933, Simon succeeded Wetmore as Supervising Architect, a position he held until 1939. Louis A. Simon joined the American Institute of Architects in 1908 and was invested as a fellow in 1937.¹⁷ Probably most of the United States post offices built in Virginia from the 1910s through the early 1940s were designed by or under Simon. Following his appointment as Supervising Architect, Simon's name appeared on the cornerstones of 1930s post offices in the Virginia communities of Arlington, Charlottesville, Chatham, Marion, and Martinsville.¹⁸

The names of a number of Treasury Department architects and/or draftsmen appear on the construction drawings and specifications for the Salem Post Office. The aforementioned standardized details were drawn by an individual named Woodward in 1916. Drawings pertaining to the structural and mechanical features of the post office were drafted by J. G. Mason in 1917. Drawings of the architectural detailing were drafted by an individual named McClelland in 1917. Other drawings dating to 1922 were drafted by an individual named Simpson and approved by E. H. Elliot, superintendent of the Drafting Division.

In the years following its contentious beginnings, the Salem Post Office functioned quietly in its role as one of the pillars of the Salem community. At the time the post office was built, J. G. Fitzgerald served as the assistant postmaster.¹⁹ Several years earlier, in 1916, postal employees W. E. Gynne, C. W. Stoutamire, N. C. Brubaker, and H. F. Humphreys formed Branch No. 1882 of the United National Association of Post Office Clerks. At the time the local branch was organized, the federal government was opposed to the unionization of postal employees. In some instances management spied on letter carriers and postal clerks in order to suppress union activities or to oust employees who were affiliated with a political party that happened not to be in power.²⁰ Considerations such as these, as well as legitimate surveillance, may have led to the inclusion of surveillance shafts in the design of the Salem Post Office.

In 1940, during the tenure of postmaster G. A. Scruggs, the Salem Post Office was upgraded to first class status.²¹ The post office was enlarged in the

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Salem Post Office, Salem, Virginia.

1950s (probably the mid-1950s) and again in the 1960s (probably the early 1960s) and a mail conveyor system linking the basement and 1950s addition was added in the early 1960s.²² In 1974, the Roanoke, Virginia architecture and engineering firm of Hayes, Seay, Mattern & Mattern produced a report on the post office that suggested several minor alterations to the existing fabric.²³ In 1985, upon completion of the present Salem Post Office at 320 W. Main Street, the old post office was decommissioned and put to public bid.²⁴ In December 1988, the old post office was purchased by Dr. Richard H. Fisher who undertook a sensitive rehabilitation of the building in 1989-91.²⁵

Rehabilitation

The 1989-91 rehabilitation converted the Salem Post Office into doctor's offices in the main story and a loft apartment in the former attic swing room. In some ways the rehabilitation approached an academic restoration in thoroughness; for instance, missing historic fabric such as the original wood-and-glass entry doors was replicated and two of the lock box banks that formerly walled the lobby were retrieved from the main Roanoke, Virginia post office, where they had been taken after decommission. The historic character of the exterior of the 1922-23 section and the lobby were preserved intact with only the minor alterations described in the text. Two major changes to the building were the addition of a portico on the rear elevation and the insertion of a second story in the 1922-23 section. The portico was added to a non-character-defining portion of the building (the 1960s and 1980s additions) and it is not readily apparent from Main Street. The portico was added in response to local building codes that required that the handicapped access ramp at the rear of the building be covered. The second story was inserted into the secondary spaces of the 1922-23 section leaving important elements such as the lobby and the spiral stair unaltered. The second story was pulled back at the windows and is not readily apparent from the exterior, as shown in the accompanying photographs. The rehabilitated Salem Post Office occupies a special place in the hearts of Salem citizens.

Endnotes

1. A number of individuals contributed to the historical background section of this report. Dr. Richard H. Fisher, the present owner of the property and initiator of the report, provided much primary source material and also information that had been related to him by former Salem Post Office employees. Salem historian Norwood C. Middleton's Salem: A Virginia Chronicle (1986) served as the main secondary source material in the preparation of

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the report. Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) architectural historian Leslie A. Giles, New York Historic Preservation Office (NYHPO) program analyst Raymond W. Smith, and NYHPO National Register and Survey Coordinator Larry E. Gobrecht provided information on the Salem Post Office's national context. VDHR architectural historian John E. Wells provided information on the architects involved in the design of the Salem Post Office.

