

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Princeton Post OfficeOther names/site number: Princeton Public Library; Anne H. Stafford Library; MC-0593

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: 920 Mercer Street; US 219/460City or town: Princeton State: West Virginia County: MercerNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide x local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

x A B x C D
Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer5/20/20
Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

Princeton Post Office
Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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 ☐

Princeton Post Office
Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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.)

EDUCATION: Library

Princeton Post Office
Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

20th CENTURY MOVEMENTS: Neo-classical Moderne (Stripped Classicism)

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: SANDSTONE, BRICK, CONCRETE, WOOD

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The former Princeton Post Office at 920 Mercer Street in downtown Princeton, now the Anne H. Stafford Public Library, is a concrete, brick, and stone building designed in a distinctive Neo-classical variation of the Moderne Style known as Stripped Classicism. The one-story building has a three-part façade comprised of a tall three-bay center pavilion with single-bay flanking wings. The central pavilion and foundation are faced with finely cut and dressed sandstone ashlar blocks mottled with a variety of colors ranging from very light gray to brownish orange, a striking and unusual type of stone in the region. The pavilion is further distinguished by its four projecting pilasters dividing the window bays—two flat corner pilasters topped with single recessed panels, and two narrow fluted pilasters with the U.S. star motif set in slightly projecting circles and fluting in the capitals. Extending between the tops of the pilasters is a narrow frieze composed of alternating circular shapes with modernized versions of classical triglyphs. The interior features a transverse lobby with tall ceiling and an abundance of natural light provided by large Palladian windows. Beyond the lobby, in the former post office work room, is now a spacious central reading room with circulation desk and rolling panels mounted overhead, helping to diffuse the natural light from the windows and two skylights, control acoustics, and partially shield the exposed steel roof trusses. Smaller offices and utilitarian spaces are partitioned along the two sides of the central room. A honeycomb of corridors connecting rooms of varying sizes within the basement are currently used for a number of library functions, mechanical systems, and utilities. The parcel includes two secondary contributing resources: a

Princeton Post Office

Mercer County, West Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

sandstone retaining wall behind the building, and also behind the building near the loading dock, a mechanical hoist used to bring heavy mail sacks up from the basement.

Narrative Description

Location/Setting

The City of Princeton lies in south-central Mercer County, very near the southernmost extents of West Virginia and the Virginia state line. The old post office is located at the intersection of Mercer Street, Center Street, and Park Avenue, which bounds the post office property on the west side; at the west end of the Princeton downtown business district. The building fronts to the south onto Mercer Street, Princeton's main east-west corridor, a wide street lined with commercial buildings on each side. The post office parcel, excluding the parking lot acquired by library in 2009, measures 146 feet x 113 feet, covering just over four-tenths of an acre. North Harper Alley runs behind the building. Straley Avenue, lined with houses and churches, is the next street to the north. The new (current) post office is a mere 460 feet west of the old post office, and the Mercer County Courthouse stands 2,352.26 feet (.445 miles) to the southwest. There is little if any landscaping that dates to the period of the post office's occupation.

Exterior Description

The former Princeton Post Office at 920 Mercer Street in downtown Princeton is a one-story concrete, brick, and stone building with a three-part Moderne Style design. The façade is comprised of a tall three-bay center pavilion with single-bay flanking wings. Behind the façade, the massing of the 12,100 square foot building essentially takes the form of a deep, one-story rectangle, although the side walls are inset several feet in the northern half of the building; and the roof is nearly flat, with almost no differentiation in height, but the center block is made to look taller by the addition of a four-sided parapet wall.

The central pavilion and foundation are faced with finely cut and dressed sandstone ashlar blocks mottled with a variety of colors ranging from very light gray to brownish orange, a striking and unusual type of stone in the region. The pavilion is further distinguished by its four projecting pilasters dividing the window bays—two flat corner pilasters topped with single recessed panels, and two narrow fluted pilasters with the U.S. star motif set in slightly projecting circles, and fluting in the capitals. On the inside flanks of the corner pilasters are slender nearly full-height filets, each with single flutes running the length of the shafts, and double flutes in the capitals, which align horizontally with the frieze. Extending between the tops of the pilasters is a narrow frieze composed of alternating circular shapes with modernized versions of classical triglyphs of the Doric order. Above the frieze is an area of flat wall surface, in which the stone blocks are inscribed with the wording: PRINCETON WEST VIRGINIA centered below UNITED STATES POST OFFICE: and above the inscription is a parapet of the same continuous stonework, with a projecting peak at the center.

The pilasters and frieze, while inspired by classical architectural motifs, represent the overall design's chief departures from the classical tradition. The flanking wings have low, sandstone

Princeton Post Office

Mercer County, West Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

parapets, but the exterior walls are otherwise faced with a variable-color brick that is similar in color to, and visually compatible with the sandstone. The same bricks, laid in 5:1 common bond with raked mortar joints were used to construct the upper walls of the side and rear elevations of the building. The foundation projects outward several inches further than the upper walls, and where visible, is faced with the sandstone blocks around the entire building. The foundation/basement walls smoothly transition into the upper wall plane by means of a thick water table of sandstone blocks, beveled inward toward the top.

The five-bay façade has five tall, round-arched Palladian windows with original three-part wooden sash, wooden sills and three-part paneled aprons. The vertical and arched window mullions are themselves fluted to match the pilasters and filets. The central front Palladian window is truncated at the bottom by the principal entrance with glazed folding doors. The entrance is reached from street level via a flight of broad concrete steps and a landing just in front of the doors, flanked by two original, restored cast-iron lamp posts, set upon stone piers (Photo 7). At the base of the façade, window wells to each side of the front steps provide light through the front basement windows. Similar wells of varying depths are found around the perimeter of the building, not unlike a moat, allowing abundant natural light to reach the basement.

Inscribed in 1934, the cornerstone is located at the southwest front corner of the building (Photo 6). It credits Henry Morgenthau Jr., Secretary of the Treasury; James A. Farley, Postmaster General; Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect; and George O. Von Nerta, supervising engineer. Von Nerta's general official capacity was "technical officer" for the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury, which was in the Public Buildings Branch of the Treasury Department's Procurement Division.¹ A bronze plaque in the lower southeast corner of the façade reads ANNE H. STAFFORD LIBRARY, 2010.

The west side elevation of the building has seven bays: three in the front wing and four in the inset north half of the elevation. The front-wing side windows are identical to the Palladian windows in the front of the building, but lack the paneled aprons. The central window is truncated at the bottom to accommodate the side entrance with its glazed folding doors like those of the front entrance. Hanging from the exterior brick wall on each side of the west entrance are cast-iron lantern light fixtures that were found in the basement, along with the front lamp posts, during the 2010 rehabilitation project. They were then restored and rehung. Like the front entrance, the west side entrance is reached via concrete steps, the ends faced with stone, with steel-pipe handrails. Another set of steps, at the south corner of the west elevation, descends to a non-public basement entrance. The four rear windows of the west side elevation, lighting the director's office and adjacent small room, are more standard—tall, rectilinear steel sash windows with 24 separate panes, which, compared to the Palladian windows are decidedly more utilitarian and practical than decorative or stylish. These windows have gray stone sills. Six windows of the same type are aligned across the building's rear (north) elevation.

