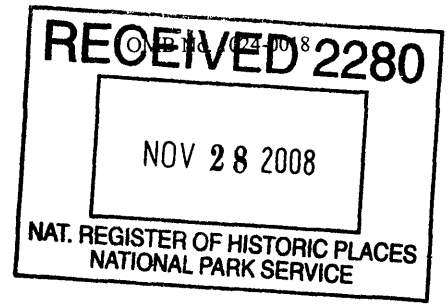


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

1273



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

1. Name of Property

historic name Ramsay-McCormack Building
other names/site number United Security Life Insurance Co. Building

2. Location

street & number 1823-1825 Avenue E (508 19th Street) Ensley not for publication N/A
city or town Birmingham vicinity N/A
state Alabama code AL county Jefferson code 073 zip code 35218

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Elizabeth Ann Brown
Signature of certifying official/Title

NOVEMBER 25, 2008
Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall 1-30-09

for

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE Sub: Business

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: VACANT/NOT IN USE Sub: _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: CONCRETE

roof: ASPHALT

walls: BRICK, STONE, CONCRETE, METAL

other: GLASS, METAL, STONE

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property 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.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce _____

Period of Significance 1929-1930

Significant Dates 1929-1930

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) _____

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Burnham, Brooke B.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property <1 acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>16</u>	<u>509605</u>	<u>3707983</u>	4	___	___
2	___	___	___	5	___	___
3	___	___	___	6	___	___

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title David B. Schneider/Susan Enzwiler
organization Schneider Historic Preservation, LLC/Alabama Historical Commission date 8/30/2008
street & number 411 E. 6th Street telephone 256-310-3620
city or town Anniston state AL zip code 36207

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Birmingham, Attn: Finance Department
street & number 710 20th St. N telephone 205-254-2205
city or town Birmingham state AL zip code 35203

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Section 7 Page 1 name of property: Ramsey-McCormack Building
county and State Jefferson County, AL

7. Narrative Description

The Ramsay-McCormack Building is a rectangular ten-story three-part Art Deco style office building with a flat roof concealed by decorative parapets. Located on an urban lot in the downtown commercial area of the Ensley suburb of Birmingham, it covers the northwest portion of its lot. The building fronts on zero lot lines to the northwest along Avenue E, to the southwest along 19th Street (Ensley), and to a vacant lot to the northeast. A small gravel parking lot extends southeast from the rear of the building to an alley. Constructed with a reinforced concrete structural system the building contains some 245,200 square feet of interior space. The exterior is visually separated into three parts: a one-story base clad with buff-colored glazed terra cotta, an eight story shaft (floors two through nine) clad with brick, and a recessed tenth floor cap with an extended parapet. The building also has a full basement and a two-story elevator penthouse atop its roof.

Three storefront bays at the first floor level of the northwest façade are separated and flanked by terra cotta pillars with brown granite bases. The principal entrance at the eastern bay is set within a Tudor-arched opening with a multi-light transom. A modern plywood wall supported by aluminum studs has replaced the original entrance system below the transom. The two western storefront bays have decorative beaded surrounds and splayed openings. Storefront systems have modern anodized aluminum frames; the center bay has a three-panel fixed storefront window with a corresponding transom and the western bay has a double entrance flanked by sidelights with a corresponding transom. The lower level of each storefront has been covered with plywood.

The painted brick second through the ninth floors are visually separated into five bays by brick pilasters that rise full-height from the storefront level and terminate into decorative cast capitals above the ninth floor. Similar narrow pilasters separate windows grouped in the three inner bays: three windows at the center bay flanked to either side by paired windows. The pilasters and vertical banding of the windows result in a decided verticality to the exterior's appearance. Brick spandrels with recessed panels separate the windows at each floor and decorative panels with paired cast stone Tudor arches are set above the 9th floor windows. The outer bays project slightly and terminate into similar capitals above the eighth floor. The angled outer bays at the ninth floor are similar in design to the inner bays. The tenth floor is recessed one bay from the lower floors and is similar in design to the ninth floor. A decorative parapet has a flat terra cotta cap and oval openings between each pilaster. Windows typically have steel frames with fixed upper and lower panels and central awning panels.

The southwest elevation is similar in design to the façade. Six storefront bays extend across the first floor level: fixed modern anodized aluminum three-panel storefront windows with transoms are set in the two northern bays; remnants of a historic storefront with a side entrance flanked by a storefront on a raised brown granite bulkhead with a multi-light transom in the next bay; and modern anodized aluminum storefronts with central single entrances flanked by sidelights with corresponding transoms in the three southern bays. The lower level of each storefront has been covered with plywood. At the upper levels, four central bays with three windows each are flanked to either side by double windows and single windows at the outer bays.

