

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 89001995

Date Listed: 11/28/89

US Post Office--Helper Main  
Property Name

Carbon  
County

Utah  
State

US Post Offices in Utah 1900--1941  
Multiple Name

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

*for* Patrick Andrews  
Signature of the Keeper

11/28/89  
Date of Action

===== Amended Items in Nomination: =====

The period of significance for this building was given as 1900-1941. Steven Stielstra of the USPS changed it to 1938-41 to reflect the building's date of construction. The nomination is now officially amended to reflect this change.

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DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

1995

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

OCT 16 1989

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Helper Main Post Office  
other names/site number N/A

### 2. Location

street & number 45 South Main N/A not for publication  
city, town Helper N/A vicinity  
state Utah code UT county Carbon code 007 zip code 84526

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> sites
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> objects
			<u>1</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
Historic U.S. Post Offices in Utah 1900-1941

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

[Signature] 12-19-88  
Signature of certifying official Date  
United States Postal Service  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

[Signature] NOV 15, 89  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
Utah State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. Patrick Andrus 11/28/89  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

[Signature] Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

U.S. Post Office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

U.S. Post Office

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Neo-Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
walls Brick

roof Tar composition  
other Cast concrete

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Helper Main Post Office is a one-story red brick building on a raised basement platform. The front facade is flat, symmetrical and Classically-proportioned. Five flat-arched bays divide the front facade--two window bays flanking a centered entry bay. Red brick in American bond faces the exterior from grade to a plain cast concrete coping. Cast concrete is also used for window sills and lintels. Flat, fluted pilasters supporting a simple entablature (wood) frame the double-door entry. The building's structure consists of reinforced concrete footings, floors and basement walls, and brick first floor walls supported by steel framing. The roof is flat built-up tar composition.

### PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The front facade (west) is horizontal in orientation and its five bays are symmetrically-arranged. The centered entry bay contains two wooden doors with single glass panels in each. A transom bar with two recessed panels rests atop the doors. Set over the transom bar is a seven-light transom window (horizontally-oriented). The entry doors and transom window are framed by flat, fluted wooden pilasters which support a simple wooden entablature. Bronze lanterns, affixed to the facade, flank the entry bay. Nine concrete steps and a concrete landing which are flanked by wrought iron balusters provide access to the main entry.

Two window bays flank each side of the entry. Framed with flat cast concrete sills and thick cast concrete lintels, the windows consist of eight-over-twelve-light double-hung wooden sash. Slightly recessed brick panels (same bond as rest of wall) lie beneath each of the outside window bays. The building is terminated by a cast concrete coping course.

The north facade contains four window bays which are detailed identically to those of the front facade. The spacing between the windows is equal, with a slightly reduced span between the end windows and the building corners. Each

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of the windows has a slightly recessed brick panel beneath. Red brick faces the facade which is terminated with a cast stone coping course.

With minor exceptions, the south and north facades are identical. In the south facade one of the window bays has been filled with brick (original construction) and one small vertically-oriented window, consisting of two-over-two-light double-hung wooden sash, flanks each side of the brick-filled window. Finally, an entry well which provides access to the basement (covered with a metal roof) is located at the rear corner.

The rear facade is faced with red brick and consists of a centered, projecting loading platform with two window bays flanking either side. The windows are detailed identically to those described above. A square brick chimney, which projects several feet above the building, occupies the junction of the loading platform and main building (northern corner). The platform is concrete and enclosed on the north and east sides by red brick walls. A single eight-light casement window occupies the north wall. The south side contains the open loading bay and a single pedestrian door. A flat metal roof with projecting marquee covers the platform.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Art

Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1900-1941

Significant Dates

Site Acq.-1937

Const.-1938

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect/-

Federal Government

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

The Helper Post Office is significant on the state and local levels. As one of only three post offices in the State of Utah that contain public artwork commissioned by the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture during the Depression, the building carries a strong association with the federal relief programs of that era. The artwork (lobby mural), which depicts the dusty main street of a western town, is an example of the American Regionalism fostered by the Section during the New Deal. The building itself is locally significant in its symbolism of the federal presence and the massive public works programs that were initiated to aid communities during a period of national economic emergency. The Helper Post Office, an unaltered example of a small town single-purpose post office, is identified as a contributing building to the Helper Commercial District which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Both the mural and building exemplify the link between the federal government and the community.