2. Norwood C. Middleton, Salem: A Virginia Chronicle. (Salem, Va.: Salem Historical Society, Inc., 1986): 186, 250, 255.

3. Ibid, 263-5. The original 0.38-acre post office site was purchased in December 1916 for a combined cost of \$9,100 (Roanoke County Deed Book 83, pages 597-8).

4. Ibid: 265; Larry E. Gobrecht, "United States Post Offices in New York State--1858 to 1943--Thematic Resources." National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, 1986: 8.20.

5. Gobrecht: 8.6.

6. Ibid: 8.15.

7. Middleton: 264.

8. Ibid: 265, 274.

9. Ibid: 246, 285.

10. Roanoke Times, March 1, 1922.

11. Ibid, March 7, 1922; November 22, 1922.

12. Ibid, March 7, 1922.

13. Gerald Cullinan, The United States Postal Service (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973): 126. The deficit in 1921 was \$157.5 million, nine times the previous record deficit.

14. Gobrecht: 8.13.

15. Ibid: 8.18-.19.

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16. Ibid: 8.23-.24; Architectural Forum, May 1940: 72.
17. Gobrecht: 8.24; American Institute of Architects College of Fellows. A History of the College. (1984): 80.
18. John E. Wells, unpublished research on Virginia architects
19. Roanoke Times, November 22, 1933.
20. Papers at the Salem Post Office; Cullinan: 110-13, 118, 122. The worst abuses were carried out in the 1890s, but anti-union sentiment still permeated the postal service in the 1910s. According to Cullinan, in 1917 Postmaster General Burleson "called for the dissolution of all unions of postal employees" (page 122).
21. Middleton: 335.
22. Interview with Dr. Richard H. Fisher, Salem, Va., February 28, 1992.
23. Hayes, Seay, Mattern & Mattern, "Postal Environmental Impact Survey ..." (1974).
24. Salem Times Register, September 26, 1985.
25. City of Salem Deed Book 146, page 36.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated parcel is depicted on the accompanying exhibit page. The parcel is known as lot 10-1 on City of Salem Tax Map 106 and is described in City of Salem Deed Book 146, page 36. The parcel contains 0.742 acres.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated parcel correspond to the present boundaries of the property and include the principal contributing resource, the Salem Post Office.

