

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT HISTORIC DISTRICT LANDMARKS COMMISSION

THE NATIONAL AMERICAN BANK BUILDING
200 Carondelet Street

Architectural Rating: Blue
Construction Date: 1928-29

Architect: Moise Goldstein, Architect, George J. Glover, & Co., Contractors

Nomination Information

Date: May 25, 1978
Nominated by: Michael Duplantier
Seconded by: Diane Manget, Imre Hegedus
Recommended by: Staff

Site Description: Square #224, Lot #1,2,3,4,5 & 7
1st M.D., 5th A.D.
Zoning: CBD-1 Lot Size: 106' 3" 4" x 107' 2" 2" x 112' 1" 2" x 22' 1" 5" x
19' 3" 3" x 84' 3" 5"

Owner: American Assets, Inc.

Current Use: Banking offices and professional offices

History of Property

Current Owner: American Assets, Inc.

Date of Acquisition: April 26, 1928

Purchase Price: \$1,125,000.00

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural significance and the fact that it was designed by a noted architect. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining landmark qualification, and outlined in City Ordinance No. 6699 M.C.S., will be examined on an individual basis in order to provide information upon which a final decision will be made on whether or not to designate the property.

Architectural Significance

According to records in the Office of Conveyance, the land on which this building stands was acquired by the American Bank and Trust Company on March 28, 1928. Blueprints for the structure preserved at the New Orleans Public Library are dated August 1, 1928 and were prepared in the office of Moise Goldstein, architect. The construction contract for the building was signed on September 6, 1928, with George J. Glover & Company to serve as contractors. The building was completed in 1929, according to Sanborn Insurance Maps. No contemporary newspaper article mentioning the exact date of completion or the date of opening has been located. The building stands 29 stories tall and measures 325 feet in height from the ground to the top of the tower lantern.

Designed, according to it's architect, in the "American vertical style of architecture", the National American Bank building is the only high-rise office building in New Orleans which can be associated with style known today as Art Deco. The name Art Deco is a corruption of the title of the 1925 Exposition des Arts Decoratifs, held in Paris. This Exposition pioneered a style of architecture and decoration which rebelled against any sort of historical design elements such as column orders. The decorative detailing on such structures is highly stylized, often taking natural forms and making them appear more geometric and two dimensional that they would in their natural state. In the U.S., the Art Deco style was used extensively in the design of skyscrapers.

The National American Bank exhibits the stark contrast between flat, unadorned surfaces against elaborate geometric ornament. The building rests on a base course of polished granite, with the remainder of the building clad in Indiana limestone. With the exception of the panel above the Carondelet entrance, which displays the bank's name between two very stylized eagles, the stonework of the building's base is devoid of ornament. The grills over the lower portion of the ground floor windows are of bronze, as are those which completely screen the windows of the second story. The first floor grilles

represent a very stylized version of foliage, with the second floor grilles featuring a strict geometric pattern. The large grille over the Carondelet Street entrance is of cast-iron, cast in yet another geometric pattern. The doors at this entrance are of bronze, as is the fluted panel above them. Curiously, the magnificent bronze doors on the Common Street facade do not reflect the Art Deco character of the other metalwork on the building. Divided into six panels, each of which features a portrait, in relief, of a famous American, including Washington, Lincoln and Jefferson, among others. This sort of monumental door with sculpture panels is a Renaissance inspired feature, first found on the doors of the Baptistery of the Cathedral of Florence, Italy. These doors and their frame, represent architectural metalwork at its finest, and are typical of the quality of workmanship found on this building.

The architect's use of the term vertical in describing the building is quite appropriate, for he designed the building's exterior so as to emphasize its verticality. The limestone piers which divide the facade into bays rise up without interruption until the various setbacks of the building mass bring them to a stop. The spandrel panels between the vertical piers are fluted and match the detailing above the Carondelet entrance to the building. As the building rises, the structure recedes from the corner of Carondelet and Common by means of a series of setbacks. The first of these occurs at the 15th floor level, which is obscured by the parapet set on top of the 14th floor. This and all other parapets on the building feature terra-cotta spandrel panels with stylized ornament set between the caps of the vertical piers. The building is setback again at the 18th, 20th and 24th floor levels. Each of these succeeding setbacks further pushes the tower of the building away from the Carondelet and Common corner. The octagonal tower starts at the 24th floor level and terminates at the 29th floor, although there is no usable interior space within the tower. The entire tower is faced in terra-cotta. The tower is capped by an illuminated lantern made of sheet bronze on a steel frame.

The use of setbacks on this building, a feature characteristic of Art Deco skyscrapers, was evidently the result of the architect's design preference. There were no zoning laws in place in New Orleans which would require such setbacks, as was the case in New York, where in 1916 a law was passed requiring the reduction of mass as the building increased in height. According to members of Goldstein's office, the setback design of New York skyscrapers was a major influence in the design of this building.

Architect

Moise Goldstein headed one of New Orleans most successful architectural offices during the years between 1920 and 1960. Goldstein's major work in the CBD is the National American Bank Building, but he is also responsible for the former Times-Picayune Building on Lafayette Square, and was the senior partner of the firm of Goldstein, Parham & Labouisse at the time that office designed the New Orleans City Hall in 1956. Goldstein was the architect of the original buildings of the Audubon Zoo, as well as the classical elements at the St. Charles Avenue entrance to Audubon Park. In association with Weiss, Dreyfous and Seiferth, he designed Temple Siani at St. Charles and Calhoun. Goldstein is perhaps best known for his work on New Orleans' college campuses. In 1939 he designed the Howard-Filton Memorial Library at Tulane University, now the Tulane Law School. His most important and longest running project was the design of the campus of Dillard University, which began in 1930 and completed in 1958. Designed in a Neoclassic style, the buildings at Dillard and the plan of the campus are indicative of Goldstein's talent as a designer and planner.

Historic Personages

None

Cultural, Political, Economic and Social History

Founded in 1917 as the Bankers Trust Company, the bank changed its name to the American Bank and Trust Company, the name carved above the entrance to the building in question. In 1944 the bank changed its name to the National American Bank, as it is known today.