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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

OCT -9 2015

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Nat. Register of Historic Places
National Park Service

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: First National Bank of Port Arthur
Other name/site number: Port Arthur Savings Building
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 501 Procter Street
City or town: Port Arthur State: Texas County: Jefferson
Not for publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
 national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Mark Wolfe State Historic Preservation Officer Date 9/23/15
Signature of certifying official / Title
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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: _____

For Edson H. Beall Date of Action 11.24.15
Signature of the Keeper

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: COMMERCE/financial institution = bank

Current Functions: TRADE/business = office building

7. Description

Architectural Classification: Modern Movement: Modern Classical

Principal Exterior Materials: Limestone

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 7-6 through 7-12)

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
		<input type="checkbox"/>	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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.
		<input type="checkbox"/>	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: N/A

Areas of Significance: Architecture, Commerce

Period of Significance: 1930 - 1965

Significant Dates: 1930

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): N/A

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): N/A

Architect/Builder: Favrot & Livaudais

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 8-13 through 8-18)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheets 9-19 through 9-20)

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:

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than 1 acre

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (use decimal degree format)

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

1. Latitude: 29.871835 Longitude: -93.935109

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated property is a building that sits on Lots 13 and 14, Block 131, in the City of Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas. The property is bound on the southeast by Procter Street, on the southwest by Austin Avenue, on the northwest by an alley, and on the northeast by a parking lot. The nominated property boundary is a rectangle, with the Procter Street side measuring approximately 50 feet and the Austin Avenue side measuring approximately 150 feet.

Boundary Justification: This boundary is drawn to encompass the historically and architecturally significant resource and to exclude the adjacent non-historic parking lot which is currently under the same ownership.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Vincent P. Hauser
Organization: Vincent P. Hauser, Architect
Address: 1412 Collier St, Suite C
City or Town: Austin State: Texas Zip Code: 78704
Email: vince@vincenthauser.com
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Date: June 28, 2015

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets Map-21 through Map-24)

Additional items (see continuation sheets Figure-25 through Figure-42)

Photographs (see log on page 5 and continuation sheets Photo-43 through Photo-51)

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Photographs

Name of Property: First National Bank of Port Arthur
City or Vicinity: Port Arthur
County, State: Jefferson County, Texas
Photographer: Vincent Hauser
Date Photographed: July 10, 2015
Number of Photos: 10

The following were submitted to the National Park Service as high quality digital images on CD. For reference they also are included at the end of this document, beginning on page XX.

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0001
View along Procter Street towards the nominated building (in foreground). Camera facing southwest.

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0002
Procter Street elevation. Camera facing west.

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0003
Procter and Austin street elevations. Camera facing north.

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0004
Austin Street elevation. Camera facing northeast.

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0005
Procter Street elevation (primary). Camera facing northwest.

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0006
Detail of primary entry. Camera facing northwest and up.

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0007
Interior entrance lobby. Camera facing south.

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0008
Lobby interior. Camera facing southwest.

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0009
Lobby interior as seen from second floor/mezzanine. Camera facing southeast.

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0010
Third floor corridor. Camera facing north.

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.

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Narrative Description

The First National Bank of Port Arthur is located on the northeast corner of Procter and Austin streets in downtown Port Arthur, Jefferson County, in southeast Texas. Constructed in 1930, the bank building is a substantial concrete framed, three-story, limestone-clad structure designed primarily in the Beaux Arts tradition, but with flatter, more streamlined ornament and detailing that reflects the popular modernistic mode of the era. The design of the exterior masonry and window patterns on both the street-facing facades suggests the overall organization of the main spaces of the building, including the location and scale of the interior atrium space. The two-story fluted, solid limestone ionic columns frame the monumental Procter Street entry. While the exterior of the building remains substantially as built, the vast majority of the original interior finishes were lost in previous remodeling efforts. The building was rehabilitated in 2014-2015.

Setting

The First National Bank of Port Arthur is located near the center of Port Arthur's historic business district. Procter Street was—and still is—the major east-west spine of the commercial district. Once a thriving commercial corridor lined by one- and two-part commercial blocks of varying heights, Procter Street has suffered from disuse since the 1970s. Already deteriorated due to abandonment, many of the buildings in the central business district were heavily damaged by Hurricanes Ike and Dolly in 2008. Some have been demolished and many stand in need of great repair. Roughly half of the remaining buildings in the CBD are currently occupied. There are entire blocks or half blocks along Procter that are now vacant lots. The First National Bank Building is the only building remaining on either side of Procter Street, between Austin and Waco streets.¹

The nominated building is located on the corner of Procter and Austin Streets; the original main entry is located on Procter Street. The Austin Street façade included an original side entry and was filled in sometime between 1936 and 1953, according to historic photographs. An alley to the north separates the building from the Adams Building (1926). The two principal facades on Procter and Austin Streets remain substantially as built in 1930, as does the alley façade. A rough, unfinished masonry wall which now faces a parking lot, the east façade was an original party wall with the former F.W. Woolworth store, which was demolished in 1973 in association with the substantial renovation of the nominated building.² This renovation included the construction of the parking lot, landscaping and the addition of a drive-up window on the east façade.

Exterior

The Procter Street façade is a five bay limestone composition that includes a shallow incised proscenium supported by two-story, fluted ionic columns that frame the entry. The entry itself is framed by a smaller portal

¹ The broader physical context for this architectural survivor was created by the significant loss of buildings in downtown Port Arthur that is described in several histories of Port Arthur, as well as in the "Historic Resources Survey of the Central Business District in Port Arthur, Texas," by Hardy Heck Moore, Inc., completed in June 2012 and on file at the Texas Historical Commission. It describes the history of building neglect and demolitions in downtown Port Arthur resulting from poor economic conditions, as well as damage caused by Hurricanes Rita, Dolly and Ike. See Section 8 for additional detail.

² "She Gives Firm New Look", *The Port Arthur News*, sec E, February 18, 1973

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that surrounds the entry door and includes detailing from the body of the building. The quarter-round pilasters are fluted and supported by smooth red granite bases. They are capped by a frieze with bas-relief, Greek-themed figures that are related to figures on the interior atrium ceiling murals. This entry no longer retains the bronze gate described in the 1930 Bank opening-day publication.³ This original document also shows the name of the building as “First National Bank of Port Arthur” incised in limestone. The block was changed some time after the 1960’s to the current “The Port Arthur Savings Building.” A 1972 photograph shows the Procter Street façade with the current stone inscription.⁴

Just below the inscription is a frieze in bas-relief depicting animal-themed motifs and gargoyles that also appear in three dimensions at the second floor cornice of the building. The interior of the portal features flat decorative patterns in red and black marble, and a decorative plaster soffit, including a bronze-trimmed light fixture set in a plaster rose. A finely detailed bronze grille that covered one of the original fresh air registers to the left of the entry door was stolen from the building in 2013. The original entry door was removed during a prior renovation, probably c.1953 or slightly later, as the original doors appear in photographs of 1939 and photographs from 1945 show visible portions of the interior unaltered. The original doors do not appear in photographs dating from 1972. The original entry door is described in the “Our New Bank” publication as “solid cast bronze grille doors...followed by drawn bronze doors at each end of the inner vestibule”⁵ The doors have since been replaced by those of modern aluminum and glass. As an overall composition, this entry element includes the stepped geometry and restrained detailing of the two principal building façades.

Other elements of note on the Procter Street façade include a thin second floor cornice, a flat upper cornice supported by shallow fluted panels at the corners, and steel casement windows flanked by decorative panels. Steel, multi-pane casement windows are inset in a separate, incised flat stone panel capped by a shallow dentilated cornice and stone eagle detailing. The second floor cornice originally included “flood lighting of the upper story, which is accomplished by means of 282 one-hundred watt globes covered by glass reflectors, all concealed in the top part of the cornice.”⁶ A photograph of the period shows the night lighting of the bank building.

The Austin Street façade is a composition that generally reflects the interior spaces of the building. Both the Procter Street and alley ends of this façade include flat stone column panels with incised stone spandrel panels at the second floor level. The center section continues the flat stone column panel rhythm, but decorative marble spandrel panels replace the limestone spandrel panels. The result is that the stone panels in this center section read more as two-story columns than the at each end section. Steel casement windows and vertically continuous cast iron framing reinforce this composition.

Overall, the Procter and Austin Street façades present a handsome Beaux Arts-inspired composition, but with restrained detailing that displays an Art Deco sensibility. On Procter Street, the overall two-story, three-bay composition of the entry proscenium includes Ionic columns flanking the entry. The solid limestone columns are engaged with the façade and are more three-dimensional than the rest of the stonework on this façade.

³ First National Bank of Port Arthur, *Our New Bank Building*, 1930, (Port Arthur Public Library)

⁴ Port Arthur Public Library photograph archives

⁵ First National Bank of Port Arthur, *Our New Bank Building*, 1930, (Port Arthur Public Library)

⁶ First National Bank of Port Arthur, *Our New bank Building*, 1930, (Port Arthur Public Library)

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Compare the column detailing with the bas-relief figures atop the entry element column capitals, as well as the much flatter detailing at the panels between the third floor windows. The latter two of these elements are much more Art Moderne in spirit, as are the incised ribs and stone panels at the third floor. On the Austin Street façade, the incised panels containing the windows are two stories in height, and the stone panels between the window bays form thin columns supporting the second floor cornice.

The Bank publication printed for the 1930 opening includes an excellent description of the building and the materials used in its construction:

“The Building is located on the most prominent corner of the city, fronting 50 feet on Procter Street with a depth of 140 feet on Austin Avenue...

The type of architecture of the building is Modified Italian Renaissance.

The building is equivalent in height to a three story structure, with the main banking room extending upward two stories, a mezzanine floor encircling the entire lobby, and a third floor to be used for storage and recreational purposes.

The exterior of the building is of buff Indiana limestone, with a five-foot course of Texas pink granite forming the base.

At each side of the main entrance stand two large Monolithic columns, each weighing approximately seven and one-half tons. Great care was necessarily exercised in the selection and preparation of these columns, each of which was carved from one solid piece of limestone about 20 feet long and 4 feet in diameter without seams or flaws.

To further add to the beauty of the main entrance, solid, cast bronze doors are also used in the vestibule at the Austin Avenue entrance.

...

An unusual variety of foreign and domestic marbles were used in the exterior and interior finish. Royal Red was used in the spandrel panels of the cast iron window frames;...”⁷

The east façade of the building was a common brick masonry party wall, now revealed, as the Bank is the only surviving structure on this block. The rough masonry wall has been painted and nine small, fixed windows have been placed on the third floor. A 1970s renovation placed a drive-through teller window on this façade. It has since been transformed into an entry, with double-entry aluminum and glass doors, sidelights and fixed transom, sheltered by a simple projecting canopy supported by slender metal posts.

