

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

RECEIVED 2280 574

JUL 15 2016

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office  
Other name/site number: Southwestern Telegraph & Telephone Company Building; Preston Central Office  
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 1121 Capitol Street and 1114 Texas Avenue  
City or town: Houston State: Texas County: Harris  
Not for publication:  Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:  
 national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

Mark Wolfe State Historic Preservation Officer Date 6/16/16  
Signature of certifying official / Title  
Texas Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register
- other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] Date of Action 9/25/2016  
Signature of the Keeper

Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	-	buildings
-	-	sites
-	-	structures
-	-	objects
2	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: NA

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** INDUSTRY / communications facility = telephone company facility  
 COMMERCE / business = office building

**Current Functions:** INDUSTRY / communications facility = telephone company facility  
 VACANT

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movements: Commercial Style  
 MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Brick, Stone/limestone, marble; Metal/aluminum

**Narrative Description** (see continuation pages 6 through 10)

Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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## 8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria:** A

**Criteria Considerations:** N/A

**Areas of Significance:** Communications

**Period of Significance:** 1912-1966

**Significant Dates:** 1912, 1926, 1929, 1938, 1950

**Significant Person:** N/A

**Cultural Affiliation:** N/A

**Architect/Builder:** Timlin, Irvin Ray, architect (1121 Capitol Street)  
Baty, J. Russ, architect (1114 Texas Avenue)  
Collins, Robert James, structural engineer (1114 Texas Avenue)  
W.S. Bellows Construction, contractor (1114 Texas Avenue)

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 11 through 15)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheets 16 and 17)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- 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 (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government (*Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library*)
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): N/A

Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** Less than one acre

### Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

1. 1121 Capitol Street:  
Longitude: 29.758538°      Latitude: -95.361462°
2. 1114 Texas Avenue:  
Longitude: 29.758874°      Latitude: -95.361319°

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The boundary includes two internally-connected buildings fronting parallel streets. The legal parcel for the building at 1114 Texas Avenue is recorded by the Harris County Appraisal District as "TRS 8 9A & 11A BLK 70 SSBB." The legal parcel for the building at 1121 Capitol Street is recorded by the Harris County Appraisal District as "LTS 1 & 2 & TRS 3A & 11 BLK 70 SSBB"

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary includes all the property historically associated with the nominated buildings.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Francisco Alecha, AIA, Architect, with editorial assistance from Gregory Smith, THC.  
Organization: Alecha Architecture  
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Date: July 24, 2015

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation page 18)

**Building Photographs** (see continuation pages 5, and 42 through 51)

**Additional items:** (see continuation pages 19 through 41)

Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photographs**

Southwestern Bell Main Office  
1121 Capitol Street and 1114 Texas Avenue  
Houston, Texas  
Photographed 2015 by Francisco Alecha

1. Corner of Texas Avenue and San Jacinto Street showing front of Southwestern Bell Texas Avenue Building at right between the Keystone Lofts and Magnolia Hotel. The Southwestern Bell Capitol Central Office Building is shown at left corner.
2. Capitol Central Office from the corner of Capitol Street and San Jacinto Street. View from Southeast.
3. Capitol Central Office with the Southwestern Bell Texas Avenue Building Expansion in the background. View from Southwest.
4. Capitol Central Office with the Southwestern Bell Texas Avenue Building expansion abutting it. View from Southwest.
5. View down Texas Avenue from Northeast. Southwestern Bell Capitol expansion at center left.
6. Southwestern Bell Capitol expansion at center left. View from Northeast.
7. West side of building, abutting the Capitol Central building with original brick, windows and galvanized steel fire escape. Mechanical penthouse at roof. Camera view from Southwest towards Texas Avenue.
8. View of 1<sup>st</sup> floor elevator (three) lobby from the entrance foyer towards rear of building. Original ribbed panel hoistway doors and marble jamb. Wood posts, beams and marble strips added in the late 1970s.
9. Typical stair, guard rail, and handrail. There is one interior stair and one exterior fire escape.
10. West side wall view at 5<sup>th</sup> floor. Painted galvanized steel double hung 2/2 windows with wire glass.
11. Galvanized steel telephone conduits at 2<sup>nd</sup> floor ten feet high. Camera view from northwest towards the rear of the building.
12. Transition of PVC plastic pipe to galvanized steel as the conduits penetrate the common wall between the Texas Avenue building and the Capitol St. building. Camera view from the east.
13. Telephone line testing tables from the 1970's. Note rotary dial 6<sup>th</sup> floor.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas**

