

NR LISTED

AUG 14 1998

AHPP

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

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**1. Name of Property**

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Historic Name: DeWitt Post Office

Other Name/Site Number: AR0146

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**2. Location**

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Street & Number: 221 West Cross Street

Not for Publication: NA

City/Town: DeWitt

Vicinity: NA

State: AR County: Arkansas Code: 001 Zip Code: 72042

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**3. Classification**

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Ownership of Property: Public-Federal

Category of Property: Building



DeWitt Post Office

Arkansas County, Arkansas

Name of Property

County and State

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art

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**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**  
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau







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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic: GOVERNMENT Sub: Post Office

Current : GOVERNMENT Sub: Post Office

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification:

Colonial Revival

Materials: foundation Concrete roof Metal  
 walls Brick other \_\_\_\_\_

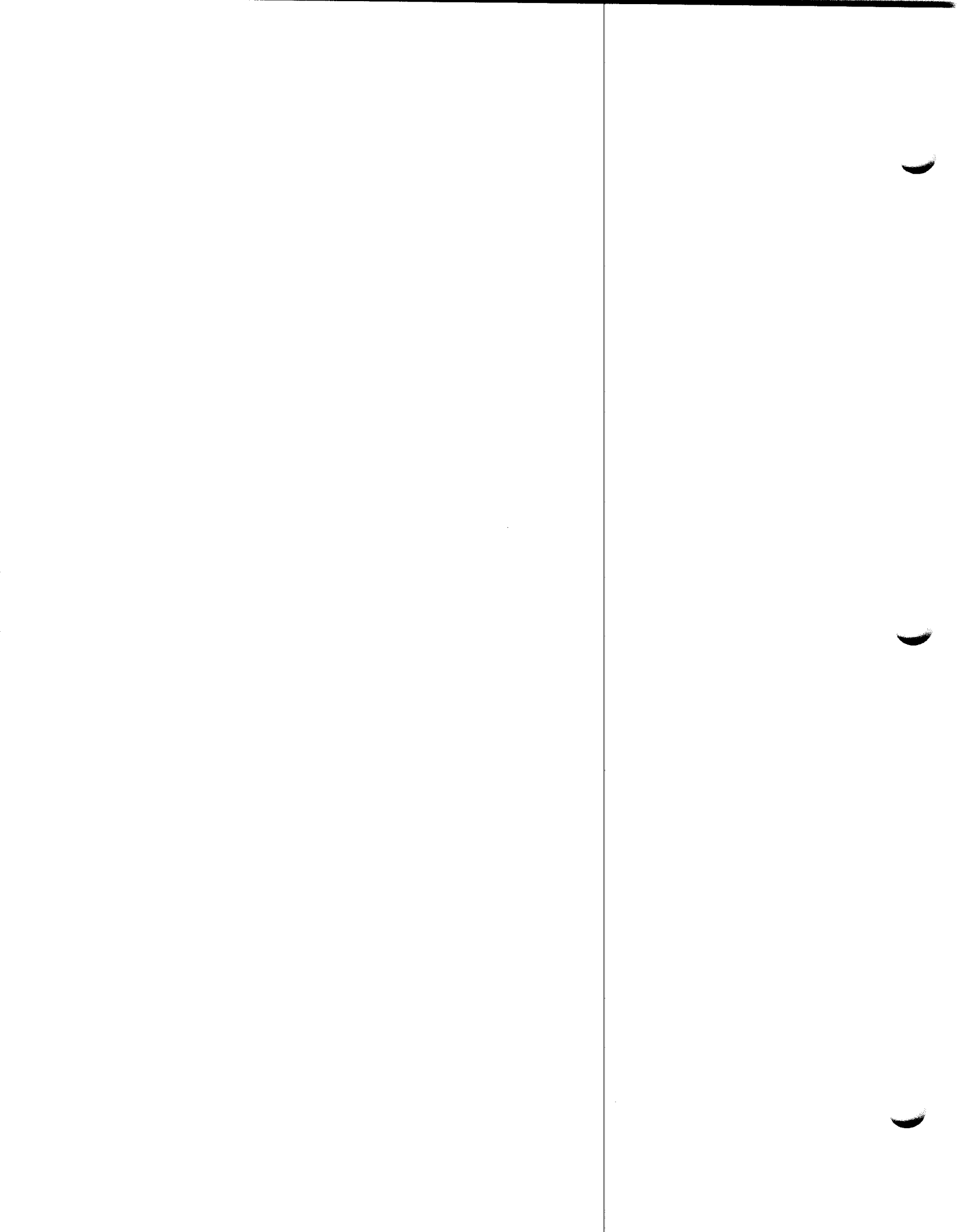
Describe present and historic physical appearance:

SUMMARY

The DeWitt Post Office is a one-story, brick-masonry structure with a full basement. It is designed in a restrained interpretation of the Colonial Revival style of architecture. The plan of the building is essentially square, with a small projecting rear "t" that serves as a loading dock.

