



Former La Follette Post Office, Campbell County, Tennessee

The former U.S. Post Office in La Follette, Tennessee was built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in ca. 1936 and functioned as a post office until 2008. Prior to 1936, the property was home to commercial buildings that were used for retail, warehousing, wagon storage, and as stables. During the 1950s, the basement of the historic building functioned as a bomb shelter for the city. From 2008 to 2013, the building sat vacant when La Follette Post Office operations moved into a new facility. In 2013, the city purchased the historic building at auction. In 2014, the Campbell County Historical Society, acting as a physical agent for a community group which later became the non-profit Postmark La Follette, approached the city to hold several different events within the building and began its transformation into an arts, culture, and history center. They partnered with the Campbell County High School Junior Leadership team and used the Christmas event to demonstrate their vision of what the building could be in the future. Since that time, Postmark La Follette has operated out of the building partnering with the city. This historic two-story brick building on 0.6-acres is located at 119 South Tennessee Avenue in downtown La Follette, Tennessee.



The former post office sat vacant from 2008 to 2014.

The ACM was found to be in non-friable condition and the Lead Based Paint was peeling in places. La Follette leveraged \$3,500 from the city budget to send their codes inspector to a lead-based paint abatement training program to remove and encapsulate the Lead Based Paint so it would not be a risk to users of the former post office. The fire department was then leveraged to paint the interior of the former post office. The Phase I ESA, LBP

Before this brownfield was transformed into a community asset, Campbell County completed a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA), Lead-Based Paint (LBP) Survey, Asbestos Survey, and Analysis for Brownfields Cleanup alternatives (ABCA) on the 6,760 square foot building using their EPA 104(k) Brownfields Assessment Grant. No Recognized Environmental Conditions (RECs) were determined to be present; however, asbestos was found to be present in caulking, insulation, flooring mastic, and floor tile in addition to the presence of lead-based



Lead-based paint was found throughout the building prior to being addressed.

and Asbestos Surveys, and ABCA expended \$10,000 of the EPA grant, but the city was able to pull in additional resources and partners in order to transform the former post office into the community asset it is today.

The property is now called Postmark La Follette and is a collaborative, creative placemaking project to establish and maintain an arts, culture, and history center within a historic structure to strengthen social and economic opportunities for the public through the arts. Throughout 2015, 198 volunteers donated a total of 16,243 hours to the county's nonprofit and arts and cultural organizations. This represents an estimated aggregate value of \$382,685 in leveraged time. The Tennessee Arts Commission invested \$6,000 in 2016 through a Creative Placemaking Grant to repurpose the former post office. In 2017, Postmark La Follette became a 501(c)3 and has hosted several events and programs by grants funded by the Tennessee Arts Commission, the East Tennessee Foundation, and the Campbell Enhancement Fund. Also in 2017, a \$50,000 grant from the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development Agency's (ECD) Asset Enhancement Grant funded a new heating and cooling system, lighting, and roof for the former Post Office. ECD partnered with the University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service to



The former post office before new windows were installed.



During 2019, the replacement of windows begun.

develop action-orientated, short-term goals based on the assets in distressed counties in Tennessee to drive economic development, which, at the time Campbell County was considered a distressed county. In 2018, The East Tennessee Foundation granted \$4,000 to paint the basement of the former post office to function as a green room for stage performances in addition to dressing rooms, a kitchen, and to provide storage. In fiscal years 2018-2019, State Senator Yager brought this project to the State Legislature and the Legislature approved a line item of \$50,000 for the replacement of period-appropriate replacement windows for the former post office as a capital improvement project. The new windows

meet the Department of Interior's Standards for Historic Rehabilitation on this National Register of Historic Places-listed property.

In 2019 and 2021, Postmark La Follette received two Campbell County Enhancement Fund grants totaling \$4,550 to host a free art camp for youth ages 10-18 in the summertime, supplying all materials needed and hiring an art teacher to teach the class. Some of the programming included learning the dying arts of regionally significant crafts including straw-weaving and making rugs out of rags. An in-kind match of 20% was provided

by community members in the form of volunteer labor for the camps. In 2019, the Tennessee Arts Commission granted \$8,000 to Postmark La Follette for hosting a monthly radio program titled *Postmark Jamboree* broadcast from the Postmark Arts, Culture and History Center. The radio broadcasts and TV simulcasts featured local storytellers and musicians in addition to honoring historical broadcasts of decades past. These events were held in the former post office building.

In 2019, Postmark La Follette was invited by the Tennessee Arts Commission to apply for \$10,000 Seed Learning Grant from the Central Appalachian Assembly, to fund start-up needs for the Co-op, which provides a marketplace for local artisans to support one of Postmarks' goals of economic development.

In 2019 and early 2020, seven Campbell County students completed films they made by interviewing Campbell Countians to create documentaries through the Film Works Grant. Students paired with local mentors in learning the basics of doing a filmed documentary and these films then debuted to the community at Postmark La Follette.

In 2020, the Tennessee Arts Commission, through an Arts Build Communities Grant, contributed \$1,290 for an interactive television show showcasing the history, traditions, culture, and uniqueness of Campbell County. The first episode of *The Trunk Show* focused on heirloom seeds featuring seeds,



Postmark Jamboree 2018 performance



Inside the building, the former's postmaster's office during its transformation.

memories, native plants of the region, and a performance to close the show by the Postmark Jamboree. This format was originally going to be an in-person roundtable, but due to the pandemic of 2020, the platform was shifted to a community public television station (WLAF) and online at Postmark La Follette's Facebook page and website.

In 2020, Postmark La Follette Arts, Culture and History Center received the 2020 *Region Strong* award from the Cumberland Gap Region Tourism Association recognizing exceptional contributions in their community including grant programs and community outreach projects in Campbell County.

In 2021, The BOSCH Community Fund awarded \$13,500 to Postmark La Follette to launch a STEM Project. STEM stands for science, technology, engineering, and math. The funding was used to hire STEM teachers to work with students on a project titled *We are the Future*, where students built models of what they envisioned their community to look like in the future.

The former postmaster's office has been converted into the Art Consortium, located within Postmark La Follette, and hosts several artists, artisans, crafters, and authors as well as musicians providing them the opportunity to showcase their handmade goods to sell within the space.

The city of La Follette plays an integral role in the continued success of this adaptive re-use by providing utilities, including trash removal, electricity, and water at the Postmark. Many government agencies, community members, non-profits, foundations, and private sector entities came together to provide funding, services, and time making this adaptive re-use of a former brownfields a community asset for this rural Appalachian community of La Follette.



The former postmaster's office was transformed into a co-op for handcrafted goods from local artisans.