

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

LISTED
VLR 6/16/2016
NRHP 8/15/2016

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Virginia National Bank Headquarters Historic District

Other names/site number: DHR No. 122-5817

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: Bounded by E Plume St (N), Commercial Place (E), Waterside Drive (S), Atlantic St (W)

City or town: Norfolk State: VA County: Independent City

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

Signature of certifying official/Title: _____ **Date** _____

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: _____ **Date** _____

Title : _____ **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> | buildings |
| <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> | sites |
| <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> | structures |
| <u>0</u> | <u>1</u> | objects |
| <u>3</u> | <u>2</u> | Total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/business/office building

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/business/office building

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/International Style/Brutalism

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: METAL: Aluminum; CONCRETE; GLASS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Virginia National Bank Headquarters Historic District consists primarily of the primary skyscraper and adjacent plaza and, across the street, the slightly later accompanying eight-story parking garage, which together occupy a total of 4.35 acres in downtown Norfolk, Virginia. The headquarters building is a late International style (with Brutalist influences) resource designed by renowned architectural firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and constructed in 1965-1967. The building reaches an equivalent height of twenty-four stories and is 308 feet tall with 410,000 square feet of floor space. It is constructed utilizing a poured concrete basement and foundation supported by approximately seven hundred pilings. The skyscraper consists of an exterior skeleton formed and supported by massive precast concrete T-beams behind which is a glass curtain wall. Completed at the same time as the skyscraper, the rectangular plaza encompasses the skyscraper and features its original reflecting pool and fountain as a focal point. The parking garage, completed in 1968, features the same white quartz exterior wall surfaces as the skyscraper. A Post-Modern sculpture was added to the plaza's reflecting pool in 1989, and south of the plaza, a landscaped area occupies the space between the plaza and Waterside Drive; at the southeast corner of the landscaped area is a ca. 1990 free-standing, drive-through teller building. As an entity, the Virginia National Bank Historic District is distinguished by its austere International style and retains character-defining elements such as the complementary wall surfaces of the skyscraper and parking garage, the plaza's raised design and aggregate concrete surfacing contrasted with the sunken reflecting pool's white concrete coping, the rectilinear massing of all three resources, which is emphasized by their clean, simple lines. The district's

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contributing resources are the skyscraper, parking garage, and plaza with sunken pool; non-contributing resources consist of the drive-through teller building and sculpture, both of which postdate the property's period of significance. The historic district retains a high degree of integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association as a corporate headquarters built in the then highly popular International style of the mid-twentieth century.

Narrative Description

Setting

The Virginia National Bank Headquarters Historic District is located in downtown Norfolk near its historically industrial waterfront. Shipping, maritime industries, and a naval base remain the bedrock of Norfolk's economy. In the aftermath of mid-twentieth-century urban renewal projects as well as several major hurricanes, the downtown waterfront has transformed in recent decades from a heavily industrial sector to a mix of commercial, light industrial, and residential uses.

The 3.5-acre site of the skyscraper, plaza, and teller building takes up an entire block across the street from the Norfolk waterfront; it is bounded to the west by Atlantic Street, to the north by East Main Street, to the east by Commercial Place, and to the south by Waterside Drive. The skyscraper is situated in the northern half of the site, towards the northwest corner, with a large plaza filling the remainder of the northern half of the site. The entire southern half of the site is landscaped with grass, trees, and shrubs and features a service driveway to the basement of the main building along with a small drive-through banking building in the southeast corner. The parking garage is located directly north of the plaza, between Bank Street and Commercial Place to east and west, and E. Main Street and E. Plume Street to north and south. The garage's footprint extends to the edges of the paved sidewalks that surround the building.

Skyscraper (Contributing Building)

The main tower measures 175' by 105' and faces East Main Street where the primary entrance is located. The building is eleven by six bays and the exterior features a regular grid pattern except on the first two stories and the penthouse. The grid is six feet outside the interior glass wall and features a pair of precast concrete shades at each opening; the exterior frame thus acts as a brise-soleil. The exterior corners are modulated to break up the box shape of the frame and reduce the bulk of the building. The entry is flush with the rest of the recessed glass interior of the building and features three pairs of bronze aluminum commercial entry doors flanked with full sized sidelight windows. The remainder of the first story is solid concrete and represents the top of the solid poured concrete portion of the building. The remaining levels, until the penthouse, feature full width, nearly floor-to-ceiling bronzed windows only broken by narrow bronzed metal mullions and mechanical panels along the floor. There are a total of 2,243 windows covering a surface area of two-and-a-half acres. The exterior concrete shell, which along with the interior mechanical tower and four large piers, forms the support system of the building. The first two levels are poured concrete and taller than the upper floors. From the second story until the penthouse there are 38 precast T-beams per level, each weighing almost twenty tons. The crown

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of the building features an unadorned solid concrete exterior surface and is topped by a flat roof. All of the exterior frame has a white quartz surface. Besides the precast beams, the remainder of the building required 48,000 tons of poured concrete and 2,700 tons of structural steel.

The interior of the building features mechanical, storage, and loading areas in the basement levels and a large entry lobby and some offices on the first level, which is sixteen feet high. The second story, accessed by two escalators, is entirely dedicated to the public banking area, though that is now vacant, and is an impressive twenty-five feet tall. The next eighteen levels are office space and were designed without any interior support columns. The central mechanical and stair core and four large interior piers, along with the exterior precast concrete structural frame, allow the office areas to be completely open and able to be designed according to any tenant plans which fit into the 13,500 feet per level. There were different tenant buildouts for every floor, and sometimes multiple per floor, all of which were altered or removed over time. The two-story penthouse contains further mechanical equipment and the roof structure. Multiple elevators provide access to the upper floors.

