

Somerville Main Post Office Local Historic District



Final Report
June 25, 2013

Final Report
on the
Somerville Main Post Office
Local Historic District
at
237 Washington Street, Somerville, MA

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Summary Sheet

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Study Committee:	Dick Bauer, Chair	Abby Freedman, Vice Chair
	Jillian Adams	Alan Bingham
	George Born	Natasha Burger
	Denis J. Chagnon	Tom DeYoung
	Ryan Falvey	Eric Parkes
	Derick Snare	Todd Zinn

Public Hearing Date: **June 18, 2013**

Board of Alderman Vote: **June 26, 2013**

Total Properties: **1**
Address: **237 Washington Street, Somerville, MA**

Conclusion:

Many historic sites and resources that retain a high level of historic and/or architectural significance are distributed throughout the City of Somerville; for this reason, Somerville has initiated the creation of single-building local historic districts. This Final Report proposes to create and present rationale for designation of the Somerville Main Post Office as a new single-building local historic district. The Post Office, listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1986, is an important historic resource that contributes significantly to the design and development of Union Square and is representative of buildings produced during the New Deal program created under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Since the United States Postal Service is closing offices and consolidating facilities, the City of Somerville is concerned that without the added protection of local historic district designation, a future owner could permanently alter the historic fabric and character of this prominent civic building.

As one of three prominent twentieth century civic buildings in Union Square, the Somerville Main Post Office is noteworthy for its degree of architectural integrity as well as its significant association with the physical growth and design of the area. This building is an excellent example of the Colonial Revival style, a style which reflects the desire to construct buildings that embody the ideals of democracy and create a sense of permanence amid the social and cultural change that followed both the Civil War and World War I. The proposed designation of the Post Office as a local historic district will ensure that it is preserved as an important historical resource; is protected from irreversible harm by future owners or tenants; and is redeveloped in a manner that is consistent with the historic character of the building as well as the overall character of Union Square.

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Introduction

A local historic district is an area officially designated by a municipality that “contains one or more parcels or lots of land, or one or more buildings or structures on one or more parcels or lots of land.” Local historic districts (LHDs) were first established in Massachusetts in 1955; since then, over 235 local historic districts have been created in communities throughout the State. All communities adjacent to Somerville and most communities within the Boston Metropolitan Area have designated local historic districts due to the cultural significance of contributing properties and the various community benefits that result from this type of designation.

Case studies and research concerning the Boston Metropolitan Area, as well as the country as a whole, have found a correlation between local historic designation, improved property values, and neighborhood stabilization. This correlation is a direct effect of the protection that local historic district designation offers to owners from variations in the real estate market. Consequently, this protection inspires confidence in owners of locally designated properties that their investment will not be undermined by inappropriate alterations to either their own house, over time, or to a neighboring house. Designating a group of properties will often help protect neighborhoods against inappropriate development while, at the same time, facilitate preservation of the historic character and overall quality of the neighborhood. Additionally, the presence of a local historic district can often appeal to and assure potential buyers that the historic character and overall quality of a neighborhood will be protected long-term.

In Somerville, local historic districts are beneficial for a variety of reasons. For the community as a whole, local historic districts create a sense of place and preserve architectural character, which, in turn, attract new residents, businesses, jobs and tourist dollars. Within existing local historic districts, infill development often produces better building design and site development because other criteria, such as historic compatibility, are taken into consideration and given priority. Local historic districts encourage both public and private investments, and reinforce awareness that Somerville is a city that cares about and respects its history as well as the quality of life for its residents. Annual events and programs such as the Prospect Hill “First Flag” Raising, the Milk Row Cemetery “Ghosts of Somerville,” and Preservation Awards demonstrate the City’s dedication to promoting Somerville history. Several historic walking tours, as well as a historic biking tour, are also sponsored each year by the City to highlight designated properties and other historic resources that may not be as well-known. Building and area survey forms, which underlie the creation of local historic districts, are an invaluable source of information about local history because they explain the significant role Somerville played in the development and growth of the region, as well as the founding of this country. This information then serves to help schools, libraries and similar resource centers develop educational materials to promote local pride and participation.



“First Flag” Raising, 2009



“Ghosts of Somerville,” 2005

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Since 1985, Somerville has been a pioneer in the creation of single-building local historic districts. The majority of previous surveying efforts in Somerville have closely focused on the most architecturally significant and historically well-known sites, which are scattered throughout the community rather than clustered in a few discrete areas; therefore, the designation of single-building local historic districts has been the most appropriate choice. This Final Report proposes to create one new single-building local historic district through the designation of the Somerville Main Post Office at 237 Washington Street, an individually listed property on the National Register of Historic Places since 1986. While the National Register offers prestige and protection from adverse effects by projects that receive state or federal funding, the National Register does not offer protection from unsympathetic changes by an owner. The Post Office is an important historic resource that significantly contributes to the design and development of Union Square and represents buildings produced through the New Deal program in 1933 under President Roosevelt. The designation of local historic districts preserves and protects historic attributes within the City, inspires greater investment in the community, and promotes widespread appreciation of local history, which in turn increases civic pride. Therefore, the proposal to designate the Post Office as a local historic district will ensure that it is preserved as an important historical resource; is protected from irreversible harm by future owners or tenants; and is redeveloped in a manner that is consistent with the historic character of the building as well as the overall character of Union Square.

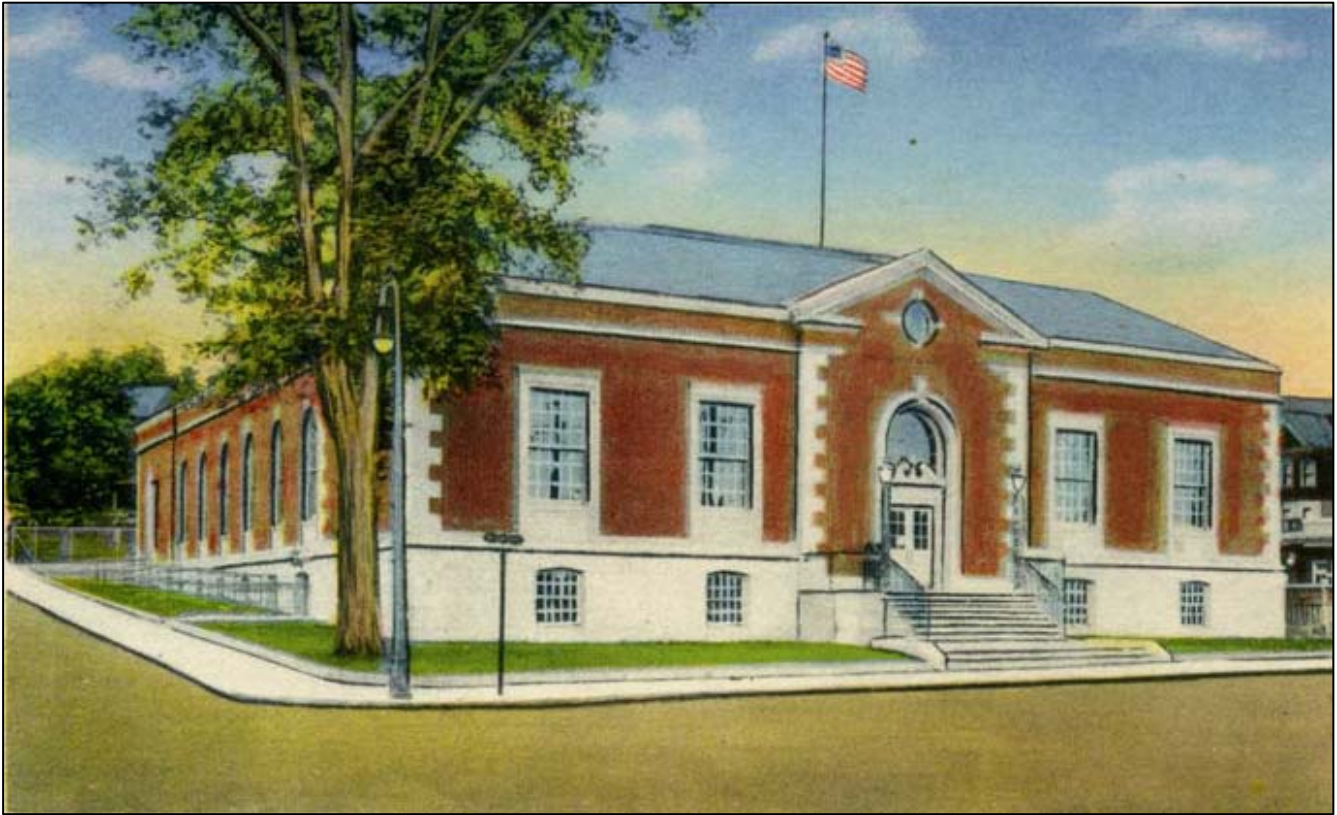
Methodology

The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and their Staff serve as the Local Historic District (LHD) Study Committee for the proposed single-building local historic district at 237 Washington Street. The Commission is a fourteen member body formed in 1985 in accordance with the authority granted under the Historic Districts Act (Chapter 40C of the General Laws of Massachusetts). The Commission oversees the creation of all local historic districts in Somerville and administers both the Somerville Historic District Ordinance and the Demolition Review Ordinance. Community support to establish a LHD Study Committee was initiated following the publication of *Beyond the Neck: The Architecture and Development of Somerville, Massachusetts* in 1982. This book was written by Carole Zellie of Landscape Research, for a project overseen by the City of Somerville and funded through a grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). The research presented in *Beyond the Neck* was based upon an extensive survey conducted in 1980 and 1981. This comprehensive survey effort also resulted in several research reports which identified groupings of historic structures that comprise various neighborhoods, squares and commercial corridors throughout the City.

Architectural and historical data relating to the development of the City also comes from various places: MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report for Somerville (1980), the Somerville Multiple Resource Area (MRA) Nomination Form to the National Register of Historic Places (1984), and several Final Study Reports (1985, 1989, 2003, and 2007) to establish new or expand existing local historic districts. All inventory forms, research reports, and study reports are available to the public for review at Somerville City Hall (93 Highland Avenue) and at the Massachusetts Historical Commission (220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston).

This Final Report builds upon information previously presented in other research documents and explains the rationale for designating the Somerville Main Post Office as a single-building local historic district. Due to budgeting pressures, the United States Postal Service (USPS) has decided to consolidate and sell a number of facilities as well as relocate many of the remaining postal offices to smaller buildings. In May 2012, the USPS put 237 Washington Street up for sale, with the intent to sell this parcel and relocate the mail services elsewhere within Union Square. Since the closing of several postal offices, and consolidating facilities such as the Somerville Main Post Office, the City is concerned that without the added protection of local historic designation, a future owner could permanently alter the historic fabric and character of this significant civic building. Due to this specific threat, consideration for other bylaws was unnecessary because only local historic designation will provide the appropriate kind of protection.

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Somerville Main Branch Post Office, c. 1935

The current post office building is a focal point in Union Square as it is located at the base of Prospect Hill, where Prospect Street terminates and Washington Street turns toward Charlestown. Rising one-half story at the front, this Classical Revival civic structure projects a pedimented central entrance pavilion that is the heart of this familiar terminus. Other architectural details include limestone quoins, a slate roof, and a granite foundation. In addition, the building houses a large mural (21 feet long by 6 feet tall) high up on the east lobby wall that visually informs the public about the vital role Prospect Hill played during the American Revolution. The mural has also become an iconic and much-loved piece of public art in Union Square.

As part of a larger survey project for the City of Somerville, the Public Archeology Laboratory (PAL) researched and updated the Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory Form B for the property at 237 Washington Street. PAL conducted research primarily online and through the local history collection at the Somerville Central Public Library, which included historic maps and atlases, historic photographs and postcards, annual City records and reports, local histories, and various unpublished materials.

There is considerable support for local historic designation of the Somerville Main Post Office from all areas of the City- residents, property owners, City staff, and members of various organizations such as Union Square Main Streets, the Somerville Arts Council, and the Somerville Museum. Civic pride in Union Square is clearly on the rise, as evidenced by festivals such as the Fluff Festival, as well as various other ArtsUnion events held throughout the year. Knowing that the building is for sale, the community as a whole is sensitive to the potential redevelopment of this 24,000 square foot site and wants to ensure that the future use of this important structure is not detrimental to the historic fabric and character of the building. Support for the local historic designation of the Somerville Main Post Office is well-known and widespread throughout the City. Following receipt of comments from the MHC dated April 10, 2013 and a recommendation for local historic district designation by the Somerville Planning Board dated May 3, 2013, a joint public hearing, between the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission and the Legislative Matters Committee

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of the Board of Alderman, was held on June 18, 2013. Public testimony at this joint hearing confirmed widespread public support for the Somerville Main Post Office Local Historic District; therefore, the Board of Alderman vote is anticipated to take place in June 2013.

During the discussion at this joint hearing, Staff was asked by the Legislative Matters Committee to look into ownership of this building upon being sold. Since the Post Office was constructed by the Public Works Administration (PWA), Committee members wanted to verify if the building would convert to municipal property. Staff has since learned that this building does not automatically convert to municipal property; however, as a PWA construction, the City of Somerville was given the opportunity to purchase the Post Office prior to being officially listed on the real estate market. In addition, Staff was asked to find more information regarding a preservation easement or restriction that would be placed on the mural, located on the east lobby wall. While Staff has looked into this request, by contacting the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Staff has not yet received any new information. However, Staff continues to look into this inquiry and will update the Board of Alderman once this information has been received.

Massachusetts Historical Commission Comments

Comments regarding the Draft Preliminary Study Report on the Somerville Main Post Office Local Historic District were received from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, dated April 10, 2013. The comments encouraged establishment of the Somerville Main Post Office Local Historic District and to investigate protecting additional significant historic resources through local historic designation within the Union Square area.

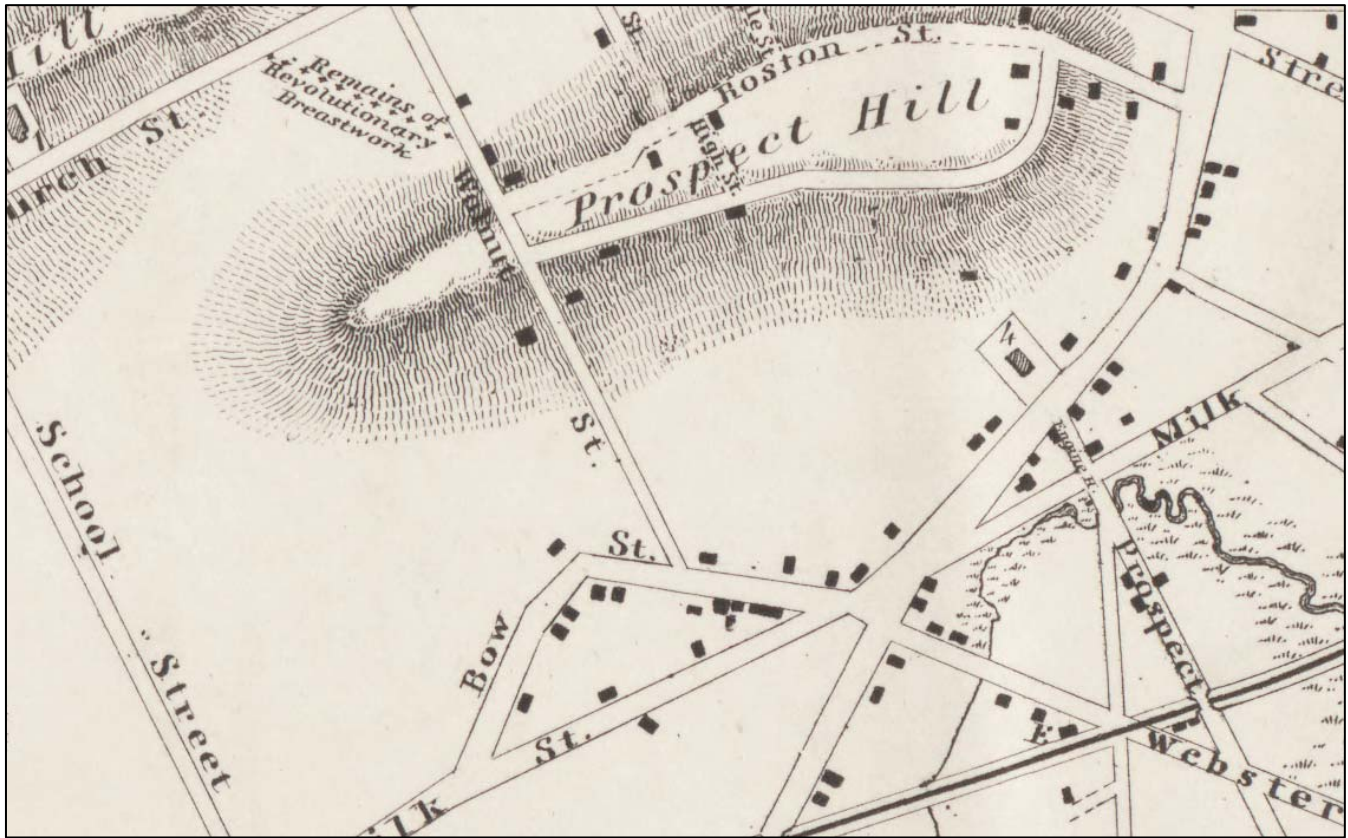
Significance

Union Square is the oldest and largest commercial district in Somerville, and development of the Square is tied historically to the residential and commercial growth of the City. The Somerville Main Post Office is a particularly noteworthy civic building within the Square and demonstrates a high degree of architectural integrity. This structure exemplifies the type of building that resulted from President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs and, as one of three twentieth century civic buildings in the Square, possesses significant associations with the physical growth and design of the area.