The alley façade is primarily of common brick masonry, punctuated in a utilitarian manner with original rolled steel double-hung windows and steel doors, placed as practical needs required at the time of construction. At the alley façade, the Austin Street limestone masonry wraps the corner for approximately four feet.

⁷ First National Bank of Port Arthur, *Our New Bank Building*, 1930, (Port Arthur Public Library)

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The elevator penthouse at the alley (north) end of the roof includes limestone and common brick detailing. The parapet exterior is the continuation of the exterior stone elevation and is faced with brick on the interior and capped with limestone coping. Copper-lined scuppers are located in the Austin Street parapet. The concrete roof deck slopes from the alley toward Austin Street. Interior cast iron roof drains are located at each front corner of the building.

Structurally, the building is a reinforced concrete - framed structure with concrete floor topping over a two-way concrete beam grid. The second and third concrete floors are a composite system that includes hollow clay tile and smaller, vee-shaped secondary beams and the concrete topping. The roof structure is reinforced concrete. Vault walls are 12"-14" thick reinforced concrete walls. The building columns are set on large concrete spread footing pads, which, according to the bank publication cited, are supported by "300 22 ft (deep) round piling." Presumably at the perimeter of the building footprint, the basement level is protected by "182 14 ft (deep) sheet piling." The first floor is a slab on grade, the roof structure is reinforced concrete, the underside of which exhibits typical wood form board marks. The structure is remarkably stable and has endured nearly eight-five years of hurricanes and floods with no apparent major structural damage.

Exterior Integrity and Rehabilitation Work

Prior to the 2014-15 rehabilitation, the overall integrity of the building's original facades was very good despite the loss of the original bronze doors and the infill of an original Austin Street entrance. The limestone and granite was found to be in excellent condition, and a thorough cleaning and minor repointing was all that was required during rehabilitation. The original steel windows were removed, repaired, primed, painted and reglazed with impact resistant laminated glass. The original cast iron window frames in which the steel windows are set were cleaned, repaired and repainted. The stone spandrel panels were cleaned. One Austin Street window bay, identified by the lightest stone spandrel panel, was probably originally constructed of cast iron, but now includes a cast iron frame rendered in cypress, milled to match the original cast iron. As the original Austin entry was located two window bays to the north, it is unclear why this bay did not contain original cast iron. This was repaired in place. At the roof level, the original rear elevator penthouse was repointed, and an original air vent opening was infilled with brick masonry and painted. Several alley windows were required to be closed by the Building Official. The balance of the existing hollow metal windows were restored and reglazed with impact resistant glass. This façade had been painted several times. Loose paint was removed and the alley brick masonry was painted. On the east / parking lot façade, the drive-up bank window was removed and a new main building entry was constructed. The rough masonry wall was repaired and painted.

Due to the loss of historic fabric in the surrounding downtown area, the bank's integrity of setting is diminished. However, it retains all other aspects of integrity to a high degree. The building very clearly conveys its identity as a former bank and its architectural significance.

Interior

The original bank interior was organized around an impressively monumental, two-story atrium around which all other banking uses were connected. The exterior composition alludes to the location of the atrium – note the seven triple window bays on the Austin Street façade. As originally designed, the first floor was the main banking floor, and featured a two-story atrium with a finely detailed colonnade, limestone wainscot teller

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stations, travertine columns with plaster Corinthian capitals supporting a deep upper cornice and an elaborately detailed decorative plaster ceiling. The historic photographs and original construction drawings show the teller stations and other work areas located beneath the east and west mezzanine bays. The main bank vault gate and vault door were the focal points at the north end of the atrium, visible upon entering the bank. The second floor contained offices, another vault and support spaces. The third floor was used primarily as mechanical space and for storage.

Seen as a whole, the original banking hall was a deftly handled composition that begins with the spare detailing and rounded corners of the teller stations at the first floor. The travertine-faced colonnade added depth to the space, texture and contrast to the smooth finish of marble and terrazzo floors. The column capitals transitioned to the entablature and to the deep relief and decorative patterns of the plaster coffers that were nearly Baroque in scale by comparison. Both the first and second floor ceilings continued the decorative ceiling themes with plaster-decorated beams and simple inset plaster ceilings.

The interior of the building was significantly altered in 1953 by the First National Bank of Port Arthur and again in 1973 when it was occupied by the Republic of Texas Savings Association. The 1953 remodeling was the most destructive. Not only was the atrium filled in—presumably to provide additional office space—but nearly all of the decorative plaster and interior stone was removed as well. Photos from 1953 indicate that an employee lunch area was constructed on the north end of the third floor, and a board/meeting room on the south end. Additional construction in the form of wall and ceiling construction and mechanical work was added during the 1973 renovation by the Republic of Texas Savings Association. These significant renovations were described in the *Port Arthur News* of February 18, 1973 when complete “new look” was introduced.

“The new look at Republic of Texas Savings Association was designed by the wife of the firm’s chairman of the board, J.B. Westmoreland. She is Mrs. Joyce Westmoreland, who operates her own interior design firm in Houston.... She has also renovated Liberty Bank in Houston, Center Savings Association in Houston, ... Irving banker’s Title Company of Houston... .”⁸

At the time the building was acquired by the current owner, the first floor of the building had been used as a residence by a previous owner. None of the limestone teller stations nor any other stone details remained in the building. Small portions of the original terrazzo floor remained in place. None of the original electrical fixtures remained, including the two large chandeliers. Approximately ninety percent of the original first floor finishes had been removed or damaged. However, the original circular safety deposit vault door remained, the “door and frame alone weigh 57,000 pounds ... These doors are constructed of scientifically prepared steel, resistible to both torch and drill”⁹ Other remaining first floor elements included a winding stair and small elevator on Austin Street, a small secondary elevator and ventilation shaft at the alley end, and remnants of a drive-in banking window on the east parking lot-facing wall.

The entire atrium ceiling was generally in very poor repair and penetrated with many suspended ceiling ties and plumbing supports. At the second floor, one complete travertine column facing was discovered under several layers of drywall, three partial column facings were discovered at other locations. One complete but damaged

⁸ “She Gives Firm New Look”, *The Port Arthur News*, sec E, February 18, 1973

⁹ First National Bank of Port Arthur, *Our New Bank Building*, 1930, (Port Arthur Public Library)

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plaster capital remained. Remains of two other capitals were found above suspended ceilings. One section of original cast iron railing was found. At the atrium ceiling, none of the original plaster coffers remained, but portions of the ceiling murals and plaster medallions remained, all in deteriorating condition. Most of the remaining plaster medallions were either damaged or missing. On the third floor, most of the boardroom paneling that remained was badly water damaged and delaminating. Most of the suspended plaster ceiling support framing was rusted and failing due to a water leak. Other original period decoration had been removed.

Interior Integrity and Rehabilitation Work

The most significant aspect of the interior rehabilitation work of the First National Bank is the re-establishment of the original open atrium space that once dominated the interior public space. Selective demolition removed the first floor suspended ceiling in this area. By observing the remaining plaster friezes of the assumed perimeter at the mezzanine floor level, and by comparing the conditions with historic photographs, the footprint of the atrium was determined and the infill floor structure was removed. Remaining plaster friezes were restored, and missing pieces were fabricated using molds from the original remaining plaster elements. All of the original structural columns remained and were furred out to approximate the dimensions of the original finish dimensions and finished in smooth plaster. A new upper atrium cornice was framed to approximate the dimensions of the original cornice.

At the atrium ceiling itself, portions of all of the original construction and decorative painting remained and were used as the basis of the rehabilitation. Molds were taken of the remaining portions of the plaster medallions to restore and reconstruct missing portions. Extant ceiling paintings were carefully cleaned and used as the basis for repainting areas missing the original ceiling paintings, using historic photographs as the reference. With the assistance and at the direction of VOH Architects, a paint scheme was developed to represent the plaster coffers as well as the decorative figure painting and the decorative painting of the plaster medallions.

The atrium space itself was programmed for use as a public meeting space and for use as the main boardroom for the building owner. Offices are located under the mezzanine floor level in a manner similar to the original teller stations, with glazing to keep the space as open as possible.

The second floor is currently unoccupied. Glass handrails and partial glazing at the north end of the atrium at the second floor are installed to retain as much of the original open atrium space as possible.

The third floor, which was the former mechanical and back office space, is partially built as office space along the east side of the building. Office partitions are glazed with the same system used at the first floor. The west / Austin Street length of the building is currently unoccupied.

At each floor, the original stone window sills were cleaned and restored and incorporated into the perimeter wall in a manner similar to the original construction. The secondary elevator and winding front stair elements were in very poor structural and cosmetic condition. They were removed and replaced with a new elevator and exit stair as required by the Building Official. The original rear stair was restored and is used as the second stair.

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The rehabilitation of the interior retains almost all of the historic material surviving the previous renovations, and returns the most important interior space to the building.

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Statement of Significance

The First National Bank of Port Arthur was founded in the earliest years of the city's existence and its growth paralleled that of the city. The current building dates from 1930. It was here that the bank was an economic anchor for Port Arthur during the depression and World War II, a period of time in which Port Arthur's petrochemical industry was vital to the country's war efforts. It also supported a booming post-war economy. The importance of this banking institution is expressed in the confidence and quality of the architecture and the financial investment required to build the bank even at the onset of the Great Depression. Architecturally, it is a very interesting stylistic bridge between the Neoclassical and Art Moderne periods, particularly in Port Arthur. It is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture and Criterion A in the area of commerce with a period of significance extending from 1930 to 1965.

Representation in Existing Historic Resources Survey

The First National Bank of Port Arthur was identified as a National Register-eligible resource in the "Historic Resources Survey of the Central Business District in Port Arthur, Texas" completed by Hardy • Heck • Moore, Inc. in 2012. This survey was undertaken, in part, as a response to several downtown building demolitions, and threatened demolitions in 2011. The intensive-level survey identified 42 historic resources within the core of the historic Central Business District (CBD). Of these 42 resources, one—the 1912 Post Office and Federal Building—is already listed in the National Register. The surveyors also identified 8 additional properties that appeared individually eligible for the National Register, including the First National Bank of Port Arthur. When compared to other historic buildings in the CBD, the surveyors found the bank building retained its architectural character and character-defining stylistic details to a high degree.

