

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED  
DATE ENTERED DEC 28 1979  
MAR 3 1980

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Pioneer Building

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

401 N. Broadway St

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Oklahoma City

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

5

STATE

Oklahoma

VICINITY OF

CODE 40

COUNTY

Oklahoma

CODE

109

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

\_\_DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

\_\_STRUCTURE

\_\_SITE

\_\_OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

\_\_PUBLIC

PRIVATE

\_\_BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

\_\_IN PROCESS

\_\_BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

OCCUPIED

\_\_UNOCCUPIED

\_\_WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_YES: UNRESTRICTED

\_\_NO

**PRESENT USE**

\_\_AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

\_\_EDUCATIONAL

\_\_ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_GOVERNMENT

\_\_INDUSTRIAL

\_\_MILITARY

\_\_MUSEUM

\_\_PARK

\_\_PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_RELIGIOUS

\_\_SCIENTIFIC

\_\_TRANSPORTATION

\_\_OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Southwestern Bell Telephone Company

STREET & NUMBER

707 N. Robinson

CITY, TOWN

Oklahoma City

VICINITY OF

STATE

Oklahoma

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Oklahoma County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

320 Robert S. Kerr

CITY, TOWN

Oklahoma City

STATE

Oklahoma

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Oklahoma County Commercial Sites Survey

DATE

1979

\_\_FEDERAL \_\_STATE  COUNTY \_\_LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Shirk Collection, Oklahoma City University Library

CITY, TOWN

Oklahoma City

STATE

Oklahoma

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Pioneer Building is a seven-level limestone office building. Designed by William A. Wells, the dominant architectural style of the structure is Sullivanesque. The elements of Sullivan's school of architecture are seen in the division of the building into three distinct horizontal zones, the projecting eave, and the use of cut-stone ornamentation.

The first zone of the design is the ground level, with massive cut-stone columns, plate glass windows, and two ornate entryways (the plate glass windows are now infilled with blue granite). The middle zone extends from the second to the fifth levels, dominated by vertical piers and recessed spandrels. This zone includes subtle variations such as hexagonal piers, pairs of windows in each bay, and minor engaged columns separating the windows. The windows on the fifth floor are arched and are terminated with a profusion of white terra cotta ornament in a floral motif. The third zone includes the sixth and seventh levels, which is topped by a protruding cornice clad with terra cotta ornamentation in a motif of intersecting circles. This same motif, in a smaller scale, also extends part-way down the major piers.

The interior of the building is just as impressive. All corridor floors are Georgian marble, with wainscoating. The main entrance is of statuary Italian marble, paneled and inlaid with glass mosaic, heavy marble brackets, and marble lintels. The woodwork is all oak. The interior has been modified, undergoing a remodeling job in 1928 and several minor changes since that time.

Southwestern Bell Telephone Company has made several modifications on the exterior. The entryway on the east end of the building and the original plate-glass windows on the ground floor have been filled in with blue-black granite. Also, all window units on the upper levels have been replaced with contemporary, bronze-colored sashes. Neither alteration has destroyed the architectural integrity of the structure. A more serious alteration is the entryway on the northeast corner of the building, which was added in 1928 when the Telephone Building was constructed on the next lot to the north. This addition, however, likewise has affected the architectural design only slightly.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1907-1979 BUILDER/ARCHITECT William Wells/Arthur Williams

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Constructed in 1907, the Pioneer Building is significant both architecturally and historically. Architecturally, it is the finest example of Sullivanesque influence in Oklahoma City. The building's bold design and subtle variations make it one of the most architecturally significant buildings in Oklahoma. Moreover, the Pioneer Building was the first multi-storied structure built in Oklahoma City with a steel frame, an architectural innovation which revolutionized the skyline of the business district. Historically, the structure is one of the two William A. Wells buildings surviving today; the other is the Colcord Building, which was listed on the National Register in 1976. And finally, the Pioneer Building, built as the state headquarters for the Pioneer Telephone Company, serves as a physical reminder of the early telephone industry and its importance to twentieth century technological, economic, and social development.

The first telephone appeared in Oklahoma City in 1892 as part of the system developed by the Missouri-Kansas Telephone Company. By 1900 Oklahoma Territory was serviced by several competing lines, all with their own exchanges. For several years residents of Oklahoma City therefore were hampered by two telephone companies, each house or business needing two independent phones. In 1904 this obstacle was overcome when the Pioneer Telephone Company of Perry, Oklahoma, gained a monopoly in Oklahoma City. With this new operation serving 2,851 telephones, Pioneer officials moved the company headquarters to Oklahoma City.