Union Square c.1930s

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1852 Draper Map illustrating 17th and 18th century trade routes

Three main streets form Union Square—Somerville Avenue, Bow Street and Washington Street. Originally, these roads were 17th and 18th century trade routes, used by farmers in Somerville and the surrounding area to transport products to Charlestown and Boston. Early 19th century transportation improvements, such as the Boston and Lowell Railroad expansion to Washington Street, enabled further development of the Square to support a rapidly growing population. In 1842, Somerville became an independent town from Charlestown and during the Civil War, the Square earned the name 'Union' by serving as a recruitment center. Following the War, local entrepreneurs established lucrative businesses in the Square and constructed a variety of ambitious buildings to house their profitable enterprises, such as the Eberle and Stone buildings. This concentration of commercial enterprises serviced employees and residents of the factories and industries that had already developed along the rail lines and rivers east of the Square. In 1872, Somerville incorporated as a city and, between 1870 and 1915, the City's population increased six-fold due to transportation access for those commuting daily to Boston. By the mid 20th century, Union Square supported a Fire Station (1903), Police Headquarters (1932) and a Post Office (1935), and became a critical hub for automobile traffic. Today, Union Square continues as a major commercial center, consisting primarily of locally owned restaurants, shops and professional offices.

An Architectural Description of 237 Washington Street (from MHC Building Form SMV.10)

The Somerville Main Post Office, constructed in 1935-1936, occupies the majority of a large, rectangular lot on the northeast corner of Washington Street and Bonner Avenue in the Union Square section of Somerville. The building faces south toward the intersection with Prospect Street. The south facade functions as the formal entrance to the building; the north (rear) elevation is the service area with a large loading dock. The building is sited on top of a slightly inclined lawn with shrubs and mature trees. The lawn on the southwest edge of the lot has a flag pole and a memorial plaque dedicated to the victims of the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. An asphalt parking lot is located to the north of the

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building. A concrete walkway running along the east elevation is cut into an embankment, allowing access to the basement level of the building.

The Somerville Main Post Office is a two-and-one-half-story, rectangular, steel-frame and brick-clad structure with a flat-top hipped roof. The Classical Revival-style civic building sits on a high granite foundation. The facade is five bays wide with a slightly projecting, pedimented central entrance pavilion. The east and west elevations are eight bays wide, and the bays on either end project away from the plane of the elevation. The utilitarian north elevation is seven bays wide with a four-bay mail loading dock platform topped with a flat roof.

The Post Office sits on a smooth granite base that is raised one-half story at the front and topped by a limestone water table with a convex cushion profile. The exterior of the building is steel-frame construction, clad in red brick laid in Flemish bond. Limestone quoins articulate each corner, including the center pavilion and the end bays of the east and west side elevations. The roof line of the south facade and the east and west elevations are defined by a cyma reversa and recta limestone cornice above an unadorned brick frieze with a narrow limestone molding band. The pediment of the central entrance pavilion on the facade repeats the same cornice profile with dentils along the rakes and gable returns. The frieze line breaks at the center above the entrance with bronzed letters attached to the brick reading "United States Post Office." The hipped roof is covered in slate shingles with copper coping at the seams. The building has one tall brick chimney at the northeast corner. The chimney is laid in Flemish bond and has copper flashing and a limestone cap.

A wide, two-level granite stair extends from the Washington Street sidewalk to the main entrance. The first level, originating at the concrete sidewalk along Washington Street, has three square-nosed, granite block steps leading up to a granite block landing edged by granite blocks. The landing tapers to meet the narrower second run of eight round-nosed, granite block stairs which lead up to the granite landing at the front door. The upper flight is flanked by a wrought iron and bronze railing with a star and scroll decorative pattern that rises from spiral newel posts with decorative finials at the first-level landing. The stair railing terminates at each top corner with a lamp post with a similar star and scroll decorative motif and is topped with bronze lanterns. The balustrade around the upper landing matches the stair railing. A simple iron handrail, which appears to have been added later, is located in the center of the stairs and runs from the base to the top landing.



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The main entrance is located on the center bay of the facade. The entrance is composed of two modern replacement glass and aluminum doors framed by a wooden classical pediment surround that is set within the deep reveal of a full-height arched limestone opening that culminates in a round-arch fanlight window above the door. The wood door surround has flat fluted pilasters, Doric capitols, an unadorned frieze, a denticulated cornice, a broken denticulated stroll pediment, and a wood finial shaped like a pineapple. The arched 30-light wood fanlight with a limestone scroll keystone rises up from behind the broken scroll pediment within the limestone arch surround. Other building entrances include a set of arched wood, partially glazed, double doors located in the basement level of the east and west elevations. These doors are set in arched wood jambs surrounded by an arched granite opening. The north elevation contains two, partially glazed, steel doors. One door provides access to the loading bays and one accesses the interior of the building. The loading dock has metal overhead doors, one for each of the four bays.

Fenestration includes a recessed ocular opening above the main entrance with four limestone keys and a 16-light round wood window. The principal fenestration consists of rectilinear and arched openings with multi-light wood windows. Two 15-over-15 wood, double-hung, flat-head windows flank the facade's center bay. These windows are set in wood jambs with limestone sills, surrounds, and denticulated lintels. An unadorned limestone panel within the surround trim extends from beneath each window to the water table molding. Modern aluminum screens have been added to the windows. The fenestration on the east and west elevations is identical. Each outer bay contains the same window type as the facade. Each middle recessed six-bay section is composed of 21-over-15 double-hung, arched wood windows set in wood frames with brick arched lintels, accented by limestone keystones and springer stones. A plain limestone panel extends from the bottom of each window to the water table molding. Basement-level windows are inserted into shallow arch openings in the granite foundation of the facade and the east and west elevations, repeating the first-floor fenestration pattern. These windows are 10-over-10 double-hung windows with arched upper sections, set in wood frames. Modern aluminum screens have been added. On the east and west elevations the basement windows have concrete window wells with an iron railing. One wood, four-over-four, double-hung window with a limestone sill and splayed brick lintel is located on the first story of the north elevation. Fenestration on the second story includes seven wood, six-over-six, double-hung windows with limestone sills and splayed brick lintels.

Interior Description

The interior of the Somerville Main Post Office retains its original configuration with the two-story lobby as the major interior space on the mezzanine level, a large open work room set behind the lobby, and small private offices on either side of the lobby. The basement level is divided between the mechanical rooms, a large workroom, and storage rooms. A narrow corridor in the western section terminates at a stair that leads to the workroom.

Currently, the only public interior space is the lobby which has a central vestibule located behind the main entrance. The vestibule is an enclosed rectangular volume set one-half story below the main lobby floor with staircases on either side leading from the vestibule to the mezzanine level. The vestibule floor has yellow terrazzo tile, black terrazzo tile detail, and a pink marble border, with thin brass edging around each tile. The south wall, which contains the main entrance doors, is covered with green marble wainscoting and a pink marble course with white marble above. The opposite (north) wall is covered in the same green marble wainscoting, with a pink marble course, but has stained wood paneling above and three wood, fixed, nine-light windows. Between each window are fluted pilasters with simplified Corinthian capitols. The east and west walls contain stained wood double doors that lead to the mezzanine stairs. Each of the four paneled doors has a six-light window, bronze kick plate, door pull, strike plate, and window grill. The doors have fluted pilasters identical to those between the north wall windows; however, the doors' pilasters are full height. Above each pair of doors is a wood, fixed, 12-light transom. The ceiling is covered in stained wood panels with a torus-style crown molding.

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The exterior of the enclosed vestibule, as viewed from the lobby, is of stained wood paneling, matching the interior finish. The same fluted pilasters with simplified Corinthian capitals that are on the interior of the vestibule are located on either side of the double doors, windows, and at each corner of the exterior. The unadorned frieze is capped by a crown molding with a simple profile. Each of the double doors on the east and west sides of the vestibule open to a flight of six pink marble stairs that lead to the lobby mezzanine level. The stairwells have green marble wainscoting and bronze handrails on both sides. A balustrade behind the vestibule has a similar star and scroll motif as the balustrade and railing on the exterior staircase.

The main public lobby is a rectangular room that is two stories tall. The floor is identical to the vestibule: yellow terrazzo tiles, black terrazzo diamond tile detail, and a pink marble and black terrazzo tile border around the entire room. Thin brass edging surrounds all the tile and marble in the floor. The baseboard is green marble, with white marble wainscoting about eight feet high, with a white marble cap. Above the marble is painted plaster walls. The coffered plaster ceiling has a decorative, multi-level cornice with alternating dentil and rosette motif.

Brass mailboxes, some with glass windows and some solid, are located on the west and east walls of the lobby. Only one set of boxes is included in the original design, but all the boxes are designed to be in keeping with the building's style. Stained wood bulletin board cases with gold lettering and glass doors are located on the south and north walls. These cases, one labeled "civil service" and two labeled "bulletins," are original to the design of the lobby. Modern aluminum ventilation grates have been laid into the original metal grates with the same star motif as on the balustrades of the lobby. A large service counter with stained wood trim and a wood countertop is located on the north wall.

The upper portion of the east lobby wall displays a mural, 21 feet long by 6 feet tall, entitled "A Skirmish between British and Colonists near Somerville in Revolutionary Times." The mural was commissioned by the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (also known as The Section of Fine Arts) and was painted by Ross Moffett in 1937. The mural depicts the fighting that occurred near Union Square during the American Revolution when the British retreated from Lexington.

History of 237 Washington Street (from MHC Building Form SMV.10)

The Somerville Main Post Office was constructed by the Public Works Administration (PWA). The PWA was created through the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) on June 16, 1933 with the intention to build large public works to increase employment, stabilize purchasing power, improve public welfare, and revitalize American industry. Unlike the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which sought to provide employment across all sectors, the PWA focused on building large infrastructure projects. Between 1933 and 1939, the PWA funded the construction of more than 34,000 projects, which ranged from the large-scale construction of the Coulee Dam and the electrification of the railroad between New York and Washington to individual buildings. Many of the buildings constructed under this program were less grand in style and function, especially in smaller municipalities and towns. Post offices built during this time reflected a desire to "provide modest, practical post offices instead of monumental edifices" (Smith 1985).

The design of post offices, as well as other Federal and non-Federal public works projects, was the responsibility of the Supervisory Architect of the Treasury. Established in 1852, the Office of the Supervisory Architect of the Treasury was charged with the design of court houses, custom houses, post offices, and other buildings that housed government functions. Unlike private architectural firms, funds for the design and construction of these buildings and structures were subject to Congressional approval; therefore, they tended to be designed in more traditional styles (Lee 2000:4). Under the tenure of James Knox Taylor (1897-1912), the Office promoted the idea that governmental buildings should be monumental

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and beautiful, represent the ideals of democracy, and set a high standard for architecture in a community. Taylor also advocated designs derived from Classical or early American styles. This Office also encouraged standardization of Federal building design to increase efficiency. By the early 1910s and 1920s, post office design became a function of the value of the real estate and of postal receipts. Post offices in larger urban areas were still designed as large, monumental structures; however, in smaller communities they were more modest (Boland 1994:3).

Under the PWA, approximately three times the number of post offices were built in the 1930s than in the previous 50 years. Since post office design had become standardized and often relied on the work of regional architects and the use of local materials, construction was easily initiated. Despite the desire to construct buildings rapidly (in an effort to reinvigorate industrial production), the PWA still stressed the importance of high-quality design and construction, so that buildings and structures would be “public works of an enduring character and lasting benefits” (Boland 1994). The PWA continued to place an emphasis on design drawn from local tradition, instead of current “modern influences,” and favored buildings characterized by “great simplicity and sparing use of ornament” (Short and Stanley-Brown 1939). In keeping with the trend toward standardization of building construction, the PWA recommended that New England buildings be of steel-frame construction with reinforced-concrete floors and exterior walls of brick and stone.

Louis A. Simon, Chief of the Engineering and Drafting Division of the Office of the Supervisory Architect and designer of the Somerville Post Office, oversaw all PWA projects. Under Simon, the design of Federal buildings, and others sponsored by the PWA, was typically more subdued and tended toward the more “sentimental architecture of the Italian Renaissance and the Colonial” (Lee 2000:261). The Board of Consulting Architects, a division of the Office of the Supervisory Architect, was established in 1934 under the NIRA at the suggestion of Leroy Barton, assistant to Treasury Secretary Morgenthau. Barton thought that the exterior design of post offices should be improved and that a general committee on design should be established to review “all existing type designs and suggest changes and improvements” (Lee 2000:261).

The Board of Consulting Architects recommended that the design of public buildings be less standardized and more specific to the site and the surrounding community. The Board stressed that “architectural traditions, as well as the limitation of natural or manufactured products of the vicinity, are given every practicable consideration.” They further called out the importance of a region’s history and stated that “Thus in New England will be found examples of Colonial Architecture with exterior facing of brick or stone...In larger centers of population, design tends toward monumental structures expresses the strength and dignity of the Federal government” (Lee 2000:262-263). The PWA also promoted the idea that Federal buildings would be spaces open to the public and could therefore be used to celebrate and promote civic values. As such, interiors became showcases for public art, most notably the use of the walls for art, especially murals, in post offices.

Congressman Arthur D. Healy is credited with securing the funding for the construction of the Somerville Main Post Office and the nearby Medford Post Office to replace the mail facility that handled mail for both communities. The sum of \$203,000 was allocated for the design of the buildings and enabled construction jobs for more than 150 local men. As part of the PWA mission to stimulate industrial production, local producers fabricated the exterior brick. Brickyards had been among the largest mid-nineteenth-century industries in the area, and a few remained in the 1930s. The post office was one of several Somerville projects funded by the PWA. Others included a school and a high school stadium (Smith 1985). In addition to housing a post office, the Somerville Main Post Office has served a number of community uses, including offices for the Social Security Administration and military recruiting. It still functions as the City’s main post office.

