

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

Growth Management Department



MEETING DATE:	April 6, 2022
PROJECT:	41 Bridge Street – Request to Designate a Contributing Resource and Amendment to the Town of Bluffton Contributing Resources Map
APPLICANTS:	Rusty Pistachio and Debbie Wunder, Owners
PROJECT MANAGER:	Glen Umberger, Historic Preservationist

APPLICATION REQUEST: The Applicants, Rusty Pistachio and Debbie Wunder as Owners, request that the Historic Preservation Commission approve the following request:

1. **DCR-03-22-016504.** Designation of Contributing Resource application to designate the former Bluffton Post Office, located at 41 Bridge Street, identified by Beaufort County Tax Map No. R610-039-00A-0333-0000 within the Neighborhood Conservation-HD Zoning District as a Contributing Resource to the Old Town Bluffton Historic District.

BACKGROUND: The local Old Town Bluffton Historic District (OTBHD) was established by Town Council on June 19, 2007 and includes the Bluffton Historic District which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on June 21, 1996. The OTBHD comprises 84 contributing resources, of which 82 are structures and two are natural features (e.g., Heyward and Huger coves). A Contributing Resource is defined by the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) as:

Any building, structure, site, object, feature, or open space, as designated by Town Council, that adds to the historic associations, architectural qualities, or archeological values that relate to the documented significance of the Old Town Bluffton Historic District.

These resources are identified on the Contributing Resources Map, as accepted by Town Council on December 14, 2021. The Map identifies all Contributing

Resources to the Old Town Bluffton Historic District that have been designated by Town Council and are visible reminders of the history and cultural heritage of the Town of Bluffton as well as the Lowcountry region.¹ (Attachment 1). Contributing Resources are eligible to receive Town of Bluffton Historic Preservation Grants, pursuant to Town of Bluffton Historic Preservation Grant Programs approved by Town Council on December 14, 2021, effective January 1, 2022 and Owners of such designated Resources have a duty to maintain, or cause to be maintained, the exterior features and structural elements of a Contributing Structure, including site features, and shall not allow Conditions of Neglect to occur.²

DESCRIPTION: The subject property consists of 0.19 acres located at 41 Bridge Street and identified by Beaufort County Tax Map No. R610-039-00A-0333-0000 within the Neighborhood Conservation-HD Zoning District (Attachments 2 and 3). The proposed Resource is a 1,140 square foot, one-story rectilinear structure on a concrete pad (Attachment 4). Constructed of concrete block and clad in red brick, the façade is divided into three bays with large double metal-framed plate glass windows with transoms set on brick sills separated by a brick wall laid in a running bond pattern and surmounted by a metal awning; a single, metal-framed plate glass entrance door and transom adjoins the double windows on the western side of the façade. The east and west elevations are identical with double metal framed one-over-one double-hung windows set on brick sills placed high on the wall on the southern end of the elevations; these windows are secured by metal bars. The structure has a low-pitched asphalt shingled roof with a front facing wood gable which features a wood louvered roof vent and wood soffit and fascia boards. The rear (south) elevation has a single metal door in the center flanked by two single, metal-framed three-over-three double hung windows set on brick sills on the western side of the rear elevation.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BLUFFTON POST OFFICE: A United States Post Office was first established at Bluffton, then May River, Beaufort County, South Carolina on May 21, 1839 with Burwell Wiggins appointed as the first Postmaster.³ The

¹ See Unified Development Ordinance, Section 3.18.1.B.

² See Unified Development Ordinance, Section 3.26.2. *et seq.*

³ "Postmaster Finder," United States Postal Service. Accessed March 7, 2022.
<https://webpmt.usps.gov/pmt003.cfm>

Post Office was briefly discontinued on October 4, 1866 and reestablished on January 29, 1867.⁴

One hundred years after the first Post Office was established, the Bluffton Post Office was located in a small room inside Maddy Simmons' Grocery Store on the northeast corner of Bridge and Calhoun streets until December 1, 1941 when the Store (and Post Office) burned down. As a result of the loss of the structure, Post Office operations were relocated across the street to the southeast corner of Bridge and Calhoun streets, occupying the eastern half of a one-story building that was sited diagonally to the corner with a porte-cochère at the street (fig. 1). An unpublished 1929 Town of Bluffton "Sanborn" map shows this building with an edited "P.O." label indicating the location of the Post Office after December 1941 (fig. 2). That building, owned by Hank Cram, was subsequently demolished by Cram and Frank Hodge in 1960.