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**Description**

The Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office in downtown Houston, Texas, is a functionally-related complex with two abutting buildings: the Commercial Style Main Office at 1121 Capitol Street (originally known as the “Preston Central Office;” 1912, with additions through 1938), and the Late Moderne Style expansion at 1114 Texas Avenue (1950). Occupying opposite sides of the same block, they are internally connected at the rear, an unusual configuration would lead most observers to assume that they are not related in any way, as the 1912 building occupies the southeast corner of the block, while the 1950 building is set between two buildings on the north side of the block. The buildings are stylistically distinct, expressing commercial architectural styles common at their time of construction. The buildings remain on their own separate lots with separate owners, as was the case in 1950. The 1912 building was originally a 7-story Beaux Arts brick skyscraper, which was expanded with a 2-story addition to the west in 1926. By 1938, the original building was topped by a two-story addition with a penthouse, while six floors were added to the west addition. The building has retained its exterior materials, detailing, and massing with the exception of the double hung windows replaced by glass block or louvered vents. The interior, not publicly accessible, has retained its original first floor elevator lobby, granite steps, and chrome handrails. The remainder of the building is largely occupied by switching equipment, cabling, and computers. The 1950 expansion faces north on Texas Avenue and is attached to the 1912 building to the south. The narrow buff brick-clad skyscraper is sixteen stories high, with a mechanical penthouse. Its primary elevation is classically composed of a tripartite base, shaft, and simple cornice, and the fenestration above the first two floors is symmetrical. This elevation is characterized by vertical window bays with red anodized cast aluminum spandrels. Each bay features three windows per floor, separated by plain brick piers. The first two floors are sheathed in windowless white marble slabs over the original limestone panels and granite base, installed c.1980. Despite alterations, both buildings retain sufficient integrity to be listed under Criterion A.

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**1121 Capitol Street (1912 with additions through 1938)**

The Southwestern Telegraph and Telephone Company (hereafter “Southwestern Bell”) building at 1121 Capitol Street in downtown Houston, is at the northwest corner of San Jacinto and Capitol. All sides of the building are built to the lot lines. It is located three blocks southeast of the Main Street/Market Square National Register Historic District. The neighborhood is composed of commercial office and retail buildings, financial institutions, county judicial courts, hotels, restaurants, clubs, parking lots, and garages. Within two blocks are the individually listed National Register properties, including Christ Church, the Houston Post-Dispatch Building, and the Kress Building.

Originally a Beaux Arts skyscraper, the building’s ornament was simplified during later alterations through 1938. The building is a flat-roofed and sheathed in brick and limestone. It was built in four phases: 1912, 1926, 1929, and 1938, and remains one of two Central Offices (Switching or Exchange ) that serve downtown Houston, the other being the Clay Central Office located eight blocks to the south. The building is ten stories high on the east side and nine stories on the west side, with a basement. The structure is cast-in-place concrete for all the stories except for the top three, which are steel-framed and with exterior non-bearing brick walls. Atop the flat roof are a mechanical room and a small penthouse, set back from the facades.

*South (Capitol Street) Elevation*

The first two floors have a dark granite and light marble pedestal base with the remainder of the two story façade sheathed in limestone blocks up to a simple cornice with volutes. On the east side, the 1912 building (then called the Preston Central Office) has a half-round arch entrance with a pediment and a pair of aluminum and glass

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entrance doors and transom. On the west side, the 1926 addition (then called the Fairfax Central Office)<sup>1</sup> has a smaller rectangular entrance that has been closed in and pediment atop. The adjacent first floor windows have a simple limestone casing and keystone ornament. The third floor and above the base are faced with a tan colored brick with applied medallions and wreath ornaments above the top windows of the left side building. The windows on this façade are glass block or louvered vents. The glass block windows infill is a later replacement intended to protect the equipment inside from the possible damage from the weather, like hurricanes, while providing natural daylight to the interior.

### *East (San Jacinto Street) Elevation*

The first two floors have a dark granite and light marble pedestal base with the remainder of the two story façade sheathed in limestone blocks up to a simple cornice with volutes. The first two floors windows have a simple limestone casing and keystone ornament. The third floor and above the base are faced with a tan colored brick with applied medallion ornaments above the top windows. The windows on this façade are glass block or louvered vents. At the seventh floor there are four sets of three 1-over-1 wood double-hung windows. The glass block windows infill is a later replacement intended to protect the equipment inside from the possible damage from the weather, like hurricanes, while providing natural daylight to the interior.

### *North and West elevation*

The north wall, where not abutting adjacent buildings, is at the property line that abuts the 1114 Texas Ave. building, and is plain tan brick with no openings. The west wall that faces a ten foot common alley is plain tan brick, with the previous windows having been bricked in.

### *Interior*

NOTE: As a functionally-related complex with two historically interconnected buildings, both buildings are being nominated to the National Register, although only the building at 1114 Texas Avenue is being rehabilitated as a tax credit project. The owner of the 1121 Capitol Street Building (AT&T) has not granted the applicant access to the interior of the building.

Renovation plans dated 1989, by the Southwestern Bell Engineering Department, show that all the floors are largely open and undivided, occupied by telephone switching equipment or computers with some accessory office and vacant areas.<sup>2</sup> In the basement there is a cable vault that connects the copper and fiber optics telephone lines that enter Capitol St. On the second floor, there is a cable vault that is connected to the second floor of the 1114 Texas Ave. building. The entrance lobby on the first floor, visible through the glass doors but not open to the public, retains its original steps width and chrome decorative handrails and terrazzo steps and floor.

### **1114 Texas Avenue (1950)**

The Moderne Style building at 1114 Texas has also retained its original design and materials with the exception of the front windows and the first two floors, which were sheathed in the 1970s with plain white marble and a cantilevered steel entrance canopy. This change coincided with the installation of 130 telecommunications metal conduits and cabling installed through the front two floors. The interior first floor elevator lobby retains its terrazzo floor, marble walls and simply decorated steel elevator doors and casings although some lobby wall areas have

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<sup>1</sup> Caughlin, William D., Corporate Archivist, AT&T Archives and History Center, San Antonio, TX.

