

NATIONAL BANK OF FAIRFAX BUILDING

4029 Chain Bridge Road
Fairfax, Virginia

Building History Report

February 2024



EHT TRACERIES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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Introduction

The National Bank of Fairfax Building is located at 4029 Chain Bridge Road (alternatively 4027 Chain Bridge Road) in Fairfax, Virginia. The two-story brick building was constructed in 1905 in the Colonial Revival style. The building contributes to the significance of the City of Fairfax Historic District, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. The National Bank of Fairfax was founded in 1902 and served as the only banking institution in the city during the early twentieth century. The building at 4029 Chain Bridge Road was the first purpose-built bank building constructed for the National Bank of Fairfax. Typical of commercial buildings of the time, the first floor was used as the bank's public area, and the second floor was rented out as office spaces. The National Bank of Fairfax constructed a new building in 1930 and sold the building at 4029 Chain Bridge. The former bank building was used as offices during the mid-twentieth century, and was most recently leased Community Bank in the 1990s. The building is presently vacant.

Methodology

This historic building report serves to document present conditions and outline the history of the building for 4029 Chain Bridge Road. Research in support of this report was conducted using online and in-person archives, including The Virginia Room at the Fairfax County Library, The Fairfax Museum, and proquest.com. Local historian Lee Hubbard supplied several photos for the report from his personal collection. Freedom of Information requests were submitted to both Fairfax County and Fairfax City, but have not been fulfilled at this time. Any information received from these requests, once they have been completed, will be included in an amended report.



Figure 1: Aerial Imagery from GoogleEarth. Location of 4029 Chain Bridge annotated in red EHT Traceries.

Building Description

The National Bank of Fairfax Building is located in the downtown business district of the City of Fairfax, on a 0.12 acre rectangular lot. The parcel is bound to the west by Chain Bridge Road, to the north by Sager Avenue, and to the east and south by a paved parking lot. It shares an asphalt parking lot, as well as an alleyway, with a two-story building located at 4031 Chain Bridge Road. The historic Fairfax County Courthouse (4000 Chain Bridge Road, constructed 1800) is located to the west, on the other side of Chain Bridge Road. The Joshua Gunnell House (4023 Chain Bridge Road, constructed 1830) is located to the north, across Sager Avenue. A public sidewalk runs along the buildings north and west elevations. The main entrances on the west elevation are accessed from a contemporary brick platform laid with a set of brick stairs and a ramp. A raised brick planter borders the north elevation (**Figure 5**). The south elevation is accessed by a brick walkway. The north elevation backs up to a parking lot, and features a sunken entrance with a concrete staircase that leads to a basement. Historic photographs indicate that the building entrances were historically located at the sidewalk level; an access stair and ramp were added later to accommodate the changing grade of the street.

Exterior

The building is two stories tall, clad in red brick with tan mortar joints. On the two façades, the brick is laid in a stretcher bond, and the secondary elevations are laid in an American bond. The



Figure 2: 4029 Chain Bridge Road, looking southeast. EHT Tracerics.



Figure 3: West elevation, looking northeast. EHT Traceries.



Figure 4: North elevation, looking southeast. EHT Traceries.



Figure 5: East elevation, looking southwest. EHT Tracerics.



Figure 6: East and south elevation, looking northwest. EHT Tracerics.

building features traditional commercial elements expressed in the Colonial Revival Style, such as the flat roof with parapet, a chamfered corner entry, and a decorative cornice. The two façades are composed of exterior walls that extend slightly past the building footprint, sheltering the secondary elevation from view. A cast concrete beltcourse runs the length of both elevations. Window openings are arched and supported by brick segmental arch lintels. Openings hold contemporary double hung vinyl sash, and north elevation first floor windows have transoms.

The north and west façades meet at one-bay chamfered corner that holds the historic primary entrance. The corner entryway is emphasized by a decorative brick surround, and the opening is supported by a segmental brick arch. The historic opening holds a contemporary decorative single-leaf wood door with sidelites and a transom. Above the main entry, on the second floor, there is a single historic window opening that holds contemporary double-hung vinyl sash windows.

