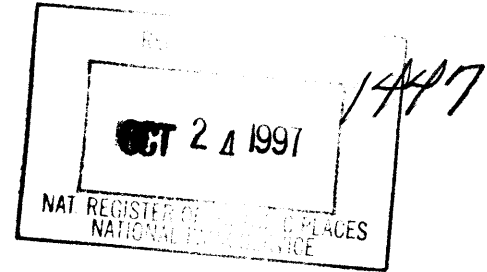


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**



=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic
name: SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND TELEPHONE COMPANY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

other name/site number: N/A

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number: 227 Church Street

city/town: New Haven

not for publication: N/A
vicinity: N/A

state: CT county: New Haven code: 009 zip code: 06510

=====

3. Classification

=====

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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 cont. sheet.

Signature of certifying official: John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission. Date: 10/14/97

State or Federal agency and bureau

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 and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- 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):

Edson H. Beal 11/24/97

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: COMMERCE Sub: business
Current: COMMERCE Sub: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Art Deco

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation CONCRETE roof OTHER: built-up
walls Stone: limestone other METAL: bronze (lobby)
METAL: steel (windows)

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: A,C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : _____

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE
COMMUNICATIONS

Period(s) of Significance: 1937-1939

Significant Dates: 1938 - completed

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Roy W. Foote and Douglas Orr, architects
Dwight Building Company, contractor

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.
X See continuation sheet.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description	Southern New England Telephone Company Administration Building New Haven, New Haven County, CT	7-1
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The Southern New England Telephone Company Administration Building in downtown New Haven is a 17-story steel-framed office tower completed in 1938 in the Art Deco style (Photographs 1, 2, and 3). The exterior is faced with off-white Indiana limestone. Measuring 102 feet by 122 feet in plan, the building occupies nearly all of a corner lot at the intersection of Church and Wall Streets; it has its principal entrance on Church Street. The building is located just one block north of New Haven's central green, in the city's downtown commercial district, an area of modern office towers, 19th and early 20th-century commercial blocks, and important governmental and institutional buildings. The telephone building fronts directly on the sidewalk; a low pink-granite wall defines the property line along Church Street and is continued as an ornamental cast-iron railing along the side boundaries.

The overall thrust of the building is vertical--a tall shaft rising directly from the ground, with several step-backs on the upper stories. There is no articulation of a base for the tower; instead, wide two-story projecting pavilions appear on the two street-facing elevations. The building is nine bays wide across the front and 11 bays deep; the end bays on Church Street are recessed behind the plane of the facade and rise to a height of only 13 stories. On the side elevations, the end bays are similarly recessed, as is the fifteenth story. The top two stories contain mechanical areas and are further stepped back. The third through fifteenth stories have full-height window bays filled with rose-colored steel double-hung sash and spandrel panels; the bays are outlined by large convex moldings in the stonework.

The Church Street elevation features a shallow two-story pavilion that contains three full-height entrances. The entries themselves have metal-and-glass doors, with fluted jambs bearing tasseled foliate ornaments. The windows above the entries are protected by gilded and painted steel grilles formed in a Greek-fret pattern. A similar projecting pavilion is found on the side elevation along Wall Street; its two-story window bays have Greek-fret grilles like those above the entries on Church Street.

Among the other decorative exterior features are three tablets over the main entries that show Classical male and female figures in reclined poses flanking a hand grasping a bolt of electricity (Photograph 4); carvings depicting the two hemispheres of the world embraced by heavily fruited grapevines on the Wall Street elevation (Photograph 5); abstract Ionic capitals floating above the fifteenth story of each window bay; and a row of huge palmette anthemion carvings on the unbroken walls of the top two stories (Photograph 6).

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description	Southern New England Telephone Company Administration Building New Haven, New Haven County, CT	7-2
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The interior plan is arranged around a large central core that accommodates six elevator shafts, two stairways, and a set of washrooms; office space occupies the perimeter. The Art Deco theme established on the exterior continues inside, particularly in the first-floor vestibule and lobby, which are exceptionally highly detailed and in original condition. These areas are finished with marble walls, painted Greek-fret banding, and cast-metal flying-geese ornaments. The doors, fluted columns, and fixtures (including several original light sconces and hanging lamps) are executed in a nickel-bronze alloy known as "Benedict Nickel" (Photographs 7 and 8). The lobby ceiling is coffered and has its original small lamps that drop from each square. A large tablet over the corridor leading to the first-floor elevators commemorates the establishment of the world's first telephone exchange in New Haven in 1878 (Photograph 9). Black Belgian-marble water fountains contrast with walls of reddish-brown, heavily streaked Spanish "Altico" marble (Photograph 10).