On the skyscraper's east wall, there is a 1974 sky bridge that connects it to an office building constructed across the street in 1974 for Virginia National Bank. The sky bridge is owned by the same entity as the nominated property while the connected office building is owned by a different entity. Although still functional, the bridge is not currently in use.

Plaza (Contributing Structure) and Sculpture (Non-Contributing Object)

Constructed of reinforced, poured and cast concrete, the plaza is elevated four feet from the street level and its perimeter is lined with unadorned poured concrete panels that complement the skyscraper's gridded elevations. Flights of shallow, poured concrete steps with simple metal handrails lead up to the plaza from the sidewalk level. The plaza's expanse features aggregate concrete surfaces and, along the perimeters, a mix of ornamental plantings are in carefully arranged, raised, rectangular beds with raised, square, poured concrete edges. The original reflecting pool with fountain is located directly east of the skyscraper. It is lined with white concrete coping that contrasts with the tan-colored aggregate paving. A series of plain, rectilinear concrete benches is placed along the pool's eastern side, while metal café tables with umbrellas offer informal seating along the skyscraper's base.

In 1989, a large metal sculpture with a polished stone base was placed in the center of the reflecting pool. It is a sleek, V-shaped, modern abstract form, similar to a swept airplane wing, mounted on a rectangular base clad with polished granite panels. The sculpture was designed by John Safer.

Parking Garage (Contributing Building)

Located directly north of the plaza, the eight-story parking garage was completed in 1968, a year after completion of the main banking tower. The garage was constructed in lieu of a planned garage beneath the skyscraper. From its completion, the free-standing garage served the Virginia National Bank building tenants and customers and features the same white quartz exterior

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surface on the facade. There are retail bays along the first floor and 785 parking spaces above. The garage is accessed at the rear northwest and northeast corners, facing Bank and East Plume Streets. Differences in the concrete along the sides of the garage, along with newspaper photographs from the time of completion, demonstrate that two more parking levels were added at a later date. There is a recessed street level pedestrian walkway on all four sides of the building. This also provides access to the commercial tenants on the first level of the west and south elevations.

Teller Building (Non-contributing Building)

The diminutive, flat-roofed, drive-through teller building is a ca. 1990 replacement for the original, larger teller building, which was located on a different parcel and is now demolished. The teller building's rectilinear massing and unadorned lines follow the same design and proportions of the original teller building, based upon photographs.

Inventory

The following inventory lists the resources within the Virginia National Bank Headquarters Building Historic District. It is organized alphabetically and numerically by street name and address. Each resource is keyed to the district sketch map by name. Contributing resources fall within the historic district's period of significance and retain integrity; the noncontributing resources postdate the district's period of significance. The resources are keyed to the attached Sketch Map.

Bank Street

130 Bank Street, #122-5817-0002

Primary Resource: Garage (Building), 6 stories, International Style, 1968

Contributing: 1

Commercial Place

1 Commercial Place, #122-5817-0001

Primary Resource: Office Tower (Building), 24 stories, International Style, 1967

Contributing: 1

Secondary Resource: Plaza (Structure), International Style, 1967

Contributing: 1

Secondary Resource: Drive through teller (Building), 1 story, No discernible style, ca 1990

Non-contributing: 1

1 Commercial Place, #122-5817-0003; #122-1162

Primary Resource: Sculpture (object), Post Modern Style, 1989

Non-contributing: 1

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1965-1968

Significant Dates

1967

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (Roy O. Allen, J. Walter Severinghouse) (Architects)

Williams and Tazewell (Architects)

Basic Construction Company (Builder)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Virginia National Bank Headquarters Historic district is focused largely on the main headquarters building for which construction began in 1965 and was completed in 1967. The property represents the best example of mid-twentieth century Modern design and skyscraper construction methods in southeast Virginia and is one of the best known in the state. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), among the most nationally important American architectural firms at the time, were the lead designers on the project, with support from prominent local firm Williams, Tazewell & Associates. The bank headquarters project included the latest design features and elements being used around the country and marked the arrival of Virginia National Bank as a major financial force in the state of Virginia and in the mid-Atlantic region. Its construction also marked the beginning of a huge transformation and revitalization of Norfolk's downtown and elevated the city within the entire region. The garage, finished one year later and also designed by SOM, contributes to the eligibility and importance of this district. This district is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture and Criterion A in the area of Commerce with a period of significance of 1965-1968, the dates of construction through completion of the skyscraper, plaza, and parking garage.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

International Style and Skyscrapers

In 1932 Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson published The International Style which accompanied the MoMA exhibit *Modern Architecture – International Exhibition* and introduced the concept and term International Style. The book summarized many of the new trends in architecture at the time and consolidated these concepts into a new style and method of discussing architecture. European architects such as Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier developed many of the early changes in design which led to the International Style but hesitated to claim the mantle of a new style and in some ways wanted to avoid creating a label. Americans Hitchcock and Johnson believed that modern architecture was not “in a period of gestation,” as suggested by most contemporaries, but rather that a consistent and widely used modern style had emerged with three defining themes: emphasis on volume over mass, regularity of design instead of axial symmetry, and a movement away from applied ornament towards a focus on materials, proportion, and technical precision. Many considered it to be a counterpoint to Functionalism of the earlier Modernists.¹ European and American architects, while sharing many elements of this new style, also took it in very different directions and as a result this analysis will focus mostly on the American “skyscraper” and the evolution of this style and building type within the United States.