The west elevation (**Figure 4**) is three bays wide and is crowned with a slender dentiled brick cornice. The first floor is pierced by two door openings and a single window opening. A contemporary secondary entrance is recessed into the building and surrounded by a contemporary wood surround with a decorative pediment. This opening holds a contemporary glass paneled wood door with a decorative transom. This entrance is not original to the building. Another secondary entrance is located on the south bay and is supported by a single segmental brick arch and holds a wood paneled door. Although there was historically a door opening in this location, this door openings may have been altered; the surrounding brickwork shows evidence of a possible renovation to the entire first story of this elevation. There is a single window opening on the first story, and three window openings on the second story.

The north elevation (**Figure 5**) is four bays wide and features regular fenestration. Sager Avenue has a sloping grade, revealing an partially exposed below-grade basement level along this elevation. The area below grade is clad in brick laid in an American bond, and the first and second stories are clad in a stretcher bond (**Figure 6**). The first and second stories are pierced by four window openings each with double hung vinyl sash windows. Windows on the first story are crowned by single-lite transoms. There is a small, single window opening on the basement level.

The east elevation (**Figure 6**) is three bays wide with and a sunken concrete staircase leading to basement access. The first and second stories are pierced by two regular, arched window openings. The first story is also pierced by a smaller window opening that holds a double hung vinyl sash window and has a flat head and no lintel.

The south elevation (**Figure 7**) is four bays wide and features irregular fenestration. The first and second stories are pierced by three window openings each. The first story also has a late-night deposit box built into the first story.



Figure 7: Detail of differing brick bonds. EHT Traceries.

Interior

The interior of the building is two floors, plus a small basement room. The first story (**Figures 9 and 10**) was historically the bank's public lobby, and is presently organized around several, large, interconnected rooms, including the bathroom and bank vault. These rooms feature contemporary wood floors and contemporary drop ceilings, although the volume of the original banking lobby remains. A staircase is located in the southeast corner of the building to connect to the second floor, and has a decorative wood railing. The second floor was historically offices and is organized around several interconnected rooms, a corridor off the stair landing, a bathroom, and a small kitchen. This floor has historic wood floors, decorative moldings, and a combination of drop ceilings and plaster ceilings. Throughout the interior, windows are encased with decorative wood surrounds. A small, unfinished basement room is accessed from the outside.



Figure 8: Staircase. EHT Tracerics.



Figure 9: First floor lobby. EHT Tracerics.



Figure 10: First Floor. EHT Traceries.



Figure 11: Second Floor. EHT Traceries.

Building Alteration

The building retains its overall appearance, but has been undergone alterations over the last century. The overall exterior of the building retains much of its historic character, including the overall footprint, chamfered corner entrance, fenestration on the north elevation, and slim cornice. The decorative surrounds around the main entrance remain intact, although it is possible that these were reconstructed during a building renovation as evidence of change at this entrance is visible in the brickwork. Alterations to the exterior appear to be concentrated largely to the west and east sides of the building, although there have been minor modifications to the other two elevations. Most notably, the historic bank window was removed from the west elevation, and a new secondary entrance was added to the west side of the building. All windows appear to have been replaced with contemporary vinyl sash windows. A large brick ramp and stair was added to the north and east side of the building.

The first story of the west elevation shows evidence of alterations and extensive brick repairs. Alterations include the removal of the large storefront window, which was replaced with a smaller window. A new, secondary entrance with a large pediment was added to the center bay. Based on historic photos, it appears that there was a secondary entrance located in the south bay of the west elevation. Evidence of repairs surrounding this entrance suggest it may have been altered at some point.

On the chamfered corner entrance between the west and north elevations, the door openings retains its historic profile with brick segmental arch; however, the historic double leaf door was replaced with a single leaf wood door with contemporary sidelites. On the north elevation, alterations include the addition of a raised brick planting bed. On the east elevation, alterations include the addition of a new window in the middle bay. On the south elevation, alterations include the addition of a contemporary bank drop box.

As research has not yet uncovered historic floor plans for the building, it is difficult to determine the extent of alterations to the interior of the building. The overall volume of the bank lobby remains intact, and the second floor retains its historic use as office space. The first floor features contemporary flooring and ceilings. The wood flooring on the second floor may be historic.