The first floor level of the southeast and northeast elevations are exposed former party walls with adjacent buildings that have been demolished. Exposed structural tile walls retain remnants of former plaster wall finishes. The upper levels of the southeast elevation are similar to the façade. The two central bays at the

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northeast elevation rise above the roofline and incorporate a two-story elevator penthouse. Windows within the central bays are blind painted to conceal interior elevators and mechanical chases. The elevator penthouse has tall blank spandrels at its lower level below open windows at its upper level. A decorative terra cotta cornice with geometric pattern ornamentation surrounds the penthouse. The north and south elevations of the penthouse are blank painted brick walls. The west elevation is similar with a pedestrian entrance at its first floor flanked to the south by a window and with two corresponding windows at the second floor level.

Flat roofs atop the ninth and tenth floors and the elevator penthouse are finished with built-up tar and gravel surfaces.

The interior of the presently unoccupied building includes a lobby and retail spaces on the first floor and offices on the remaining floors. An entrance foyer is located at the northeast corner of the first floor that opens to the south into a long stair and elevator lobby. The foyer and the lobby typically have solid white polished marble wall finishes above gray marble bases. Flooring in these areas is marble set in an alternating white and gray diamond pattern. Walls at the foyer rise to a molded white marble cornice that supports the entrance transom to the north, three arched decorative windows to the east, south, and west, and a ribbed vaulted plaster ceiling. At the south end of the foyer a marble clad-pilaster along the east wall and an off-center pillar flank a marble staircase that descends southward along the east wall to the basement. A cased opening to the west of the pillar opens into the stair/elevator lobby. Walls at the lobby rise to a molded white marble cornice supporting a long decorative plaster barrel-vaulted ceiling. A decorative white marble railing extends from the rear of the pillar to a marble staircase with a similar railing that rises to the east from the lobby and then returns northward along the east wall to an intermediate landing. Stair treads and risers are gray marble. A bank of three elevators is located along the east wall at the south end of the lobby. Walls at the elevators have been extensively vandalized and retain only vestiges of historic marble surrounds and some modern metal doors. An entrance into the retail space to the west of the lobby has also been vandalized and retains only the header of its marble surround.

Retail spaces are located along the west side of the first floor. The front retail space is larger than the remaining spaces and incorporates two storefronts along the façade and three storefronts along the southwest elevation. The three remaining retail spaces to the south each incorporate one storefront bay along the southwest elevation. Ceiling, wall, and floor finishes within the retail spaces are typically modern and include dropped acoustical ceilings, sheetrock or plywood paneled walls, and vinyl tile or carpeted floors. The front retail space is open in plan with a modern raised counter and shelving system at its southwest corner. The retail space immediately south has a modern mezzanine level and the remaining spaces have modern secondary service rooms partitioned at their east ends.

A secondary rear corridor leads from the west side of the south end of the lobby to the southernmost retail space that extends the full width of the rear of the building. Modern bathroom and mechanical spaces flank the rear corridor to the east.

Upper floors were historically laid out with central corridors surrounded by office spaces of varying sizes and configurations. Elevator lobbies typically open into the corridors through large cased openings. The office spaces and corridors have typically seen successive generations of alterations. Elevator lobbies and corridors

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are typically finished with polished white marble walls with gray marble bases, smooth plaster ceilings, and marble flooring.

The basement level includes a large open rental space to the north that appears to have been last used as a nightclub. Remaining areas housed a variety of support activities for the building and mechanical systems.

The Ramsay-McCormack Building has been vacant for more than twenty years and has suffered considerable moisture-related deterioration and vandalism. Exterior alterations have been minimal and have typically been limited to replacement storefront systems and the removal of adjacent buildings exposing underlying wall systems. The exterior was also painted some time in the mid to late 20th century. Interior retail and office spaces have typically been altered with new partitions and finishes. Corridors have typically been altered with dropped ceilings and have suffered the loss of much of their historic wall surfaces to deterioration. Despite these alterations, the Ramsay-McCormack Building retains integrity, remains structurally sound, and is in generally fair condition with deterioration becoming progressively more extensive at the upper floors.

Archaeology

While no formal archaeological survey has been made, the potential for subsurface remains is minimal due to the extensive excavation of the site to accommodate a full basement and the structural support for the present ten-story building.

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Significance

The Ramsay-McCormack Building is significant under criterion A in the area of commerce for its role as the only major office tower in the suburban community of Ensley, home at the time of the largest steel mill complex in the Birmingham District. The Ramsay-McCormack Building is also architecturally significant under criterion C as Ensley's only skyscraper and as its only major Art Deco style building, designed by noted Birmingham architect Brooke B. Burnham. The building's period of significance is 1929 to 1930, the years of its construction and initial occupancy.

Historical Narrative

Enoch Ensley, a wealthy Tennessee planter and merchant, began acquiring land in the Opossum Valley near Birmingham in the early 1880s with the intent of developing a vast steel production facility to exploit the site's location adjacent to the Pratt coal seam. It was on this site, described in contemporary accounts as "rough, sterile, full of scrubby pine and blackjack" that the town of Ensley and its extensive iron and steel operations would be developed.¹ The Ensley Land Company was established in 1886 with Enoch Ensley as president and the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company owning a majority of the company's \$10 million in stock. Four thousand acres of land were acquired on which to develop the company's industrial facilities and a town. Founded in 1852 as the Sewanee Mining Company of Tennessee, T.C.I.'s original operations were limited to the mining of coal. The company began producing coke in 1873 in response to an increased demand from the expanding regional iron industry. Renamed the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company in 1881, the company was reorganized to add the production of pig iron to its operations. The company acquired the Pratt Coal and Iron Company and its extensive facilities in the Birmingham area in 1886.

