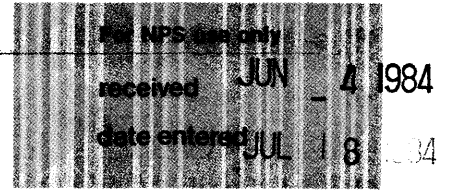


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**  MAIN POST OFFICE

historic

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number 86 BAYARD STREET N/A not for publication

city, town NEW BRUNSWICK vicinity of congressional district

state NEW JERSEY code 034 county MIDDLESEX code 023

**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 type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

street & number c/o NY FIELD REAL ESTATE AND BUILDINGS OFFICE, 50 CHURCH STREET

city, town NEW YORK vicinity of state NEW YORK 10007

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. MIDDLESEX COUNTY COURT HOUSE

street & number JOHN F. KENNEDY SQUARE

city, town NEW BRUNSWICK state NEW JERSEY 08901

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title EXCESS PROPERTY REPORT SURVEY has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date MAY - SEPTEMBER, 1979  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records OFFICE OF NEW JERSEY HERITAGE

city, town LABOR BLDG. TRENTON state NEW JERSEY

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" 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

The New Brunswick Main Post Office is a red brick and brownstone, Neo-Georgian building located at the corner of Bayard and Kirkpatrick Streets in the civic center of New Brunswick. The building was designed and constructed in 1934-36, under the direction of architect Wesley S. Bessell. It is basically rectangular in plan, with the main facade to the north and a secondary formal elevation to the west. The main pavilion along Bayard Street and the side portion of the building immediately adjacent to Kirkpatrick Street are topped by slate hipped roofs; the remainder of the building has a flat, built-up roof. In contrast to the formal north and west elevations, the south and east elevations are largely unornamented. The building is one tall story in height, except for the Bayard Street pavilion and a smaller pavilion at the south end of the Kirkpatrick Street elevation, both of which are two stories high.

Exterior decorative detail is concentrated in the hip-roofed sections. This includes modillioned eave cornices; English bond brickwork with subtle diaper patterning in dark headers; multi-pane wood window sash in flat or round-headed openings on the second floor and in segmental-headed openings with brownstone keystones on the first floor; brownstone quoins, basement and string courses; and brownstone ornamentation on the north and west entrances. The brownstone treatment of the north entrance includes two Tuscan columns in antis on the first floor; a series of pilasters framing round-headed window openings and carved ornamental shields and garlands on the second floor; and an entablature with dentilled cornice between the two floors. The west entrance includes brownstone quoins and door architrave, topped by a semicircular pediment with an excellent quality relief carving of a mounted postman in the tympanum.

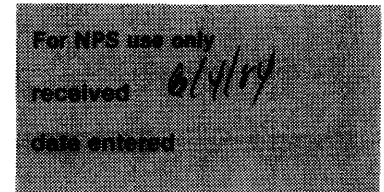
The vestibule is decorated with neoclassical woodwork, bronze lighting fixtures and radiator grilles with geometrical motifs, and a marble spiral stair to the second floor. The space also includes historical wall murals painted by the New York/Philadelphia artist George Biddle. The murals, installed in 1939, depict Revolutionary War scenes in New Brunswick. Other interior detail includes simple varnished woodwork in the first and second floor offices of the two hip-roofed pavilions. The only interior alteration is a ca. 1970's modernization of the post office box and counter area behind the entrance vestibule.

With the exception of the alteration noted above, the interior and exterior architecture of the Post Office is in its original state and is in very good condition.

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Verbal boundary justification: The Post Office is bound by Bayard Street to the north, Kirkpatrick Street to the west, a narrow driveway leading to the adjacent City Hall parking lot to the east, and a parking lot to the south. Although the parking lot is associated with the Post Office, it does not contribute to the property's historical and architectural significance. Thus, the southern boundary of the nomination is the southern most line of the building. The property lines form the northern, eastern and western boundaries of the nomination. The property lines and the proposed southern boundary line are shown on Sheet #35 of Tax Maps of the City of New Brunswick (1932, revised 1968-69, scale 1"=50'), a copy of which is included in the supporting documentation.

Existing interior floor plan description:

Basement: Spaces include boiler room, toilets and office space. Finishes are strictly utilitarian, with no ornamental surfaces or features.

