

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

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 Building
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 730 12th Street, N.W. not for publication N/A
city, town Washington vicinity N/A
state District of Columbia code DC county N/A code 001 zip code 20005

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u> </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A 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 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Carol B. Thompson 17 June 1988
Signature of certifying official State Historic Preservation Officer Date

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:)

Automatically listed DB 8/5/88

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION/communications

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

facility (same as historic function)

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concretewalls BRICK

roof OTHERother

Describe present and historic physical appearance.Exterior

730 12th Street, N.W. (square 288, lot 22) is a steel-frame, seven-story, six-bay, brick-and-limestone structure constructed in 1928 to house telephone switching equipment for American Telephone and Telegraph/Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Companies (Photo 1). Designed with Art Deco ornamentation, the L-shaped building is vertical in its massing (79' x 155' x 105'H). One of four buildings constructed on the square by the telephone company between 1903 and 1971, it is sited mid-block between the first and the last C&P buildings erected there (Photo 2). A structure housing telephone equipment, its skillful design as an office building disguises its noncommercial use.

The main facade of the building faces east, and consists of a basically symmetrical, six-bay, tripartite composition, topped by a large pediment. Multiple design devices create a strong sense of verticality and carry the Art Deco stylistic characteristics. The center four bays of the facade project slightly from the side bays, visually creating a strong, vertical thrust which is enhanced by the use of five brick pilasters rising the full height of the shaft and giving additional verticality to the building. Essentially a simple, spare geometric form faced with beige brick, the building is embellished with an ornately carved Art Deco limestone veneer. The carved, stepped motifs of the veneer and their placement carry the observer's eye upward, thus giving the building its most emphatic vertical emphasis. This applied decoration articulates a base for the building, covering its first story and moving up into the second and third stories. The appearance of a building shaft is created by unornamented brickwork on the fourth through sixth stories. The shallow, ornamental relief begins again between the sixth and seventh floors, and continues to the top of the building. Art Deco in character, the carved ornamentation features geometric patterns (Photo 3). The building is capped by a pediment, which is delineated from the facade by the setback of the seventh floor and the penthouse behind it.

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)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMUNICATIONS

Period of Significance

1928

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker/

Davis, Wick, Rosengarten Co., Inc.

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

Introduction

730 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 distinctive example of 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 1928, 730 12th Street, N.W. is one of many telephone company buildings erected in the Washington, D.C. area during the first half of the century. Designed by the well-known New York City firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker (corporate architects for the Bell system at the time), it was built to accommodate equipment for the newly developed dial system.

The building meets Criteria A and C of the National Register. Its significance is threefold. Under Criterion A: 1) it is associated with and is representative of the development of the C&P Telephone Company, a commercial institution of long standing and a leading public utility which has made a significant impact on the local community. Under Criterion C: 2) it was designed by the noted New York firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, who were the favored corporate architects for the Bell system of New York and New Jersey during the 1920s; and 3) it is a noteworthy extant example of Art Deco styling--a decorative form not common to downtown Washington, D.C.

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See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

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

Acreeage of property less than 1/2

UTM References

A

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

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property at 730 12th Street, N.W. occupies lot 22, square 288.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The property boundaries are formed by the edges of lot 22 in square 288.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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The entrance of 730 12th Street, located in the north bay, is deeply recessed from the wall and is subtly articulated from the facade design by a decorative panel which spills downward from the facade into the recess (Photo 4). The glass, double doors are framed in bronze and have decorative, bronze grilles with designs echoing the carved limestone motifs of the facade. The grille is stepped in the same manner as the stone veneer. Between it and the bronze door frame is a bronze motif of vines and stylized bunches of grapes.

Rectangular, three-over-three-light, double-hung windows with stone sills are evenly spaced, one per bay, across the front facade. Those on the first floor have been filled in with stone (concrete?) and present a blank wall to the street. Security grilles are attached to the second-floor windows.

The first three floors of windows are slightly recessed, while the rest are flush with the facade. On the first and second stories, the windows are framed by the stone veneer which is draped in a stylized manner, giving the appearance of hung drapery (Photo 5). This design ends at the third story where it is topped by carved ornamentation. Above the first-floor windows are richly carved panels ornamented with stylized vines, leaves, and fruit (Photo 6). The design is reminiscent of Sullivan-esque motifs. Above the second-floor windows the stone drapery effect ends. This finish is intertwined with carved panels similar to the reliefs below the windows. The four center windows on the third floor are also framed by stepped, carved stone surrounds and are topped by ornate reliefs. The windows on the fourth through sixth floors are unornamented. However, at the top the sixth floor windows, the carved stone veneer begins again, gradually stepping up to the seventh floor. There, the veneer is once again richly carved with fluting and ornamentation that is now more geometric in pattern and more closely related in style to the Art Deco.