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The Somerville Main Post Office is an excellent example of a Colonial Revival style post office. The Colonial Revival style gained popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries during a period of “creative eclecticism” in American architecture that was encouraged by the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia. The Centennial Exposition sparked an interest in Colonial architecture and was followed by the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, which displayed the full potential of Revival styles. The Revival styles emphasized order, symmetry, formal design, and elaborate ornamentation with a “return to classic principles of design and, often, to the literal reuse of classical forms” (Bhaskaran 2005:58, Roth 1980:174). Many hallmarks of the Colonial Revival style can be seen in the Somerville Main Post Office, including its flat-top hipped roof, brick exterior, rectangular form, restrained granite detailing, and classically symmetrical facade with a prominent gabled center entry.

The use of the Colonial Revival style also reflected the desire to construct buildings that embodied the ideals of democracy and created a sense of permanence amidst the social and cultural changes brought on by technological advancements in the years following both the Civil War and World War I (Roth 1980:174). Large and small towns wanted their public buildings to make a statement about the permanence of American democratic ideals and to celebrate this as a unique form of government. Traditional buildings, such as post offices, also helped to express the rich colonial past of particular areas (Upton 1998). The Classical Revival style was one of the dominant styles chosen for buildings and structures constructed by the Federal government under the PWA.

The Somerville Main Post Office was designed by Louis Adolf Simon (c. 1870-1941), then Supervising Architect for the PWA. Simon was born in Boston and educated at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He began practicing as an architect in Washington, DC in 1894 and entered the office of the U.S. Treasury Supervising Architect in 1896, serving as chief architect from 1905 until 1933. From 1933 until his death in 1941, he remained the PWA’s Supervising Architect and was responsible for numerous post offices, custom houses, and court houses. He was the architect of the U.S. Federal Building at the New York World’s Fair of 1939-1940 (Smith 1985).

Maurice P. Meade (1892-1955) was the local architect responsible for the design of the Post Office. Meade was born in Boston and graduated from MIT in 1908. In the early 1910s, he maintained a private practice at 44 Bromfield Street, Boston, and later moved to 80 Boylston Street. Meade is credited with the design of at least two other post offices, the Arlington Post Office and the Brookline Main Branch Post Office (both National Register-listed). He is also credited with designing a number of institutional buildings, including Saint John’s Roman Catholic Seminary Complex, the Saint Augustine Roman Catholic Church Convent, and the Saint Brigid Roman Catholic Church, all in Boston. He retired in 1954 and died on October 4, 1955 (Smith 1985).

The mural in the lobby of the Somerville Main Post Office, as previously mentioned, was painted by Ross Embrose Moffett (1888-1971). Moffett was born in Clearfield, Iowa, and began studying art at the Cummins School of Art in Des Moines in 1907. He later attended the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he studied with John Vanderpool and Harry Wallcott until 1913. He was also a pupil in 1913 of Charles W. Hawthorne in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and in 1914 participated in classes at the Art Students League in New York. In 1924 he established the Provincetown Painting Class with fellow artist Heinrich Pfeiffer. During the 1930s, Moffett completed several mural projects for the WPA’s Federal Art Project and later received a commission, with Louis Bouché, from the National Academy of Design for the Eisenhower Memorial Foundation in Abilene, Kansas, completed in 1956. Moffett was a member of the National Academy of Design, the American Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Gravers, and the National Society of Mural Painters.

The Somerville Main Post Office at 237 Washington Street is both historically and architecturally significant. This structure continues to retain a superior level of integrity and has been enlisted on the National Register of Historic Places since 1986. Several institutional structures within the City are

Somerville Main Post Office Local Historic District Final Report

designated as local historic districts and some of these are located in Union Square. However, there are no institutional structures designated historic in Union Square to represent twentieth century growth and development. Since the incorporation of Somerville as a city in 1872, the population grew at an exponential rate through 1915. This growth rate is a leading factor in the concentration of municipal development projects in and around the Square during the early twentieth century, which includes the Fire Station (1903) and Police Headquarters (1932). However, of these twentieth century institutional structures, the Somerville Main Post Office retains the original intent of design (interior and exterior), is the only municipal structure from this era that is eligible for and listed upon the National Register, and is at risk of losing historic and architectural significance due to unsympathetic alterations.



Ross Moffet mural, c. 1937, entitled "A Skirmish between British and Colonists near Somerville in Revolutionary Times"

Justification of Boundaries

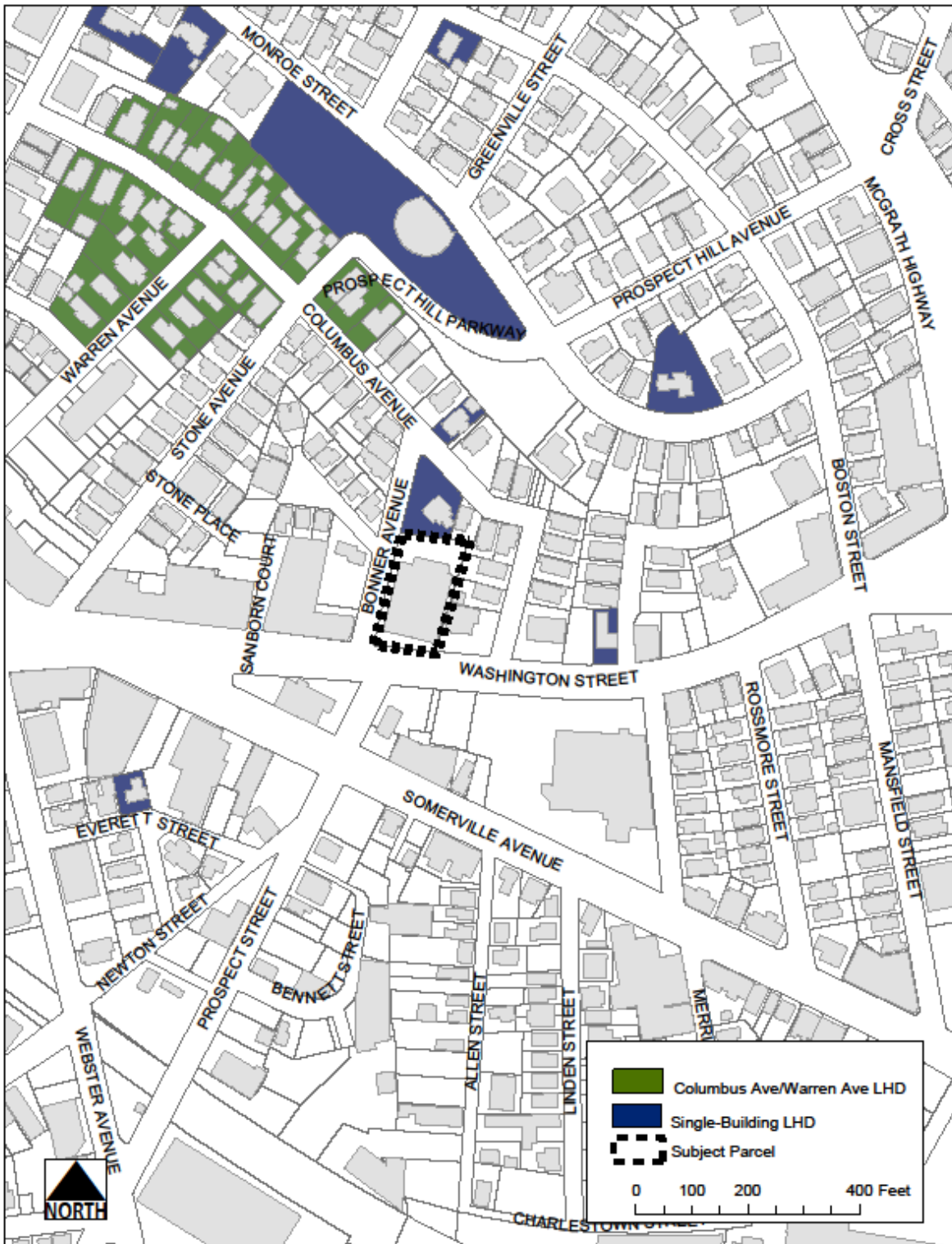
The proposed Somerville Main Post Office Local Historic District at 237 Washington Street is located at the corner of Washington Street and Bonner Avenue, slightly east of the Union Square center. The proposed boundaries for this district would follow the lot lines around the parcel and measure 113.26 feet along Washington Street, 206.6 feet along Bonner Avenue, 122.67 feet behind the structure and parallel to Washington Street, and 205.6 feet along the right side of the structure and parallel to Bonner Avenue. These boundaries are determined by the single-building nature of the district and, therefore, include only the parcel located at 237 Washington Street.

Architectural historians at the Public Archaeology Lab (PAL) undertook a comprehensive survey of various properties in the larger Union Square area during 2010-11. The Commission determined that none of these newly surveyed structures are contiguous to the subject property, most represent a different development era of the Square, and the integrity of these newly surveyed properties is not consistent with that of the Somerville Main Post Office. The Commission also found that some of the newly surveyed properties (former American Tube Work buildings and houses on Properzi Way) are better suited to be grouped together as a separate, contiguous local historic district since these buildings do not share the same historic context regarding development and growth of the Square. Furthermore, a single-building local historic district is located behind the Post Office at 17 Bonner Avenue (c. 1845); however, this building represents a much earlier development period.

The proposed designation of the Somerville Main Post Office as a single-building local historic district, a property already listed on the National Register of Historic Places, will ensure that this important historical resource is both preserved and protected from irreversible harm. Designation will also encourage high quality and appropriate redevelopment of this property that will enhance the historic value of the existing structure and compliment the overall historic character of Union Square.

Somerville Main Post Office Local Historic District Final Report

Somerville Main Post Office Local Historic District Map 6/25/2013



Somerville Main Post Office Local Historic District Final Report

Property Street Index

This index identifies the parcel and resource within the proposed Local Historic District. Information included on the property index is as follows:

- MHC #: Massachusetts Historical Commission inventory form number
'SMV' is the Somerville inventory prefix
- MBL: City of Somerville Assessor Map-Block-Lot numbers
- Address: Number and street where resource is located
- Style: Architectural style as identified on the MHC survey Form B
- Year: Approximate year of construction
- Hist. Name: First identified owner or name associated with the resource

MHC #	MBL	Address	Style	Year	Hist. Name
SMV.10	81-E-08	237 Washington St	Colonial Revival	1935-36	Somerville Main Post Office

Total Properties to Include: 1

Recommendation

The City of Somerville previously adopted an ordinance creating and protecting historic districts in the City of Somerville known as Ordinance No. 1985-2, the Somerville Historic District Ordinance. The intent of this ordinance is to govern all local historic districts in Somerville including the establishment of new districts and the enlargement or reduction of existing districts. Each district adopted as part of the Ordinance is also defined by a map. The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission proposes that the Board of Aldermen adopt a map amendment to create the Somerville Main Post Office Local Historic District at 237 Washington Street. There are no recommendations to change the existing ordinance that governs the establishment, enlargement or reduction of a district and district commission, the procedures for review of applications, the criteria for determinations, or the exclusions from review. The existing ordinance is included as Appendix A.

CITY OF SOMERVILLE

**ORDINANCE NO. 2013-__
IN THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN: _____, 2013**

**MAP AMENDMENTS PURSUANT TO THE HISTORIC DISTRICT ORDINANCE TO
CREATE THE SOMERVILLE MAIN POST OFFICE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT**

WHEREAS, it is the intent of the Historic District Ordinance to protect, enhance and preserve the City’s cultural and historical resources; and,

WHEREAS, historic districts safeguard these resources and offer the best protection for the community’s unique character through preservation of its representative built environment; and,

WHEREAS, historic districts create strong economic benefits for the community, through an increase in property values, neighborhood stability, quality property reinvestment, and tourist appeal; and

WHEREAS, historic districts integrate the City’s goals for Smart Growth and a sustainable green economy, by promoting reinvestment in the existing building stock, reducing material waste, and capitalizing on our rich architectural heritage; and

WHEREAS, a broad survey was completed over a two year period through State and Federal grants to identify the most significant unprotected historic properties in the City; and

WHEREAS, extensive outreach has been undertaken and documented to owners of properties proposed for designation, now,

NOW THEREFORE , be it hereby ordained by the Board of Aldermen, in session assembled, that the below listed properties are approved as Map Amendments to the Historic District Ordinance, Sections 7-26 of Chapter 7, Article II, of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Somerville in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C.

<u>Local Historic District (LHD) Name</u>	<u>Property Address</u>	<u>Map-Block-Lot</u>
Somerville Main Post Office LHD	237 Washington Street	81-E-08

Approved by the Board of Aldermen;

President

Appendix A

Somerville Historic District Ordinance

**AN ORDINANCE CREATING AND PROTECTING HISTORIC DISTRICTS
IN THE CITY OF SOMERVILLE**

BE IT ENACTED BY THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN AND THE MAYOR, in accordance with the authority granted under the Historic Districts Act, Chapter 40C of the General Laws of Massachusetts

Section 1. Purpose and Intent

It is hereby declared a matter of public policy that the protection, enhancement, preservation and use of historical resources or value is a public necessity and is required in the interest of education, prosperity, safety and welfare of the people. The purpose of this ordinance is to:

- a. Protect, enhance and preserve cultural and historical resources, including those districts which represent or reflect elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history.
- b. Safeguard the City's historical and cultural heritage by improving historical and cultural resources by creating historic districts.
- c. Foster wider public awareness of and pride in accomplishments of the past.
- d. Encourage private efforts of Somerville citizens in support of such purposes.
- e. Promote the use of historic districts as a stimulus to local business and industry.
- f. Enhance the City's image to residents, visitors and tourists and make the City a more attractive and desirable place in which to live and work.

Section 2. Definitions

In the ordinance, unless the context clearly requires otherwise:

- a. Commission means the Historic Preservation Commission created under this ordinance.
- b. Historic District is an area designated in accordance with Section 3 that contains one or more parcels or lots of land, or one or more buildings or structures on one or more parcels or lots of land.
- c. Altered includes the words "rebuilt", "reconstructed", "restored", "removed" and "demolished" and the phrases "changed in exterior color" and "any alteration to exterior physical appearance or exterior architectural feature visible from a public way".
- d. Building means a combination of materials forming a shelter for persons, animals or property.
- e. Constructed includes the words "built", "erected", "installed", "enlarged" and "moved".

- f. Exterior architectural feature means such portion of the exterior of a building or structure as is open to view from a public street, public way, public park or public body of water, including but not limited to the architectural style and general arrangement and setting thereof, the kind, color and texture of exterior building materials, the color of paint or other materials applied to exterior surfaces and the type and style of windows, doors, lights, signs and other appurtenant exterior fixtures.
- g. Person Aggrieved means the applicant, an owner of adjoining property, an owner of property within the same historic district as property within one hundred feet of said property lines and any charitable corporation in which one of its purposes is the preservation of historic structures or districts.
- h. Structure means a combination of materials other than a building, including a sign, fence, wall, hitching post, terrace, walk or driveway.

Section 3. Establishment of Historic Districts

The City of Somerville may, by ordinance adopted by two-thirds vote of the Board of Aldermen, establish historic districts subject to the following provisions:

- a. Process. Prior to the establishment of any historic district in Somerville, an investigation and report on the historical and architectural significance of the buildings, structures or sites to be included in the proposed historic district or districts shall be made by an historic district study committee or by an historic district commission, as provided in this section. The buildings, structures or sites to be included in the proposed historic district may consist of one or more parcels or lots of land, or one or more buildings or structures on one or more parcels or lots of land.

The study committee or the commission shall transmit copies of the report to the Planning Board, and to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for their respective consideration and recommendations.

Not less than sixty days after such a transmittal the study committee or commission shall hold a public hearing on the report after due notice given at least fourteen days prior to the date thereof, which shall include a written notice, given by certified mail, postage prepaid, return receipt requested, to the owners as they appear on the most recent real estate tax list of the Board of Assessors of all properties to be included in such district or districts. The committee shall submit a final report with its recommendations, a map of the proposed district or districts and a draft of a proposed ordinance to the Board of Aldermen.

