



White River Valley Museum
918 8 Street SE
Auburn, WA 98002

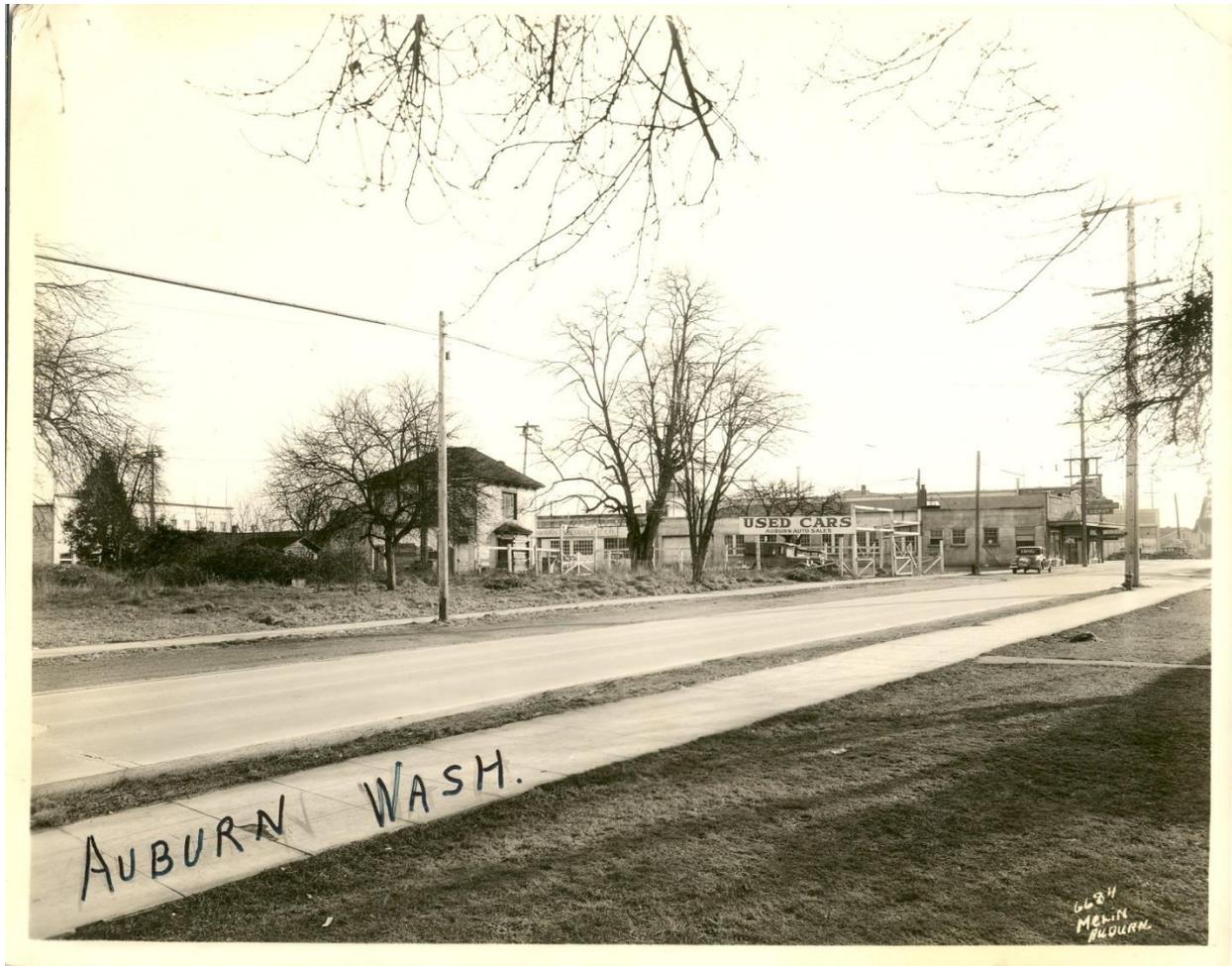
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RESEARCH REPORT