ELABORATION

The DeWitt Post Office is a one-story, brick-masonry structure with a full basement. It is designed in a restrained interpretation of the Colonial





Name of Property

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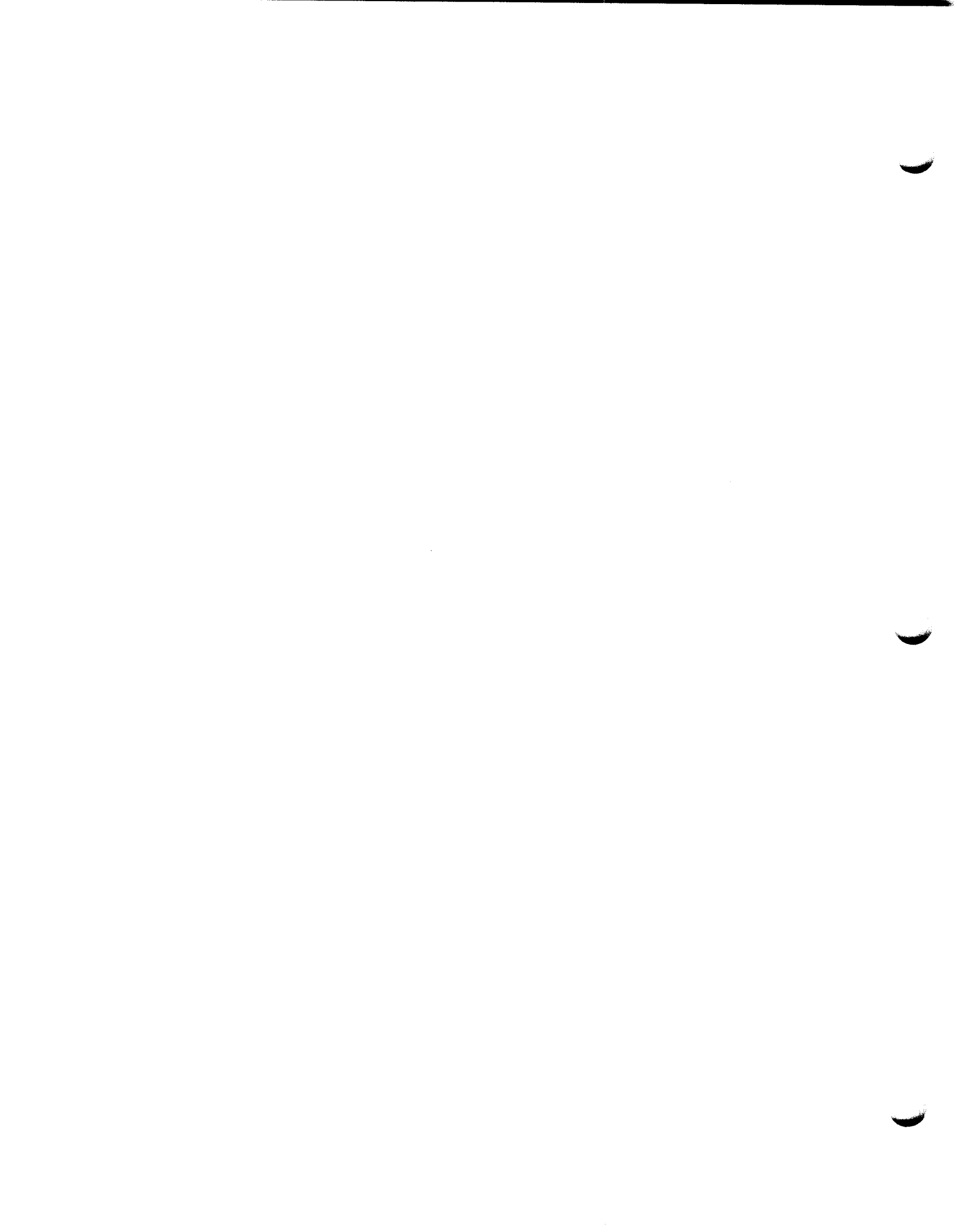
Revival style of architecture. It is designed on an essentially square plan with a small projecting rear "t" that serves as a loading dock. The entire structure is encircled with a limestone cornice band.

The north, or front, facade centers around twin wooden doors topped by a transom and located in the center of the facade; they are flanked by simple wooden Doric columns inset in the brick facade. The door arrangement is topped by a dentil course. The frieze band between the dentil course and transom has adhesive letters attached reading: DEWITT AR 72042/221 W CROSS ST. Two eight-over-twelve, double-hung windows flank the door assembly on each side; they are topped by a limestone lintel, as are all full-sized windows in this structure. A set of concrete steps lead down from the front of the door; they feature a simple metal railing. Twin lamps flank the door assembly. A handicap-access ramp runs below the eastern pair of windows. A sunken area below each pair of windows provides basement window access. Each side in the sunken area, which is bisected by the stairs, features twin six-over-six, double-hung windows.

Continuing around the western facade of the building, heading from north to south, the building is fenestrated with an eight-over-twelve, double-hung window; a four-over-four, double-hung half window; a blank, brick-filled, recessed area; another half window; another eight-over-twelve window; and a final half window within another recessed brick area. Steps at the northern edge of the facade lead to a recessed area with twin six-over-six windows flanking a door with a twelve-pane window and a three-pane transom. An additional recessed area with a six-over-six, double-hung window lies below the southernmost eight-over-twelve window.

The rear, or south facade, from west to east, features a four-over-four, double-hung half window; two eight-over-twelve, double-hung windows, a projecting loading dock enclosed on the east side with an L-shaped brick wall; a door leading onto the loading dock, and two more eight-over-twelve windows. The two-story chimney rises above the eastern edge of the loading dock, and a small wooden shed is built onto the eastern wall of the loading dock.

The eastern facade is fenestrated from south to north with four eight-over-twelve, double-hung windows. A recessed area below the second to the southernmost window is fenestrated with a six-over-six, double-hung window. The handicapped access ramp forms a switchback beneath the northernmost



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windows before continuing across the front facade to the porch. All windows on all facades are covered with screens.

Significant interior details include original woodwork, post office boxes, wooden vestibule, and a mural by William Traher titled "Portrait of Contemporary DeWitt."

Despite the loss of some of the recessed windows when the ADA access ramp was added in 1994 and the lowering of ceilings in 1970-71, the structure retains a remarkable degree of historic integrity. It continues to serve as a U.S. Post Office.