Steel and concrete construction methods, along with the development of elevators, allowed for the rapid emergence of the skyscraper beginning in the late nineteenth century. Many name

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Louis Sullivan's Wainwright Building in St. Louis as the first modern skyscraper. Le Corbusier developed his "Dom-ino frame system" in 1914 utilizing a reinforced concrete skeleton which led to open, free-flowing interiors and the "volume" Internationalists desired. It also led to the development of cantilevered facades and screen walls which allowed for further opening of the interior spaces.² Walls became subordinate, evolving into interior screens or exterior shells separate from structural elements. It was said that architecture had moved from the dense brick to the open box.³ Early skyscrapers followed traditional design concepts, particularly with decorative adornments and ornamental crowns as seen in Hood and Howells' 1925 Chicago Tribune Tower, which is topped with massive neo-Gothic features. Even as decorative styles evolved, the ornamented crown continued, such as the Art Deco-inspired Chrysler Building (1930) designed by William van Alen. However, the simple regularity of the lower stories looked forward to International Style skyscraper designs.

Rather quickly many architects in the United States came under the sway of International Style thinking and designs became much more streamlined. Raymond Hood designed the McGraw-Hill Building (1931) which utilized alternating horizontal bands of green metal windows and terra-cotta ceramic panels to cover the exterior. Hood kept the traditional concept of the ornamental crown, but minimized it and utilized Art Deco design elements. This was only one of a handful of skyscrapers featured in the 1932 *International Exhibit* and the only one from New York City. Hood and Howells, only a few years removed from the Tribune Tower, designed the Daily News Building (1930) in New York, which emphasized verticality in a way not previously seen. The building features unadorned cream-colored brick vertical elements, almost stripped down pilasters, cut across by red panels marking each window. The Daily News Building also featured what would become a hallmark of mid-to-late twentieth century American skyscraper design: the flat roof. Finally, it utilized a stepped back design which at that time was required in New York City for all buildings which occupied more than a quarter of the site. This became a favored design technique from the 1930s through the 1950s when skyscrapers evolved into the large vertical box which is so familiar today.⁴

This increasing verticality also began to separate American skyscraper design from one traditional International Style characteristic: horizontality. The International Style also emphasized some sort of natural contrast to the artificial building; many skyscrapers in less dense downtowns or on the edge of developed areas utilized larger, landscaped parcels to counterbalance the building and this trend continued with later American examples. These buildings were constructed to be urban monuments to power, progress, and financial success.⁵

The Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building (PSFS) (1932) has been called the first true American skyscraper in the International Style. It features many elements which became mainstays of American office tower design in the mid-twentieth century. There was a second-story main banking floor accessed by escalators with a separate lobby to access the tower above. The concept of a podium for a tower is introduced to separate it from the street. It features horizontal bands of windows yet features minimalized narrow projecting columns to offer some verticality.⁶ Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building (1958) in New York epitomizes the

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evolution to the quintessential twentieth century American corporate headquarters skyscraper. It begins with a large plaza which leads to the recessed glass entry floor which is accessed by passing through the two-story support columns which stand alone like stilts before disappearing into the body of the building. The windows are vertical and run floor to ceiling and result in the pure curtain wall discussed by Internationalists for several decades. The exterior corners are slightly modulated, a subtle feature which would become more common in later skyscrapers to break up the box and reduce the bulk of the building.⁷

Brutalist Influence

While clearly derived from many elements of the International Style, the Virginia National Bank Headquarters Building also demonstrates some influence from the Brutalist Style. Brutalism emerged in the 1950s and was popular in the United States through the 1970s. It is defined by massive, often bulky concrete forms with windows deemphasized versus earlier styles. Exterior elements often feature rough, unfinished concrete surfaces and large irregular shapes. The Virginia National Bank Headquarters does feature a concrete exterior skeleton which defines the structure. However, the elements are completely regular in design and the surface is finished with quartz. Additionally, the curtain wall of windows directly behind the concrete elements is clearly visible and intended to be an important element of the exterior design, balancing out the minimized and repetitive concrete forms.

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and the evolution of the corporate skyscraper

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) was the architectural firm which dominated American institutional design in the post-World War II era and created the template for American corporate architecture beginning in the 1950s, taking on the mantle established by Mies van der Rohe. The firm was founded by Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel Owings in Chicago in 1936 and expanded to New York the next year when John Merrill joined the firm. Gordon Bunshaft joined the firm in 1937 and was the leading influence on design within SOM until the 1960s, helping the firm to transition through the early retirement of its founder, Skidmore, in 1955. SOM established a new model for running an architecture firm which propelled them forward in the number and prominence of their commissions. They organized design teams within each office modelled after American business and the concept of economic efficiency and corporate culture. Supplementing this approach was the practice of not naming a designer of each building; all commissions were simply credited to SOM: "design by committee." SOM continued this approach of economic efficiency into its designs and sold its buildings as such. Eventually having a building designed by SOM brought substantial cache to a company.⁸

The Lever House in New York (1952) is one of SOM's best known commissions and the building which anchored their early rise to national prominence. The primary tower is narrow and set back at the end of the parcel and abuts a three-story section which fills the rest of the site and stands in place of the plaza seen in earlier works, such as the Seagram building. The low section has a courtyard in the middle while the raised perimeter supports a roof garden for