First Floor: Spaces include an entrance lobby and private office at the north end of the building; an open customer service/postal box area adjacent to the lobby; and an open, high-bay mail handling storage area behind the customer service area. Significant features and finishes are concentrated in the lobby, which has colonial revival-style woodwork and hardware, a curving stair leading to the second floor, and the original historical murals. The private office to the west of the lobby space is not as elaborately finished, but does include some simple colonial revival opening enframements and doors. The customer service space was altered recently (probably during the 1970's), with interior wall finishes of artificial brick and with acoustical suspended ceilings and other non-significant finishes. The large mail handling space is finished in utilitarian fashion, with simple tongue-in-groove wood flooring and unornamented plaster walls and ceilings.

Second Floor: Second floor spaces exist above the north lobby and office areas, and above the small first floor office and entry lobby (not described above: these are simple in finish, similar to the private office adjacent to the north lobby) in the pavilion at the southwest corner of the building. The second floor office spaces are simply finished with plaster walls and ceilings, wood floors and wood doors, door enframements and window enframements.

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Note: The original floor plan drawings included in the Nomination Package describe the location and configuration of the above spaces. The only substantial change from the original was the recent alteration of the first floor customer service area.

## 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1934-36

**Builder/Architect** Wesley Sherwood Bessell, architect

### Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

The New Brunswick Main Post Office is significant architecturally as an excellent example of Neo-Georgian design in a 1930's public building; artistically for its WPA lobby murals by George Biddle, an artist of importance both as a muralist and as the major force in the establishment of the WPA Federal Arts Project; and from a communications standpoint as the center of postal activities in the city of New Brunswick for the past half century of the city's 250-year postal history.

In both design and workmanship, the New Brunswick Main Post Office reflects the high quality of much federal architecture of the 1930's, and it exemplifies the period's creative exploration of American "Colonial" architecture as a symbolic and esthetic model for public buildings. Wesley S. Bessell, the building's architect, cited "the pure Colonial, or Georgian" as the inspiration for his design, with specific reference to the Queen's Building on the Rutgers New Brunswick campus. While the design draws on eighteenth century precedents, it interprets them in an unusual and highly accomplished fashion. This is evident in the fine quality of the stone carving, and in the skillful manipulation of scale, massing, detail and set-back in the hip-roofed portions of the building. These features give the building a complex relationship to its corner site, making it appear as a collection of interlocking, small-scale Georgian pavilions. The treatment reduces the exterior effect of the large, functional mail-handling spaces dictated by the standard Post Office floor plan, which often made less accomplished designs appear sterile and out of scale with their surroundings.

Wesley Sherwood Bessell (1883-1967) was the architect of two New Jersey post office buildings in addition to the New Brunswick Post Office. He designed the Cranford Post Office, and at precisely the same time as the New Brunswick building was being built (1934-36), he was the architect of the Perth Amboy Post Office. His other published designs include the Mount Vernon Seminary for Girls in Washington D.C. (ca. 1920, later used as the U.S. Naval Communications Center), the Christ Church Parish House in Hackensack, N.J., and numerous private houses in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Bessell's interest in colonial architecture was reflected in a series of articles on Connecticut's colonial buildings, which appeared in the Architectural Record in 1915. A 1908 graduate of the School of Architecture at Columbia University, Bessell practiced in New York City until his retirement in 1957.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE ATTACHED CONTINUATION SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.95  
Quadrangle name NEW BRUNSWICK QUADRANGLE

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UMT References

A 

1	8	5	4	6	9	2	0	4	4	8	2	4	4	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

**Verbal boundary description and justification** The nomination comprises part of Block 12, Lot 9.01, as outlined on the Site Plan included as part of the nomination package. The boundaries of Block 12, Lot 9.01 are shown on Sheet #35 of Tax Maps of the City of New Brunswick (1932, with revisions. Scale 1"=50') a copy of which is included in supporting documentation.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title William J. Higgins Project Development Manager

organization The Aspen Group date February 21, 1984

street & number 18 Washington Place telephone (201) 623-0300

city or town Newark state New Jersey

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature Russell W. Meyers 23 May 1984

title Director, Division of Parks & Forestry date

For NPS use only.