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**8. Statement of Significance**  
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Statewide.

Applicable National Register Criteria:   A  

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):   NA  

Areas of Significance:   Politics/Government    
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

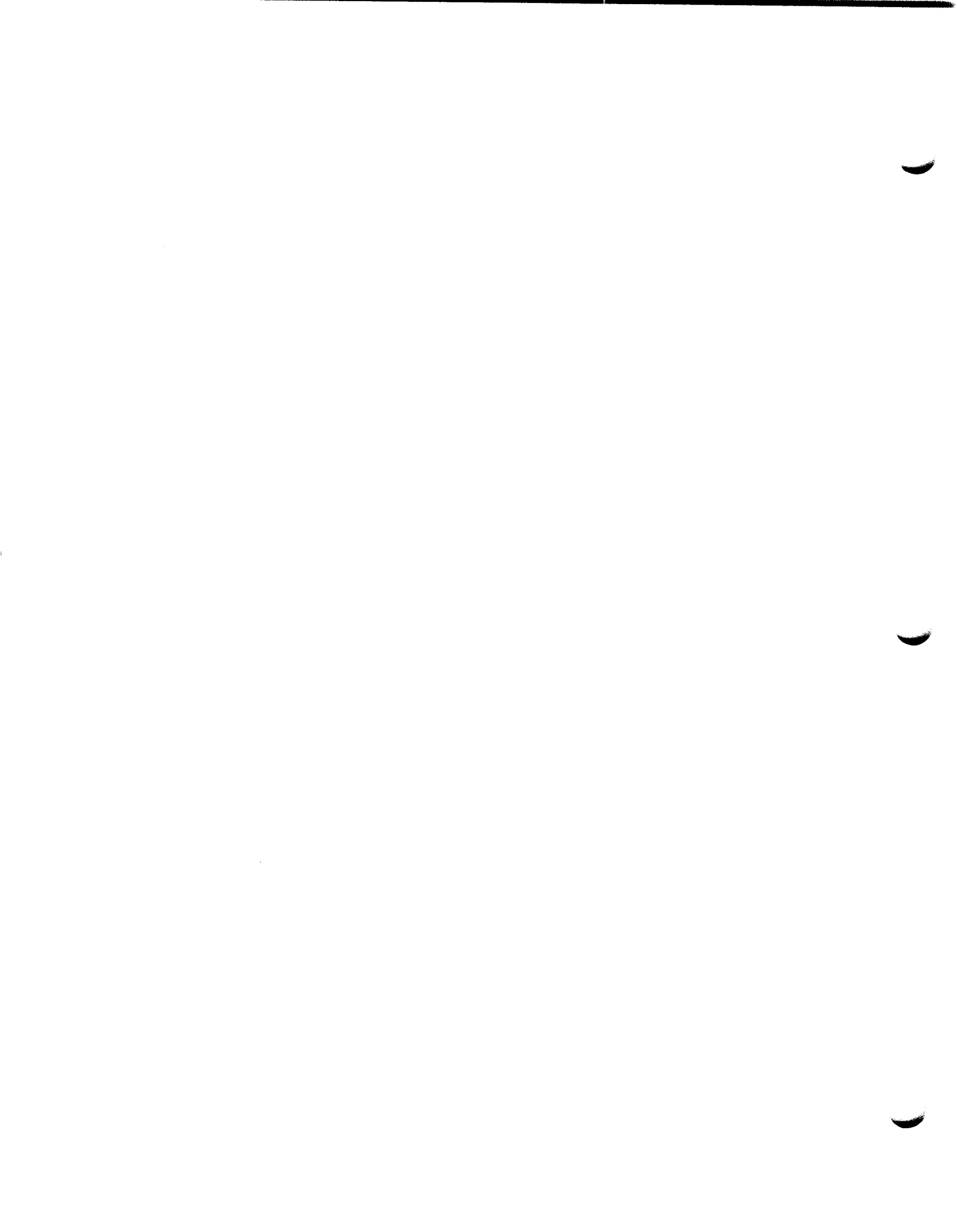
Period(s) of Significance:   1939-1941  

Significant Dates:   1939-1941  

Significant Person(s):   NA    
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation:   NA  

Architect/Builder: Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect



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H.A. Ivry, builder

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

#### SUMMARY

The DeWitt Post Office is associated with the historic context Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art as a U.S. Postal Service structure containing a mural financed through the U.S. Treasury Department's Section on Fine Arts. As such, it is eligible under Criterion A with statewide significance for its associations with the Section's efforts to employ Depression-era artists and place art in post offices around the country.

#### ELABORATION

In late 1937, the U.S. Congress approved a \$70 million emergency construction fund appropriation to finance the building of post offices around the country. Among the projects was a \$75,000 appropriation to build a new post office in DeWitt, the county seat for the southern district of Arkansas County in southeast Arkansas. The proposed site for the new post office was surveyed in November of 1937, but the first round of bids were rejected in December of 1938. The February 2, 1939, *DeWitt Era-Enterprise* announced that the successful candidate in the second round of bidding was H.A. Ivry of Atlanta, with a low bid of \$50,350. The article said the first floor would house the county extension service and other agencies, and "there will also be quarters for the janitor and special private offices for the post master and his assistant." Work began soon after.

On January 8, 1940, Treasury Department Fine Arts Section assistant chief Edward B. Rowan wrote William Traher, a Denver, Colorado, artist offering a \$750 commission to execute a mural for the DeWitt facility "on the basis of competent designs submitted in the 48-State Mural Competition." Traher responded four days later that he was "delighted with the opportunity to decorate" the new building, adding that he would visit the town to "make sketches, study the locality." The plan met the approval of Rowan, who wrote "we find in dealing with the public that such works of art have more meaning if the subject matter is related to or reflective of the locale."