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employees. The building is supported by stainless steel columns which disappear into the building clad in blue-green glass. The glass exterior, with narrow mullions, hides the structure and appears light, sleek, like a “tight skin” redefining the curtain wall for skyscrapers. This building was designed to be American, to occupy the site in a way which differentiated it from typical office buildings and which did not maximize square footage over design and setting. It was to house only the corporate client with no tenants or street level shops polluting the design and effect. Lever Brothers wanted this building to change architecture while also highlighting the company which commissioned the work.⁹

The 1960s saw the evolution of SOM design away from glass curtain walls towards greater use of concrete and the expression of the structure. This moved skyscraper design away from some elements of the International Style and into a later phase of the style and more general Modernism.¹⁰ The headquarters of the Business Men’s Assurance Co. of America (1964, Kansas City) is an office tower completely minimalized to its basic structural elements. It utilizes the established concept of exposed support columns at the entry level, but these stay visible to the full height of the building, with the glass curtain wall behind. The beams are of the same uniform dimension, form, and color, resulting in essentially a structural cage containing a glass box. The structure is so abstracted as to almost hide all evidence of construction. The open arcade of the first level is only differentiated from the upper floors by a slight difference in height. It is surrounded by a low plaza and abuts a small park echoing earlier Internationalist conventions. Parking and mechanical elements are hidden below ground. The inspiration for the design of this building can be traced directly to the façade of Giuseppe Terragni’s *Casa deo Fascio* constructed in Como Italy in 1936; even as SOM moved into a different phase of the International Style they paid tribute to the early roots of Modernism.¹¹

The Tenneco Building in Houston, Texas (1963), uses the same concept as the Business Men’s Assurance building, a structural skeleton with a glass curtain wall behind, but with structural details partially revealed rather than abstracted. The entry arcade is taller and its supporting columns protrude from the main frame, forming an articulated buttress. Horizontal metal shades are attached to the bottom of each horizontal joist element, effectively turning the entire frame into a brise-soleil.¹² Additionally the “crown” has returned to the upper level, though quite severe and regimented as compared to ornamented crowns of early International Style skyscrapers. This compromise between the vision of a pure form seen in the Business Men’s Association building and the moderately articulated skeleton enclosing an internal, open glass office was the guiding principal for many office buildings for the next several years.

Also completed in 1963 was an office building in New Orleans for the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company, designed by SOM, specifically Gordon Bunschaft. The much smaller seven-story building features a concrete exoskeleton much like that of Virginia National Bank, though with no crown and a limited plaza; it won an Award of Merit from the American Institute of Architects. The VNB Building, a later expansion of this concept, won an Honorable Mention in *Administrative Management Magazine* in 1968.¹³

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Within the state of Virginia are two other SOM resources. The most prominent is the 1958 Reynolds Metals Company International Headquarters (NRHP 2000; DHR #043-0242). This 121-acre suburban campus in Henrico County was designed through the combined effort of acclaimed architect Gordon Bunshaft and landscape architect Charles F. Gillette. The primary four-story courtyard building is sited in a large carefully landscaped park. This resource is one of the finest examples of the International Style in post-World War II America.

The other example is the 1976 office tower at 8th and Main Streets (DHR #127-5642) in downtown Richmond. This twenty-story, granite-clad tower facing Main Street is noticeably less distinct in its design from the earlier Virginia National Bank Headquarters Building and is shows little or no visual link to the International Style.

Williams and Tazewell & Associates

James Lee Williams Jr. and Edmund Bradford Tazewell Jr. formed this firm in 1953-1955. Williams obtained his architectural education at the University of Virginia. He worked previously with several well-known local firms: Benjamin F. Mitchell; Rudolph, Cooke & Van Leeuwen; and Vernon F. Moore. Tazewell also attended the University of Virginia as well as studying architecture at the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁴ Interviewed in 2011, Tazewell offered an account of many of their commissions and history. He worked with the firm of Oliver & Smith for less than two years before partnering with Williams until 1991, when Williams retired. The firm then merged with TAF Group in 1996 and Tazewell retired six years later. Of the nearly 500 buildings he helped design, Tazewell estimated 95 percent were in the Norfolk area. Some of the most prominent, other than the Virginia National Bank building, included the Scope Cultural and Convention Center, The Harrison Opera House, Chrysler Hall, Old Dominion University's Batten Arts & Letters Tower, and the Norfolk Southern Corporation building.¹⁵ The opportunity to work on the VNB project began a huge expansion in the amount and prestige of work for the firm that continued until their respective retirements. Projects commissioned shortly before VNB were the Empire Machinery Company headquarters, the Trailways Bus Terminal, and the administration building for the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel.

Virginia National Bank and the Creation of their Norfolk Headquarters Building

The Peoples Bank of Norfolk was founded in 1867. This was the first iteration of the bank which would become Virginia National Bank (VNB) after numerous name changes and restructurings. The first headquarters building used by VNB was constructed from 1904-1907 for the National Bank of Commerce of Norfolk and located at 300 Main Street across from the location of its later replacement. Soon after the VNB was officially chartered in 1910. This bank underwent various expansions and mergers through the first half of the twentieth century eventually reaching over \$400 million dollars in assets and a presence in thirty-three towns and cities. Soon after they announced their plans for a new headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia.¹⁶