Overview of Port Arthur's Development¹⁰

In 1895, railroad owner Arthur E. Stilwell founded the City of Port Arthur as the terminus of the Kansas City Southern Railroad. The townsite was platted in 1895, and Procter Street quickly became the nucleus of commercial development. Port Arthur grew rapidly, with its population jumping to 1,800 by November 1898. Two banks—including what would become the First National Bank of Port Arthur—were among the first 300 businesses and dwelling houses.

The city became an official port with the opening of the Port Arthur Ship Canal in March 1899. The 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map shows the core of the commercial business district developing at the intersection of Procter Street and Austin Avenue (an intersection location now occupied by the nominated building). The city's physical development at this time was due to the city's continued growth as a port city and the endeavors of billionaire John W. Gates. When the nearby Spindletop well blew in 1901, the overflow of people at Beaumont spilled into Port Arthur. Two major refineries were established in the city, and the city was

¹⁰ This subsection is adapted from the historic context developed for the "Historic Resources Survey of the Central Business District in Port Arthur, Texas," prepared in June 2012 by Hardy • Heck • Moore, Inc. On file at the Texas Historical Commission.

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soon connected to the oilfield via pipeline. As a result of this oilfield prosperity, Port Arthur experienced another boom with a rapid growth in businesses, many of which were located along Procter Street.

Port Arthur became an official U.S. port of entry in 1906 and was the twelfth largest U.S. port in 1909. That year, the city had a population of 5,000. The central business district served a city-wide population of 7,663 in 1910 and the city's economic and physical growth continued. Many municipal infrastructure improvements were completed into the 1910s. By 1914, Port Arthur was the nation's second largest refining point and the area continued to prosper due to increased oil production at local refineries and to shipping that supplied wartime demand. Port Arthur's downtown development reflected its status as a major petrochemical center.

In 1920 Port Arthur had a population of 26,340 and over the next decade, the city saw significant road and seawall improvements. The central business district was almost completely occupied by the time of the 1923 Sanborn Map. In 1930, the population of Port Arthur had nearly doubled again, reaching 50,902. The city's status as a major port and commercial hub was reflected in continued roadway improvements connecting Port Arthur to other cities. The city's oil- and shipping-based economy allowed it to escape the severity of the financial depression experienced by much of the country in the 1930s. In 1931, the \$1,750,000 seawall was completed. Other municipal improvement projects (levees, water and sewer extensions, sidewalks and curbs, Pleasure Pier Bridge) and the petroleum industry kept citizens employed. The expansion of the intra-coastal canal, the shipbuilding industry, and oil refineries also allowed the city to remain prosperous. A \$4.5 million building boom commenced in 1936. That same year, Port Arthur ranked seventh among the nation's ports.

The 1940s and 1950s saw the expansion of gas processing and lube processing facilities at Port Arthur's refineries, to refine fuel for the American war machine. An extensive shipyard at Port Arthur also contributed to the state's booming wartime industries. By 1950, the city possessed five refineries. Procter Street remained a busy thoroughfare with a variety of commercial enterprises. In fact, the downtown district thrived with 50 percent of the salaries of the city's 12,000 oil refinery workers being spent there.

In the modern era, the City of Port Arthur continued to thrive, albeit at a slower pace. Procter Street was still a major thoroughfare with businesses that provided a variety of goods and services in the 1960s. However, as happened in many historic commercial downtowns, the 1970s and 1980s saw continued disuse of the CBD with the closing of hotels and other businesses. The twenty-first century has seen continued ruin of Port Arthur's CBD as a result of economic recession and a series of natural disasters. In 2005, Hurricane Rita made caused significant property damage as it directly hit the Procter Street Seawall. Three years later, buildings which were already unstable received the brunt of wind and water damage from Hurricanes Dolly and Ike. Afterward, the few major commercial enterprises still located downtown (Capitol One Bank, Walgreen's Pharmacy, Lucky 7 Grocery store) relocated or closed. At present, much of the historic district is vacant and boarded up. Entire blocks or groups of lots have been demolished. Port Arthur's commercial activity has relocated north of the city to the junction of US 69 and FM 365 in Nederland which is closer to Beaumont and Port Neches.

First National Bank of Port Arthur

The First National Bank of Port Arthur was intimately connected with the economy of Port Arthur from the date of its founding on its current site in 1900. The current bank building is the third documented bank structure on

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

this site, beginning with a wood structure constructed in 1900, which replaced by a brick Mission Style building c. 1914. That building was replaced in 1930 with the current one.¹¹

W.N. Smith and Frank Cummings originally organized the bank in 1898. In 1900, John Warne Gates and George M. Craig purchased it and reorganized it as a national bank with a capital stock of \$50,000 and with 10 men making up its list of stockholders.¹² Gates was a successful businessman who had early successes in the barbed wire and railroad industries; in 1900, he provided financing for drilling at Spindletop and formed the Texas Company (Texaco).¹³ Craig was also influential and had been the active manager of both the Port Arthur Townsite Company and the Port Arthur Land Company.¹⁴

The First National Bank grew with early Port Arthur port and oil boom periods. Newspapers and city directories describe retail and commercial banking services from savings accounts to home and commercial loans. The bank's deposits grew to over \$4,000,000 in 1930, when the present bank building was constructed.

Neighboring Merchant's Bank also completed a significant renovation in 1930, opening on the same day as the new First National and demonstrating the local competition in the banking community. Merchants Bank renovated its building located just across Austin Avenue from the First National. Merchant's Bank was founded in 1909 and in 1930 had deposits of slightly over \$3,000,000.

During the bank runs in the fall of 1929, First National Bank remained open and liquid and according to reports of the time, serving as an anchor for the local banking community. However, at least one well-known bank run took place in Port Arthur, and the survival of the First National Bank was threatened. On May 18, 1932, there were rumors of a bank failure and numerous depositors gathered at the doors of the First National Bank. Officers of the bank pleaded with depositors and during the course of the day received a \$50,000 loan from Merchant's Bank, along with a personal please of restraint from Merchant's Bank president George M. Craig, previously an officer at the First National. In sum, the response to the threatened bank run was impressive:

“Texas Company, Gulf Company and the Federal Reserve bank sent three quarter million dollars by airplane arriving at 2 p.m.

Merchants National Bank shows faith by depositing \$50,000 in First National today.

Merchants National announces it will deposit a quarter million dollars tomorrow if necessary.

¹¹ Sanborn maps of 1900 and 1904 show a small building taking up approximately one half of Lot 13 of Block 131. Sanborn Maps of 1915, 1918 and 1923 show the Bank occupying a single block with a drug store on Lot 14, expanding to two full-depth blocks by 1918. The 1956 map shows the 1930 fireproof construction and notes the mezzanine and vault.

¹² “Local Institution Has Shown Steady Growth Since 1900”, *The Port Arthur News*, page 1, April 25, 1930

¹³ Sidney A. Brindle, “GATES, JOHN WARNE”, Handbook of Texas Online. (<http://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fga41>)
Published by The Texas State Historical Association

¹⁴ Hardy & Roberts, *Historical Review of South-east Texas*, Vol 2

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At 2 p.m. D.P. Sheeks, president of First National said: 'We've got more money in the bank than we can use. If every depositor drew out every cent we would still have more money than we could have use for.'¹⁵

The First National Bank and Merchants Bank were the only two major banks standing at the end of the Great Depression. They continued to contribute significantly to the local economy through the post-war years and supported the growth of the oil - and port - related businesses. Merchants Bank followed the history of the First National Bank during the 1970's and 1980's, reorganized and eventually closed.

Architects Favrot & Livaudais

The First National Bank building was designed by Favrot & Livaudais of New Orleans, who had a long and prolific practice based in New Orleans. Charles A. Favrot began work in the office of distinguished architect James Freret, who eventually became his father-in-law. He also met his future business partner Louis Livaudais here and later formed Favrot & Livaudais in 1895, two years prior to the death of Freret.¹⁶

Within a significant body of work, mostly in New Orleans, several commissions stand out as particularly distinctive, and others indicate the reach of their practice into Southwest Louisiana and Southeast Texas. Much of their work is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places, including 18 of their works in Louisiana.

The New Orleans Cotton Exchange Building on Carondelet Street is one such building, begun in 1920 and completed in 1921 by the Selden - Breck Construction Company at a cost of \$1,222,520.¹⁷ The Cotton Exchange is an eight-story steel-framed structure designed and detailed in the style of a Renaissance palazzo, with a rusticated stone base, a street-scaled third floor cornice and a middle section with large paired double-hung windows. The top two floors and deep upper roof overhang cap the palazzo composition. It was designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1977.

Another example of the firm's work is the Hibernia Bank Building on Gravier Street in New Orleans, constructed in 1921. It is a 23-story building that features a C-shaped upper floor plan over the full-block, three-story base. At the center atop this C-shaped composition rests a six-story square tower capped by a colonnaded cupola that employed distinctive seasonal color lighting. It, too, is a steel-framed, masonry-clad structure with a distinctive street-scaled, three-story base, a rhythm of paired, double-hung windows in the middle section and Chicago-style windows at the upper 6-floors of the wings and at the 6-story tower. It clearly shows the influence of the steel framed, masonry clad building contemporaries in Chicago. The Cotton Exchange and the (second) Hibernia Bank both exhibit the visual lightness achieved in the best of the Chicago skyscrapers of this period. There is a very strong architectural connection between the main lobby of the Hibernia Bank Building and the First National Bank of Port Arthur, especially in the scale and quality of the detailing.

