

**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 Memphis Trust Building

and/or common Commerce Title Building

2. Location

street & number 12 South Main Street not for publication

city, town Memphis vicinity of congressional district Eighth

state Tennessee code 047 county Shelby code 157

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Memphis Title Partners, Ltd.

street & number 12 South Main Street/Suite Number 1438

city, town Memphis vicinity of state Tennessee 38103

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Shelby County Registrar

street & number 160 North Main Street

city, town Memphis vicinity of state Tennessee 38103

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town vicinity of state

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 Commerce Title Building is a fifteen (15) story steel frame structure with hollow tile arch floor construction. Exterior finishes are buff brick with terra cotta and granite ornament. The building is located on the east side of the Mid-America Mall in downtown Memphis, approximately 75 feet south of Madison Avenue. The building was constructed in a unique manner in two narrow vertical phases. The original 1904 building was constructed in three bays on the south half (37.25 ft. x 148.50 ft.) of the present site. In 1914 the building was expanded in size with the addition of the north half of the present building. The 1914 west (front) elevation was constructed as a mirror image of the original west elevation. The building as expanded occupies a lot that is 74.25 ft. x 148.50 ft.

West Elevation-Main Street Frontage

Pedestrian scale at the street level is defined by a two (2) story high architrave, frieze and cornice supported by engaged columns placed twelve feet (12'-0") on center. The colonnade rhythm is defined by two (2) circular fluted granite engaged columns with entasis, placed between engaged rectilinear columns. This rhythm, as established in 1904, was repeated in every detail of the 1914 addition. Modified Doric capitals are placed on the rectilinear columns while the circular columns have Ionic capitals. These columns were notched out and placed directly over the structural steel columns. Oversized one-over-one double-hung wood windows are found in each bay of the second floor.

The third floor acts as a transition between the street level and the tower and is terminated by a dentiled cornice. Its twelve foot (12') height contains six oversized 6'-8"x 6'-2" wood double hung windows.

The tower of the building consists of floors four through eleven with a typical floor height of twelve feet (12'-0"). A pair of wood double hung windows is placed within the six 7'-0" x 7'-6" openings that are spaced four feet apart. The tower is terminated at the eleventh floor containing circular arched wood windows.

The twelfth floor is a transition between the tower and the cap of the building. While continuing the same vertical placement of windows the rhythm is changed by the use of a pair of 3'-1" x 7'-0" window units separated by a 13" masonry mullion. A shallow terra cotta cornice with dentils provides a horizontal band above the twelfth floor.

Floors 13, 14, 15, and attic cap the building with engaged columns extending from 13 through 14, a deep bracketed cornice at 15 and a shallow (10'-10") attic containing portal windows. The vertical organization and column rhythm is consistent with that of the first and second floors. All the columns at the cap have Corinthian capitals.

With the fifteenth floor acting as a frieze the elements of the cornice above are terra cotta egg and dart, fish scale patterned ornament between modillion brackets and Greek antefixae terminating the cornice.

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 1904–1914 **Builder/Architect** Hanker and Cairns

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The significance of the Commerce Title Building lies in the 1904 use of steel framing for a fifteen story high structure, in the unprecedented 1914 expansion and a partial replication of the existing 1904 building, the important role it has played in local commerce, and the individually prominent Memphians who have been connected with it throughout its life.

The Commerce Title Building was constructed by the Bank of Commerce and Trust in 1904 as the Memphis Trust Building. That year saw the emergence of the first two high rise structures taller than the Porter Building; the Memphis Trust Building and the Tennessee Trust Building, both of steel frame construction and fifteen stories high. These structures exemplified the image of commercial architecture of the period. This new image resulted from increased office space demands, higher urban land costs, new building construction code regulations, and new construction materials and techniques. These factors forced the progression from romantic and individualistic detailing (e.g. The Porter Building) to less architectural embellishment, higher structures and eclectic detailing commonly occurring at the top and bottom of the building—leaving the midriff distinctive only by virtue of its height. The Commerce Title Building represents this period of commercial construction in Memphis' history and serves as a link from the early Victorian commercial to the introduction of the Modern expression.

The Bank of Commerce & Trust Building was built at 14–16 South Main Street, directly adjacent to the opulent Luehrmann Hotel, under the personal direction of its president, J. T. Fargason, Sr. In that same year, Mr. Fargason was instrumental in negotiating the consolidation of the Bank of Commerce and the Memphis Trust Company, the first commercial marriage of that nature in Memphis, which resulted in the construction of the new building. Through Mr. Fargason's shrewd management, the \$450,000 building was paid for out of surplus bank funds. The bank occupied the first floor, the basement, and the sub-basement; the Trust Division occupied the second floor; with the remainder of the building being quickly leased upon opening. Original plans called for 300 offices in the tower with adjustable partitions "so that an office can be made any desirable size." The banking lobby was finished in white marble.

