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NATIONAL PARI< SERVICE

HISTORIC

Branch Banking & Trust Company Building

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 124 West Nash Street

(CW Corner Nash and Goldsboro Street)

CITY, TOWN Wilson

STREET & NUMBER 223 West Nash Street

CITY, TOWN Wilson

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Wilson County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN Wilson

TITLE Wilson Historic Properties Commission Survey

DATE

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN Wilson

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN Wilson


**DESCRIPTION**

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<tr>
<th>CONDITION</th>
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<td><em>EXCELLENT</em></td>
<td><em>DETERIORATED</em></td>
<td><em>UNALTERED</em></td>
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<td><em>GOOD</em></td>
<td><em>RUINS</em></td>
<td><em>ORIGINAL SITE</em></td>
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<td><em>FAIR</em></td>
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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Branch Bank Building, erected in 1903, is a handsome, two story brick commercial structure executed in the formal Neo-Classical, Second Renaissance style. Working with a long, narrow corner site, the designer was able to achieve a pleasing, well-proportioned, and dignified scheme by combining classical vocabulary with then-current materials and stylistic preferences. Since many early banks of this era have subsequently been replaced or so heavily remodelled that their original charm and elegance has been lost, Branch Bank is significant not only for the quality of its original design and execution, but also for its remarkable state of preservation.

Situated on the southwest corner of Nash and Goldsboro Streets in the heart of Wilson's commercial district and directly across the street from the Wilson County Courthouse, the two-story, pressed blond brick building is set on grade over a full basement. Much of the architectural detailing such as the window surrounds, pediment, columns and capitals is executed in a reddish sandstone colored soft concrete contrasting with the lighter brick walls. An overhanging pressed metal cornice wraps around the two principal facades of the structure and defines the roofline. Originally a classical-style parapet with pedestals linked by a turned baluster balustrade crowned the building. The roof parapet gave the structure a stylistic completeness and lightness that it deserves.

The treatment of the principal facades reflects the arrangement of detailing found on Renaissance urban palaces. The lower level, the least significant serving as a basis for the richer detailing of the intermediate level, is articulated by two horizontal bands of concrete. The lower band is a water table which expresses the actual height of the floor, while the higher course is a string course beneath the windows. The bands set against the plain brickwork emphasize the horizontal. The intermediate level of the elevations possesses the richest detail. Channeled brickwork radiates from the keystone and voussoirs surrounding the handsome circular-headed windows. The upper or attic level returns to plain brick walls, but the channelling of the intermediate level is echoed in the channeled pilasters set at the corners of the main facade and between each bay on the east side.

The main facade features an engaged triangular pediment carried on brick Ionic pilasters flanked to the interior by concrete fluted Ionic columns. Both are set on a common high pedestal. The full entablature which carries the name "Branch Banking Company" in the slightly recessed frieze panel and the date of the building's completion "1903" occurs in the tympanum.

The doorway, which is not original, is set within an elongated arched opening that corresponds in height to the circular headed windows along the east side. A brick archivolt and concrete keystone outline the upper portion of the opening. Modern double plate glass entrance doors are hung between full-length sidelights. The upper half of the arched opening is filled by a large circular-headed window with the muntins of the arched section set in a radiating pattern. The arched motif is echoed in the projecting band set against the window over the double entrance doors.
Initially the entrance was recessed beneath the engaged pediment and reached by a flight of steps rising between the pedestal bases to the columns. Old sketches of the building suggest that the original doors to the bank were located behind the fluted Ionic columns which were freestanding. A circular-headed window with an archivolt and keystone that appears to have been quite similar to the present scheme was set within the recessed front wall. When the entrance was brought forward is not known, but was probably not until sometime after the First World War.

The upper level of the main facade is set with two small, square windows flanking the engaged pediment. The windows have deep concrete architraves with crossetted corners. Channelled pilasters with banded concrete capitals are set at the corners. The overhanging, pressed metal modillion cornice and richly accented frieze are set above a concrete stepped architrave.

The east or long side is also treated as a principal facade owing to the corner site of the structure and is equally as elaborate in its detail. A range of four large circular-headed windows, defining the original four bay length of the building, dominates the intermediate level. The channelled brickwork radiates from the high keystone and voussoirs surrounding each arched opening. Each window has an arched central sash surrounded by radiating side panels filled with beautiful leaded glass. The southernmost of the original bays is full-length and incorporates a secondary entrance to the banking lobby. It is set with a modern, plateglass door.

The second story has coupled one over one sash surrounded by wide concrete architraves identical in detailing to those on the main facade. By coupling the sashes, the designer was able to achieve a nearly square opening, and, although larger than its High Renaissance counterparts, the scheme recalls the Classical treatment of the uppermost or attic level windows. Channelled pilasters with banded capitals are set at the corners and between the interior windows.