On October 31, 1953, Lucille Heyward was appointed "Acting Postmaster" following the retirement of Gladys P. Harrison; Lucille was nominated by President Dwight D. Eisenhower on February 5, 1955 and confirmed by the United States Senate as "Postmaster" on March 17, 1955.⁵ In November 1955, Post Office operations were moved again, this time to 45 Bridge Street ("the Rate") which was originally constructed by Gaillard and Lucille Heyward in early 1946 who operated it as a grocery store. According to Anne Heyward, daughter of Gaillard and Lucille, the Post Office Department permitted operations to be moved into a building owned by the Postmistress only because no other suitable building in Bluffton was available at that time. According to Anne Heyward, "Bluffton's mail for many years came by train to Hardeeville and Mr. and Mrs. Mock, who worked out of the Hardeeville Post Office, were contract carriers who brought it to Bluffton and delivered to rural boxes along the way. That changed completely in 1963 when [the] ZIP Code started. The Mocks then retired. Bluffton's mail then came [directly] from Savannah by Postal truck."⁶ A photograph of Mrs. Heyward and Mrs. Mock in front of the Bluffton Post Office, is on display at Town Hall (fig. 3). Post Office operations remained at the Rate until 1965.

⁴ Following the end of the Civil War, former Confederate Postmasters were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the Union. If a Postmaster refused to do so, the Postmaster General had the authority to "discontinue the delivery of mails for offices where there is no regularly appointed person to receive them." See *The Anderson intelligencer*. (14 June 1866). Accessed March 7, 2022. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026965/1866-06-14/ed-1/seq-2/>

⁵ "Postmasters Confirmed," *The State* (Columbia, SC, March 18, 1955), 8, c.f. *The Times and Democrat* (Orangeburg, SC, February 6, 1955), 2.

⁶ Anne Heyward, daughter of Postmaster Lucille Heyward Interview with Author, March 5, 2022.

The Bluffton Post Office was built in 1964-65 under provisions set forth in the Post Office Department Lease-Purchase Act of 1952 whereby the private sector constructed purpose-built post office buildings which were then leased back to the Department for a specified period of time. In this case, the Bluffton Post Office was built by Lucille G. Heyward on Heyward family property and was leased to the Department for an annual rent of \$1,248.⁷ Of the three bids received by the Post Office Department to construct a new building for the Bluffton Post Office, Mrs. Heyward's winning bid was the lowest and the contract was awarded to her with a construction cost of \$10,480. An official dedication for the new Post Office was held on Sunday, May 16, 1965 which was attended by State and local dignitaries (fig. 4).⁸ According to an article published in the *New York Times* on July 5, 1981, "On Buying and Owning a Post Office," the United States Postal Service ("USPS"), as successor to the Post Office Department, was at that time leasing 28,743 post office buildings from private owners, including the Bluffton Post Office. As former mayor Emmett McCracken pointed out during a recent interview, it was where you went to see anyone in Bluffton because everyone came into the Post Office every day (fig. 5).⁹

In 1988, the USPS opted not to renew its lease on the structure at 41 Bridge Street and moved into a larger facility at 2 Bruin Road and in 2002, the USPS purchased property and constructed a larger facility at 25 Thurmond Way where it remains today.

After the Post Office moved from Bridge Street, the proposed Resource was used as the offices of the *Bluffton Eccentric*, a local newspaper first published by William Graham Bullock on June 25, 1987; the newspaper ran for almost four years. The proposed Resource was later used as an office by the owners and most recently as a private residence.

On February 2, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission ("HPC") heard a request from Pearce Scott Architects, on behalf of the owners, Rusty Pistachio and Debbie Wunder, to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness to allow the renovation to, and addition of approximately 528 heated square feet and 315

⁷ "Bluffton Post Office Contract Let," *Charleston News and Courier* (October 22, 1964), 29.