¹ Von Nerta's office files on the construction of public building during his tenure, 1923-1935, are held in the National Archives. File ID# 1945652.

Princeton Post Office

Mercer County, West Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

The east elevation features three tall, arched bays like those of the front and west side elevations, with stone sills and brick, rather than wood recessed panels; yet only the southernmost bay has a matching Palladian window (Photo 8). The other two bays are mostly infilled with the same brick as the surrounding matrix, and incorporate small six-light steel-sash windows. Also on the east side of the building is the loading dock that extends from the rear wall of the front wing to the rear (north) corner of the building, wrapping around to the rear elevation. The loading dock is sheltered by a flat metal roof supported by a beam resting on round steel poles, and has a poured concrete deck with steel-pipe railing, a pedestrian entrance and parcel entrance with folding doors in the west elevation, and another pedestrian door in the rear elevation. The loading dock is well-lighted by nine hanging, industrial-type metal lamps that may date to the early years of the post office.

Interior Description

The building interior features a transverse lobby with a tall ceiling and an abundance of natural light provided by large Palladian windows and two skylights added during the 2010 rehabilitation project (Photo 13). Beyond the lobby, in the former post office work room, is now a spacious central reading room filled with bookshelves, tables and chairs, and the u-shaped circulation desk, with rolling panels mounted overhead, helping to diffuse the natural light from the windows and the skylights, and to control acoustics and partially shield the exposed steel roof trusses and ductwork (Photos 14 and 15). Between the lobby and the reading room was a partition wall with customer service counter. In the upper wall were a series of wire grills that had been covered for some time. In 2010, the wall was largely removed and spanned by beams to open the transition between the two primary public spaces, and the grills (Photos 13 and 14) were re-exposed and retained in place.

Smaller offices and utilitarian spaces are partitioned along the two sides of the central room. A honeycomb of corridors connecting rooms of varying sizes within the basement are currently used for a number of library functions, mechanical systems, and utilities. Numerous original doors are still found throughout the building, including paneled wooden doors at the entrances to offices, restrooms, and work spaces, as well as fire-proof steel folding doors for parcel freight areas (Photos 16 and 18).

Overlooking the central room is a small hidden “lookout” room in the east side of the building, accessed via a steel ladder that leads up through a hatch. The lookout room was the precursor of security cameras, a place from which employees could be watched. Supervisors could study the activities of the employees through a small grate disguised as a vent without being detected.

Secondary Resources

Immediately behind the building is a deep well with steps leading down to a door, surrounded by a red-brick wall topped with stone. Standing upright, attached inside the corner of the well, is a mechanical hoist, essentially a winch set on top of a steel pole, used to crank large sacks of mail and bulk parcels up to the driveway near the loading dock (Photo 12). Presumably installed during construction of the building, the device adds interpretive value to the post office and is worthy of preservation. It is therefore identified as *one contributing object* to the significance of the post office.

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

Beyond the window wells on the north side of the building is a concrete-curbed driveway hemmed in by a roughly six-foot tall retaining wall, canted slightly and faced with the same sandstone blocks used to construct the building (Photo 11). The similarity of construction between the retaining wall and the post office building suggests they were built at approximately the same time and within the period of significance. Behind the retaining wall, which aligns with the north parcel line, is N. Harper Alley. Integral to the overall design of the post office, the retaining wall is identified *as one contributing structure*.

Princeton Post Office
Name of Property

Mercer County, West 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.)

- ☐ 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Politics/Government

Architecture

Period of Significance

1932–1970

Significant Dates

1932–1935

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Simon, Louis A.

Von Nerta, George O.

Johnson, P. W.

Princeton Post Office
Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia
County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Decommissioned by the United States Postal Service ca. 2004, the former Princeton Post Office is a highly notable architectural landmark and an outstanding example of a Great-Depression era public works project. Located at 920 Mercer Street in downtown Princeton, the building is a concrete, brick, and stone building designed in a distinctive Neo-classical variation of the Moderne Style. So-named for its typical highly restrained use of traditional classical ornamentation, the style was often employed in the design of official government buildings. As an important railroad hub, the seat of Mercer County, and one of southeastern West Virginia's principal towns beginning in the early twentieth century, Princeton was a natural location for a relatively large-scale postal facility. The building was constructed by private contractor P. W. Johnson working under a team led by Louis A. Simon, chief architect of the U.S. Treasury Department and George O. Von Nerta, the Treasury's supervising engineer. Simon's and Von Nerta's names are inscribed on the building's cornerstone. The former post office is nominated at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Politics/Government as an important postal facility built during the Great Depression to serve one of southern West Virginia's largest cities. It remained in use as a post office until 2004. The property is also nominated under Criterion C in the area of Architecture for its distinctive and visually striking design inspired by the Stripped Classicism movement that took place during the second quarter of the twentieth century. The proposed period of significance spans from 1934, when construction began, to 1970, in observance of the National Register 50-year rule.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to sincerely thank Princeton Public Library director Sheena Johnston, as well as Todd Boggess and Donna East of ET Boggess Architects, and Jeff Smith of the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture and History for their timely and generous assistance.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Local Historical Background

Mercer County was established in 1837 and named for Hugh Mercer, a Revolutionary War hero who died at Princeton, New Jersey, for which the Mercer County seat was named. Since the early 1880s, densely concentrated coalmining activity has taken place in northwestern Mercer County and in the adjacent counties of McDowell, Wyoming, and Raleigh, to the north. Bluefield had become a major hub of the Norfolk & Western Railway, established in 1881, as the headquarters of its Pocahontas Division; and in 1909 Princeton, formerly a quiet agricultural town, became a bustling urban community closely associated with an N&W rival, the Virginian Railway. The Virginian Railway figured prominently in the fortunes of Princeton, where the company's main yards and shops were located along the line's 446-mile run between Fayette County, West Virginia and Norfolk, Virginia. The rail line had been carefully engineered to run

Princeton Post Office

Mercer County, West Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

almost exclusively downhill from its beginning in West Virginia to its end in Norfolk, which allowed many east-bound coal trains to be combined at the rail yards in Princeton before continuing their run as a single, extremely long train. A vast rail yard at Princeton was needed to facilitate such operations.²