The first floor formerly provided facilities for public business that were entered from the lobby through the "flying-geese" doors; these are now internal administrative office spaces. There is also an assembly room with a small stage in the southeast corner of the first floor; three of the assembly room's walls are finished with large rectangular panels of stained sycamore veneer.

The walls of the upper-floor elevator areas (Photograph 11) are clad in yet another kind of marble, a light-tan travertine stone from Montana. The elevators themselves are finished in black, with gilded stars, parallel lines, and Greek-fret ornaments; the latter motif is repeated in the terrazzo floors. The square light fixtures are similar to the circular ones on the first floor. In contrast to the elevator lobbies, the upper-floor office areas are completely modern and plainly finished (Photograph 12), except for the president's office and the boardroom on the fifteenth floor, the walls of which have Colonial Revival-style raised paneling.

The building has undergone few alterations and is still in use as telephone company offices (though now only one of several office facilities in the city). In 1955 the working areas were completely renovated with new partitions and dropped ceilings to accommodate the building's first air-conditioning system; since then, the electrical and mechanical systems have undergone additional upgrading. The two spaces on the first floor that formerly were used for business with the public were modified for office space, eliminating or obscuring their original floors, furnishings, and ceilings. In 1984 the fifteenth-

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description	Southern New England Telephone Company Administration Building New Haven, New Haven County, CT	7-3
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floor lobby and executive reception area were totally refurbished with modern wood paneling. Otherwise, particularly in the vestibule, the first-floor lobby, and the other elevator areas, the building continues to exhibit the Art Deco features for which it is renowned.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance **Southern New England Telephone Company** **8-1**
Administration Building
New Haven, New Haven County, CT

Summary

The Southern New England Telephone Company Administration Building has architectural significance as New Haven's premier example of the Art Deco or Modernistic style of architecture and as the collaborative effort of two prominent architects, Roy W. Foote and Douglas Orr (Criterion C). It also has historical significance because it was the flagship building of a company that played a major role in the economic development of both Connecticut and the city of New Haven (Criterion A). Southern New England Telephone Company created Connecticut's telephone network (including the first telephone exchange anywhere), and for more than a century it provided communications services to nearly the entire state as its regulated utility. With hundreds of technical workers and more than 900 office employees, the telephone company ranked as one of New Haven's largest employers when this building opened in 1938¹.

Architectural Significance

The Southern New England Telephone Company Administration Building is architecturally significant because of its extensive iconographic symbols, stylized motifs, and futuristic materials, all of which were defining characteristics of the Art Deco style. Taking particular note of its richly embellished and well-preserved lobby, the standard guide to the city's architecture declares it to be "New Haven's best example of Modernistic."²

Art Deco's enthusiasm for iconography is abundantly evident. For example, the building's Wall Street panels (Photograph 5, top) were intended to convey the sense of Connecticut (symbolized by fruited grape vines like those on the state seal) embracing the world through telephone connections; the panels may also be interpreted as a reference to one of the state's major innovations in communications, the telephone exchange. The flying-geese ornaments in the lobby (Photographs 8 and 9) symbolize the speed of telephone communications

¹The building is dated 1938, when it was substantially complete; the first workers began occupying it in August of that year. However, the formal dedication did not occur until February 13, 1939.

²Elizabeth Mills Brown, *New Haven, A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 114. As used by most architectural historians, the term Modernistic embraces both Art Deco and Art Moderne, the latter of which is more characterized by streamlining and other futuristic motifs than decorative effects.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance **Southern New England Telephone Company** **8-2**
Administration Building
New Haven, New Haven County, CT

and use a highly appropriate species: geese are known not only for their long migrations but also for maintaining constant communication among members of the flock. Finally, the Church Street panels (Photograph 4) present an allegory about electricity providing the link between distant individuals.

The Art Deco practice of stylizing traditional architectural elements can be seen in the building's abstract Ionic capitals that make the window bays into pilasters, in the huge anthemion in relief on the upper two stories, and in the use of an oversize Greek fret in the window grilles and lobby surfaces (Photographs 5, 8, and 11). The latter motif, sometimes called a meander, reflects the style's penchant for repeating angular patterns and is comparable to the chevrons often found on buildings in what has sometimes been called the "Zig-Zag Style."

The use of oversized Classical elements in a stylized way allowed the company to claim that its new building was both traditional and modern. That combination, executed in rare and expensive materials, served as a corporate symbol that at once stood for the company's long history in New Haven, its prosperity at the time the building opened, and its prospects for the future, a future that telephone communications would help to create. Another futuristic motif characteristic of Art Deco is that of concentric geometric forms, seen in the telephone building's overall stepped-back massing and the lobby's coffered ceiling. Finally, the lobby's extensive use of tawny nickel-bronze alloy further advanced the building's futuristic appearance. The metal's shiny yet warm tone was undoubtedly something that few visitors had ever seen before, and the multiplicity of fluting and highly reflective surfaces added to the "Flash Gordon" effect.