- b. Formation of Historic District Study Committee. An historic district study committee may be established in Somerville by vote of the Board of Aldermen for the purpose of making an investigation of the desirability of establishing an historic district or districts therein. The study committee shall consist of not less than three nor more than seven members appointed by the Mayor, subject to confirmation by the Board of Aldermen including: a) one member from two nominees submitted by the Somerville Historical Society or, in the absence thereof by the Society for the Preservation of New England

Antiquities; b) one member from two nominees submitted by the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects; and c) one member from two nominees of the board of realtors, if any, covering the area. If, within thirty days after submission of a written request for nominees to any of the organizations herein named, no such nominations have been made, the appointing body may proceed to appoint the study committee without nominations by such organization.

Section 4. Historic Preservation Commission: Membership Terms and Administrative Matters

- a. Terms. The ordinance shall be administered by an Historic Preservation Committee with the following terms, composition and administrative matters. The Historic Preservation Commission shall consist of seven (7) members, and seven (7) alternates, appointed by the Mayor and subject to confirmation by the Board of Aldermen. All of the members and at least five (5) of the alternates shall be residents of the City. Each member and alternate shall serve for a term of three years; except that the initial appointments shall be for two members and two alternates to serve a term of one year, two members and two alternates to serve a term of two years, and three members and three alternates to serve a term of three years. Vacancies shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment for the unexpired term. In case of the absence, inability to act or unwillingness to act because of self-interest on the part of a member of the Commission, his or her place shall be taken by an alternate member designated by the chairman. Each member and alternate shall continue in office after expiration of his or her term until a successor is duly appointed and qualified.
- b. Composition. The Commission membership shall be composed of the following: one member, preferably a professional architectural historian, chosen from three nominees submitted by the Somerville Historical Society or the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities; an architect, preferably a person registered in the Commonwealth, chosen from three nominees submitted by the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects; a licensed real estate broker chosen from three nominees submitted by the regional chapter of the Board of Realtors; a city planner, preferably with knowledge about allied local activities and boards; a lawyer with knowledge of real estate and historic preservation law; and two citizen members who, through education or experience, have demonstrated a commitment to historic preservation. Two or more of the members so appointed shall be residents of a designated historic district. The alternate members shall include: at least one resident of a designated historic district, one landscape architect, one licensed general contractor or building tradesperson and four with a background in any of the other categories represented by the regular members of the Commission. If, within thirty (30) days after the submission of a written request for nominees to any of the above-named organizations, no such nominations have been submitted, the Mayor may make such an appointment without nomination by said organization. To the extent a person meets more than one of the foregoing specific membership requirements, then each such specific membership requirement so met shall be satisfied by such person's membership on the commission.
- c. Compensation. No member or alternate shall receive compensation for his or her service on the Commission, but shall be reimbursed, subject to availability of

appropriated funds, for his or her actual expenses reasonably and necessarily incurred in performance of his or her official duties.

- d. Conflict of Interest. If any Commission member or alternate is employed or to be employed by the City or to have directly, or indirectly a financial interest in any contract with the City, the classification of "special municipal employee" should be obtained from the Board of Aldermen and all other requirements as set forth under Chapter 268A, Massachusetts General Laws, shall be met.
- e. Officers. The Commission shall elect before the end of its fourth regular meeting during the first year and every May thereafter, a chairman, vice-chairman, and a secretary. All officers, except the secretary shall be elected from its own members. Whenever the secretary shall not attend a meeting of the Commission, the Commission shall elect a secretary pro-tempore who shall take the minutes of the meeting. The records of the Commission shall set forth every determination made by the Commission, the vote of every member participating in such determination and the absence or failure to vote of every other member.
- f. Expenses. The Commission may enter into contracts and may, if necessary, subject to appropriation, employ clerical and technical assistance of consultants and incur other expenses appropriate to the carrying on of its work.
- g. Gifts. The Commission may accept money gifts and expend the same for the carrying on of its work. The Commission may also administer on behalf of the City any properties or easements, restrictions or other interests in real property which the City may have or may accept as gifts or otherwise and which the City may designate the Commission as the administrator thereof.
- h. Record Keeping and Rules. The Commission shall keep a permanent record of its resolutions, transactions and determinations and of the vote of each member participating therein, and may adopt and amend such rules and regulations not inconsistent with the provisions of this Ordinance and prescribe such forms as it shall deem desirable and necessary for the regulations of its affairs and the conduct of its business. The Commission shall file a copy of any such rules and regulations with the City Clerk. An annual report of the Commission's activities shall be filed with the Massachusetts Historical Commission under provisions of Chapter 40C, Section 15, and shall be submitted to the City Clerk for filing.
- i. Other Powers. The Commission shall have, in addition to the powers, authority and duties granted to it by this Ordinance, such other powers, authority and duties as may be delegated or assigned to it from time to time by vote of the Board of Aldermen.

Section 5. Amendments to Historic District Designations

- a. Enlargements or Reductions. An historic district may be enlarged or reduced or an additional historic district in the City created in the manner established under Section 3, for creation of the initial district, except that in the case of the enlargement or reduction of an existing historic district the investigation, report and hearing shall be by the

Historic Preservation Commission having jurisdiction over such historic district instead of by a study committee.

- b. Additional Districts. In the case of creation of an additional historical district the investigation, report and hearing shall be by the City Historic Preservation Commission instead of by a study committee unless the Commission recommends otherwise.
- c. Notice. If the district is to be reduced, written notice, as provided in section 3 for the creation of the initial district, shall be given to said owners of each property in the district.
- d. Filing Requirements. No changes to the boundaries of an historic district shall become effective until a map(s) setting forth the changes to the boundaries of the historic district has been filed with the City Clerk and has been recorded in the South Middlesex Registry of Deeds and the provisions of Section 13A of Chapter 36, of Massachusetts General Laws, shall not apply.

Section 6. Application for Certificates from the Commission

- a. Considerations of Commission. In passing upon matters before it the Commission shall consider, among other things, the historic and architectural value and significance of the site, building or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the features involved, and the relation of such features to similar features of buildings and structures in the surrounding area. In the case of new construction or additions to existing buildings or structures, the Commission shall consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the building or structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings and structures in the vicinity, and the Commission may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and set back requirements in addition to those required by applicable ordinance or by-law. The Commission shall not consider interior arrangements or the categories of exclusions specified in paragraph c of this Section.

The Commission may after public hearing set forth in such manner as it may determine the various designs of certain appurtenances, such as light fixtures, which will meet the requirements of an historic district and a roster of certain colors of paint and roofing materials which will meet the requirements of an historic district, but no such determination shall limit the right of an applicant to present other designs or colors to the Commission for its approval.

The Commission shall not make any recommendation or requirement except for the purpose of preventing developments incongruous to the historic aspects or the architectural characteristics of the surroundings and of the historic district.

- b. Submission Requirements. Except for the exclusions noted in paragraph (c), no building or structure within an historic district shall be constructed or altered in any way that affects exterior architectural features unless the Commission shall first have issued a certificate of appropriateness, a certificate of nonapplicability or a certificate of hardship with respect to such construction or alteration.

Any person who desires to obtain a certificate shall file with the Commission an application for a certificate of appropriateness, a certificate of nonapplicability or a certificate of hardship, as the case may be, in such form as the Commission may reasonably determine, together with such plans, elevations, specifications, material and other information, including in the case of demolition or removal a statement of the proposed condition and appearance of the property thereafter, as may be reasonably deemed necessary by the Commission to enable it to make a determination on the application.

No building permit for construction of a building or structure or for alteration of an exterior architectural feature within an historic district and no demolition permit for demolition (full or partial) or removal of a building or structure within an historic district shall be issued by Inspectional Services thereof until the certificate required by this section has been issued by the Commission.

- c. Exclusions. The authority of the Commission shall not extend to the review of the following categories of buildings, structures or exterior architectural features of the historic district and, in this event, the buildings, structures or exterior architectural features so excluded may be constructed or altered within the historic district without review by the Commission:
1. temporary structures or signs, subject, however, to such conditions as to duration of use, location, lighting, removal and similar matters as the Commission may reasonably specify;
 2. storm doors and windows, screens, window air conditioners, lighting fixtures, antennae, lawn statuary and similar appurtenances, or any one or more of them;
 3. the color of paint;
 4. signs of one foot square or less in area in connection with use of a residence for a customary home occupation or for professional purposes, provided only one such sign is displayed in connection with each residence and if illuminated is illuminated only indirectly; and one sign in connection with the non-residential use of each building or structure which is not more than twelve square feet in area, is appropriately located and consists of letters and/or symbol or trademark compatible with the character of the area and if illuminated only indirectly; or either of them;
 5. the reconstruction, substantially similar in exterior design, type of use and size of a building, structure or exterior architectural feature damaged or destroyed by storm or other disaster, provided such reconstruction is begun within one year thereafter and carried forward with due diligence; and upon request by an applicant, the Commission shall issue a certificate of non-applicability with respect to construction or alteration in any category then not subject to review by the Commission in accordance with the above provisions.

- d. Commission Powers and Duties. The Commission shall have the following powers, functions and duties related to issuance of certificates:
1. If the Commission determines that the construction or alteration for which an application for a certificate of appropriateness has been filed will be appropriate for or compatible with the preservation or protection of the historic district, the Commission shall cause a certificate of appropriateness to be issued to the applicant. In the case of a disapproval of an application for a certificate of appropriateness the Commission shall place upon its records the reasons for such determination and shall forthwith cause a notice of its determination, accompanied by a copy of the reasons therefore as set forth in the records of the Commission, to be issued to the applicant. The Commission may make recommendations to the applicant with respect to appropriateness of design, arrangement, texture, material, and similar features. Prior to the issuance if any disapproval the Commission may notify the applicant of its proposed action accompanied by recommendations of changes in the applicant's proposal which, if made, would make the application acceptable to the Commission. The Commission shall, as feasible, identify sources of additional information, technical assistance and financial incentives, which may eliminate the area of concern. If, within fourteen days of the receipt of such notice, the applicant files a written modification of his application in conformity with the recommended changes of the Commission, the Commission shall cause certificate of appropriateness to be issued to the applicant.
 2. In the case of determination by the Commission that an application for a certificate of appropriateness or for a certificate of non-applicability does not involve any exterior architectural feature, or involves an exterior architectural feature which is not then subject to review by the Commission in accordance with the provisions of Section Six, the Commission shall cause a certificate of non-applicability to be issued to the applicant.
 3. The commission shall determine if the construction or alteration for which an application for a certificate of appropriateness has been filed is inappropriate, or in the event of an application for a certificate of hardship, the Commission shall determine if, owing to conditions especially affecting the building or structure involved, (e.g. handicapped access), but not affecting the historic district generally, failure to approve an application will involve a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the applicant. The commission shall also determine whether such application may be approved without substantial detriment to the public welfare and without substantial derogation from the intent and purposes of this Ordinance. If the commission determines that owing to such conditions failure to approve an application will involve substantial hardship to the applicant and approval thereof may be made without such substantial detriment or derogation, or, in the event of failure to make a determination on an application within the time specified in Section Seven, the Commission shall cause a certificate of hardship to be issued to the applicant.

4. Each certificate issued by the Commission shall be dated and signed by its Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary or such other person designated by the Commission to sign such certificates on its behalf. Each certificate issued by the Commission shall also be accompanied by a document substantiating in sufficient detail, the basis of the determination. Certificates are valid for one full year from the date of issuance and must be revalidated by the Commission if substantial work has not been completed by the end of this period.
5. The commission shall file with the City Clerk and with the City Building Department a copy or notice of all certificates, determinations of disapproval and substantiating documents issued by it.

Section 7. Meetings of the Commission

- a. Voting: The Commission shall hold meetings at the call of the Chairman and at the request of two members of the Commission, and in such other manner as the Commission shall determine in its rules. A majority of the members of a Commission shall constitute a quorum. The concurring vote of a majority of the members of the Commission shall be necessary to issue a certificate of appropriateness, a certificate of non-applicability or a certificate of hardship.
- b. Review of Application: The Commission shall determine promptly, and in all events within fourteen (14) days after the filing of an application for a certificate of appropriateness, a certificate of non-applicability or a certificate of hardship, as the case may be, whether the application involves any exterior architectural features which are subject to approval by the Commission. If the Commission determines that such application involves any such features which are subject to approval by the Commission, the Commission shall hold a public hearing on such application unless such hearing is dispensed with as hereinafter provided.
- c. Hearing an Application: The Commission shall fix a reasonable time for the hearing on any application and shall give public notice of the time, place and purposes thereof at least fourteen (14) days before said hearing in such manner as it may determine, and by mailing, postage prepaid, a copy of said notice to the applicant, to the owners of all adjoining property and other property deemed by the Commission to be materially affected thereby as they appear on the most recent real estate tax list of the Board of Assessors, to the City Planning Board, to any person filing written request for notice of hearing, such request to be renewed yearly in December, and to such other persons as the Commission shall deem entitled to notice.
- d. Period of Determination: As soon as convenient after such public hearing, but in any event within forty-five (45) days after the filing of the application, or within such further time as the applicant may allow in writing, the Commission shall make a determination on the application. If the Commission shall fail to make a determination within such period of time, the Commission shall thereupon issue a certificate of hardship.

- e. Waiver of Public Hearing: A public hearing on an application need not be held if such hearing is waived in writing by all persons entitled to notice thereof. In addition, a public hearing on an application may be waived by the Commission if the Commission determines that the exterior architectural feature involved or its category or color, as the case may be, is so insubstantial in its effect on the historic district that it may be reviewed by the Commission without public hearing on an application, provided, however, that if the Commission dispenses with a public hearing on an application, notice of the application shall be given to the owners of all adjoining property and other property deemed by the Commission to be materially affected thereby as above provided and ten (10) days shall elapse after the mailing of such notice before the Commission may act upon such application.

Section 8. Process of Appealing Determinations of the Commission

- a. Court Appeal. A person aggrieved by a determination of the Commission may, within twenty (20) days after the filing of the notice of such determination with the City Clerk, appeal to the South Middlesex Superior Court.
- b. Court Option. The court shall hear all pertinent evidence and shall annul the determination of the Commission if it finds the decision of the Commission to be unsupported by the evidence or to exceed the authority of the Commission, or may remand the case for further action by the Commission or make such other decree as justice and equity may require.
- c. Other Options. The remedy provided by this section shall be exclusive but the parties shall have all rights of appeal and exception as in other equity cases.
- d. Costs. Costs shall not be allowed against the Commission unless it shall appear to the court that the Commission acted with gross negligence, in bad faith or with malice in the matter from which appeal was taken. Costs shall not be allowed against the party appealing from such determination of the Commission unless it shall appear to the court that such party acted in bad faith or with malice in making the appeal to the court.

Section 9. Enforcement

The South Middlesex Superior Court shall have jurisdiction to enforce the provisions of Chapter 40C, General Laws and this ordinance enacted thereunder and the determinations, rulings and regulations issued pursuant thereto and may, upon the petition of the Mayor or the Board of Aldermen or of the Commission, restrain by injunction violations thereof; and, without limitation, such court may order the removal of any building, structure or exterior architectural feature constructed in violation thereof, or the substantial restoration of any building, structure or exterior architectural feature altered or demolished in violation thereof, and may issue such other orders for relief as may be equitable.

Whoever violates any of the provisions of this ordinance shall be punished by a fine of not less than ten dollars (\$10.00) nor more than five hundred dollars (\$500.00). Each day during any portion of which a violation continues to exist shall constitute a separate offense.

Section 10. Limited Coverage

Nothing in this ordinance shall be construed to prevent the ordinary maintenance, repair, or replacement of any exterior architectural feature within an historic district which does not involve a change in design, material, color or the outward appearance thereof, nor to prevent landscaping with plants, trees or shrubs, nor construed to prevent the meeting of requirements certified by a duly authorized public officer to be necessary for public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition nor construed to prevent any construction or alteration under a permit duly issued prior to the effective date of this historic district ordinance.

