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

historic (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building
and or common North Carolina National Bank Building

2. Location

street & number 358 South Main Street

3. Classification

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4. Owner of Property

name Jim Griggs

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Alamance County Courthouse

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Architectural Inventory of Burlington has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date 1981-1982

depository for survey records N.C. Division of Archives and History

city, town Raleigh state North Carolina
The (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building, constructed in 1928 to 1929, is the most prominent feature in the skyline of downtown Burlington, N.C. As the city's only true skyscraper, the nine-story building is visible from any approach to the business district. Coupled with its height, the building's Art Deco style—highlighted with fanciful passages yet dignified in its overall effect—stands as the hallmark of both the city center and the period of prosperity that produced it.

The exterior of the steel-framed (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building is remarkably intact. Its design is characterized by the rational organization of the design, a variety of materials, and a profusion of low-relief ornamentation. The rectangular block is situated on a corner lot so that it has two main, adjoining facades: five bays front East Davis Street and three bays face South Main Street. The design of the South Main Street facade continues around the corner on one bay of the north elevation. The rest of the north elevation and all of the east side are unadorned red brick. On all of the facades, the fenestration is uniform, consisting of double-hung sashes in the upper floors. On the two main facades, large six-paned windows appear at the bottom two levels. The basic horizontal tripartite organization of the main facades is typical of tall structures erected in the first few decades of this century. Mediating the overall vertical orientation, the (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building's arrangement, often compared to the "base-shaft-capital" division of a classical column, features rich granite ornamentation at the bottom and top pairs of stories and a fairly austere treatment of the middle five stories executed entirely in brick. The symmetrically ordered decoration combines traditional treatment of classical motifs with specifically Art Deco decoration of stylized forms.

The bottom two levels of the main facades are completely sheathed in granite that emphasizes the hard-edged, linear quality of the structure. Above a polished base, fluted pilasters rise through the two stories. Between these, recessed planes contain two stories of metal-framed windows separated by metal spandrels decorated with octagons and raised rectangles. Both of these stories of windows illuminated the bank lobby which originally was open through two stories and had two mezzanines. Carved ribbons intertwined around stylized foliate and geometrical medallions enframe the pilasters and run across the top of the mezzanine windows.

An elaborate entablature with a single band of sawtoothing at its base completes the design of the first two levels. "Atlantic Bank and Trust Company" carved in raised relief covers three bays of the frieze on each facade. Holes indicate that each of the letters originally were covered with metal, probably brass. On the East Davis Street facade, the frieze's end bays consist of panels with medallions flanked by eagles with wings unfurled. On the medallions, Liberty and Indian Heads found on early twentieth century coins refer to banking. A heavy modillion cornice finishes the entablature.

The two main entrances to the building are quite distinctive. In the bank entrance at the corner of the South Main Street facade, the octagonal motif is repeated in the design of the heavy sliding, double cast bronze doors. The doors are flanked by pilasters of smooth cut blocks with a bevelled corner. On the capitals surmounting the pilasters, stylized classical nudes, carved in relief, are in cramped reclining positions to conform to the irregular shape of the elements. Above, there is a lintel carved in a symmetrical pattern of stylized sunbursts, quatrefoils and other geometrical patterns. The larger entrance on East Davis Street, which provides access to both the bank and the offices above, is recessed and framed by elements similar to, but simpler in design than, those of the South Main Street entrance. Here, consoles with carved scrolls and foliate decoration take the place of the capitals and the lintel is metal, doubling as a spandrel beneath a mezzanine window.
The middle five floors of the main facades consist primarily of light yellow brick. Except for the end bays of the South Main Street elevation, the simple rectangular windows are paired on each story. The resulting vertical emphasis is accentuated by spandrels of black bricks in rows of sawtoothing in the central bays, thus creating a secondary, vertical tripartite organization above the first two floors.

This vertical tripartite organization continues into the top two floors with the spandrels and an extensive application of ornament. The eight-story windows in the end bays are flanked by fluted pilasters and topped with a zig-zag band. Ascending from this band is the granite surround of the windows in the ninth-floor end bays. The central bays of the top two floors are distinguished by fluted half-columns framing the windows as they rise through the two stories to stylized foliate capitals. The entire composition is completed by an ornate parapet with simple fret bands in the end bays and an alternating series of carved cattle skulls and Aztec-derived masks above the foliate capitals in the central bays. A red brick elevator shaft and an octagonal smokestack, each decorated with chevrons of black and light-yellow bricks, project from the top of the east elevation.