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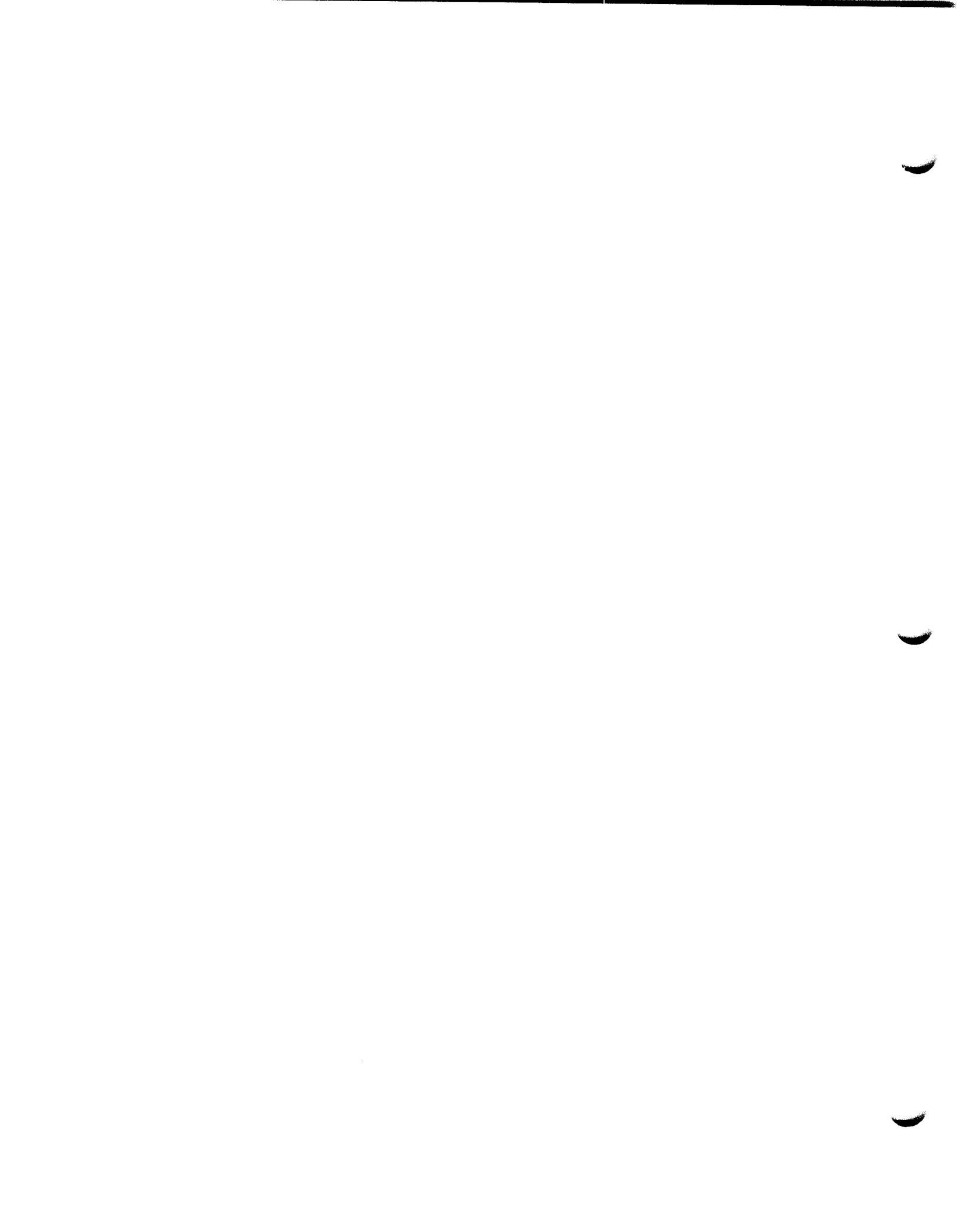
Traher went to DeWitt in May of 1940. He wrote Rowan on May 14 that "I have come here with no preceived ideas, preferring to find what I need in subject material and inspiration in this locality. When this is done, I'll return to Denver and put this material into mural form." He ended up living in DeWitt for three weeks.

In a remarkable July 5, 1940, letter to Rowan, Traher outlined his vision for the mural to be titled "Portrait of Contemporary DeWitt." The letter illustrates not only the artist's visions, but some of his prejudices as well.

Traher wrote that DeWitt "is a placid place -- more so than most small towns because it is southern, more so than most southern towns because it is in Arkansas. ... Even the dogs respect this mood, 'ah do decleah'. ... No dramatics, no sweeping rhythms, struggling forms, nor violent contrast of design belong in a portrait of DeWitt. The extremely literal minded citizens will fail to understand and resent obvious distortion or simplification.

"I chose the three panel form only after experimenting with many others. Each panel is a composite one, combining elements of several viewpoints. They represent: left, the negro quarter; center, the rice fields in flood; right, residential section. Long lines of washing everywhere is characteristic of 'Darktown.' The pigs feeding beneath a rose bush is a clue to the character of the place -- and the race. Wells for flooding the rice fields are shown in the central panel, and in the extreme distance, the towers and smoke of our country's biggest rice mill. The right panel contrasts the town's handsomest and most historic house [the Halliburton House, NR 11/05/74] with the old barn, woodpile and Jersey cow to be found in every back yard. It also suggests the town is a good place to raise children."