With its two designated cities, Bluefield and Princeton, Mercer County's population grew markedly around the turn of the twentieth century, increasing from about 16,000 residents in 1890 to almost 40,000 by 1910, and 50,000 in 1920. The presence of the rail operations in the eastern part of the city resulted in Princeton's population doubling to well over 6,000 between 1910 and 1920. A new downtown commercial district sprang up around the Princeton passenger station as courthouse square became known as uptown.³

In 1931, the local architectural landmark, Moderne-style Mercer County Courthouse was completed in Princeton. The same year, ground was broken for the new post office at the corner of Mercer and Park streets, though the building would not be completed until 1935. The National Register of Historic Places nominations for the Virginia Railway Yard Historic District (NR Reference No. 03000351) and the Mercer Street Historic District (NR Reference No. 03001060) both attribute the steady growth of Princeton, from 1909 to the 1950s, primarily to the major presence of the Virginian Railway, with its machine and repair shops, and its effect on the industrial commerce in the region.⁴

Mercer County's growth peaked in 1950, with a population of 75,000. The Virginian merged with the Norfolk and Western in 1959, diminishing the importance of railroads in Princeton. Beginning in the 1970s, the closure of railroad passenger service and the rise of suburban sprawl towards Bluefield drew businesses away from downtown.

The 900 Block of Mercer Avenue 1930–1945

The 1930 Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Princeton depicts the 900 block of Mercer Avenue with only a bank on the northwest corner of Mercer Avenue and 9th Street and the Princeton Presbyterian Church on the west side of the bank (Figure 1). The wide, open expanse of land on the west side of the church, which includes the site of the post office (yet to have been built), is labeled "playground," which was possibly an amenity for church members. The 1945 Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Princeton depicts the footprint of the post office as it remains today, and notes the building's fireproof construction (Figure 2). On the east side of the post office is the narrow parking lot included in the nominated parcel boundary; yet depicted adjacent to the east of the post office parking lot is a row of four commercial buildings that no longer stand. In their place today is a paved parking area that is contiguous with the post office's original parking lot.

² S. Allen Chambers, 185–186; McGehee, "Mercer County."

³ Stuart McGehee, "Mercer County."

⁴ Michael Gioulis, Virginia Railway Yard Historic District and Mercer Street Historic District nominations, 2003.

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

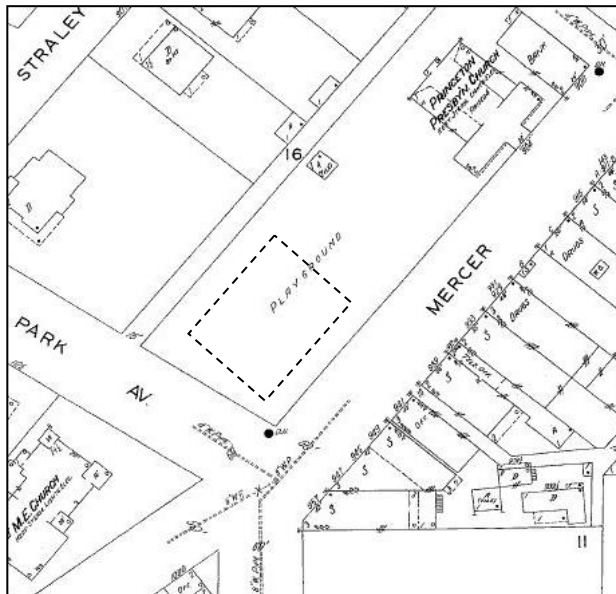


Fig. 1. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, July 1930, depicting the vacant lot where the post office would be constructed.

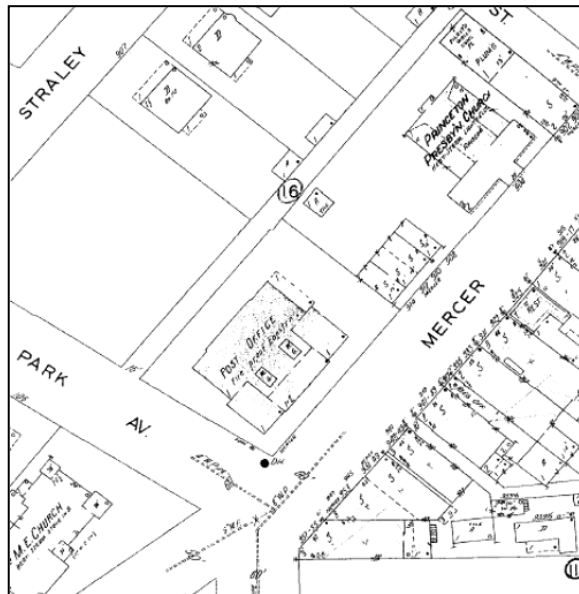


Fig. 2. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, July 1945, depicting the post office at its current location.

Princeton Post Office History

Site preparation was begun by November of 1931 and foundation construction barely begun in 1932, but the building was not completed until 1935. An article appearing in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* on September 20, 1931 (page 14) indicates the involvement of local architectural firm Garry and Sheffey, at least at the beginning phase of the project: "Garry and Sheffey, Bluefield architects who have been selected as the architects for the proposed federal post office in Princeton, were in town Saturday to check lot measurements and obtaining [sic] other needed data preparatory to starting work on the plans." Another *Telegraph* piece on November 4th, 1931 revealed that "Postmaster R. E. L. Holt has been appointed custodian of the postoffice site at Mercer Street and Park Avenue...It is said that the site will not be required for several months by the government, possibly not until next May. Plans are being prepared for the new postoffice building by Garry and Sheffey, Bluefield architects." Curiously, after another brief statement in the *Telegraph* on November 14, 1931, no further mention of Garry and Sheffey's involvement with the Princeton Post Office appears in archived versions of the *Telegraph* or other West Virginia period newspapers.

Beginning in 1932, the process was documented by a fairly comprehensive set of specifically dated black-and-white photographs. The photographs reveal that after a lengthy period of delays lasting from 1932 to 1934, the foundation and basement were quickly completed by the end of 1934, and the entire building above the basement was completed in 1935. The delays appear to have been caused by the reorganization of federal agencies and the transition from the Hoover

Princeton Post Office

Mercer County, West Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

Administration to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration during the early years of the Great Depression, and the advent of FDR's New Deal. The issues were evidently alleviated by June, 1934, with an Order by the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department stipulating that work on more than 300 new post offices be undertaken by in-house government architects. The main objective of the Order was to get the projects under contract and put men to work in the construction industry as quickly as possible. The Order was unsuccessfully opposed by the American Institute of Architects (AIA), who cited the ongoing detrimental effects of the Great Depression on the field of architecture, and expressed concern that the Treasury's decision would cast their professionals in a poor light, as if they were not worthy or competent to work on federal post offices, which might undermine the public confidence in private-sector architects and add further injury to their profession. The Procurement Division's Order may explain why the names of architects Garry and Sheffey are not inscribed on the Princeton Post Office's cornerstone. They were likely replaced by the Treasury Department's architect Louis A. Simon and supervising engineer George O. Von Nerta, whose names do appear on the cornerstone, by the time construction resumed late in 1934 and the majority of the building was finally erected.⁵

