

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The National American Bank Building (1929) is a twenty-three story steel and limestone Modernistic skyscraper located in the New Orleans central business district. The building has received only minor alterations since construction.

Stylistically speaking, the National American Bank Building consists of two somewhat related elements. First, the overall exterior design represents an abstraction of the commercial Gothic style. This can be seen in the skin of ascending limestone piers which terminate abruptly, without pinnacles or cornice, slightly above the roofline. Secondly, it features considerable Modernistic ornamentation, culminating in a remarkable rooftop water tower.

The previously mentioned piers ascend from a heavy base with a verticality which is broken at three points by minimal setbacks. The base contains the entrance hall, the elevator lobby, and the banking hall. The upper stories contain rental offices. Below the banking hall is the vault area, which has a lobby of its own.

The exterior decorative elements are predominantly of cast concrete. They include:

- (1) The reeded spandrel panels which vertically separate the windows.
- (2) The ornamental volute scroll panels which mark the upper story setbacks.
- (3) The exaggerated reeding and fluting pattern which crowns the upper story.
- (4) The octagonal water tower with its two-stage fluted buttresses, reeded panels, and elaborate finned copper cupola.

#### The Interiors:

The lobby is clad in marble and features a gold and silver leaf pressed metal ceiling with a repeating chevron and diamond point pattern. The bronze elevator doors are cast with fluting and panels of stylized flower and leaf motifs. Major spaces are separated by bronze filigree panels and doors. The hypo-style banking hall has walnut paneled walls and an ornate rather Jacobean-looking plaster ceiling. The banking hall retains its original bronze check stations, its original chandeliers, and its original decorative steam radiators.

#### Alterations:

The building is in an excellent state of architectural integrity. Some of the upper offices have been superficially modernized and virtually all the original double hung windows have been replaced, but the bank's major spaces and exterior architectural elements are completely intact. In fact, the building is so well preserved that it even retains its original 1929 air conditioning system, which is thought to be the earliest in the state. (The system is still operable.)

Specific dates	1929
Builder/Architect	Architect: Moise Goldstein Consulting Engineer: Jens Jensen General Contractor: George T. Glover

Statement of Significance  
Criterion C

The National American Bank Building is of statewide significance as a rare example, for Louisiana, of progressive commercial architectural trends of the 1920's.

The building takes its place, along with other progressive skyscrapers, as an example of the abstract commercial Gothic style developed by Eliel Saarinen in his second place entry in the Chicago Tribune competition (1922). Of course, the Gothic is stylized to the point where it is almost unrecognizable. But the system of ascending piers and setbacks became a very popular and much admired way of articulating large skyscrapers during the 1920's and early '30's. The technique was popularized in renderings by Hugh Ferriss showing cutaway ribbed masses dramatically bathed in light. This style represented the "state of the art" prior to the onset of the International Style, But despite its national popularity, the technique made little headway in conservative Louisiana. In fact, the National American Bank Building is thought to be the only example in the state.

In addition, the bank building is one of only four Modernistic skyscrapers in the state and the only one in New Orleans. Moreover, its water tower is probably the most elaborately styled feature of a Modernistic commercial building in Louisiana.

Major Bibliographical References

Description and Evaluation of American National Bank Building by Mark P. Lowrey, F.A.I.A. Copy in Register file, LA State Historic Preservation Office.

Christovich, Mary Louise, et al. New Orleans Architecture: The American Sector. Gretna, La: Pelican Publishing Company, 1972.