The Architects

Roy W. Foote was the older of the two architects who collaborated on the building's design.³ After an apprenticeship as a draftsman, Foote in 1906 joined Charles F. Townsend in a partnership that lasted until 1915; together they designed a Beaux-Arts office building for the United Illuminating Company, New Haven's electrical utility. By the

³Orr may have played the greater part in the telephone company project. Where one name or seal appears in the specifications and drawings, it is inevitably Orr's, and in his entry in the *Directory of American Architects* (1956), Orr did not acknowledge having worked with Foote.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance **Southern New England Telephone Company** **8-3**
Administration Building
New Haven, New Haven County, CT

1920s Foote was considered the leader of the architectural profession in New Haven. Major work from this period includes the Neo-Gothic 12-story Powell Building (1921, since demolished), which was the city's first office high-rise, and the Masonic Temple on Whalley Avenue (1926). Following the telephone company project, Foote and Douglas Orr worked together on New Haven's first three public housing complexes, Elm Haven, Quinnipiac Terrace, and Farnham Court (1939-1941). Foote retired in 1948.

Douglas Orr (1892-1966) graduated in 1919 from Yale (where he later earned a master's degree) and went to work in the firm of George H. del Grella. In 1926 he formed his own firm; among his early major designs was the New Haven Lawn Club (1929). Orr went on to achieve a national reputation in the years after his collaboration with Foote on the New Haven telephone building and public-housing projects. He served two terms as president of the American Institute of Architects (1947-1949), where he instituted the annual awards program and oversaw renovation of the organization's Octagon House headquarters in Washington, D.C. Orr also played a major role in the reconstruction of the White House in the early 1950s. Other commissions that attracted national attention include several buildings on the campus of Yale University and the Robert A. Taft monument (1958), a 105-foot-tall carillon in Washington, D.C.

Historical Significance

The Southern New England Telephone Company (S.N.E.T.) built the first telephone exchange in the country in New Haven in 1878 (before exchanges, customers had to have a separate instrument for each party they wished to call). Densely populated and highly industrialized, Connecticut was a ripe market for telephone service; by the 1930s, it had 20 telephones for every 100 people, one of the highest rates of usage in the country. From its New Haven base, S.N.E.T. expanded and eventually operated as the regulated utility that supplied service to nearly the entire state. As a consequence, the company became one of New Haven's largest employers, with some 900 office workers alone when the administration building opened. Although S.N.E.T. cooperated with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company in providing long-distance calling and in jointly developing new products and services, it has remained an independent company to this day.

Planning for the Administration Building had started in 1928, but the Depression intervened, and while the company was able to complete two

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance	Southern New England Telephone Company Administration Building New Haven, New Haven County, CT	8-4
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smaller office buildings in the early 1930s, the New Haven headquarters was put on hold until 1937. The building's main purpose, besides serving as a symbol of prosperity and future prospects, was to consolidate the company's administrative functions, which at the time were divided among several locations in New Haven. It was designed to provide space for 1,200 office workers, and in terms of both height and volume, it was the largest office building in the city. Nevertheless, the new headquarters soon reached and then exceeded its capacity, as the demand for S.N.E.T's services continued to mushroom. The assembly room on the first floor was partitioned into office space in 1948, and not until a second office building was completed nearby in the middle 1950s was the overcrowding relieved.

Communications networks are now generally understood as an essential part of an economy based upon information, finance, and other services. Resources such as New Haven's telephone building, original in their appearance and instantly identifiable as built in a particular era, help recall the long history of the communications industry in Connecticut and the role it played in sustaining the state's economy.

9. Major Bibliographical References

X 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:

- X State historic preservation office Connecticut Historical Commission
- Other state agency 59 South Prospect Street
- Federal agency Hartford, Connecticut 06106
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: approx. .5 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	18	673820	4574940	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

The nominated property includes the parcel recorded in the New Haven Assessor records as Map 243, Block 0291, Parcel 001.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes the entire lot associated with the historic property.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Bruce Clouette and Hoang Tinh, reviewed by John Herzan, Conn. Hist. Commission

Organization: Historic Resource Consultants Date: July 11, 1997

Street & Number: 55 Van Dyke Avenue Telephone: 860-547-0268

City or Town: Hartford State: CT Zip: 06106

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Bibliography **Southern New England Telephone Company** 9-1
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New Haven, New Haven County, CT

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