The facade, as previously mentioned, is topped by a pediment faced with smooth, ashlar block. At its center is a stylized eagle. The pediment is edged with a carved geometric pattern, which is also found above the bronze door frame of the entrance and along the roofline of the penthouse (Photo 7).

The south and north elevations of the building abut the neighboring buildings on the first six floors. Above that the building steps back one floor at a time to the penthouse.

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The rear elevation faces a public alley. Like the front facade, it is six bays wide. There are a variety of window types. A fire escape is located in the south bay of the elevation, and a rear entrance in one of the center bays.

The building's design is noteworthy for its use of carved ornamentation which gives the building its style and sense of verticality. It aptly shows the transition from the floral motifs of Sullivanesque design popular at the turn of the century to the jazzy, geometric patterns made popular by the Art Deco movement of the mid-1920s.

Interior

The interior consists of seven floors and a full basement. As originally planned in 1928, all of the floors (except the basement, which houses power lines) are used to house telephone switching equipment and are virtually devoid of wall partitions. A few floors have a minimal amount of office space, used by personnel monitoring the now-computerized equipment. The penthouse stores the building's mechanical system.

In contrast to the exterior of the building, the interior reflects the utilitarian equipment use of the structure and lacks extensive ornamentation. The one visually interesting interior space is the vestibule, which is octagonal in shape. It is partially faced with rare, green, New Jersey marble which is stepped upward. In stepped niches on either side of the vestibule are bronze grilles filled with elegant drop leaf designs. The ceiling features a stylized sunburst pattern.

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

The C&P Telephone Company was formed in Washington, D.C. in 1883, just seven years after the telephone had been invented.

By demonstrating his newly perfected telephone at the Centennial Exposition in 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. It 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 Formation of C&P and the Company's Downtown Growth

The C&P Telephone Company was formed in 1883 as a merger of Bell's company with Maynard's.

At that time, about 900 telephones were in operation in the city of Washington. By 1897, the number had increased to 2,000; by 1904 it had reached 10,768; and by 1928 there were over 145,000 telephones in Washington, D.C. With this ever-increasing service, the original C&P 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, and by the middle of this century, over two dozen C&P buildings had been erected.

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On Square 288 alone, four telephone buildings were eventually erected, including 730 12th Street, N.W. The first of these four buildings was 722 12th Street (directly south of 730 12th Street), which was built in 1903 to serve as the company's headquarters and main downtown exchange (replacing the original headquarters on 14th Street and servicing the entire downtown area). Constructed in this key downtown location, it accommodated the increasing number of businesses beginning to rely on the telephone.

As technology progressed and the demand for service increased, a second building, 725 13th Street, was built shortly after World War I on a lot behind the 1903 headquarters building. (725 13th Street is no longer owned by C&P.)

A few years later, a revolutionary advancement in telephone equipment, the dial system, enabled mechanical and electrical mechanisms to replace operators using a manual system. This required more space than was available in the two existing buildings on the square. In order to house the new dial switching equipment and to accommodate expanding C&P offices housed in rental space, a third building--730 12th Street (the subject of this nomination)--was constructed north of and adjacent to the 1903 headquarters building. The new building contained seven floors of switching equipment and a basement which housed power lines. Small offices for personnel in charge of overseeing the equipment were scattered throughout the building. (The construction of this building was authorized under D.C. Building Permit #5838, issued on January 31, 1928. The permit lists the New York firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker as the architects, and the local firm of Davis, Wick, Rosengarten Company, Inc. as the builders. The estimated cost of the building was \$520,000--almost \$300,000 less than the final construction cost of \$783,532.)

The fourth and last telephone company building erected on Square 288 is 1200 H Street, N.W. Constructed in 1971, directly north of and adjacent to 730 12th Street, it serves as an equipment building with limited office space.

The Architects

For the design of 730 12th Street, C&P looked to the New York architectural firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker (VGW). According to company correspondence and all construction documents, H.C. Williams, head of VGW's Washington office, was the project architect for 730 12th Street (Photo 8).