The original building contractors who prepared the site appear to have been general contractors Boon, Eason, and Wood, who took their final photo of the building site on December 1, 1932, around the time the long period of inactivity began. Three other photos from 1932, the first one taken on July 2nd, another on August 1, and the third on November 1, show the site being prepared and the beginning of the foundation being constructed. An article in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* on October 19, 1932 notes that P. W. Johnson of Portsmouth, Ohio submitted the low bid on the post office construction, and that the government was spending \$113,343 on the post office building and work relief projects operated under the county welfare administration. Another *Telegraph* piece on July 14, 1933, stated that contracts for the Beckley, Elkins, and Princeton post offices were signed before the Roosevelt Administration was in office, and were not to be held up pending formulation of the administration's new public program; however, on December 21, 1933 the *Telegraph* reported that "D. L. Casey, secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, gave a report on the present status of the Princeton Post Office building, and announced that a committee would be sent to Washington the first part of January to get some action on the building. The PWA appropriation of \$56,000 is considerably less than the balance that was left in the original appropriation for the building."

The next construction photograph was not taken until a year later, on December 29, 1934, by the P. W. Johnson Construction Company. It was the first photograph to be taken during the final surge of work that completed the building within the next year. The *Telegraph* reported on August 7, 1934 that "All bids on the Princeton postoffice building were rejected by the Treasury Department," which caused further delays.

It was not until Sunday, December 9, 1934, that the *Raleigh Register* in Beckley reported "The P. W. Johnson Construction Company, who constructed the Beckley post office, has the contract for construction of a new post office in Princeton, and work was started there on Thursday. The

⁵ Tony Schuman, Chapter Two in Paul L. Knox, ed., *Rutledge Revivals*, 1988.

Princeton Post Office

Mercer County, West Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

company's bid was \$59, 973, but the *Princeton Observer* says that 'it is probable that some adjustment has been made for a slightly lower price'." On September 24, 1935, the *Telegraph* reported that L. E. White, postmaster, had been directed to move the post office operations to the new building on "September 28 or as soon as practicable thereafter. The front door is yet to be placed and there is considerable work to be done on the heating plant, but Mr. White hopes to be installed by October 1." Finally, on October 2, 1935, the *Charleston Daily Mail* reported, "Congressman John Kee with be the master of ceremonies at the dedication of the new \$100,000 Princeton post office Saturday."



Figure 3. Contractor P. W. Johnson's April 27, 1935 construction photograph. Courtesy of Princeton Public Library.

Construction Chronology 1934–1935

Treasury Department photographs of the Princeton Post Office construction were taken at monthly intervals between December 1934 and completion of the building in the fall of 1935. A December 29, 1934 photograph shows the basement walls and reinforced-concrete first floor well underway, but not yet completed. A substantial amount of steel rebar is shown woven throughout the built-up concrete. By February 2, 1935, the floor is complete, but the first-story walls had not yet begun. A March 30 photograph shows remarkable progress, with the first-story walls and the roof structural support system of steel I-beams well underway, and the basement windows installed. By April 27 the exterior walls were complete except for the pilasters, frieze, and parapets, and the windows and exterior doors appear to have been installed (Figure 3). The

Princeton Post Office

Mercer County, West Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

building remained open to the elements, but the steel roof trusses were in place. On May 27 the building was under a roof. By June 29, the ceiling and load-bearing interior walls were completed. By July 31, the building was finally nearing completion, especially the exterior, with its pilasters, frieze, and parapets finished. By August 30, the service counter, mail boxes, overhead wire grills and the steel-door security vault were in place.

Public Library Rehabilitation Project, Completed 2010

The rehabilitation of the essentially abandoned post office building was a remarkable event in the City of Princeton, and a boon to its economically distressed downtown business district. The project culminated in the adaptive re-use of the building as a new, modern public library. The architectural firm of E. T. Boggess, chiefly architect Todd Boggess, won the 2012 West Virginia AIA Honor Award for the project. One of the main goals of the project was to follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation so that the historical integrity of the building and grounds would be maintained. The project mostly involved an interior renovation that created useful activity spaces as well as traditional library book shelves, tables and chairs, files, and records; although exterior work involved the restoration of the cut stone and brick, total roof replacement, window restoration, and improved access, transforming the abandoned former USPO building into a new focal point for Mercer Street. Plans called for low-level lighting, taking advantage of the natural light provided by the numerous original windows. The basement now has rooms dedicated to three specific age groups, an open computer lab, and public meeting/conference rooms with state-of-the-art technology equipment.⁶

The Hunnicutt Foundation provided approximately \$2.6 million of the approximately \$4 million total budget. The Kendrick Foundation and the Shott Foundation also made generous contributions that helped with purchase of the building. Princeton Public Library director at the time, Connie Schumate, has been recognized as the driving force behind the library's move to occupy the old abandoned post office, but Ann "Dink" Stafford, for whom the library has been renamed, as well as Emilie Holroyd and Martha Draper, and fund-raising chairs Dewey Russell and Gina Boggess of the Library's Board of Directors all contributed their talents, time, and collaborative efforts to the highly successful project. The City leadership also earned acclaim for "great commitment to the project."⁷

The rehabilitation work was performed by Fredeking Stafford Construction Company of Princeton, and the HVAC contractor was David Darnold Company of South Charleston, West Virginia. During the rehabilitation project, the original (or early period) cast-iron lamp posts and lanterns that lit the exterior of the building were found in the basement. They were sent away for

⁶ E.T. Boggess Architects website, accessed September 12, 2019:
http://etbarchitects.net/portfolio_item/wv-princeton-library/

⁷ Tammie Toler, "Old home, new hope...Princeton Library plan breathes fresh life into familiar facade." Princeton Times, June 20, 2008; Toler, "Library writes a new edition." Princeton Times, September 3, 2010; and Toler, "ET Boggess Architects Brings Home Honor award for Princeton Public Library Design." Princeton Times, April 20, 2012; Todd Boggess, personal communication, September 27, 2019.

Princeton Post Office

Mercer County, West Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

restoration and re-mounted toward the end of the project, and remain part of the post office's historic character.

Justification of Criteria

Criterion A – Politics/Government

The Princeton Post Office opened in 1935, at the height of the Great Depression, when thousands of citizens were able to find much-needed work in the construction of public buildings and other types of infrastructure. The building was constructed under the auspices of the U.S. Treasury Department's Public Buildings Program within the Treasury's Procurement Division. By 1934, it had been decided that in-house architects, engineers, and project managers would oversee construction of at least 300 new post offices across the nation, in order to put men and women to work on the projects as quickly as possible, providing relief to the jobless. The Princeton Post Office served the U.S. Postal Service and the City of Princeton exceptionally well for nearly 80 years until being decommissioned in 2004. Vital to the continued growth and prosperity of Princeton and surrounding Mercer County, the former Princeton Post Office is nominated at the local level of significance under *Criterion A* for its contributions to broad patterns of history in the region.

