

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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NATIONAL REGISTER

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, Old Main Building other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 722 12th Street, N.W. not for publication N/A city, town Washington vicinity N/A state District of Columbia code DC1 county N/A code 001 zip code 20005

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: [x] private, [] public-local, [] public-State, [] public-Federal. Category of Property: [x] building(s), [] district, [] site, [] structure, [] object. Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 1, Noncontributing buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing: Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this [x] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility 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 [x] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: Carol B. Thompson, State Historic Preservation Officer, Date: 25 April 1988.

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official: State or Federal agency and bureau: Date:

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: [x] entered in the National Register. [] See continuation sheet. [] determined eligible for the National Register. [] See continuation sheet. [] determined not eligible for the National Register. [] removed from the National Register. [] other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper: Patrick W. Andrews Date of Action: 6/13/88

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION/communications facility

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Italian Renaissance

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

STONE/granite

roof OTHER

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Exterior

722 12th Street, N.W. (square 288, lot 55) is a six-story, three-bay, brick, limestone, and terra-cotta structure constructed in 1903 to house offices and telephone switching equipment for American Telephone and Telegraph/Chesapeake and Potomac (C&P) Telephone Companies. Designed in the Italian Renaissance style, the rectangular building is vertical in its massing (45' x 155' x 85'H). The structure is one of four buildings constructed on the square by the telephone company between 1903 and 1971. Sited mid-block just north of an alley, it is located between a 1928 Art Deco C&P building (to its north) and a 1980s Post-Modern department store (south of the alley). (Photo A)

The main facade faces east and has a symmetrical, three-bay, tripartite composition (see Photo B). The base of the building rests on a flame-cut granite plinth and is of smooth limestone ashlar block. The entrance, located in the north bay, has Tuscan columns supporting a paneled entablature with a closed balustrade above. The glass, double doors are modern.

A projecting beltcourse at the level of the sills of the second-story windows delineates the base from the stories above. The shaft of the building is four stories in height and is faced with beige unbonded brick with beige glazed terra-cotta trim. Heavy, rusticated quoining articulates these stories as well as the sixth. The top section of the building is delineated from the shaft by a beltcourse composed of dentils and garland moulding between the fifth and sixth floor levels. The building was originally capped by a wide dentilled cornice and a balustrade, both of which were replaced by a plain frieze and parapet in 1968. An egg-and-dart beltcourse below the frieze is extant.

The windows on the front elevation are wood-frame, 1/1 double-hung sash. The first floor windows (in the center and south bays) puncture the rustication of the base, and are unornamented. The second-floor windows are surrounded by architrave trim and plain quoining, and are topped by a simple projecting lintel.

See continuation sheet

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) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

ARCHITECTURE

1903

N/A

COMMUNICATIONS

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Eidlitz and McKenzie/Richardson & Burgess

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Introduction

722 12th Street, N.W., a Chesapeake and Potomac (C&P) Telephone Company building in Washington, D.C., is an expression of the company's corporate image through a fine and distinctive example of the commercial architecture of the time. It represents both the physical development of a significant public utility, and the association of the telephone company with the development of the commercial downtown.

Built in 1903, 722 12th Street, N.W. is one of many telephone company buildings erected during the early 20th century in the Washington, D.C. area when the company was expanding. Designed by the well-known New York City firm of Eidlitz and McKenzie (the corporate architects of the Bell system at the time), it served as the main switching offices for the downtown telephone exchange.

The building meets Criteria A and C of the National Register. Its significance is twofold: 1) It is associated with and is representative of the development of the C&P Telephone Company, a commercial institution which has made a significant impact on the local community (Criterion A). 2) It was designed by the noted New York firm of Eidlitz and McKenzie, the corporate architects for the Bell system of New York and New Jersey at the turn of the 20th century (Criterion C).

Early History of the Telephone in Washington, D.C.

The C&P Telephone Company was formed in 1883, just seven years after the telephone had been invented. By demonstrating his newly perfected telephone at the Centennial Exposition in

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Babb, Laura L. (editor), The Washington Post Guide to Washington, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.

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See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property _____ .20

UTM References

A

1	8	3	2	4	1	0	0
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4	3	0	7	3	0	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is at 722 12th Street, N.W., which occupies lot 55, square 288.

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Boundary Justification

Subject property is clearly defined by the boundary of lot 55 in square 288.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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organization Traceries date February, 1988
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The beltcourse between the first and second floors forms their sill. Plain, projecting terra-cotta spandrels rest between the second- and third-story windows. Paneled spandrels connect the third- and fourth-story windows. The fourth-floor windows are more elaborately articulated than those on the other stories. These windows have transoms and are decorated by heavy, projecting lintels supported by consoles. The windows on the fifth floor are similar to those on the second and third floors. Windows on the third, fourth, and fifth floors have stone sills. The sixth-floor window treatment is differentiated from the other floors by a pair of windows in the center bay (rather than a single window). All sixth floor windows are ornamented by guilloche trim and plain quoining. The two windows in the center bay are separated by a pilaster.