ART

According to Dan E. Burke, in the exhibition catalogue for Utah Art of the Depression (1986), the public arts programs sponsored by the federal government in Utah during the Depression were successful in not only in enriching the lives of Utah citizens but also for laying down the first stone in the foundation of a vital cultural movement. The first of the federal programs, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), functioned from December 1933 to June 1934. Under the direction of the Women's Division of the Utah Civil Works Administration ten projects were initially assigned to Utah artists. These works included sculptures, sketches, easel paintings and murals for the Utah State Capitol rotunda.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

1. Notarianni, Philip F., Carbon County: Eastern Utah's Industrialized Island, Salt Lake City, UT: Utah State Historical Society, 1981.
2. Epperson, Terrence W., "Helper Commercial District" (National Register Nomination), February 1978.
3. Falk, Peter H., Who Was Who In American Art, Madison, Conn: Soundview Press, 1985.
4. The Helper Journal, various articles 1935-41.
5. Original Floor Plans, 1937.

See continuation sheet

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

**Specify repository:**

USPS Facilities Service Center  
San Bruno, CA 94099-0330

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 0.55 acres

**UTM References**

A 12 512560 4392780  
Zone Easting Northing

B \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

C \_\_\_\_\_

D \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name: Helper  
Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Beginning 617.2 feet South and 294 feet West of the Northeast corner of Section 24, Township 13 South, Range 9 East, Salt Lake Meridian, South 129.8 feet, East 5 feet, South 15.2 feet, East 160 feet, North 145 feet, West 165 feet to beginning.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes all of the property originally purchased by the federal government for the post office site.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title H.J. "Jim" Kolva, Project Manager; Steve Franks, Research Assistant  
organization Institute for Urban & Local Studies date August 1988  
street & number West 705 1st Avenue telephone (509) 458-6219  
city or town Spokane state WA zip code 99204

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After the initial projects were completed, several other artists received commissions to execute murals and easel paintings.

Following PWAP, arts programs were continued under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration of Utah (FERA) which existed in Utah from April 1, 1934 to July 1, 1935. Administered by Judy F. Lund, twenty-two artists produced eighty-three art works. These works included easel paintings, ceramic pieces, woodblock prints, sketches, sculptures, posters and the completion of the State Capitol dome murals. The program allowed completion of projects initiated under PWAP, provided additional opportunity for artists to produce their artwork, and continued federal support for the arts until the beginning of the Section of Painting and Sculpture.

The Section of Painting and Sculpture (renamed the Section of Fine Arts in 1938) was established by the Treasury Department on October 14, 1934. It was under this program that the Helper mural and murals in the Provo and Beaver post offices were completed.

(Note: According to Burke, no Utah artist received a commission under this program. It is most likely, however, that Utah artist Norman Thorpe's mural in the Provo Federal Building was awarded by the Section in a Western states competition. Although Burke attributes the work to the WPA Federal Art Project, Karel Yasko, Counsellor for Fine Arts and Historic Preservation for GSA has stated "...there were no WPA artworks in federal buildings, including post offices, under the New Deal.)

The Section, which was administered in Washington, dealt directly with the artists, and selected them through national and regional design competitions. The Section sought the best decorative art that it could find for designated federal buildings. The intent of the program's administrators was that the work would reflect the themes and styles of the American Scene, with a hope that it would strike a responsive chord in the general public. Although the program is attributed with having fostered an American Regionalism, art critics could never find a coherent body of work that was truly Regionalist or representative of particular sections of the country. The work that was

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created did, however, portray the American Scene in the form of localized subject matter. Further, the work resulting from the program tended to pursue an inoffensive middle ground of style and content which was sometimes viewed as producing limp platitudes rather than strong statements. This resulted from the requirement for final approval from Washington as well as compliance with local preferences. The strife or dark side of the Depression was not portrayed, but instead the nostalgic and positive events of the American Scene were depicted.