⁸ "Bluffton Post Office Dedication is May 16," *Charleston News and Courier* (May 9, 1965), 39.
Note: An official Dedication Program was published for the occasion.

⁹ Emmett McCracken Interview with Author, March 7, 2022, 58 Stock Farm Road, Bluffton, South Carolina.

unheated square feet to the existing structure (COFA-11-21-016079): the HPC approved the request for the addition and Town Staff has determined that the proposed alterations will not negatively impact the historic integrity of the structure and the proposed Contributing Resource would remain eligible for listing under the Criteria set forth in Section 3.25 *et seq.* of the UDO.

REVIEW CRITERIA & ANALYSIS: Town Staff and the Historic Preservation Commission are required to consider the criteria set forth in Section 3.25 of the Unified Development Ordinance, "Designation of Contributing Resources," in assessing an application for Designation of Contributing Resource. The applicable criteria are provided below followed by Staff Finding(s) based upon the review of application submittals to date.

1. Section 3.25.3.A. "Any Resource that is at least 50 years old and retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association" may be considered for a Contributing Resource designation by Town Council upon a recommendation of the Historic Preservation Commission.

- a. *Finding.* The proposed Resource was constructed in 1964-65, 57 years ago, and retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

2. Section 3.25.3.A. At least one of the following criteria must [also] be present:

- a. The resource is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;

Finding. The proposed Resource does not meet this criterion.

- b. The resource is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;

Finding. The proposed Resource does not meet this criterion.

- c. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master,

or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction;

Finding. The Bluffton Post Office is significant as a remarkably intact example of a "Thousands Series" International-style ("modern") post office property type, as defined in USPS Nationwide Historic Context Study: Postal Facilities Constructed or Occupied Between 1940 and 1971. Constructed in 1964-65 during a time of rapid expansion in the Post Office Department, the building represents a standardized type of post office building contained in the Post Office Department's *Building Designs* catalog (1959, republished 1964) which was used as a guide in the construction of "uniformly efficient and architecturally attractive small post office buildings throughout the United States." (fig. 6) While these designs were "standard," they were also highly adaptable and suitable for all climates and geographical areas in the United States. Even with local adaptations, these buildings were intended to reflect Postmaster General Arthur Ellsworth Summerfield's desire for modern buildings focusing on efficiency and clean lines. These buildings were also distinctive enough that a stranger visiting a town could immediately identify the Post Office by its architectural form with distinctive red brick even without reading the standard "UNITED STATES POST OFFICE" signage.

In this case, the Bluffton Post Office is a rectilinear form, constructed of concrete block and faced in red brick with large metal framed plate glass windows and glass door surmounted by a protruding metal awning on the façade and low-pitched roof. While the original roof was flat, as seen in a newspaper photograph from the week in June 1965 when the building was officially dedicated, (fig. 4) the roof was changed sometime before 1970 however the altered roofline is consistent with typical forms of the International Style (fig. 7). As a single-story, red brick commercial building on Bridge Street, adjacent to the Rate (45 Bridge Street) and across the street from antebellum dwellings including the Cole-Heyward House (70 Boundary Street), the Fripp House (48 Bridge Street), and the Card House (34 Bridge Street), the Bluffton Post Office is a striking departure from Bluffton's distinctive Lowcountry-style architecture and is noteworthy as one of only two commercial structures in this particular style of architecture extant in the Town of Bluffton; the other is the former the Bluffton

Health Center (Jennie Kitty Municipal Building) located at 1261 May River Road that was constructed in 1957.

The Bluffton Post Office is sited within the Bluffton Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, however in 1996 at the time of the nomination, the building was described simply as “[item] 47. Bridge Street: Non-historic, non-contributing brick commercial building.”

- d. The resource has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Finding. The proposed Resource does not meet this criterion.