<sup>2</sup> Wiese, Aaron. Previous building owner, September, 2014. Architectural plans of 1121 Capitol St.

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been altered. The other floors have simple elevator lobby finishes and the interior office walls have mostly been changed.

The 1950 building faces north on Texas Avenue, midblock between San Jacinto Street and Fannin Street, and is attached to the 1912 Capitol Central Office to the south. The rectangular-plan building is sixteen stories high with a basement, and measures 47.6 feet across the front, 126 feet deep, and 199 feet tall, with 6,000 square feet of space per floor. Atop the flat roof is a 24-foot-tall mechanical penthouse that houses the enclosed elevators equipment room. The steel-framed building features a buff brick facade. The exterior steel columns and beams are encased in concrete and the interior columns and beams encased in plaster that provide fireproofing for the steel.<sup>3</sup> The steel corrugated floor pans are doubled, one facing down and one facing up, onto which the concrete floor was poured. This created a void through which telephone communication wiring conduits could be placed and accessed by flush covered floor boxes.

Designed by the Houston architect J. Russ Baty in 1948 for the noted Houston developer, Jesse Jones, and completed in 1950, it is an example of the postwar Moderne style, similar in appearance to other high-rise buildings in Houston of the late 1930s and 1940s. The original two-story limestone cladding at the street level has been sheathed with marble for privacy and security reasons c.1980 when Southwestern Bell installed 130 telephone conduits in the basement, first, and second floors.<sup>4</sup> A cantilevered flat slab canopy was also installed over the entrance doors and the ground floor elevator lobby remodeled. The previous three over three double hung steel windows on the front elevation were replaced with aluminum framed fixed glass. On the façade, the aluminum Moderne spandrels between the windows and brick detailing of the front wall remain for the upper fourteen stories. The other three elevations retain the original brick cladding and painted galvanized steel two over two double hung windows. The original steel fire escape at the alley remains in place.

### *North (Texas Avenue) Elevation*

The front elevation faces north on Texas Avenue and is classically composed of a tripartite base, shaft and simple cornice and the fenestration above the first two floors is symmetrical about the vertical axis. The first two floors are sheathed in white marble slabs over the original limestone panels and granite base and are windowless, placed near the time that the telephone conduits were installed on the first two floors around 1980. The closing of the front windows on the first and second floor is a physical record of Southwestern Bell's need to protect the 130 telecommunication conduits from public view and the weather. The original thirteen-foot-wide by thirteen-foot-high entrance opening is framed with an anodized black aluminum and glass storefront with a pair of aluminum and glass doors. An eight-foot by thirteen-foot cantilevered canopy, installed approximately in 1980, extends over the sidewalk.

The upper fourteen stories are sheathed in a buff running bond brick with extruded anodized black fixed glass windows, which replaced the three-over-three double hung windows without altering the original window openings. The two exterior brick piers and one central pier, at the column lines, have a subtle but visible one inch by four foot projection from the building line. The two bays of three windows continue uninterrupted up to the top floor and parallel the vertical sweep of the overall building proportion. In turn, each of the three windows and geometric

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<sup>3</sup> Database of Architectural Records: Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library. Original 1948 architectural plans and construction photographs.

<sup>4</sup> Dey, Jim. Interviews -Southwestern Bell Telephone, Architect, August 23, 2014 and Thompson, Lance. Southwestern Bell telephone, Manager- Construction and Engineering. Worked at SWBT, 1114 Texas Avenue, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. August 23, 2014 and September 24, 2014.

## Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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profiled cast aluminum spandrels form a continuous vertical ribbon within the two bays that parallel the same vertical sweep as the two bays and the vertical proportion of the façade. The vertical proportion of the building, then, is repeated by the uninterrupted vertical sweep of the three columns, the two window bays, the three window/spandrel bands at each bay, and the two one foot three inch piers between the three windows.

There is a limestone lintel over each of the top windows and three fluted limestone stone plaques. At the top, the simple cornice ends with a taller brick wall and with a two foot six inch limestone band and coping. The enclosed elevator mechanical penthouse, recessed sixteen feet from the front of the building is clad with buff running bond brick, with vertical accent dark bands of brick that continue the width of the three windows below. At the right half of the mechanical penthouse are three openings in a brick frame, the same width as the windows below that allow air flow for the cooling towers.

### *West Elevation (Alley)*

At the two story base, the front marble cladding returns four feet. The remainder of the original limestone and granite base continues horizontally for another eighteen feet, with dark colored brick spandrels between the first two columns of windows all the way to the top. The original two-over-two double hung galvanized steel windows remain. The same buff colored running bond brick covers this elevation. The original galvanized steel fire escape stairs remains. At the top, the simple cornice ends for the first twenty feet the same two foot six inch limestone band and coping as in the front. There is a fluted limestone stone plaque. The mechanical penthouse, at the cooling towers has four openings in a brick frame that line up with the window lines below.

### *South Elevation*

The abutting 1912 building covers the first ten floors of the building. Above that the same running bond buff brick clads the wall and there are four two over two, double hung galvanized steel windows per floor for the top four floors. The mechanical penthouse is brick clad with contrasting dark brick over the three existing openings.

