

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Roanoke Downtown Historic District
(2014 Update)

Name of Property

City of Roanoke, Virginia

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 1

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date: February 2014

Additional Documentation, February 2014

The Roanoke Downtown Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2002. The district is located in the southwest quadrant of the greater downtown area, which continues to serve as the business and governmental center of the City of Roanoke. South Jefferson Street serves as the central thoroughfare of downtown, dividing east and west. The historic district boasts an intact collection of commercial, social, and governmental resources that range in date from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The period of significance and boundaries of the district were revised in 2013, at which time the original period of significance (1882 to 1952) was extended to 1961. The boundaries were expanded several blocks south along South Jefferson Street, and several blocks west along Church and Luck Avenues. The expansion areas include the 1950s International-style Roanoke Public Library on South Jefferson Street and the YMCA on Church Avenue.

Subsequent to the 2013 nomination update, it was discovered that the historic district's last major post-World War II general-purpose office building, the Seven-O-Seven Building, was constructed in 1964. No further major construction took place within the historic district until redevelopment efforts of the 1970s, and this later development was of a different character than earlier design trends. Archival and field investigations have demonstrated the Seven-O-Seven Building supports the context of the downtown historic district, and it is warranted to extend the district's period of significance to 1964 to capture this most recent example of International Style architecture in the district.

This additional documentation includes an analysis of the architectural design of the Seven-O-Seven Building in Section 7; an explanation of the building's significant historical associations with the areas of commerce and architecture in Section 8; additional bibliographic references in Section 9; a location map and photo key for the Seven-O-Seven Building; and labeled photographic prints of the building.

Section 7

The Seven-O-Seven Building is located at 707 South Jefferson Street, within the existing boundaries of the Roanoke Downtown Historic District. The International-style five-story office building was constructed in 1964. It is rectilinear in form and is six bays wide and twelve bays deep with terraces over the first floor on either side. The steel-frame structural system is clad with a curtain wall of cream-colored brick. Precast-concrete spandrels fill the spaces between the vertical pivot windows. The lobby entrance is recessed to reveal the outermost row of granite-clad steel columns. The ground floor is faced with granite and is entered via an aluminum-and-plate-glass storefront. Simple stylized lettering that

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Section number Additional Documentation Page 3

Historical Background

Virginia's urban downtowns served as centers for commercial, government, financial, and institutional activity throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Rapid post-World War II population growth (colloquially known as the Baby Boom), accompanied by housing shortages and new mortgage lending practices, stimulated a residential building boom that lasted into the 1960s. The advent of the automobile and construction of efficient road networks allowed new homes to be built outside of traditional city limits. Retail stores, bank branches, and offices soon followed the population to the suburbs. From the 1940s through the early 1960s, most downtowns maintained their role as economic and political loci due to the unprecedented of growth and economic prosperity that occurred in the United States during this period. By the early 1960s, however, many central business districts across the country entered a period of extended decline that persisted through the late twentieth century.

Suburbanization in Roanoke

In Roanoke, the 1950s was a prosperous decade, although the growth patterns demonstrated the increasing influence of suburbanization. The population increased by 32 percent during this time, although much of it was attributable to the substantial annexation of Roanoke County that occurred in 1949. Subsequent growth took place in the suburban areas in the former Roanoke County. Williamson Road, which experienced a commercial and residential building boom after the war, was included in the annexation. The First National Exchange Bank established the first permanent branch bank in the valley on Williamson Road in 1949. Colonial American National Bank and Mountain Trust National Bank announced plans to build branches in the same area that year.²

Commercial offices and retail stores also established locations outside of downtown Roanoke to take advantage of the suburban population. In 1948, the Shenandoah Life Insurance Company moved its headquarters from downtown and built its new home office on Brambleton Avenue, two miles southwest of the central business district. Crossroads Mall opened in July 1961, as the first regional shopping center in the valley and the first enclosed shopping center in Virginia. The mall was climate controlled and boasted 39 stores. A few months later, Towers Shopping Center opened in October 1961, with 33 stores. The Roanoke-Salem Plaza opened in 1962, at the intersection of Melrose Avenue and Peters Creek Road. It featured department stores, variety stores, a supermarket, and a drug store. These suburban shopping centers became direct competition for the downtown retail stores.