Historic Overview

Fairfax Historic District

The City of Fairfax Historic District was originally listed on the National Register in 1987 and was updated in 2021. The district centers on the intersection of Chain Bridge Road (Route 123), historically known as Ox Road or Payne Road, with the Little River Turnpike (Route 236), alternatively known as Main Street. Historic resources within the district include a collection of properties that chronicle the development of Fairfax City from 1799 to the mid twentieth century. Contributing properties within the district are a collection of single-family dwellings, commercial buildings, government buildings, churches, office buildings, and a school. The building at 4029 Chain Bridge Road is listed as a contributing resource to the district.

National Bank of Fairfax

The National Bank of Fairfax was organized in 1902, and served as the first bank in the Town of Fairfax. At the turn of the twentieth century, Fairfax underwent a period of economic expansion, supported by the introduction of an electric train service and the development of commercial activity along today's Routes 50 and 29. In order to support this growth, many influential Fairfax businessman, including Robert Walton Moore and Joseph

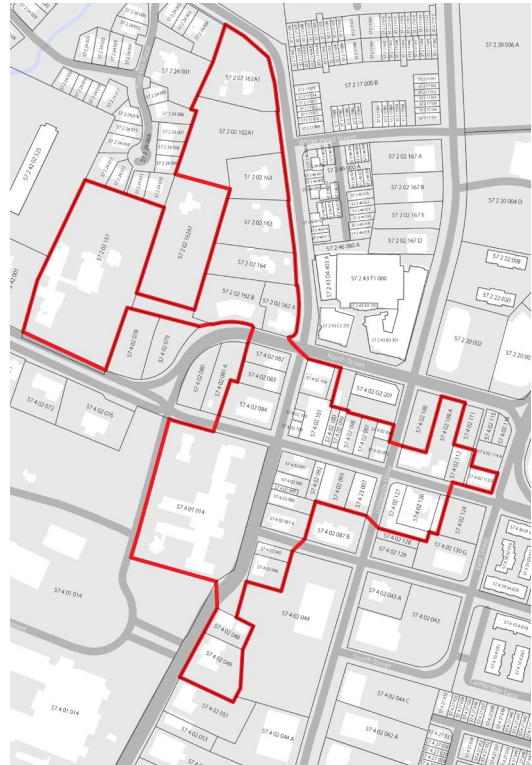


Figure 14: City of Fairfax Historic District Boundaries, updated 2021. EHT Tracerics.

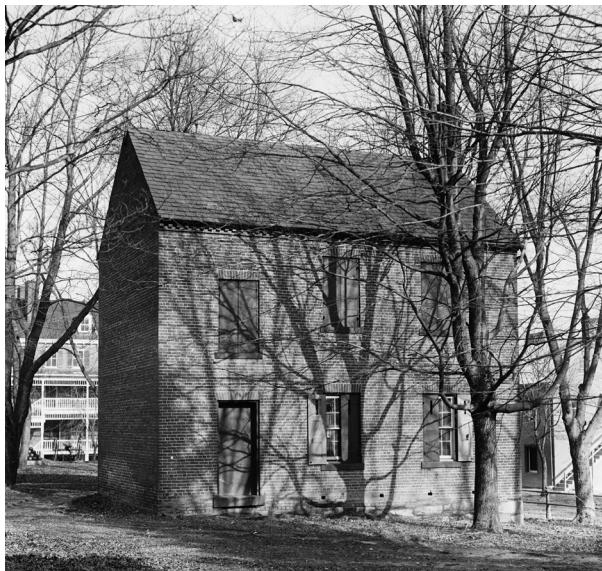


Figure 12: Clerk's Office (undated). Courtesy of Lee Hubbard.