It should be noted that on March 29, 2022, the South Carolina Department of Archives and History as the State Historic Preservation Office (“SHPO”) determined that the proposed Resource is not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

NAMING A NEW CONTRIBUTING RESOURCE: While the Unified Development Ordinance provides Criteria for the Designation of a Contributing Resource, there is no specific criterion for nomenclature. Accordingly, when proposing a new Contributing Resource to the Old Town Bluffton Historic District, Town Staff will nominate the resource using its historic name, which conforms to applicable guidelines of the National Park Service when a property is being listed on the National Register of Historic Places. As such, the historic name “best reflects the property’s historic importance or was commonly used for the property during the period of significance ... [t]he historic name is preferred for general reference because it continues to be meaningful regardless of changes in ownership or use and most often relates to the reasons the property is eligible for National Register listing.”¹⁰ Therefore, the name of the proposed Contributing Resource for inclusion on the Contributing Resources Map should be **Bluffton Post Office**.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION ACTIONS: As granted by the powers and duties set forth in Section 2.2.6.E.4, the Historic Preservation Commission has the authority to take the following actions with respect to this application:

¹⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources. *Guidelines for Completing National Register of Historic Places Forms: Part A, How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, (revised 1997), 8.

1. Reviewing and recommending to Town Council resources to be designated or removed from being designated as a Contributing Resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Based on the criteria found in Section 3.25.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance, Town Staff recommends Approval of the Bluffton Post Office, located at 41 Bridge Street be designated a Contributing Resource to the Old Town Bluffton Historic District and subject to procedures specified Section 3.25.4 of the Unified Development Ordinance, that the Contributing Resources Map be amended and accepted by Town Council.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Town of Bluffton Contributing Resources Map, as adopted by Town Council on December 14, 2021.
2. Location Map
3. Zoning Map



Figure 1
Bluffton, South Carolina
Post Office
Southeast Corner of Bridge and Calhoun streets
c. 1945
Courtesy Joannie Heyward