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The primary factor driving the creation of such a large bank in Virginia was the 1962 Buck-Holland banking bill in order to help Virginia banks compete with institutions from neighboring states in the field of large commercial loans. This led to the need for larger headquarters and the loans created by these larger banks also led to the construction of other commercial towers. The key component of the state legislation was allowing the creation of branch offices to expand the footprint and lending power of banks. The bill was introduced to the state legislature by State Senator Shirley T. Holland and Delegate Fred C. Buck and approved by the General Assembly. It allowed branches to be established in neighboring communities and, most importantly, allowed statewide branches via mergers with other financial institutions. This set off a sprint of mergers, first at the local level then across the state. Between 1962 and 1974 there were 118 mergers in the state and the eight largest banks increased their share of bank offices in the state from 29 percent to 64 percent. VNB was a statewide leader in this transformation of the Virginia banking industry and second in total assets only to United Virginia Bankshares, Inc., out of Richmond. VNB led the state in total number of mergers, with 31 acquisitions.¹⁷

The plan to construct a new headquarters for VNB was revealed in November 1963. Chairman R. Cosby Moore announced at the end of February 1964 that the prime architects would be from the New York office of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) supported by local Norfolk firm Williams and Tazewell. Albert B. Gornto, Jr., the VNB cashier, would coordinate the project for the bank. The site was the east side of Commercial Place in downtown Norfolk. In March 1964, Cushman and Wakefield, Inc. of New York was chosen as the primary interior designer. The Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority provided the land for the project, which had been cleared as part of an urban renewal effort.¹⁸

In late April 1964, VNB officials R. Cosby Moore, chairman, W. Wright Harrison, president, as well as Roy O. Allen and J. Walter Severinghouse from SOM and both partners of Williams and Tazewell officially announced the plans for the new VNB headquarters with the goal of having the building occupied sometime in 1967. Allen declared that “the concept...gives great depth and dimension to the appearance of the building. Extended floors and columns will serve as an efficient shade system from solar glare and heat.” Moore described this new office tower as a symbol of the size and strength of Virginia National Bank and as “a tribute to the people of Virginia, especially those we serve, that our bank can undertake such a venture.” Harrison stated that “from the beginning we have envisioned the building as an architectural achievement in which all Virginians may take some measure of pride.” Lawrence M. Cox, executive director of the Norfolk Redevelopment Authority, stated the new building to be an expression of the VNB’s board confidence in the future of the community.¹⁹

Likely the tallest in Virginia once complete, the new VNB headquarters would be 308 feet tall, with 24 stories and 410,000 square feet of floor space, including the basement, of which 18 stories would be offices; each floor would encompass 13,500 square feet. The first-floor lobby area would be 16 feet high, with the second story, accessed by escalators, rising to 25 feet and housing the main public banking center. The building would rest on a landscaped 350-foot by 192-foot podium four feet above street level as part of a 3.5-acre site. The exterior detailing

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would feature precast concrete load-bearing columns with windows featuring bronze aluminum molding and bronze tinted glass recessed six feet from the limit of the exterior structure. The extended structure was designed to protect the interior from glare and heat and also provide a platform for window washing without the traditional suspended equipment. The top two floors would feature an unadorned crown behind which would be mechanical equipment. The core of the building would house elevators and mechanical equipment and bear the weight along with the exterior walls and two pairs of large piers. The result would be an office space free of columns and completely flexible from the core out to the windows. A basement parking garage was planned to house 130-140 spaces for customers accessed by a long ramp from Atlantic Street; this parking area, however, was never created. In a nod to the ascendancy of the automobile in design concerns, the project would also include a detached building for drive-up teller banking.²⁰ This was to be the premier building in southeast Virginia, if not the entire state.

Contracts for construction began to be signed in January 1965 with Basic Construction Co. of Newport News as the prime contractor; the budget settled at approximately \$12 million. Site clearing was also underway by this point before the driving of approximately 1,700 piles could begin. Groundbreaking for construction was on March 8, 1965. Over the next several months a large 400-foot crane was assembled to hoist the 38 nearly 20-ton precast concrete T-beams needed to support each floor and form the structural shell. Each floor was completed in about two weeks. The final of 732 concrete T-beams was installed by February 1967. On May 22, 1967, the building was "topped out" as the final concrete was poured for the penthouse. Local officials, officers from VNB and representatives from all architect and construction companies were present as 75 new pennies were tossed into the concrete to represent the number of VNB offices in the state.²¹

The building was ready for occupancy by November 1967 and the VNB's computer department moved into the fifth floor that month. By this point 60 percent of the building was already preleased. Features of the building included a dedicated mailroom in the basement, an employee lounge, and a club on the upper floor. The first non-banking tenant, Goodman-Segar-Hogan, Inc., real estate brokers, arrived in late November and served as the rental and management agent for the building. For the benefit of bank employees and tenants, a parking garage was planned to open across the street in 1968. It would cost \$1.5 million dollars and provide 522 spaces.²²

The new Virginia National Bank Headquarters Building officially opened on Saturday, January 20, 1968, with Governor Mills E. Godwin Jr. serving as the main speaker at the dedication ceremony at eleven in the morning. Also attending were members of the General Assembly, Senator William B. Spong, Dewey Daane (governor of the Federal Reserve Board), Representative Porter Hardy Jr., and Mayor Roy B. Martin Jr. A week of public tours began the next day. The Norfolk Mace was also put on display on the ground floor lobby and had been held by the bank beginning with its predecessor institution, the National Bank of Commerce in 1894. Additionally, the extensive collection of U.S coins belonging to R.L. Miles Jr. of J.H. Miles & Company, Inc., was placed on display at the bank indefinitely. The collection features approximately 4,000 coins of copper, silver, and gold with the earliest being from 1793, the first