### *East Elevation*

The first twenty-foot return on the east elevation is similar to that on the west elevation, with four windows at the top floors, one per bay and with dark contrasting spandrel bands between the windows. At the top, the simple cornice ends for the first twenty feet the same two foot six inch limestone band and coping as in the front. There is a fluted limestone stone plaque. The remainder of the east wall is the same running bond buff brick with original two over two double hung galvanized steel windows.

### *Interior*

The primary public space on the ground floor is the elevator lobby, which has retained the original terrazzo floor and the marble-clad east and west walls. The rear wall opposite the entrance has been covered with painted sheetrock. The original marble curved casing around the elevator doors remain as do the ribbed faced metal hoistway doors and mail chute. The two elevator walls are clad in marble strips that are more recent, as are the wood boxed columns and ceiling beams. The ceiling is painted gypsum board, and the added cantilevered canopy structure is visible. Behind the lobby wall, the telephone conduits continue vertically to the second floor where they bend ninety degrees and continue, ten feet high, through the west bay of the building into the 1912 building. The telecommunication conduits are galvanized steel until they make the horizontal run on the second floor, where the conduits become Schedule 40 PVC pipe. At the common wall, the conduits that penetrate this wall are again

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galvanized steel. The conduits contain lead clad paper or fabric insulated copper telephone wiring and fiber optic cables (see photo 22).<sup>5</sup>

The basement houses mechanical equipment, such as the chillers and boilers. In 1980, Southwestern Bell installed 130 telephone conduits to provide service to downtown Houston. The conduits enter the building from under the sidewalk, and turn up vertically to enter the first floor.

Twelve of the sixteen floors, for a total of 72,000 square feet, were originally dedicated Southwestern Bell operations, with the others proposed as rental office space. The typical sixteen floors have either bare floors, carpet, or vinyl tile, with plaster or gypsum board walls, metal door frames and solid wood doors (some with glass), and acoustic tile ceilings. Each floor has large areas of open space with some enclosed offices. The interior walls have undergone a number of alterations through the years as the uses changed. The elevator doors and frames, fire hose cabinet, and mail chute are original on all the floors. Additional spaces typical for each floor are the mechanical room, the original interior stairs, and the granite-clad walls and partitions in the bathrooms, which are accessible from the intermediate landings at the stairs at half stories below the main floors. On the sixth floor are eight telephone line testing tables and on the eleventh floor are seven operator switchboards. The penthouse at the roof contains the elevators mechanical equipment and the now removed air conditioning cooling towers.

Both the original drawings and present conditions show large open areas and smaller accessory rooms at the periphery of each floor. This mostly open space configuration lent itself to the functional bullpen arrangement of department switchboards, desks, and files. Other distinguishing functional characteristics are the unique double floor pans that provided communication raceways. Numerous floor flush mounted electrical and communication boxes are placed on each floor at the open spaces providing flexibility of layout. An enclosed pneumatic tube system was installed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup> floors.

### *Integrity*

The 1912, with substantial additions through 1938, retains a good degree of integrity despite its windows alterations that were undertaken in an effort to better house and protect the telephone equipment. The original granite pedestal base, limestone, brick, cornice with volutes, arched entrance and pediment, window casements and keystones, medallions, remain and still convey the Beaux Arts style and pre modern feeling of the early 20th century buildings common in local institutional architecture of the time.

All elevations of the 1950 building, with the exception of the front two stories and windows above, retain their original materials and design. The alteration of the bottom two floors façade is the result of the installation of the telephone conduits which required that they be secured from view and protected from the weather, and as such has acquired significance in continuing the technological function of the telephone building.<sup>6</sup> The replacement of the front windows above is mitigated by not having altered the original windows rough openings, by the high level of the other extant materials and sufficiently retaining overall design and feeling of the Moderne aesthetic. Despite modifications to the ground floor entrance and replacement of its front windows, the 1114 Texas building stands as a good local example of modernistic skyscraper design typically employed in the immediate post WWII period, with a restrained modernist alteration.

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<sup>5</sup> Davis, Trey. Southwestern Bell Telephone, Telecommunication Service Technician, August 13, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Dey, Jim. Interviews -Southwestern Bell Telephone, Architect, August 23, 2014 and Thompson, Lance. Southwestern Bell Telephone, Manager- Construction and Engineering. Thompson worked at SWBT, 1114 Texas Avenue, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. interviews of August 23, 2014 and September 24, 2014.

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### Statement of Significance

The Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office in downtown Houston, Texas, is a functionally-related complex with two connected buildings: the Commercial Style main office at 1121 Capitol Street (1912, with additions through 1938; originally known as the "Preston Central Office"), and the Late Moderne office expansion building at 1114 Texas Avenue (1950). The earliest portion of the complex was built in 1912 by the Southwestern Telegraph and Telephone Company (hereafter "Southwestern Bell"), and served until the 1950s as the company's local office building. It was also a customer service center, as well as a switching station that provided service to central Houston. Like many telephone offices throughout the United States, the original building was enlarged periodically (three times through the late 1930s) in order to better serve an ever-growing customer base, as telephone service became increasingly commonplace. In 1946, Houston developer Jesse Jones purchased property on the north side of the block to construct a building with the intention of leasing it to Southwestern Bell. In 1963, Jones' company transferred the property to his non-profit Houston Endowment, which sold the building to Southwestern Bell in 1973. Currently owned by AT&T, the 1912 building has continually served as telephone office, and presently houses switchboards and fiber optic cabling for the downtown area. The 1950 building housed additional employees, including plant engineers, administrators, marketing, training, and accounting staff, and long distance switchboard operators. It is currently slated for rehabilitation for use as a hotel, utilizing federal tax credits. The buildings are nominated to the National Register under Criterion A in the area of Communication for their central role in providing telephone service to the central business district of Houston, Texas, through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In June 2015, the NPS approved Part 1 of the federal rehabilitation tax credit application, certifying that both buildings were eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A.

