

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JUL 14 1978
DATE ENTERED SEP 13 1978

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

National Metropolitan Bank Building

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

613 15th Street, N. W.

__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Washington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

__VICINITY OF

Walter E. Fauntroy

STATE

District of Columbia

CODE

11

COUNTY

District of Columbia

CODE

001

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

__DISTRICT

__PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

__AGRICULTURE

__MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

__UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

__PARK

__STRUCTURE

__BOTH

__WORK IN PROGRESS

__EDUCATIONAL

__PRIVATE RESIDENCE

__SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

__ENTERTAINMENT

__RELIGIOUS

__OBJECT

__IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

__GOVERNMENT

__SCIENTIFIC

__BEING CONSIDERED

__YES: UNRESTRICTED

__INDUSTRIAL

__TRANSPORTATION

__NO

__MILITARY

__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

American Security Corporation

STREET & NUMBER

15th Street & Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

District of Columbia

__VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Recorder of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

6th & D Streets, N.W.

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

District of Columbia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

District of Columbia's Inventory of Historic Sites

DATE

August 11, 1977

__FEDERAL STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Joint District of Columbia/National Capital Planning Commission
Historic Preservation Office

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

District of Columbia

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The following architectural description was prepared by Anne H. Helwig, architectural historian, of Don't Tear It Down.

The National Metropolitan Bank building at 613 15th Street, N.W., is an imposing Beaux Arts structure dating from 1905-1907. The architects were B. Stanley Simmons, a prolific Washington architect, and Gordon, Tracy, and Swartwout, a New York firm. Documentation providing information about which of the four architects involved actually provided the designs for the building has not been uncovered at this time. The five-bay, seven-story bank and office building is capped by a copper mansard roof. Above the banking lobby the floor plan is C-shaped, affording more light to the offices on the upper levels than would have been possible had the building been rectangular. The bank building and the Albee Building to the north, which was built in 1911-1912 and designed by Jules Henri de Sibour, form a monumental facade that counters the low, colonnaded Treasury Building across 15th Street. Although designed by different architects and stylistically different, the National Metropolitan Bank building and the Albee Building present a unified front. Their cornice lines are continuous and of the same lion head-acanthus leaf motif, and the building materials and scale are similar.

Although imposing, the National Metropolitan Bank building is not as large as it appears. The brick structure, which is faced with white Georgia marble, is 66.71 feet wide and 100 feet deep. Its apparent size is perhaps the result of the dignified classical building vocabulary employed by the architects, particularly the colossal Corinthian columns which dominate the facade. Round arches, pedimented windows, and an elaborate modillioned cornice are further classical elements which add dignity to the building. The design of the facade is balanced and symmetrical; the strong vertical emphasis of the columns is counterbalanced by the horizontality of the balustrade at the third floor and by the cornice.

The first two floors form a stable base for the columns above. The three inner bays, articulated by arches with elaborate scroll keystones, delineate the banking area. Concave rondels enliven the spandrels between the arches. The entrance to the banking lobby is within the center arch. In the fanlight over the door stands a gilt eagle with outspread wings, encircled by a wreath. The entrance to the office portion of the building is in the northern bay. A window in the corresponding location in the southern bay balances the facade.

The most prominent feature of the facade is the pair of three-quarter engaged Corinthian columns that rise in a four-story loggia between the third floor and the cornice above the sixth floor. Corinthian pilasters form the sides of the recessed space. The fenestration within the loggia, three bays of triple windows, is set in a bronze window wall. Engaged marble columns flank the pedimented third floor windows behind the balustrade. The pediment over the center window is segmental, the others are triangular. Other window openings on the facade are unornamented. Above the sixth floor the modillioned cornice successfully terminates the facade as it is seen from the street below. The simple crowning cornice one story higher is barely noticeable. The window openings between the two cornices repeat the fenestration pattern of the lower stories. Five large dormers pierce the roof. Segmental arches cap the outer dormers.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES 1905-1907