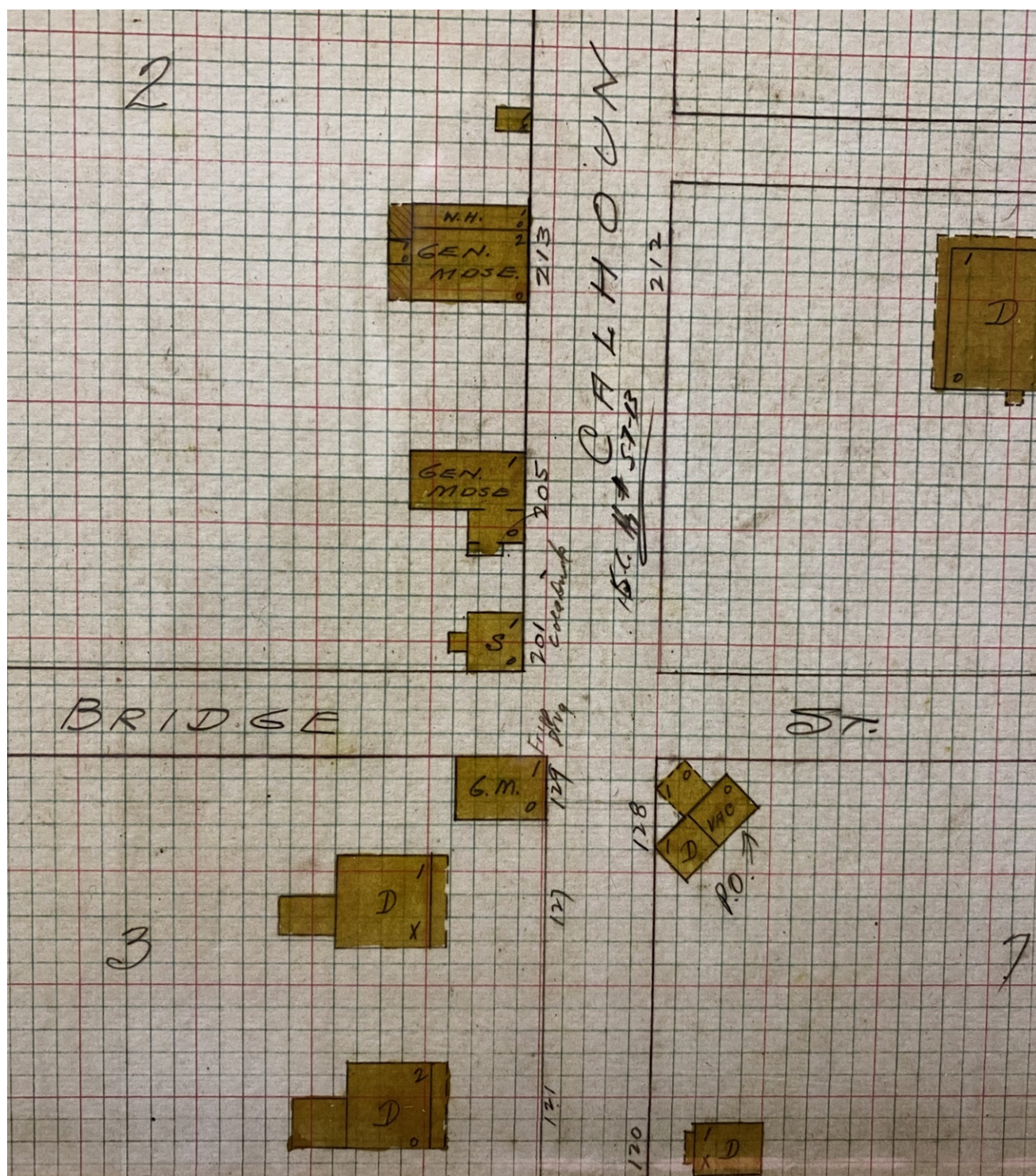


Figure 2

Detail, Unpublished "Sanborn" Map (1929)
 Showing Post Office (Figure 1) labelled as "P.O." c. 1945
 Courtesy Historic Bluffton Foundation, Caldwell Archives



Figure 3

Lucille Heyward, Postmaster, Bluffton, South Carolina Post Office (left)
with Idell Mock of the Hardeeville, South Carolina Post Office
at Bluffton Post Office, no. 45 Bridge Street, c. 1960
Courtesy Town of Bluffton