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The conventional telephone was first patented by Alexander Graham Bell in March 1876. In July 1877, Gardiner Greene Hubbard created the first telephone company in the United States, the Bell Telephone Company, which later evolved into AT&T. The first Texas telephone exchange opened for business in Galveston in August 1879, and soon afterward another system was established in Houston. The next development was connecting individual exchanges by long distance lines, and in 1883 the first state's long distance line linked Galveston and Houston. It is generally accepted that in 1882, the first PBX board (private branch exchange switchboard) in the United States was installed in the Capitol Hotel, later named the Rice Hotel in Houston, two blocks from the 1114 Texas Avenue building.<sup>7</sup> Southwestern Bell Telephone, a part of the Bell System of telephone companies (also known as "Baby Bells"), traces its roots to consolidation of a number of regional telephone companies that by 1912 provided local exchange telephone services in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas and portions of Illinois. The company was headquartered in St. Louis.

### *Construction and Use of the 1912 Southwestern Telegraph and Telephone Company Building*

A telephone exchange, also called a central office (CO), is a building used by telecommunication companies to house switching equipment needed to direct and process telephone calls and data traffic. Before the early 1900s, telephone operators had to manually switch (connect) all of the calls in their exchange, but mechanical switching eventually made local calls connected by human operators unnecessary. In 1912, the Southwestern Telegraph and Telephone Company built a seven-story building to house its operations in downtown Houston, calling it the "Preston Main Office." The building also housed the Preston telephone exchange (prefix "PR") operations. It is presently the oldest operating central office exchange in the Houston metropolitan area. A two-story addition was built to the west in 1926, and named the Fairfax Central Office. This central office served the Fairfax (prefix "FA") telephone exchange area. Both the original building and its additions were designed to accommodate additional stories on top, and in 1929, four additional floors were added to the Fairfax Office. In 1938, the final three-story

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<sup>7</sup> Whitten, Frank and Kleiner, Diana. "Telephone Service," *Handbook of Texas Online* .

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addition was built over both offices. In addition to being the Central Office switching exchange for most of Houston, the Preston Office was the “Main Office,” housing administrative and engineering staff, the billing and payment services department, and customer service department to handle new accounts. The building also housed the switchboard (central office) functions, for all of Houston until 1958.<sup>8</sup> Until at least the late 1950s, the building with its additions was called the Preston-Fairfax Exchange Building. The building presently houses the switchboards and fiber optic cabling for downtown Houston. Serving as a “main office” in addition to being a central office, this building also houses the company’s management team for the Houston metropolitan area.

Through the 1960s, central offices additionally could house administrative, marketing, accounting and billing, plant, engineering, and telephone switching operators for customer information and assistance and for “toll calls” (long distance) for the area, or district, in a city that the exchanges serviced. A telephone exchange, or number prefix, is the first three numbers of a telephone number, but not including the area code. By 1925 Houston had six telephone exchanges; Preston, Fairfax-Capitol, Hadley, Wayside, Taylor and Park Place. In 1958 Houston had 27 exchanges.<sup>9</sup>

Architect Irvin Ray Timlin, (1880-1955) spent his entire career with the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, where he was the chief architect during the company’s rapid expansion in the first half of the twentieth century. From the 1910s to the 1940s, he designed or co-designed 140 buildings for the company across the midwest and southwest United States. Timlin joined the Bell Telephone Company in 1904 as a draftsman in Kansas City, then architect in 1911, moved to St. Louis, headquarters of Bell’s Telephone Southwestern System in 1917 and retired in 1945. Timlin mostly designed low-rise Central Offices, and although credited as associate architect for a number of company high rises, other larger architectural firms were their architects of record, with Timlin being the company’s architectural representative.

### *Postwar Developments*

World War II redirected the resources of the Bell System, as the demands of government and military for telephone service at home and abroad took precedence over commercial and residential development. The major divisions of the Bell System – AT&T Long Lines (interconnected local exchanges and long distance calling services), Western Electrical Company (equipment manufacturing firm), Bell Labs (research and development) and the Bell Operating Companies (providing local exchange telephone services) -- diverted their labor and materials for the war effort. The end the war released the Bell System to satisfy the pent-up residential and commercial demand that had accumulated over the war years. The engineering organization, both at area and general levels, expanded to help meet the demand. The ability to expand service rapidly could not keep up with customer expectations: It took a decade before the held-order lists finally dwindled and same-day service in emergencies became a possibility.<sup>10</sup>

Houston grew dramatically after the war, supported by the wartime construction of petrochemical refineries and manufacturing and shipbuilding plants along the ship channel. In 1948, several unincorporated areas were annexed into the city limits, which more than doubled the city's size. The availability of air conditioning encouraged many companies to relocate to Houston.<sup>11</sup> The postwar transition to a civilian economy, along with the pent-up demand, required Southwestern Bell expansion and new facilities for the installation of additional and more efficient

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<sup>8</sup> *Greater Houston Telephone Directory, 1958*. Southwestern Bell Telephone Company; Caughlin, William D., Corporate Archivist, AT&T Archives and History Center, San Antonio, TX.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Park Jr., David G. *Good Connections: A Century of Service by the Men and Women of Southwestern Bell*. Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1984.