The Helper mural, entitled "A Typical Western Town," (5' x 12' over the Postmaster's door) was executed in oil on canvas by Jenne Magafan and installed in April of 1941. The mural design was a prizewinner in the 48-state competition sponsored by the Fine Arts Section of the Federal Works Agency. The winning designs, to be placed in one post office in each of the 48 states, were selected from 1,475 anonymously submitted sketches. According to Maurice Stern, jury chairman, the competition, the largest ever held in the country, made a distinct contribution to American mural art.

As indicated by its title, the mural depicts a dusty main street flanked by false-front wooden buildings--post office/general store, saloon, blacksmith shop, and various other buildings--through which ride two men on horseback. The town marshall and blacksmith turn their attention to the riders as a dog nips at the horses hooves. The mural was depicted in the December 4, 1939 issue of Life magazine along with the other winning entries. According to Life:

As mural sketches, there are interesting not only in themselves but also as barometers by which the everyday art taste of rural America may be judged. Designed mostly for village post offices, they represent in most cases the collective taste of the citizens of the community, together with the individual taste of the artist. ...

Apparently rural Americans are artistic "stay-at-homes" with a preference for paintings that reproduce experiences and scenes and parts of history with which they are familiar. In spirit, many of these sketches are local American epics.



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Jenne Magafan was born in Woodstock, New York in October 1916. She studied at the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center, and with Frank Mechau and Peppino Mangravite. She exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Denver Art Museum, National Academy of Design and others. She received several awards for her work including the competition for which she completed the Helper mural. Her other mural work includes West High School in Denver, the Social Security Building in Washington, D.C. and post offices in Glenwood Springs (Co.), Albion (Neb.), and Anson (Tex.). Ms. Magafan died in 1950.

Although no post office murals were completed under this program, the WPA Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) perhaps made the greatest contribution to the body of Utah art. Implemented in mid-1935, the Utah program was sponsored by the Utah State Institute of Fine Arts. Three areas of activity were covered by the program: (1) creation of art; (2) technical research; and (3) art applied to community service and art education. Several hundred works of art including fourteen murals were added to the collections of the State, and various public agencies and municipalities.

Sixteen or so artworks also were obtained by the City of Helper from Utah artists under sponsorship of this program. Moreover, a fine arts center was established in Helper on December 29, 1939 under the program. Housed in the newly completed civic auditorium, the center was an immediate success. From a city population of 2,700, the first three weeks of the center's operation attracted 3,017 people. In 1940, the center presented nineteen Utah and national exhibitions which were attended by 28,720 persons.

The Helper Post Office is significant under Criterion A for its historic association with the federal government's New Deal public arts programs. The mural is also significant under Criterion C as an integral part of a building that represents a significant type, period, and style of artistic expression. Finally, the building is eligible under Criterion D because of its information potential relating to artistic expression and techniques of the period, and social history of its locality.

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As Helper's first and only federally-constructed post office, the building is locally significant under Criterion A. It represents the link between the federal government and the local community, and functions as both a symbol and as an agency of the federal government. The building further symbolizes the massive public building programs of the 1930s which were intended to assist communities during a period of national economic emergency. Indeed, the Post Office was constructed during a period of significant WPA-sponsored and other public-sponsored construction in the city. Local newspaper articles carried the news of the new junior high school and school shop, the civic auditorium, the municipal power plant (all WPA projects) and the Janet Street Underpass. Over one-half million dollars in public works projects were underway or near completion in 1936. Finally, the dedication of the Post Office afforded Helper citizens the opportunity to hear the words of their elected officials from Washington: Senator Thomas and Congressman Murdock complimented the citizens for their far-sighted and aggressive attitude in working to improve the community.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Helper is in Carbon County, the heart of Utah's coal mining district in east central Utah. With an estimated 1984 population of 2,846, Helper has a small retail core which provides services for the local area. Coal mining, agriculture and three electric generating plants provide the base for the local economy.

