

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

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**1. Name of Property**

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historic name: National Bank of Commerce Building

other name/site number: N/A

=====

**2. Location**

=====

street & number: 200 South Pruett St.

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Paragould

vicinity: N/A

state: AR

county: Greene

code: AR 055

zip code: 72450

=====

**3. Classification**

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Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>  1  </u>	<u>    </u>	buildings
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	objects
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

=====  
**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**  
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  X  nomination \_\_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  X  meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Cathryn A. Brand  
Signature of certifying official

4-8-93  
Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

=====  
**5. National Park Service Certification**  
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I, hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_\_ entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_  
     See continuation sheet.  
\_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
    National Register  
     See continuation sheet.  
\_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
    National Register  
\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper      Date  
   of Action

=====  
**6. Function or Use**  
=====

Historic: Commerce      Sub: Financial Institution  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Current : Commerce      Sub: Professional  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification:

Classical Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation Limestone roof Asphalt  
walls Limestone other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Local.

Applicable National Register Criteria: C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period(s) of Significance: 1923

Significant Dates: N/A

Significant Person(s): N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Hankers and Cairns, Architects  
Lesmeister, Contractor  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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X See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- X State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing
A 15 726420 3992810 B
C D

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

23 ft. and 4 in. of equal width off, from and across the north end of Lots 1 and 2, Block 7, of the original town (now city) of Paragould, Arkansas.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

This boundary includes all of the property historically associated with th resource.

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11. Form Prepared By

-----  
Name/Title: Patrick Zollner, National Register Historian  
Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: 04/08/93  
Street & Number: 323 Center, 1600 Tower Bldg. Telephone: (501) 324-9880  
City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72201

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Continuation Sheet

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### Summary

Constructed in 1923, the National Bank of Commerce is a rectangular plan, two-story commercial building constructed of cut-stone in the Classical Revival style of architecture. Twin Ionic columns grace the front of the building while the interior features a restored vaulted ceiling. Located at 200 South Pruet Street in Paragould, the National Bank of Commerce is in good condition and, with the exception of a 1951 mezzanine addition, has not been altered significantly.

### Elaboration

Located at 200 South Pruet Street in downtown Paragould, the National Bank of Commerce was built in 1923 as a two-story commercial building constructed of smooth-finished, cut-limestone. The rectangular plan building rests upon a concrete basement (the visible exterior foundation is stone-faced) and is covered by a flat, built-up roof behind a parapet.

The front, or eastern, elevation is punctuated by a pair of Ionic columns with fluted columns and attic bases. The columns, which flank the central double-leaf entrance, rest on raised pedestals and rise two stories to support a substantial entablature. Beneath the entablature, the exterior wall is recessed the width of the columns and enframed by corner pilasters that are flush with the columns. The corner pilasters are actually comprised of two shallow pilasters with base and capital superimposed on a narrow projecting wall.

A stone lintel supported by two scrolled brackets projects above the entrance which contains a modern aluminum-frame double-leaf door and large single-pane transom. The first story is further fenestrated by two narrow windows between the columns and the pilasters. A panelled course divides the two stories, and the upper story is lighted by four one-over-one double-hung windows.

The entablature consists of a simple architrave, a wide frieze with the inscription "National Bank of Commerce," and a projecting cornice. A modestly stepped parapet extends above the cornice and conceals the roof. The entablature is continued on the northern elevation and is identical to that of the eastern facade with the exception of six rectangular attic vents in the cornice molding and a straight parapet.

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The northern elevation consists of eight bays divided by pilasters. At the northeast corner, a narrow bay flanked by pilasters identical to those found on the northern elevation contains a uninterrupted first-story wall and a single one-over-one double-hung window on the second story. The next six bays are similar in arrangement and are defined by conventional pilasters that rest on the course formed by the first-story window sills. Originally, the first story of each bay contained a large, metal-frame window composed of a rectangular pane surrounded by smaller side and upper panes. In 1951, a mezzanine was added to the rear, or western end, of the building, and this alteration resulted in the division of two windows by a band of stone veneer (over the structural support). At this time, a walk-up teller window was also added; however, only the lower third of a window (to the east of the mezzanine-altered windows) was replaced with a sliding glass. Each upper story of these six bays are fenestrated by a pair of one-over-one double-hung windows. The eighth, and westernmost, bay is flanked by two of the pilasters as found on the front elevation and contains a modern aluminum-frame single-leaf entrance with transom and a single one-over-one double-hung window above. The doorway is slightly recessed and leads to a staircase for the second floor.

The interior is entered through a small foyer with marble wainscoting and a plaque on the southern wall listing the officers and directors of the bank when the building was constructed. Another pair of doors leads into the former bank lobby which is characterized by the original vaulted ceiling that is supported by five arches which rest on wall pilasters. The ceiling is adorned by decorative molding and circular reliefs surrounding the light fixtures. A balcony with a turned-spindle balustrade is located above the foyer and extends the width of the interior. The floor of the lobby is now divided into cubicle office space by movable partitions. Marble wainscoting is found on the north wall while the south wall is decorated with rectangular panels between the pilasters. The aforementioned 1951 mezzanine addition served as the board room for the bank. It contains a row of stationary window to permit viewing of lobby activities. The second floor was originally one large area. It is currently divided into a meeting room and two imitation-wood panelled offices.