¹⁵ "Run On First National Dies Down", *The Port Arthur News*, page 1, May 18, 1932

¹⁶ Tulane University, *James Freret Office Records*, (<http://seaa.tulane.edu>/ James-Freret-Office-Records.pdf Collection 147)

¹⁷ Ralph J. Christian, "New Orleans Cotton Exchange Building", National Register Nomination Form, June, 1977

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Closer to Port Arthur, Favrot & Livaudais designed the Church of the Immaculate Conception (1913), the Calcasieu Parish Courthouse (1912) and the Calcasieu Marine Bank (1928), all located in Lake Charles, Louisiana, just 60 miles north of Port Arthur. The Calcasieu Parish Courthouse is a distinctively neoclassical composition modeled in form and detail after many courthouses in the U.S. prior to and including this time period. The building is an assembly of brick-faced blocks with monumental-scaled windows and a two - story portico of terra cotta that faces Ryan Street. The central block is topped with a copper-clad dome. The overall design of the exterior, and the interior planning and detailing of this building clearly places it in the earlier period of the work of Favrot & Livaudais, as more or less an adaptation of the neoclassical revival elements to civic architecture.¹⁸

More closely related to the First National Bank of Port Arthur (FNBPA) is the Calcasieu Marine Bank (see photos on Page 41). It was constructed in 1928, just two years prior to the construction of the FNBPA. As a complete building, the Calcasieu Marine Bank and the FNBPA are nearly fraternal twins in organization and scale. However, in the overall execution and quality of materials, the Port Arthur example excels, surely benefitting from a much larger construction budget. The Calcasieu Marine Bank is also a three-story structure with a central atrium serving as the main banking hall. The composition of the exterior, while similar to that of the FNBPA, is much more in the Classical Revival vein, particularly the projecting, colonnaded portico and the more three-dimensional detailing. The stepped parapet above the upper cornice and the large-scaled eagle finial is quite dramatic. More important as a precursor to the FNBPA is the scale and detailing of the banking hall. The atrium also includes the first floor as well as the second floor mezzanine. Here, the relatively equal first and mezzanine floor heights present a very fine but less dramatic space when compared to the FNBPA. The simple beam-framed ceiling at Calcasieu Marine Bank seems appropriate when combined with the block-faced columns, which are distinctly more rusticated when compared to the travertine column facings of FNBPA. According to the Calcasieu Marine Bank National Register Nomination, the columns are faced in bagasse board, or pressed wood pulp boards, painted to resemble marble.¹⁹ The band of teller stations surrounding the atrium is of marble-faced as well. The detailing of the first floor beam bracket detail is very similar to that of the FNBPA, and the original atrium chandeliers of each building appear to be almost identical.

In the Golden Triangle, outside of Port Arthur, perhaps two buildings are comparable in the significance of the exterior architectural design: the Julie Rogers Theater, Beaumont (1928) and the United States Post Office Building (1933), now known as the Jack Brooks Federal Building.

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Architectural Significance

In the design of the First National Bank of Port Arthur, Favrot & Livaudais clearly found a project and client and a budget that would showcase their substantial design talent. The FNBPA is a building design clearly on the cusp of the Neoclassical Revival tradition and the emerging Art Deco influences, in particular the design of the exterior stone composition, scale and detailing previously described. It is distinctive and unique in Port Arthur during this time period, and the only building in Port Arthur to rival its design is Lamar University's Gates Library (1911; see image on page 42) designed by prominent New York architects Warren & Wetmore of New York, who also designed the Grand Central Terminal (1903) in New York and the Union Station Building

¹⁸ National Register Staff, State of Louisiana, "Calcasieu Parish Courthouse", National Register Nomination Form, August, 1989

¹⁹ National Register Staff, State of Louisiana, "Calcasieu Marine Bank". National Register Nomination Form, November, 1990

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

(1911) in Houston.²⁰ Compared to the Gates Library, which includes a similar composition and exterior decorative elements, the First National Bank Building is thinner, lighter and flatter in its overall detailing, but still true to the use of symmetry and classical order. Thus, the design blends the more traditional elements of classical architecture with more popular modernistic forms, ornament and finishes that were emerging in contemporaneous trends.

The significance of the exterior design of the First National Bank building includes the distinctive monumental colonnaded entry, the neoclassical vertical organization and the sophistication and quality of the detailing, all in keeping with traditional Beaux Arts design concepts. Complementing the neoclassical organization and forms there is an additional layer of more contemporary Art Deco elements and details which is more stylized and abstracted. At the entry, the ionic columns frame an entry door proscenium that employs shell and wave scroll motifs, and bas-relief figures flanking the central panel. A gargoyle head motif begun at the entry is included at the second floor cornice; a related pattern of eagles is incorporated into the flat upper cornice frieze, and is repeated in the surviving atrium ceiling plaster medallions and decorative paintings. While the upper cornice frieze panels were called out to be of marble in the original drawings, these motifs were ultimately rendered in limestone and are much more typical of the period – the marble transom panels between the first and second floors provide the contrast and flair of color to brighten the limestone composition.

The First National Bank of Port Arthur is a prominent example in the body of work of prolific and important regional architects Favrot & Livaudais, and an important work. The sophistication of the design and the quality of its execution is a tribute to the architects, Christy Dolph Collins, who built the structure, and the bank leadership, who clearly intended the building to last. It is a very fine example of commercial architecture in Port Arthur, and was home to a significant Port Arthur and Southeast Texas business enterprise that was deeply connected to the oil and shipping foundation of Port Arthur's economic and social history.

²⁰ The library was a gift of Mrs. Delora Gates, John W. Gates' widow.

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

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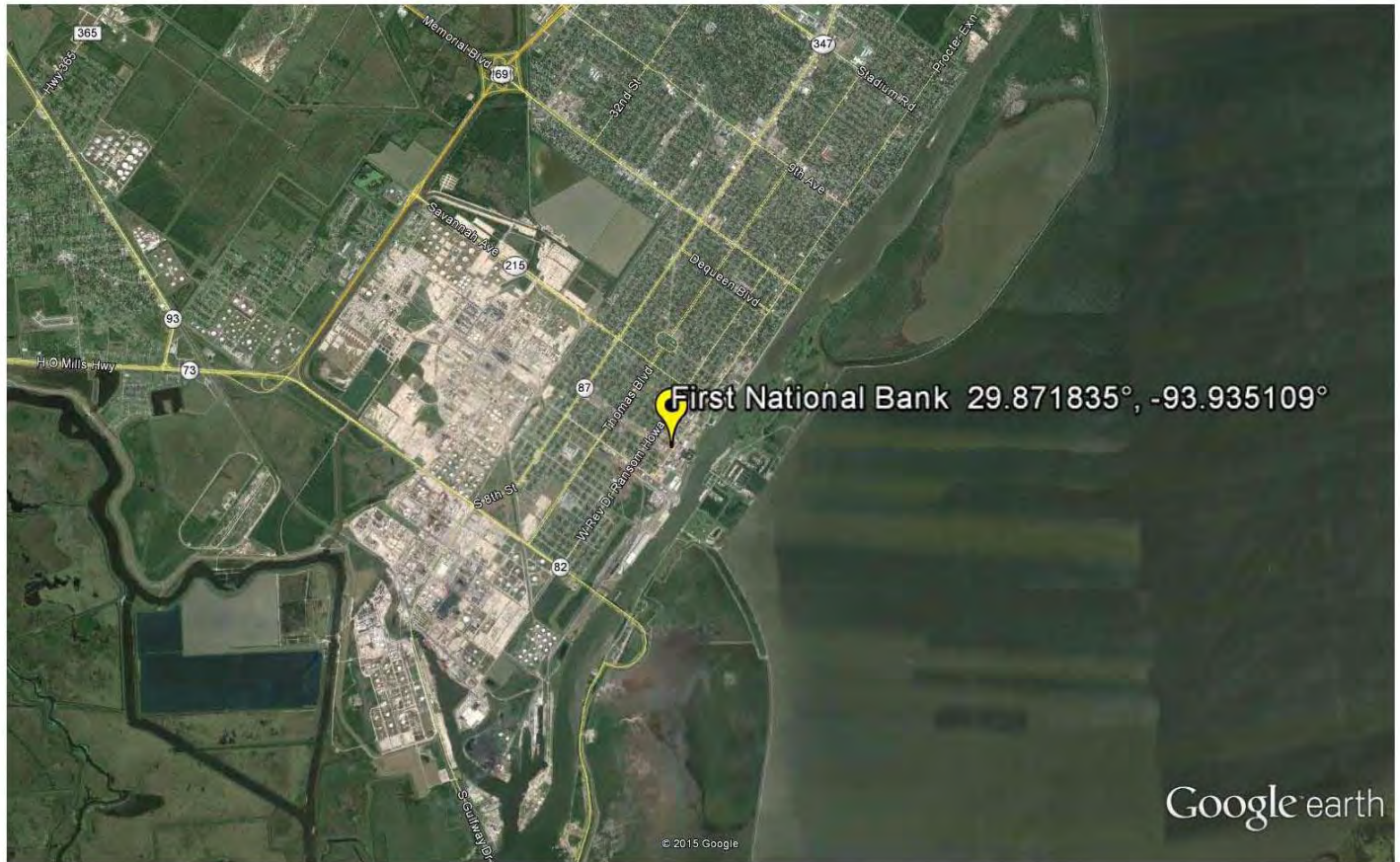
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1925, 1929, 1933

First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Map 1: Jefferson County (shaded) is located in east Texas, along the Gulf of Mexico.