Rowan replied on July 10 that Traher's "explanation of the selection of subject matter and approach is entirely logical and I am pleased to tell you that the designs were regarded as extremely interesting by the members of the Section." A formal contract was issued on July 15, 1940, for production of the mural. The only change from Traher's original plan was that vehisote replaced a hard wood base as the "canvas" for the murals "since this office has no guarantee that the latter will not warp unless thoroughly cradled." Traher's preliminary design was approved on October 9, and he received his first payment of \$150 on October 21. The Section approved the full-sized cartoon of the proposed panel on January 13, 1941, and the artist received a





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\$250 payment on January 25.

On April 23, 1941, Traher wrote Rowan that he had installed the mural and "the whole town has agreed that it's 'pretty.' More sophisticated critics might have better words to describe a work of art they like, but would not know how to be more pleased or appreciative. ... They have paid me their highest compliment in sparing me that sly ridicule for which these Arkansas people are famed and feared -- that ridicule for things pretentious and artificial." The *DeWitt Era-Enterprise*, in a May 1, 1941, article, said simply: "These murals are fine specimens of workmanship."

Traher's final payment of \$350 was approved May 23, 1941. Though the artist went on to complete murals for Cole Junior High School in Denver and Williams Field, Arizona, "Portrait of Contemporary DeWitt" was his only Section commission for a post office facility.

The DeWitt Post Office is associated with the historic context Arkansas Post Offices with Section Art as a U.S. Postal Service structure containing a mural financed through the U.S. Treasury Department's Section on Fine Arts. As such, it is eligible under Criterion A with statewide significance for its associations with the Section's efforts to employ Depression-era artists and place art in post offices around the country.

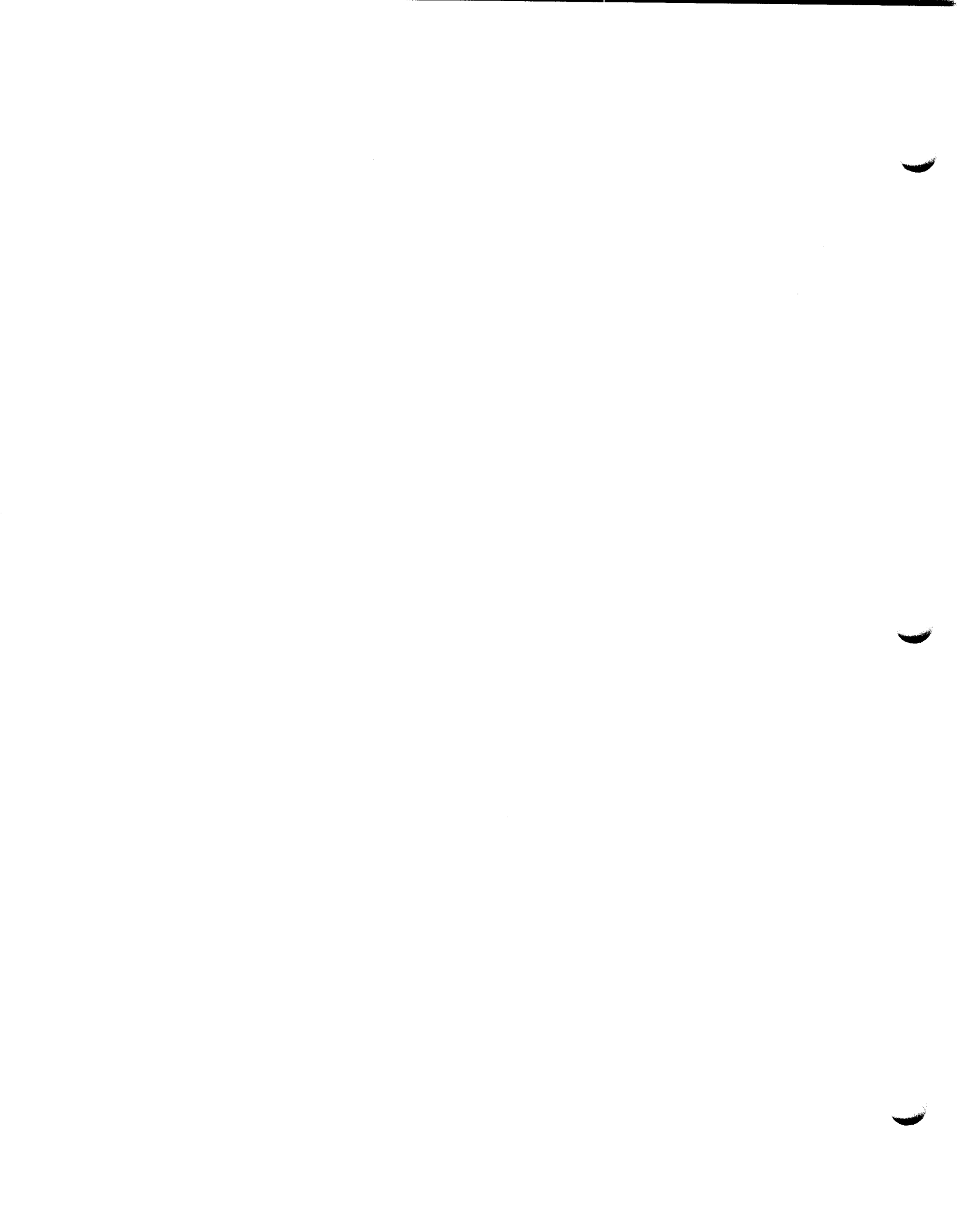
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**9. Major Bibliographical References**  
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*Arkansas Gazette*, September 10, 1937

*DeWitt Era-Enterprise*, November 11, 1937; December 8, 1938; February 2, 1939; February 22, 1939; May 1, 1941.