<sup>11</sup> Wikipedia, Houston. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Houston>

## Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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telephone systems, as in the downtown Houston district. By the end of 1946, Southwestern Bell operations in Texas included more than 930,000 telephones in 247 exchanges. Houston was the largest service area with 169,068 telephones, followed by: Dallas, 147,497; San Antonio, 85,323; Fort Worth, 73,566; and Austin, 34,030. Outside these metropolitan areas, 349 other Texas telephone companies with 794 exchanges operated a total of 182,704 telephones. Southwestern Bell at the time had 20,000 employees in Texas and handled an average of 7,165,000 local and 130,000 long distance calls every day.<sup>12</sup>

### *Construction and Use of the 1950 Extension*

Southwestern Bell responded to need for increased capacity by expanding its existing Fairfax-Capitol exchange that had connected and serviced the downtown Houston district since the early 1900s. Instead of building a costly new exchange elsewhere, the company eyed the lot directly behind and abutting their existing exchange. In 1946 developer Jesse Jones (1874-1956) purchased the property to construct a building for and lease it to Southwestern Bell.<sup>13</sup> Jones, the largest developer in the area and owner of nearly 100 other properties, purchased the property in 1946, and as was his practice of building, owning and leasing his properties, offered to lease it to Southwestern Bell instead of selling it to them. This deal was perhaps mutually beneficial, freeing the telephone company from constructing and managing a new building, thus freeing capital for other purposes, such as expanding the telephone infrastructure to serve a growing customer base. The two buildings were connected by doorways (now bricked in) at the first, ninth, tenth and eleventh floors of the 1114 Texas building. In 1963, Jesse Jones' company transferred the property to his non-profit Houston Endowment, Inc. In 1973, Houston Endowment sold the building to Southwestern Bell. In 1998, Southwestern Bell sold the property to the developer Aaron Wiese and it has remained vacant to this date.<sup>14</sup>

By the 1920s, Southwestern Bell had been organized into five main departments: Traffic, Plant, Commercial, Engineering, and Accounting. All of these departments (except for the inside and outside Plant crews, typically located in other industrial facilities) were present in the 1121 Capitol and 1114 Texas buildings during the period of significance:

- *Traffic* was composed of (switchboard) telephone operators that handled long distance calls and answered customer calls for phone number information. Some of these operators were part of the assignment group that received orders for new service from the plant department and who then forwarded the assignment to the directory department for directory listing and to the accounting department for billing.
- *Plant* was responsible for the construction and installation of the telephone lines and equipment in the public and private right-of-ways and inside the commercial, institutional and residential buildings, and for the maintenance and repair of these.
- *Commercial* handled marketing and commercial, institutional and residential customer sales and service, billing and collections, and dealt with customer problems.
- *Engineering* was responsible for designing an economical way to provide service.
- *Accounting* kept the company books and other records and client billing.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Whitten, Frank and Kleiner, Diana. "Telephone Service," *Handbook of Texas Online* .

<sup>13</sup> In a few years he was the largest developer in the area and was responsible for most of Houston's major prewar construction. Besides owning nearly 100 buildings in Houston, Jones also built structures in Fort Worth, Dallas, and New York City.

<sup>14</sup> Buckalew, Burr. StarTex Title Company, 1177 West Loop South, Suite 1475, Houston Texas.

<sup>15</sup> Park Jr., David G. *Good Connections: A Century of Service by the Men and Women of Southwestern Bell*. Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1984.

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Based on the original 1948 construction floor plans, each floor of the 1950 building is 6,000 square feet. Southwestern Bell occupied 72,000 square feet for the first twelve floors.<sup>16</sup> Where the rooms or spaces are labeled, they indicate the following functions and departments:

- Basement: Mechanical equipment for a chilled water system and for heating, an electrical transformer vault, emergency power generator.
- Ground floor: Employment office, Customer service
- 2<sup>nd</sup> floor: Traffic, lockers
- 3<sup>rd</sup> floor: Traffic and Commercial
- 4<sup>th</sup> floor: Dining and large lounge, Traffic, Training
- 5<sup>th</sup> floor: Traffic and Commercial, District Manager
- 6<sup>th</sup> floor: Commercial, Listening-in Conference room, Commercial Service Observation
- 7<sup>th</sup> floor: District Plant Supervisor, Employment, Training
- 8<sup>th</sup> floor: Assignment Operators.
- 9<sup>th</sup> floor: Long Distance Traffic, PBX, TWX instructors, Training, Local District Traffic Superintendent; Local District Clerks
- 10<sup>th</sup> floor: Lounge, Movie Room, Training Room, Traffic
- 11<sup>th</sup> floor: Lounge, Training Room, Traffic
- 12<sup>th</sup> floor: Engineering
- 13<sup>th</sup> through 16<sup>th</sup> floors: Office tenant rental, unassigned

From 1948 until 1980, when the previous uses were being relocated to other facilities, the building at 1114 Texas Avenue provided essential services to the urgently required rapidly growing and vital telecommunication needs of the expanding downtown businesses.

