

OMB NO. 1024-0047

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

received JUL 23 1985
date entered AUG 23 1985

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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

1. Name

historic Sunset Telephone & Telegraph Company Building

and/or common 1101 Fawcett Building

2. Location

street & number 1101 Fawcett Avenue not for publication

city, town Tacoma vicinity of ~~Congressional District~~

state Washington code 053 county Pierce code 053

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> In process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name 1101 Fawcett Limited Partnership (Richard F. Evans)

street & number 625 Commerce Street, Suite 140

city, town Tacoma vicinity of state Washington 98402

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pierce County Assessor

street & number 2401 South 35th Street

city, town Tacoma state Washington 98409

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Tacoma Cultural Resource Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1980 federal state county local

depository for survey records Office of Historic Preservation, Tacoma Municipal Building

city, town Tacoma state Washington

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Sunset Telephone Building is located on the southeast corner of the intersection of Fawcett Avenue and South 11th Street in downtown Tacoma. It is five blocks uphill from Pacific Avenue, historically the city's main street and still the major arterial of the central business district.

The old telephone building is rectangular in plan and built to the property lines. Because of the steep eastward slope of the site, there are two stories above grade on the Fawcett Avenue (west) facade and three and one-half stories above grade on the Court D (east) elevation. The building presently contains about 25,000 gross square feet.

The exterior presents a remarkable unity of design, considering that construction occurred in three distinct phases. The varying rhythm of fenestration on all three visible elevations, slight differences in brick color, and the off-center placement of the main entrance are all indications of the successive construction phases.

The original building (1901) occupied the corner of the property, with a 40 ft frontage on Fawcett Avenue and a 65 ft frontage on 11th Street. The main entry was at the center of three tall arched openings on the west facade. In 1905-06 an addition on the south extended the Fawcett Avenue facade by 25 ft and, reaching 80 ft to the east, broke the regular form of the plan. A few years later the 'L' was filled in with a third addition and the building returned to a rectangular form, now measuring 65 ft by 120 ft.

The exterior walls are faced with a light tan pressed brick laid up in common bond. The tall round-arched openings that occur on all elevations at the main floor level are framed by recessed surrounds of brick with radiating voussoirs. Simple stone keystones and vestigial capitals with an incised design are the only additional distinctive elements. The main entry is flanked by ribbed pilasters of brick and enhanced by a decorative escutcheon emblazoned with the initials of the original owners. Swags of Roman character flank this central ornament above the doorway. The recessed entry is also noteworthy for the extant original tile floor mosaic depicting a beribboned vine encircling a blue bell with the words: "Long Distance Telephone."

The tall rectangular window openings of the upper story have stone lintels and sills and are filled with wooden double-hung sash of one-over-one lights and nine-light transoms. Several of the upper story window openings (three on the west facade and one each on the north and east elevations) extend downward to the stone belt course that separates the two main levels. These openings contain paneled oak french doors, and the two end ones on the west have circular transom windows set in decorative carved oak panels. Originally, narrow wrought-iron balconies were placed at each of these taller openings, and they are being restored during the current rehabilitation of the building.

The building always had a hipped roof, which became a truncated hip as the structure was expanded in size. The covering is a standing seam metal roof over wood trusses. A narrow metal parapet at the ridges is restored. The boxed metal cornice, with simple modillions and a dentil row, is also restored.

The interior of the building contained little of its original architectural features when it was purchased by the present owners. Changes in use over the years (the last

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 type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1901, 1905, 1907
1901-1931

Builder/Architect unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Sunset Telephone and Telegraph Company building is significant as the first home of Tacoma's fledgling telephone company, an enterprise that began with 22 subscribers in 1884 and grew rapidly as the new form of communication became indispensable in the twentieth century. The telephone company, which ultimately became part of the nationwide Bell system, built the brick structure as its first office and exchange and occupied the expanded quarters for 57 years. The building is closely associated with the birth and growth of telecommunications in Tacoma and in the Puget Sound area and represents the entrepreneurial spirit of its founders and officers.

Widespread utilization of the telephone quickly followed its invention by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876. Single telephone connections were at first an oddity, but small local exchanges were soon formed. The first exchange in Washington Territory was established in Seattle in March of 1883 and, by 1889, the year of statehood, pioneer exchanges also existed in Tacoma, Walla Walla, Port Townsend, Colfax and Spokane, with a total of 750 telephones in use.