BUILDER/ARCHITECT B. Stanley Simmons and Gordon, Tracy, and Swartwout

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated the National Metropolitan Bank Building a Category II Landmark of Importance which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual beauty of the District of Columbia. Together with the adjacent Albee Building, it has a major design impact at one of the most strategic points along the ceremonial route between the Capitol and the White House, reinforcing the stately and powerful rhythm of the colonnaded east side of the Treasury Department, a Category I Landmark listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and creating a sense of ceremonial closure before the climactic turn of the route into Pennsylvania Avenue toward the White House. Historically and visually it is an integral part of the 15th Street financial district. The Bank has been located in the 600 block of 15th Street for 144 years occupying Rhodes' Tavern, a Category II Landmark listed in the National Register of Historic Places, from 1814--36, moving to an earlier building at the present site in 1836, and, after construction of the existing building in 1905-07, continuing at that location till the present time. Architecturally the facade is substantially unaltered.

The distinctive Beaux Arts facade of the National Metropolitan Bank Building forms a strong architectural unit with the adjacent Albee Building, balancing Robert Mills' superb east side of the Treasury Department and complementing it in scale, vocabulary and presence. Its boldly modeled portico in antis motif echoes the Treasury pavilions as well as the Riggs National Bank building and other buildings in the 15th Street financial district, creating an architecturally coherent environment at one of the most visually prominent intersections in the city. It is a major work of Washington architect B. Stanley Simmons in collaboration with Gordon, Tracy and Swartwout of New York.

The following history of the National Metropolitan Bank and biographical sketch of its architects was prepared by Anne H. Helwig, architectural historian, of Don't Tear It Down. The architects of the National Metropolitan Bank building were B. Stanley Simmons, a prolific, turn-of-the-century Washington architect, and Gordon, Tracy, and Swartwout, a prestigious New York firm. Simmons (1871/2-1931), a graduate of M.I.T., practiced architecture in Washington for over forty years. Residential rows, apartment houses, a theater, a storage warehouse, and even a candy store are among the many Simmons buildings that appeared in Washington in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century. Among Simmon's most important buildings are the National Metropolitan Bank building, the Barr Building at Farragut Square and 17th Street, N.W., the Fairfax Hotel at 2100 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., and the Elks Club at 919 H Street, N.W.

(Continued on Form No. 10-300a)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See attached

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .15 acre; 6,671 sq. ft.

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 8	3 2 3 6 4 0	4 3 0 7 1 9 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property occupies lot 811 in Square 224 and is approximately 100' x 66.7' in size.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Tanya Beauchamp, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION Joint District of Columbia/National Capital Planning Commission Historic Preservation Office

DATE June, 1978

STREET & NUMBER National Capital Planning Commission
1325 G Street, N.W.

TELEPHONE 724-0202

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

District of Columbia

12 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

[Signature] 7-12-78

TITLE Director, Department of Housing and Community Development

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

R. B. Rethy

DATE 9/13/78

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: *William Lebowich*

DATE Sept 11, 1978

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Careful attention was paid to the detailing of the facade. Egg and dart, acanthus, and abstract lotus motif mouldings appear in the cornices, in the door and window surrounds, and in the archivolt of the arches. Panels of sculptural decoration originally appeared on either side of the inscription NATIONAL METROPOLITAN BANK in the frieze, as well as just below the frieze. Unfortunately, the panels have all been removed. Above the north door, flanking a pair of small rectangular windows, is the inscription ERECTED MCMV MCMCII. Inscribed in the corresponding wall space in the south bay of the facade is ORGANIZED JAN XIII MDCCCXIV. Bronze letters reading NATIONAL METROPOLITAN BANK were originally studded into the facade on either side of the main entrance. A pair of bronze acanthus motif globe lamps on granite pedestals now flank the door that was the entrance to the banking lobby. The lamps were moved from positions by the north door to their present location sometime after 1931. Simple bronze grills are set in front of the windows in the arches on the second and fourth bays.