The interior of the (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building consists of rental offices on the upper floors and the quarters of the bank, traditionally the building's major tenant and owner, on the first two floors and basement. As originally designed, the banking quarters were elegant. They may be entered directly from South Main Street, through a small foyer of plate glass in a brass frame with very slender, stylized Corinthian colonnettes at the corners and stylized geometrical cresting around the top. The main banking floor, open two stories with mezzanines at the east and west ends, was characterized by cream-colored marble wainscoting, dark green marble baseboards with decorative brass register grilles, tile floors, deep coved crown molding, and an Art Deco chandelier of successively smaller, descending tiers. Between the large windows fronting East Davis Street and lining the facing, north wall, pilasters rose from floor to ceiling.

A long, single-run staircase on the north wall rose to the west mezzanine containing the directors' room and rest rooms. Beneath this balcony, there was the cashier's office, partitioned from the rest of the lobby with dark panelled wood. The east mezzanine, with an elevator connecting it to the basement, also contained offices. Both mezzanine balconies were faced with marble and decorated with machicolation.

Initially, the row of tellers' booths along the north wall was enclosed so that each booth of dark panelled wood had a window at the front and a door at the rear. At the west end of the booths, an enclosed, marble-lined staircase descends to the basement containing the vaults, additional offices, and utility rooms. The main vault is typical, the size of a small room and of thick steel construction. The smaller book vault, moved to this building from the Atlantic Bank and Trust Company's previous quarters, features an ornate surround with fluted pilasters and swan's neck pediment.
From the building's main lobby at the East Davis Street entrance, access is gained to the upper floors by an elevator or an enclosed narrow, winding metal staircase. In the lobby, the elevator has decorative brass doors and a round brass floor-dial mounted on the marble-faced wall above. Next to the elevator there is an ornate brass letter box at the base of the mail chute that runs from the top floor. Except for the marble wainscoting in the corridors, the upper floors of offices are fairly plain, with plaster walls, wooden doors with a large frosted pane of glass and a single-pane transom, and simple moldings. All of the bathrooms are completely tiled.

While the upper floors of offices and the lobby at the East Davis Street entrance remain intact, the banking quarters have been altered substantially. In the 1940s, the mezzanines were linked to create a new second floor of offices for the bank. During a thorough renovation in 1961, the original tellers' booths were replaced, the tile floors were carpeted, and the walls, including the pilasters and marble wainscoting, were covered with paint or wallpaper. The brass-framed foyer, marble staircase to the basement, marble baseboards and brass grilles all remain intact.

The only structural work executed was the cutting of an archway in the north wall of the bank lobby to the adjoining store facing South Main Street, which was converted to offices. (Although previously there was no passageway between this one-story commercial building and the (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building, it appears that the smaller building was part of the same construction project that yielded the tower. The polished granite base is continuous with that of the bank building and the facade is granite carved with Art Deco motifs—similar but not identical to the bank's—enframing plate glass display windows.) The display windows of the store facade were covered with enameled metal when the bank expanded. The exterior of the (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building remains completely intact except for the conversion of a first-floor window on East Davis Street to a metal-framed entrance directly to the bank lobby.

(Description of original aspects of the building which have been altered are based upon an interview with Ms. Nina Mebane in Burlington, N.C., January 1983. Ms. Mebane, who worked in the bank from 1929 to 1974, has several early photographs of the interior.)
8. Significance

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Specific dates 1928-29 Builder/Architect Charles C. Hartmann

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building is one of the most significant, pivotal structures in downtown Burlington. As the most distinctive feature of the city's skyline, it represents the pinnacle of pride, optimism, and success which characterized Burlington in the 1920s and produced an ambitious building effort citywide. Related through mergers and acquisitions, the three banks that have been the building's owner and major tenant for most of its history all have played leading roles in the local economy. The elegant Art Deco design of the building was executed by Charles C. Hartmann of Greensboro, one of North Carolina's foremost architects.

Criteria Assessment

A. The (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building is a striking expression of the prosperity that characterized Burlington from the mid-1910s to 1930 and yielded a spate of buildings.

B. Charles C. Hartmann, one of the foremost architects practicing in North Carolina from around 1920 to the 1960s, designed the (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building. Hartmann was trained in New York according to Beaux Arts methods and is best known for several Greensboro landmarks, most notably the Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Company Building.