Tacoma's first telephone was brought to the city by the local superintendent of Western Union in 1878. It was connected to another phone at the Lister Iron Foundry and to telegraph wires at the Western Union end. Another line was later added to connect the Tacoma Mill Company to Western Union and was used to get quick service on business telegrams from San Francisco. By 1883 another line connected W.B. Bonney's drug store on Pacific Avenue with the residence of Dr. C.W. Harvey, the physician for the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, so he could be called when needed at the company's hospital.

Early in 1884 John Sabin, president of the Sunset Telephone Company, headquartered in San Francisco, sent E.W. Melse to Tacoma to organize a local telephone exchange. Melse had some initial misgivings. "When I first saw Tacoma, I must confess I wished I was in San Francisco. However, it wasn't long before I got acquainted here. I found a splendid group of men who were willing to make sacrifices for their progressive little city."

Melse circulated a petition to obtain 25 subscribers, the number considered necessary to warrant a telephone exchange. Although only 22 customers signed up, plans for the exchange went forward. A 25 year franchise was obtained from the city, equipment was installed, and Tacoma's first telephone exchange began operations on April 4, 1884. The exchange was located in Rebard's Cigar Store on Pacific Avenue. Sam Simon, a clerk at Rebard's, ran the switchboard on a commission basis while selling cigars and tobacco. It soon became evident that larger quarters were needed, so the exchange was moved to the Wells Fargo office and eventually to the Mason Block on A Street. By this time (1888) Alva C. Sands, agent for Wells Fargo Express, had become manager of the Sunset Telephone and Telegraph Company.

Sands is considered a pioneer in developing telephone service in the Puget Sound region. Originally from Iowa, he was an ex-theatre manager and cattle rancher who eventually

9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Tacoma Daily Ledger, November 24, 1901; January 24, 1916; April 5, 1929; April 2, 1944.
2. Tacoma News Tribune, April 5, 1926; March 3, 1936; November 19, 1947; April 7, 1951; March 7, 1976. (cont'd)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Tacoma North, WA

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

1	0	5	4	2	2	9	0	5	2	3	3	2	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 1 and 2, Block 1109, Map of New Tacoma, W.T.

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 Shirley L. Courtois, Architectural Historian

organization N.A.

date March 1985

street & number 4021 E. Highland Drive

telephone (206) 325-9346

city or town Seattle

state Washington 98112

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 *James E. Hoover*

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date June 19, 1985

For NPS use only

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

date 8/23/85

James M. Anderson
Special Agent in Charge
National Register

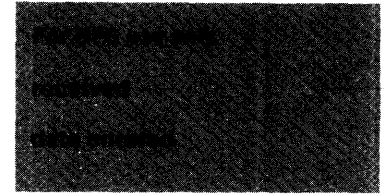
Affected

date

Chief of Registration

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

**National Register of Historic Places
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Continuation sheet

Item number 7, 8, 9

Page 2

7. DESCRIPTION

use was as a warehouse before a decade of vacancy) had reduced the interior to its skeleton of post-and-beam mill construction. Only one portion retained some tongue-and-groove wainscoting. The interior has been completely renovated and now contains offices on three levels.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

became head of all telephone construction in western Washington. In 1887 he established a line to the Puyallup Valley in order to connect the valley's hop growers with wholesalers and brokers in Tacoma. In subsequent years he set up toll lines to Seattle (1888), Olympia (1889), and Portland, Oregon (1892). Under his management, the Tacoma office became the Puget Sound headquarters for the Sunset Telephone and Telegraph Company, and he remained as District Manager until his death in 1910.

By that time the company had occupied their own building for nine years. Originally constructed to house the company's offices and local exchange, the structure was soon expanded to provide space for big new switchboards to accommodate the increasing number of customers and the long distance lines.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, there was great competition among small independent providers of telephone service. The Telephone Company of Puget Sound and the Home Telephone Company both challenged Sunset for a share of the business. The result was that many commercial customers had to have more than one phone. This situation could not last and, indeed, by the time Sunset's franchise expired it had merged with the Home Telephone Company and was known under that name until 1916 when the operation was reassigned as the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company, forerunner of Pacific Northwest Bell.

By 1929 the old telephone building at 11th and Fawcett was no longer adequate and construction began on a new building at 9th and Fawcett. Upon its completion in 1931, offices of the company and the local exchange were moved, and the old building continued to serve as the long distance exchange and later as a substation. Since 1958 it has been used as a warehouse and also suffered periods of vacancy and neglect. The present rehabilitation has restored its former exterior dignity while transforming the interior into modern office spaces.

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

3. Tacoma Times, March 30, 1936; February 22, 1940; November 11, 1948.
4. Tacoma Then and Now (Vaughan & Morrill Printing Co., 1903).