U.S. Treasury Department Section on Fine Arts documents on DeWitt Post Office, National Archives.

Falk, Peter Hastings, ed. *Who Was Who in American Art* (Madison, CT: Sound View Press, 1985).



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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:

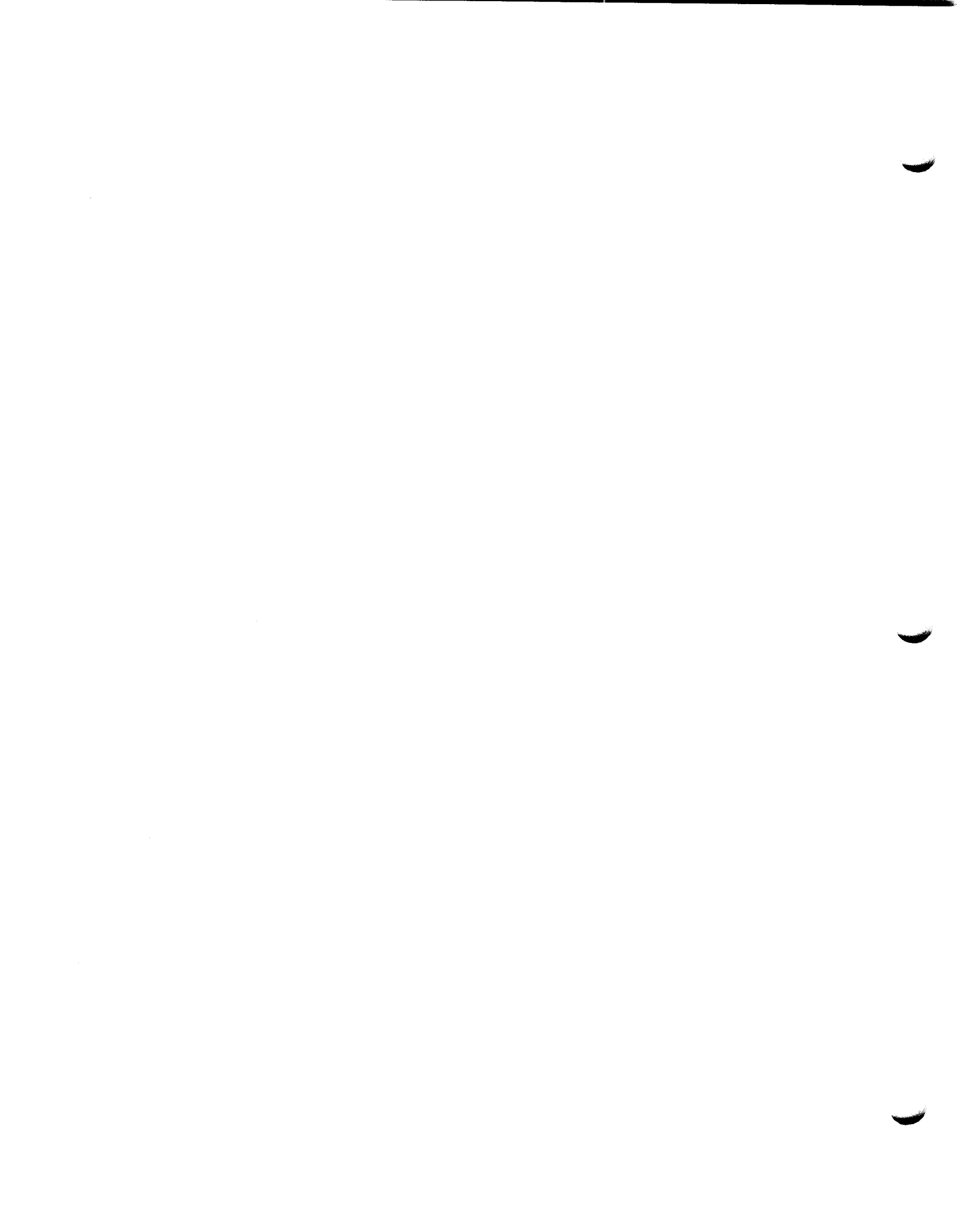
- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**  
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Acreeage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>15</u>	<u>653040</u>	<u>3795920</u>	B	_____	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____	_____



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Verbal Boundary Description:

Beginning at a point formed by the southern edge of West Cross Street with a perpendicular line running parallel with the building's western elevation and located approximately 50 feet to the west thereof, proceed southerly along said line for approximately 200 feet; thence proceed easterly along a perpendicular line for approximately 200 feet; thence proceed northerly along a perpendicular line for approximately 200 feet to its intersection with the southern edge of West Cross Street; thence proceed westerly along said edge to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification:

This boundary contains all the property historically associated with this resource that retains its integrity.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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Name/Title: Mark Christ/Communications and Development Director