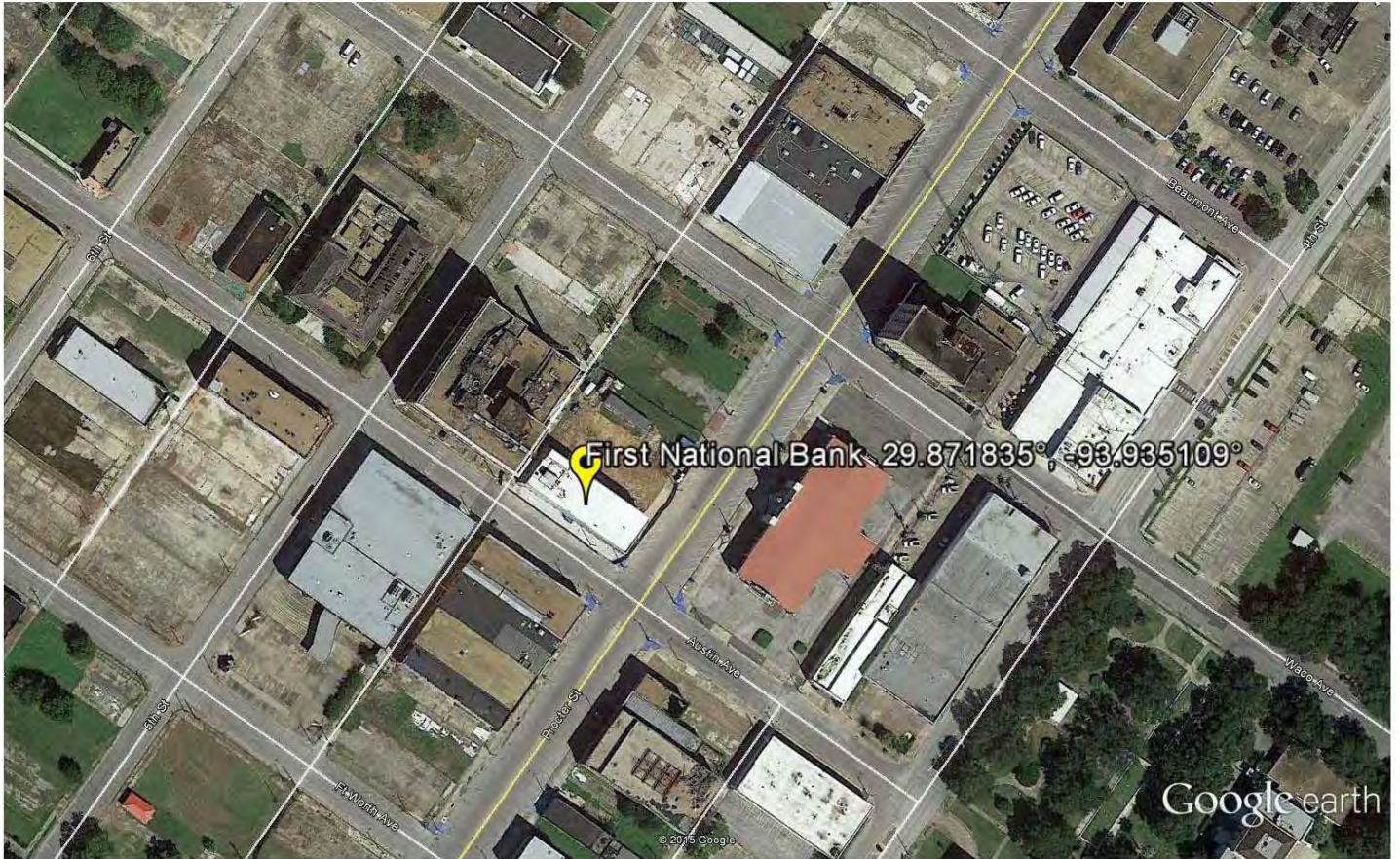


Map 2: Scaled Google Earth map depicts the nominated property's location within the greater Port Arthur area.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Map 3: Scaled Google Earth maps depicts nominated property's location in downtown Port Arthur.



Google earth



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Map 4: Scaled Google Earth map depicting the nominated property's approximate boundaries.

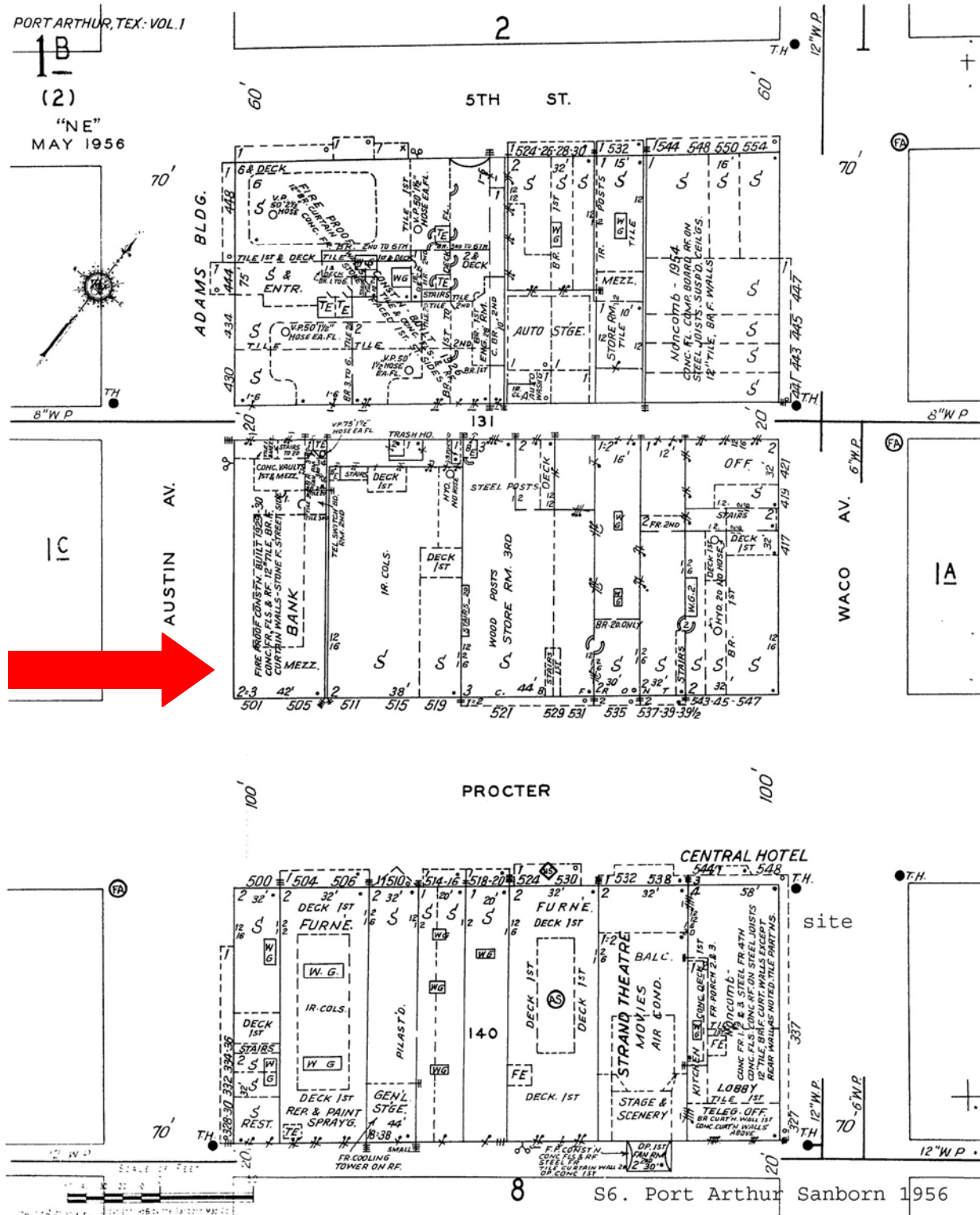


Google earth



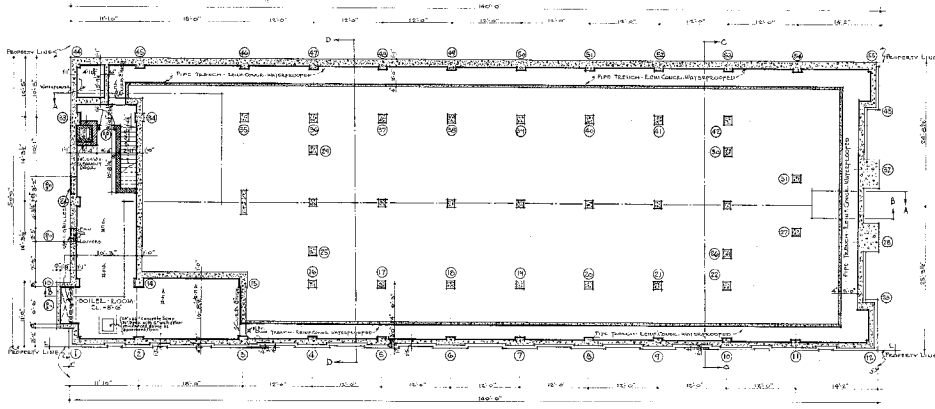
First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Map 4: The 1956 issue of the Sanborn Fire Insurance map is the first issue to depict the nominated property.

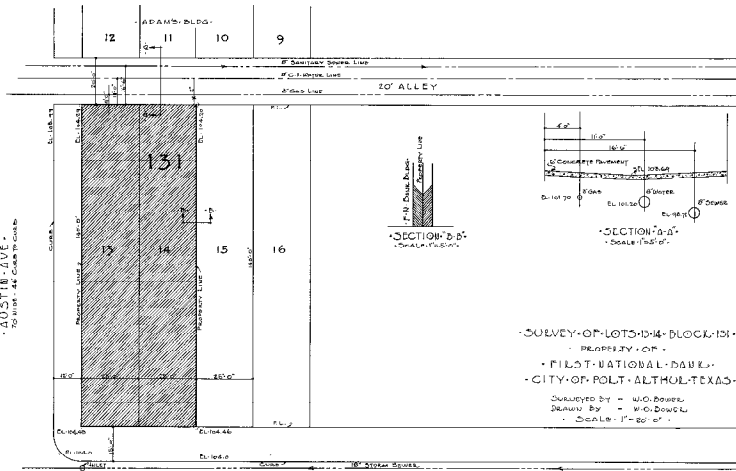


First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 1: Original plans, site and basement.



BASEMENT PLAN
 Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"