The "Luehrmann Property" at 10 So. Main was first obtained by the bank in May 1904 in a "long drawn out battle" outbidding the Jos. Schlitz Brewing Company by a mere \$5. Mr. John Watkins (representing the bank in the bidding) declared that the bank was "in no way interested in the purchase, but that he represents other parties, whose names he declines to mention." Mr. Watkins left for New York the next day. In 1909, the property was sold to a local "syndicate" of business men at a \$95,000 profit. In 1911, the property reverted back to the bank. While it would appear that considerable thought had been given to the expansion of the 1904 building, any plans for it were kept highly secretive while the bank continued to profit from ownership of the property.

9. Major Bibliographical References

The Memphis Commercial Appeal. 10 April 1904; 8 May 1904; 15 July 1904; 8 June 1905; 22 October 1905; 9 March 1911; 5 March 1912; 25 April 1914.
 Sigafos, Robert A. Cotton Row To Beale Street-A Business History of Memphis, Memphis State University Press, 1979.

10. Geographical Data

UTM NOT VERIFIED
ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreege of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Northwest Memphis

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	5	7	6	8	5	4	0	3	8	9	2	8	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing							

C

Zone		Easting				Northing							

D

Zone		Easting				Northing							

E

Zone		Easting				Northing							

F

Zone		Easting				Northing							

G

Zone		Easting				Northing							

H

Zone		Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot 234 on the Plan of Memphis, described by metes and bounds as follows:
 Beginning on the east line of Main Street 74½ feet south of the south line of Madison Avenue;
 running thence south with said east line of Main Street 74½ feet to the north line of an

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 David M. Schuermann

organization Bologna & Associates, Inc. date
Architects and Planning

street & number 60 N. Main Street/ Suite 1408 telephone (901) 527-0371

city or town Memphis state Tennessee 38103

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 Harold L. Hager

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission date 9/26/80

For HCRS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u>W. Ray Luce</u>	date <u>11/25/80</u>
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest: <u>Linda Hunt McClelland</u>	date <u>11.24.80</u>
Chief of Registration	

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South Elevation-Alley Frontage

The south elevation represents the original 1904 building and contains little exterior detail. Three double hung windows are placed between the first and last pair of structural columns. Oriel windows occur between the remaining columns on four through eleven, taking advantage of the alley's public right-of-way for light, ventilation and views. Horizontal terra cotta bands define the base, tower and cap.

North Elevation

The north elevation represents the 1914 building which was built on the north property line against an existing building. As a result this elevation contains a 12' x 48' light well by which the architects were able to maintain natural lighting, ventilation and views. Horizontal terra cotta bands define the base, tower and cap.

Modifications

Modifications to the exterior are consolidated to the ground floor street facades. They include the removal of the lower portion of the columns (at the first floor), the consolidation of two original entrances to one granite faced entrance, the installation of new street level facade store front treatments (i.e. reflective glass, corrugated metal panels and porcelain panels), the removal of exterior stairs from the sidewalk to basement commercial spaces and the addition of a rear revolving door.

On the interior, the main corridor established in the 1914 addition has been extended to the rear of the building with the installation of a marble stair to the revolving door. This modification dictated the removal of an existing marble opera stair (1914) to the second floor.

Interior finishes from the original banking lobby have been modified as dictated by tenant improvements.

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Then, on March 5, 1912, the bank's president, T. O. Vinton announced plans to construct a new building at a cost of \$500,000. The new building site was the lot adjacent to the present bank structure on which lay the old Luehrmann Hotel building, then leased by the bank and operated as the Baumgarten Hotel. The 1912 plan called for the existing building to adjoin the new building and the replication in every exterior detail of the Main Street facade with the end result of the two buildings appearing as one. Interior modifications required included three new elevators, turning the existing elevators one hundred and eighty degrees to open into the new building, and the addition of a new marble opera stair to serve the second floor from the expanded banking lobby. Machinery and boilers were of sufficient capacity that it was unnecessary to double the equipment! The expansion/replication was accomplished under the joint administration of T. O. Vinton, president and R. Brinkley Snowden, vice president. These two men were also joint developers of the South's first subdivision—Annesdale Park.

Ownership of the building was held by the Bank of Commerce and Trust (later the National Bank of Commerce) until title was transferred to the Commerce Title Guaranty Company on March 3, 1934. Title was transferred to the Commerce Title Building Corporation in March 1965; and in June 1976 the building was sold to Rovicyn, Inc. Present owners, Memphis Title Partners, Ltd., have held title to the structure since 1979.

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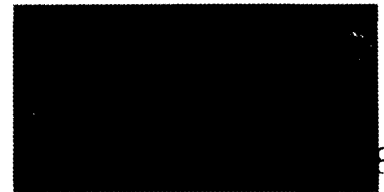
Item number 9

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Talley, Robert. Our 80th Anniversary Year, 1873-1953: National Bank of Commerce,
Memphis: Merrill Kremer, Inc., 1953.

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alley; thence east with the north line of said alley 148½ feet to the west line of an alley formerly known as Maiden Lane and now November Sixth Street; thence north with the west line of said November Sixth Street 74¼ feet to a point; thence west 148½ feet to the point of beginning, and being the same property described in and conveyed to party of the first part by Warranty Deed of record at Instrument No. L3 4160, in the Register's Office of Shelby County, Tennessee.