Architect J. Russ Baty AIA (1897-1973) was born in Palestine, Texas. Upon graduating from Rice University in 1919, Baty worked with architect Alfred C. Finn, with whom he designed the Lamar Hotel Annex, the top 13 floors of the Commerce Building, the Oil and Gas Building, the San Jacinto Hotel and several other Houston projects.<sup>17</sup> After 1942, Baty went to work for developer Jesse Jones, and designed a number of Houston parking garages and commercial buildings such as the Wagner Hardware building (1946), Haverty's Furniture Store (1949), the Theater and Hotel Building (1957), Taylor St and Seventh St., Fort Worth, TX, MacGregor Park National Bank, the Cozy Building and the Pasadena Garden Commercial Building at Park Avenue<sup>18</sup> Baty's only other extant major building, the 18-story Houston Club Building (1955) at 811 Rusk Avenue is modernist, but in the International Style.<sup>19</sup> The Southwestern Bell Telephone Building shares many elements of the high rise Moderne work of Finn and others of the period. The vertical proportions of the Southwestern Bell building are repeated in the uninterrupted vertical sweep of the two window bays and the brick cladding. The windows with the cast aluminum spandrels form a darker band than the buff brick cladding, adding to the vertical sweep. The geometric motif of the spandrels is Moderne, as are the fluted limestone plaques at the top. In Houston, the City National Bank Building (1947), 1001 McKinney Street, Houston, Texas by Alfred C. Finn, Baty's previous employer, reflects the Moderne style

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<sup>16</sup> Database of Architectural Records: Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library. Original 1948 architectural plans and construction photographs.

<sup>17</sup> *The Houston Chronicle*, "Last Garage Most Unusual, Architect Baty Has 27 Years Experience," Tuesday, July 6, 1954 Section A, Page 15.

<sup>18</sup> Slater, Gene. Interviewed by Louis J. Marchiafava, Houston Public Library Digital Archives, July 22, 1991. Draftsman, worked with Alfred Finn and J. Russ Baty.

<sup>19</sup> Database of Architectural Records: Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library. Original 1948 tectural plans and construction photographs.

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elements in Baty's 1114 Texas Avenue building. The fenestration of the building above the limestone base is symmetrical about its vertical axis. The building above the base, due to its height is vertical in proportion, as are the uninterrupted vertical bands of windows and brick cladding. The windows have geometric decorated spandrels between them, darker in shade than the adjacent buff brick, strengthening the vertical line.

### *Rehabilitation and Future Use*

The 1121 Capitol Central Office building, owned and occupied by AT&T, is not part of the rehabilitation project underway for building at 1114 Texas Avenue, which is being converted to a 154-room Hyatt Place hotel. In the basement, a pool and laundry room and offices are planned. The ground floor will have the reception area, lounge and dining facilities. The 130 penetrating telephone conduits at this floor will be enclosed behind sheetrock walls per ATT's stipulations. The second floor will have two meeting rooms and exercise room, as well as the active communications conduits behind a sheetrock wall for privacy and security. The third through sixteenth floors will provide eleven guest rooms per floor. At the ground floor lobby, the original terrazzo floor will be uncovered and restored. The original marble lobby wall on the east side will be retained. The west marble wall panels will be relocated to the elevator walls and the walls surrounding the conduits. The original elevator hoistway doors and jambs and mail chute will be restored. The original fifteen foot high plaster elevator lobby ceiling has been replaced with a later suspended ceiling, which will be removed. The first two floors with the marble slab sheathing and the cantilevered entrance overhang are proposed to be retained, with a new storefront glass opening to match the original in size and proportion.

### *Conclusion*

Despite alterations, both the 1121 Capitol and 1114 Texas Avenue buildings maintain a good degree of integrity. They are nominated to the National Register under Criterion A in the area of Communications at the local level of significance, as a complex that served an extraordinarily important role of providing telephone service to central Houston customers – including numerous national and international corporations headquartered there - throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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- Davis, Trey. Southwestern Bell Telephone, Telecommunication Service Technician, August 13, 2014.
- Dey, Jim. Southwestern Bell Telephone, Architect, August 23, 2014.
- Gardner, Ronald. Worked at 1114 Texas Ave. from 1969 – 1984 as a stationary engineer. June 9, 2014.
- Holliday, Kate, PhD. Associate Professor and Director of the David Dillon Center for Texas Architecture, School of Architecture, University of Texas at Arlington; Emails of June 24 and 26, 2014.

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Draftsman, worked with Alfred Finn and J. Russ Baty.

Thompson, Lance. Southwestern Bell Telephone, Manager- Construction and Engineering. Worked at SWB,1114  
Texas Avenue, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. August 23, 2014 and September 24, 2014.

**Building Plans, Photographs, Title search:**

Buckalew, Burr. StarTex Title Company, 1177 West Loop South, Suite 1475, Houston Texas.

Caughlin, William D., CA, Corporate Archivist. AT&T Archives and History Center, San Antonio, TX.

Database of Architectural Records: Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library. Original 1948  
architectural plans and construction photographs.

Wiese, Aaron. Previous building owner , September, 2014. Architectural plans of 1114 Texas Ave. renovations,  
1973-1986, and 1121 Capitol St. renovations.

