NPS Form 10-900
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received OCT 1 1986
date entered NOV 6 1986

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Vancouver Telephone Building

and/or common Pacific Northwest Bell Building

2. Location

street & number 112 West 11th ___ not for publication

city, town Vancouver ___ vicinity of

state Washington code 053 county Clark code 011

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	_x_ occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
_x_ building(s)	_x_ private	___ unoccupied	_x_ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	___ yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	_x_ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
	n/a	___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Columbia Venture, c/o David Groth

street & number 112 West 11th, Suite 250

city, town Vancouver ___ vicinity of state Washington 98660

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Clark County Courthouse

street & number P.O. Box 5000

city, town Vancouver state Washington 98668

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title 1) Clark County Cultural Resource Inventory
2) Washington State Inventory of Cultural Resources — has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes _x_ no

date 1) 1980
2) 1980 ___ federal _x_ state _x_ county ___ local

depository for survey records 1) Heritage Trust of Clark County
2) Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

city, town 1) P.O. Box 5000, Vancouver Washington 98668-5000
2) 111 W. 21st Ave., KL-11, Olympia state Washington 98504-5411

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	_x_ original site
_x_ good	___ ruins	_x_ altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Vancouver Telephone Building is a two story office building and telephone exchange with a reinforced concrete frame, decorative brick veneer, and unglazed terra cotta ornament. Built in 1934 and designed by the Seattle firm of Albertson, Wilson & Richardson, the building employs a stylized brick and terra cotta facade which reflects the "modernistic" movement in American architecture in the 1930s. The building, which is located on a 100 by 100 foot corner lot in a commercial area of downtown Vancouver, is built on a U-shape plan. The bottom of the U faces the principal (south) street facade. The western leg is slightly longer than the eastern. The two legs frame an open service court which faces the rear (north) driveway.

The building rests on a concrete foundation and is veneered on all elevations with buff colored brick. On the three primary facades (south, west, and east), the building is composed of alternating brick piers and slightly recessed window bays. The south facade has five piers and four window bays; the west elevation has six piers and five window bays; the east facade has four piers and five window bays. The rear elevation has a planar stretcher course brick facade.

On each facade, the piers are faced with brick laid in vertically aligned patterns of Flemish bond, single stretcher stacks, and molded brick. The molded bricks are concave on the sides with a central arris, creating a fluted motif. The piers rise from the concrete foundation uninterrupted to the terra cotta cornice like a "modern" version of a colossal fluted column.

Recessed between the vertical piers, the window bays feature casement windows on both floors separated by brick spandrel panels. Each window group includes a pair of wood sash casement windows, with lead cames and wood mullions. Above the casement windows are pairs of fixed transom windows. Each window group has a wooden frame. The first floor windows are flat arched; those on the upper floor have angled flat arches.

The windows rest on terra cotta sills, and have decorative terra cotta lintels, ornamented with a scroll and acanthus design. The spandrel between the floors features tapestry brick with an inset terra cotta panel decorated with a scroll and acanthus motif. The terra cotta ornament above the second story window heads rises to a terra cotta course at the frieze of the building where the acanthus leaf pattern wraps around the building. Above that terra cotta course, inset brick panels are ornamented with tapestry brick. The cornice is embellished with an unglazed terra cotta course with a scroll and banded leaf pattern which runs around the perimeter of the building.

The entrance, located on the south facade, features a new aluminum double door with transom and an elaborate terra cotta surround of acanthus and scroll motif. The telephone company logo--a bell within a circle and the stamped word "BELL"--appears over the door. A semi-elliptical flat roofed canopy projects over the entry. The canopy is built of copper and bronze with antefixae-like ornament running in a band around the outer face of the canopy. The principal change to the exterior is the construction of a fire escape from the rear second floor. It is located within the end of the U and does not detract from the principal elevations. An original garage was removed some years ago.

Although the exterior of the Vancouver Telephone Building remains unchanged, the interior has been altered over the years. Originally, the commercial department occupied the eastern quarter of the first floor, circulation the middle, and the mechanical equipment was located in the westernmost bays. Remodeling has occurred in the office spaces, restrooms, and interior partition walls. Some hardware and original second floor restroom tile survives. In 1985, the building's current owners altered the original circulation plan, replacing the single run stairs that faced the rear of the building with stairs that face the entrance and double back, with a landing as they rise to the second floor. The new lobby floor is grey glazed tile; the stair and lobby wainscoting is lightly stained paneled oak. (1)

(1) For endnotes, see item 8.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion	
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science	
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture	
___ 1600–1699	_x_ architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian	
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater	
___ 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation	
_x_ 1900–	_x_ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ other (specify)	
		___ invention			

Specific dates 1934; period of significance: 1934-1936 **Builder/Architect** Albertson, Wilson, Richardson

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Vancouver Telephone Building is historically significant for its association with the development of the telecommunications industry in Clark County. Built in 1934-35, and designed by the prominent Seattle architectural firm of Albertson, Wilson, and Richardson, the building was the first structure designed exclusively to house the city's telephone exchange. For 50 years, the building served in that capacity and is today the only surviving structure associated with the company's early history. In addition, the building is among the most distinguished examples of "modernistic" design in the county, combining highly decorative brickwork and unglazed terra cotta ornament in a design that is at once classical and modern, suggesting both the civic importance of the telephone company and the functional role it played.