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### Summary

The National Bank of Commerce provides an important architectural link to the vibrant commercial life of Paragould in the 1920's and is being nominated under Criterion C as the best example of a Classical Revival commercial building in Greene County.

### Elaboration

The community of Paragould was founded in 1882 when the Texas and St. Louis Railroad crossed lines with the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railroad in southeastern Greene County. The Texas and St. Louis was chartered in east Texas in 1877 by a former Confederate officer, J. P. Douglas, to facilitate faster transportation and a wider market for the products of his fruit orchards. Douglas made arrangements with the owners of the Iron Mountain Railroad and began construction of a narrow-gauge line called the Tyler Tap Line that would connect with the Iron Mountain at Texarkana. Unfortunately, construction setbacks and financial difficulties soon forced Douglas to cease work on the line and search for new financing.

In St. Louis, Douglas found a partner in Colonel James Paramore, a former Union officer from Ohio. Paramore operated the St. Louis Cotton Compress Company and was interested in securing direct transportation of Texas cotton to his mills in St. Louis. The Texas and St. Louis Railroad Company was formed, and Paramore was, somewhat surprisingly, able to obtain financial backing from several New York bankers. After the creditors were paid and construction resumed, Douglas left the nascent railroad to pursue other interests, and Paramore became president of the fledgling company. Unfortunately, before the Texas and St. Louis could connect with the Iron Mountain line in Texarkana, railroad mogul Jay Gould purchased the Iron Mountain and revoked all Texarkana traffic agreements made by the previous owners.

Without an outlet to a major line, the Tyler Tap Line was now useless, and Gould naturally expected that Paramore would have to sell his interests in the company or face bankruptcy. Paramore, however, rejected Gould's offer and started construction of an independent line, as far away from the Gould lines as possible, through Arkansas and Missouri to Cairo, Illinois. Gould, determined to break Paramore at all costs, ordered his railroad to cross the lines of the Texas and St. Louis whenever possible, thereby dividing the business Paramore expected to receive. In



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Greene County, the two lines arrived, almost simultaneously, at the site of present day Paragould in 1882. Myrl Rhine Mueller noted in her *A History of Greene County, Arkansas* that ". . . a silver spike was not driven at this juncture."

The fierce competition between Paramore and Gould ensured the success of the future town, for the area now had complete transportation facilities in all directions. In her book, Mueller described the origin of the new town's name:

In searching for a suitable name to submit to the Post Office for the proposed town, a group of citizens, led by Dr. Edrington, came up with the idea of coining a unique and original name honoring the presidents of the two railroads who had played leading roles in a classic railroad drama. By combining syllables from each of the names, Para-Gould was invented and accepted by the Post Office in July, 1882.

Mueller goes on to note that Gould "pettishly" refused to use the new name for his station because he resented having his name linked with that of Paramore; moreover, his name had been relegated to the last syllable. The Iron Mountain used the name of Parmley for several years on their station and schedules until the resultant confusion among arriving passengers finally became too much for the company to ignore. The hyphenation of the two syllables was also dropped at some point in the early years of the town. Paragould was incorporated on March 3, 1883.

The new community grew quickly, and in 1884 a campaign was initiated to move the county seat from Gainesville, which had held that honor since 1840, to Paragould. This issue bitterly divided not only the residents of Gainesville but the entire county as well. After months of bitter controversy, a referendum was held in September, 1884, in which the Paragould faction won by a narrow margin, 943 to 707.

The first bank in Paragould, the Greene County Bank (or Bank of Greene County), was organized in 1887 by Richard Jackson, who was also its principal stockholder. A number of years later, when Jackson suspected fraudulent banking practices and requested an examination of the cashier's books, the majority of the stockholders voted against him. Jackson promptly withdrew his funds and placed them in a St. Louis bank. Shortly thereafter in 1901, the Greene County Bank went into receivership due to

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embezzlement by the cashier.

After the demise of the Greene County Bank, a group of leading businessmen, including Jackson, Eli Meiser, R. W. Meriwether, and L. U. Stedman, established the Bank of Commerce in the building formerly occupied by the previous bank. The Bank of Commerce was incorporated under a state charter in 1901, but ten years later, the bank switched to a federal charter in order to increase its capitalization. Accordingly, the name was then changed to the National Bank of Commerce. The bank prospered, and by 1923 the bank directors decided that a new facility was needed.