C. The (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building is a handsome example of the Art Deco style in its own right and the only full-blown instance of the mode in Burlington.
Historical Background

The (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building is Burlington's visible culmination of the period from mid-1910s to 1930 that was characterized by prosperity and a resultant citywide building effort. Its nine-story height that dominates the City's skyline and its elegant Art Deco design represent the pinnacle of pride and optimism which prevailed in Burlington in the 1920s. As the high-water mark of the city's commercial architecture, it is appropriate that the (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building was erected by a respected regional financial institution with roots in Burlington's burgeoning textile industry of the turn of the century.

The development of this major construction project, and its importance locally, is expressed in contemporary newspaper articles. On April 5, 1928, the Burlington Daily Times printed an unconfirmed report that the Atlantic Bank and Trust Company, a "powerful financial institution of Central North Carolina," would shortly begin construction of an eight to twelve-story combination banking/home office building on the corner of South Main and East Davis streets. This rumor received some confirmation in an April 20 advertisement for Wysong's Men's Shop, which was selling all of its stock in preparation for a forced move from its building at the corner of South Main and East Davis streets.

Official confirmation of the impending construction appeared in late August when bids for the various components of the project were invited from 33 local and foreign contractors. The bids announcement stated that the Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building "when completed will take its place in the forefront of modern banking homes of the South." The newspaper went on to say that:

The bank "front" will display a stone design embodying advanced ideas in this type architecture, and this type, as it is viewed today, is looked upon as an art work. Chas. C. Hartman (sic), of Greensboro, drew the plans.

Trained in New York under masters of the Beaux Arts School of Architecture, Hartmann had been based in Greensboro since around 1920 when Julian Price, vice-president of the Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Company, hired him to design the insurance company's new headquarters. Hartmann had first become known in Greensboro in 1919, when he supervised construction of the O'Henry Hotel for the New York architectural firm of William L. Stoddard. His design for the seventeen-story Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Building firmly established him as an accomplished architect and launched an approximately forty-year career as one of North Carolina's foremost architects. During that period, Hartmann designed many of Greensboro's commercial institutional landmarks, as well as numerous notable residences. In 1924, he designed Burlington's Alamance Hotel, then the city's tallest building. It was no surprise that the Atlantic Bank and Trust Company chose Hartmann as the architect for the new bank building that was to be Burlington's greatest construction project to date. S.J. Hinsdale, Cashier of the Burlington office of the Atlantic Bank and Trust Company, commented, "We believe...that our building plans are equally as advanced for Burlington as the Jefferson Standard was for Greensboro."
J.R. Owen and Son, of Greensboro, won the general contract on the building with their bid of $157,121.00. Two other Greensboro firms received the contract for the plumbing and heating while the local Alamance Electrical Company was awarded the electrical contract. Otis Elevator Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, was to provide elevators for the building. Total investment in the building was anticipated to exceed $300,000.00. When construction on the nine-story building began late in 1928, it was expected to require six to nine months for completion.

It is noteworthy that a project of such magnitude was undertaken in late 1920s, practically on the eve of the Great Depression. Indeed, the building opened just one month shy of the stock market crash, and as construction commenced eleven months earlier economic difficulties were multiplying nationwide. In Burlington, some financial institutions already were suffering due to overextension during the massive building boom of the early and mid-1920s. Anxiety about the abatement of the tremendous accomplishments of which the city was so proud may have contributed to these effusive comments that accompanied the announcement of the distribution of plans for bids on the Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building:

These banking house officials who are investing heavily in the future of Burlington, are thus indicating their faith in a city that is already powerful industrially, and industry is the hub about which a city is born and grows.

The faith of this development is the belief (sic) that nowhere in the state; that nowhere in the entire South, is there a city basically more sound nor with better promise of rapid progress ahead along every line.

The Atlantic Bank and Trust Company was based in Greensboro, where its president for many years was Julius W. Cone, a member of one of Greensboro's pioneering textile families. In 1922, the bank opened a branch office in Burlington, apparently by acquisition of Alamance Bank and Trust Company. An announcement in the October, 1922 issue of Tarheel Banker states, "The Alamance Bank and Trust Company was officially opened on July 8 as the Burlington branch of the Atlantic Bank and Trust Company of Greensboro." The Alamance Bank and Trust Company had close ties with local textile leaders. As early as 1902, the Alamance Bank and Trust Company was listed in Burlington City Directories and for many years its president was J.M. Holt. The new Burlington office of Atlantic Bank and Trust Company remained in the two-story brick building on East Davis Street, occupied for many years by Alamance Bank and Trust, until the Atlantic directors decided to build their impressive tower across the street.