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*[Signature]* Entered in the National Register date 7/18/84

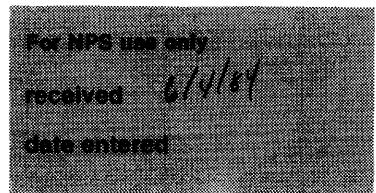
Keeper of the National Register

Affect: date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
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Main Post Office, New Brunswick

Continuation sheet Middlesex County, NJ Item number 8 Page 1

George Biddle (1885-1973) painted the historical murals in the building's lobby. The murals depict three Revolutionary War events: General Howe and Cornwallis entering the burning city of New Brunswick; George Washington and Alexander Hamilton leaving New Brunswick on December 1, 1775; and Washington with Simeon DeWitt, the Rutgers-educated cartographer of the Continental Army, mapping their route to Virginia, where Cornwallis was ultimately captured. Biddle was a member of the prominent Philadelphia family and a noted twentieth century artist whose works are in the collections of major museums worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, the Fogg Museum and the Corcoran Gallery. Much of his reputation derives from his work as a muralist, and he was President of the Mural Artists' Guild in 1937-38, during the period of his work on the New Brunswick murals. Biddle's most notable murals are in the Department of Justice Building in Washington, in the National Library in Rio de Janeiro, and in the Supreme Court Building in Mexico City. Biddle is credited as the major figure in the establishment of the WPA's Federal Arts Project: In 1933, he made a proposal to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom he knew as a classmate at Gordon, suggesting that the Federal Government support mural painting as a means of embellishing public buildings and providing employment for artists. After initial opposition from the Commission on Fine Arts, Biddle's plan was adopted and later that year a work relief program was established. In six months some 15,000 paintings were produced, many of which were installed in government buildings throughout the country. The project was later expanded and remained in effect through the thirties. The paintings produced by the Federal Arts Project survive in thousands of public buildings, and they constitute a national cultural resource whose importance is recognized today.

The history of the New Brunswick Post Office began as early as 1731, when Postmaster General Alexander Spotswood fixed New Brunswick as a point on the main postal route linking New York and Philadelphia. Evidence indicates that the New Brunswick Post Office was the seventh or the eighth to be established in the Colonies. During the 1750's and 1760's, New York and Philadelphia newspapers carried notices of letters delivered to the New Brunswick Post Office, indicating the city's importance as a colonial postal distribution center.

Growth in postal activity reflected New Brunswick's development in population and commerce: Records from shortly after the Revolution show total annual receipts of \$50 at the city's post office in 1790, as compared with over \$330,000 in 1934, the year in which construction of the present post office commenced. The close connection between commerce and the post office in New Brunswick was demonstrated in 1883, when Postmaster John F. Babcock proposed to remove

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the office from its long-time location near the Raritan River to a new uptown site at the corner of George and Albany Streets. Babcock believed that if New Brunswick were to grow further, the center of commerce must shift from the narrow streets along the Raritan, where business was prone to water damage from recurrent floods. The move, although ultimately successful, met with a storm of protest - including mass meetings and petitions sent to Washington with the signatures of hundreds of citizens - from merchants who feared a loss of business with the removal of the post office as the focal point of their district.

The post office rapidly outgrew the downtown facility which was constructed in 1903. In addition to handling a growing volume of letter mail, the facility housed expanding Post Office services in parcel post, sale of Postal Savings Certificates and U.S. Savings Bonds, and insured mail. During the First World War, the building contained the military radio broadcasting installation which is supposed to have maintained the formal link between the United States and Germany after the hostilities were initiated. In July, 1925, the nation's first regularly scheduled transcontinental night air mail service was inaugurated, with Hadley Field in South Plainfield as its eastern terminus. While operations were maintained at Hadley Field, the transcontinental mail was received and sorted at the New Brunswick Post Office. As the demands on the limited post office space increased with all of these activities, it became obvious that a new, larger facility was needed.

The existing New Brunswick Main Post Office was built in response to this need. The building's significance to New Brunswick was demonstrated in the enthusiasm with which its completion was received by citizens, business, city government, and the press. The New Brunswick Daily Home News published a special section on the building's dedication in December, 1936, carrying extensive coverage of the design, construction and function of the new facility. The section included testimonials from government officials, congratulations from dozens of local businesses, and a detailed history of postal activity in New Brunswick, researched and written by the Federal Writer's Project.