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year of U.S. coinage. The collection at the time was called more complete than the national collection at the Smithsonian Institution and this was the first time the entire collection was on display. Eventually more than 10,000 people toured the building.²³

The parking, which was originally planned to be housed below the building and provide only 140 spaces, was moved to a stand-alone garage because of the significant cost savings and to avoid below ground water table issues. The garage was also designed by SOM and Williams, Tazewell & Associates and utilized the same exterior cladding as the headquarters building. The construction began on May 8, 1967, and was carried out by Daniel Construction Company of Richmond. The final plan called for six stories, 500 parking spaces, and 15,000 square feet of retail space.²⁴

This project also represented the most important piece in an ongoing effort by the City of Norfolk to redevelop its downtown. An editorial in the Ledger-Dispatch declared this as an example of the key to redeveloping the city: “an enthusiastic partnership between the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority and, bespeaking the interests of the community at large, the City Council.” The final step was to add the third partner, private enterprise, to replace what had been torn down. Other examples of this partnership were the Golden Triangle Hotel, the Maritime Tower, the Medical Tower, Plaza One, and the Hague Towers. The editorial concluded by declaring that it was hard to overrate the potential influence of the new VNB building as a “strong new stimulant for the whole program of downtown transformation.”²⁵ Several major downtown projects followed soon after, including the Seaboard Citizens National Bank building, a complete renovation of the First & Merchants National Bank Building, and the new Norfolk Scope entertainment venue. These projects represented the culmination of a process that had begun with the planning for a new Norfolk Civic Center in 1956, led by Philadelphia architect Vincent G. Kling and Charles K. Agle, who designed the master plan for the city. Their efforts included a new city hall, a new school administration building, and a new juvenile and domestic relations court and a large plaza. Additionally the waterfront warehouses were cleared along with many of the smaller historic buildings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The goal was to create virtually a new city with open spaces, wide boulevards, and new International Style skyscrapers.²⁶

The Virginia National Bank Headquarters Building represents the progression of the International Style from the early twentieth century, through the establishment and rise of SOM as America’s leading architectural firm and designer of corporate skyscrapers. It features many of the elements which had come to define the late International Style. The lower landscaped park to the skyscraper’s south and the large platform plaza under the building were design elements seen repeatedly in major urban office designs from this era. The exterior structural frame with the interior glass office box was a hallmark of the later International Style and SOM design, allowing entirely open interior spaces and a shield from sunlight. The large first-floor lobby access from the plaza with escalators heading to the public banking space of the second floor was a well-established interior layout design by this time. The modulated corners, the unadorned penthouse crown, the flat roof, and nearly every feature and design element marks this building

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as an important milestone in the development of American corporate office design. It was also a remarkable commission for Norfolk, Virginia, and the Virginia National Bank in the late 1960s. This new headquarters represented the arrival of a major force in mid-Atlantic banking and a prime example of the effects of the new Buck-Holland banking bill. Finally, the new VNB building was the highlight of the downtown redevelopment efforts by the city of Norfolk.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

_____ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

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- ____ 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 # _____
- ____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- ____ Other State agency
- ____ Federal agency
- ____ Local government
- ____ University
- Other

Name of repository: Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill Archives, New York, NY

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR No. 122-5817

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.35

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 36.845740 | Longitude: -76.290020 |
| 2. Latitude: 36.845730 | Longitude: -76.289440 |
| 3. Latitude: 36.846670 | Longitude: -76.289290 |
| 4. Latitude: 36.846675 | Longitude: -76.288738 |
| 5. Latitude: 36.844640 | Longitude: -76.288910 |
| 6. Latitude: 36.844910 | Longitude: -76.290080 |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

Virginia National Bank Headquarters Historic
District

Name of Property

Norfolk, VA

County and State

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The southern boundary of the district is marked by Waterside Drive. From here, the western boundary is marked by Atlantic Street, which then turns east onto East Main Street, creating a partial northern boundary until Bank Street, where it then extends north again, to East Plume Street. East Plume Street marks the most northern boundary. The eastern boundary runs south from East Plume Street, along the Garage property line between the Garage and Plume Fountain. It continues south, past Plume Fountain, across East Main Street, and along Commercial Place until it meets with the southern boundary at Waterside Drive.

The boundary bisects an elevated walkway that connects this building with a separately owned, and later constructed, office building across the street. The walkway was constructed in 1974 and the two buildings that it joins now have no functional relationship, though the connection remains open and functional.

The true and correct historic boundaries are delineated on the attached maps labeled "Sketch Map" and "Location Map."

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries represent all land historically associated with the Virginia National Bank Headquarters Building and its associated plaza and garage.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Marcus R. Pollard

organization: Commonwealth Preservation Group

street & number: PO Box 11083

city or town: Norfolk state: VA zip code: 23517

e-mail: marcus@commonwealthpreservationgroup.com

telephone: 757-651-0494

date: 2/24/2016

Virginia National Bank Headquarters Historic
District

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Norfolk, VA

County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Virginia National Bank Headquarters Historic District

City or Vicinity: Norfolk

State: Virginia

Photographer: Marcus Pollard

Date Photographed: August 2015

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1 of 7: (VA_NorfolkCity_VirginiaNationalBankHeadquartersHistoricDistrict_0001)
View: Main Entry, North Elevation, Facing South

Photo 2 of 7: (VA_NorfolkCity_VirginiaNationalBankHeadquartersHistoricDistrict_0002)
View: Northwest Corner, North Façade and West Elevation, Facing Southeast