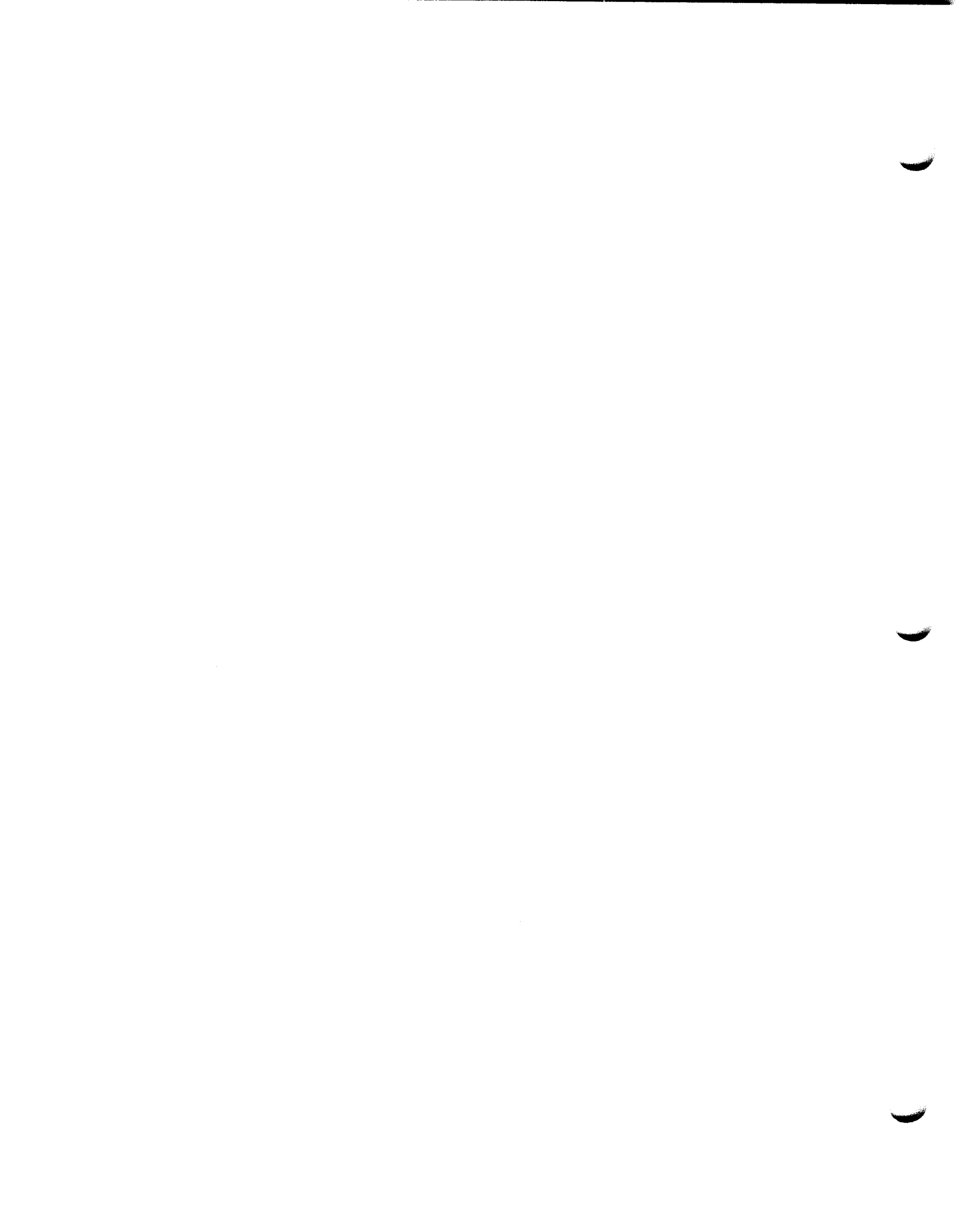
Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: November 14, 1997

Street & Number: 1500 Tower Bldg., 323 Center St. Telephone: (501) 324-9880

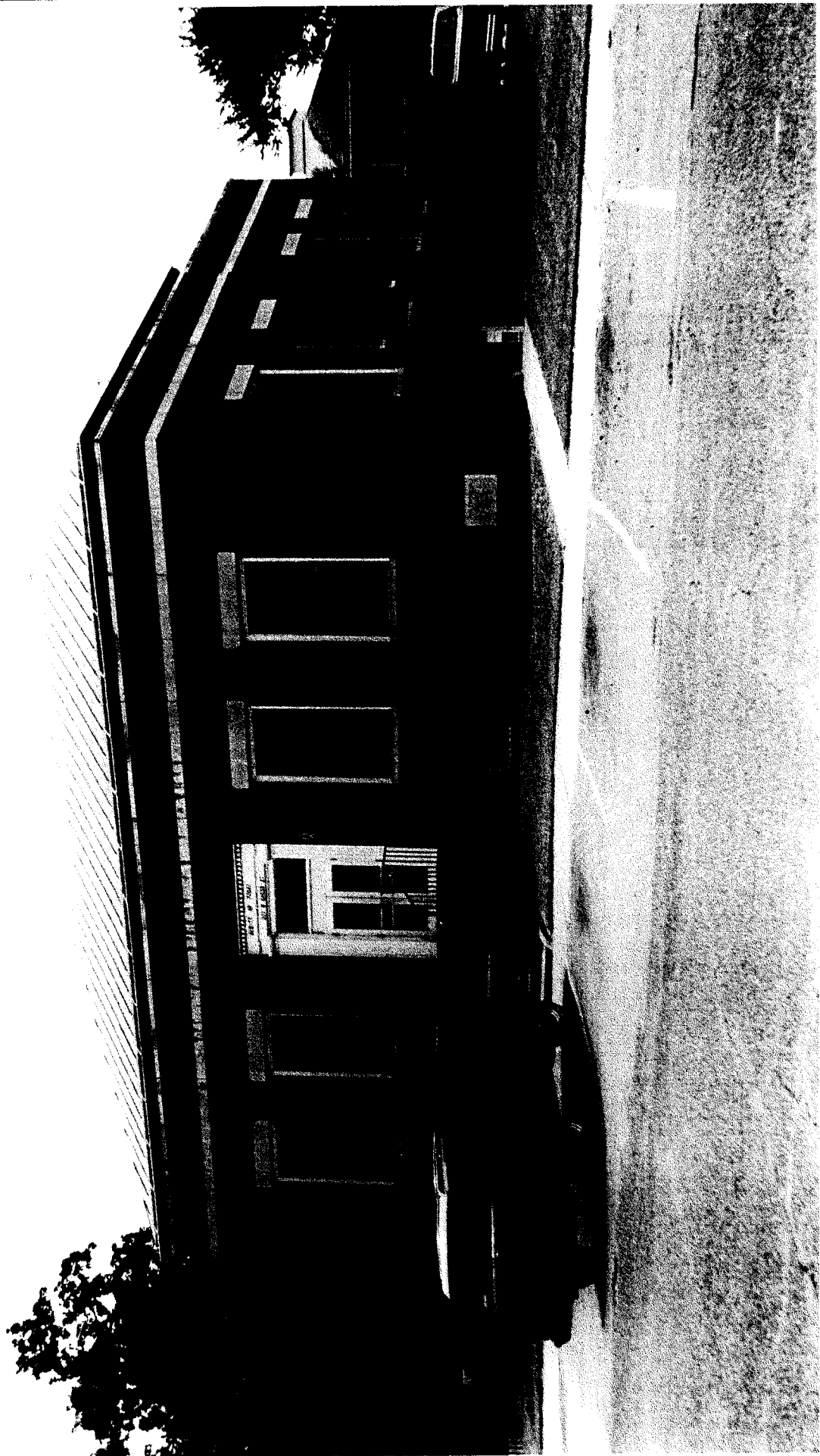
City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72201