The alley or south facade of the building is eight bays long and is faced with beige brick (see Photo C). It is plain in decoration except for the eastern-most bay (next to the front elevation) where the ornamental design of the front facade is carried around the corner. The first and second bays are separated by heavy rustication which echoes the quoining at the building's corner. Each bay has two double-hung, 2/2, wooden, metal-clad windows. As with the front facade, the fourth-floor windows have transoms. A plain beltcourse runs between the fifth and sixth floors.

The building's design is noteworthy because it is, in essence, an industrial building camouflaged as an office building (originally a secondary function of the structure). It thus blends successfully with the commercial appearance of the downtown area, and stands as a fine example of commercial design from the turn of the century.

Interior

The interior consists of six floors and a full basement in the original body of the building, and two floors in the penthouse addition. As originally planned in 1903, most of the floors were used to house telephone switching equipment and were devoid of wall partitions. A few floors had a minimal amount of office space. According to Building Engineer's records dating from as early as the 1920s, the interior was altered on a regular basis (almost annually) to accommodate changes in equipment, personnel, and personnel needs. Except for the location of the main stairwell, and the elevator lobbies and core, nothing of the original interior plan of the building is extant. Today, the interior plans vary from floor to floor. Some floors have wall

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partitions delineating office spaces toward the front of the building, and open spaces for equipment toward the back of the building. Some floors have large open office spaces throughout the entire floor. The penthouse floors mostly store HVAC equipment.

Conceived as a series of utilitarian spaces, the building is not extensively ornamented. Interior finishes include simple, plaster moldings around the plaster ceilings of each floor (except the fourth), and metal molding on the exposed structural columns. Many of these moldings are currently hidden above dropped, acoustic tile ceilings which were installed starting in 1934. The moldings are visible mainly in the public spaces, such as the elevator and stair lobbies. There is some wood trim around windows and doors. The window trim may be original to the building; however, none of the door trim is original (the extant doors postdate the construction of the building). There are no known original fixtures in the building. The decorative metal rail of the staircase is extant from the second through sixth floors.

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Philadelphia in 1876, Washingtonian Alexander Graham Bell won the Gold Medal award and was assured the publicity needed to finance the development of the telephone.

The telephone was one of the most rapidly developed inventions in the United States. By 1878, Bell was able to demonstrate the commercial utility of the telephone with the formation of two small companies in Washington, D.C. These companies joined in 1879 to form the National Bell Company which became the American Bell Company in 1880 and, finally, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company in 1899.

At the same time, George C. Maynard, an early advocate of the uses of electricity in Washington, D.C., was quick to capitalize on Bell's invention. An electrician himself, Maynard acquired the proper equipment and connected the city's first telephone line in 1877, only 18 months after Bell patented the invention. He later secured an exclusive license to use and lease telephones in Washington and nearby Maryland. Maynard went on to experiment with switching devices and began an exchange from an office at 1423 G Street, N.W. in late 1878. This office moved to 1420 New York Avenue in 1879.

The Downtown Growth of C&P

When C&P was formed (as a merger of Bell's company with Maynard's) in 1883, about 900 telephones were in operation in the city of Washington. By 1897, the number had increased to 2,000, and by 1904 it had reached 10,768. With this ever-increasing service, the original central office located on 14th Street was outgrown. During the first decade of the 20th century, at least eight offices with switching equipment were constructed to handle the demand.

Among the approximately two dozen telephone company buildings constructed during the early part of the century was 722 12th Street, N.W. It was constructed in a key downtown location to accommodate the increasing number of businesses beginning to rely on the telephone. It serviced the entire downtown area, and, over the years as more and more telephone buildings were erected in the downtown area, it came to be known as "Old Main".

C&P's Washington facilities continued to expand in the 1920s as technology progressed and as the demand for service increased. 722 12th Street is one of four buildings C&P would eventually

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construct on Square 288. Shortly after World War I, 725 13th Street was built on a lot behind the original building. (A bridge linking the sixth floor of 722 12th Street with 725 13th Street--which is no longer owned by C&P--was built at that time.) A few years later, a revolutionary advancement in telephone equipment, the dial system (which enabled mechanical and electrical mechanisms to replace operators using a manual system), required more space than was available in "Old Main" and 725 13th Street. In order to house the new dial switching equipment and to accommodate C&P offices formerly in rental space, a third building--730 12th Street--was constructed north of and adjacent to 722 12th Street. This building was designed by the successor firm to Eidlitz and McKenzie, who continued to serve as the corporate architects of the Bell system. The most recent construction, 1200 H Street, N.W., occurred in 1971 when C&P built a large office building (their fourth on the square) just north of 730 12th Street.

