

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1** NAME

HISTORIC

The Old Second National Bank of Aurora

AND/OR COMMON

**2** LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

37 South River Street

\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Aurora

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

15

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Illinois

CODE

12

COUNTY

Kane

CODE

089

**3** CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

**4** OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Old Second National Bank of Aurora Corporation

STREET & NUMBER

37 South River Street

CITY, TOWN

Aurora

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Illinois

**5** LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Kane County Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

719 Batavia Avenue - Building "B"

CITY, TOWN

Geneva

STATE

Illinois

**6** REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Illinois Historic Sites Survey

DATE

October, 1972

\_\_ FEDERAL  STATE \_\_ COUNTY \_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Department of Conservation, Division of Land and Historic

CITY, TOWN

Springfield

STATE  
Illinois

Sites

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Old Second National Bank of Aurora is a large banking facility built in downtown Aurora in 1924. The design, by George Grant Elmslie, uses a derivation of the Prairie School style that incorporates some of the traditional Prairie School ornament Elmslie learned from Sullivan.

The foundation of the building and the wall of the first floor is pink granite brought by barge from New Hampshire. The walls above this floor are golden-brown roman brick laid with raked joints. The roof, a steeply pitched saddleback, is red tile. At the center of the long elevation of the structure, a small dormer abruptly pierces the roof. Ten brick-clad columns support the structure. They are an integral part of the fenestration of the south facade of the first and second floors, and are then abruptly terminated on the facade by carved stone capitals set into the brick. In fact, these columns continue unrevealed to the roof. The upper floors have a plain window detail, and the rhythm of the windows doubles at the third and fourth floor.

The ornament of the building is quite austere, and unlike the free flowing floral or geometric ornament of most Prairie School architects, figures of people and animals are used, symbolizing the customers of the bank and early Aurora history. Only the south facade is detailed, the north being plain brick. The capitals, carved by Emil Zettler in white limestone, symbolize transportation, animal husbandry, and merchant and manufacturing trades. The five large windows are filled with geometrically patterned stained glass. The entrance is a complex assemblage of vertical and horizontal members, with two massive piers topped by limestone capitals. These are carved with figures depicting civic and agricultural development. Above the doorway is a Zettler bas relief of a farmer, his horse and his plow. The cornice is a narrow terra cotta band that goes around the building, following the contours of the roof gable. This was modeled and cast by Kristian Schneider, Elmslie's long-time associate.

The interior of the main banking lobby is an uncolumned space 45 feet by 98 feet. On the north wall is a three-panel mural by John W. Norton, depicting life in Aurora c. 1835. The wall is faced with the same Roman brick used externally, to a height of seven feet. Above the brick the walls are divided into three-foot tile squares, decorated at each corner with small colored tiles. The original floor was red tile, bordered in colors, which simulated a large oriental carpet. Elmslie designed the fixtures and furnishings in the banking room in the typical style of Prairie furniture, with accentuated horizontals and colorful geometric patterns.

The exterior of the bank has been unchanged from the original, with the exception of a Prairie-styled chime clock added at the SE corner. The interior has been altered. The floor described above has been covered over, and the banking area re-designed to accommodate modern banking conventions. The structure is in excellent condition, being prized by the directors of the bank as a valuable symbol to their clientele.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1924

~~XXXXXX~~ BUILDER/ARCHITECT George Grant Elmslie

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old Second National Bank designed by George Grant Elmslie in 1924, is one of the last structures in the Prairie School style by a principal architect of the school. It is not innovative, but rather a strong statement of Elmslie's work of the past three decades. The ornamentation Elmslie learned from Louis Sullivan is present, although quite sparse, and the building itself does not have the combination of grace and massiveness that marks the best work of the architect or the Prairie School as a whole. Yet the bank is a very significant work, for these less important flaws point out Elmslie's genius when working in fruitful association with his mentor, Sullivan, or with his partner of twelve years William Gray Purcell. The Old Second National Bank building also foreshadows some of the qualities second generation followers of the Prairie School would use in their designs. Most important, it is a beautiful, well preserved Prairie School building.

When Elmslie (1871-1953) received the commission for the bank, he was instructed by the client to work in the small commercial bank style that he, Purcell, and Sullivan had developed over the past twenty years.<sup>1</sup> While the Prairie Style was already declining in American architecture, Elmslie enthusiastically accepted the commission, and assembled the craftsmen he had worked with throughout his career. Sculptor Emil Zettler, muralist John Norton, and artist Kristian Schneider (who had executed Sullivan's and Elmslie's terra cotta work for twenty years) were all well schooled in Prairie design, and able to contribute once again to this late design.

The bank building does not have the unified feeling of earlier Prairie structures. Elmslie's experimentation with vertical forms is only partially successful, as the upper floors seem cut off from the first two stories. The varying fenestration and the horizontal line created by the capitals above the second floor contribute to this disjointed quality, and the entrance, which appears to have been taken from one of Purcell's and Elmslie's smaller banks, does little to draw the structure together. Elmslie seemed unable to handle vertical massing as well as other Prairie School architects (especially Dwight Perkins and Barry Bryne) practicing after 1915. However, this verticality and the austere ornament does foreshadow the architects of the mid-twentieth century who consider themselves followers of the Prairie School, notably Bruce Goff and Richard Neutra. Elements of both of these men's earlier designs are present in the bank in Aurora.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

see continuation sheet

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. .14 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME \_\_\_\_\_

QUADRANGLE SCALE \_\_\_\_\_

UTM REFERENCES

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	
C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
E	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
G	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	
D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
F	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
H	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Philip L. Pomerance, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission

DATE

August 24, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

400 West Madison Street

TELEPHONE

(312) 454-0400

CITY OR TOWN

Chicago

STATE

Illinois 60606

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES: The Old Second National Bank

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Old Second National Bank, R. Hausman, Historian.

Koeper, Johann. Illinois Architecture. Chicago: University  
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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10

PAGE

VERBAL LEGAL DESCRIPTION: The Old Second National Bank

The Southwesterly 45.83 feet of Lot 5 in Block 5 of the original town of West Aurora, now City of Aurora, Kane County, Illinois

and

the Northeasterly 20 feet 2 inches of Lot 5 in Block 5 of the original town of West Aurora, now City of Aurora, Kane County, Illinois

# MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

see continuation sheet

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. .14 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME AURORA NORTH

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A V.6 390400 4623520

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Philip L. Pomerance, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission

DATE

August 24, 1978

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400 West Madison Street

TELEPHONE

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STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*David Kennedy*

TITLE

*Director, Department of Conservation*

DATE

12/29/78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER.

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ILLINOIS

STATE

Date Entered      MAY    8    1979

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
Old Second National Bank	Aurora Kane County

Also Notified

Honorable Charles H. Percy  
Honorable Adlai E. Stevens  
Honorable Tom J. Corcoran

**COPY OF CONGRESSIONAL NOTIFICATION**

For further information, please call the National Register at (202)343-6401.