By the 1920's, Paragould had grown into a thriving town fueled by Greene County's vibrant timber industry made possible by the transportation afforded by its two railroads (now known as the Missouri Pacific and the St. Louis and Southwestern or "Cotton Belt"). In addition to the National Bank of Commerce, Paragould's downtown featured the First National Bank, Security Bank, and Paragould Trust, as well as the three-story Bertig department store, two newspapers, a pressed brick factory, a tile factory, an ice and cold storage plant, a flour mill, two spoke factories, three cotton gins, the Missouri Pacific railroad shops, a post office, an 800 seat theater, a telephone exchange, and other assorted businesses. In the Vandervoort Hotel, Paragould could also boast of one of the finest hotels in Arkansas. In light of the town's prosperity, the Chamber of Commerce proudly adopted as its slogan the epithet "You'll like Paragould."

For the design of their new building, the National Bank of Commerce directors selected the Memphis architectural firm of Hanker and Cairns, the same firm that had designed the Vandervoort Hotel in 1915. Well-known throughout the Mid-South region, the firm was established in 1903 when William Julius Hanker and Bayard S. Cairns formed a partnership. Hanker and Cairns designed such National Register properties in Memphis as the Commerce Title Building, the Shrine Building, and the Bank of Commerce and Trust Company Building (later known as the National Bank of Commerce) as well as St. Mary's Cathedral, the Chisca and Tennessee Hotels, the Lowenstein Building, and many others.

The minutes from a regular meeting of the National Bank of Commerce directors on March 17, 1923 reveal that Mr. Lesmeister received the general contract for his low bid of \$43,700. Fisher Heating Co. received the heating contract (\$2,195); City Plumbing Co. received the plumbing contract (\$850); and Drake Electric Co. received the

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wiring contract (\$648). When electric fixtures (\$400), hardware (\$600), and "contingencies" (\$2,000) were added, a total cost of \$50,393 was estimated for the construction of the new building. The minutes also note that the architect, William J. Hanker, was present and that Lesmeister was called into the meeting. Lesmeister advised the board that he could complete the building by October 1, 1923, and agreed to a proposition by the board that he forfeit \$25 per day that construction continued beyond that date, while a \$25 per day bonus would accrue for early completion. The new structure was constructed on the site of the previous building, at the corner at Emerson and Pruett Streets.

At the time of the new building's construction, the officers of the bank were: Eli Meiser, president; J. D. Block, vice president; R. W. Meriwether, vice president; H. W. Woosley, cashier; T. L. Payne, assistant cashier. With the exception of Payne, the bank officers were also on the board of directors, which also included L. U. Stedman, John Meiser, J. H. McPherson, T. B. Kitchens, R. C. Grizzard, M. F. Block, A. H. Wrape, A. W. Jackson, and Joe Wolf. Some of the wealthiest and most influential men in the city were represented. Stedman and Meriwether owned and operated successful hardware stores in the downtown, while J. D. Block was an attorney, large landowner, and sole proprietor of a downtown insurance company. A. H. Wrape's family owned large timber holdings in Greene County and the Missouri bootheel, and at one time the Wrape Mills were the largest producer of "tight" barrels in the state.

As an institution, the National Bank of Commerce played an active role in the community by providing financial support to both economic and charitable ventures. For instance, the bank donated to both the First Baptist Church and the Ely and Walker shirt factory for the construction of their new facilities. Also notable was the contribution of \$12,000 for the construction of the Marmaduke to Paragould highway in the late 1920's.

The National Bank of Commerce Building, however, derives its primary significance from its architectural styling. Although it was not the only building in Paragould to reflect the Classical Revival style of architecture - the stately 1914 Post Office building was also constructed of cut stone and adorned by Ionic columns - the National Bank of Commerce nevertheless was unique to the downtown district and in direct contrast with the red brick-constructed, early Twentieth century commercial buildings that predominated along Pruett Street. By utilizing a smooth ashlar

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finish and a monumental facade, Hanker and Cairns achieved the desired appearance of stability and grandeur appropriate for a proud banking institution. Indeed, the National Bank of Commerce is the only one of the four early bank buildings which currently retains its integrity, and many of the other downtown commercial buildings have either been lost or severely altered. Furthermore, the bank became the unquestioned finest example of commercial and institutional Classical Revival architecture in Greene County when the Post Office was drastically expanded and altered in 1964. As such, the National Bank of Commerce provides an important, and perhaps the best, architectural nexus with 1920's Paragould. For these reasons, it is being nominated under Criterion C with local significance.

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### Bibliography

Herndon, Dallas T. *Centennial History of Arkansas*. Chicago-Little Rock: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922. Vol. I.

Information supplied by Fred Kleihauer, August, 1982.

Mueller, Myrl Rhine. *A History of Greene County, Arkansas*. Little Rock: Parkhurst Book Design, 1984.

National Register nomination for Bank of Commerce and Trust Company Building, Memphis, Tennessee.