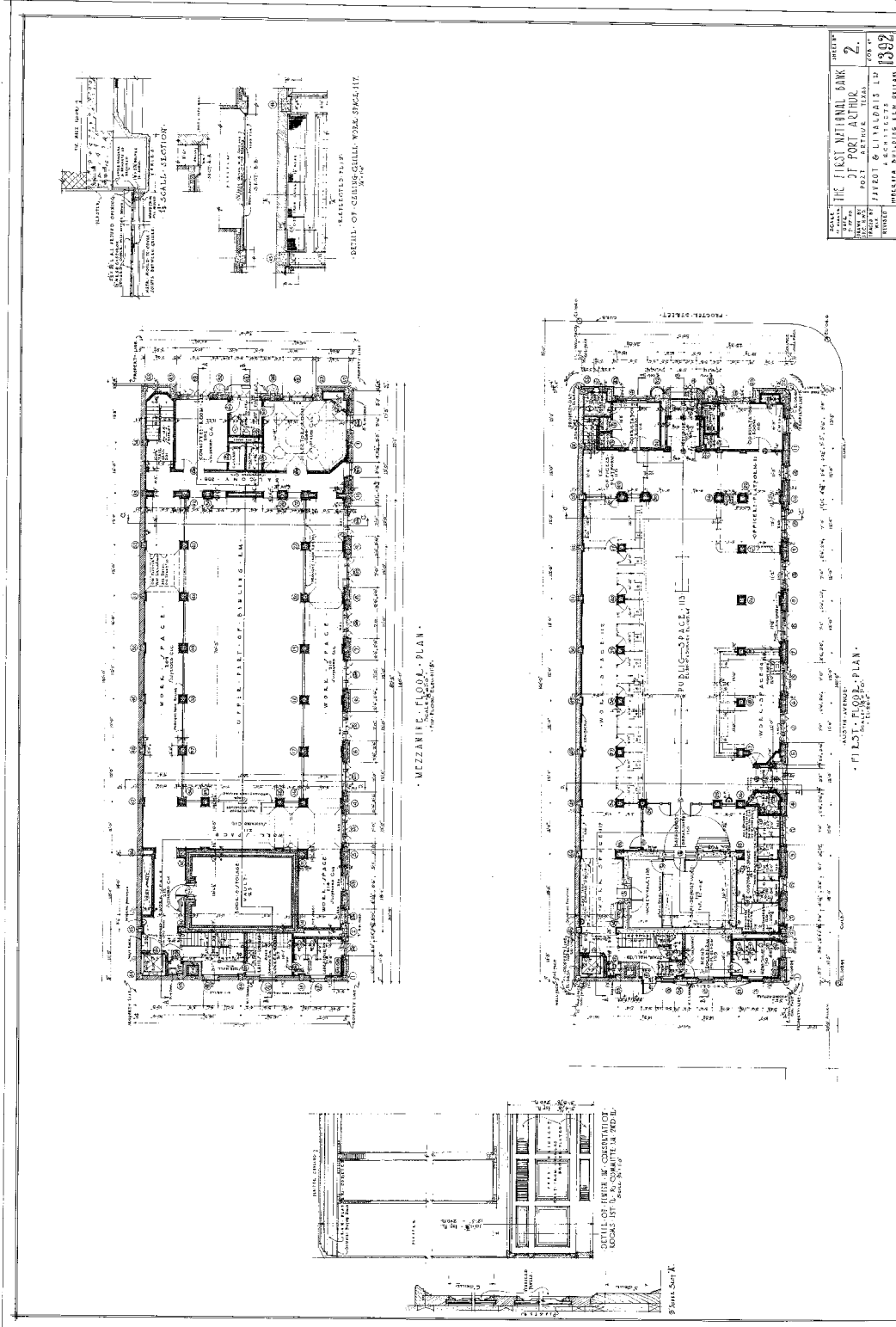


PROJECT - PT.
 Scale: 1" = 20'-0"
 COPY (VERTICAL) OF SURVEY AS SUBMITTED

SCALE	1" = 20'-0"	SHEET NO.	1
DATE	1939	PROJECT	THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF PORT ARTHUR, TEXAS
DRAWN BY	W.D. BOWEN	NO. AT	1392
TRACED BY	W.D. BOWEN	REVISED	1939
REVISIONS		ARCHITECTS	FAVROT & LIVAUDAIS LLP
			BIDENBIA BUILDING NEW ORLEANS

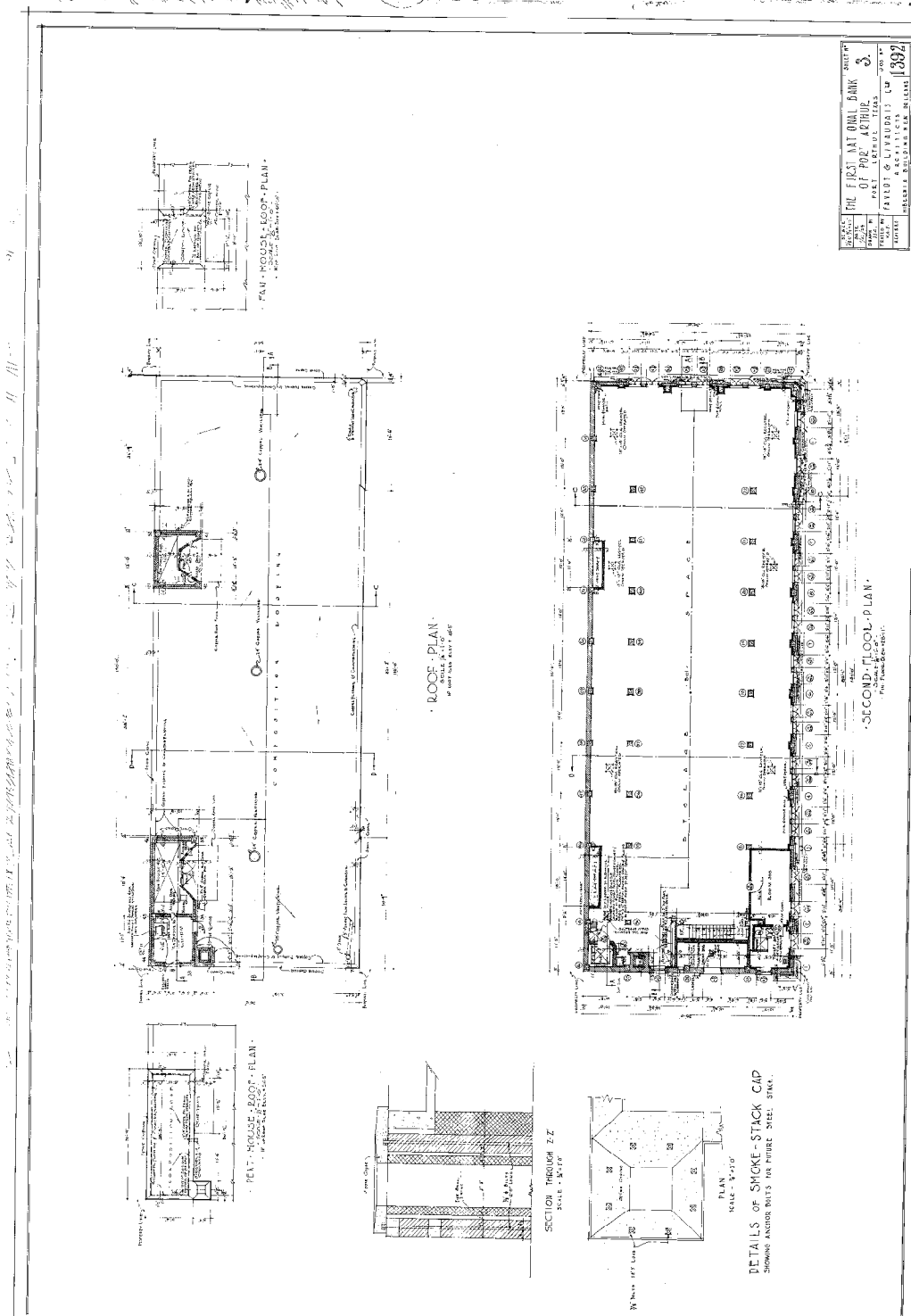
First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 2: Original plans, first and mezzanine levels.



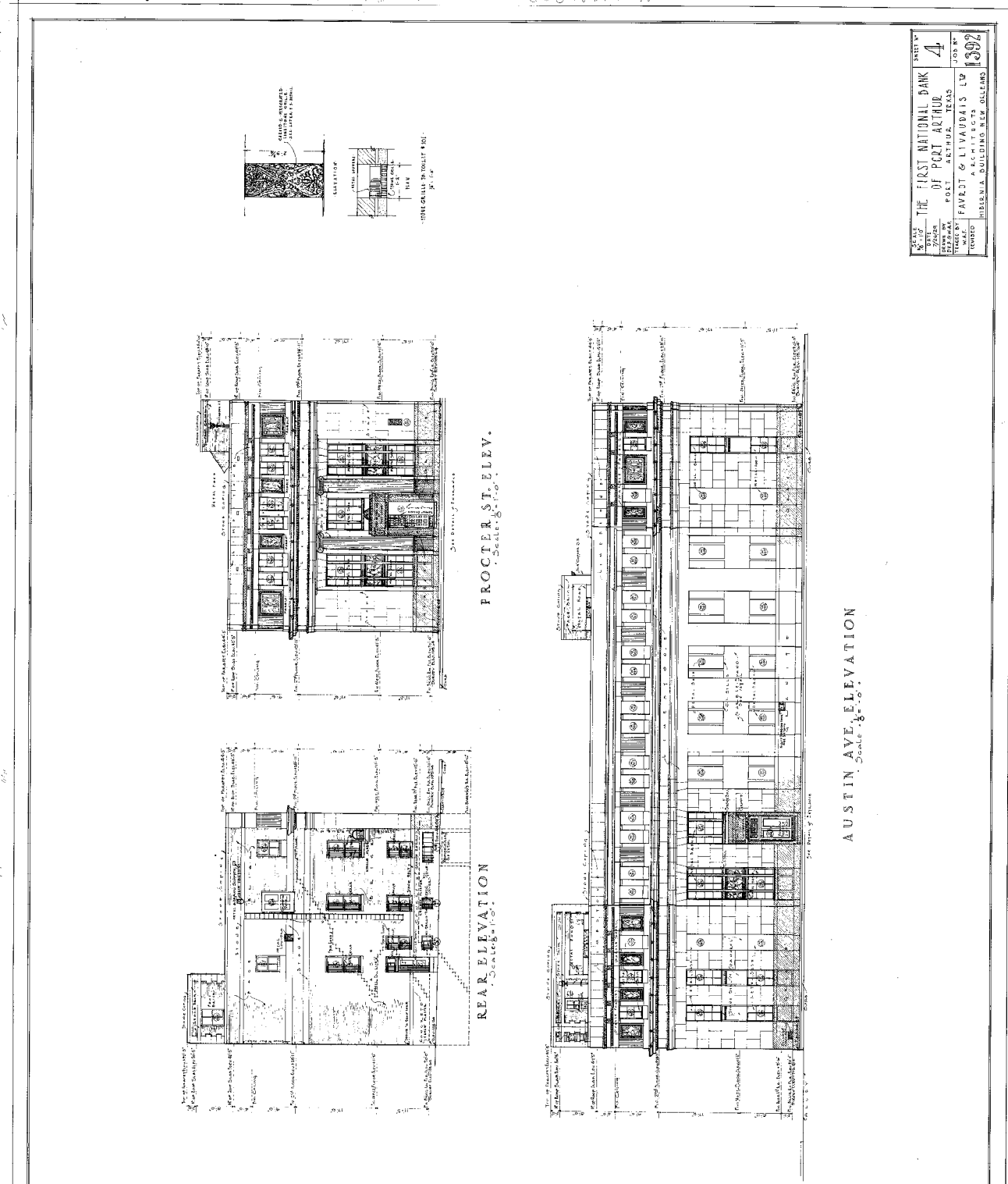
First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 3: Original plans, third and roof levels.