The Ensley Land Company had the town surveyed and platted in 1887. Designed by Newport, Rhode Island engineer Edward Waring, Jr., the town was laid out on a grid that paralleled the proposed plant facilities and featured a complete sewage system with separate piping for storm water and sewage. Birmingham's street railway was soon extended to the community. Construction began the following year on four blast furnaces, the last of which was lighted on April 4, 1889.² Enoch Ensley died unexpectedly in 1891 and in 1892 T.C.I. combined its Ensley holdings with the Debarleben Coal and Iron Company, the Cahaba Coal Mining Company, and the Excelsior Coal Company "to form the largest single industrial enterprise in the Birmingham District."³ By that time, the company's total holdings reached 400,000 acres of land, seventeen blast furnaces, and coal lands that produced 13,000 tons of coal per day.⁴ An open-hearth steel plant was added to the Ensley site in 1899 and the company continued to expand, becoming "the Birmingham District's strongest industrial corporation" by 1907.⁵ Despite T.C.I.'s success, an economic downturn in the autumn of 1907 resulted in circumstances that led to its acquisition by the United States Steel Corporation on November 5 for \$35.3 million. T.C.I. became a subsidiary company of U.S. Steel yet retained the T.C.I. name. At the time of its formation in 1901, U.S. Steel was "the largest industrial corporation in the world."⁶

In 1893 during a particularly difficult economic downturn, the Ensley Land Company went into receivership and was sold at a sheriff's sale. The company was reorganized in 1898 with local businessman and T.C.I. executive Erskine Ramsay as one of its principals. With economic conditions improving, additional industrial development occurred in Ensley: an open-hearth furnace was built at the Ensley Works; the Semet-Solway Company opened a new coke byproducts facility; the Birmingham Cement Company opened a facility to use

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blast furnace slag to make concrete; the Alabama Steel and Wire Company built a plant; and the Ensley Brick Company was established.⁷ Additional blast furnaces were added to the Ensley Works in 1900 and 1904 and the facilities began producing rails in 1904. In 1907, T.C.I. management announced plans for a \$25-30 million modernization and expansion program "with the intention of doubling capacity and 'radically' cutting costs."⁸ After its acquisition by U.S. Steel in 1907, additional improvements were made and annual steel capacity at the plant reached 840,000 tons by 1912.⁹ U.S. Steel expanded its operations to the southwest in 1909 and created new facilities and another town at Corey, later renamed Fairfield. By World War II, the company's total employment reached 28,000.¹⁰

The town of Ensley grew slowly in the 1890s but expanded rapidly in the early 1900s. T.C.I. built two hundred workers cottages in 1898 and the Ensley Land Company added two hundred more in 1900. The City of Ensley was incorporated on February 12, 1899 and its population reached 10,000 by 1901. Fourteen thousand workers were employed at the Ensley Works by 1907 and the city's population more than doubled by 1910. Ensley merged with the City of Birmingham in 1909. Industrial expansion continued and Ensley's population topped 41,000 by 1934.¹¹

Marjorie Longenecker White wrote in her book The Birmingham District: "Ensley prided itself as a community 'with a backbone of steel' and a regional business and shopping center serving Ensley, Highlands, Bush Hills, Fairview, Oak Hill, Central Park, Pratt City, Wylam, Fairfield and outlying communities. Aggressive promotion and development activities fostered a strong sense of separate identity which endures today."¹² The community's commercial district initially developed along Avenue E between 17th and 20th Streets. The 1902 Sanborn map shows a relatively dense concentration of primarily one and two story commercial buildings lining both sides of Avenue E and along the southwest side of 19th Street and both sides of 17th Street between Avenues D and E. By 1911, business had extended somewhat to the southwest along Avenue E and to the southeast along 17th and 19th Streets. The 1928 map indicates that considerable commercial development occurred since the earlier edition, with much of it occurring along 19th Street by then the commercial district's principal corridor. The city's fortunes were well represented by a large collection of buildings of substantial architectural character and quality.