Just as the new building was nearing completion, the Atlantic Bank and Trust Company merged with Citizens National Bank of Raleigh, Murchison National Bank of Wilmington, American National Bank and Trust Company of Greensboro, First National Bank of Rocky Mount, and Rocky Mount Savings and Trust Company. The new financial institution was named North Carolina National Bank and Trust Company. According to the annual report of the North Carolina Banking Department, North Carolina Bank and Trust Company opened for business on September 30, 1929, with a branch in Burlington. At the close of 1931,
its capital stock was $2,500,000.00 and the bank had offices in High Point, Kinston, Monroe, Raleigh, Rocky Mount, Salisbury, Scotland Neck, Speed, Spencer, Tarboro, Wallace, and Wilmington, in addition to Burlington and the home office in Greensboro. The president of the new bank was W.S. Ryland; S.J. Hinsdale remained cashier until his retirement in 1930, when he was succeeded by J.B. Tutwiler. The coincidence of the merger with the completion of Burlington's new bank building is reflected in the sign "Atlantic Bank and Trust Company" carved in the stone frieze of the two main facades.

The grand opening of the building at the end of 1929 was a major event featuring T.C. Anderson's orchestra, playing on the east mezzanine overlooking the bank lobby. The building's distinctive exterior, reflective of Hartmann's Beaux Arts training in its ordered combination of classical and pure Art Deco elements, and the elegant interior of the lower levels were fitting for a regional bank. The upper floors of offices, included to provide income to the bank to pay for the cost of construction, were quickly rented. Over the years, tenants included dentists, physicians, insurance and real estate agents, attorneys, accountants, an architect, and the offices of several firms associated with the local textile industry.

In 1933, North Carolina Bank and Trust Company succumbed to the critical conditions of the country's economy. During a national bank holiday, North Carolina Bank and Trust Company reorganized as Security National Bank and liquidated the Burlington branch. It wasn't until 1936 that Security National Bank opened its office in the (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building. Renovation in the 1940s of the banking quarters for additional offices and the erection of another local branch on Church Street in 1954 were some indications of Security's success.

On July 1, 1961, Security National Bank and American Commercial Bank merged to form North Carolina National Bank. J. Spencer Love, of Burlington Industries, was elected to the general board of directors. The local board of directors was composed of bankers and other industry executives. North Carolina National Bank remained the Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building's owner and principal tenant until the early 1980s when it constructed a new building a few blocks away. During the 1970s, the other tenants had moved to new quarters as downtown Burlington suffered a decline in patronage. By the time North Carolina National Bank moved to its new building in 1982, all of the upper floors of the old Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building were vacant. NCNB sold the building and today its owner, local businessman Jim Griggs, is looking for a buyer who will preserve the still elegant city landmark.
Notes

(Much of the data on this building was compiled by Allison Harris, who conducted the architectural inventory of Burlington.)


4. Ibid.


7. "Plans For New Bank Building..."


9. "Plans For New Bank Building..."

10. See advertisements in Tarheel Banker throughout the 1920s.
12  See Burlington city directories for the early 1900s.
13  Tarheel Banker, Vol. 8, No. 4, October 1929, pp. 51-52.
14  State of North Carolina Banking Department, Report on the Condition of the State Banks at the Close of Business on December 31, 1931, pp. 87 and 90.
15  Nina Mebane, typescript of unpublished personal recollections of her career in the banking quarters of the (Former) Atlantic Bank and Trust Company Building, in her possession in Burlington, N.C.
16  Ibid.
17  See Burlington city directories for the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.
18  Nina Mebane.
19  Ibid.
See Continuation Sheets

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property: less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name: Burlington, N.C.

UTM References

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Quadrangle scale: 1:24000

Verbal boundary description and justification

Block 4, Lot 19, Burlington Tax Maps, Map #2

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

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Claudia P. Roberts

organization: Consultant to the City of Burlington

date: 3-15-83

street & number: 425 South Lexington Avenue

telephone: 227-3603 Ext. 79

city or town: Burlington

state: North Carolina

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national: X 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

For NPS use only

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

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: Chief of Registration