Although the building's postal use has diminished with the recent construction of a large regional facility in Edison, the New Brunswick Main Post Office remains the city's only functioning postal facility and the only surviving structure in New Brunswick's 250-year history of postal activity.



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The Avery Index of Architectural Periodicals, New York, Avery Library, Columbia University.

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Wall, John P., The Chronicles of New Brunswick, New Jersey, New Brunswick, Thatcher-Anderson Company, 1931.

Who's Who in American Art, New York, Jacques Cattell Press, 1973.

Note: The cooperation of the New Brunswick Free Public Library and of the New Jersey Reference Department of the Newark Public Library are gratefully acknowledged.

Addendum:

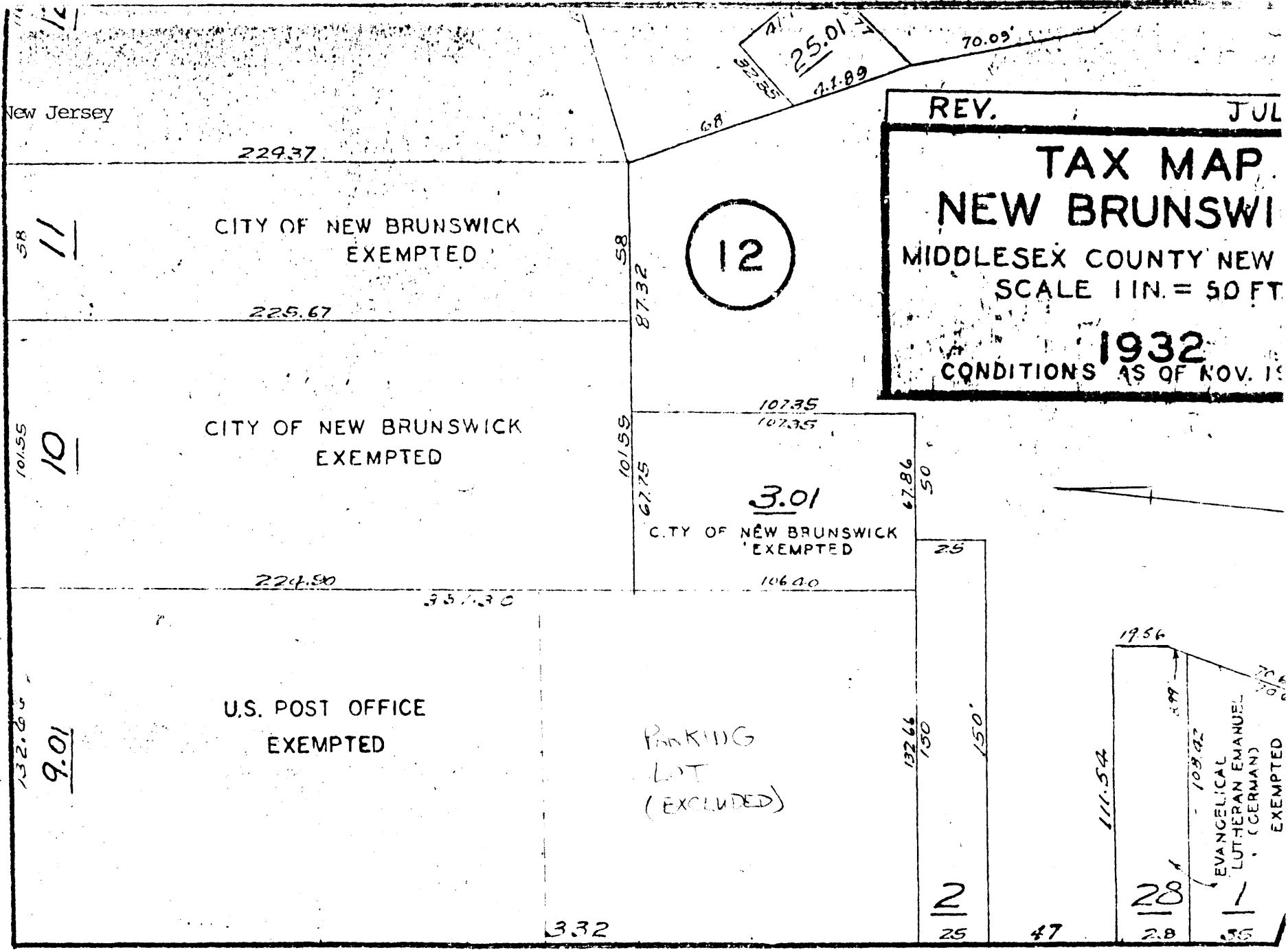
Baigell, Matthew (ed.) Biographical Dictionary of American Artists, Harper and Row, 1981

