

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER Various PAGE 3

Southwestern Bell Main Dial Building.

Location: 424 S. Detroit Ave., Tulsa, Oklahoma. 74120

Owner of Property: Southwestern Bell Telephone Company.

Description:

The facade of the first floor of this light brown brick building is broken by a series of large arched windows. These windows are framed in terra cotta which matches in color the rather narrow terra cotta quoins and foundation of the building.

The second floor windows are rectangular and separated by brick panels decorated with ornate terra cotta torches, above the torches are a vertical pair of terra cotta shields. There is a cornice terminating the first two floors, which are considered to be of Gothic Style.

Above the second floor the building facade is broken into a series of stepped-back panels terminating in pinnacles above the roofline. The windows occur as recessed panels. The spandrels area constructed of buff colored terra cotta tile and their art deco designs have strong vertical lines. The pinnacles are also faced with terra cotta tile, as is all the building ornamentation. Northwestern Terra Cotta Tile Company of Chicago, the leading manufacturer of these tiles was the supplier.

The building is 140' x 75'. When the first two floors were built in 1924 it was framed for a future addition of seven stories because the Telephone Company was continually outgrowing its space.

Significance:

The first two floors of this well maintained building were built in 1924 when the Gothic Style was popular. Six years later in 1930, when the four story addition was made, Zig-Zag Art Deco had supplanted the Gothic. Mr. Ben Ball, architect for the Southwestern Bell explained, "Southwestern Bell is a conservative company operated by conservative men. Naturally, their building reflects this. Since in the early 20's Gothic architecture was 'mainstream' that was what was built. By the time of the 1930 addition, however, Art Deco was a well established commercial style."¹ The architect was Mr. I.R. Timlin who was the firm architect for the Southwestern Bell and worked out of their office in St. Louis, Missouri. The attitude of the Southwestern Bell toward Art Deco is a significant statement of its wide spread acceptance.

The extensive use of terra cotta tile in this building is a significant feature of Art Deco architecture. These tiles were made in the chevron ziggarat and stepped-back Art Deco motifs.

The first two floors were erected to house the new dial equipment which was first used in Tulsa on November 1, 1924. Oklahoma had been a state for only 17 years at that time; progressive minded Tulsans increased their telephone usage from 23,354 phones in 1924 to 41,471 in 1930.

The four story addition held the division offices and the toll terminal equipment for the Oklahoma City-Tulsa underground cable. The growth of Tulsa telephone usage is a significant indicator of its growth as a business center in the 1920's.

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Acreage: Approx. 1 acre

Quadrangle Name: Tulsa Oklahoma

Verbal Boundary Description: Block 138, Lot 3.

UTM: 15 231300 4004860 - corrected use 100/84 as is map