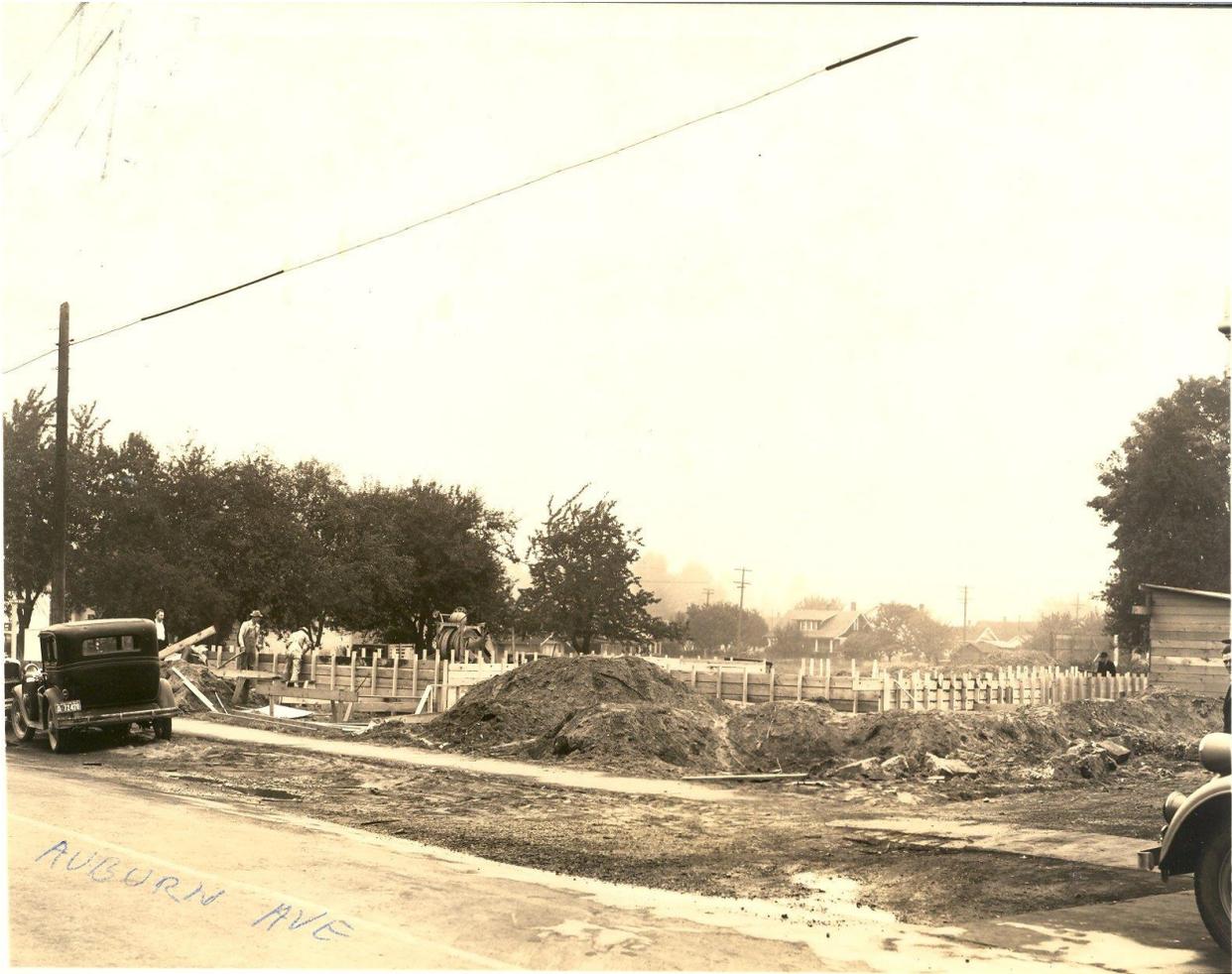
History of the Auburn Post Office Building

The Auburn United States Post Office building was built in 1937 and officially opened for business in March of 1938. Prior to the building of the 1937 Post Office, the official post office of Auburn was located in a building determined by the current postmaster, usually in a building owned by him or her. This resulted in the post office regularly moving locations until about 1915. It remained put at 106 East Main until the building of the 1937 building. Over time, other rural post offices closed – including Stuck, Green River and White River – the Auburn Post Office was assigned their workloads.

The 1937 building was funded in part through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) program. Many local construction projects during the Great Depression were funded in part or in whole by this federal program. The land for the post office was donated by Levi Ballard, an early Auburn citizen and the town's first postmaster in 1886. The Levi Ballard house can be seen in the center of the image below, shortly before it was demolished for the post office. (The brick building in the background of this image was partially preserved and repurposed as the Auburn Ave Theater.)



The building was designed by architects Louis A. Simon and James I. Barnes. Simon worked on many WPA projects, especially post offices. He preferred a Colonial Revival style, which is reflected in the symmetrical façade of the building and matching windows. Barnes also worked on a variety of WPA projects, many of which featured a Classical Revival style of architecture. Despite the architect's usual preferences, the Auburn Post Office was designed following a slightly more modern aesthetic, referred to today as Starved Classical or Modern Movement, which did away with many of the pillars and ornate details preferred in previous decades in favor of a cleaner, less imposing façade.



The Auburn Post Office Building under construction, September 1937



The Auburn Post Office under construction, November 1937.



The Auburn Post Office under construction – January 1938.



Completed Post Office building exterior, February 1938.



Interior of the Auburn Post Office, March 1938. The marble on the floor and counter was advertised as “Alaskan Marble.”

2,500 visitors came to see the official open house for the new post office building in 1938. The American Legion Drum & Bugle Corps and the Young Men’s Band played music, souvenir cars were given out, and the Auburn Garden Club provided flowers for the occasion. The post office employed 15 people at the time of its opening.

The building served as the Post Office building until 1963, when a newer, larger facility was built a few blocks away. Both the Auburn School District and the King County Health Department hoped to utilize the building for expansions of their services. The School District hoped to use it as a vocational training center for secondary students; the Health Department hoped to open its first public clinic in Auburn. The GSA awarded the building to the Health Department, who began renovations in 1964. The renovations included lowering the ceilings and repairing the furnace.

When the facility reopened in March 1964, the staff of the new facility included nine nurses and a clerk who did the following jobs: Rehab nursing for recently released hospital patients, inoculations of school-

ages children and adults, post-hospitalization care planning, medical supervising of new babies. The building continued to be used as a storage site for civil defense mobile hospital facilities, something which it had already been doing as a post office. Future plans for the clinic included a mental health program, once funding became available.

The building continued to be used as a public health building until 2009, when King County Public Health relocated to a newer building on Auburn Way. It remains vacant, though the City of Auburn began negotiations to acquire the building in 2015.

Sources

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*Photographs are all from the White River Valley Museum archives.