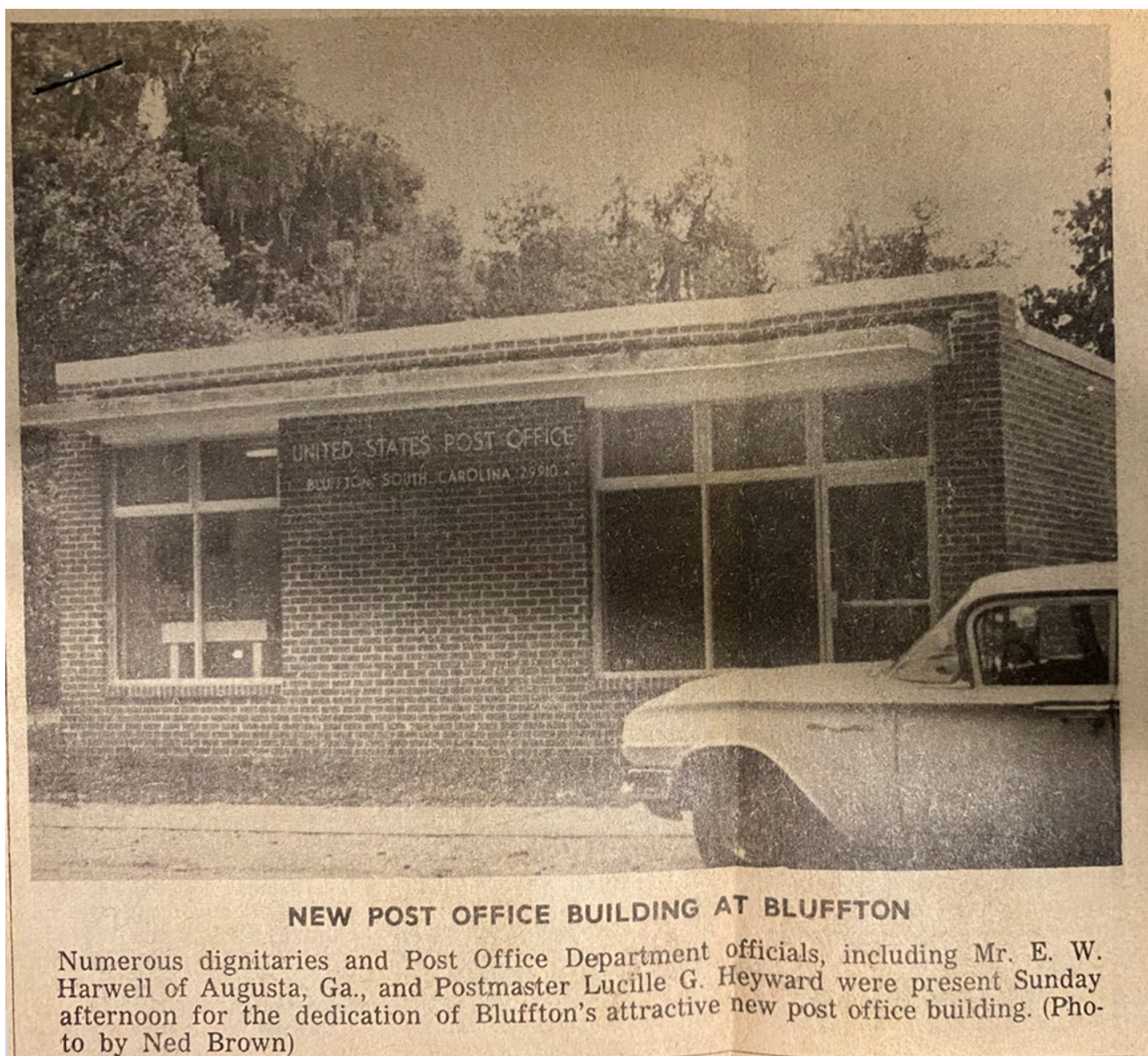


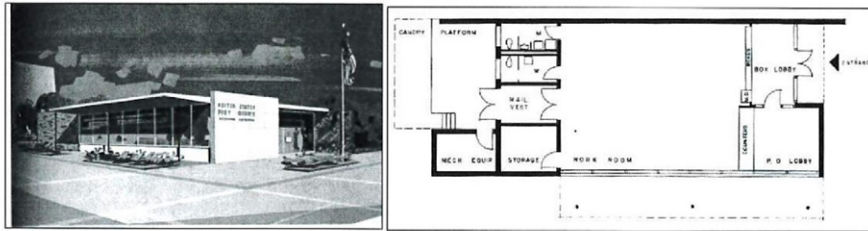
Figure 4
Beaufort Gazette clipping from week of May 16, 1964 showing New Post Office Building,
 no. 41 Bridge Street with original flat roof
 Courtesy of Joannie Heyward



Figure 5

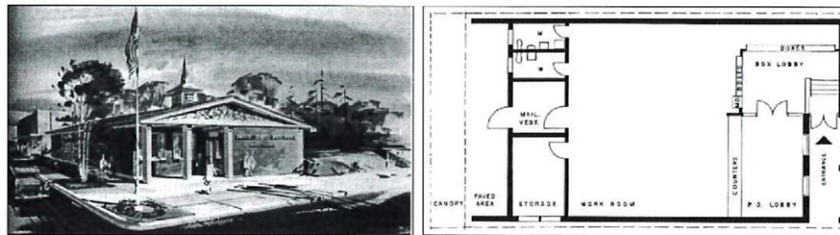
Eva Seaman Lynn, Officer-in-Charge, Bluffton Post Office
Raising Flag in front of Bluffton Post Office, no. 41 Bridge Street, c. 1975
Courtesy of Paul Tollefson

Building Designs featured two styles of post office: International (Figure 2-7) and Colonial Revival (Figure 2-8). The International Style predominated, and the building plans provided straightforward delineations of spaces.



Source: *Building Designs*, 1959

Figure 2-7: Plate 15, Design for 1,500-Square-Foot Area



Source: *Building Designs*, 1959

Figure 2-8: Plate 21, Design for 2,000-Square-Foot Area

Figure 6

URS Group, Inc. *USPS Nationwide Historic Context Study: Postal Facilities Constructed or Occupied Between 1940 and 1971*. Unpublished., 2012.