The September 1926 edition of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce's newsletter announced that: "Erskine Ramsay and Carr [sic] McCormack will erect a six story office building of reinforced steel and concrete, to cost \$200,000, at Avenue E and Nineteenth Street, Ensley. This will be Ensley's first Skyscraper."¹³ The location was then the epicenter of Ensley's commercial core and was sited directly across the intersection from the imposing Bank of Ensley building, constructed by Ramsey and McCormack in 1911. Construction of the building was delayed and by the time it was started in 1928, its plans had been expanded to include ten floors. The 1928 Sanborn map shows a one-story commercial building on the site that housed a drugstore and two retail shops. Excavation work commenced in late 1928 but was delayed when a spring was discovered at the site.¹⁴

Erskine Ramsay (1864-1953) was among the most prominent of Birmingham's industrial, commercial, civic, and philanthropic leaders from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries. He began his career in 1884 when he became "the youngest mine superintendent in history" in charge of Henry Clay Frick's Morewood Coke Company, Ltd., one of the largest coke production facilities in western Pennsylvania.¹⁵ By 1889, he was in charge of the third largest coal and coke producer in Pennsylvania and was considered a genius by

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industrialist Frick and a man who would be a "credit to us all" by Andrew Carnegie.¹⁶ In 1887, the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company was able to attract Ramsay to come to Birmingham to become the engineer and superintendent of the Pratt Mines. By 1894, he was T.C.I.'s chief engineer and the following year he was named the company's assistant general manager. When the company was reorganized in 1901, Ramsay decided to leave to pursue his diverse interests in real estate, finance, invention, and industry.

Ramsay had previously formed a partnership with George B. McCormack, who had been his immediate supervisor at T.C.I. In addition to taking a lead role in the 1898 reorganization of the Ensley Land Company, Ramsay and McCormack acquired four blocks of what would become Ensley's business district. The following year they founded the Bank of Ensley; the bank's present building was built in 1911. Ramsay's biographer James Saxon Childers wrote: "Next to coal, he [Ramsay] was most interested in real estate. One looks back now with considerable amusement to his first investment in real property in Alabama. It was a corner 'lot' on a scrub oak ridge which a blueprint flattered with the name 'Town of Ensley.'"¹⁷

Ramsay's business interests multiplied after 1901 and he, often in conjunction with partner McCormack, was involved in real estate, coal, engineering, and inventing. Ramsay and McCormack continued to purchase land in downtown Ensley and amassed some eight blocks by the early 20th century.¹⁸ A millionaire by the age of forty, Ramsay was by 1937 "president and director of the Ensley Company, Union Land Company; Blossburg Land Company; Ramsay-McCormack Land Company, Inc.; President, director, and consulting engineer of the Cedartown Iron Company in Georgia; Tennessee Consolidated Coal Company of Tennessee; vice president and director of the Mountain Brook Land Company, Birmingham, and the Avondale Mills, Avondale; chairman of the board and general consulting engineer of the Alabama By-Products Corporation of Birmingham; president, director, and chairman of the board of the Alabama Mineral Land Company; chairman of the board, director, and general consulting engineer of the New Castle Coal Company, Birmingham; and of the Buffalo Rock Company of that city; vice president and chairman of the board of the Goodall-Brown Dry Goods Company; director and member of the executive committee of the First National Bank of Birmingham; and director of the Guarantee Building and Loan Company, the Protective Life Insurance Company, and the Birmingham Fire Insurance Company."¹⁹

Ramsay served as president of the Birmingham school board for nineteen years and was a noted local philanthropist. Among the buildings named in his honor as a result of his many contributions are buildings on the campuses of Auburn University, the University of Alabama, and Birmingham Southern College as well as the Ramsay High School in Birmingham. The front-page notice of Ramsay's death in The Birmingham News stated that: "A fabulous American of the nation's most colorful years of industrial growth, Mr. Ramsay made his fortune in Birmingham in the days of his youth and spent his senior years giving it away for good causes."²⁰ The article indicates that he gave away nearly five million dollars.

Designed by Birmingham architect Brooke B. Burnham, the \$500,000 building was completed and ready for occupancy in January 1930.²¹ Among the first tenants was the Doster-Northington Stores Company which occupied a large retail space at the northern corner of the building as a retail pharmacy. The 1930 city directory recorded the following office tenants: the Alabama Credit Corp. loans; Nat G. Clark, a physician; Robert E. Cloud, a physician; the Home Realty Co.; Holland N. McTyeire, a dentist; William M. McTyeire, a dentist; the National Life and Accident Insurance Co.; Queen & Nichols, lawyers; Green H. Smith, a physician; State Adjusting Agency, collections; Townsend & Cumbee, dentists; and William H. Wynne, a physician. The 1931

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directory lists the building's offices by suite number for the first time and indicated that thirty-four of the fifty-eight suites remained vacant. The building would never fully be occupied. Despite local tradition to the contrary, the building never housed the offices of T.C.I or U.S. Steel.²²

Twelve office suites are recorded as being vacant in the 1947-1948 directory and thirteen were vacant in 1956. Provident Mutual Life Insurance Company acquired the property some years after its construction. Provident Mutual sold the property to the United Security Life Insurance Company in April 1956 for \$250,000.²³ By 1958, the building was being called the United Security Life Building with the company occupying suites on the second, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and tenth floors. Other tenants included a mix of professional offices including doctors, lawyers, dentists, an accountant, the American Cancer Society, and the Ensley Chamber of Commerce. Eight suites remained vacant.