Postwar Development in Downtown Roanoke

Even with the trend toward decentralization, business and government operations continued to be concentrated in downtown Roanoke through the late 1950s and early 1960s. Miller & Rhoads, a Richmond-based department store, opened its first Roanoke branch downtown in 1957, just before the advent of regional shopping centers. Although downtown Roanoke would eventually decline as a retail destination, most department stores, including Heironimus, Miller & Rhoads, Woolworth's, and Leggett's, retained their downtown locations into the late twentieth century.

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

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Section number Additional Documentation Page 4

In 1958, the seven-story First Federal Savings Building (now the Valley Bank Building) was constructed at the corner of First Street and Church Avenue. It was the first major general-purpose office building to be built downtown since 1928.³ Several other office and institutional buildings followed the First Federal Savings Building. Next was the Thomas B. Mason Building at 105 Franklin Road. Built in 1961, it housed the Federal District Attorney’s Office for the Western District. A year later, the American Red Cross Building was built on a large lot at 352 Church Avenue. Although the building represents a major institutional use constructed in the district within the period of significance, it does not contribute to the district due to extensive alterations and additions. Its sprawling development on a large lot is also more typical of suburban development patterns.

The Seven-O-Seven Building at 707 South Jefferson Street, constructed in 1964, was the last major downtown office building of the postwar era. At five stories tall, it was touted as a “handsome, most modern office building” in a multi-page spread by the Roanoke Times. The building was constructed for Professional Properties, Incorporated in response to the need for additional medical office space in the area. Roanoke architects Guerrant and Mounfield were commissioned to design the building and J.H. Fralin and Son served as the general contractor. The \$1 million project supplied more than 200 persons with work. The building was designed with many modern amenities, as well as copious parking at the rear.⁴ Downtown Roanoke Incorporated called the Seven-O-Seven Building the “most imaginative and outstanding improvement in the downtown area.”⁵ The Seven-O-Seven Building thus reflects the architectural trends of the post-World War II era, towards simpler forms and the emphasis on structural systems as the principal aesthetic rather than applied ornamentation. Its form and use of modern materials is consistent with the other buildings constructed in the district during the postwar period.

According to the Roanoke Times, the office building was a forerunner of the medical complex that was coalescing in downtown Roanoke.⁶ The Seven-O-Seven Building offered custom facilities for both businesses and medical practices. Established next to the 1926 Gill Memorial Eye, Ear, Nose, and Throat Hospital, it was connected by a door cut between the walls of the two buildings. In 1967, Community Hospital was constructed nearby on Elm Avenue, on the fringe of the central business district.

The earliest occupants of the Seven-O-Seven Building were dentists and insurance agencies. Travelers Insurance Company was one of the first and largest tenants, occupying the entire first floor, and at times portions of the second floor, until the early 1970s. The United Insurance Company of America and the Life Insurance Company of Virginia also occupied office suites in the building. Over the years, the building would accommodate a variety of tenants, although most were associated with the fields of medicine and dentistry. The fifth floor was almost exclusively occupied by dentists, including a couple of dental laboratories. By 1980, clinic overflow and the credit department of Gill Memorial Hospital had expanded into the first floor of the building.

The Seven-O-Seven Building was the last major general-purpose office building to be constructed downtown until the 1970s, when urban revitalization efforts transpired. By the time of its construction, there was a clear trend toward the location of office parks in areas outside of downtown, where large sites could be devoted entirely to office buildings and their parking and landscaped areas.⁷ Downtown Roanoke suffered a major blow in 1966, when the main U.S. Post Office was moved to a new location

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Section number Additional Documentation Page 6

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1 of 4: 707 South Jefferson Street, east (front) elevation