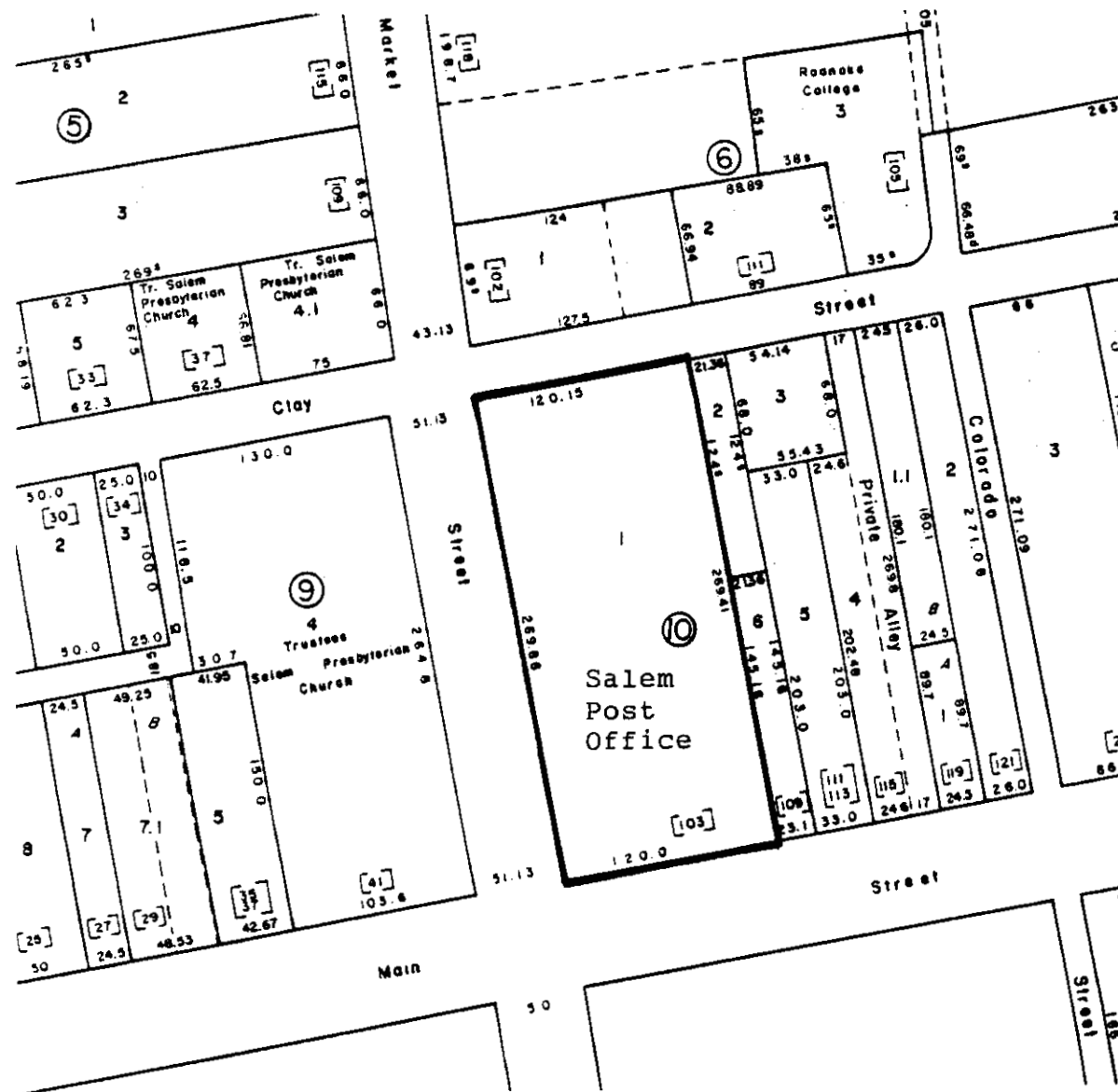
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Salem Post Office, Salem, Va.

Section of Salem Tax Map 106-10-1 showing nominated area for Salem Post Office. Scale: 1" = 100'.



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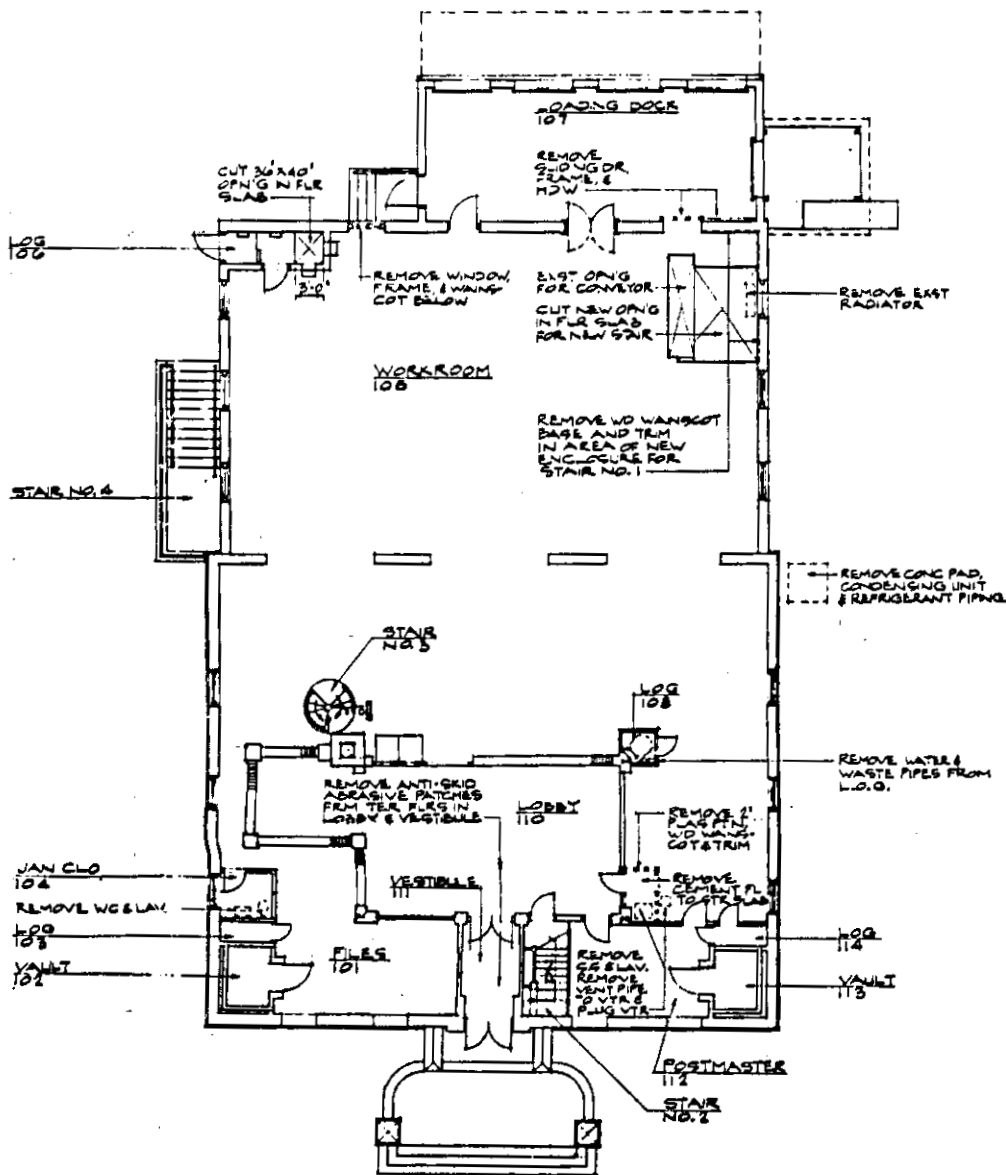
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Salem Post Office, Salem, Va.