Criterion C – Architecture

The Princeton Post Office, completed in 1935, is a reinforced concrete, brick, and stone building designed in a distinctive and sophisticated Neo-classical variation of the Moderne Style. Similar designs are sometimes called Stripped Moderne or the Stripped Classical Style, a subgenre of the broadly defined Moderne Style popular throughout the United States and other countries mainly between 1925 and 1940. So-named for its typical highly restrained use of classical ornamentation in which the classical orders of architecture are only indirectly referenced, the style is often seen in the design of official government buildings. The Princeton Post Office should be ranked among West Virginia's best examples of the style. Its design could have been influenced by that of the Mercer County Courthouse, another important Moderne-style building, completed in 1931. The courthouse, individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 (NR Reference No. 80004032), is itself regarded as one of the state's most important twentieth-century architectural landmarks, and one of its finest courthouses. Like the Princeton Post Office, the courthouse has three-part massing with lateral wings and is faced with cut stone over a brick core. The courthouse is described by S. Allen Chambers in his book *The Buildings of West Virginia* (2004) as such: "These basic blocks, with setbacks, sharp edges, and flat surfaces characteristic of the Moderne style, are embellished at salient points with restrained, incised carvings...[The courthouse] interiors are straightforward and uncluttered, with minimal trim."⁸

Louis A. Simon was supervising architect the Princeton Post Office, at least during its construction phase, in his capacity as the Supervising Architect of the Public Buildings Branch of the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Procurement Division from 1933- until July, 1939. The Treasury Department's Public Buildings Branch was the predecessor of the Federal Works Agency known as the Public Buildings Administration between July 1939 and December 1949.

⁸ Chambers, *The Buildings of West Virginia*, 2004:186.

Princeton Post Office

Mercer County, West Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

Works credited to Simon include a long list of post offices and other government buildings, however, the vast majority of his post offices were more modest Colonial Revival designs.

The West Virginia National Register database has three National Register-listed post office buildings in the state, one of which, the St. Albans Post Office, was also designed by Louis A. Simon. The other two are the Neo-Classical-style Old Morgantown Post Office and the Beaux Arts-style United States Post Office and Court House in Huntington. As an exemplary local representation of the Neo-Classical Moderne architectural style, the former Princeton Post Office is nominated at the local level of significance under *Criterion C: Architecture*.

Integrity Statement

Although converted into the Princeton Public Library in 2010, the building and grounds are exceptionally well preserved and maintained and retain a high level of historic integrity of location, setting, design, feeling, association, and workmanship. From the exterior, there is virtually no discernable difference in the appearance of the building or grounds from late 1935 to the present day; while the interior preserves multiple reminders of the building's origins as a postal facility including the majority of the primary circulation patterns, e.g. the lobby, work rooms and corridors, wall and ceiling finishes, numerous interior doors, and the security vault. The aforementioned discussion of the 2010 historically appropriate rehabilitation project details the interior alterations and retention and rehabilitation of historic fabric throughout the building.

Princeton Post Office
Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Bluefield Daily Telegraph, Bluefield, West Virginia:

September 20, 1931, page 14

November 4, 1931, page 4

November 13, 1931, page 5

October 19, 1932, page 4

July 14, 1933, page 5

November 30, 1933, page 13

December 21, 1933, page 4

May 9, 1934, page 6

August 7, 1934, page 2

December 9, 1934, page 8

September 24, 1935

October 2, 1935, page 11

September 7, 1997

Bogges, Todd. Personal communication, September 27, 2019

Charleston Daily Mail, Charleston, West Virginia:

November 30, 1933, page 13

October 2, 1935, page 11

Chambers, S. Allen. *Buildings of West Virginia*. Society of Architectural Historians. New York, Oxford Press, 2004: 185-187.

ET Bogges Architects website, accessed September 12, 2019:

http://etbarchitects.net/portfolio_item/wv-princeton-library

Gioulis, Michael. Virginia Railway Yard Historic District and Mercer Street Historic District National Register of Historic Places nominations, 2003, West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture and History.

McCormick, Kyle. *The Story of Mercer County*. Charleston Printing, 1957.

McGehee, C. Stuart "Mercer County." e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia. 03 June 2013. Web access 16 September 2019.

Mercer County Historical Society. *Mercer County History, 1984*. Walsworth Publications, 1985.

Princeton Post Office

Mercer County, West Virginia

Name of Property

County and State

"Princeton Post Office." US Postal Service Historic, Architectural, and Archaeological Significance Survey, April 20, 1983.

Raleigh Register, Beckley, West Virginia. December 9, 1934, page 8.

Toler, Tammie. "Old home, new hope...Princeton Library plan breathes fresh life into familiar facade." *Princeton Times*, June 20, 2008.

_____. "Library writes a new edition." *Princeton Times*, September 3, 2010.

_____. "ET Boggess Architects Brings Home Honor award for Princeton Public Library Design." *Princeton Times*, April 20, 2012.

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of Princeton, WV, 1930 and 1945, accessed via the West Virginia Western Counties Regional Library System website: <https://cabe.ent.sirsi.net/>

Schuman, Tony. Chapter Two: "Professionalization and the Social Goals of Architects," in Paul L. Knox, ed., *Rutledge Revivals: The Design Profession and Built Environment*, 1988.

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 # _____
- ____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository: West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture and History, Charleston

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): MC-0593

Princeton Post Office
Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .407 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 37.3696498

Longitude: -81.0983769

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone:

Easting:

Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated parcel boundary encompasses the entire Mercer County tax parcel number 10-10-317, on which the building stands, the immediate surrounding landscapes with its narrow lawns, retaining walls, steps and landings, the 29 x 113-foot parking lot on the east side of the building, and the stone retaining wall along the south side of the N. Harper Alley, behind the post office/library building. The parcel is bounded by Mercer Street to the south, Parke Avenue to the west, N. Harper Alley to the north, and an adjacent parking lot to the east. The boundary is depicted on the accompanying aerial site plan.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated parcel boundary encompasses the entire Princeton Post Office building and grounds, which comprised US Postal Service property from ca. 1932 to ca. 2004.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Michael J. Pulice

organization: n/a

street & number: 1715 Bluemont Ave SW

city or town: Roanoke state: VA zip code: 24015

e-mail mikep5@hotmail.com

telephone: 540-387-5443

date: August, 2019

Princeton Post Office
Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photo Log