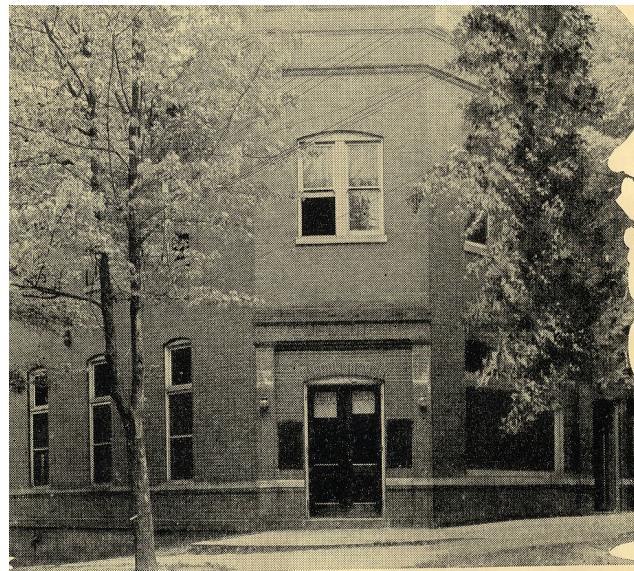


Figure 13: Historic photo of the old First National Bank of Fairfax. Courtesy of Lee Hubbard.

Edward Willard spearheaded the development of a local bank.¹ The operations of the National Bank of Fairfax were initially housed in the old Fairfax County Clerk's Office (**Figure 13**) between 1902 and 1905 while the bank's stockholders developed a plan for the construction of a new building "with modern improvements."²

Building Construction and Chronology

In 1904, the bank gave the contract for the construction of the new building to Oliver B. Campbell and A. Thompson on the lot formerly owned by John R. Taylor.³ The approximate cost of construction was \$5,200 for the "handsome, two story structure," that was to measure 50x40 feet.⁴ The first story was reported to be constructed with a burglar-proof vault and safety deposit boxes, and the second floor was to contain five office spaces for rent.⁵ The bank occupied a prime location across from the County Courthouse, at the intersection of Payne Street and Bank Street (now Chain Bridge Road and Sager Avenue).⁶ Early photos of the bank building (**Figure 14**) show that the two-story brick building featured a chamfered corner, a slim cornice, and a decorative brick surround around the main entrance. The first floor of the east elevation is pierced by a single entrance and a large window. The north elevation has regular fenestration with arched windows. Research has not yet located any historic plans associated with the building.⁷ Although no building plans have been located, there is one possible historic photo of the interior during its time as a bank (**Figure 15**). This unlabeled photograph is from a collection in the The Fairfax County Courthouse Historic Records Center, donated by the former clerk of the court, Thomas Chapman, Jr. The photo appears to depict the interior of the bank building, although it is unclear what the images is showing and where it was taken from.

From 1905 to 1931, the building continued to operate as a bank on the first floor, and the second floor was leased to the law firm of Moore & McCandlish. In 1930, the National Bank of Fairfax hired architect Albert Reuben Sherwood to design a new building for the bank, located down the street. The bank vacated their first building in 1931, and the lower floor of the building was fitted for additional offices. The first tenants of the building included real estate agency Farr and Chapman, and engineering firm Clarke & Berry, and Mayor Chapman.

The law firm of Moore and McCandlish occupied the building from 1931 until 1972, and leased out portions of the building to other tenants, many of which were legal professionals.⁸ This was later the home for the Fairfax Legal Aid Society. In 1992, the Community Bank of Northern Virginia was leased the building from the Mackall brothers. The bank is presently vacant.

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- 1 William Page Johnson, II "The Old National Bank of Fairfax Building," *The Fare Facts Gazette*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (Winter 2004).
 - 2 "Brief Mention," *Evening Star*, August 23, 1902.
 - 3 "New Bank Building," *The Fairfax Herald*, September 19, 1904.
 - 4 "New Bank Building," *The Fairfax Herald*, September 19, 1904.
 - 5 "New Bank Building," *The Fairfax Herald*, September 19, 1904..
 - 6 Chain Bridge Road was historically called Ox Street, and then later Payne Street. A 1932 article in the *Fairfax Herald* refers to the bank's location on Bank Street, which is presumably Sager Avenue.
 - 7 Researcher submitted a Freedom of Information request to Fairfax City that is still pending.
 - 8 William Page Johnson, II "The Old National Bank of Fairfax Building," *The Fare Facts Gazette*, Vol. 2, Issue



Figure 15: Undated Photo potentially depicting the interior of the bank. The Fairfax County Courthouse Records Center.