Photo 2 of 4: 707 South Jefferson Street, north (side) elevation

Photo 3 of 4: 707 South Jefferson Street, west (rear) elevation

Photo 4 of 4: 707 South Jefferson Street, south (side) elevation detail

ENDNOTES

¹ The Roanoke Times

² White, 109

³ White, 118

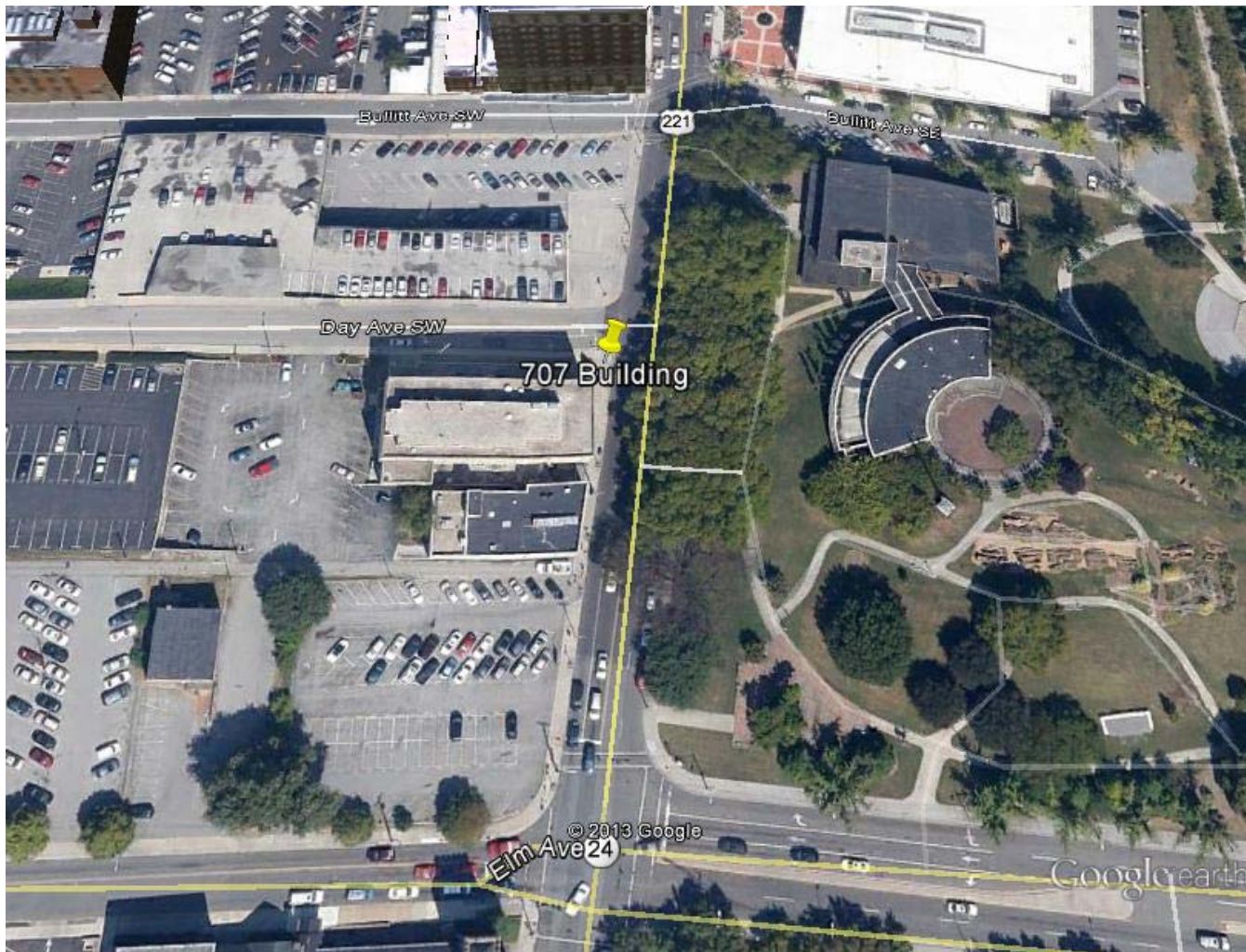
⁴ The Roanoke Times

⁵ The Roanoke Times

⁶ The Roanoke Times

⁷ A Development Plan for Roanoke

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Roanoke, Virginia **DHR #128-5761**
Location Map for the Seven-O-Seven Building



WGS84

Latitude: 37.267687

Longitude: - 79.941087