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When the partnership of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker was formed in 1926, Voorhees and Gmelin were already established as the favored corporate architects for the Bell telephone system and had already designed several buildings for the company (of which C&P was a part). In addition, they were the successor firm in a line of offices which had been the corporate architects for the Bell system since the turn of the century. The partnership of VGW was formed upon the death of senior partner, Andrew McKenzie (architect of the neighboring C&P headquarters built in 1903), when company associate Ralph Walker was promoted and joined Voorhees and Gmelin.

The work of VGW and its predecessor firm became well known in the mid-1920s. This work was mostly centered in New York City and its environs. Perhaps the building which first brought the office (actually, McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin) significant national recognition and for which they are best-known is the New York Telephone Company's Barclay-Vesey Building, constructed between 1923 and 1926 in New York City. Significantly, this is the building to which 730 12th Street is most often stylistically compared. When constructed, the Barclay-Vesey Building was the largest telephone company building in the world and, today, is considered to be the first significant Art Deco structure erected in New York City. Highly acclaimed, its photograph serves as the frontispiece in the English editions of LeCorbusier's Toward a New Architecture.

The firm of VGW and its successors were extremely prolific. At the time of Voorhees' death in 1965, the firms had designed 385 buildings for the New York Telephone Company alone and another 155 for the New Jersey Telephone Company. Their work however, did not solely include telephone company buildings, but also a wide variety of office and institutional structures, including: the Walter Lisenard Building in New York City; the Brooklyn Municipal Building; the Prudential Insurance Company Headquarters in Newark; the Bell Telephone Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey; and educational buildings at Harvard, Princeton, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In Washington, D.C., VGW is responsible for the design of the AFL-CIO Headquarters at 16th and H Streets, N.W. and the Belgian Chancery at 3330 Garfield Street, N.W.

The firm's principals at the time of the design and construction of 730 12th Street, N.W. consisted of Stephen Voorhees, Paul Gmelin, and Ralph Walker. Each of these men was well known in his own right.

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A native of Germany, Paul Gmelin (1859-1937) was a graduate of the University of Stuttgart. He began his professional training in New York City as a draftsman for an architectural periodical. His skill came to light after he completed a rendering of the Boston Public Library for Charles McKim. He later worked for several noted New York City architectural firms, where he assisted with the designs of many of the city's first skyscrapers. In 1910, he entered into partnership with Andrew McKenzie and Stephen Voorhees.

Stephen Voorhees (1879 -1965) was educated as a civil engineer at Princeton University. Upon graduating in 1900, he worked for two years as an engineer before joining Eidlitz and McKenzie as a construction superintendent. Upon Eidlitz' retirement in 1910, McKenzie asked Voorhees and Gmelin to join him in partnership. A man of great ambition, Voorhees was responsible for enlarging and organizing the office into a large and successful architectural practice. Aside from the office, he was very active in the architectural community. He was the founder and president of the New York Building Congress, head of the committee to reorganize the New York City Board of Standards and Appeals, head of the Building-Industry Division of the Employment Emergency Committee, and chairman of the Construction Code Authority of the National Recovery Administration. On the national level, he served two terms as president of the American Institute of Architects. From 1936 to 1940, he was the chairman of the Board of Design for the New York World's Fair. Between 1930 and 1949, he served as the supervising architect for his alma mater, Princeton. During his lifetime he received many honors including degrees from prestigious universities and honorary memberships in the professional institutions, including the Royal Institute of British Architects. Voorhees retired from his firm in 1959, but continued to serve as a consultant until his death in 1965.

Ralph Walker (1889-1973) was the last partner to join the firm that was responsible for the design of 730 12th Street. A 1911 graduate of M.I.T., he joined McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin in 1919 and became a partner upon McKenzie's death in 1926. He is considered to have been VGW's head designer and as such was responsible for many of the firm's noted projects. In addition to his active architectural practice, Walker was a prolific writer. He followed a public and professional service career much like Voorhees, but was perhaps better known. Walker served as president, trustee or chairman of many organizations including the American Institute of Architects. In Washington, D.C., he

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served on the Commission of Fine Arts during the Eisenhower Administration. In 1957, close to his retirement, the American Institute of Architect's Centennial Gold Medal was bestowed upon him. This award is given only once in a century, to a person who in the AIA's opinion "has made the most significant contribution of any living American architect to humanity and the planning of the human environment."