Helper's history is tied to that of the mining region in which it is located and the development of the railroad. From humble beginnings Helper would grow to be the "Hub of Carbon County"--the railroad center and trading post for the region's many mines.

The first settler in the area was Teancum Pratt, who arrived in 1880 with his two wives Sarah and Annie to prospect the coal veins of Spring Canyon. He eventually owned most of the land in the vicinity of present-day Helper and made the first survey of the town. In 1883 he sold a right-of-way to the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. Its new railway

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line opened up Carbon County's coal lands and made Helper a center for both mining and railroads. (Helper is in fact the only town in the United States named after a locomotive. A "helper" locomotive was one that was added to help pull a train over a steep mountain grade.)

Helper proceeded to grow in a slow and deliberate fashion, in contrast to booming metal mining towns. By the early 1890s the first school was established, a roundhouse, depot, and hotel were built, and a clothing store, grocery store, and three saloons were in operation. The appointment for the first U.S. post office was made on January 7, 1892. A notable characteristic of Helper was its ethnic diversity, which was primarily the result of the railroad's encouragement of immigration. The 1900 census indicated that Helper's population was 385, with 16 nationalities represented. Labor activities were also a vital element of Helper's early history.

In 1907 Helper was incorporated; civic pride was sparked and soon Main Street was widened and new residential spaces were laid out and old ones were improved. Helper's growth into a center for the Carbon County coal fields continued as more mines opened in 1908 and 1910. By 1910 Helper's population was 816, which grew to 1,606 in 1920.

Helper's steady growth continued even through the 1920s and 1930s, primarily due to a massive building program undertaken in 1927 by Helper Securities, a multi-ethnic corporation. Helper's position as a railroad center also provided some stability during the Great Depression, when coal production declined. The 1930 population of 2,707 grew slightly to 2,843 in 1940 and has remained near that level ever since (the 1950 population was 2,850; the 1960 figure was 2,459). The population declined to a low of 1,964 in 1970 before rising to 2,724 in 1980, primarily due to the national emphasis on coal during the 1970s fuel crisis.

The Helper Post Office is on the east side of Main Street at the north end of the business district (Main is the primary commercial street). Extending north of the Post Office are three single-family residences (two - 1914; 1918) The WPA-constructed Helper Civic Auditorium (1938, brick, International Style) lies north of these houses. A city park

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is adjacent to the south of the Post Office, and the D&RGW Railroad yard is adjacent to the east. Across Main Street to the west are several commercial buildings extending south along Main and single-family residences to their north. The Post Office is within the Helper Commercial District which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Post Office is listed as a contributing structure to the District.

LOCAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HELPER MAIN POST OFFICE

The year 1936 brought good news for Helper. On February 14th the Helper Journal reported that the coal business was booming and 3,000 miners were at work. On March 13th the paper announced that the new junior high school would soon be dedicated and a new \$100,000 PWA civic auditorium was being proposed. More progress was reported on April 17th with the news that Helper's post office was advancing to second class status. The paper explained that the post office had fallen to third class in 1933 when stamp sales declined and the return to second class made Helper eligible for a federal building.

On June 26th the Helper Journal announced "Helper Assured Federal Building in Murdock Dispatch, Civic Clubs Aid." Congressman Abe Murdock (D) had recently recommended that Helper have a federal building and the Chamber of Commerce and other civic clubs had also been active in seeking the building. "Building Boom Set for Helper" was the news on July 3rd, when the following projects were described: two PWA projects (the civic auditorium and a municipal power plant), a street underpass project, and the post office (which was projected to cost around \$80,000). On July 23rd it was reported that sites were being investigated for the post office; on October 9th it was reported a site was still being sought (two railroad land sites favored by the government had been judged to be too expensive).