In 1934 a three bay extension was made to the end of the building. The style of the original building was so carefully reproduced that it is difficult to detect the newer fabric. The second floor faithfully continues the pattern established by the original scheme, but the main level is slightly different. Owing to the length of the building, an arched passageway was located between the rear of the original section and the addition. The stilted arched covering of the passageway is carried on richly detailed consoles.

In the addition, a handsome segmental arched frontispiece cast of the same reddish concrete used in the 1903 section frames the entrance crowded between the two circular-headed windows. A round window with leaded glass glazing is set above it.

The overall effect of the Branch Bank is one of quiet monumentality carefully
scaled not to overpower the diminutive structure. The scale and repetition of the Classical detailing is handled with restraint creating a high style elegance infrequently found in smaller buildings.

Interior

The high-ceilinged banking lobby with a mezzanine balcony occupies the entire first floor of the 1903 section of the building. The entrances were originally on the same level as the banking floor but was lowered to the street level when the entrances were altered. Now the banking floor level is reached by a short flight of steps set immediately inside the entrances.

Most of the woodwork dates from 1903 and is Neo-Classical in styling. The walls are panelled to the window sill level and are plastered (now wallpapered) above. A highly decorative coffer-patterned pressed metal ceiling with a coved cornice accented with delicate Adamesque motifs crowns the interior space.

Each of the circular-headed windows has an interesting surround that was designed to correspond to the original teller's cages. Each window has a diminutive Ionic pilaster carrying a much taller flat-panelled pilaster and an entablature with egg and dart molding. The spandrels are left undecorated. Louvered blinds with a radiating motif to the upper section completely shade the windows. Although the upper portion of the original panelled tellers' cages with Ionic columns carrying an entablature and iron grilles is gone, the lower portion has survived. Neo-Classical in feeling, the base is detailed with large flat panels set with applied egg and dart molding. The variegated marble baseboard matched the countertops.

A balcony, reached by a flight of steps rising immediately to the left of the main entrance, stretches across the front and side of the lobby. The present railing and solid balustrade do not appear to be original. A wooden balustrade with plain, square balusters and newels still in place on the back stair leading to the open second floor room is more typical of the original treatment.

Although the lobby has been remodelled several times, a large amount of the original fabric remains. The appointments were as carefully detailed in the Neo-Classical style as the exterior, offering not only an example of fine craftsmanship but also a stylistic continuity between the exterior and interior of the building. This is a remarkable occurrence when the pressures to "modernize" a commercial structure over its seventy-four year history are considered.
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Branch Banking and Trust Building in Wilson is among North Carolina's most elegant and perfectly preserved examples of the small but monumental Neo-Classical banks of the early twentieth century. The two-story brick building is distinguished by fine detail handled in an unusually sophisticated composition and beautifully adapted to its long corner lot. Built in 1903, the building was constructed for the Branch Banking Company, a firm whose antecedent had opened in Wilson by Alpheus Branch and T. J. Hadley in 1872. Chartered in 1889, the firm remained a private institution until 1900; in the twentieth century it has expanded to become one of the state's major banks, and this, located in the town where the firm began, is its oldest building and first permanent banking facility.

Criteria assessment:
A. Associated with the development of banking in the state and the economic history of Wilson.
B. Associated with life of Alpheus Branch, an important business leader.
C. Embodies distinctive characteristics of early twentieth century Neo-Classical commercial and specifically bank buildings in an unusually fine and unaltered building.

Following the Civil War, banks in North Carolina were virtually liquidated. The old state banks were forced to discontinue operations due to a heavy tax placed on them by Congress. Although many private banks were chartered from 1865 to 1870, only a small percentage was able to organize, because the necessary capital could not be raised.

The only practical basis on which business could be conducted was credit, and it is almost impossible to imagine how farmers and businessmen would have conducted business without the aid of private bankers during this period. One private banking firm which succeeded as a forerunner of a significant chartered bank opened in 1872 in Wilson. It was the banking firm of Alpheus Branch and Thomas Jefferson Hadley, which was listed as Branch, Hadley, and Company, G. S. Fertilizer and Cotton Buyers, in the 1872 N. C. Business Directory by Levi Branson.

The firm of Branch and Hadley was formed when Wilson was 23 years old and had a population of a little over 1,000 people. The business was located at the corner of Barnes and Tarboro Streets and is shown on Gray's New Map of Wilson as Branch, Hadley, and Farmer in 1882. Charles Farmer, bookkeeper, did not remain with the firm very long. The firm accepted time deposits, sold foreign drafts and engaged in the usual transactions of the private banker.
Alpheus Branch, for whom the bank is named, was born in Halifax County on May 7, 1843, son of Captain Samuel Warren and Mary Branch. His father was an extensive planter and sent his son to be educated at Deems Military Academy in Wilson, Horner School in Oxford, and Trinity College. Alpheus left Trinity at the age of seventeen to volunteer in the Scotland Neck Calvalry, in which he served with gallantry. He became interested in military organizations, and after the war served as an honorary member of the Wilson Infantry Company.