Architectural Significance: The Vancouver Telephone Building is among the finest examples of "modernistic" architecture in Clark County. The design incorporates stylized unglazed terra cotta ornament (principally a scroll and acanthus motif), cast by Gladding McBean and Company, with a decorative brick veneer that suggests streamlined classical columns. The decorative use of brick was an acknowledgment of both the functional aspects of a telephone exchange and the financial constraints imposed by the Depression. Neither strictly Art Moderne nor Art Deco in style, the building is an original interpretation of the "modern" influences of the period. Less original examples of modern architecture from the period in Vancouver include the streamlined Moderne Pepsi Bottling Company Building (c. 1935) and the classical Moderne Clark County Courthouse (1940).

The telephone building was not always intended to be a landmark of modern design in the city. The firm's original plan called for a Georgian Revival design. But in June 1934, the firm presented schemes for more modern plans--a design that was labelled "too boxy" and "an abuse of pleasing and well proportioned lines" by corporate executives. It is possible that the final plans--blending modernism with classicism--represented a compromise between the architects and the corporation. (1)

Nevertheless, the Bell Telephone Company, parent of the Vancouver system, was not reticent about modern design. The 1928 Longview exchange building (National Register, 1985), designed by Bebb and Gould of Seattle, combines ornamental terra cotta and brick in an Art Deco design. The 1931 telephone exchange in Tacoma, also by Bebb and Gould, is an Art Deco design executed in brick and terra cotta. Finally, the 1946 Centralia telephone building by Bebb and Gould is a Moderne example.

The Architects: The firm of Albertson, Wilson, and Richardson of Seattle included three prominent architects but was dominated by the figure of A.H. Albertson, one of the most important designers in the region in the 1920s and 1930s. Albertson was born in Hope, New Jersey, in 1872 and educated in the Bangor, Pennsylvania, public schools. He apprenticed as a carpenter and cabinet maker and graduated from Columbia University in 1895.

Albertson began practicing architecture immediately and worked for two years in the late 1890s for the firm of Clinton and Russell of New York City. In 1905, Albertson was employed in Duluth, Minnesota, as a project manager for a power house and substation designed by the New York firm of Howells and Stokes. In 1907, Howells and Stokes sent Albertson to Seattle to act as a local representative of the firm, which was then designing the White Building. Albertson served as the Seattle representative of Howells and Stokes from 1907 until 1917, when the Seattle firm became known as Howells and Albertson. Two years later, the firm assumed the name A.H. Albertson and Associates, and was later known as Albertson, Wilson, and Richardson. (2)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Pacific Northwest Bell Company Archives, Portland, Oregon.
Vancouver Columbian, April 27, 1935, p. 8; July 17, 1935, p.1; July 20, 1935, p. 1; July 25, 1935.
See endnotes, Item 8, for complete references.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Vancouver, Wash.-Oreg. (7.5) **Quadrangle scale** 1:24,000

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	10	521561310	5105127180
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification
The south 100 feet of Lots 3 and 4, Block G, of Wyche and Stephens Addition; in the northwest quarter of Section 27, Township 2 North, Range 1 East, W.M., Clark County, Washington.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	**code**	**county**	**code**
state	n/a	**code**	**county**	**code**

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Sheila Finch-Tepper, AIA Historical Research: Janice Rutherford Edited By: Leonard Garfield		
organization	Finch-Tepper & Associates AIA	**date**	July 28, 1986
street & number	919 S.W. Taylor, #215	**telephone**	(503) 227-0786
city or town	Portland	**state**	Oregon 97205

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Jan E. Thon

title State Historic Preservation Officer **date** 9/16/1986

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register **date** 11-6-86

Attest: **date**

Chief of Registration

GPO 911-399

Albertson's associates through much of that time included Paul Richardson and Joseph Wilson. Richardson was born in Maryland in 1888 and arrived in Seattle with his parents two years later. He was employed as an architect with the Seattle firm of Saunders and Lawton from at least 1907 until 1910 when he worked as a draftsman for his father P.C. Richardson, who at the time was the principal of the "old Central school." In 1913, Richardson began work with the Seattle branch of Howells and Stokes and continued with that firm when it became Howells and Albertson and Albertson and Associates. (3)

Joseph Wilson was born in Kansas in 1878 and received his architectural degree from the University of Illinois in 1902. Although he began his career in Chicago, he had gone to Seattle by 1907 searching for his brother, a "timber cruiser" who had disappeared in the Northwest woods. Although the search was unsuccessful, Wilson stayed in Seattle and in 1908 began working for the Seattle branch of Howells and Stokes. Like Richardson, he remained with the firm through its various incarnations. (4)