Marking, Karal Ann, Wall to Wall America, University of Minnesota Press, 1982

st Office  
nswick  
ex County, New Jersey

BAYARD

56'±



REV. JUL

**TAX MAP**

**NEW BRUNSWICK**

MIDDLESEX COUNTY NEW

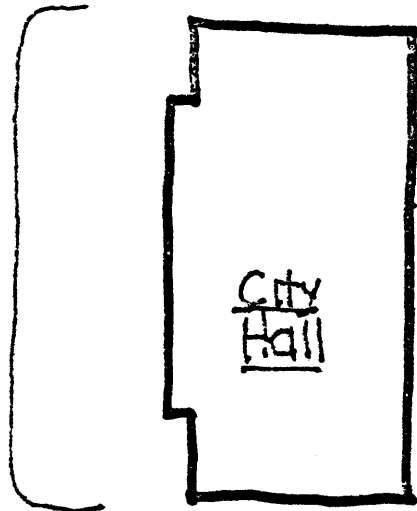
SCALE 1 IN. = 50 FT

**1932**

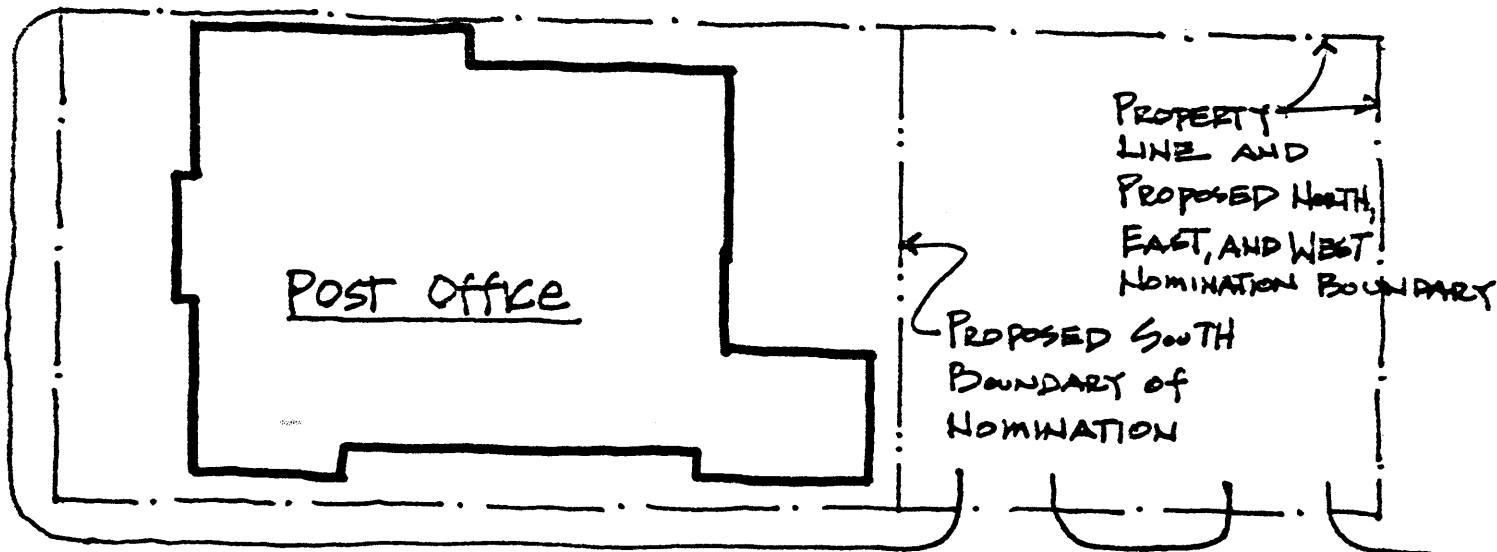
CONDITIONS AS OF NOV. 1932

KIRKPATRICK STREET

Bayard St.