By 1907 the Pioneer Telephone Company employed more than 150 men and women, outgrowing their rented space in a small downtown building. As a result of this prosperity, Pioneer officials contracted with regionally famous architect, William A. Wells, to design a new office building. Wells had established a reputation three years earlier when he designed the Oklahoma County Courthouse, an imposing sandstone structure. Pioneer officials also retained Wells due to his training, for he had studied under Louis Sullivan in Chicago. From Sullivan, who is known as the father of the skyscraper, Wells learned new design techniques for multi-storied buildings--just what the Pioneer Telephone Company desired.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Daily Oklahoman, June 7, 1908, Sec. D, p. 1.  
 Roy Stewart, Born Grown: An Oklahoma City History (Oklahoma City: Fidelity Bank, 1974), pp. 256-257.  
Daily Oklahoman, September 4, 1977, "Orbit," pp. 2-5.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Circa 1 acre

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

QUADRANGLE NAME Oklahoma City

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 14 6 34 8 10 39 26 1,00  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B                                          
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C                                        

D                                        

E                                        

F                                        

G                                        

H                                        

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning on the curb at the northwest corner of 3rd and Broadway, which is approximately 12' southeast of the building, proceed (cont.)

## LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Dr. Bob L. Blackburn, Project Director

ORGANIZATION

Oklahoma County Historical Society

DATE

July 30, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

3801 N. Shartel

TELEPHONE

405-528-5091

CITY OR TOWN

Oklahoma City

STATE

Oklahoma

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

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

*H. Glenn Jordan*

TITLE

DATE

12/11/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

March 3, 1980

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

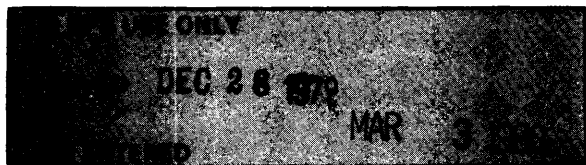
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

2/27/80

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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CONTINUATION SHEET 1

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 1

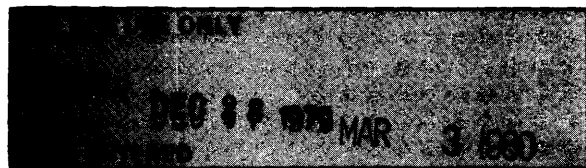
In partnership with Arthur J. Williams, an Englishman trained in architecture and civil engineering, Wells designed the tallest structure yet built in Oklahoma City. His design included several unique and innovative elements. One was the steel super-structure, never before used in Oklahoma City. He also was the first architect to use Sullivanesque design features such as distinct horizontal zones, projecting eaves, and ornate cut-stone decoration as part of the structural support. The subtle variations and unique design which resulted made the Pioneer Building "an enduring monument" and "the handsomest [building] in the state and the most substantially constructed," according to the local newspaper. (Daily Oklahoman, June 7, 1908, Sec. D, p. 1)

To 1914 Wells designed only four other public buildings in Oklahoma City. They were the Colcord Building, which shared many of the same design features as the Pioneer Building, the old Sears Building, the Terminal Building, and the old Kerr's Department Store. All have been razed except the Colcord Building, which is recognized as the first skyscraper in Oklahoma City and the premier example of Sullivanesque architecture in Oklahoma. Together with the Colcord Building, the Pioneer Building is the last of William A. Wells' architectural legacy to Oklahoma, a legacy which should be preserved.

The Pioneer Telephone Company remained in the structure until 1915, when Bell Telephone purchased their operations and facilities in Oklahoma City. With their state headquarters in the Pioneer Building, Bell officials added two buildings to the telephone complex. In 1928 they constructed the Telephone Building just to the north; in the 1960s an even larger structure was built to the west. These three office complexes, together with dozens of other major buildings in the metropolitan area, represent the largest capital investment of any one company in Oklahoma City. The technological, economic, and social impact of this development began in the Pioneer Building in 1907.

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CONTINUATION SHEET 2

ITEM NUMBER 10

PAGE 1

west 170' to the alley, which is 10' beyond the southwest corner of the building. Then proceed north 60' to a point parallel with the north side of the building, which adjoins the Telephone Building. Then proceed 170' along the face of the north wall to the curb on Broadway. Then proceed 60' south along the curb to the original point of departure.