At the end of 1936 the Helper Journal listed the many projects that would be completed in Helper in 1937 (they totaled approximately \$500,000): the civic auditorium (the taxpayers had overwhelmingly approved the fall bond election for it), the underpass project, post office, two new

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churches, a new depot, and new sewers and asphalt streets (December 23rd article).

The new year of 1937 brought continued good news for Helper: 3,500 men were employed in the mines (February 5th article), construction of the underpass began (March 12th article), and Helper applied for WPA assistance for the street paving and waterworks projects (March 19th article). On June 11th the Journal reported "Federal Building Plans Are Rushed"; custody of the post office site had been given to Postmaster Eugene Gibson and ground clearing already started. The site cost \$8,000 and it was estimated the entire project would cost \$90,000.

On August 19th it was reported that the request for Federal building construction bids would soon be advertised. The announcement that the contract has been awarded to Newstrom & David of Denver was made by the Journal on October 14th. They had submitted the low bid of \$44,850 and planned to immediately commence construction

At the end of 1937 the Helper Journal reviewed the town's great building boom (December 30th article). The paper noted that the underpass and auditorium had been completed and predicted that one of the major improvements in 1938 would be the construction of the post office, which was expected to start in February.

On February 10, 1938 the Helper Journal reported "Federal Building Taking Tangible Form"--the excavation was completed, most of the basement concrete poured, and the bricklaying would begin in a few days. An article of April 7th reported that bricklaying would be completed that week and predicted that the building would be completed by July 1st.

Other progress continued in June when Helper received a \$51,000 PWA grant to improve its municipal water system (June 30th article). On August 11th the paper reported that Helper citizens had approved a \$63,000 water bond to fund the rest of the \$114,000 project.

The Helper Journal of August 25th featured a photograph of the recently completed federal building along with the news "Helper's New Post Office Opens Monday." On October

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20th the paper reported that dedication rites had just been held. Senator Elbert Thomas (D), Congressman Murdock, and Mayor Spratling gave speeches, the Helper High School band played, and 300 people attended the event. Congressman Murdock complimented Helper's citizens for their farsighted and aggressive attitude in working to improve the community, and said "A public building of this kind is a public trust, and is a monument to the community designed to be served by it."

The Helper Journal was able to report more good news for the community when, on June 29, 1939, it announced "Helper Post Office To Get Mural, Only One In Utah." The Section of Fine Arts had announced a competition for 48 murals, one for a post office in each state. It was noted that artists could compete for a mural depending on his knowledge and interest in the region in which the post office was located. Helper's mural was to be 5' x 12' and cost a maximum of \$740. Mural painters throughout the area were invited to submit examples of their work. (Additional cultural development occurred in Helper in 1939 when the Helper Community Art Gallery was established with the aid of the WPA. The Gallery, a branch of the Utah State Art Center of Salt Lake City, held monthly exhibitions of promising and established Utah artists.) On April 24, 1941 the Journal published a photo of the new mural along with the caption "Special Painting for Helper Post Office Hung Monday." Entitled "A Typical Western Town," the painting was executed by Jenne Magafan of Colorado Springs. The article commented "It is believed by the artist that the painting will collect very little dirt and dust, even in as smokey community as this. But if it does, she pointed out, it may be cleaned by running a loaf of soft white bread (sliced bread won't do) over the surface."