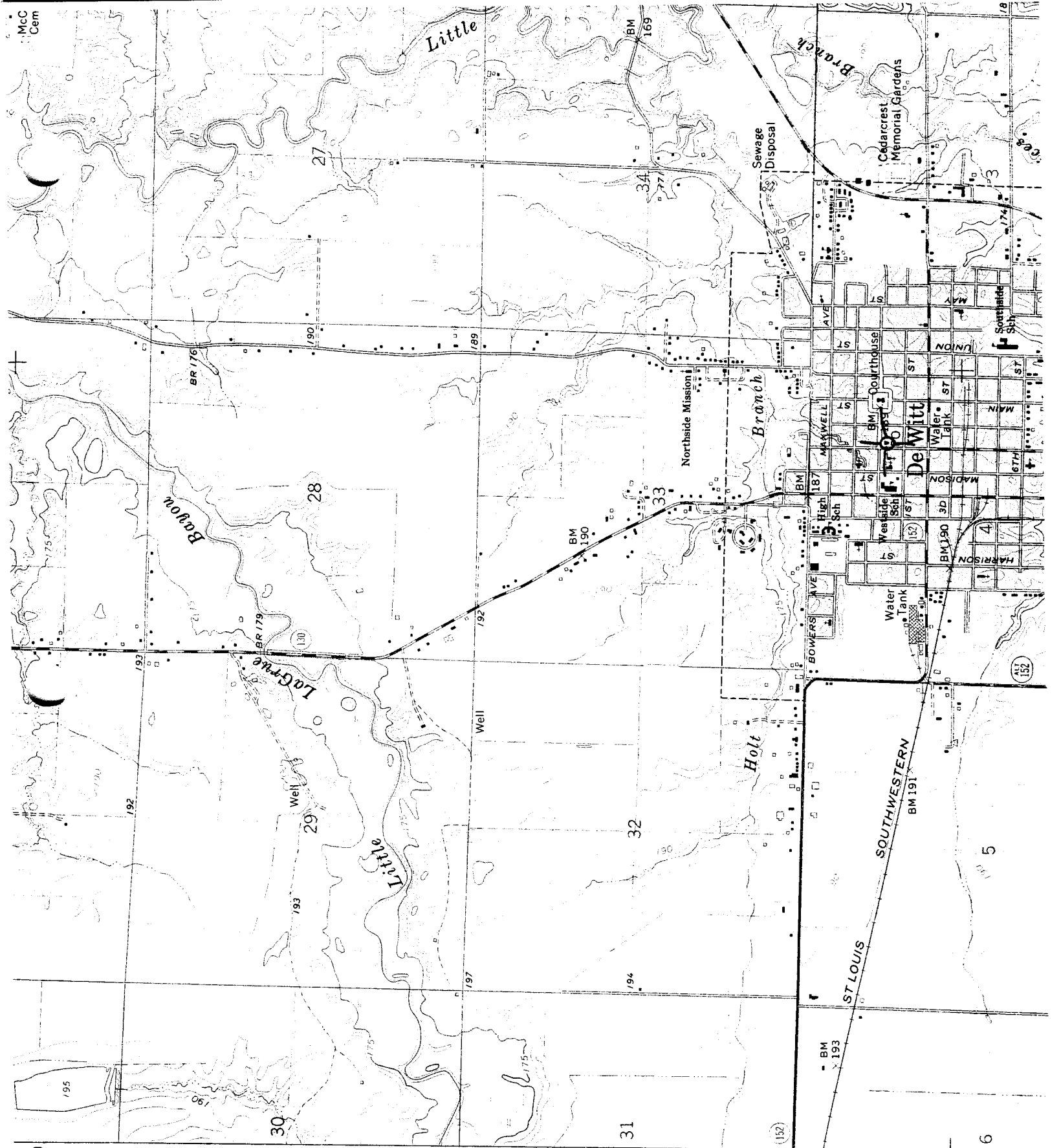












3800 3799 3796 17'30" 3795  
 7752 IV SW (DE WITT SW) 26 MI. TO U.S. 79 9 MI. LODGE CORNER 9 MI.  
 T. 4 S. 31 T. 5 S. 6

DeWitt Post Office  
 DeWitt  
 Arkansas County  
 Arkansas  
 15/653040/  
 3795920