Name of Property: Princeton Post Office

City or Vicinity: Princeton

County: Mercer

State: West Virginia

Photographer: Michael J. Pulice

Date Photographed: July 31, 2019

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1) Exterior, west and south elevations, looking northeast
- 2) Exterior, south (front) elevation, looking north-northeast
- 3) Exterior, south (front) elevation, looking north-northwest
- 4) Exterior, façade (south elevation) detail
- 5) Exterior, south (front) and east elevations, looking northwest
- 6) Exterior, cornerstone, southwest corner of south (front) elevation,
- 7) Exterior, lamp post at front of building
- 8) Exterior, east elevation window
- 9) Exterior, east elevation, looking west
- 10) Exterior, loading dock and alley, looking southwest
- 11) Exterior, rear alley, looking west
- 12) Exterior, postal hoist at rear of building
- 13) Interior, front lobby, looking west
- 14) Interior, central room/circulation desk, looking northwest
- 15) Interior, central room ceiling

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

16) Interior, first floor, original doors

17) Interior, basement corridor

18) Interior, basement, original doors

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos Page 1



Photo 1



Photo 2

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos Page 2



Photo 3



Photo 4

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos Page 3



Photo 5



Photo 6

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos

Page 4



Photo 7



Photo 8

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos Page 5



Photo 9



Photo 10

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos Page 6



Photo 11



Photo 12

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos Page 7



Photo 13



Photo 14

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos Page 8

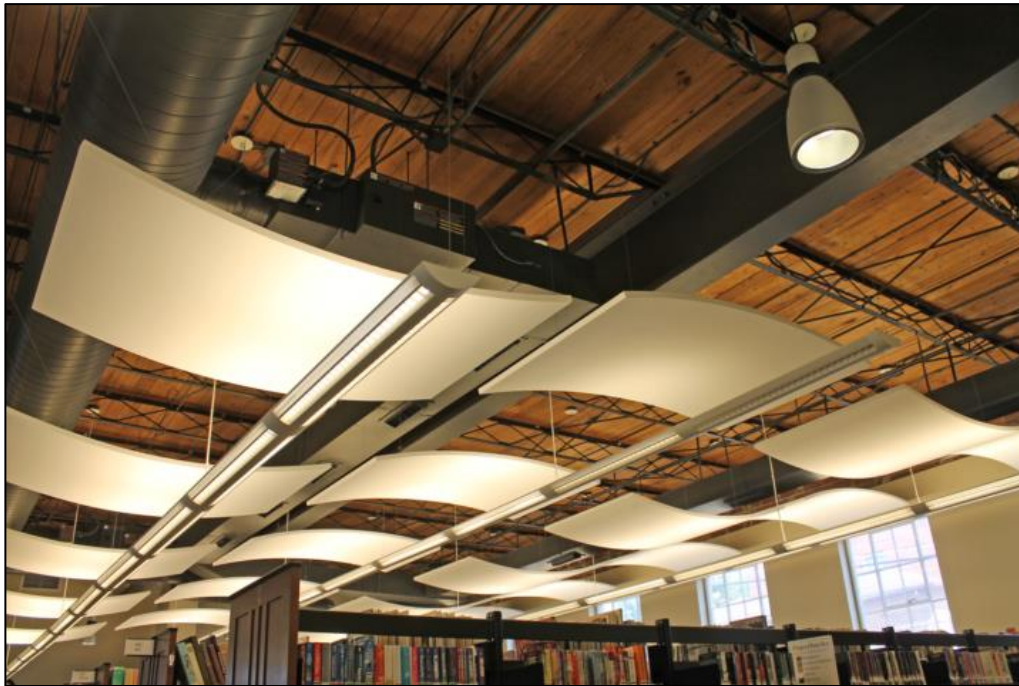


Photo 15



Photo 16

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Princeton Post Office

Name of Property

Mercer County, West Virginia

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos Page 9



Photo 17



Photo 18

PRINCETON PUBLIC LIBRARY

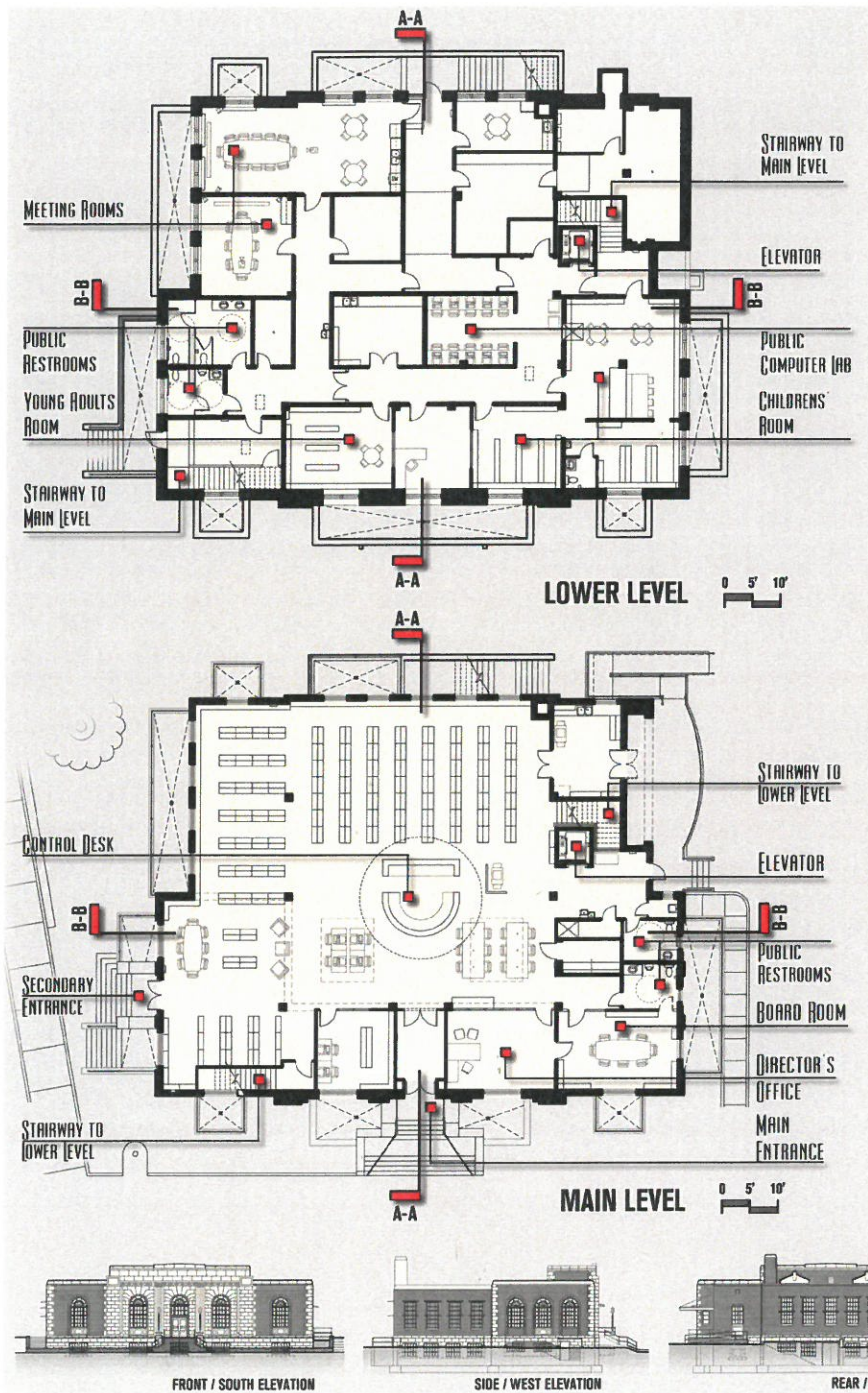
Princeton, WV

PROJECT DETAILS

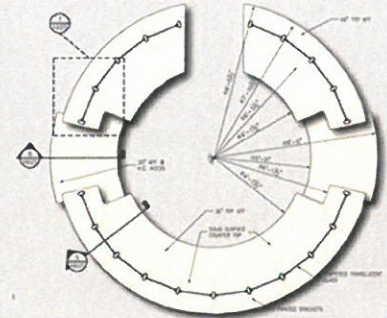
owner/district:
City of Princeton

year:
2010

size:
13,331 sf, (Two Story)



