

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination 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 the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Elizabeth A. Lyon
Signature of certifying official

2/21/90
Date

Elizabeth A. Lyon
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer,
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

In my opinion, the property () meets () does not meet the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

Entered in the
National Register

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

Melanie Byers 3/29/90

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other, explain:

see continuation sheet

[Signature]
Signature, Keeper of the National Register

Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

COMMERCE/TRADE/organizational

Current Functions:

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Commercial Style

Materials:

| | |
|------------|-------------|
| foundation | concrete |
| walls | brick |
| roof | unknown |
| other | terra cotta |

Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The SOWEGA Building is a three-story, red-brick building with a roof deck and basement. The building is in a commercial style with construction and materials of high quality. It is located in the small central business district of Adel, a county-seat community, in central South Georgia.

A light buff terra-cotta trim accents the brick exterior, in the belt course, window trim, parapet cups and quoins. The base of the building is finished in a light colored hard marble of unknown origin. Terra-cotta tracery panels accent the trim under the cornice and the balustrade on the false balcony. The most significant exterior ornaments are the green terra-cotta watermelons set within terra-cotta lozenges (which represent the SOWEGA trade mark) between the second and third floor windows.

The ground floor is organized to provide three commercial bays, a foyer, and elevator lobby. The second floor is arranged so that there is a corner office suite on the southeast, three central offices facing east, three small and one larger office facing north; a storage room at the southwest corner and several restrooms. Walls are plastered and painted with painted pine chair rail and picture frame molding. Interior floors in the public areas are terrazzo; service area floors are concrete. The floor on the roof deck is red tile.

The interior is of a simple, practical design without ornamentation except for the chair rail trim on the wall. Interior doors on the first floor were painted; and other doors were stained. Woodwork was stained in a walnut color, shellacked and varnished.

The SOWEGA Building is of concrete reinforced with structural steel.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7

The building was originally equipped with a coal-burning Webster "Type R" hot water radiator system, ceiling fans for ventilation, and an electric passenger elevator of 2,500 pound capacity.

There are no grounds, foliage or outbuildings connected with this site because it is located on a corner city lot.

A single story commercial building was demolished on this site immediately prior to the construction of the SOWEGA Building. As the site was completely excavated, there is no known archaeological potential.

This building is surrounded by other commercial buildings that have, for the most part, lost their historic character.

Major remodeling occurred on the third floor (Del-Cook offices) in the early 1960s. The ground floor was remodeled in 1988 and the long-missing metal awning was replaced at that time.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

AGRICULTURE
ARCHITECTURE
COMMERCE

Period of Significance:

1930-1940

Significant Dates:

1930

Significant Person(s):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect(s)/Builder(s):

Daniell and Beutell of Atlanta

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8

Significance of property, justification of criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above:

Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)

The SOWEGA Building is significant in architecture because of its good commercial style architecture and its unique use of the watermelon trademark within the design of the building. It is the only known use of the watermelon motif on a building in Georgia, and reflected the purpose of the association which built the building as its headquarters. It represents one of the few historic standing structures associated with a marketing cooperative organized to enable growers to obtain the highest prices for their products. It is also significant as a work of the Atlanta-based firm of Daniell and Beutell. The firm designed many public buildings as well as private homes around the state.

The building is significant in agriculture and commerce because it was built by the South West Georgia (SOWEGA) Watermelon Growers Association, a major regional marketing cooperative organized in 1921 to enable farmers to obtain the highest prices for their products. It was formed due to marketing needs for the non-essential, but ever popular, watermelons. The watermelon logo/trademark, found on the building, and all their official publications, was also placed on all the watermelons shipped. The cooperative also published a newspaper, **The SOWEGA Standard**, in this building.

National Register Criteria

The SOWEGA Building meets National Register Criterion A, "broad patterns of American history," because it was a farming cooperative headquarters, one of the few ever created for watermelon growers, and the headquarters for their association's newspaper. The cooperative was organized in 1921 and incorporated in 1922 to serve a five-county area of South Georgia to insure that watermelon growers would get the best prices for their produce. The cooperative performed its functions adequately for over two decades until the growth of the post-World War II trucking industry brought on major competition. The association was part of an early 20th century movement in which labor unions and marketing cooperatives were just two of the organizations which arose to help workers, including farmers, gain and keep their rightful place in the marketplace.

The building also meets National Register Criterion C because of its design, workmanship and also for being the work of a major architectural firm. While the building exemplifies a typical

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8

commercial building style, its ornamentation is apparently unique to Georgia. The use of the watermelon trademark, in terra cotta, on the exterior facade of the building, was a definite marketing technique to notify all passersby that they were arriving at the headquarters of the watermelon association. The building also contains other terra-cotta ornamentation making it a cut-above the normal downtown buildings of the era in such a small town. The architectural firm of Daniell and Beutell, based in Atlanta, had established a reputation for themselves in the decade they had been in business prior to obtaining this contract. They designed some high-quality private homes, several schools, and the State Tuberculosis Hospital at Alto.

Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

N/A

Period of significance (justification, if applicable)

1930-- construction date of the building.
1940-- 50-year cut-off, in continuous use.

Developmental history/historic context (if applicable)

The Wiregrass region east of the Flint River was initially associated with livestock production, and later Sea Island cotton was grown. Railway construction permitted exploitation of the area's resources in the late 19th century, and small trade centers sprang up.

In 1888, the Georgia Southern Railroad established the foundation for trade in the south Georgia region, and streets and commercial buildings of the Wiregrass towns conformed to the railroad. In 1891, a deepening agricultural depression stalled growth and it was several years before momentum was restored.

Agricultural diversification was heralded as the answer to difficulties caused by the extraction of timber and the invasion of the boll weevil in the first decades of the twentieth century. According to the Adel News of 1925, the first carload of south Georgia watermelons had been shipped from Dixie in Brooks County in 1876.

Augusta was the first watermelon center in the state; watermelons were first shipped to New York in 1867 in crockery crates. By the close of the century, the state was involved in "truck" farming for northern markets, and the Wiregrass region became renowned for its

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

watermelons, probably because of superior soil conditions. The loss of cotton as a profitable crop after the invasion of the boll weevil surely hastened agricultural diversification. The precise circumstances surrounding the introduction of the watermelon to south Georgia as a cash crop are unknown. Horticultural experimentation was unusual for that time, as most landowners stayed with traditional crops or timber.

During the era from 1890 to 1920, a movement to organize marketing cooperatives was notable in American agriculture. Aaron Shapiro was credited with the scheme to form large specialized marketing cooperatives around 1916 for the purpose of controlling a large segment of the market for effect on prices. By 1923, the American Farm Bureau had begun intensively encouraging the formation of cooperatives.

Many factors influenced the formation and success of the SOWEGA cooperative. Possibly the organizers turned to watermelons at the temporary demise of the timber industry; by 1920, the U.S. Forest Service announced that almost all of Georgia's virgin timber was gone and predicted that in ten years, the large sawmills could close. The turpentine and gum, or naval stores, industry was perceived to be dying also.

Watermelons, by virtue of their nature as a non-essential commodity, were well-suited for specialized marketing efforts. They were not useful as animal food, their saccharine matter was not easily converted to sugar, and the juice could not be processed to make acetic or alcoholic substances. Attempts to sell a pickled rind product on a large scale were never successful. During World War II, the growing of watermelons was discouraged by the Federal government.

The light gray sandy subsoil with a clay subsoil typical of the Wiregrass country was considered ideal for watermelon cultivation. Crops had to be rotated at three year intervals for best results. The SOWEGA Association encouraged the growth of a superior product with sales of watermelon seed and fertilizer. The cultivation of the Tom Watson, Irish Gray, and Thurmond Gray varieties was recommended in the 1902 era. Unfortunately, the thick rind varieties that shipped with little damage were not the varieties that were most flavorful.

The SOWEGA Association trained inspectors to oversee the proper insulation and packing of railcars with watermelons, contracted with brokers to bring the highest prices in northern markets, and attempted to have growers produce a uniform, high quality product. The SOWEGA Association developed a lozenge-shaped logo and attached this label to each watermelon shipped in 1930. Radio advertising was tried, with a

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

"southern melodies" theme: **Suwannee River** was the song used on the advertising announcement.

The SOWEGA Growers Association also published a newspaper, The SOWEGA STANDARD, for farmers with regional news items, cartoons, household hints and advice columns.

Membership in the Association required that growers be located within boundaries that initially included south Georgia but later expanded to north Florida. Growers had to plant at least 5 acres, pay membership fees, and be approved by the Membership Committee.

The SOWEGA building reflected trends in agriculture and trade during the early 20th century. Improved methods of transportation and more scientific farming methods coupled with a demand for delicacies by the growing middle classes of the urbanized North rendered the cultivation of specialized products profitable. The SOWEGA building was a manifestation of the Wiregrass agriculturalist's pride and confidence in the future of this commodity. The building, designed by Atlanta architects and built of practical but fine materials and craftsmanship, was a significant landmark in the region as it outshone all but a few other buildings in the Wiregrass towns. It was surely the most elegant building associated with agriculture in the south Georgia Region. It is also important that it was built during the first year of the U.S. Depression.