1974 plan of Salem Post Office. Scale: 1" = approx. 20'.

Plan shows 1922-23 section with 1950s and 1960s additions to rear. In 1989-91 a small addition was made to the northwest rear corner of the building creating an even rear elevation.

Plan drawn by Hayes, Seay, Mattern & Mattern, Roanoke, Va.



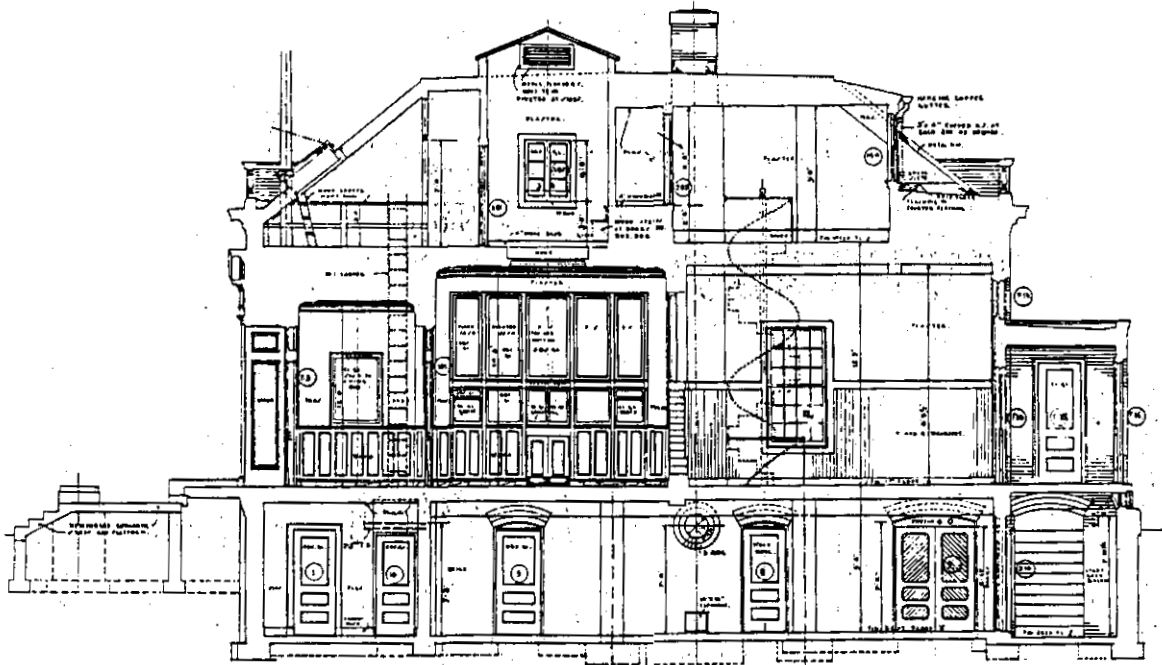
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Salem Post Office, Salem, Va.