Figure 7
Bluffton Post Office with altered, low-pitch roof, c. 1976
Courtesy of Joannie Heyward

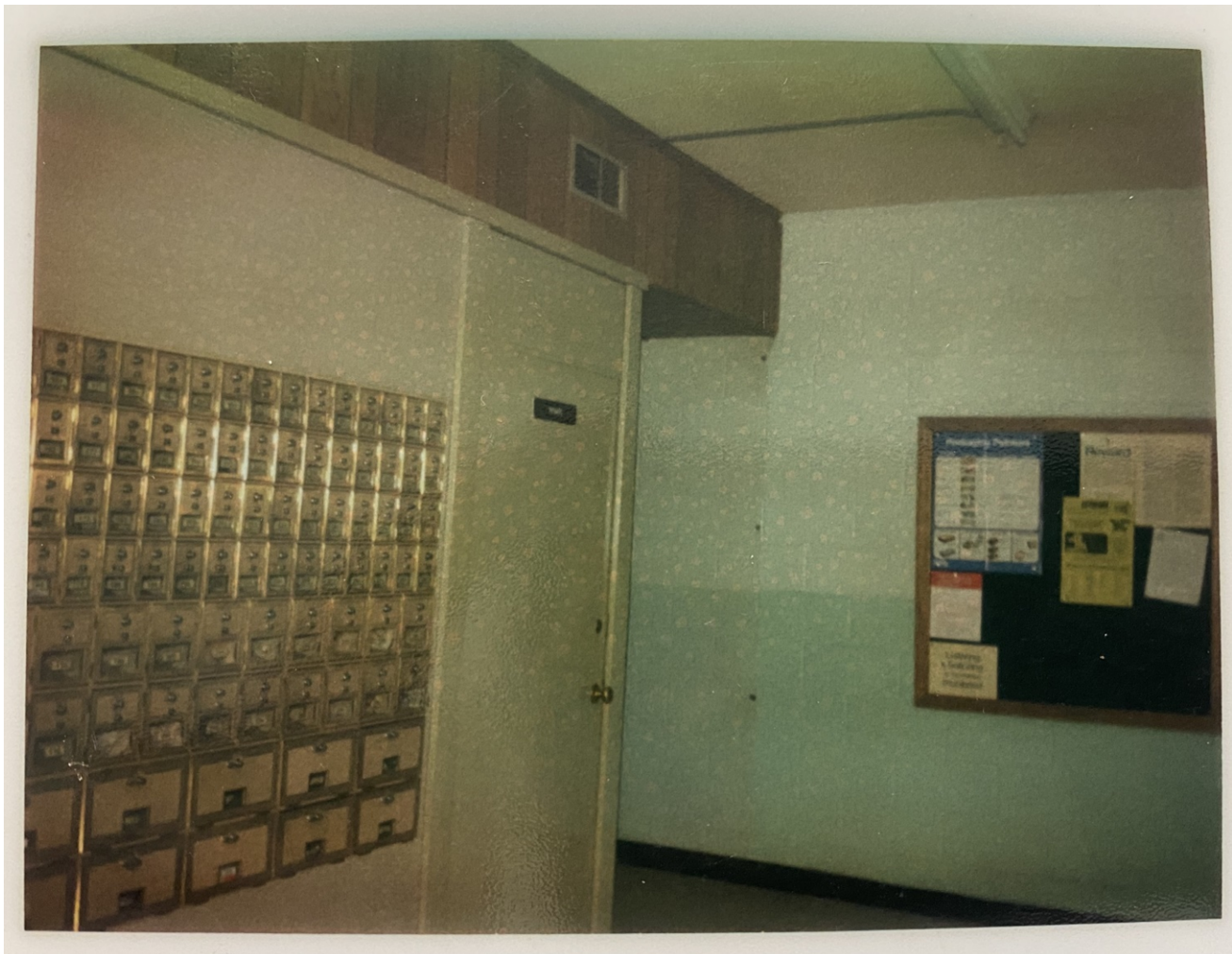


Figure 8
Bluffton Post Office interior, Mailbox Lobby, c. 1976
Courtesy of Joannie Heyward