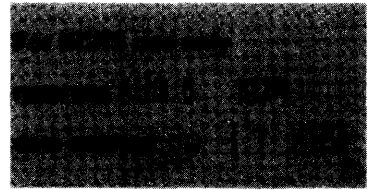


**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 Watts Building

and/or common Watts Building

**2. Location**

street & number 2008 Third Avenue, North  
(northeast corner of 3rd Avenue and 20th Street, North) — not for publication

city, town Birmingham — vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district 6

state Alabama code 01 county Jefferson code 073

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Molton, Allen and Williams, Inc.

street & number 2008 Third Avenue, North

city, town Birmingham — vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state Alabama

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Jefferson County Courthouse

street & number 210 21st Street, North

city, town Birmingham state Alabama

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Alabama Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1978  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery state Alabama

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## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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		

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The gracefully proportioned 16-story Watts Building soars upward 14 stories and then breaks to form stepped terra cotta gables that incorporate the two final stories. The street sides of the building are faced in cream-colored terra cotta and rust-colored (painted cream in 1977) terra cotta spandrels in low relief that, with the recessed windows, form vertical stripes. The two other sides had cream and rust striping in brick; one of those sides remains intact. The (originally) striped 12-story midsection of the building is framed by flush, cream-colored facing pierced by unrecessed windows at the second and 14th stories and the corner piers. At the 14th floor, high-relief geometric projections above and below the windows provide a transition between the rectilinear quality of the lower floors and the sculptural quality of the setback above. The corner piers visually support the setback and anchor the structure to its base.

The recessed window-and-spandrel striping resumes in the setback gable. The piers between the windows on the front gable are flush with the surface below, giving the gable more intense relief and vertical accent. The central pier rises to support a globe silhouetted against an arched opening that pierces buttresses, achieving a distinctive transition between a standard ziggerat setback and an unbroken incline. Between the gable ends is a pitched slate roof. The setback and unifying gable of the top floors make them read as a solid sculptural element.

The ground floor, faced with dark granite, has large display windows and remnants of ornate bronzework that was originally over all the windows.

A bronze marquise on Third Avenue marks the entrance to the lobby, which is richly decorated with walls and floors of travertine marble, elevators of dark wood and hammered bronze in bas relief, and an arched ceiling ornamented with Elizabethan plaster frescos. Above the entrance is a hemispherical window of green, blue, gray and white leaded glass.

Rehabilitation work done by Molton, Allen and Williams in 1977, retained most original features on the exterior and in the elevator lobby. Unfortunately, one of the building's most distinctive features, the stripes of rust-colored terra cotta, were neutralized by cream paint; presumably the original color could be restored at a later date.

# 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1927

**Builder/Architect**

C.M. Allen, contractor

Warren, Davis, and Knight, architects

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Watts Building, one of the most distinctive elements in the city skyline, is of more than local architectural importance. Its imaginative interpretation of the setback that influenced 1920s skyscrapers, its stylized ornamentation, and its colored vertical stripes (recently painted) make it a significant expression of evolving Art Deco design. The elevator lobby is a good example of the rich, decorative treatment typically given public spaces in important office buildings during the 1920s. The building, which replaced an 1881 four-story structure of the same name, commemorates a pioneer Birmingham family. The stockholders of Molton, Allen and Williams, the family-owned firm that purchased the building in 1976, are members of the family that erected the building. They are third-generation descendants of one of Birmingham's pioneer developers, who deeded the property on which the building stands to his daughter in 1879; she left it to her son, Thomas Haynes Watts, Jr., in 1921. Since it was erected, the building has housed the offices of three prominent local companies.

Architects for the building were a local firm, Warren, Knight and Davis, who during the 1920s designed three Art Deco skyscrapers that added distinctive vertical profiles to the Birmingham skyline. The same contractor, Charles M. Allen and Company, constructed both the 1881 building and the present building.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

see continuation sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Birmingham North

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 

1	6
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5	1	7	9	4	0
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3	7	0	8	3	8	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Northwest quarter of 36 Tsp. 17 South Range 3 West -- New Bl(11) P(11,12)

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 Alice Bowsher, Marjorie White, and Tom Bast (Ellen Mertins, AHC, 832-6621)

organization Birmingham Historical Society date July 30, 1979

street & number 1425 22nd Street, South telephone (205) 254-2495

city or town Birmingham state Alabama 35205

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Neil B. Howard Jr.

title SHPO Ala date August 1, 1979

For HCERS use only

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

William H. Bradman date 9.17.79  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: Carol A. Dubie date 9/13/79  
Chief of Registration

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED AUG 5 1979

DATE ENTERED

SEP. 17 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Birmingham Regional Planning Commission. Historic Sites Survey, Jefferson County, Alabama. 1972, p. 6

Satterfield, Carolyn Greene. Historic Sites of Jefferson County, Alabama. Birmingham, Gray Printing Company, Inc., 1976. p. 40.

White, Marjorie L. Downtown Birmingham - Architectural and Historical Walking Tour Guide. Birmingham Historical Society and The First National Bank of Birmingham, Birmingham Publishing Company, 1977. p. 62.