NORTH

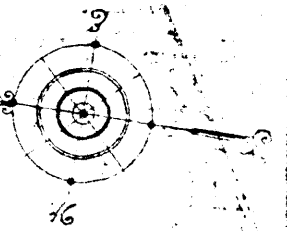


Kirkpatrick St.

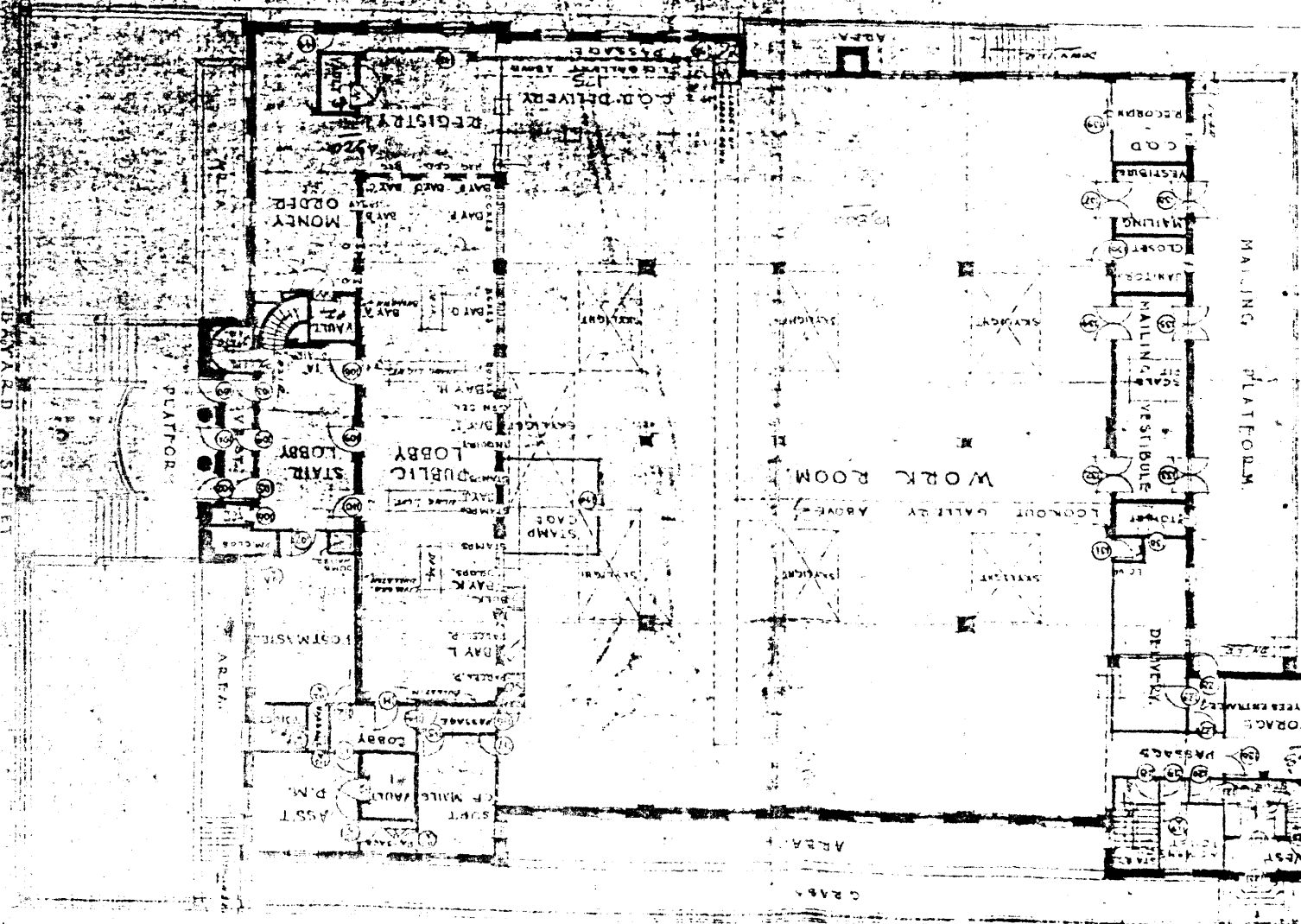
Site Plan  
NOT TO SCALE

MAIN POST OFFICE  
NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.  
Middlesex County

