

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH 0685984

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	OCT 12 1978
DATE ENTERED	NOV 29 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

Commercial Building

AND/OR COMMON

Commercial Building

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Third and Johnston Street

--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Alexandria

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Louisiana

--- VICINITY OF

CODE

22

8th - Gillis Long

COUNTY

Rapides Parish

CODE

079

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Second Southern Inc./Optionee

*Survey by Borden & Traylor  
P.O. Box 351  
Alexandria, La., 71301*

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 4275

CITY, TOWN

Alexandria

--- VICINITY OF

STATE

Louisiana

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Rapides Parish Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Murray Street

CITY, TOWN

Alexandria

STATE

Louisiana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Louisiana Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1978

--- FEDERAL  STATE --- COUNTY --- LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

State Historic Preservation Office

CITY, TOWN

Baton Rouge

STATE

Louisiana

# 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 type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

---

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Commercial Building is located at Third and Johnston Streets in downtown Alexandria one block from the Red River. Although the surrounding area is commercial in character, many of the buildings have been demolished, leaving large areas of parking lot. Several of the extant structures are low-scale, late 19th century brick, shop-fronted buildings. But these do not form a cohesive district. In any case the vast majority of the buildings in the area were built or severely modified within the last 20 years. The nominated building is one of about four tall buildings in Alexandria. Being the second tallest, it rises noticeably above much of the downtown area.

The plan consists of open bay spaces on each floor with wooden partition walls. Each floor has a corridor which runs from end to end of the building with offices on each side. The building is entered off center in the main facade with a one bay marble lobby. Behind the lobby is a pair of elevators and a fine staircase.

At one time the Commercial Bank and Trust Company was located at the Third Street end of the building (ground floor). The bank failed in the Depression and the area was reworked for a shop in the 1940's. The reworking included marble facing on the outside and new glass. The present owner plans to restore the bank area to its original appearance with old brick, where brick has been removed.

The building rests upon concrete footings with a concrete basement. The structure is steel frame with hollowtile infill and brick facing. Two of the buildings four sides (the Third Street facade and the Johnston Street facade) are articulated as follows. The remaining two sides are not meant to be seen having a simple brick surface with windows cut in.

The exterior has a strongly skeletal appearance with the traditional base, shaft, and cornice articulation typical of the "Chicago School" of commercial buildings. The two-story base is faced in crimson brick with large two-story openings between piers. The five main stories of the building (the shaft) are faced in grey brick. The building is surmounted by a moderately projecting cornice with a pressed copper architrave over pressed tin modilleons.

The five main stories are lit by pairs of sash windows which are separated horizontally by piers and vertically by pairs of spandrel panels. The piers in both the base and the five main stories are trimmed in raised bricks resembling coining. The most noteworthy feature of the building is its decorative trim along the top of the base, below the cornice, in the spandrel panels, and above the top windows. Made of cast concrete, this ornamentation consists of repeating and interlacing geometric forms, in a manner reminiscent of Louis Sullivan.

# 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 1915 - 1916 BUILDER/ARCHITECT W. L. Stevens

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Commercial Building is significant as a major architectural landmark in Alexandria. It was the city's first skyscraper, and remains today the second tallest structure in town. The Commercial Building, with its seven-story height, with its base, shaft, and cornice articulation, and with its skeletal frame, large amount of glass, and repeating geometric ornamentation, is a good representative example of the early phase of the American "skyscraper" which was developed in Chicago in the 1880's. The Commercial Building is the only such example in Alexandria. Moreover it is one of about four examples in the northern half of the state.

The Commercial Building was built in 1915-1916 for Commercial Bank and Trust Company. It was designed by New Orleans architect W. L. Stevens and built on a lot at the corner of Third and Johnston Streets by Nicol, Langord and Johnston, a construction firm with home offices in Louisville, Kentucky. Commercial Bank and Trust Company, founded as Commercial Bank of Alexandria in 1902, bought the lot from James B. Thigpen in 1913 for \$42,750. The cost of construction of the building was about \$123,500.

The building was finished in March, 1916, and the bank moved into its new quarters on the ground floor. It continued to operate in this location until it failed in 1934 during the Great Depression. The part of the building above the bank housed numerous tenants through the years. For many years the J. F. Ball Lumber Company occupied most of the sixth floor offices. Lumber broker John E. Thorsell also had his offices on the sixth floor. The main occupant of the fifth floor was the law firm of Blackman, Overton and Dawkins, attorneys for the bank. The Overton of the firm was U.S. Senator John H. Overton. John H. McSween, father of Congressman Harold B. McSween, joined this law firm as a secretary in 1919 and was admitted to the bar in 1927. He went on to become one of Alexandria's most prominent attorneys. Through the years, the offices of the building also housed many doctors, dentists, lawyers, and other types of firms.

In 1941, the liquidator of the Commercial Bank and Trust Company sold the building to a corporation named Commercial Building in Alexandria, Inc., headed by Frank C. Murphey. This corporation retained control of the building until 1975. Since that time it has passed through the hands of several owners.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Hambleton, Gerald. "Commercial Building: Its 54-Year History Outlined." Alexandria Daily Town Talk, March 29, 1970.

Interview with Bill Wiener, Architect, Historic Preservation of Shreveport, September 18, 1978.

(continued)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

552

A	1,5	2,5	2,9	4,0	3,4	6,3	9,8	0	B				
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING					ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING	
C									D				

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The exterior wall of the building described within are the boundaries for this nomination.

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

John H. Downs

ORGANIZATION

Owner

DATE

9/19/78

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 4275

TELEPHONE

318/487-8610

CITY OR TOWN

Alexandria

STATE

Louisiana

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL     

STATE     

LOCAL X

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.

*Bill Wiener*

SIGNATURE

*Oct 2 1978*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

ATTEST:

*Bill Wiener*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

*11/29/78*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

*Nov 29, 1978*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	OCT 12 1978
DATE ENTERED	NOV 29 1978

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

---

Interview with Michael Wahlder, Alexandria attorney and former secretary of Commercial Building in Alexandria, Inc., based on his files, September 18, 1978

Rapides Parish Conveyance Records. Rapides Parish Courthouse. Especially James B. Thigpen to Commercial Bank and Trust Co., May 28, 1913, Conveyance Book 57, p. 283; Wilfred J. Begnaud to Frank C. Murphey, January 29, 1941, Conveyance Book 252, p. 392; Commercial Building in Alexandria, Inc. to Isaac Wahlder, Michael M. Wahlder, and Mary Ann Nachman, January 15, 1975, Conveyance Book 847, p. 831.