Conclusion

The National Bank of Fairfax Building contributes to the Fairfax Historic District as an important part of the Fairfax's early twentieth century growth. As the home to the first bank to serve the City of Fairfax, the building at 4029 Chain Bridge Road is associated with the early economic history of the city. Proposed development plans aim to respect the historic character of the building and adhere to historic district guidelines. Additions to the building will be added to the secondary (east and south) elevations so as not to detract from the street views of the building or alter the more articulated façades.



Figure 16: Photo depicts buildings across from old County Courthouse. Oliver Building in background next to last house is old Fairfax Bank. Undated photo (pre-1972). Fairfax City Library, Virginia Room.



Figure 17: 1986 Photo of the bank building. City of Fairfax National Register Historic District Nomination.



Figure 18: 1915 USGS Map Showing Location of Bank. USGS.

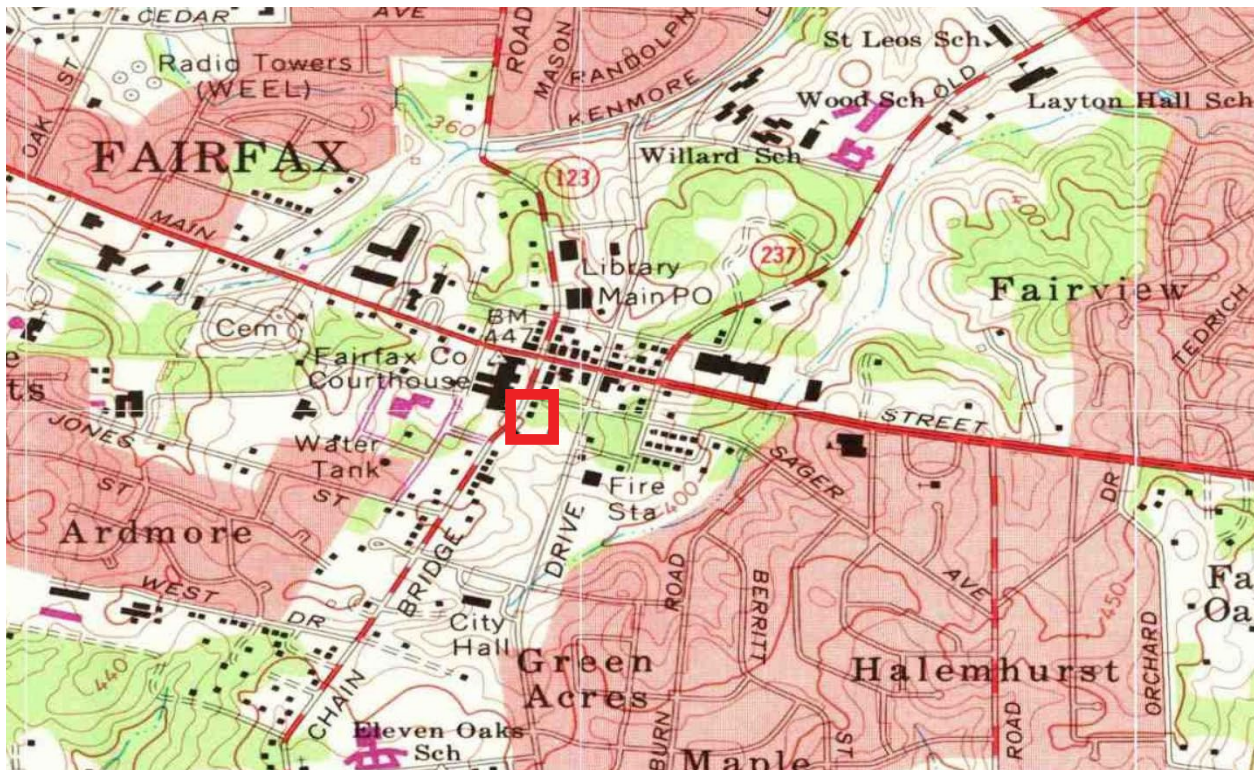


Figure 19: 1986 Photo of the bank building. USGS.



Figure 20: 1937 Aerial of Fairfax, showing location of bank. Fairfax County.



Figure 21: 1953 Aerial of Fairfax, showing location of bank. Fairfax County.



Figure 22: 1972 Aerial of Fairfax, showing location of bank. Fairfax County.



Figure 23: 1997 Aerial of Fairfax, showing location of bank. Fairfax County.

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