After his discharge from the Confederate Army, he returned to Halifax and became successful enough during the three years following 1865 to become a private banker for neighboring farmers. He received deposits from them, put the money to use, and paid them interest until the funds were withdrawn to finance spring planting.

On November 7, 1865, he married Nannie Barnes, only daughter of General Joshua Barnes, a respected leader in Wilson County. They moved to Wilson, and by 1869 Alpheus Branch had established a mercantile business named Branch and Company. In 1872 he joined forces with Thomas Jefferson Hadley and formed the firm of Branch and Hadley, forerunner of Branch Banking and Trust Company. In 1887 he bought Mr. Hadley's interest and changed the name to Branch and Company, Bankers.

Throughout his relatively short life, Mr. Branch was destined to be a successful businessman. He engaged in many business enterprises, such as Wilson Cotton Mills (established in 1883), of which he was president and principal owner. He was a director of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad and owned considerable stock. He was also one of the original directors of the Bank of Wilson (later the First National Bank of Wilson), chartered in 1874. He was listed at the age of 27 as owning real property worth $10,000 in the 1870 Census of Wilson County. Josephus Daniels in the Tar Heel Editor described him as:

... one of the wealthiest citizens. Mr. Branch was the one businessman in Wilson who dressed in the latest style and put on "lugs," having a carriage and footman. It set him apart and people looked askance at what they regarded as his putting on airs. But because he was most successful in business—he had an almost uncanny knowledge of money-making—and was a man of substance and character, nobody except Sheriff Sims felt free to jump on him.

Aside from being a shrewd businessman, Alpheus Branch was an active member in the social and cultural events of the Wilson community. In 1873 he, along with Frank W. Barnes and H. G. Whitehead, built a hall over a building on the corner of Tarboro and Green Streets occupied by Dempsey Bullock's store. The hall was named "Mamona", made up from the first two letters of the Christian names of the wives of the three gentlemen: Mattie Barnes, Mollie Whitehead, and Nannie Branch. Mamona Hall was Wilson's first opera house and the scene of many gay social affairs through the years.
According to Daisy Hendley Gold's "A Town Named Wilson," Mr. Branch was active in the educational arena also. He was trustee of the Wilson Male Academy in 1890 and served as treasurer of the Wilson Graded Schools in 1891. He was considered a philanthropist of sorts, ready to give money for educational, social, and religious purposes. Early records reveal he was a devout Episcopalian and a member of the Democratic party.

Alpheus Branch and his wife had six children: Ximena, Alpheus, Matilda, Nannie, Ellen, and Joshua. They lived in a large beautiful home at the corner of Nash and Pine Streets, as noted on Gray's 1882 Map of Wilson. They built another house at the corner of Nash Street and Park Avenue. It was here that Mr. Branch died, at the age of 50, on January 3, 1893. The cause of death was listed as brain trouble in the Record of the January 10, 1893, issue of the Wilson Mirror, proclaimed him the, "... wealthiest, most influential and most useful citizen ... broad-gauged and liberal minded ... he was the most affable and delightful gentlemen we ever met, and no one could surpass him in those courtly graces and princely courtesies which always distinguish and proclaim the cultured and polished well bred gentlemen ..."

Mr. Branch's partner, Thomas Jefferson Hadley, was born on July 9, 1838 in Wayne County in a section which is now Wilson County. He was educated at the Wilson Male Academy and the University of North Carolina, where he received bachelor of arts and law degrees. When the War Between the States broke out, he enlisted as a private in 1862. He was slightly wounded at the Battle of Falling Waters and shot in the left shoulder at the Battle of the Wilderness. He was promoted to captain at Petersburg in December of 1864.

Mr. Hadley was head of the movement in Wilson to establish and organize the first system of public schools and became the first chairman of the board of trustees. His own early training had been acquired at the inadequate schools of the day, and he never lost sight of the need for public education. On page 152, Volume 4, of Biographical History of North Carolina, edited by Samuel A. Ashe and published in 1906, Mr. Hadley is described:

"In person Mr. Hadley is tall, erect, and without stiffness. He is approachable without encouraging familiarity, pleasant and easy in manner without compromising his natural dignity."

He was married to Sallie Sanders in 1867 and had five children: Lucien S., Sally, Thomas J., Jr., Mary, and Mattie. After a long and useful life, Mr. Hadley died on August 3, 1917 at the age of 79. The cause of death was listed in the Record of Maplewood Cemetery as paralysis.