With the exception of the above changes, the facade of the National Metropolitan Bank building appears essentially as it did when the building opened in 1907. Sometime after 1931 a pair of flagpoles was removed from the roof and metal sheathing was placed over the capitals of the columns and pilasters in an attempt to ward off resting birds. In 1954-1955, when the National Metropolitan Bank enlarged its main office by connecting the lower floors of the 15th Street building with those of the F Street building (1423-1425 F Street, N.W.), major renovations altered the old banking lobby. No documentary evidence remains to illustrate the original appearance of the interior and the exact nature of the alterations is unknown. Since 1955 many more alterations have been made. Today only a small portion of the seventh floor reflects the original interior design of the building, with its wood paneling and office layout. Throughout the rest of the building isolated features of the original interior remain. The single white marble stairway on the north side of the building still functions and the plasterwork around the doors of the two elevators is still intact.

Some remnants of the once splendid banking lobby remain visible in spite of the alterations that have occurred. Four pairs of rich green marble columns are integrated into the present decorating scheme. In the center bay of the ceiling an elaborate decorative cornice still adds an element of elegance to the banking lobby. A false ceiling covers the rest of the banking space. Marble was used freely in the bank lobby. The floor in the entrance foyer is white marble with an eight-pointed red marble star set in a circle. Surrounding the star are four green marble diamonds and two tan and two white marble circles within another circle. The plaster ceiling in the area to the north of the foyer is still intact. A white marble slab, supported by dignified white marble lions, hides a radiator in the same niche on the north side of the building. Parts of a similar radiator cover remain in the wall on the south side of the foyer. In the south wall of the banking lobby, near the front of the building, is a light rust color marble fireplace. All of these elements of the original interior offer a strong suggestion, in spite of recent alterations, of the elegance and dignity of the old banking lobby.

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The firm of Gordon, Tracy, and Swartwout was formed in 1904 when James R. Gordon (1863-1937) joined the already established New York firm of Tracy and Swartwout. Gordon began his architectural career in Washington as a draftsman in the office of the United States Supervising Architect. Evarts Tracy (1868-1929) studied architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and returned the New York to work in the office of McKim, Mead, and White until 1896, when he established an independent practice. In 1900 Tracy and Egerton Swartwout (1870-1943), who also worked for McKim, Mead, and White, formed a partnership. Gordon joined the firm in 1904 and remained until 1911. After 1911 Tracy and Swartwout continued the partnership until Tracy retired in 1915. There are buildings by members of this firm in many of the major cities across the country.

During its 144 year history the National Metropolitan Bank was a prominent member of Washington's financial community. The bank, which has been located on or near its 613 15th Street, N.W., site since its inception in 1814, was the District of Columbia's oldest national bank and the city's second oldest banking institution. Many prominent local and national figures were responsible for the bank's operation over the years. Among them was John P. van Ness, four-time mayor of Washington and member of Congress. In 1813 van Ness supervised the organization of and subscription for the Bank of the Metropolis, the forerunner of the National Metropolitan Bank. By January, 1814, with a capital of about \$500,000, the Bank of the Metropolis opened for business on the northeast corner of 15th and F Streets, N.W., in the Rhodes Tavern building (a Category II landmark and the oldest extant commercial building in the downtown section of Washington). The bank purchased the building from John G. Jackson for \$8,000, payable in bank stock.

During its early years of operation the bank had many dealings with the national and local government. The federal government borrowed money from the Bank of the Metropolis to pay the salaries of American soldiers who had fought in the War of 1812. In 1814 the bank loaned the government \$100,000, one-fifth the estimated cost of repairing the capital city after the destruction it had suffered at the hands of the British. The District of Columbia was the recipient of a \$10,000 loan in 1833. President Andrew Jackson, one of the original stockholders and depositors in the Bank of the Metropolis, made the bank a public depository of federal funds when those funds were withdrawn from the dying Bank of the United States in 1836.

It was also in 1836 that the bank moved to 613 15th Street, N.W., in the middle of the block. The bank's new home was a brick, two-story Federal building. In 1844 the bank's charter, granted by Congress in 1817, expired. The Board of Directors continued to operate the bank as a private banking association until 1865. In March and April of that year the bank was reorganized, under the National Banking Act, as the National Metropolitan Bank of Washington. At that time the bank's capital was about \$350,000. By 1904 the bank had grown sufficiently to absorb Citizen's National Bank, which was founded in

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1874 and had a capital of \$500,000. For two years the bank operated as the National Metropolitan-Citizens' Bank. After this merger plans were made for a new structure at the same site. In 1906 the name reverted to the National Metropolitan Bank.

