

LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

Wachovia Building

Local Historic Landmark #116
301 N. Main St., Winston-Salem

Construction Date: 1966

Landmark Designation Date: 05/17/2004

Wachovia Bank and Trust Company was created in 1911 and, from its inception, was a leader in North Carolina banking, eventually expanding its presence throughout the Southeast. By late 1964, the bank's total resources had exceeded the billion-dollar mark. The following year, Wachovia had become the largest bank in the Southeast. Since 1911, the bank had been located at the southwest corner of N. Main and W. Third Streets (Local Historic Landmark #118). After more than half a century at that location, and with considerable business expansion, the bank required a new home – one that would not only provide more space, but also one that reflected its stature in the banking world. Thus, in 1962, the announcement was made that construction would begin on a new 30-story skyscraper to house the banking giant.

The announcement ended a period in which there had been no construction of significant buildings in downtown Winston-Salem. During the city's "era of success" during the 1910s and 1920s, there was a proliferation of downtown construction that included a race to the sky among new commercial buildings. It included the construction of the original Wachovia Bank and Trust Building, the O'Hanlon Building, the Robert E. Lee Hotel, the Nissen Building, and peaked with the construction of the R.J. Reynolds Building in 1929. Then the stock market crashed, and with it, the financial stability necessary for such large-scale undertakings. Recovery from the Depression was just underway when the country entered World War II. When local commercial construction resumed following the war, it favored the burgeoning suburbs, rather than the city's downtown. As such, strategies began to be formulated for urban renewal, including plans for new traffic thoroughfares, slum clearance, and downtown rehabilitations. When plans for the new Wachovia Building were announced, the building's role in the redevelopment effort was made clear. Construction of the Wachovia Building in downtown Winston-Salem demonstrated a major commitment to the revitalization of the central business district. This show of faith led not



only to the construction of North Carolina's tallest building, but also served as a catalyst for the construction of other major commercial buildings in downtown Winston-Salem during the next several decades.

Albert B. Cameron, principal of the Charlotte architectural firm of Cameron Associates, was selected to design the Wachovia Building because the bank's leaders liked his flair for imaginative, distinctive, and practical innovations in architecture. Cameron's architectural training and experience leaned toward modernism and, as such, he chose to design the new Wachovia Building in the International Style, the corporate standard of the mid 20th century. His design for the 30-story structure exemplified the main characteristics of the style: a boxy, unornamented form; a stripped-down geometric grid surface established by a structural steel frame and glass curtain walls; overall symmetry; a flat roof; and, a ground floor set back behind the outer piers of the building.



Photographs courtesy of Heather Fearnbach

Essentially, the Wachovia Building served as Winston-Salem's Lever House or Seagram Building (both located in New York) – the kind of prestige building that national corporations liked to occupy. When the Wachovia Building was completed, it was the tallest building not only in North Carolina, but in the Southeast as well. During a period when the prevailing building philosophy in the business community was “height makes might,” this distinction was of great importance. More significant was the position that the Wachovia Building attained in North Carolina's architectural history. There simply was no other building in the state that could compare with it – in height, in modern commercial progressiveness, or in its implied statement of prominence and power that people could easily see.



Men present at the announcement of the plans for the new Wachovia Bank Building, 1962
 Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection

The Wachovia Building served as the bank's corporate headquarters until 1995, when a new building was constructed nearby. The bank vacated the 1966 building in stages between late 1995 and early 1999; ultimately removing its logo from the top of the building.

Today the Wachovia Building houses a variety of law and business offices and is branded “Winston Tower.”

View of the Reynolds Building and the new Wachovia building looking down on North Main Street, 1965

Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection



Architectural rendering for the new Wachovia Bank Building at 301 North Main Street, 1962
 Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection via Digital Forsyth (<http://www.digitalforsyth.org>)



Adding letters to the top of the new Wachovia Building by helicopter, 1965
 Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Wachovia Building National Register Nomination
<http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/nr/FY2615.pdf>



This information is also available at the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission's web site:
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>