Ensley's fortunes began to decline sharply after 1974, when U.S. Steel significantly expanded the Fairfield Works with the construction of two innovative Q-BOP furnaces and added another furnace in 1978. The older more inefficient facilities at Ensley were gradually shut down, with the last of the mill's open-hearth furnaces ceasing operation in late 1978. With the closure of the rail mill and U.S. Steel's steel service center, Ensley's era as a major industrial center was over and much of its employment base was lost.

The United Security Life Insurance Company remained the primary tenant of the Ramsay-McCormack Building in 1970. A mix of professional tenants similar to previous years remained with others including the Jefferson County Court of General Sessions, the United Steelworkers of America, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. Fifteen suites were vacant. Jefferson County Board of Equalization records indicate that the interior was remodeled in 1976. While the nature of the renovations is not detailed, changes that occurred to interior hallways including dropped ceilings and changes to many of the storefronts are consistent with that date. Despite the updates, by 1980 only a handful of tenants remained with the Security Drug Company on the first floor, a lawyer's office on the second, a dentist on the fourth, the United Steelworkers of America on the fifth, and the Robert W. Hunt Company on the sixth floor. The 1984 and 1985 city directories indicate that the building was essentially vacant but six tenants are listed in 1986, the year in which the city finally closed the building. The corner retail space, which had operated as a pharmacy under a succession of owners since 1930, was also closed.

A prominent symbol of the community's declining fortunes, the Ramsay-McCormack Building has remained vacant since 1986. A 1996 article in the Birmingham News noted that: "Not much remains of downtown Ensley these days but ghosts and a handful of hold-on businesses. Even the grand 10-story Ramsay-McCormack Building, a landmark image of Ensley's past, now stands sadly empty, its windows one by one becoming broken." A photograph of the building that ran in an August 2007 Birmingham News article was entitled "an icon of blight." A local business owner petitioned the city of Birmingham in 2008 seeking to have the building demolished as an eyesore and danger to local residents. The building was subsequently listed in the 2008 Places in Peril list, an annual listing of endangered statewide landmarks published by the Alabama Historical Commission and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation. In August 2008, Veristar Development Services operating as Ensley Centre, L.P. entered into an agreement with the City of Birmingham to purchase the Ramsay-McCormack Building and to rehabilitate it as low and moderate income housing for senior citizens.

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Architecture

The Ramsay-McCormack Building is the only skyscraper in the Ensley suburb of Birmingham. At the time of its construction, it was reported to be "the tallest building in suburban districts of any Southern city."²⁴ The building is also the best example of the Art Deco style in Ensley. No other high style Art Deco buildings were identified in the historic sites survey of downtown Ensley completed by Schneider Historic Preservation, LLC in 2008.

The building was designed by noted Birmingham architect Brooke Browning Burnham (1887-1962). Burnham received his degree in architecture in 1909 from George Washington University and spent a year working with architect Glenn Brown before relocating to Birmingham. He established his own practice in 1917 and his works are documented to include the Ramsay McCormack Building, a vaudeville theatre in Nashville for the Hury Amusement Company, and the Pavilion for Avondale Park in Birmingham.²⁵ Burnham served as an architect for the U.S. government from 1933 until 1936, after which he returned to private practice in Birmingham. In June 1945, the firm of Burnham, Echols, and Smith was established and Burnham continued with the firm until his death in 1962.²⁶ Among the designs attributed to the latter firm is the Angwin-Service Funeral Home in Ensley.²⁷

Notes

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- ¹ Marjorie Longenecker White, The Birmingham District: An Industrial History and Guide (Birmingham, AL: Birmingham Historical Society, 1981), p. 98.
- ² White, p. 99.
- ³ White, p. 99.
- ⁴ Robert Gregg, Origin and Development of the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company (New York: The Newcomen Society of England, American Branch, 1948), pp. 16-17.
- ⁵ "Written Historical and Descriptive Data, Addendum to the Tennessee Coal & Iron Co., Fairfield Works," Historic American Engineering Record, Washington, D.C., n.d.
- ⁶ Kenneth Warren, Big Steel: The First Century of the United States Steel Corporation 1901-2001 (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), p. 1.
- ⁷ White, p. 100.
- ⁸ Warren, p. 79.
- ⁹ Warren, p.82.
- ¹⁰ "Written Historical and Descriptive Data"
- ¹¹ White, p. 102.
- ¹² White, 102.
- ¹³ "Industrial Activities for August," Birmingham, Official Organ of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, Vol. 2, No. 9, September 1926, p. 11.
- ¹⁴ A.G. Prince. Landmarks of Ensley (Ensley, AL: Best Printing Service, 1986), p. 24.
- ¹⁵ Albert Burton Moore, History of Alabama and Her People (Chicago & New York: The American Historical Society, 1927), p. 624.
- ¹⁶ Owen, p. 1
- ¹⁷ James Saxon Childers, Erskine Ramsay, His Life and Achievements (New York: Cartwright & Ewing, 1942), p. 234.
- ¹⁸ George Cruikshank, A History of Birmingham and its Environs. Volume II (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1920), p. 34
- ¹⁹ Marie Bankhead Owen, The Story of Alabama, Personal and Family History (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1949), p. 2.
- ²⁰ "Erskine Ramsay, famed philanthropist, is dead," The Birmingham News, undated clipping, Birmingham Public Library.
- ²¹ "Workmen Put Final Touches on Ensley Office Building, Tallest in Suburbs," The Birmingham News-Age Herald, 15 December 1929, p. 14.