In 1887 Alpheus Branch bought out T. J. Hadley's interest in the banking firm of
Branch and Hadley for $81,000 and moved to new quarters on Nash Street. He set up a new bank called Branch and Company, Bankers. In 1889 Mr. Branch, together with T. J. Hadley, General Joshua Barnes, J. F. Bruton, R. L. Thompson, and Walter Brodie, secured a charter from the Legislature of North Carolina for a second bank known as the Wilson Banking and Trust Company. At the 1891 session of the legislature the name was changed to The State Bank of Wilson, and in 1893 it was changed to The Branch Banking Company. Branch and Company was a separate institution operating simultaneously. In 1900 Branch Banking Company bought out Branch and Company and became the firm now known as Branch Banking and Trust Company.

Alpheus Branch died in 1893, and W. P. Simpson, executor of Branch's estate, became president of the bank. Simpson died in 1896 and Judge H. G. Connor took over the management of the bank. H. G. Connor was one of North Carolina's most respected judges. He served as judge of the N. C. Superior Court from 1885 to 1893 and as a United States District Court Judge from 1907 until his death in 1924. He served as president of Branch and Company, Bankers until 1900 when the company was bought by Branch Banking Company. He was elected president of this company and remained so until 1907.

By 1901 the tobacco market had brought permanent prosperity to Wilson. The banks in the town prospered also. The Branch Banking Company opened a savings department on December 20, 1902, and had expanded enough by the following year to require new quarters. On July 6, 1903, H. G. Whitehead and wife, Nolia G. Whitehead, conveyed a lot known as "The Branch Bank Building lot" at the corner of Nash and Goldsboro Streets to The Branch Banking Company in consideration of the sum of $3,250. It opened up for business in 1904 and has been in continuous operation since that time.

Since 1904, Branch Bank has constantly expanded in departments, stockholders, and branch offices. It opened a trust department in 1907, thus becoming among the first in the state to engage actively in trust activities. The 1920s saw Branch Banking and Trust Company make great strides forward in every area of activity. Resources increased 64% and deposits jumped 119%. The establishment of branch offices began in 1921 with an office at Bailey. This was later discontinued. During the Depression years, the building on the corner of Nash and Goldsboro Streets was the only bank in Wilson that remained open. Its resources rose steadily and the bank continued to open branch offices, while the aggregate resources of North Carolina banks declined, as did the number of banking units. The company is now a major North Carolina bank.

In 1934 Branch Banking and Trust Company remodeled the main office and purchased property behind this building on Goldsboro Street upon which it constructed another building connected with the original structure. The property was purchased from two parties in June of 1934 and recorded in Deed Book 214, pages 220 and 203 in the Wilson County Registry. Much care was taken to make this addition compatible with the original architecture. In fact, it is difficult to tell that an addition was made.
Today, although a new home office for Branch Bank has been built further west on Nash Street, this building on the corner of Goldsboro and Nash Streets still serves as a major branch of the bank. It is significant in that Branch Bank is claimed to be the oldest continuous operating bank in the state and this building is the oldest existing building used by the bank. Although it has been remodeled, the building has remained basically intact, and is a prime example of the formal Neo-Classical, second Renaissance style.

Chain of Title

1. Nolia Gardner was allotted the "two story brick storehouse and lot on the corner of Goldsboro and Nash Streets in a special proceeding to partition the land of her father, Thomas J. Gardner in 1888. Special Proceedings Book 2, page 258, Wilson County Clerk of Superior Court's Office.

2. Mr. H. G. Whitehead and wife, Nolia G. Whitehead, on July 6, 1903, conveyed the lot to the Branch Banking Company, predecessor to Branch Banking and Trust Company. Book 65, page 479, Wilson County Registry.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY
LATITUDE
Longitude: 77° 54' 36"
WORLD REFERENCE SYSTEM
Latitude: 35° 43' 29"
UTM REFERENCES
A
EASTING 1
NORTHING 1
ZONE 1
C
D
ZONE 1
EASTING 1
NORTHING 1
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE
NAME/TITLE
Description prepared by Mary Shoemaker, Consultant
Significance prepared by Vicki Craft, Planning Technician, Wilson
ORGANIZATION
Division of Archives and History
STREET & NUMBER
109 East Jones Street
CITY OR TOWN
Raleigh
STATE North Carolina

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION
THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:
NATIONAL
STATE X
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
TITLE
State Historic Preservation Officer
DATE January 12, 1978
FOR NPS USE ONLY
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DATE
ATTEST:
DATE
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER


*N. C. Business Directory, 1872.*

*Record of Maplewood Cemetery [sic].*


Branch Banking & Trust Company
124 West Nash Street
Wilson, N.C., Wilson County
Latitude: 35° 43' 29"
Longitude: 77° 54' 36"
(less than 1 acre)