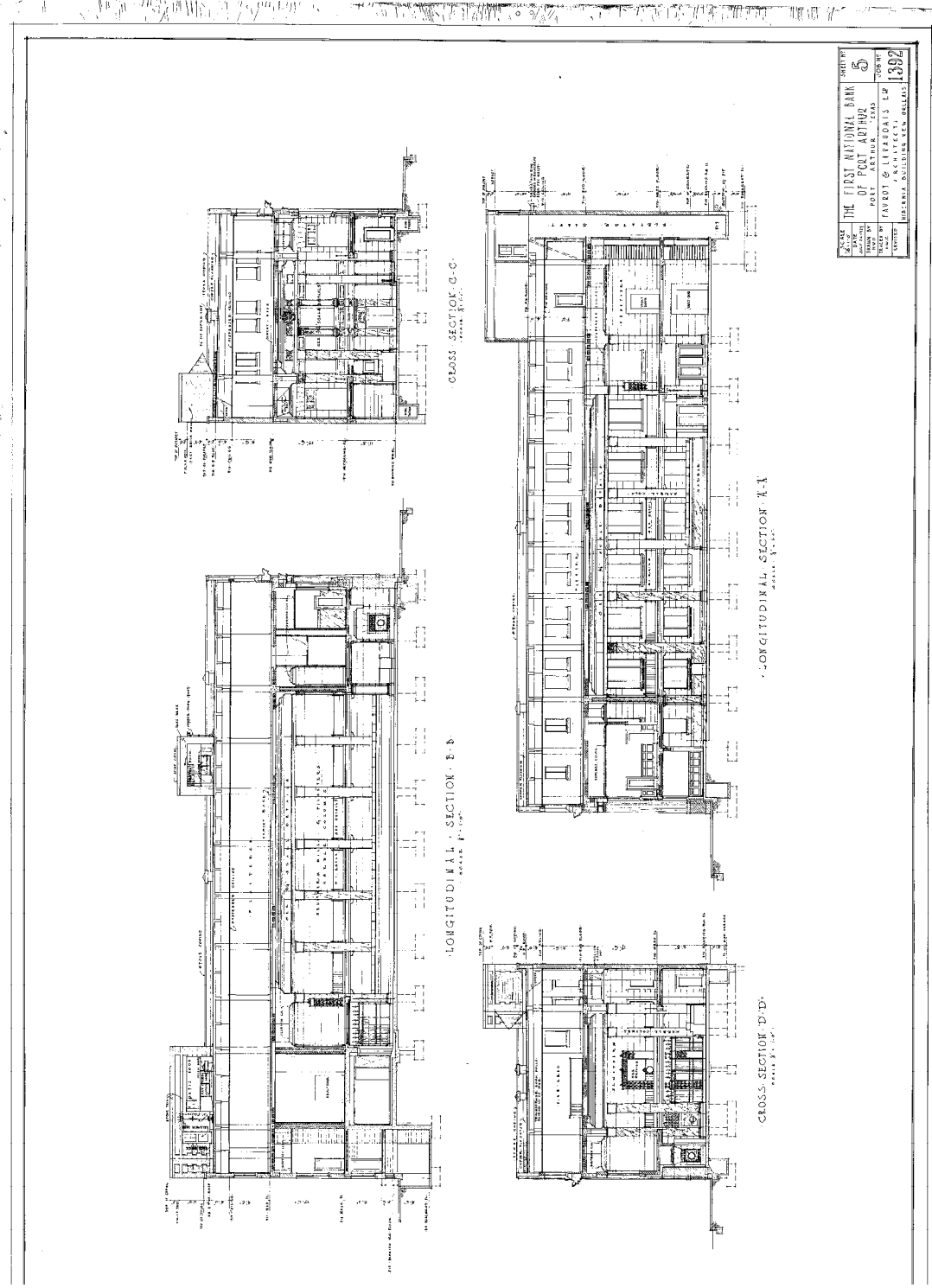
First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 4: Original elevations.



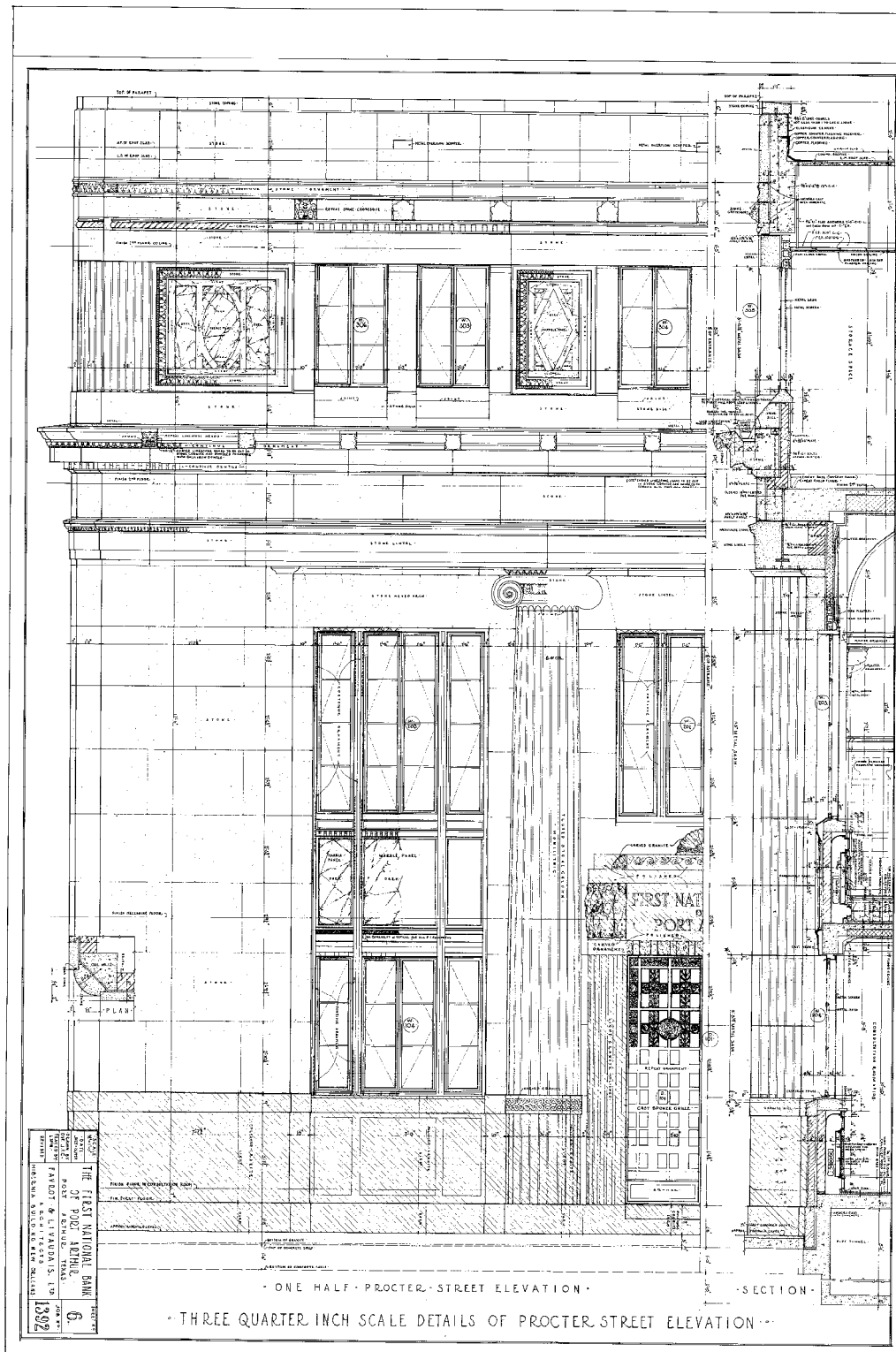
First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 5: Original sections.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 6: Original detail, primary elevation.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 7: View along Austin Street, c. 1939. Nominated building near center.



Figure 8: View along Procter Street, c. 1936. Nominated building on right.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 9: Undated historic photograph of nominated building as seen at night.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 10: Original interior.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figures 11 and 12: First National Bank of Port Arthur interior, c. 1943.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 13: Bank interior, c. 1953.



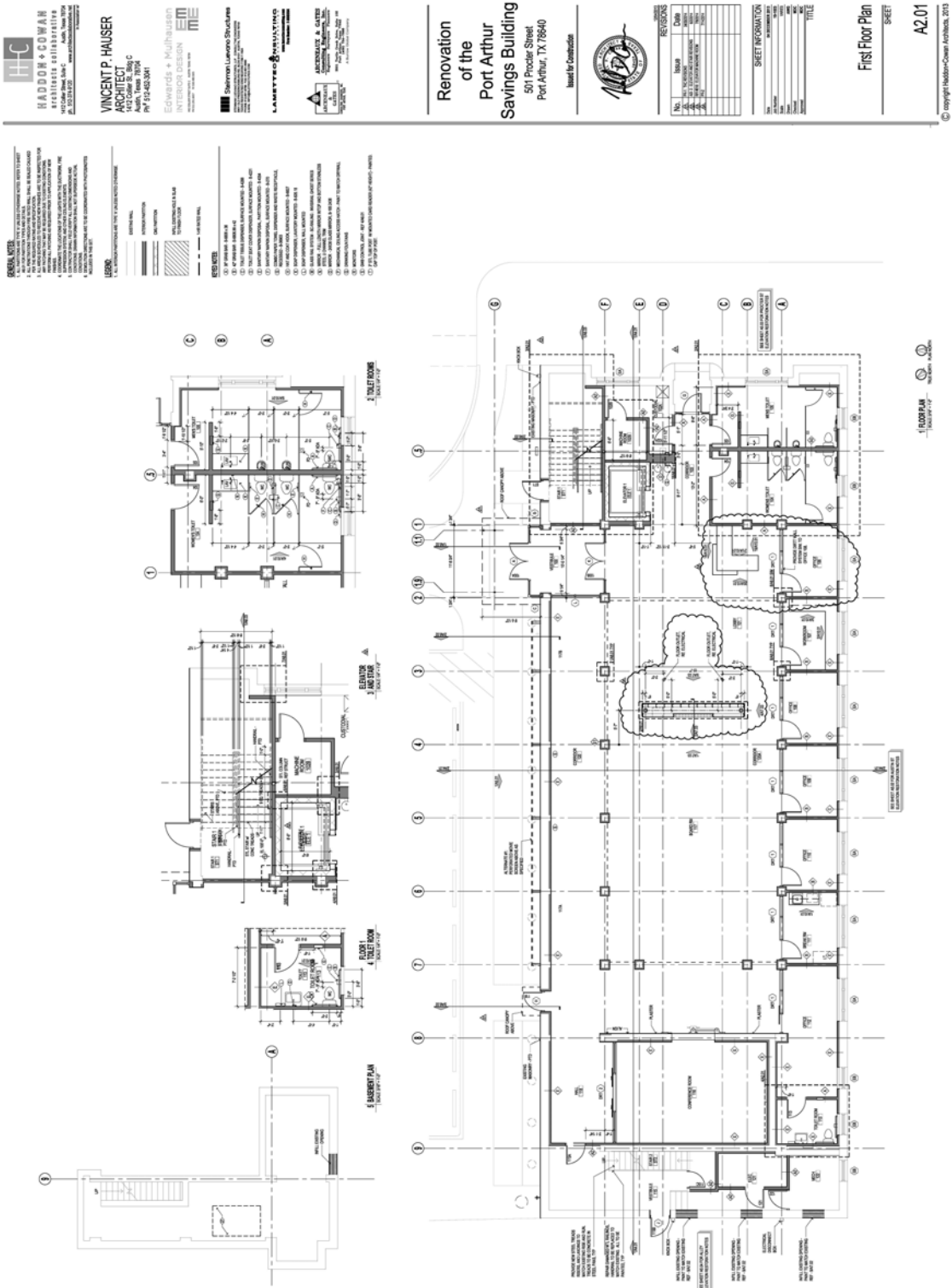
First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figures 14 and 15: Third floor spaces, c. 1953.