Increasing sophistication in agricultural techniques, shipping and marketing caused the organization of agricultural cooperatives across the nation. A melon grower's cooperative was formed November 29, 1920 in Quitman, Brooks County, Georgia. The organization was incorporated in 1922 under the Georgia Cooperative Marketing Act of 1921. The association was originally known as the Southwest Georgia Watermelon Growers Association, chartered in Cook County in 1922, using the SOWEGA name as a trademark, from the first two letters in the regional name. When activities expanded into north Florida, the association name became SOWEGA.

The organization was incorporated in Adel, probably due to the influence of J. S. Jones and June Jackson Parrish, prominent leaders in Cook County. It was said to be the first and only cooperative market association dealing exclusively in watermelons.

In 1929, the Agricultural Marketing Act was approved by Congress to provide farm relief. The Federal Farm Board was created with a revolving fund of \$500 million to be lent to farm marketing cooperatives and builders of warehouses. According to Cohn's The Life

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

and Times of King Cotton (1956), this was a significant departure from the prior independence of farmers.

It is unknown whether the Agricultural Marketing Act had any direct influence on the decision of the SOWEGA board of directors to construct a grand office building in Adel in 1929. As only 1.4% of the state's farmers were producing fruit or truck crops, it appears diversification was only beginning in 1930.

Mr. June Jackson Parrish was one of the area's most enthusiastic promoters; he organized the Chamber of Commerce and several business initiatives. He was credited with starting the watermelon grower's association.

The land for the new building was sold to the association on February 16, 1929. The building, designed by Daniell and Beutell of Atlanta to be the SOWEGA headquarters, was dedicated March 12, 1931.

The firm of Daniell and Beutell consisted of Russell L. Beutell (1891-1943) and Sidney S. Daniell (1889-1956) both Georgia natives. Both received architecture degrees from Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama and studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris, and with prominent Atlanta architects before forming their own firm in 1919. Although they never gained the recognition other architects of their era did, their known works include a number of fine private homes and major public buildings throughout the state.

A local historian, Miss Minnie Shaw, wrote in the early 1930s about the SOWEGA building: "On the ground floor are the Western Union offices, Adel Post office and C.J. Adkins' Drug store. The second floor is used for offices... The third story is used by the Sowega force...[and] a lovely roof garden with adjacent cooking department on top of the building. Here some of the most brilliant social events of our time have been held. [It has] the first electric elevator in our little city." The building served as the corporate headquarters for the association.

When the truck appeared in the early 20th century, sufficient highway systems did not exist to profitably ship produce. But after the return to a civilian economy following World War II (1945), it was no longer practical to ship any but the heaviest freight by rail. This change in shipping patterns caused the demise of the SOWEGA Association. According to a local historian, competition from direct truck shipments from points in central and north Florida lessened demand for SOWEGA watermelons. The association survived here until 1960 when they sold the building and moved elsewhere. Today, while the

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8

SOWEGA Association no longer exists, there is a state watermelon growers association by another name.

The SOWEGA building was purchased by the Del-Cook Lumber Company in 1960. The building retained its stature as a landmark, as growth in the town of Adel occurred very slowly. Metcalf Lumber Company purchased Del-Cook from Jim Paulk in 1986, and donated the building to the Cook County Chamber of Commerce, Inc. in 1987 with the stipulation that the building always bear the name SOWEGA/Jim Paulk. In 1988, the ground floor was renovated for the Chamber's headquarters. Plans are for the upper floors to be rented out as offices.

9. Major Bibliographic References

DeWeese, Donna. "SOWEGA Building." Historic Property Information Form, Feb. 1989. On file at the Historic Preservation Section, Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): (X) N/A

- () 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:

- (X) State historic preservation office
- () Other State Agency
- () Federal agency
- () Local government
- () University
- (X) Other, Specify Repository: South Georgia Regional Development Center, Valdosta, Georgia.

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre.

UTM References

A) Zone 17 Easting 268920 Northing 3447080

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is the city lot upon which the building rests and is delineated on the attached tax map. The lot is 50' by 75' in size.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property is the single city lot which is all that has been associated with this building since its construction.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Historian.
organization Historic Preservation Section, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
street & number 205 Butler Street, S.E., Suite 1462
city or town Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30334
telephone 404-656-2840 **date** February 12, 1990.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