Photo 3 of 7: (VA_NorfolkCity_VirginiaNationalBankHeadquartersHistoricDistrict_0003)
View: Site, Corner of Atlantic Street and Waterside Drive, Facing East/Northeast

Photo 4 of 7: (VA_NorfolkCity_VirginiaNationalBankHeadquartersHistoricDistrict_0004)
View: Site and Drive Through Teller Building, Commercial Place Between Waterside Drive and East Main Street, Facing West

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Photo 5 of 7: (VA_ NorfolkCity _VirginiaNationalBankHeadquartersHistoricDistrict_0005)
View: Southeast Corner, South and East Elevations, Facing Northwest

Photo 6 of 7: (VA_ NorfolkCity _VirginiaNationalBankHeadquartersHistoricDistrict_0006)
View: Sculpture, Facing South/Southeast

Photo 7 of 7: (VA_ NorfolkCity _VirginiaNationalBankHeadquartersHistoricDistrict_0007)
View: Parking Garage, South and West Elevations, Facing Northeast

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

ENDNOTES

¹ Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, The International Style, New York, 1966, p.27-29, 246, 252.

² Hasan-Uddin Khan, International Style: Modernist Architecture from 1925-1965, New York, 2001, p.27, 67.

³ Russell-Hitchcock and Johnson, The International Style, p.254-55.

⁴ Khan, International Style: Modernist Architecture, p.117-18.

⁵ Khan, International Style: Modernist Architecture, p.70, 117.

⁶ Khan, International Style: Modernist Architecture, p.122-23.

⁷ Khan, International Style: Modernist Architecture, p.126-28: Philip Johnson assisted on elements of the design.

⁸ Nicholas Adams, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, the experiment since 1936, Milan, 2006, p.24, 27; Khan, International Style: Modernist Architecture, p.130.

⁹ Adams, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, the experiment since 1936, p.64-69.

¹⁰ Khan, International Style: Modernist Architecture, p.134.

¹¹ Arthur Drexler and Axel Menges, Architecture of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1963-1973, New York, 1974, p.10, 102.

¹² Drexler and Menges, Architecture of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, p.11, 106.

¹³ Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Skidmore, Owings Merrill, 1936-1980, 1980, p.15, 26.

¹⁴ John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton, The Virginia Architects: 1835-1955, Richmond, 1997, p.444, 481.

¹⁵ Philip Walzer, "Architect left his mark on many iconic Norfolk structure," *The Virginian-Pilot*, July 25, 2011.

¹⁶ Virginia National Bank, *Press Release: A Brief History of Virginia National Bank*, Norfolk, VA, 1968.

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¹⁷ Michael J. Ileo and David C. Parcell, "Evolution of the Virginia Banking Structure 1962-1974: The Effects of the Buck-Holland Bill," *William & Mary Law Review*, vol.16, Issue 3, Article 8, 1975, p.567-97.

¹⁸ "Architects Chosen for VNB Building," *The Virginian-Pilot*, February 26, 1964, p.6; "Cushman, Wakefield To Plan VNB Office," *The Ledger-Star*, March 27, 1964, p.9; "VNB Will Unveil Bank Plans Today," *The Virginian-Pilot*, April 28, 1964, p.17.

¹⁹ Frank Sullivan, "VNB Unwraps \$9-Million Plan for New Office," *The Virginian-Pilot*, April 29, 1964; "VNB To Change City Profile With 280-Foot-High Building," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, April 29, 1964.

²⁰ "24-Story Building Under Way," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, January 28, 1965; Paul Williams, "Neck-Craning Time Coming for SSSUs," *The Ledger-Star*, April 29, 1966, p.17; Donald Moore, "Bank Construction Workers Stand Tallest in Tidewater," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, November 26, 1966.

²¹ "24-Story Building Under Way," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, January 28, 1965; "VNB Buys New Site For Building," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, June 14, 1965; Donald Moore, "Bank Construction Workers Stand Tallest in Tidewater," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, November 26, 1966; "732nd 'T' Now in Place," *The Ledger-Star*, February 3, 1967; "VNB 'Tops Out' New Building," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, May 22, 1967; "Pennies Top VNB Building," *The Virginian-Pilot*, May 23, 1967, p.11; "Big Crane on Bank Extended 80 Feet," *The Ledger-Star*, July 21, 1967, p.5.

²² Arthur P. Henderson, "VNB's Computer Operation First to Move Into New No.1," *The Ledger-Star*, October 7, 1967, p.13; "VNB Building Gets 1st Tenant," *The Virginian-Pilot*, November 28, 1967, p.12.

²³ "New Virginia Bank Building To Be Dedicated on Saturday," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, January 16, 1968; "Mace Given Place of Honor in Bank Lobby," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, January 17, 1968; "Vast Coin Exhibit to Be at VNB," *The Virginian-Pilot*, January 19, 1968; "Towering Home of VNB Toured by Thousands," *The Virginian-Pilot*, January 22, 1968; "10,000 Visit VNB Building," *The Ledger-Star*, February 1, 1968, p.15.

²⁴ Arthur P. Henderson, "\$1 Million Garage Slated," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, June 6, 1966; "Excavation Starts for Bank's \$1,560,000 Garage Building," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, May 8, 1967; "Bank's 6-Level Garage May Open Nov.20," *The Ledger Dispatch*, November 12, 1968; "Ramp Garage Opens Monday," *The Virginian-Pilot*, November 22, 1968.

²⁵ "Centerpiece in a Transformed City," *The Ledger-Dispatch*, April 30, 1964.