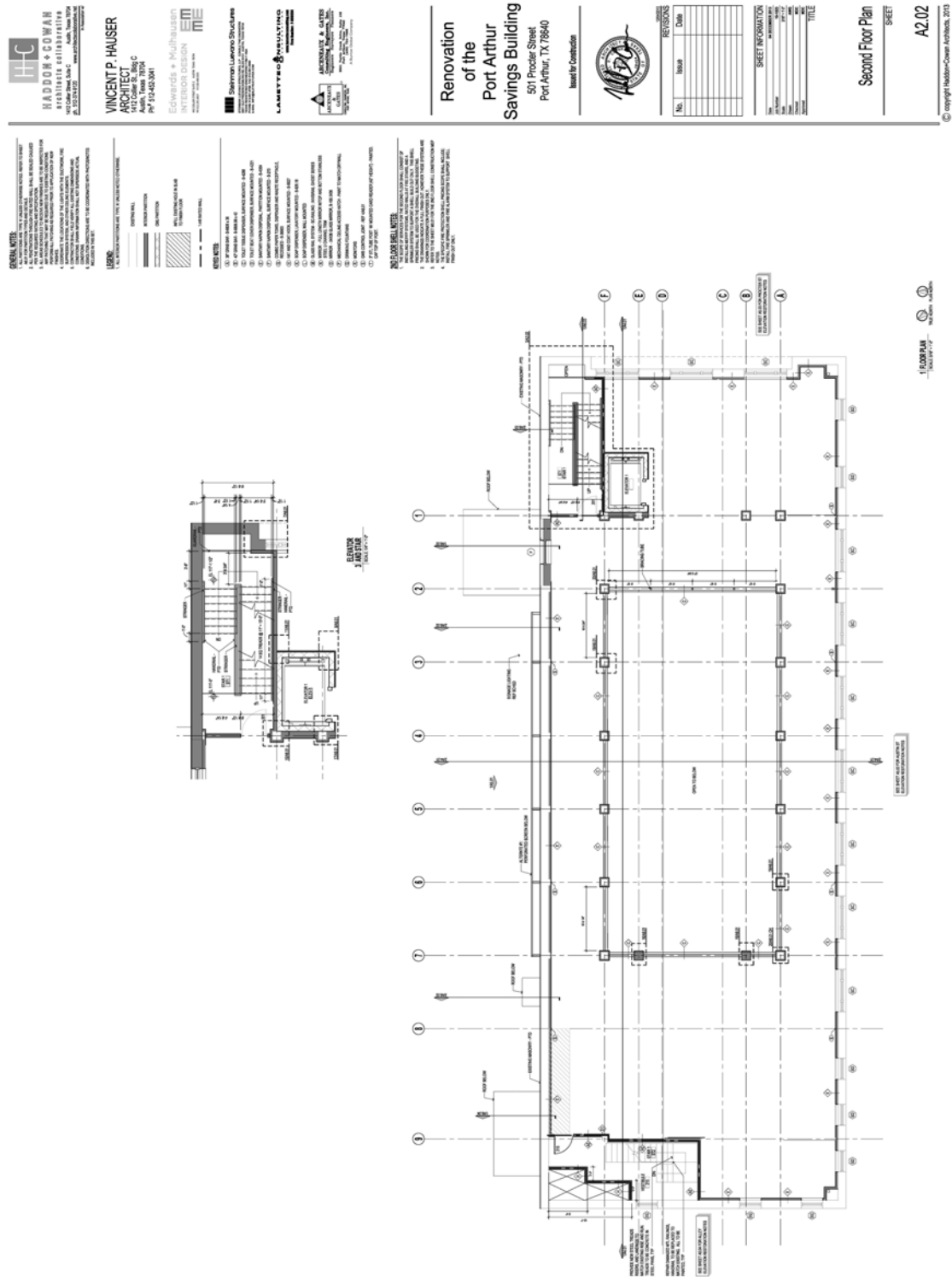
First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 16: Current first floor plans.



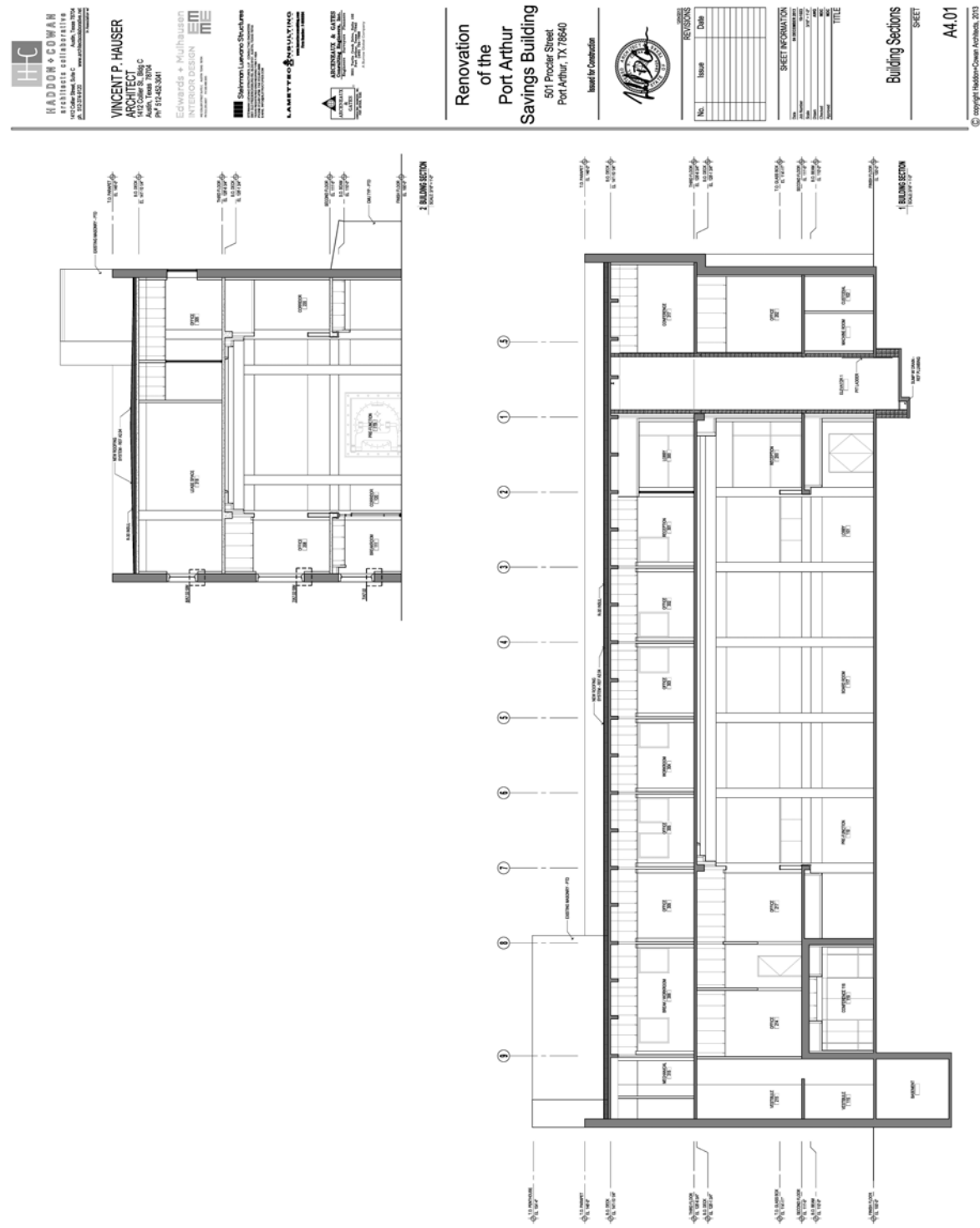
First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 17: Current second floor plan.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 19: Current sections.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figures 20 and 21: The Calcasieu Marine Bank of Lake Charles.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

Figure 22: Gates Memorial Library, Lamar University, Port Arthur.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

CURRENT PHOTOS OF THE NOMINATED PROPERTY

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0001

View along Procter Street towards the nominated building (in foreground). Camera facing southwest.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0002
Procter Street elevation. Camera facing west.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0003
Procter and Austin street elevations. Camera facing north.



TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0004
Austin Street elevation. Camera facing northeast.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0005
Procter Street elevation (primary). Camera facing northwest.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0006
Detail of primary entry. Camera facing northwest and up.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0007
Interior entrance lobby. Camera facing south.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0008
Lobby interior. Camera facing southwest.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0009
Lobby interior as seen from second floor/mezzanine. Camera facing southeast.



First National Bank of Port Arthur, Port Arthur, Jefferson County, Texas

TX_Jefferson County_First National Bank of Port Arthur_0010
Third floor corridor. Camera facing north.





The main building is a two-story structure with a light beige or off-white facade. The left portion of the building features a classical architectural style with a prominent portico supported by four square columns. To the right of the portico, the facade is more modern and minimalist, with a series of small, rectangular windows arranged in two rows. The ground floor has a central glass entrance with a dark grey awning. A small sign above the entrance reads "FD".

A multi-story brick building is visible on the right side of the image. It has a traditional architectural style with many windows and a fire escape on its exterior wall. The building appears to be older and is partially obscured by the modern building in the foreground.

Several smaller buildings are visible on the left side of the street. One has a bright yellow corrugated metal facade, and another has a blue facade. They appear to be older, multi-story structures.

A black Chevrolet pickup truck is parked on the street in front of the building. It is facing away from the camera.

A group of vehicles is parked in a lot to the right of the building. This includes a white pickup truck, a black sedan, and a white sedan.

A black SUV is driving away on the street to the left of the frame.

A utility pole with several power lines is located on the sidewalk in front of the building.

A tall, black street light pole stands on the grassy area in front of the building.

A red fire line is painted on the ground in front of the building entrance, with the text "FIRE LINE - 10' AWAY ZONE" written on it.





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