By October, 1907 the National Metropolitan Bank was completed. The two-story banking lobby occupied most of the ground floor space. The National Metropolitan Bank leased out the upper stories for office space. Bausch and Lomb Optical Company and R. G. Dun, Mercantile Agent, were early tenants, leasing offices by 1908. By 1909 the Otis Elevator Company, which later installed two passenger lifts in the building, had offices in the National Metropolitan Bank building. Lawyers, brokers, real estate agents, and manufacturer's agents have been consistent occupants of the building from 1908 until recent years. In the 1920's and 1930's a number of newspapers, including the Detroit Free Press, had offices in the building. At the present time the majority of the tenants are lawyers.

In 1915 the National Metropolitan Bank was granted trust powers under the Federal Reserve Act of 1913. The bank continued to prosper and by 1944 its assets reached \$52 million. In August, 1950, the first branch office was opened at 49th Street and Fordham Road, N.W. The following year a bomb-proof branch office (the first in Washington) was opened at First and O Streets, N.E. In 1951 the bank also purchased the property at 1423-1425 F Street, N.W., around the corner from the main office. In 1954 the F Street building was remodeled and joined to the rear of the 15th Street banking lobby. The new L-shaped banking lobby officially opened in December, 1955. The architects, Irwin S. Porter and Sons, and the contractors, Davis, Wick, and Rosengarten, leased offices in the National Metropolitan Bank building. The alterations, the first to the bank since 1907, cost about \$1 million.

In 1958 the National Metropolitan Bank merged with American Security and Trust Company, which was founded in 1889 and was the second oldest trust company in Washington. As a result, all three of the National Metropolitan Bank offices became branch offices of American Security and Trust Company. The merger, one of the largest in Washington banking history, resulted in the formation of the second largest banking institution in the District of Columbia. National Metropolitan Bank, with assets of \$70 million, had been the fifth largest local bank and American Security and Trust, with assets of \$248 million, had been listed third in the District of Columbia. Their combined assets of \$318 million ranked second only to Riggs National Bank, with assets of \$453 million. American Security and Trust continued to grow. In 1959 it purchased City Bank of Washington. In 1969, still Washington's second largest bank, American Security and Trust Company became a shareholding member of Allied Bank International, an international bank organized to finance foreign trade transactions.

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The 15th Street office of American Security and Trust Company, formerly the main office of the National Metropolitan Bank, continued to function until December 31, 1976 when, because of declining business, the branch was closed and the accounts were moved to the bank's main office at 15th and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. (the building, erected in 1904-1905 and designed by York and Sawyer of New York, is a Category II landmark). The banking lobby presently serves as office space for American Security and Trust Company.

Throughout the National Metropolitan Bank's long history many prominent men served as presidents and directors of the bank. John Maury and Thomas Carberry, early bank presidents, each served two terms as mayor of Washington. James Monroe served as a bank director while serving as Secretary of State under James Madison. Colonel John Tayloe, builder of the Octagon House, Alexander R. Shepherd, Henry Willard, E. Francis Riggs, and S. W. Woodward were among the bank's directors. These and other capable individuals guided the National Metropolitan Bank through a long and illustrious history that bridged eight financial panics and four wars before Washington's oldest national bank merged with another old and prominent Washington financial institution.

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The Washington Post, Jan. 11, 1914, Sept. 9, 1931, Jan. 11, 1940, Dec. 17, 1955, April 30, 1958, May 21, 1958, Aug. 25, 1976.

Washington Star, Dec. 16, 1902, Jan. 11, 1914, Sept. 9, 1931, Oct. 28, 1944, May 7, 1954, Dec. 18, 1955.

Collected files

Commission of Fine Arts - files on B. Stanley Simmons and on the National Metropolitan Bank building

Columbia Historical Society - vertical clipping files on banks and banking

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Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King Memorial Library - vertical clipping files on B. Stanley Simmons, the National Metropolitan Bank, and American Security and Trust Company

Unpublished documents

Applications for building permits for District of Columbia buildings, stored in the Natural Resources Branch of the National Archives.

List of illustrations

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