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²² A.G. Prince states in Landmarks of Ensley that "While the building was being constructed a popular rumor was that the TCI Offices in the Brown-Marx Building would be moved into the new Ramsay-McCormack Building, but this never materialized." The company did consolidate its headquarters in the Flintridge Building in nearby Fairfield in 1951.

²³ Deed book 5528, p. 565.s

²⁴ "Workmen Put Final Touches on Ensley Office Building, Tallest in Suburbs," p. 14.

²⁵ Marie Bankhead Owen, p. 1406; "Burnham, Brooke B." file, Birmingham Public Library Archives.

²⁶ "Brook [sic] Burnham, Architect, Dies," The Birmingham News, March 5, 1962.

²⁷ Louis Isaacson, "Angwin-Service building Ensley funeral home," The Birmingham News, February 27, 1958.

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10. Geographic Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated boundary includes the entire parcel recorded in the Assessor's Office for Jefferson County, Alabama as parcel number 012200313017004000.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire current parcel only, which represents the total remaining acreage historically associated with the resource.

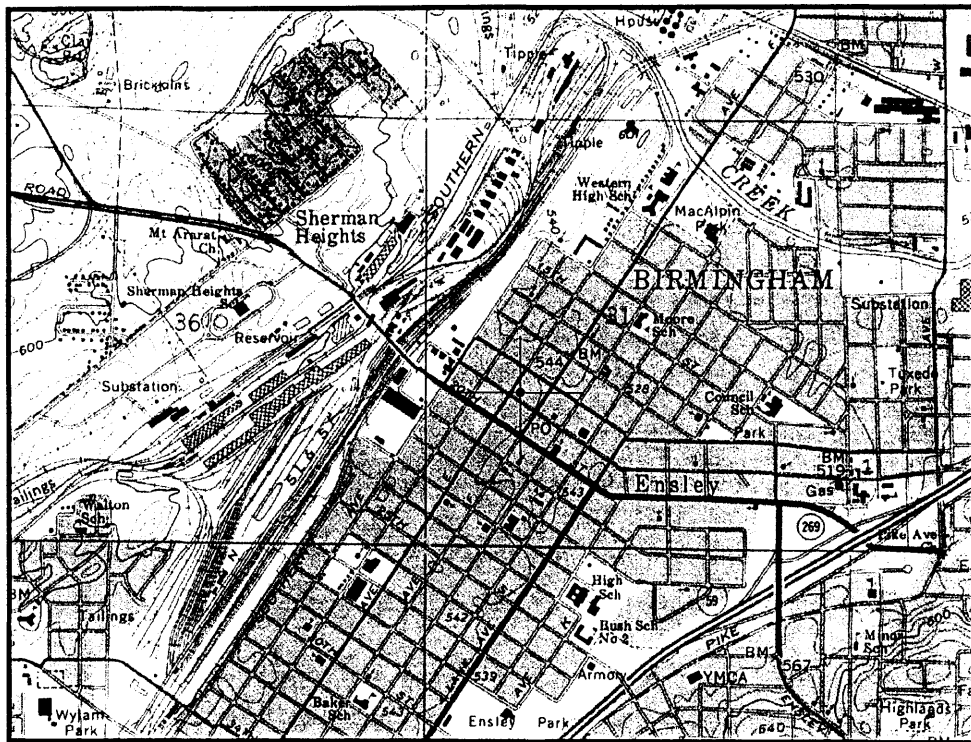
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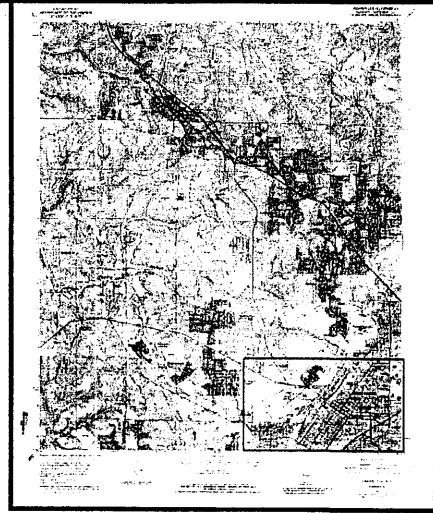
name of property: Ramsey-McCormack Building
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U.S.G.S. Topographic Map



U.S.G.S. Topographic Map
Adamsville Quadrangle

Zone Easting Northing
16 509605 3707983



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Location Map



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name of property:

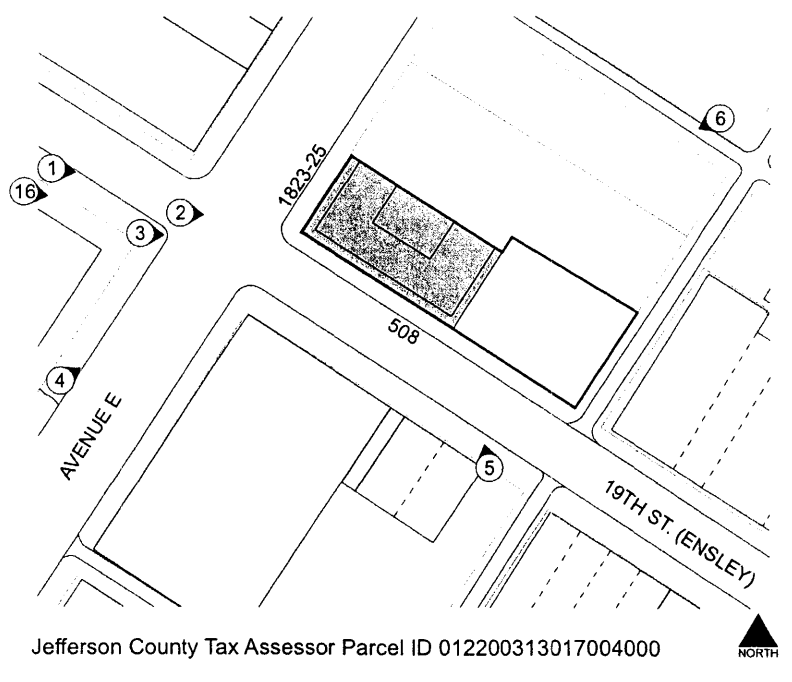
Ramsey-McCormack Building

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Siteplan (with Photo Directions Indicated)



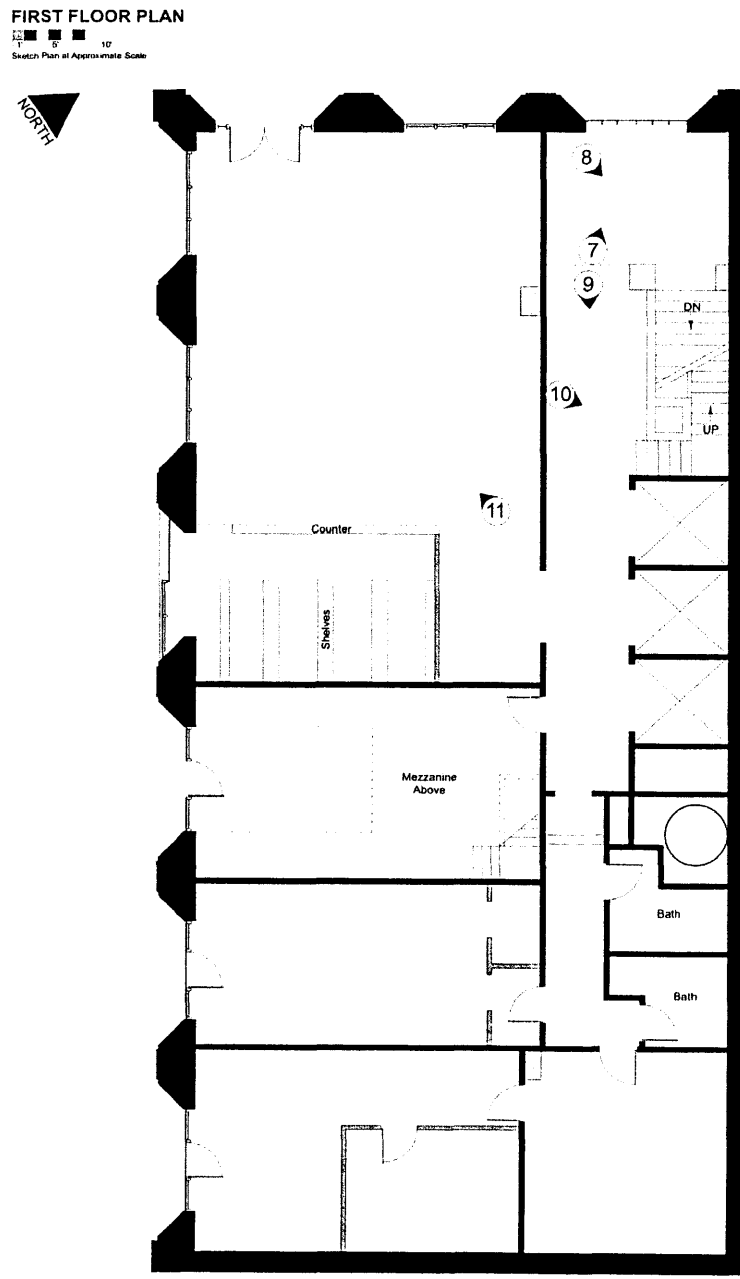
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First Floor Plan (with Photo Directions Indicated)