722 12th Street, N.W.

722 12th Street, N.W. was built in 1903 for the American Telegraph and Telephone/C&P Telephone Companies (part of the Bell system) as offices and switching equipment headquarters for the Washington, D.C. downtown exchange. D.C. Building Permit #1626, issued April 21, 1903, lists as architect Cyrus Eidlitz (a partner in the firm of Eidlitz and McKenzie), and as builders the local firm of Richardson and Burgess. The estimated cost of the building was \$185,000. (See Figure A)

The design of 722 12th Street closely resembles that for a local office of the New York Telephone Company at Irving Place and 18th Street in New York City. Designed in 1902 by Eidlitz and McKenzie (who were the Bell system's corporate architects), it was published in Architectural Record in June 1902 (Vol. XII, No.2, page 233.) This building may have served as a prototype for the Washington office which is smaller in scale as appropriate to its D.C. setting.

At the time of its erection in 1903 (see Figure B), 722 12th Street was one of many telephone company exchange buildings being constructed in the city. Between 1902 and 1908, Eidlitz and McKenzie were responsible for the design of five such buildings. 722 12th Street was built as the C&P company headquarters and as the main downtown exchange (replacing the original main exchange, which had outgrown its quarters). It served as company headquarters until 1918.

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As new, downtown, telephone company equipment buildings were being erected after World War I, and as the equipment housed in 722 12th Street became obsolete, the building's function slowly evolved into office use. Office use eventually filled the building, except for the basement, which still houses cables.

The Architects

When C&P decided to build a new central office in 1903, they looked to the architectural firm of Eidlitz and McKenzie, who had designed many buildings in New York and New Jersey for the Bell system (of which C&P was a part).

Formed in 1902, Eidlitz and McKenzie was the partnership of Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz and Andrew C. McKenzie (McKenzie was also associated with Eidlitz before the actual formation of the partnership). When the partnership was formed, Eidlitz had already established himself as the corporate architect for the Bell telephone system, of which C&P was a part, and had already designed several buildings for the company. Although it is his name which appears on the building permit and original drawings of 722 12th Street, official C&P records dating to the early 20th century indicate that McKenzie was in charge of the project and did, in fact, design the building. The firm was the architect of many well-known New York buildings in addition to their telephone company commissions. Their designs were frequently published in national architectural journals. The partnership lasted until 1910, when Eidlitz retired from active practice.

The son of noted New York architect Leopold Eidlitz, Cyrus Eidlitz (1853-1921) was sent to Switzerland and later to Germany to receive his formal architectural education. Upon his return to this country in 1871, he entered his father's office where he served as a draftsman for four years. In 1878 he received his first commission--the reconstruction of the fire-damaged, Westchester St. Peter's church, a building originally designed by his father in 1851.

In c. 1881, Eidlitz won a competition for the design of the Buffalo Public Library. His name was suddenly catapulted into the limelight because one of the other competitors was Henry Hobson Richardson, one of the contemporary deans of American Architecture. Eidlitz's major works are in New York and include

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mostly commercial structures, many of which were designed for the Bell system. Among his works are the New York Telephone Company Building, the Western Electric Company Building (1889), and the ten-story Fidelity & Casualty Office Building (his first tall building, 1893). With McKenzie, he designed the New York Times Building, the design for which both are perhaps best known.

Little is known of the career and personal life of Andrew McKenzie (1861-1926), as published materials are scarce. An obituary indicates that he was a native of New York State, like Eidlitz. He was educated in Buffalo before moving to New York City in 1884 where he joined the firm of Babb, Cook and Willard. He later went to work for Eidlitz and was the project architect on 722 12th Street, N.W. He was responsible for many New York City buildings, as well as many erected buildings under the aegis of the Bell system in other cities. Upon Eidlitz's retirement in 1910 (seven years after the construction of 722 12th Street), McKenzie formed a partnership with Stephen Voorhees and Paul Gmelin. (That firm continued as the corporate architects of the Bell system and went on to design the telephone company building just north of 722 12th Street, N.W.)

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H STREET, N.W.



C&P
1200 H St.

Public Alley

AT&T
735 13th St.

C&P
730 12th St.

Public Alley

C&P
722 12th St.

12th STREET, N.W.

Public Alley

Hecht Company property