Section 11. Amendments to Ordinance

This ordinance enabling the creation of historic districts may from time to time be amended in a manner not inconsistent with the provisions of Chapter 40C, General Laws, by a two-thirds vote of the Board of Aldermen, provided that the substance of such amendment has first been submitted to the Historic Preservation Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission, for their recommendation and their recommendations have been received or sixty (60) days have elapsed without such recommendations.

Section 12. Severability

The provisions of this ordinance are severable, and if any of its provisions shall be held invalid or unconstitutional by any decision of any court or competent jurisdiction, such decision shall not impair or otherwise effect any other provisions of this act.

Section 13. Designation of Historic Districts

There are hereby established under the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40C, as amended, the following Historic Districts bounded as shown on the map accompanying the inventory forms, which is attached and made a part of this ordinance.

Appendix B

Inventory Form B for 237 Washington Street,
Somerville Main Post Office

&

1986 Inventory Nomination Form for the
National Register of Historic Places

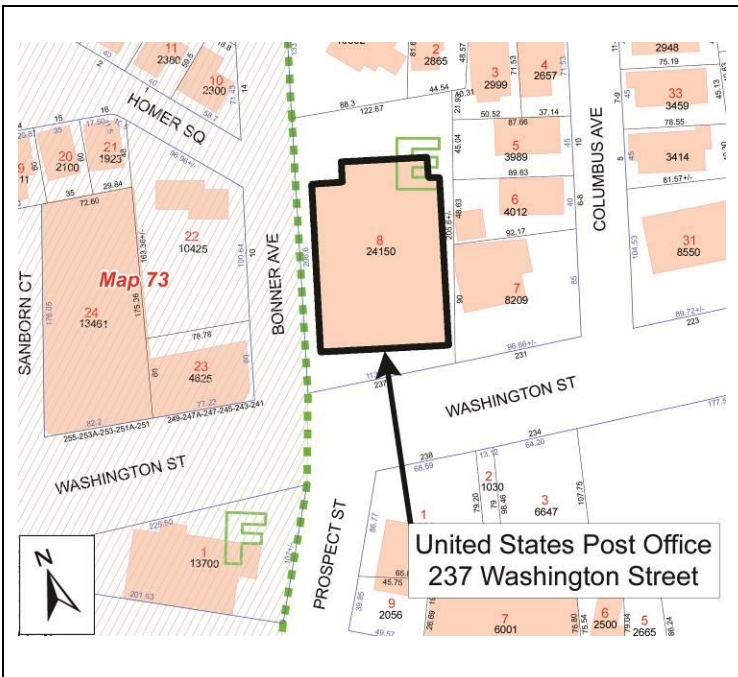
FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Photograph



Topographic or Assessor's Map



Recorded by: Virginia H. Adams, Carey L. Jones, and Quinn R. Stuart

Organization: PAL, Inc.

Date May 2010

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

81-E-8

Boston
North

SMV.G

SMV.10

Town Somerville

Place (*neighborhood or village*) Union Square

Address 237 Washington Street

Historic Name United States Post Office/Somerville Main Post Office

Uses Present: Post Office

Original: Post Office, Government Office

Date of Construction 1935-1936

Source Building Plans

Style/Form Colonial Revival

Architect/Builder Louis Adolf Simon, Maurice P. Meade

Exterior Material

Foundation: Brick

Wall/Trim: Brick, stone, wood

Roof: Slate

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures

None

Major Alterations (*with dates*)

None

Condition Excellent

Moved x **no** **yes** **Date**

Acreage 24,150 S.F.

Setting The Somerville Post Office is located on the northeast corner of Washington Street and Bonner Avenue and is surrounded by a mix of other institutional buildings, including the Somerville Police Station, modern commercial buildings, and mid- to late nineteenth-century residences.

BUILDING FORM

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION X *see continuation sheet*

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE X *see continuation sheet*

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES X *see continuation sheet*

 X *Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

237 Washington Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.G

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Somerville Main Post Office, constructed in 1935-1936, occupies the majority of a large, rectangular lot on the northeast corner of Washington Street and Bonner Avenue in the Union Square section of Somerville. The building faces south toward the intersection with Prospect Street. The south facade functions as the formal entrance to the building; the north (rear) elevation is the service area with a large loading dock. The building is sited on top of a slightly inclined lawn with shrubs and mature trees. The lawn on the southwest edge of the lot has a flag pole and a memorial plaque dedicated to the victims of the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. An asphalt parking lot is located to the north of the building. A concrete walkway running along the east elevation is cut into an embankment, allowing access to the basement level of the building.

Exterior

The Somerville Main Post Office is a two-and-one-half-story, rectangular, steel-frame and brick-clad structure with a flat-top hipped roof. The Classical Revival-style civic building sits on a high granite foundation. The facade is five bays wide with a slightly projecting, pedimented central entrance pavilion. The east and west elevations are eight bays wide, and the bays on either end project away from the plane of the elevation. The utilitarian north elevation is seven bays wide with a four-bay mail loading dock platform topped with a flat roof.

The Post Office sits on a smooth granite base that is raised one-half story at the front and topped by a limestone water table with a convex cushion profile. The exterior of the building is steel-frame construction, clad in red brick laid in Flemish bond. Limestone quoins articulate each corner, including the center pavilion and the end bays of the east and west side elevations. The roof line of the south facade and the east and west elevations are defined by a cyma reversa and recta limestone cornice above an unadorned brick frieze with a narrow limestone molding band. The pediment of the central entrance pavilion on the facade repeats the same cornice profile with dentils along the rakes and gable returns. The frieze line breaks at the center above the entrance with bronzed letters attached to the brick reading "United States Post Office." The hipped roof is covered in slate shingles with copper coping at the seams. The building has one tall brick chimney at the northeast corner. The chimney is laid in Flemish bond and has copper flashing and a limestone cap.

A wide, two-level granite stair extends from the Washington Street sidewalk to the main entrance. The first level, originating at the concrete sidewalk along Washington Street, has three square-nosed, granite block steps leading up to a granite block landing edged by granite blocks. The landing tapers to meet the narrower second run of eight round-nosed, granite block stairs which lead up to the granite landing at the front door. The upper flight is flanked by a wrought iron and bronze railing with a star and scroll decorative pattern that rises from spiral newel posts with decorative finials at the first-level landing. The stair railing terminates at each top corner with a lamp post with a similar star and scroll decorative motif and is topped with bronze lanterns. The balustrade around the upper landing matches the stair railing. A simple iron handrail, which appears to have been added later, is located in the center of the stairs and runs from the base to the top landing.

The main entrance is located on the center bay of the facade. The entrance is composed of two modern replacement glass and aluminum doors framed by a wooden classical pediment surround that is set within the deep reveal of a full-height arched limestone opening that culminates in a round-arch fanlight window above the door. The wood door surround has flat fluted pilasters, Doric capitols, an unadorned frieze, a denticulated cornice, a broken denticulated stroll pediment, and a wood finial shaped like a pineapple. The arched 30-light wood fanlight with a limestone scroll keystone rises up from behind the broken scroll pediment within the limestone arch surround. Other building entrances include a set of arched wood, partially glazed, double doors located in the basement level of the east and west elevations. These doors are set in arched wood jambs surrounded by an arched granite opening. The north elevation contains two, partially glazed, steel doors. One door provides access to the loading bays and one accesses the interior of the building. The loading dock has metal overhead doors, one for each of the four bays.

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Fenestration includes a recessed ocular opening above the main entrance with four limestone keys and a 16-light round wood window. The principal fenestration consists of rectilinear and arched openings with multi-light wood windows. Two 15-over-15 wood, double-hung, flat-head windows flank the facade's center bay. These windows are set in wood jambs with limestone sills, surrounds, and denticulated lintels. An unadorned limestone panel within the surround trim extends from beneath each window to the water table molding. Modern aluminum screens have been added to the windows. The fenestration on the east and west elevations is identical. Each outer bay contains the same window type as the facade. Each middle recessed six-bay section is composed of 21-over-15 double-hung, arched wood windows set in wood frames with brick arched lintels, accented by limestone keystones and springer stones. A plain limestone panel extends from the bottom of each window to the water table molding. Basement-level windows are inserted into shallow arch openings in the granite foundation of the facade and the east and west elevations, repeating the first-floor fenestration pattern. These windows are 10-over-10 double-hung windows with arched upper sections, set in wood frames. Modern aluminum screens have been added. On the east and west elevations the basement windows have concrete window wells with an iron railing. One wood, four-over-four, double-hung window with a limestone sill and splayed brick lintel is located on the first story of the north elevation. Fenestration on the second story includes seven wood, six-over-six, double-hung windows with limestone sills and splayed brick lintels.

Interior

The interior of the Somerville Post Office retains its original configuration with the two-story lobby as the major interior space on the mezzanine level, a large open work room set behind the lobby, and small private offices on either side of the lobby. The basement level is divided between the mechanical rooms, a large workroom, and storage rooms. A narrow corridor in the western section terminates at a stair that leads to the workroom.

Currently, the only public interior space is the lobby which has a central vestibule located behind the main entrance. The vestibule is an enclosed rectangular volume set one-half story below the main lobby floor with staircases on either side leading from the vestibule to the mezzanine level. The vestibule floor has yellow terrazzo tile, black terrazzo tile detail, and a pink marble border, with thin brass edging around each tile. The south wall, which contains the main entrance doors, is covered with green marble wainscoting and a pink marble course with white marble above. The opposite (north) wall is covered in the same green marble wainscoting, with a pink marble course, but has stained wood paneling above and three wood, fixed, nine-light windows. Between each window are fluted pilasters with simplified Corinthian capitals. The east and west walls contain stained wood double doors that lead to the mezzanine stairs. Each of the four paneled doors has a six-light window, bronze kick plate, door pull, strike plate, and window grill. The doors have fluted pilasters identical to those between the north wall windows; however, the doors' pilasters are full height. Above each pair of doors is a wood, fixed, 12-light transom. The ceiling is covered in stained wood panels with a torus-style crown molding.

The exterior of the enclosed vestibule, as viewed from the lobby, is of stained wood paneling, matching the interior finish. The same fluted pilasters with simplified Corinthian capitals that are on the interior of the vestibule are located on either side of the double doors, windows, and at each corner of the exterior. The unadorned frieze is capped by a crown molding with a simple profile. Each of the double doors on the east and west sides of the vestibule open to a flight of six pink marble stairs that lead to the lobby mezzanine level. The stairwells have green marble wainscoting and bronze handrails on both sides. A balustrade behind the vestibule has a similar star and scroll motif as the balustrade and railing on the exterior staircase.

The main public lobby is a rectangular room that is two stories tall. The floor is identical to the vestibule: yellow terrazzo tiles, black terrazzo diamond tile detail, and a pink marble and black terrazzo tile border around the entire room. Thin brass edging surrounds all the tile and marble in the floor. The baseboard is green marble, with white marble wainscoting about eight feet high, with a white marble cap. Above the marble is painted plaster walls. The coffered plaster ceiling has a decorative, multi-level cornice with alternating dentil and rosette motif.

The interior trim, sill, and apron of the two 15-over-15, double-hung windows on the north wall are stained wood. The interiors of the window jambs are trimmed with white marble surrounds and caps matching the wainscoting. The fanlight above the main entrance viewed from the vestibule is trimmed with the same stained wood, including the interior of the window jamb. The sill

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is not visible from floor level. A two-panel wood door in a wood jamb is on the east wall, next to a modern steel elevator that replaced the original door into the Postmaster's office. There is minimal trim, but the original bronze knob, strike plate, deadbolt, and hinges are present.

Brass mailboxes, some with glass windows and some solid, are located on the west and east walls of the lobby. Only one set of boxes is included in the original design, but all the boxes are designed to be in keeping with the building's style. Stained wood bulletin board cases with gold lettering and glass doors are located on the south and north walls. These cases, one labeled "civil service" and two labeled "bulletins," are original to the design of the lobby. Modern aluminum ventilation grates have been laid into the original metal grates with the same star motif as on the balustrades of the lobby. A large service counter with stained wood trim and a wood countertop is located on the north wall.

The upper portion of the east lobby wall displays a mural, 21 feet long by 6 feet tall, entitled "A Skirmish between British and Colonists near Somerville in Revolutionary Times." The mural was commissioned by the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (also known as The Section of Fine Arts) and was painted by Ross Moffett in 1937. The mural depicts the fighting that occurred near Union Square during the American Revolution when the British retreated from Lexington.

The other interior spaces relate to the function of the post office. A large work room is behind the main lobby on the mezzanine level. The work room is a two-story, open room with five steel posts near the center. Four skylights located near the center of the work room and one skylight over the service counter on the south wall provide optimal natural light. A cat-walk, or look-out gallery, above the work room runs parallel to the south and north walls and bisects the middle of the room. Windows inside the workroom have painted wood trim and locking metal grills. Auxiliary spaces on the mezzanine level include a service elevator, bathrooms, special delivery offices, a mailing vestibule, storage rooms, a vault, and the superintendent's office, all of which are inaccessible to the public. A staircase located in the northwest corner of the building runs between the basement level and second story. The U-shaped staircase has cast-iron stairs and a wrought-iron handrail and is within an enclosure with plaster walls and ceiling.

The basement level contains a large auxiliary work room with wood flooring, tongue and groove painted wainscoting, and a painted concrete ceiling. The north side of the basement contains a boiler room, fuel room, and service room. The south side of the basement is split by a long corridor running parallel to the facade. The west side contains bathrooms, supply rooms, equipment/janitorial space, and offices. The south side of the corridor contains five offices with three-panel, stained wood doors, with original brass knobs and strike plates, set in a simple surround of stained wood with four-light hopper transoms. The basement-level windows are trimmed in painted wood with locking metal grills over the inside.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

History of Union Square Area (taken from MHC Inventory Form SMV.G)

Union Square is the oldest and largest commercial district in Somerville, and its growth is tied to the residential and commercial growth of the City. Since the 17th century, the district has been the site of commercial establishments serving travellers and tradespeople. Transportation improvements in the early part of the 19th century enabled further development in the area to support the rapidly growing population. Following the Civil War, local entrepreneurs established lucrative businesses in the Square and constructed numerous ambitious buildings. By the early 20th century, Union Square was a critical hub for automobile traffic, and it continued to develop commercially, adding auto-related enterprises to the mix. Today Union Square is one of two major commercial centers in Somerville, along with Davis Square, consisting primarily of locally owned restaurants, shops, and professional offices.

The three main streets that form Union Square—Somerville Avenue, Bow Street, and Washington Street—were originally 17th- and 18th-century trade routes used by farmers in Somerville and the surrounding area to transport products, mostly dairy and produce, to markets in Charlestown and Boston. The sandy soils deposited by the nearby Miller's and Mystic Rivers gave the area its first name, Sandpit Square. Charlestown Lane (later Milk Row and now Somerville Avenue) carried farm products

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across bridges or to ferries to Boston. Bow Street was originally built around a marsh that was later filled, and Somerville Avenue was extended over the former wetland (Zellie and Stott 1990:122). In addition to farming and dairying, early local industries included brickyards and quarrying sites near the marshes.

Commercial and residential development in and around Union Square grew with the expansion of the railroad service. In 1835, the Boston and Lowell Railroad opened the first passenger railroad station in Somerville on the south side of Washington Street. This station was joined by the Kent Street station of the Fitchburg Railroad in 1842. In 1845 horsecar service was established between Union Square and Harvard Square in Cambridge along Kirkland and Washington Streets. Additions to the streetcar line provided residents of the Union Square area with easy commuting service to Boston.

In 1842 Somerville, which was originally included in the 1630 Charlestown grant, became an independent town and its population began to increase steadily. Between 1842 and 1850, the population tripled to reach a total of 3,540 people. Growth continued throughout the 1850s and 1860s as the area's job opportunities attracted many immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Canada. Small factories and meat packing plants built alongside the railroads created new development centers. As the population increased and industrial production grew, developers gradually filled in the Miller's River and covered it with vast railroad yards, roads, residential development, and industrial space. Manufacturing grew rapidly, with such enterprises as the American Tube Works Company, established in 1851 on Somerville Avenue west of Union Square (American Tube Works Company Complex), and the Union Glass Company, founded in 1854 between Webster and Prospect streets just south of the Square (not extant). Later nearby industries included wood-working shops, ice businesses, and carriage factories.