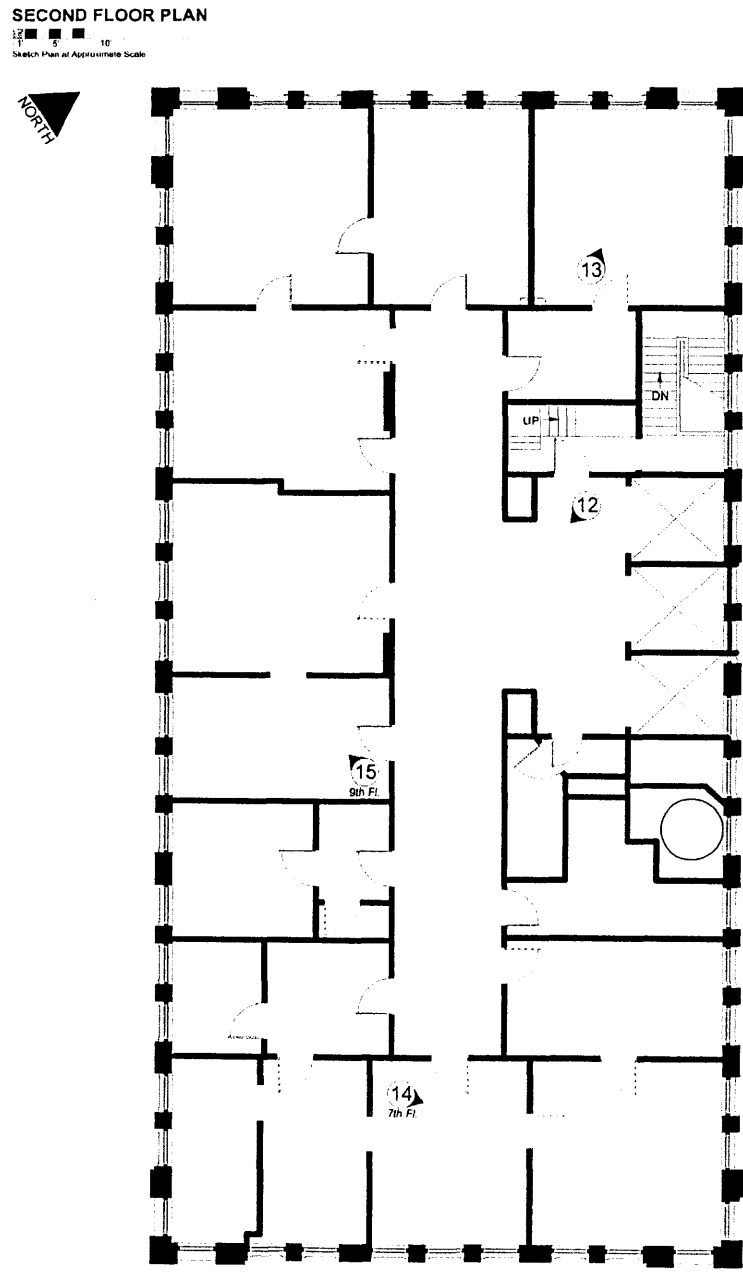
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Second Floor Plan, Floors 3-9 Similar (with Photo Directions Indicated)



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Photographs

1. Ramsay-McCormack Building
2. Birmingham (Ensley), Jefferson County, AL
3. David B. Schneider, Schneider Historic Preservation, LLC
4. August 2008
5. 411 E. 6th St., Anniston AL 36207
6. Avenue E (NW) facade (left) and 19th Street elevation (SW, right), camera facing E
7. Photo #1 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0001.tif)

6. Avenue E (NW) facade (left) and 19th Street elevation (SW, right), camera facing E
7. Photo #2 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0002.tif)

6. Avenue E (NW) facade (left) and 19th Street elevation (SW, right), camera facing E
7. Photo #3 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0003.tif)

6. Avenue E (NW) facade (left) and 19th Street elevation (SW, right), camera facing NE
7. Photo #4 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0004.tif)

6. 19th Street elevation (SW, left) and southeast elevation (right), camera facing N
7. Photo #5 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0005.tif)

6. Northeast elevation, camera facing W
7. Photo #6 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0006.tif)

6. Interior, lobby, camera facing NE
7. Photo #7 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0007.tif)

6. Interior, lobby ceiling, camera facing E
7. Photo #8 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0008.tif)

6. Interior, elevator lobby, camera facing SE
7. Photo #9 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0009.tif)

6. Interior, elevator lobby staircase, camera facing E
7. Photo #10 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0010.tif)

6. Interior, retail space at NW corner, camera facing W
7. Photo #11 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0011.tif)

6. Interior, 2nd floor elevator lobby, camera facing S
7. Photo #12 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0012.tif)

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- 6. Interior, typical office space, camera facing NE
- 7. Photo #13 (JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0013.tif)

- 6. Interior, typical office space, camera facing NE
- 7. Photo #14 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0014.tif)

- 6. Interior, 9th floor, typical office space, camera facing W
- 7. Photo #15 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0015.tif)

- 6. Historic view, 1930, courtesy Birmingham Public Library Archives
- 7. Photo #16 (AL_JeffersonCounty_RamsayMcCormackBld_0016.tif)