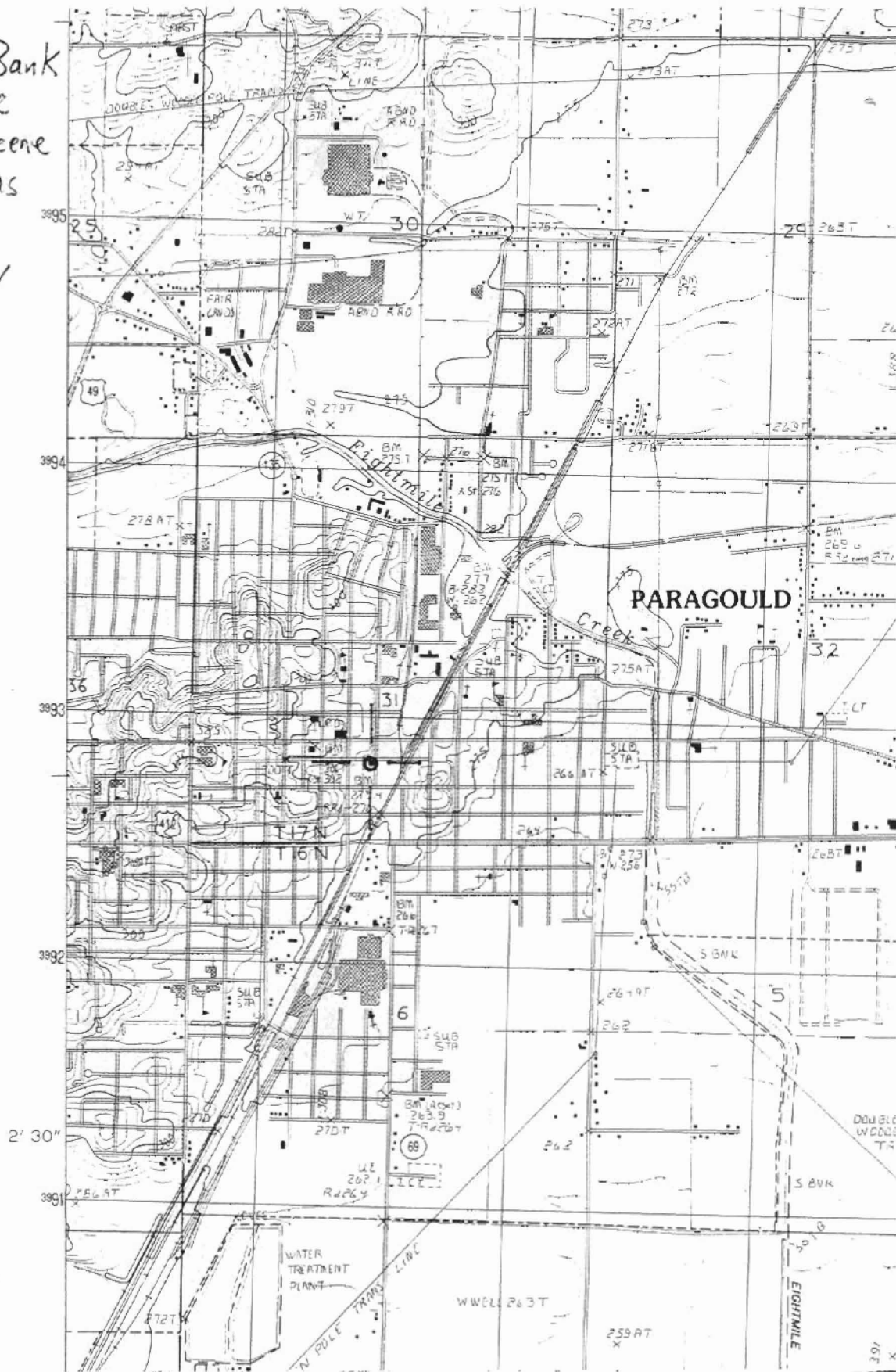
"William Hanker: Architect." *Memphis Press Scimitar* obituary, August, 23, 1958.