Union Square developed as a center of commerce for the numerous industries and residences surrounding the junction of the area's three major thoroughfares. The Robert A. Vinal House at 15 Union Square (SMV.690) is the sole survivor of the earliest residential-scale development in Union Square. Vinal, a grain dealer operating in the Square, built the ca. 1845 house that was later converted to commercial use. The building adjacent to it, constructed ca. 1850 (not extant), was known as The Oasis and served as a grocery store and local meeting place.

Vinal eventually became a leading figure in Somerville politics and owned and sold off for development many acres of land in the Prospect Hill neighborhood north of Union Square. In 1852, he built the first large multi-purpose building in the Square, Franklin Hall (not extant). The building stood on the current site of 92 Union Square and housed a post office, grain and grocery store, and meeting and entertainment hall. Somerville firemen erected a flagpole in the Square the following year, and subsequently the area was known as Liberty Pole Square. During the Civil War, the Square served as a recruitment center, thus acquiring its current name.

Following the Civil War, both Union and Davis Squares evolved into larger commercial centers of a rapidly growing community. In 1872, Somerville incorporated as a city, and between 1870 and 1915, its population increased six-fold. Several local entrepreneurs capitalized on the growing markets and established themselves in Union Square. In 1869, shoe dealer Phillip Eberle and three other local businessmen built the Masonic Block (later called Somerville Union Hall, not extant) at the prominent corner of Somerville Avenue and Washington Street. Like most of the subsequent blocks constructed nearby, the Masonic Block housed commercial space on the ground floor (in this case, an apothecary and Eberle's shoe shop) and a variety of professional offices, as well as meeting rooms for fraternal organizations on the upper floors. Eberle's success led to other development ventures in the Square, including the ambitious Eberle Building at 31-34 Union Square (SMV.762) (1884).

Local realtor Ira Hill financed the construction of several commercial structures in Union Square, including the Pythian Block and Hotel Warren (both built 1872 on the north side of the Square, not extant), the Hill Building at 38 Union Square (SMV.773) (1874), the Colson Block (1890, not extant), and the Stone Building at 61 Union Square (SMV.763) (1888). Hill also platted Summit Avenue on Prospect Hill into large lots intended for spacious homes. He often collaborated with builder-designer Thomas B. Blaikie from Nova Scotia. The construction of these buildings created a cohesive commercial district of high-style architecture incorporating red brick with granite sills and trim, dark bands of contrasting brick, and patterned slate roofs trimmed with ornamental iron work (Zellie and Stott 1990:121-122).

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Many businesses that later branched out to other locations in the City, particularly local financial and institutional entities, initially located their primary offices in Union Square. The Somerville Co-operative Bank, chartered in 1880, the Somerville Savings Bank, incorporated in 1885, and the Somerville National Bank, established in 1892, all had central offices in the Stone Building at the end of the 19th century (Samuels 1897:446-451). Frederic W. Stone, the son of the carriage maker after whom the building was named, was a clerk and treasurer for the savings bank for 43 years, as well as a director of the national bank.

The Square's commercial buildings also housed meeting halls on the upper floors for the numerous social and fraternal organizations that flourished in the latter part of the 19th century. The influx of immigrants to the neighborhood increased the popularity of such groups, a tradition brought over from Europe. Organizations like the Masons and the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows (IOOF) constructed buildings and elaborate halls in many cities, and a single organization often had multiple chapters, or lodges, meeting in different parts of a city. The first Masonic lodge formed in Somerville met in various buildings in Union Square from about 1857 to 1888, including the Masonic Block (Samuels 1897:378-383). Several IOOF lodges met in the Odd Fellows Hall over the Hotel Warren and later in the Stone Building (Samuels 1897:385-393).

The Square's concentration of commercial enterprises served the employees and residents of the factories and industries that developed along the rail lines and rivers east of the Square. At the turn of the 20th century, the Union Square area was also a central point for streetcar and rail transport serving the many people living in Somerville and commuting to jobs in Boston (Zellie and Stott 1990:122). Somerville began a period of great expansion around 1900, in both population and construction activities. The town's population grew from 40,152 in 1890 to 77,236 in 1910. Almost half of Somerville's residential construction occurred between 1890 and 1900. The building trades flourished, as evidenced by the large numbers of such industries listed in the City directories: building tradesmen, lumberyards, woodworking shops (coffins, picture frames, tables, museum cases, furniture), brass foundries, makers of architectural hardware, window shades, and tinware. Several Somerville investors built multi-unit rowhouses and apartment hotels in Union Square to accommodate the influx of residents. Generally these buildings included storefronts on the ground floor to produce additional income, like the Patrick Rafferty Block and Rowhouse at 318-322 and 318R Somerville Avenue (SMV.1341 and SMV.1342), both built ca. 1880; the Hannah J. Allen Building at 210 Washington Street (SMV.1337), built 1890; and the Edward J. Llewellyn Building at 216 Somerville Avenue (SMV.1338), built 1896.

Religious buildings serving the area around Union Square are primarily located outside the Commercial District on the periphery of the Square. However, in 1875, an Episcopal congregation raised money to construct Saint Thomas Episcopal Church at 300 Somerville Avenue (SMV.1340), only a few buildings away from the Square intersection. The Gothic Revival building has been greatly altered at the street level, but it has recently returned to its original use as a church, serving both the Hispanic and Haitian communities.

Beginning with the first Police Headquarters constructed in 1874 at 50 Bow Street (in the adjacent Bow Street Historic District), municipal activities in Somerville concentrated in and around the densely developed Union Square. Three major public buildings are located within the Union Square Commercial District: the Fire Station at 92 Union Square (SMV.67) (1903), the second Somerville Police Headquarters at 66-70 Union Square (SMV.764) (1932), and the Somerville Main Branch of the U.S. Post Office at 237 Washington Street (SMV.10) (NR listed, 1935-36).

The early 20th century introduced automobile traffic to Union Square, and vehicular circulation has significantly influenced the subsequent development of the area. The construction of Route 28 at the east end of the district linked the area to Cambridge and Medford. The Commercial District has several significant auto-related buildings, including an early gas station constructed in Somerville, the Cities Service Refining Co. Fuel Station at 69 Bow Street (SMV.776) (ca. 1925). Auto repair shops appeared as early as 1914 (the Union Square Garage at 267-271 Somerville Avenue, SMV.772) and continued to be built into the 1930s (Barnes & Walsh Co. at 224 Somerville Avenue, SMV.776). The 1927 Northern Artery Filling Station at 181 Somerville Avenue (SMV.771) marks the beginning of a proliferation in the establishment of independent gas stations, separate from private garage facilities, throughout the country and signifies how entrenched automobile use had become.

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After the 1920s, building construction in Somerville slowed dramatically, the result of a general decrease in fortunes that preceded the Depression years. Business owners in the Union Square area began building smaller brick stores like the J. A. Bremner and Co. Building at 344-346 Somerville Avenue (SMV.769) (1910). Fires destroyed some of the earlier wood-frame buildings in the area, but newer development replaced most of the 19th-century buildings that are no longer extant. More modern lower structures replaced several prominent historic buildings in the Square, such as the Hurley Building at 20-29 Union Square (SMV.761) built in 1932 on the site of the Masonic Block. The Union Building at 16 Union Square (SMV.760), built in 1922, replaced a group of older domestic structures on the prime site with a small-scale commercial block. Development also extended down the main artery of Somerville Avenue, where the three-story commercial and apartment block at 218-222 Somerville Avenue (SMV.765) was constructed ca. 1926. The scarcities of the 1930s also prompted many owners of real estate in the Square to “lop off” the upper stories of taller buildings to reduce their property taxes, as occurred at the Hill Building (Rezoning Union Square 2009).

The City’s population expanded through 1930, and industrialization continued to increase through that date. Directories from 1930 list 145 manufacturing establishments in Somerville, 75% of which had been in existence in 1900. Meat processing remained the City’s leading industry. The population declined through 1940, but peaked again during World War II, when many employees of the Ford Motors Plant, built in 1926 in what is now Assembly Square, lived in Somerville. Other industries located nearer to Union Square included the A&P Company food distribution complex on Fitchburg Street, the Fresh Pond Ice Company on Washington Street, and the James A. Kiley Wagon Shop at Linwood and Fitchburg Streets (all outside the district). The Ford plant closed in 1958, along with many of the larger meat packing businesses, and the City’s population declined in the following years through 2000. At the end of the 20th century, telecommunications and high-tech industries appeared, bringing new job opportunities and a related influx of new residents. More recent changes within Union Square include the creation in the 1980s of a pedestrian plaza across the portion of Washington Street between the 1932 Police Headquarters and the 1903 Fire Station. In addition, the police and fire activities were relocated in the mid-1980s to a new public safety complex housed in a rehabilitated MBTA Bus Garage at 208-220 Washington Street (SMV.676) (1926).

History of 237 Washington Street, The Somerville Post Office

The Somerville Post Office was constructed by the Public Works Administration (PWA), created by the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) on June 16, 1933 with the intention of building large public works to increase employment, stabilize purchasing power, improving public welfare, and revitalizing American industry. Unlike the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which sought to provide employment across all sectors, the PWA focused on building large infrastructure projects. Between 1933 and 1939, the PWA funded the construction of more than 34,000 projects, including airports, dams, schools, and hospitals. In June 1941, the program was moved under the auspices of the War Department as industrial manufacturing became focused on wartime production (Black 2003).

Projects sponsored by the PWA ranged from the large-scale construction of the Coulee Dam and the electrification of the railroad between New York and Washington to individual buildings. Many of the buildings constructed under this program were less grand in style and function, especially in smaller municipalities and towns. Post offices built during this time reflected a desire to “provide modest, practical post offices instead of monumental edifices” (Smith 1985).

The design of post offices, as well as other Federal and non-Federal public works projects, was the responsibility of the Supervisory Architect of the Treasury. Established in 1852, the Office of the Supervisory Architect of the Treasury was charged with the design of court houses, custom houses, post offices, and other buildings that housed government functions. Unlike private architectural firms, funds for the design and construction of these buildings and structures were subject to Congressional approval; therefore, they tended to be designed in more traditional styles (Lee 2000:4). Under the tenure of James Knox Taylor (1897-1912), the Office promoted the idea that governmental buildings should be monumental and beautiful, represent the ideals of democracy, and set a high standard for architecture in a community. Taylor also advocated designs derived from Classical or early American styles. The Office of the Supervisory Architect also encouraged standardization of Federal building design to increase efficiency. By the early 1910s and 1920s, post office design became a function of the value of the real estate and of

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postal receipts. Post offices in larger urban areas were still designed as large, monumental structures; however, in smaller communities they were more modest (Boland 1994:3).

Under the PWA, approximately three times the number of post offices were built in the 1930s than in the previous 50 years. Since post office design had become standardized and often relied on the work of regional architects and the use of local materials, construction was easily initiated. Despite the desire to construct buildings rapidly (in an effort to reinvigorate industrial production), the PWA still stressed the importance of high-quality design and construction, so that buildings and structures would be “public works of an enduring character and lasting benefits” (Boland 1994). The PWA continued to place an emphasis on design drawn from local tradition, instead of current “modern influences,” and favored buildings characterized by “great simplicity and sparing use of ornament” (Short and Stanley-Brown 1939). In keeping with the trend toward standardization of building construction, the PWA recommended that New England buildings be of steel-frame construction with reinforced-concrete floors and exterior walls of brick and stone.

Louis A. Simon (see below), Chief of the Engineering and Drafting Division of the Office of the Supervisory Architect, oversaw all PWA projects. Under Simon, the design of Federal buildings, and others sponsored by the PWA, was typically more subdued and tended toward the more “sentimental architecture of the Italian Renaissance and the Colonial” (Lee 2000:261). The Board of Consulting Architects, a division of the Office of the Supervisory Architect, was established in 1934 under the NIRA at the suggestion of Leroy Barton, assistant to Treasury Secretary Morgenthau. Barton thought that the exterior design of post offices should be improved and that a general committee on design should be established to review “all existing type designs and suggest changes and improvements” (Lee 2000:261).

The Board of Consulting Architects recommended that the design of public buildings be less standardized and more specific to the site and the surrounding community. The Board stressed that “architectural traditions, as well as the limitation of natural or manufactured products of the vicinity, are given every practicable consideration.” They further called out the importance of a region’s history and stated that “Thus in New England will be found examples of Colonial Architecture with exterior facing of brick or stone...In larger centers of population, design tends toward monumental structures expresses the strength and dignity of the Federal government” (Lee 2000:262-263). The PWA also promoted the idea that Federal buildings would be spaces open to the public and could therefore be used to celebrate and promote civic values. As such, interiors became showcases for public art, most notably the use of the walls for art, especially murals, in post offices.

Congressman Arthur D. Healy is credited with securing the funding for the construction of the Somerville Main Post Office and the nearby Medford Post Office to replace the mail facility that handled mail for both communities. The sum of \$203,000 was allocated for the design of the buildings and enabled construction jobs for more than 150 local men. As part of the PWA mission to stimulate industrial production, local producers fabricated the exterior brick. Brickyards had been among the largest mid-nineteenth-century industries in the area, and a few remained in the 1930s. The post office was one of several Somerville projects funded by the PWA. Others included a school and a high school stadium (Smith 1985). In addition to housing a post office, the Somerville Main Post Office has served a number of community uses, including offices for the Social Security Administration and military recruiting. It still functions as the City’s main post office.

The Somerville Main Post Office is an excellent example of a Colonial Revival style post office. The Colonial Revival style gained popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries during a period of “creative eclecticism” in American architecture that was encouraged by the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia. The Centennial Exposition sparked an interest in Colonial architecture and was followed by the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, which displayed the full potential of Revival styles. The Revival styles emphasized order, symmetry, formal design, and elaborate ornamentation with a “return to classic principles of design and, often, to the literal reuse of classical forms” (Bhaskaran 2005:58, Roth 1980:174). Many hallmarks of the Colonial Revival style can be seen in the Somerville Main Post Office, including its flat-top hipped roof, brick exterior, rectangular form, restrained granite detailing, and classically symmetrical facade with a prominent gabled center entry.

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SM V.G

SM V.10

The use of the Colonial Revival style also reflected the desire to construct buildings that embodied the ideals of democracy and created a sense of permanence amidst the social and cultural changes brought on by technological advancements in the years following both the Civil War and World War I (Roth 1980:174). Large and small towns wanted their public buildings to make a statement about the permanence of American democratic ideals and to celebrate this as a unique form of government. Traditional buildings, such as post offices, also helped to express the rich colonial past of particular areas (Upton 1998). The Classical Revival style was one of the dominant styles chosen for buildings and structures constructed by the Federal government under the PWA.

The Somerville Main Post Office was designed by Louis Adolf Simon (c. 1870-1941), then Supervising Architect for the PWA. Simon was born in Boston and educated at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He began practicing as an architect in Washington, DC in 1894 and entered the office of the U.S. Treasury Supervising Architect in 1896, serving as chief architect from 1905 until 1933. From 1933 until his death in 1941, he remained the PWA's Supervising Architect and was responsible for numerous post offices, custom houses, and court houses. He was the architect of the U.S. Federal Building at the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940 (Smith 1985).

Maurice P. Meade (1892-1955) was the local architect responsible for the design of the Post Office. Meade was born in Boston and graduated from MIT in 1908. In the early 1910s, he maintained a private practice at 44 Bromfield Street, Boston, and later moved to 80 Boylston Street. Meade is credited with the design of at least two other post offices, the Arlington Post Office in Arlington and the Brookline Main Branch Post Office in Brookline (both National Register-listed). He is also credited with designing a number of institutional buildings, including Saint John's Roman Catholic Seminary Complex, the Saint Augustine Roman Catholic Church Convent, and the Saint Brigid Roman Catholic Church, all in Boston. He retired in 1954 and died on October 4, 1955 (Smith 1985).