The Design of 730 12th Street, N.W.

The exterior design of 730 12th Street has often been compared to the telephone company's Barclay-Vesey Building in New York City, designed by McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin in 1923. Completed the year of the Paris Exposition of Decorative Arts from which the decorative style took its name, the Barclay-Vesey Building is considered to be one of the earliest structures in the United States designed with Art Deco styling.

730 12th Street, N.W. is one of Washington's noteworthy extant examples of such styling in architecture. In a city that traditionally erected more conservative buildings, the Bell System's decision to erect an "Art Deco" structure projected a modern, progressive, corporate image. Its liberation from the rigidity of classical styles and the heaviness of Victorian design in the city was a change from the accepted norm. In addition, the design of the building produced a sense of verticality in a city bounded by height restrictions imposed by the city's zoning regulations.

The design of 730 12th Street seems to be a combination of the decorative program of the New York Telephone Company Building in Syracuse, and the massing of the Traveler's Insurance Company Building in Hartford. All three buildings were designed by VGW in 1928. The C&P building is a lower, smaller-scale version of VGW's New York work for AT&T, yet it is typical of that work in its two-directional set-backs and Art Deco decoration.

The decorative program of 730 12th Street and the Syracuse telephone building can be traced directly to the Barclay-Vesey building which was completed just two years before the construction of these buildings. Both are fairly plain, low buildings in massing--unlike the Barclay-Vesey Building--but have

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a carefully placed, richly ornamented veneer which give the buildings a feeling of verticality (Photo 9). The ornamentation of the Barclay-Vesey Building consists of ornately carved stone juxtaposed with plain brick to create a tripartite building composition. In addition, there are interesting transitions between like motifs in stone and bronze. Fluted stone, placed to look like pilasters; well-integrated stone panels and bronze grillework decorated with stylized trees, vines, and fruit (Photo 10; 730 12th Street); and elegant interior marble public spaces are first found in the Barclay-Vesey Building and later become common to the other buildings' decorative schemes. Specifically, one can find direct correlation between the actual decorative designs found on the Barclay-Vesey Building and 730 12th Street. These include the use of identical vine and fruit motifs, the abstracted sunburst design in the greenish-black and gold main lobby of the Barclay-Vesey Building and in the vestibule of the C&P building (which employs the same colors).

What Louis Mumford wrote about the Barclay-Vesey Building is clearly applicable to 730 12th Street:

Ornament is usually conceived as an enrichment of the structural elements: the designers in this case have treated it, bravely, as a contradiction. In the midst of the hard masses and the severe planes which belong to the structure itself, a delicate stone ornament, in low relief, creeps up, as grass and flowers might peer through the rectangular cracks of a pavement. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the designer, Mr. Walker, has turned the lower stories into a rock garden, giving to the panels over the entrances, and to various other appropriate spots, a free naturalistic covering of birds, beasts, flowers, and children. Louis Sullivan used ornament in much the same fashion on his early skyscrapers, but not always so successfully; and although ornament so conceived has no effect in modifying the mass of the building, one may pardon it as an acknowledgement of the human impulses to which the structure as a whole is, in the nature of things, impervious.

Ralph Walker, Architect.
New York: Henahan House, 1957

Without a doubt, 730 12th Street is derivative of the decorative philosophical thought of the VGW office in the late 1920s. What

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had worked so successfully in New York City, they employed again on other buildings in other cities, including Washington, D.C. 730 12th Street is a direct descendent of the Barclay-Vesey Building which received much national acclaim. As such, it is an important, local example of the work of a renowned New York City firm and the emergence of Art Deco as an accepted decorative style for a powerful utility's corporate image in Washington, D.C.

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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H STREET

C&P
1200 H STREET

PUBLIC ALLEY

AT&T
735 13th STREET

C&P
730 12th STREET

PUBLIC ALLEY

C&P
722 12th STREET

12th STREET

PUBLIC ALLEY

HECHT COMPANY PROPERTY

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

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Washington, DC

Section number Photo- Page 1
graphs

PHOTOGRAPH INVENTORY

1. Front facade
2. Front facade
3. Cornice detail
4. Entrance
5. Facade detail
6. Facade detail
7. Pediment detail
8. Copy of original drawing
9. Facade detail
10. Entrance detail

For specific data pertaining to photographer, date of photo and camera location, please refer to the back of individual print. All negatives are filed by Tracerics, Inc., Washington, D.C.