National Bank  
of Commerce  
Paragould, Greene  
Co., Arkansas

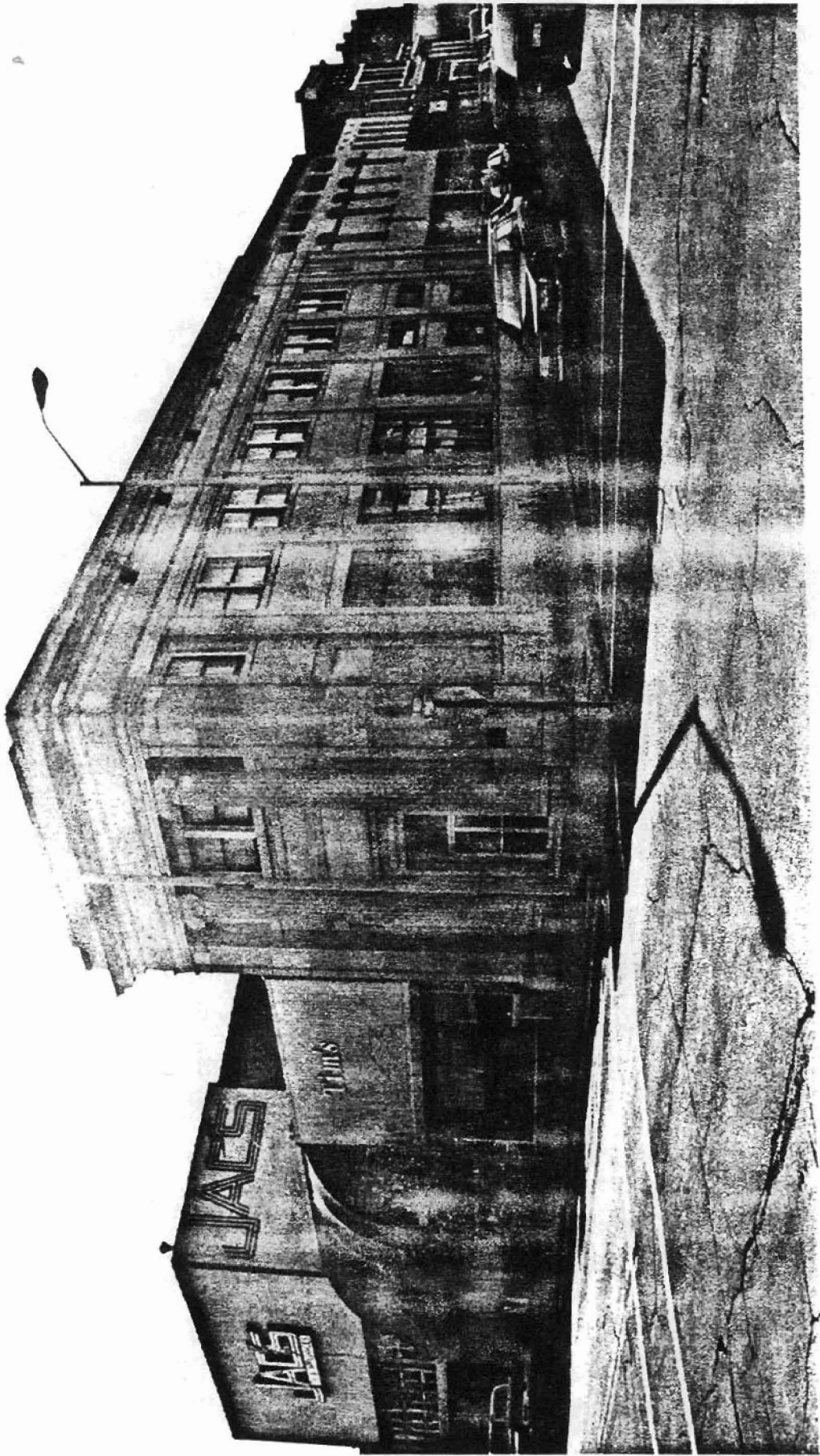
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15/726420/  
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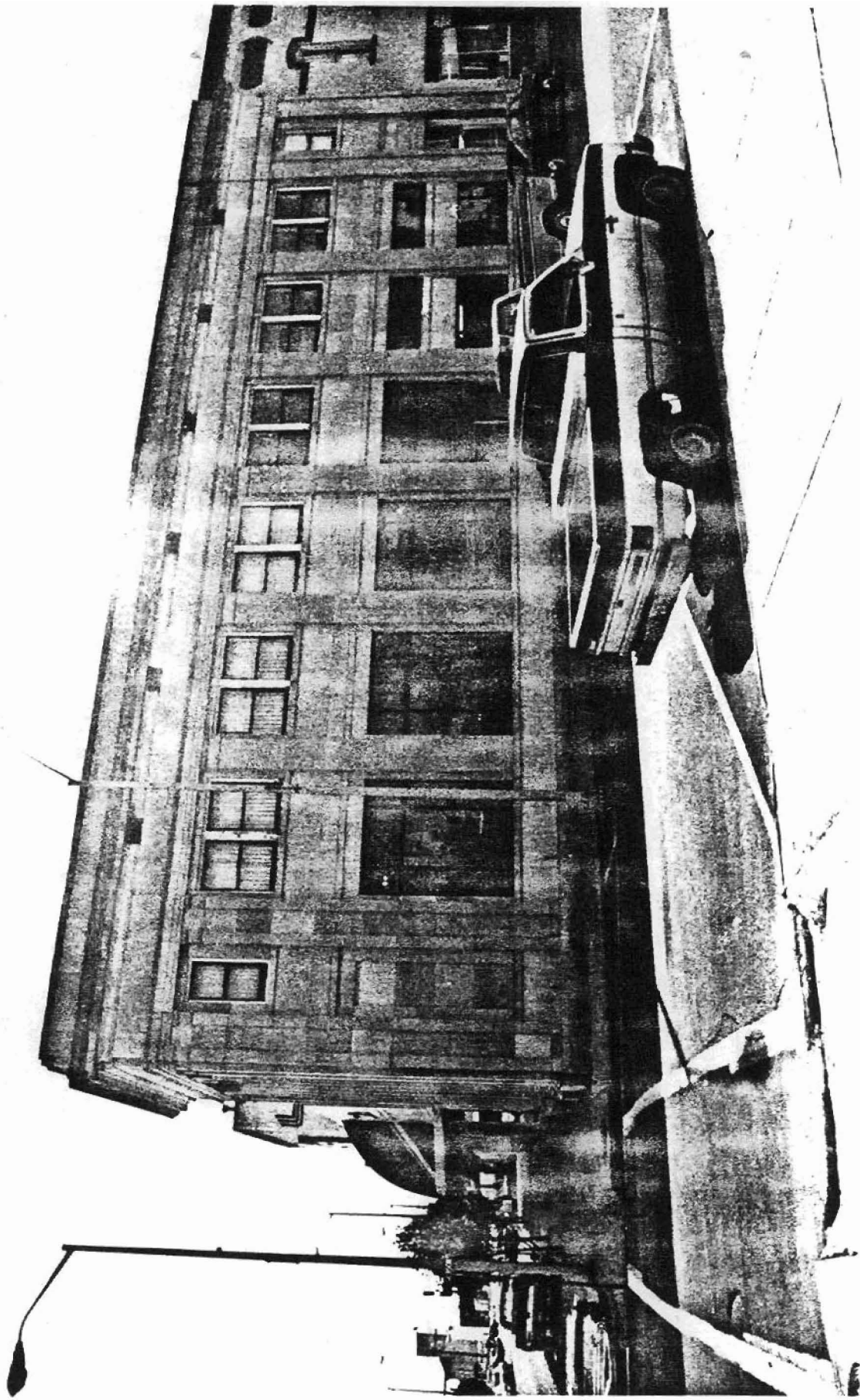
Natic #1 Bank of Commerce

