

The Merchants and Planters Bank (1910) is a two-story, masonry structure located within the Lafourche Parish community of Lockport. A restrained, vernacular interpretation of the Neo-Classical style, the brick building stands at the edge of the business district facing Bayou Lafourche near the point where the bayou and the Intracoastal Canal cross. The building has received two large additions but remains eligible for National Register listing.

The bank's corner location necessitates that two of its exterior walls be styled, and the resulting design is meant to be viewed from a three-quarter angle. It is on the building's two street-facing walls that its simple Neo-Classical details are found. They include:

- 1) thick pilasters which rise from a first floor belt course (see below) to support the parapet. Each pilaster features a molded base and capital.
- 2) a column marking the building's corner entrance, which consists of double doors standing a few feet behind the column. This column stands upon a thick brick pier which raises it to the same height from which the pilasters rise. It then rises as a free-standing column to the second story, where it becomes attached to the building's corner as an engaged column. The column's base and capital resemble those on the pilasters.

Other features of interest on the building include large recessed triple windows with accompanying transoms, a side door opening to the structure's original staircase, a watertable, window sills which extend to form the previously mentioned belt course, and two sets of narrow recessed double windows. The narrow windows are separated by a boldly corbelled brick pier, while elements resembling short pilasters rise from the top of each. The previously mentioned parapet encircles the building, but is decoratively shaped on only the two street elevations.

The sharp angle of the building's corner location has had a major effect upon its floorplan. This is not very evident on the first floor, which contains only one large room. This space originally served as the banking hall and has been altered to such an extent that its appearance is not noteworthy (see below). The influence of the corner location is quite evident on the second floor, which contains three rooms, a hallway, and a small bath. Two of the three rooms display unusual polygonal shapes. Otherwise, the upper floor's interior is completely undistinguished.

As mentioned previously, the bank has received two additions since its construction, but the exact dates of these cannot be pinpointed. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for 1922 (the only map available for Lockport) clearly shows that neither addition was in place in that year, while a historic photograph dating to 1942 shows both. One addition is a two story masonry structure which lacks the height of the original building. This addition has three rooms on the first floor and two rooms plus a bath on the second. Its facade is veneered and scored to resemble stone. Like the odd-shaped two rooms of the original section, the front room of the annex also has an unusual polygonal shape. An arched door cut into the former outside wall connects the original section and this addition on the first floor.

Also of masonry construction, the second addition is only one story in height. It originally consisted of four small offices, each with its own windows and door to the street. One of the offices was later enlarged by the addition of a kitchen so that the space could be used for meetings. A hallway connects three of the four offices to the bank, and there is a distinct change in floor level where the original structure and one-story addition meet.

Along with the additions, other alterations to the building include:

- 1) the loss of the structure's original cornice,

- 2) the installation of a large metal canopy on the building's two street elevations. In place by 1942, it was obviously added after the construction of the two-story annex.
- 3) the replacement of the glass within the main entrance's doors, the closing of a rear second floor exterior door, and the covering of some window transoms by wood.
- 4) the removal of the banking room's original partitions, the construction of one new partition in a different location, and the installation of ceiling tile in this room.

Despite these changes, the details which give the building its architectural distinction remain virtually intact. The original portion of the structure clearly stands forth from the two additions, which were themselves added during the historic period. And, although the canopy visually interrupts the line of the pilasters on the two street-facing elevations, the detailing itself remains intact. Finally, the "ghost" of the lost cornice is visible, and a historic photograph showing this detail exists to assist in any restoration. Even without the cornice the Merchants and Planters Bank is an architectural landmark within the community of Lockport. For this reason, it is a strong candidate for National Register listing.

Significant dates	1910
Architect/Builder	unknown
Criterion C	

The Merchants and Planters Bank is locally significant in the area of architecture because it is a landmark building within the community of Lockport.

Lockport was founded in 1833 when William Fields donated a tract of land to the Baratavia and Lafourche Canal Company. Fields had owned all the land on both sides of Bayou Lafourche for several miles up and down the waterway from the future town's location. As part of the donation agreement, the company promised to construct a canal completing the water route between New Orleans and Bayou Terrebonne. The canal itself was completed in 1847, but the locks accompanying it were not finished until c. 1850. After that date, the west side of Bayou Lafourche at Lockport was used as a port for boats awaiting transfer through the locks. Prosperity came with the completed canal. By 1849 the community had a public school; by 1850, a Catholic church; and by 1875, a post office. It incorporated during the latter years of the nineteenth century.

Despite its long history, Lockport has few historic structures left to illustrate its early years. Much of the business district was destroyed by a tornado in 1893, and a catastrophic 1916 fire devastated several downtown blocks. Virtually the entire central business district of the small town contains undistinguished one-story structures dating to the early years of the twentieth century or later. While older residential areas survive, these appear to date only between 1885 and 1930. The houses here consist mainly of undistinguished Creole cottages, shotguns, and bungalows. Only a handful of houses with Eastlake, Queen Anne or Colonial Revival details may be found, and these details are extremely low-key. Against this background, the Merchants and Planters Bank stands as an architectural landmark. It is one of only four two-story commercial buildings in the CBD, and it is one of only two which make any attempt at architectural styling. In addition, although a vernacular interpretation, it is the only example of the Neo-Classical style within the community. For these reasons, the bank building is a legitimate candidate for National Register listing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Division of Historic Preservation, Historic Standing Structures Survey of Lafourche Parish, Lockport Folder.

Historic photos of Main Street, Lockport, Louisiana, no date available. Copy in National Register file.

Historic photo of Main Street, Lockport, Louisiana, 1942. Copy in possession of Lockport Heritage Museum, Inc.

Site visit by National Register staff.