1917 Treasury Department section drawing of the Salem Post Office.
Front elevation: left-hand side. Scale: 1" = approx. 12'.



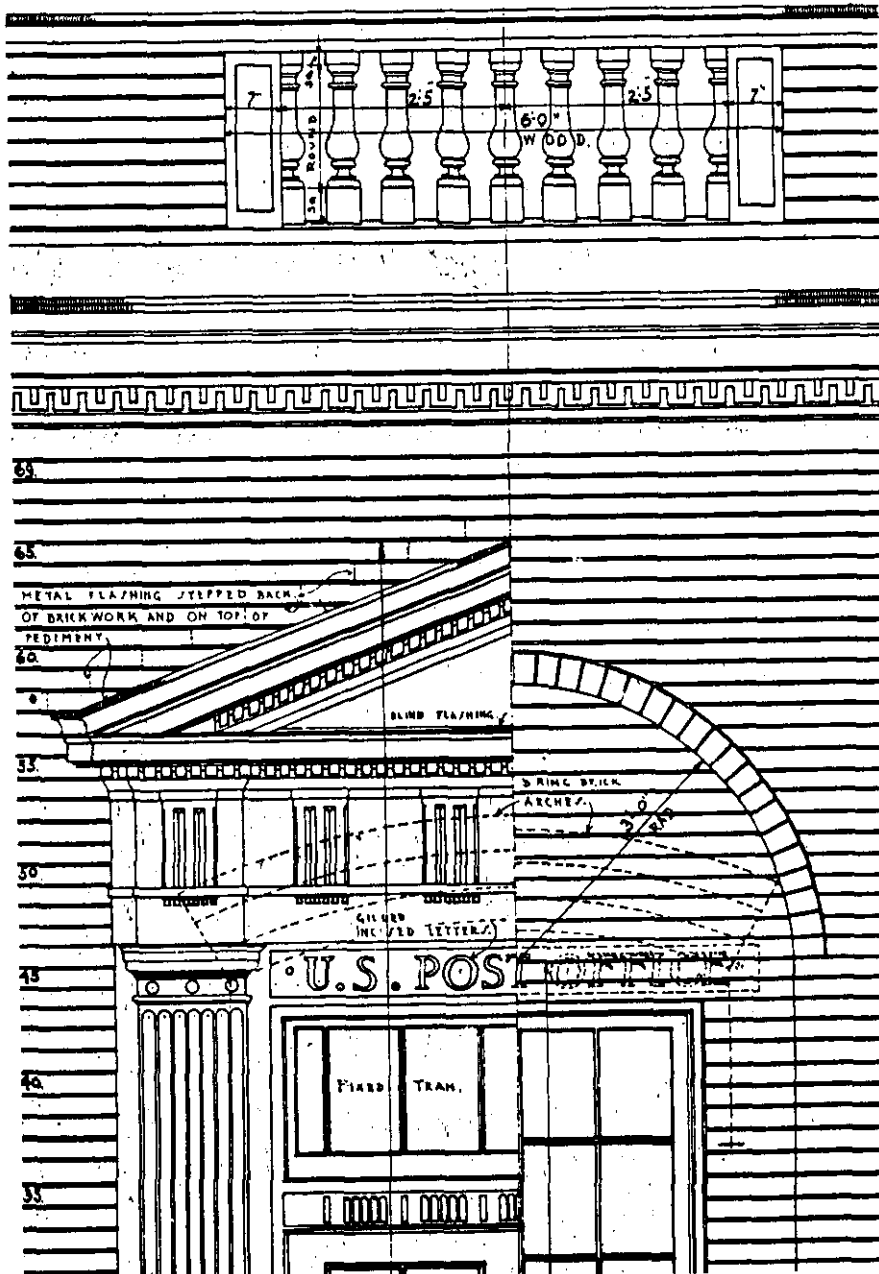
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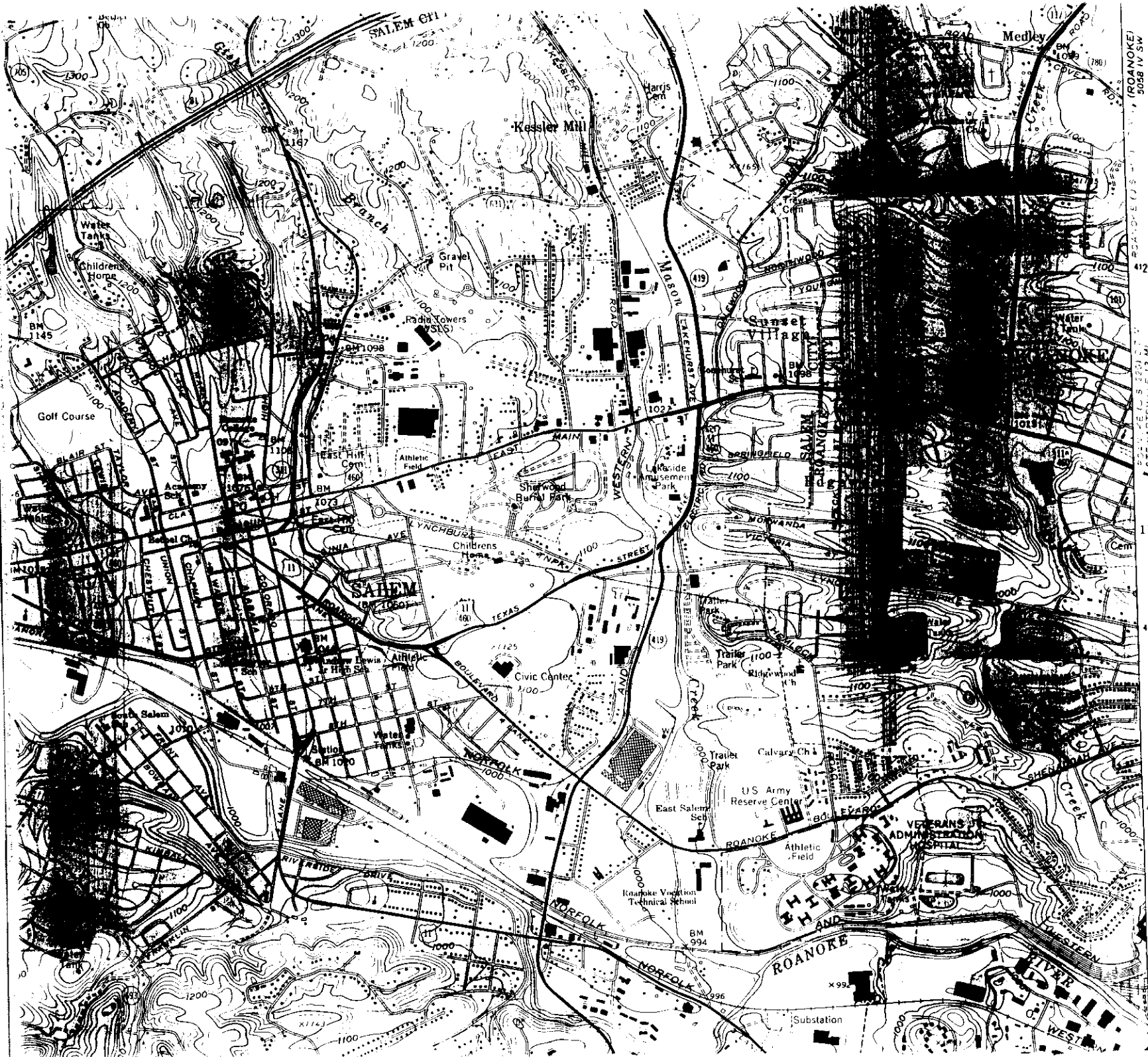
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Salem Post Office, Salem, Va.

1917 Treasury Department drawing of a section of the front entry and parapet of the Salem Post Office. Scale: 1" = approx. 2'.





SALEM POST OFFICE
103 E. MAIN ST, SALEM, VA

UTMs: ZONE 17
E 583620
N 4127600

4129
17°30"
4127
4126
4125