Greent Co., Arkansas

Photographed by Ernest Johnson

October 1911

Measure on file at Natic #1  
New from me, original



Near west Bank of Commerce

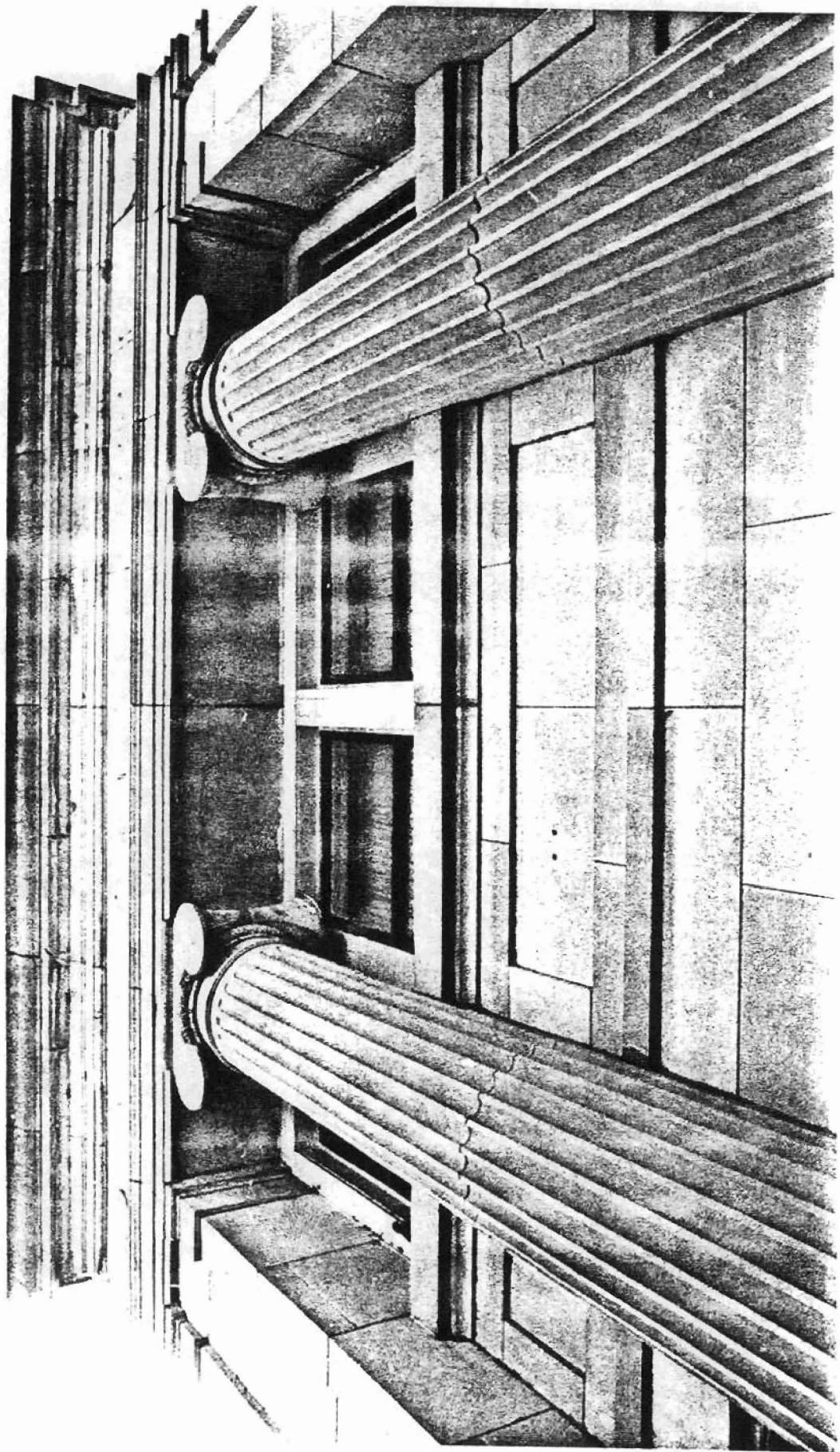
On the side Arroyos

Photographed on Jan 1991

October 1991

Maple on fire at 11:11

View from the north



Nat'l Bank of Commerce

3700 12th St. N.W.

Washington, D.C.

October 1941

Message on view on A-1113

View from the east

# NATIONAL BANK OF COMMERCE

ESTABLISHED 1900

ERECTED 1922

## OFFICERS

ELI MEISER

PRESIDENT

J. D. BLOCK

VICE PRES.

R. W. MERVETHER

VICE PRES.

H. W. WOOSLEY

CASHIER

T. L. PAYNE

ASST. CASH.