²⁶ Richard Guy Wilson, *Buildings of Virginia, Tidewater and Piedmont*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p.399-400.



LOCATION MAP

Virginia National Bank

Headquarters Historic District

City of Norfolk, VA

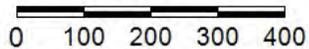
DHR No. 122-5817

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

- 1. Latitude: 36.845740
- Longitude: -76.290020
- 2. Latitude: 36.845730
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- 3. Latitude: 36.846670
- Longitude: -76.289290
- 4. Latitude: 36.846675
- Longitude: -76.288738
- 5. Latitude: 36.844640
- Longitude: -76.288910
- 6. Latitude: 36.844910
- Longitude: -76.290080



Feet



1:4,514 / 1"=376 Feet

Title: Virginia National Bank Headquarters Historic

Date: 4/26/2016

District

DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.

Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.

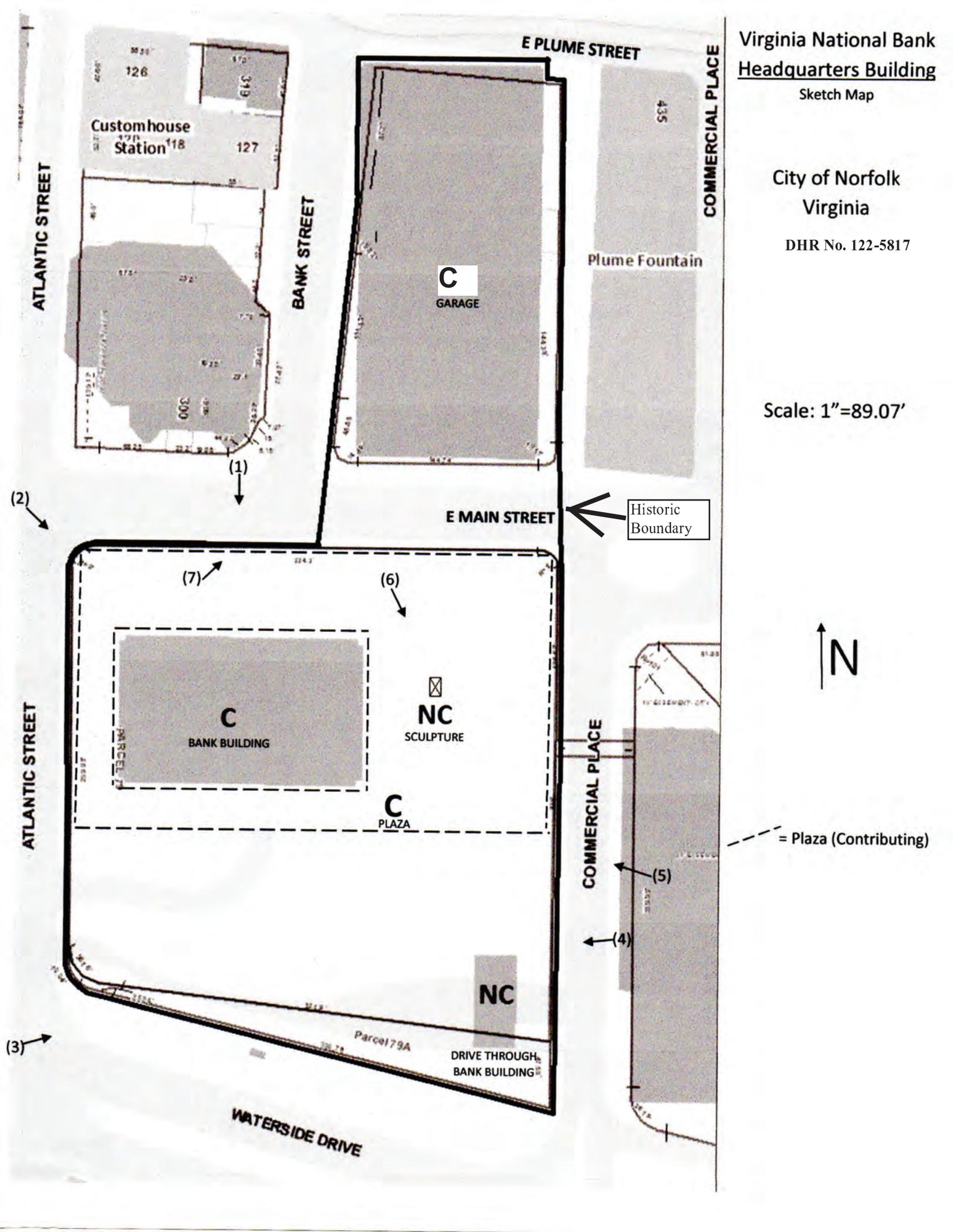
Virginia National Bank
Headquarters Building

Sketch Map

City of Norfolk
Virginia

DHR No. 122-5817

Scale: 1"=89.07'



COMMERCIAL PLACE

435

Plume Fountain

C
GARAGE

E MAIN STREET

Historic
Boundary

C
BANK BUILDING

NC
SCULPTURE

C
PLAZA

NC

DRIVE THROUGH
BANK BUILDING

N

- - - = Plaza (Contributing)

COMMERCIAL PLACE

(5)

(4)

WATERSIDE DRIVE

Parcel 79A

Customhouse
Station 118

126

319

127

000

(1)

(2)

(7)

(6)

(3)

ATLANTIC STREET

BANK STREET

ATLANTIC STREET

E PLUME STREET

(3)