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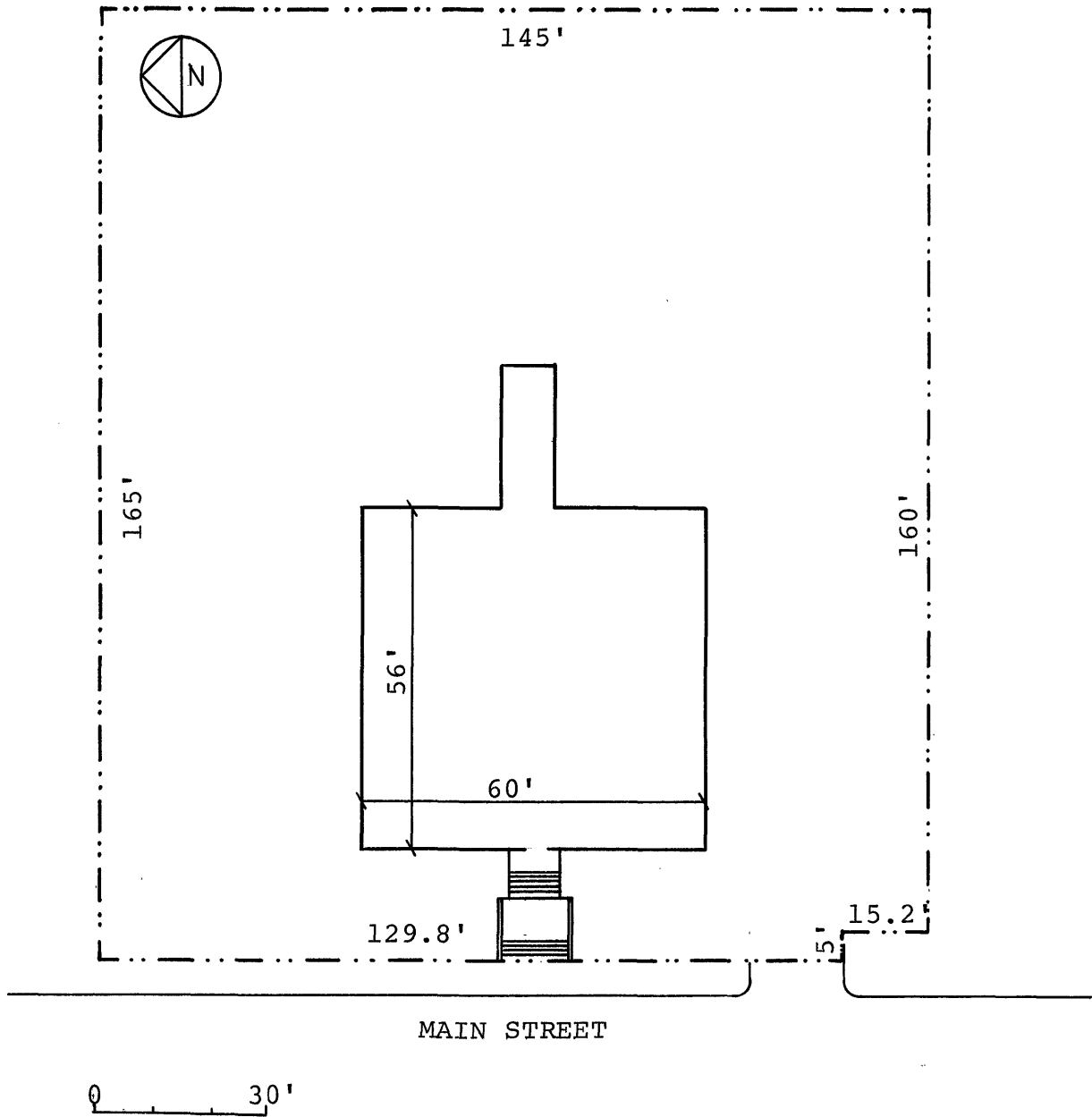
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received  
date entered

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The following information is the same for all the photographs listed:

1. Helper MPO
2. Helper, Utah
3. Jim Kolva
4. August 1986
5. Negatives on file at USPS Facilities Service Center, San Bruno, CA.

Photo No. 1 (negative #15)

6. View to southeast

Photo No. 2 (negative #14)

6. View to east

Photo No. 3 (negative #17)

6. View to northeast

Photo No. 4 (negative #22)

6. Mural, south end of lobby