The mural in the lobby of the Somerville Main Post Office was painted by Ross Embrose Moffett (1888-1971). Moffett was born in Clearfield, Iowa, and began studying art at the Cummins School of Art in Des Moines in 1907. He later attended the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he studied with John Vanderpool and Harry Wallcott until 1913. He was also a pupil in 1913 of Charles W. Hawthorne in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and in 1914 participated in classes at the Art Students League in New York. In 1924 he established the Provincetown Painting Class with fellow artist Heinrich Pfeiffer. During the 1930s, Moffett completed several mural projects for the WPA's Federal Art Project and later received a commission, with Louis Bouché, from the National Academy of Design for the Eisenhower Memorial Foundation in Abilene, Kansas, completed in 1956. Moffett was a member of the National Academy of Design, the American Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Gravers, and the National Society of Mural Painters.

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INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

237 Washington Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.G

SMV.10

PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph 1.
View of south (facade)
elevation looking
northwest from
Washington Street.



Photograph 2.
View of facade and
west elevations looking
northeast from
Washington Street.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

237 Washington Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.G

SMV.10



Photograph 3.
View of north (rear) elevation looking southeast from Bonner Avenue.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

237 Washington Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.G

SMV.10



Photograph 4.
View of east elevation
looking west from
Washington Street.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

237 Washington Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.G

SMV.10



Photograph 5.
Detail of main entrance.



Photograph 6.
Interior detail of mural
on east lobby wall.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

237 Washington Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

SMV.G SMV.10

National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible Eligible **only** in a historic district
 Contributing to a potential historic district Potential historic district

Criteria: **A** **B** **C** **D**

Criteria Considerations: **A** **B** **C** **D** **E** **F** **G**

Statement of Significance by: Virginia H. Adams and Carey L. Jones, PAL Inc. May 2010

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The Somerville Main Post Office has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1985. As stated in the nomination, it is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criteria A and C at the local level in the areas of Politics/Government, Community Planning and Development, Architecture and Art. Under Criterion A the building possesses significance in the area of Politics/Government as an example of the type of buildings produced by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs, namely the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture. The New Deal program, as administered by Roosevelt, sought to stimulate the economy by providing jobs for the multitude of unemployed Americans during the Depression. The focus of the PWA was on the construction of both large- and small-scale municipal projects, such as post offices. The interior of the building houses a mural painted by Ross Moffett, who was hired under the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, another important New Deal program. The Somerville Main Post Office is one of three civic buildings in Union Square and, as such, possesses significant associations with the physical growth and design of the area.

The Somerville Main Post Office is also significant under Criterion C as an intact example of a Colonial Revival civic building. Designed by local architect Maurice P. Meade, with Louis A. Simon, the Supervisory Architect for the Public Works Administration, the building features strong Colonial Revival detailing characterized by its hipped roof, brick cladding, central entryway, arched windows, and stone window surrounds and quoins.

The Somerville Main Post Office also contributes to a potential Union Square Commercial District.

NRTND 5/30/86

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**
FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED
COPY

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

United States Post Office

AND/OR COMMON

Somerville Main Post Office

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

237 Washington Street

N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Somerville

N/A VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Eighth Congressional District

STATE

Massachusetts 02143

CODE

1190

COUNTY

Middlesex

CODE

017

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	N/A <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

New England Field Real Estate and Buildings Office

STREET & NUMBER

1050 Waltham Street

CITY, TOWN

Lexington

N/A VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts 02173

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, Cambridge Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

208 Cambridge Street

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

STATE

Massachusetts 02141

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None

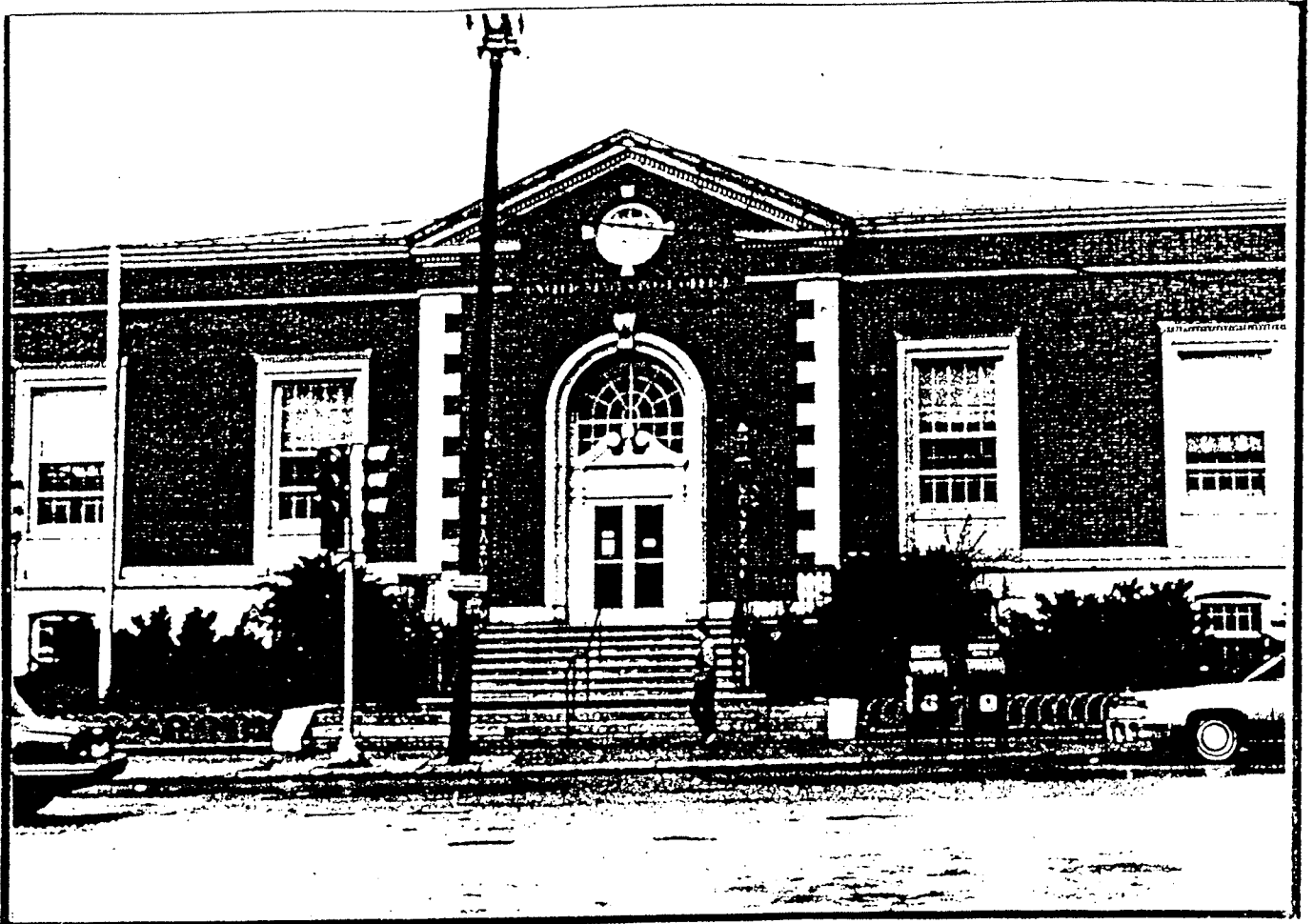
DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

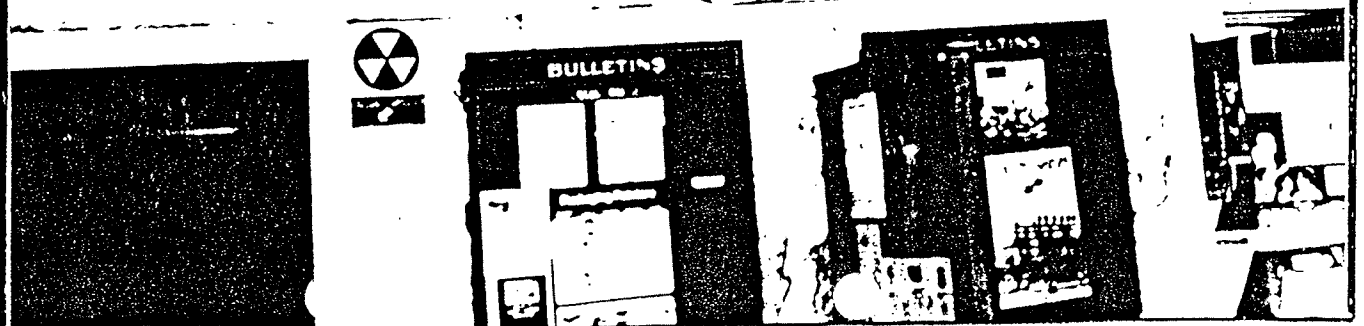


SOMERVILLE MAIN POST OFFICE - SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS





SOMERVILLE MAIN POST OFFICE - SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS



SOMERVILLE MAIN POST OFFICE - SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The building and its grounds are in very good condition, with the exception of the construction involved in front of it. The Post Office occupies most of the site, leaving a small vehicle maneuvering area to its rear, with access on Bonner Avenue. The site is landscaped with lawn, shrubs, and several small trees. The building is of steel construction with a brick exterior laid in a Flemish bond. In plan, a small vestibule has side entrances to stairs leading to a public lobby flanked by the Postmaster's office to the right and workroom space to the left. Behind the service screen is the workroom with the mail vestibule and platform in the rear.

Three wide granite stairs leading to eight smaller steps, with wrought-iron railings and bronze lamps on Newel posts, create the main approach. The front (south) elevation is a five-bay structure with a projecting one-bay entrance portion. The building features a granite base, brick entablature, and limestone quoins, denticulated cornice, and detailing. The windows are double-hung with wood sash, 15/15 light with limestone architrave, projecting dentils, and infill coffered panel below. The entry features a limestone arch with shaped keystone and inset fanlight. The replacement aluminum and glass doors are framed by fluted wood pilasters that support a simple entablature below a broken pediment with full rosettes and finial. Above is a simple limestone cyma reversa and recta marking the brick entablature. This section is topped by a small gable roof reaching back to the building's hipped slate roof, leaving a brick pediment with denticulated molding and a centered oculus window with limestone keystone repeated every ninety degrees. Within the base are small arched openings containing windows for basement level government offices.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
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Continuation sheet

Somerville Post Office

Item number 7

Page 2

The side elevations are similar to the front facade in detail. Some of the windows have brick arched tops with inset fanlight and limestone keystone and springer stones while others are rectangular with a flat brick arch. The rear elevation has a flat roof with low parapet wall and contains the mail platform.

The building is entered by a lower level vestibule of stained wood and glass. It is carved to resemble fluted Corinthian corner pilasters supporting a plain entablature with a stained wood panel dado below and double doors to the sides with brass bars. Two sets of six marble stairs with brass railings lead to the two-story high lobby. Materials here include a plaster coffered ceiling, walls and modillioned edging inset with a floral pattern, a peach terrazzo floor with small black diamonds at each intersection and a black borders, a high white marble wainscot with a black marble base (which extends below the stairs to create a wainscot for the vestibule), and stained wood window frames, sills, and inner doors. Four cast aluminum grills are located high in the interior walls to ventilate the workroom behind. The service screen has postal boxes, a door to the workroom, a large service counter, and new stamp machine.

ART

Above the lobby's right wall wainscot is a canvas mural twenty-one feet by six feet. Entitled "A Skirmish Between British & Colonists near Somerville in Revolutionary Times," it is in excellent condition.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES: Groundbreaking: September 3, 1935
 Dedication: May 16, 1936

Builder/Architect: Louis A. Simon, Sup. Architect
 Maurice P. Meade, Architect
 Edmund J. Rappoli, Contractor

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built in 1935-1936, The Somerville Main Post Office building is located at the foot of Prospect Hill. Along with the nearby police and fire stations, it ranks among the more architecturally distinguished buildings in Union Square, an area dominated by buildings with 20th century commercial treatments. Architecturally this structure is significant as a reflection of 1930's Public Works Administration (P.W.A.) policies in post office construction and design. The P.W.A. endeavored to "provide modest, practical post office instead of monumental edifices." Its compact, boxy form, brick materials, minimal ornamentation and 7-area plan are features of more efficient and standardized post office building design. That the Colonial Revival style rather than the more frequently used Classical Revival style was chosen for this building's design probably represents an historical reference to a Revolutionary War skirmish that occurred near this site. In an effort to bolster the local economy, local brick rather than an expensive imported stone was chosen for their buildings facing. The marshland and sandy soils of the Union Square area yielded a fine grade Silica. During the 19th century clay pits were dug throughout the area and brickyards ranked among the largest mid 19th century industry near Union Square - by the 1930's only a few brickyards were still in existence in Somerville.

Overtime the Somerville Main Post Office's site has been associated with community focal points such as the Prospect Hill School, the Somerville Boys' Club and a branch of the Somerville Library. Congressman Arthur D. Healy is credited with securing funds to build the Somerville Main Post Office building. He endeavored to replace inadequate facilities which handled mail to Medford as well as Somerville. Healy was also responsible for obtaining a separate post office for Medford in 1936/37. Groundbreaking for the Somerville Main Post Office occurred on September 3, 1935. It was built with an allocation of \$203,000.00. The cornerstone was laid on November 16, 1935, reading "Henry Morgenthau Jr., Secretary of the Treasury; James A. Farley, Postmaster General; Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect; Neal A. Melnick, Supervising Engineer; Maurice P. Reade, Architect 1935."

Simon

Louis Adolf Sullivan, Supervising Architect for the Public Works Administration (c. 1870-1941) was born in Boston and educated at M.I.T. He began a private architectural practice in Washington, D.C. in 1894, entering the office of the U.S. Treasury Supervising Architect in 1896. He served as the chief architect in this office from 1905-1933. From 1933 until his death in 1941 he was the P.W.A.'s Supervising Architect. Simon was responsible for numerous post offices, custom houses and court houses across the country. He was the architect of the U.S. Federal Building at the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940.

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Continuation sheet SOMERVILLE MAIN POST OFFICE Item number 8

Page 2

Maurice P. Meade, this building's local, consulting architect, was born in Boston in 1882. He graduated from M.I.T. in 1908. During the 1910's his office was located at 44 Bromfield Street, Boston. During the 1920's and 1930's his firm is listed at 80 Boylston Street, Boston. Information on Meade's work is sketchy. He is credited with the design of the Sacred Heart Church in North Quincy and served as consulting architect during the Arlington Main Post Office construction (1935). Meade retired in 1954 and died on October 4, 1955.

The Somerville Main Post Office's significance is derived, in part, from a well executed mural by modernist Ross Moffitt. He was a member of the National Academy of Design and a winner of numerous medals and honors. The mural in the Somerville Library depicts the retreat of the British from the Battle of Lexington. Moffitt was also responsible for a mural painted for the Eisenhower Foundation.

The construction of the Somerville Main Post Office building provided work for more than 150 men. It was one of several construction projects funded by the P.W.A. in Somerville during the mid 1930's. Other P.W.A. constructed buildings included a vocational school and a stadium for Somerville High School.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"The Somerville Journal" Volume LXVI, No. 42, October 29, 1937. Also 9-6-35, 5-10-6-28-35, 8-9-35, 3-1-36

History of Post Office Construction 1900-1940, July, 1982

Beyond the Neck. The Architecture and Development of Somerville, MA - Landscape Research, Cambridge, MA 1982 - p. 120

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 0.554

UTM REFERENCES

A	19	327600	4693840	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Southwest to East - 113.26' along Washington Street
 South to North - 205.6' along side lot line
 East to West - 122.67' along rear lot line
 North to South - 206.6' along Bonner Avenue

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Steven M. Smith, Project Manager

ORGANIZATION

SULLIVAN DESIGN GROUP, INC.