MAIN FLOOR PLAN
LOWER FLOOR PLAN
ELEVATIONS
DETAILS



CONTROL DESK PLAN



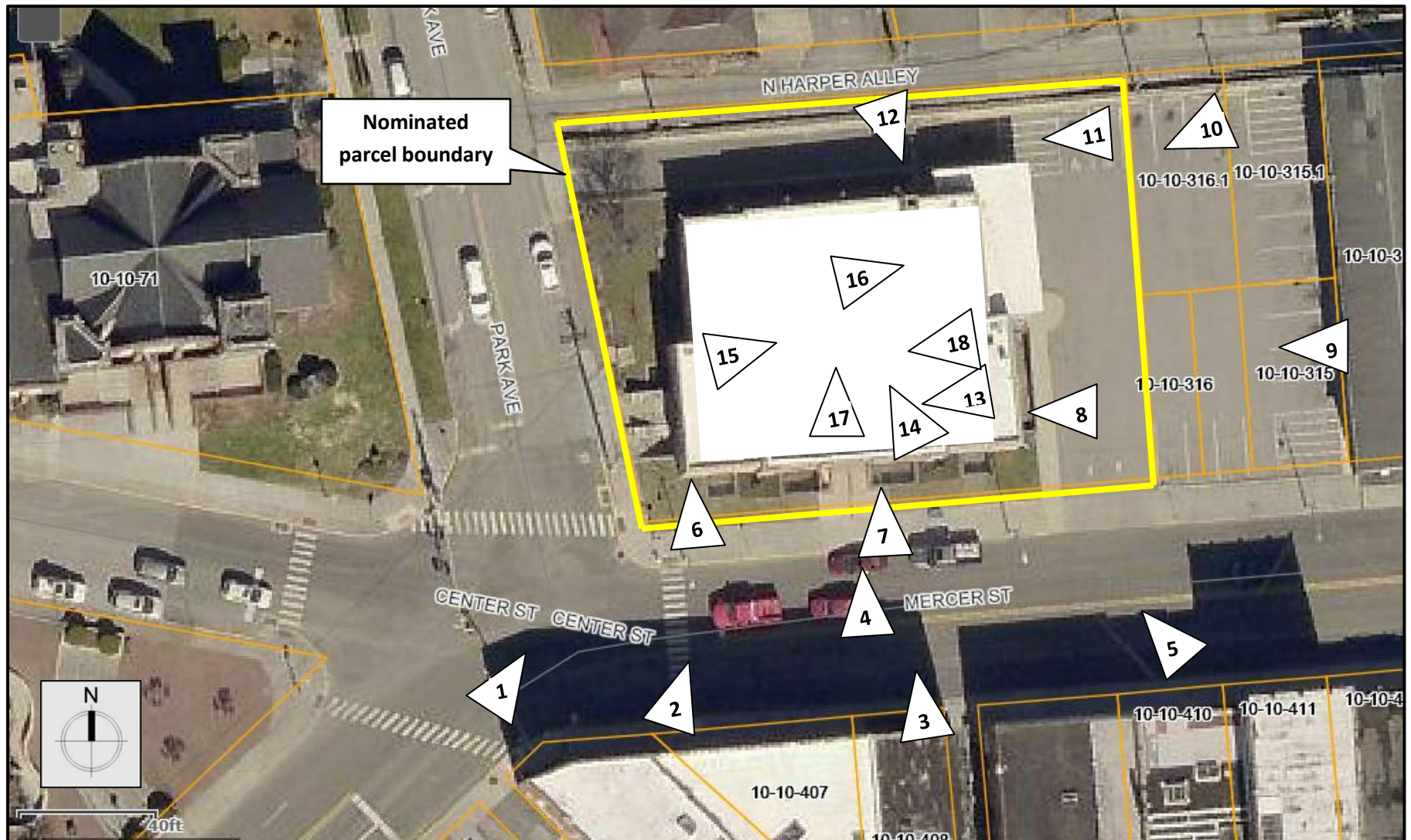
CONTROL DESK SIGN & BULKHEAD



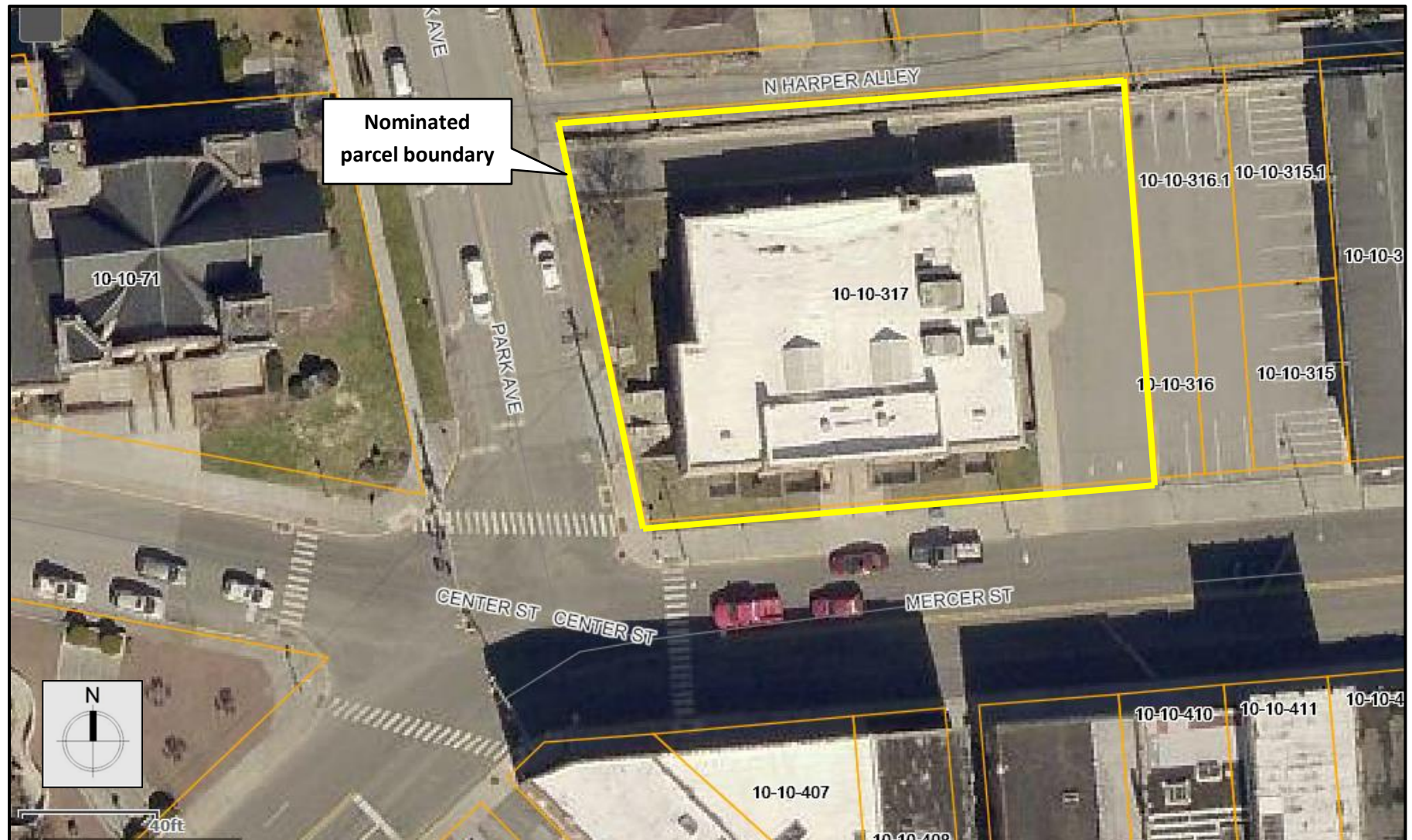
CONTROL DESK ELEVATION

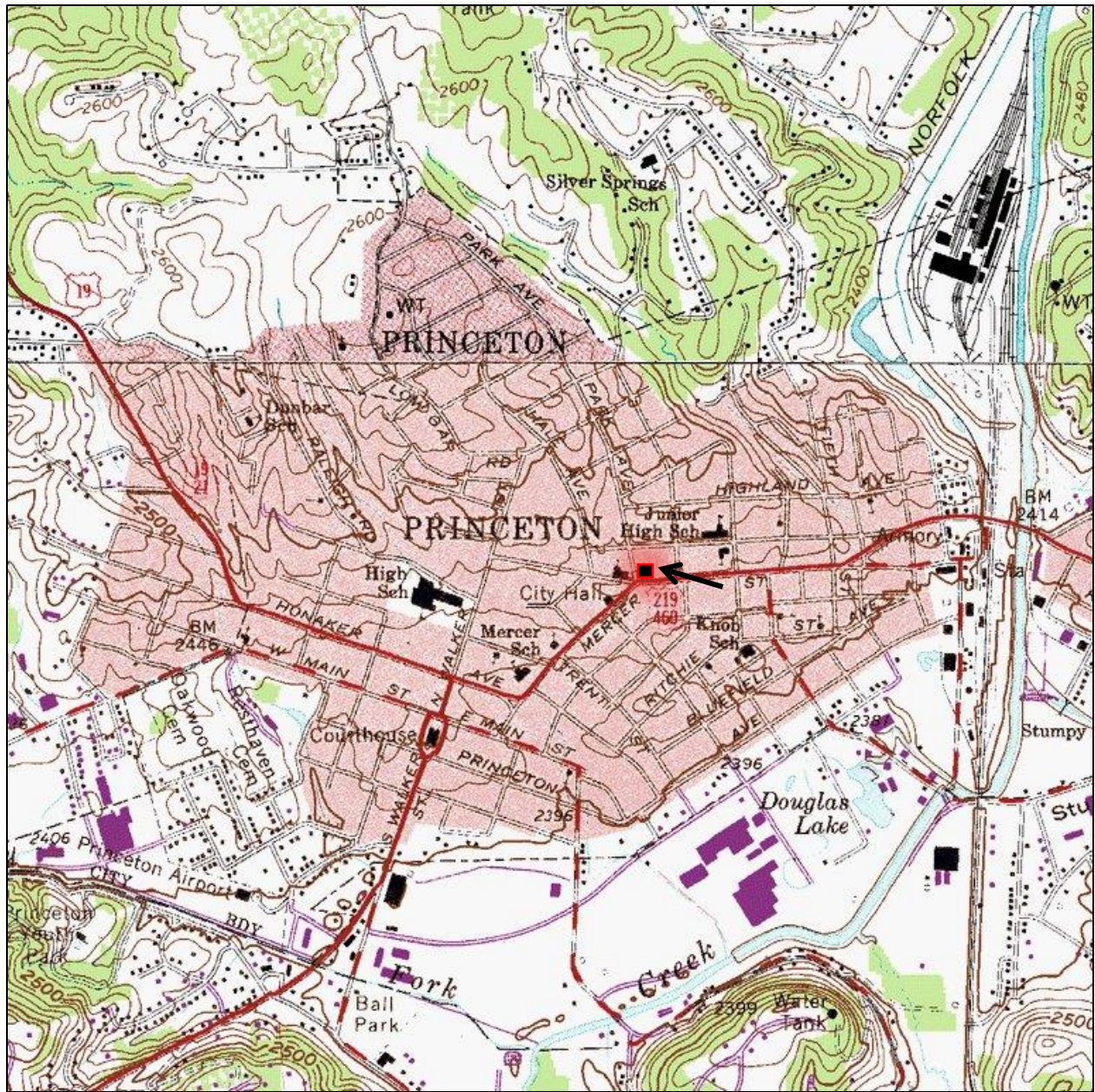
Princeton Public Library
City of Princeton, Mercer County, West Virginia
National Register of Historic Places Site Plan

Photo no. and
direction



Princeton Public Library
City of Princeton, Mercer County, West Virginia
National Register of Historic Places site plan – October 2019





Princeton Public Library

City of Princeton, Mercer County, West Virginia

Latitude: 37.3696498 Longitude: -81.0983769

National Register of Historic Places location map – October 2019