Top Plan of the New  
Brunswick Post Office  
Middlesex County  
New Jersey

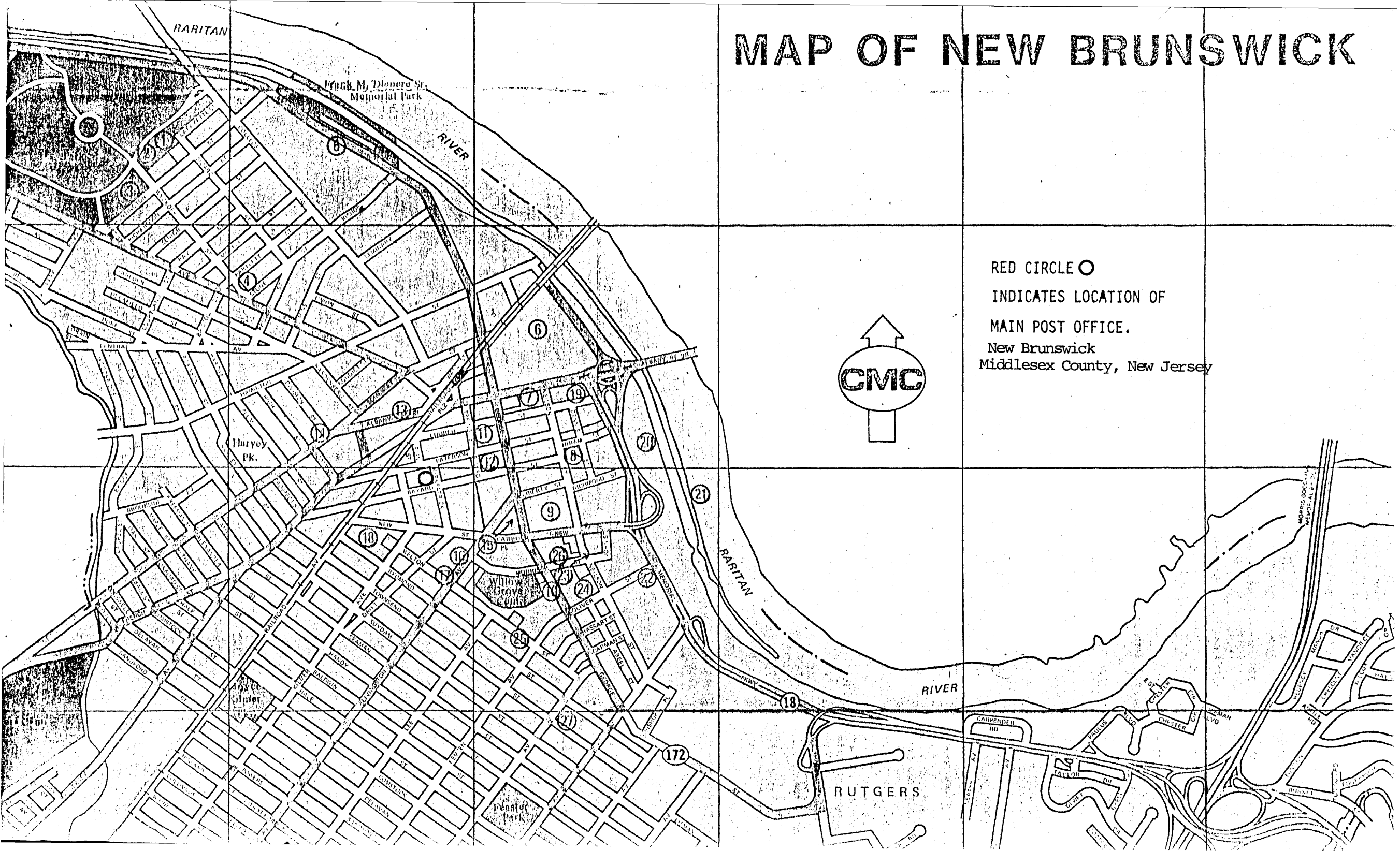


ASSIGNMENT  
UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J.  
DIVISIONS  
DRAWING  
NUMBER  
AS 50



1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33-34-35-36-37-38-39-40-41-42-43-44-45-46-47-48-49-50-51-52-53-54-55-56-57-58-59-60

# MAP OF NEW BRUNSWICK



RED CIRCLE ○  
INDICATES LOCATION OF  
MAIN POST OFFICE.  
New Brunswick  
Middlesex County, New Jersey