DATE

September 23, 1985

STREET & NUMBER

44 Adams Street

TELEPHONE

(617) 848-1545

CITY OR TOWN

Braintree

STATE

Massachusetts 02184

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES _____ NO _____ NONE _____

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is _____ National _____ State _____ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

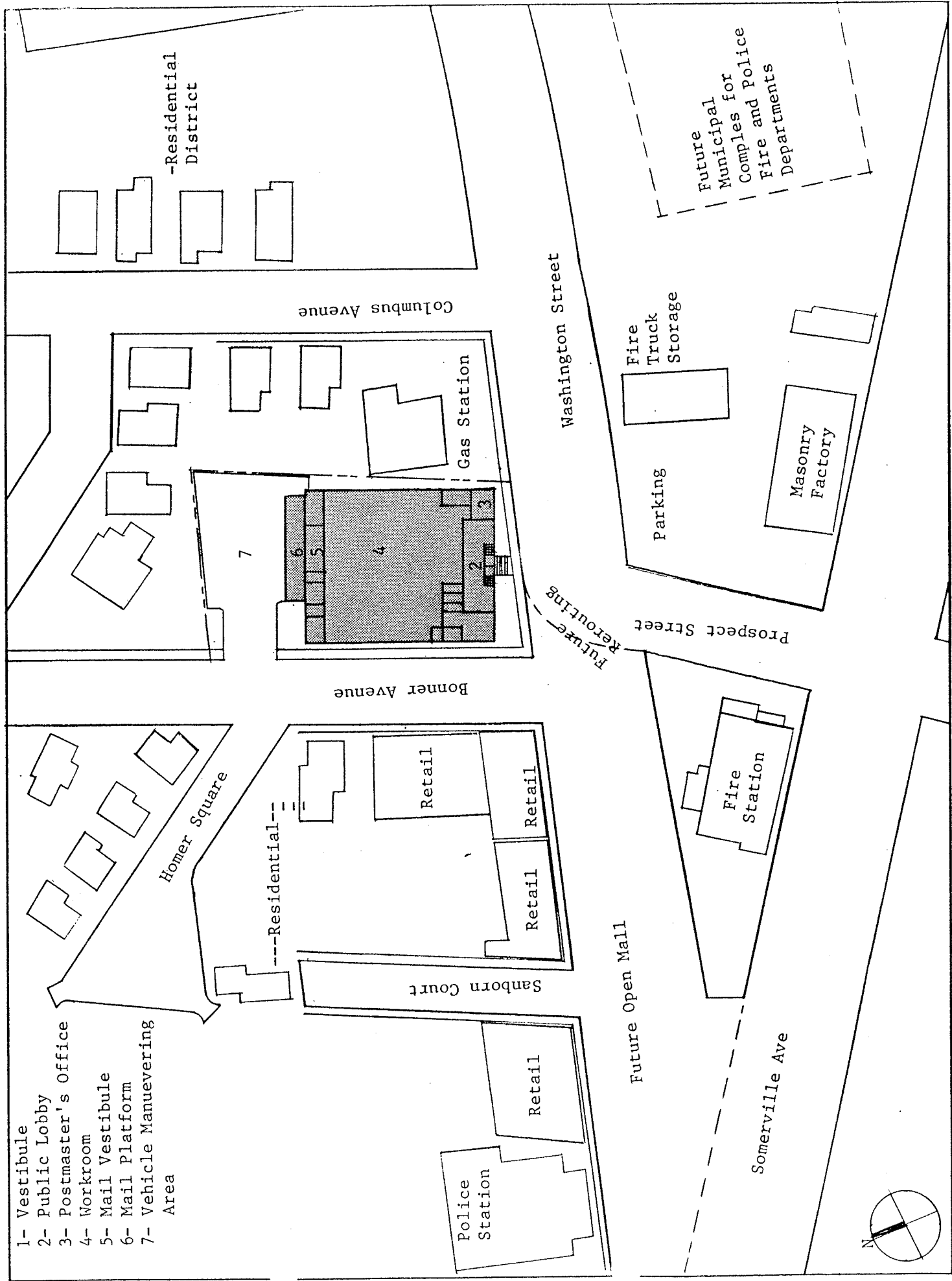
DATE

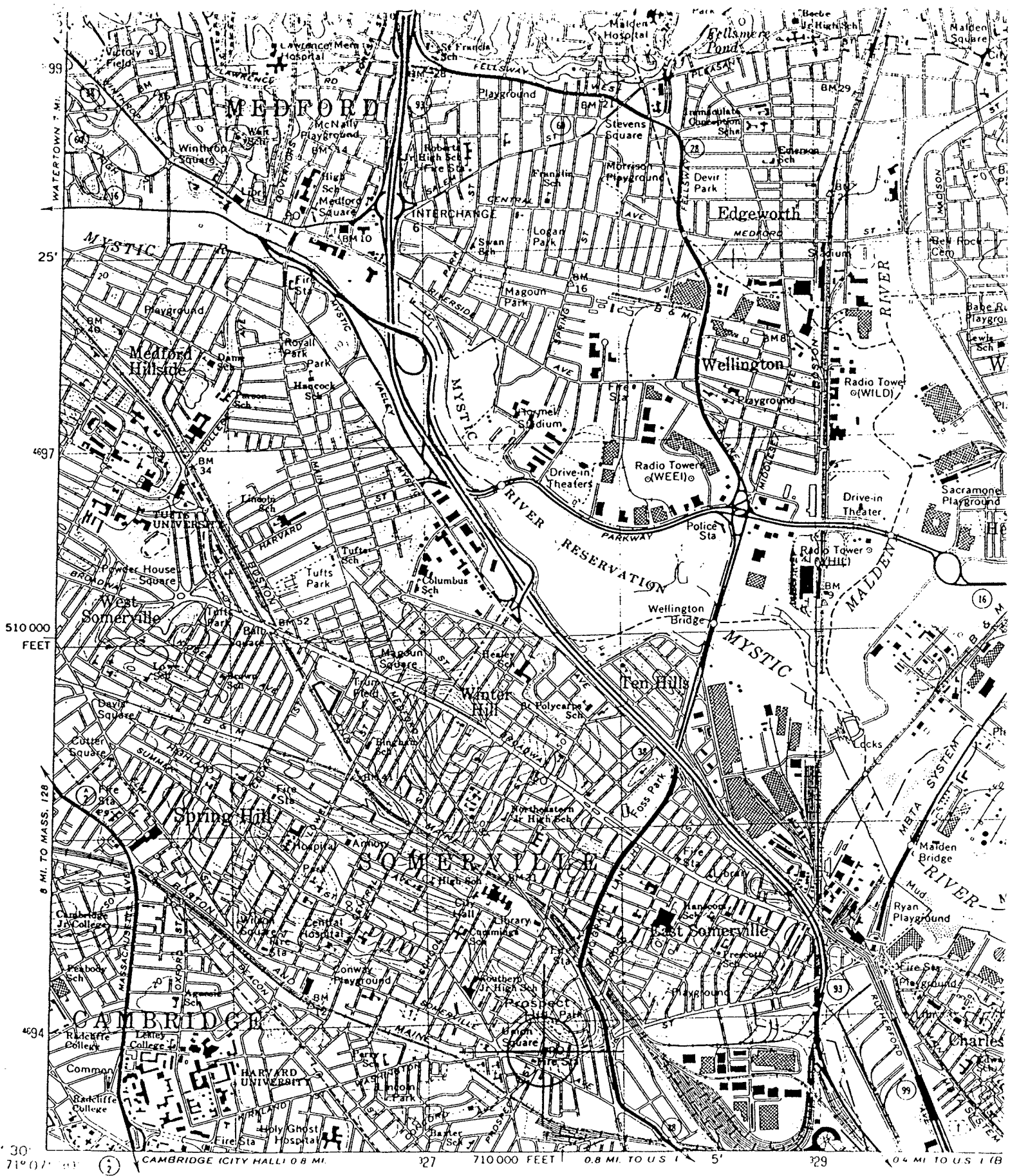
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
 ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

- 1- Vestibule
- 2- Public Lobby
- 3- Postmaster's Office
- 4- Workroom
- 5- Mail Vestibule
- 6- Mail Platform
- 7- Vehicle Manuevering Area





Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

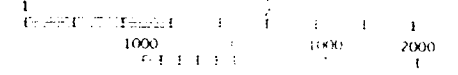
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and Massachusetts Geodetic Survey

Topography by planetable surveys 1943 Revised from
aerial photographs taken 1969 Field checked 1971

Selected hydrographic data compiled from USC&GS Chart 248 (1971)

1967

SC



Appendix C

Photographs/Slides

Somerville Main Post Office



Union Square

Somerville Main Post Office



View from the terminus of Prospect Street

Somerville Main Post Office



View from Union Square looking east,
1903 Fire Station in foreground

Somerville Main Post Office



View from Union Square looking east,
1932 Police Headquarters in foreground

Somerville Main Post Office



Note the rectangular form with steel frame, red brick laid in Flemish bond, flat-top hipped roof & projecting pedimented entrance pavilion

Somerville Main Post Office



Note the smooth granite base; limestone water table, corner quoining, & cornice; recessed fenestration pattern with limestone sills and denticulated lintels; and slate shingles with copper coping

Somerville Main Post Office



Note the wooden classical pediment, arched limestone opening and round-arch fanlight window along with fluted pilasters, Doric capitals and denticulated stroll pediment

Somerville Main Post Office



1937 mural, "A Skirmish between British and Colonists near Somerville in Revolutionary Time, by Ross Moffett

Somerville Main Post Office



Rear elevation looking southeast from Bonner Avenue

Appendix D

Composition of Somerville Historic Preservation Commission/Study Committee

2013 Somerville Historic Preservation Commission / Study Committee

Commission Staff

J. Brandon Wilson: Executive Director since 2000. She was Chairman of the Study Committee that spurred adoption of the Historic District Ordinance in 1985, established the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission shortly thereafter, and pioneered the designation of single-building local historic districts. Brandon also oversaw the adoption of other local historic districts in 1989, 2003, and 2010. She has directed numerous grant projects for the repair and restoration of municipally-owned historic properties throughout the City.

Kristi Chase: Preservation Planner since 2001 and resident of the Bow Street Local Historic District. Kristi and her partner have been actively restoring their home for many years and won a Preservation Award in 1996. Kristi works closely with owners of historic properties, helping them with both technical assistance and application reviews. She is knowledgeable about architectural history, methods of building research, and resources to aid in preserving historic properties.

Amie Hayes: City Planner since 2012 and a graduate of the Boston University Preservation Studies Program. She has a Master's degree with a concentration in community development and preservation planning, and experience with various preservation organizations. As a previous intern, Amie has been familiar with the City since 2010 and, as a Planner who is knowledgeable about historic structures, her focus is on the cases going through the Demolition Review process and she is responsible for moving forward the projects that require more than one review process.

Commission Members

Dick Bauer (Real Estate Lawyer): Chairman of the Commission since May 2008 and Member since 2003. Dick is a senior attorney at Greater Boston Legal Services and has degrees in both law and urban studies. He is the Somerville representative on the Middlesex Canal Commission, Co-Chair of the Jewish Labor Committee, Co-President of Congregation Kahal B'Raira, and has been an active volunteer for many local non-profit organizations. He and his wife received a Director's Award in 2006 for outstanding work on their house.

Abby Freedman (Citizen/Historic District Resident): Vice Chairman of the Commission since May 2008 and Member since 2005. Abby is an independent filmmaker and community videographer. She is currently a member of the Union Square Focus Group, and previously served on the ArtsUnion Street Architecture Committee and the City's Cable Advisory Commission. Abby and her husband have been restoring their house for 27 years and due to her efforts, the Aldersey-Summit Local Historic District was greatly expanded in 2003.

Jillian Adams (Architectural Historian/Citizen): Member since 2012. Jillian has a degree in historic preservation and extensive experience managing complicated restoration projects in both the public and private sectors. For several years she was assistant administrator for the Lowell Historic Board and a grants program manager at Historic Boston Incorporated. In 2009, she launched her own firm as a preservation project consultant helping faith-based and non-profit organizations develop and support purposeful restoration projects in transitional neighborhoods.

Alan Bingham (Citizen/Historic District Resident): Member since 2011. Alan has extensive experience renovating historic homes, first in Australia, then in New England, and now his 1870s home in Davis Square. He has a wide ranging academic background that includes management studies at the NSW Institute of Technology and the University of Phoenix as well as a philosophy degree from Sydney University. Alan has many years of management experience in the healthcare industry, journalism writing, and a strong financial and accounting background.

George Born (Architectural Historian): Member since 2011. George earned his undergraduate degree in Art History/Comparative Literature at Brown University, a Master's degree in Historic Preservation at the University of Vermont, and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in American Studies at Boston University. In addition to in-

depth academic training, he has substantial practical experience in the field through historic preservation work in Providence, R.I., Key West, Florida, Washington, D.C., and Portland, ME.

Natasha Burger (Realtor): Member since 2011. Natasha grew up in a historic home north of Boston and is now a proud Somerville homeowner. She has work experience in brown field redevelopment and has been working in real estate since 2004. She is actively involved in the community, serving as a member of the Somerville Garden Club and as an executive member of the Young Somerville Advisory Group. Natasha has a Bachelors degree in American Civilization from Brown University and brings a love of history, houses, people and urban planning to her work.

Denis (DJ) Chagnon (Landscape Architect): Member since 2005. DJ is a principal at a Somerville landscape architectural firm experienced in working with historic properties and contexts. He and his wife purchased an 1890s home in Somerville in 2006. DJ has a Bachelor's degree in design theory and a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture. His knowledge and experience with both landscaping and architectural history are helpful when discussing with applicants the different landscape materials and options available for their properties.

Tom DeYoung (Real Estate Agent): Member since 2007. Tom earned a BS in Business Administration from Northeastern University and has enjoyed a long career in sales and marketing. He is currently a very active real estate specialist for an international realty office that serves the Somerville and Greater Boston area. He is proud to be showcasing the many historic buildings and assets of Somerville to a wide range of clients throughout the metropolitan region. Tom is a long-term native of the City who is preserving the family homestead.

Ryan Falvey (City Planner): Member since 2007. Ryan has an undergraduate degree in Urban Studies and a Master's degree in Education and Cognitive Development. Currently a vice president of a rapidly growing moving company, Ryan has extensive professional experience in management consulting and software systems design, and has developed and taught several courses at Harvard. Ryan became a preservation enthusiast after rehabilitating his mid-nineteenth century home in Somerville, for which he won a Director's Award from the Commission.

Eric Parkes (Architect/Historic District Resident): Member since 2009. Eric received his architectural degree in 1989 and started his own private practice in Somerville in 2007. He has extensive experience with the remodeling and preservation of older residential and municipal buildings throughout New England. He and his wife spent four years restoring the exterior of their locally designated historic house in Somerville, purchased in 1999. They were very proud to win a Preservation Award from the Commission for the work in 2004.

Derick Snare (Architect/Historic District Resident): Member since 2002. Derick is an experienced architect in private practice in Somerville. He and his architect wife and daughter live in a designated historic house that they have been gradually restoring since purchasing it in the 1990s. Derick works closely with the Somerville High School CAD Program, providing technical assistance and guidance as the students create architectural drawings each year as part of the Commission's Annual Preservation Award Program.

Todd Zinn (Real Estate Agent/Historic District Resident): Member since 2011. Todd has a Bachelors degree in History and a Master's degree in Elementary Education from Wheelock College. After teaching elementary school for almost ten years, he became a stay-at-home parent for several years to his twin boys. Todd currently works as a real estate agent in the Greater Somerville and Cambridge area. He and his partner own an 1875 historic home in Winter Hill which they fully enjoy for its architectural character and charm, Somerville landscape and Boston skyline.