Between 1907 and 1917, the Seattle branch of Howells and Stokes was responsible for the Cobb Building and the White-Henry-Stuart Building for the Metropolitan Building Company as well as other structures in Seattle. During World War I, the firm (then known as Howells and Albertson) designed several structures in Bremerton, including the Navy Yard Hotel and government housing. By 1919, the firm, known as A.H. Albertson and Associates (and eventually Albertson, Wilson, and Richardson) designed such buildings as the Wells Building and the Central YMCA in Seattle, the Security Bank in Olympia, the Tacoma Medical Arts Building (1928), and most notably, the Northern Life Tower (1928), a nationally acclaimed example of Art Deco skyscraper design and for years the tallest building in Seattle. In 1930, the firm designed St. Joseph's church, another landmark of Moderne design in Seattle. In 1939, Richardson died and the office was closed with the two remaining principles devoting their full time to the FHA. Albertson died in 1964; Wilson died in 1968. (5)

History: The public opening of the Vancouver Telephone Company exchange in July 1935, was a celebration to modern technology unparalleled in the small city which that year housed 3,000 telephones. Not only was the building "the newest and most modern building in the city," but the exchange itself was touted as "one of the most intricate electrical installations ever made in the city...an epic change in the city communications system." (6) The transfer and installation of the new equipment, overseen by Western Electric's J.H. MacKenzie, took a full five months after the building itself was completed.

When the business offices had been moved into the new facility and the equipment was in place, all operations were transferred from the old exchange at Washington and Sixth Streets (demolished) at midnight July 15. Two shifts of operators were at the switchboard that night so that there would be no break in service when Mayor Ed Hamilton pulled the strings to cut over to the new exchange. A month later the three day public open house attracted 2,400 visitors, who were given tours of the new facility by telephone company employees from neighboring exchanges as well as from the Vancouver exchange. (7)

In addition to its architectural beauty, the new building signalled a high point in the 42 year history of the city's telephone system. The first exchange was housed in the venerable Columbia Hotel at 212 Main Street (demolished). L.M. Hidden, part owner of the hotel, leading Vancouver citizen, and proprietor of the Hidden Brick Company, served as the infant exchange's first manager. By 1895, the exchange provided service to fifteen telephones. In 1900, the exchange was moved to 512 Main Street (demolished in 1909). In 1906, the company leased space in a building at Sixth and Washington until the new facility was built in 1935. That year the old building was demolished. As such, the Vancouver Telephone Building is the only extant structure associated with the history of telephone service in the city. (8)

Endnotes:

(1) Detailed information regarding the construction and design of the building is from the Pacific Northwest Bell archives, Portland, Oregon. The author is indebted to Mr. Mark Stein of PNB for access to the archives which include original plans.

(2) Biographical information on Albertson is from the following sources: "AIA Fellowships Granted Washington Architects," Pacific Building News, July 21, 1934; Dennis Francis, Architects In Practice: New York City, 1840-1900 (COPAR: 1980, p. 11); AIA Archives, Washington D.C.; Capitol's Who's Who for Seattle, 1939-1941 (Capitol Publishing Co: Portland, 1939), pp. 546-7, 574; Who's Who in Washington State, Vol 1, 1927 (Seattle: Allen Publishing, 1927), pp. 11-12; Albertson material, Special Collections, University of Washington Library (Seattle); Daily Journal of Commerce, June 17, 1930; Robert Durham, July 21, 1986, telephone interview with author; Polk's City Directory of Seattle, 1906-1964 (Seattle: R.L. Polk Co.); Seattle Times, April 19, 1964, p. 29; and Seattle Times, April 16, 1946.

(3) Biographical information on Richardson is from the following sources: Seattle Daily Times, April 16, 1939, p. 30; AIA Archives, Washington, D.C.; Chapters on Architecture, Vol. 1, no. 1, June 1911, Washington State Chapter of Architects; Robert Durham, July 21, 1986, telephone interview with author; Polk's City Directory of Seattle, see above.

(4) Biographical information on Wilson is from the following sources: Jane Wilson MacGowan, July 21, 1986, telephone interview with author; Robert Durham, see above; Polk's City Directory, see above; "Catalogue of 1st Annual Exhibition of Architecture and Allied Arts", Washington State Chapter AIA, Seattle, 1907-08.

(5) Additional information on the firm is from the following sources: Albertson material, Special Collections, University of Washington Library (Seattle); Sally Woodbridge and Roger Montgomery, A Guide to Architecture in Washington State (Seattle: Univeristy of Washington Press, 1980).

(6) Vancouver Columbian, July 27, 1935, p. 8.

(7) Vancouver Columbian, July 17, 1935, p. 1.

(8) Information on the history of the telephone exchange in Vancouver and the construction and operation of the new facility is from the following issues of the Vancouver Columbian: October 1, 1934, p. 5; December 31, 1934, p. 8; April 22, 1935, n.p.; April 27, 1935, p. 8; April 29, 1935, n.p.; July 8, 1935, p. 6; July 17, 1935, p. 1; July 20, 1935, p. 1; July 25, 1935.