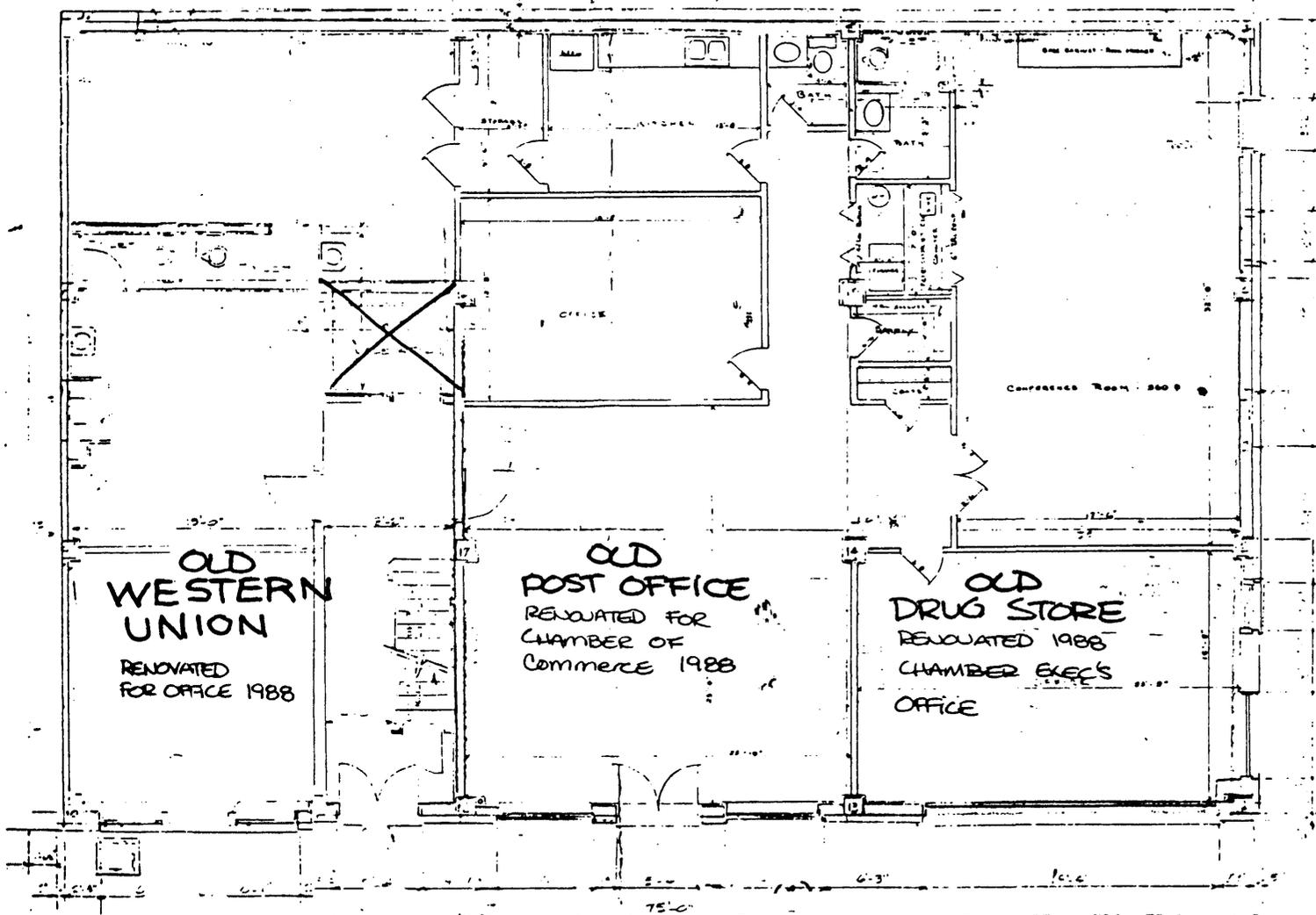
Photographs

Name of Property: SOWEGA Building
City or Vicinity: Adel
County: Cook
State: Georgia
Photographer: James R. Lockhart
Negative Filed: Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Date Photographed: June, 1989

Description of Photograph(s):

- 1 of 8: North and East facades. Photographer facing southwest.
- 2 of 8: East facade (South Hutchinson Avenue side). Photographer facing northwest.
- 3 of 8: Detail of east facade showing watermelon trademark ornamentation. Photographer facing west.
- 4 of 8: Rear of building (west and south facades). Photographer facing northeast.
- 5 of 8: First floor, interior office space as renovated. Photographer facing southwest.
- 6 of 8: Second floor, original door to office area. Photographer facing west.
- 7 of 8: Second floor, corridor. Photographer facing north.
- 8 of 8: Third floor, stairs to roof. Photographer facing west.

GROUND LEVEL
JIM PAUL - SOWAGA
150206



Floor Plan
SOWEGA Building
Adel, Cook County, Georgia
Scale: Not to scale
Source: Original architectural plans
for building by Daniell and Beutell,
1929-1930.
Date: 1930, with modern overlay of data
Key: The historic and current usages are
shown directly on the plan