## DIRECTORS

J. D. BLOCK

H. W. WOOSLEY

L. U. STEDMAN

A. H. WRAPE

JOHN G. MEISER

R. W. MERVETHER

J. H. McPHERSON

W. E. KIRSCH

T. B. KITCHENS

A. M. JACKSON

R. C. GRIZZARD

JOE WOLF

M. E. BLOCK

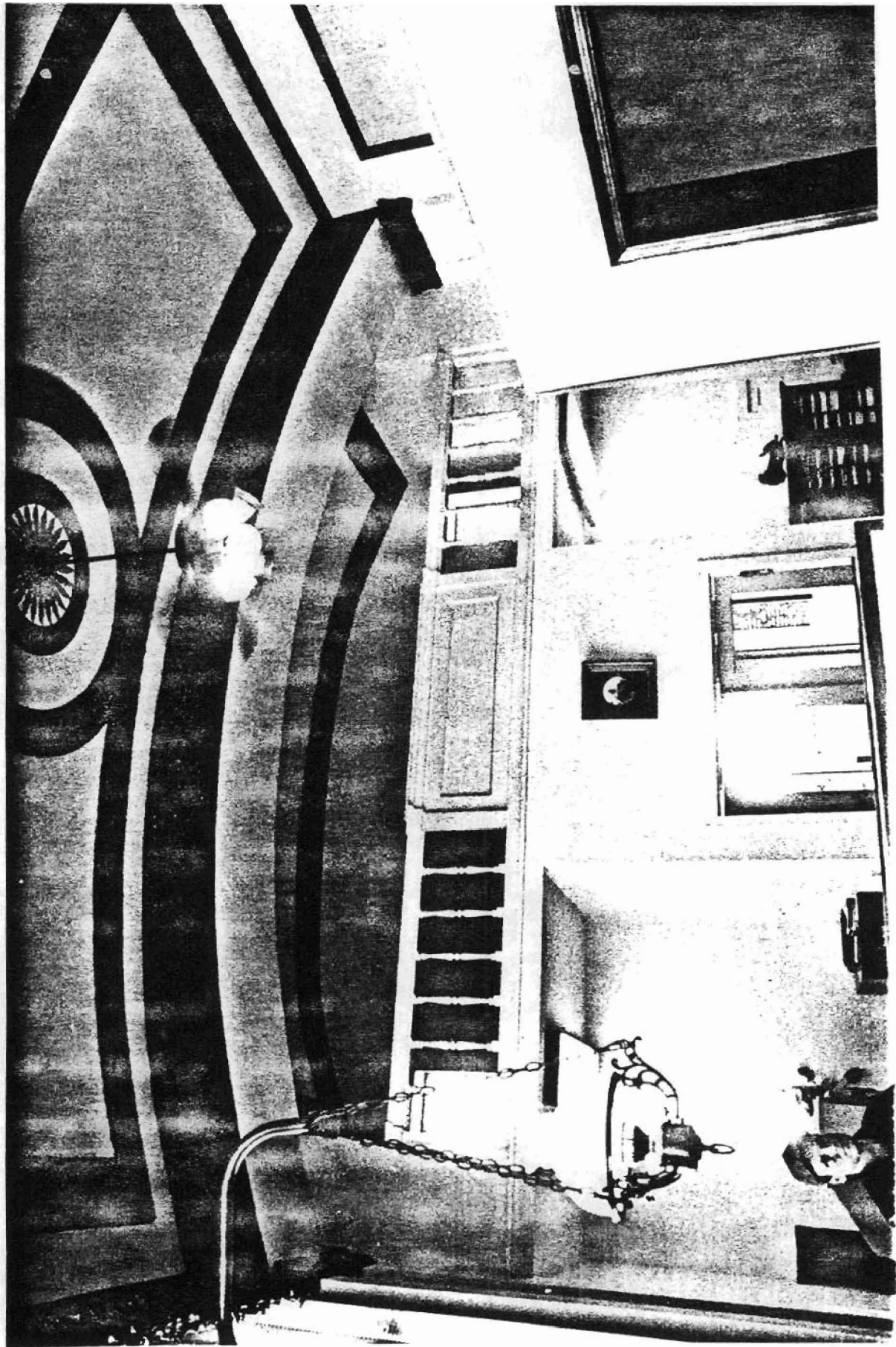
ELI MEISER

BANKER AND CARPERS - ARCHITECTS

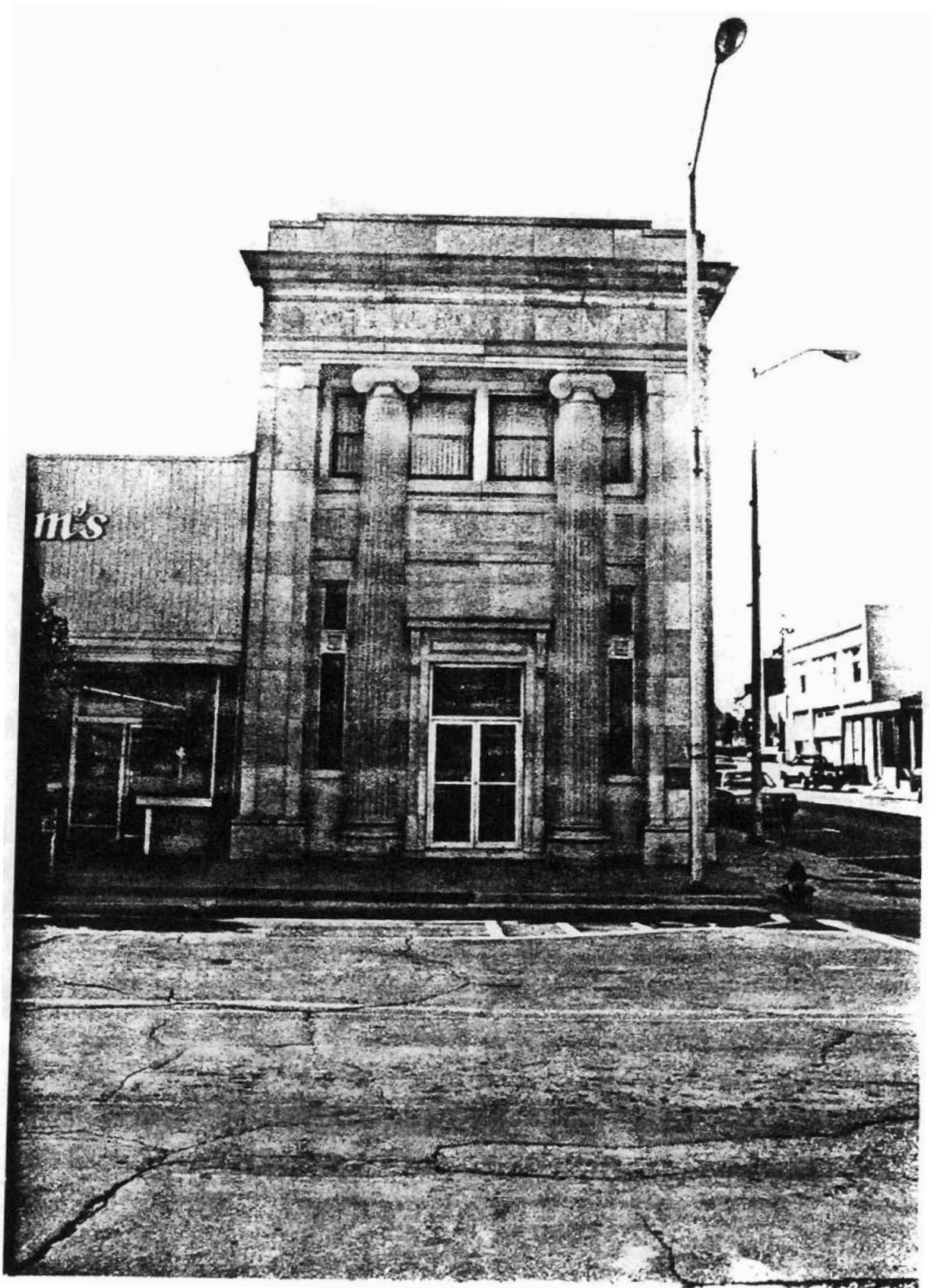
Madison  
Green

2000  
New York, N.Y. or Albany  
View from the north, inside  
the tower





National Bank of Commerce  
Sincere Gratitude, Wm. W.  
F. Kempford for services  
Oct 25, 1881  
Near the water in Philip  
View of water from the



Admiral Bank of Commerce  
Corner of ...  
...  
View from the East