

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received MAY 21 1984
date entered JUN 21 1984

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Bank of Ensley

and/or common

2. Location

street & number ~~northwest corner~~ 19th Street and Avenue E, Ensley, NA not for publication

city, town Birmingham NA vicinity of 6th congressional district

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

4. Owner of Property

name C. Crawford Williams, Jr.

street & number 425 19th Street, Ensley

city, town Birmingham NA vicinity of state Alabama

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Jefferson County Courthouse

street & number 716 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 1970-present federal state county local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery state Alabama

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" 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 Bank of Ensley (1918), designed by local architect H. D. Breeding, is a two-story neoclassical style building on the northwest corner of Ensley's most important commercial intersection. The south and east facades are faced in white granite resting on a continuous, darker granite plinth; the west (rear) facade is brick and to the north the building abuts another structure. The primary (east) facade, which faces 19th Street, consists of a symmetrical three-bay block articulated by four engaged colossal Ionic columns and an adjacent (to the north) slightly wider bay flanked by Ionic pilasters. There is a full unenriched entablature surmounted by a tall parapet inset with blind balustrades. Entry--between the sets of engaged columns--is marked by a heavy decorative pediment featuring large consoles, acanthus leaves, modillions, and a cartouche. Modern doors have replaced the original decorative heavy brass doors. Above the doorway is a round-headed window topped by a large corinthian keystone. Storm windows now cover the decorative transoms and spandrels of the original windows.

The bank interior has been substantially altered, both by the bank and by subsequent occupants in the late 1960s and 1970s. One office (in the southwest corner), and the second floor retain much of their original character. Alterations generally have included wood paneling, dropped ceilings, and modern light fixtures. A bathroom at the rear of the ground floor is essentially intact, and there are remnants of original marble wainscoting in one room. The only other remaining feature of note is two walk-in vaults, one with a particularly massive door.

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 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 checked="" 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 1918, 1926 **Builder/Architect** H. D. Breeding

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Commercial

The Bank of Ensley (1918), located on the most important commercial intersection in Ensley, is significant because of its importance in the commercial development of the town, and later suburb, of Ensley. Originally organized in 1899, the bank was the first in what is now the western section of Birmingham, and was backed by the unparalleled Ramsay and McCormack interests. Until 1921--three years after construction of the present neo-classical building--Erskine Ramsay and George B. McCormack served as president and vice-president respectively. In 1921 they sold the business to Robert E. Chadwick, formerly also a vice president, and former cashier Sam C. King. Throughout the twenties the bank flourished, but on January 10, 1930 due to frozen assets, it opened for the last time.

9. Major Bibliographical References

White, Marjorie L. The Birmingham District. Birmingham Historical Society; 1981.
Satterfield, Carolyn G. Jefferson County Site Survey.
Ensley Enterprise, 1918-1919.
The Birmingham Post-Herald
The Birmingham News Interview with Crawford Williams, May 1983.

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property approx. 3900 sq. ft.; 75' x 36' approx.

Quadrangle name Adamsville, AL

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

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

B

Zone	Easting				Northing									

C

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D

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E

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

SE 73' of Lots 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 & 24 of Blk. 19 D According to survey of Ensley as in Map Book 4, Page 3 in office of Judge of Probate, Jefferson Co. subject to 10' easement over southwesterly 10' of said Lot 19 reserved in Vol 505-7 page 125 of said Probate Office

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

state NA code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Pamela Sterne King/Operation New Birmingham, & Ellen Mertins

organization Alabama Historical Commission

date August 16, 1983

street & number 725 Monroe Street

telephone 205 261-3184

city or town Montgomery

state Alabama

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date May 15, 1984

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the National Register

date

6/21/84

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Bank of Ensley

The town of Ensley was the brainchild of Colonel Enoch Ensley who emigrated from Memphis, Tennessee and acquired substantial lands in Jefferson County in the early 1880s. His hope was to fill the area with blast furnaces, steel mills, rod, wire and hoop mills and car works to convert Birmingham's mineral resources into finished products. Although Ensley was successful in establishing the Ensley Land Company to handle the sale of prime real estate, the company collapsed during the panic of 1893.

In the reshuffling and reorganization of the company, two young men, Erskine Ramsay and George B. McCormack, cheaply purchased four blocks in the heart of Ensley. Because of the location of Ensley's plants and her street railway system, this area became the main business and commercial district in the town by the late 1880s. In the early 1900s--and lasting up to the Great Depression--business activity grew rapidly here; shops and offices were built all along this 19th Street area.

At the very inception of this boom, the Bank of Ensley organized. In May 1899 Ramsay and McCormack built the bank on what was becoming Ensley's primary commercial intersection, that of 19th Street and Avenue E. Until 1921 Ramsay served as President and McCormack as Vice President. During that period the town underwent significant change, perhaps the most pivotal of which was its annexation into the City of Birmingham in 1910--only ten years after Ensley's incorporation as a town.

Though substantial elements of Ensley's population opposed annexation--including Ramsay and McCormack, Inc.--the suburb and its Bank of Ensley grew. In 1916 the bank incorporated and in 1918 noted local architect, H. D. Breeding, was hired to design a new bank building. Only a few years later, however, Ramsay and McCormack turned over the deed to the building and business to two other bank officials, Robert E. Chadwick and Sam C. King.

Until 1930 the suburb and the bank continued to flourish. Nineteen twenty-six was the best year in the bank's history and was also the year in which an annex was built that allowed 50% additional lobby and work space. For Ensley as a whole, growth and development reached its zenith in 1929 with the construction of the ten-story Ramsay-McCormack Building.

By 1930, however, the bottom had already fallen out of the nation's and Ensley's economy taking the Bank of Ensley as a victim. On January 11, 1930 the bank failed to open. After a heroic effort by former owners Ramsay and McCormack, and present owners King and Chadwick to rally, the bank closed permanently by February. Almost immediately, charges of false representation and mail fraud were leveled primarily at King and after several years of court battles, he was sentenced to five years in federal prison.

Subsequent owners of the building have included the First National Bank, who made most of the alterations, United Securities Insurance Company, and J. Jackson Stratton of "Mrs. Stratton's Salads" fame. In about 1980 the building was purchased by local lawyers whose practice is located there. Their plans are to renovate the upper floor for office space.