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Google Earth, accessed December 14, 2015.



**Coordinates**

1. 1121 Capitol Street  
Longitude: 29.758538°      Latitude: -95.361462°
2. 1114 Texas Avenue  
Longitude: 29.758874°      Latitude: -95.361319°

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The boundary includes two internally-connected buildings fronting parallel streets. The legal parcel for the building at 1114 Texas Avenue is recorded by the Harris County Appraisal District as “TRS 8 9A & 11A BLK 70 SSBB.” The legal parcel for the building at 1121 Capitol Street is recorded by the Harris County Appraisal District as “LTS 1 & 2 & TRS 3A & 11 BLK 70 SSBB”

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary includes all the property historically associated with the nominated buildings.

Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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The Preston (now Capitol) Main Office and Exchange Building, circa 1912. View from southeast.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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The Preston (now Capitol) Main Office with the first addition (known as the Fairfax Exchange), c.1926. Houston patrons that wanted to place an order for telephone service entered at the arched entrance. View from southeast.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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The Preston-Fairfax Main Office, circa 1926. View from Southwest.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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The Preston Fairfox Main Office with the third and fourth final additions, circa 1938. View from southeast.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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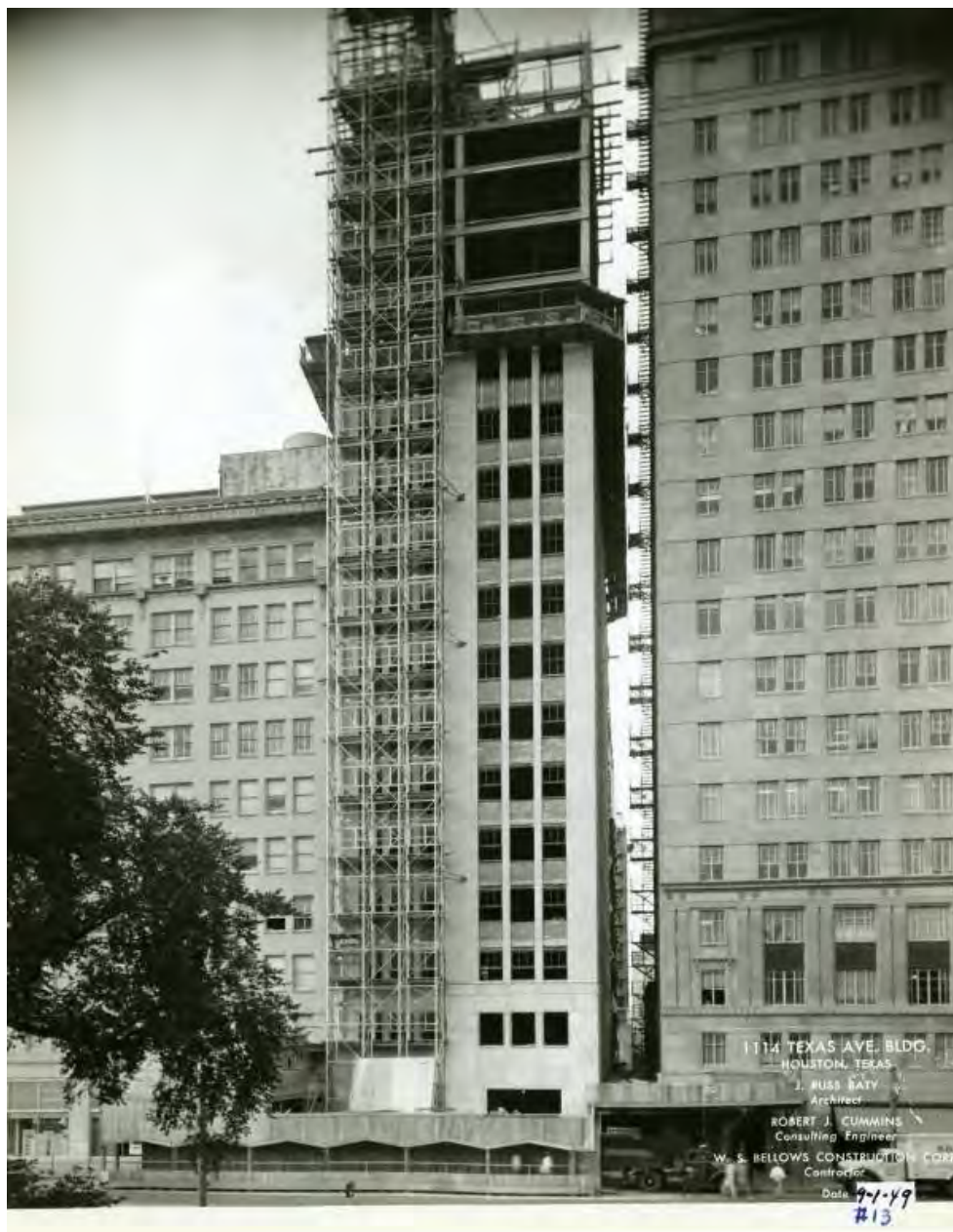
South view of 1114 Texas Avenue under construction, c.1949. The building in the foreground is the SWB Capitol Central Office Building.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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North view during construction of 1114 Texas Avenue, showing materials lift at left and exterior suspended platform at right.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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1114 Texas Avenue, upon completion, 1950.

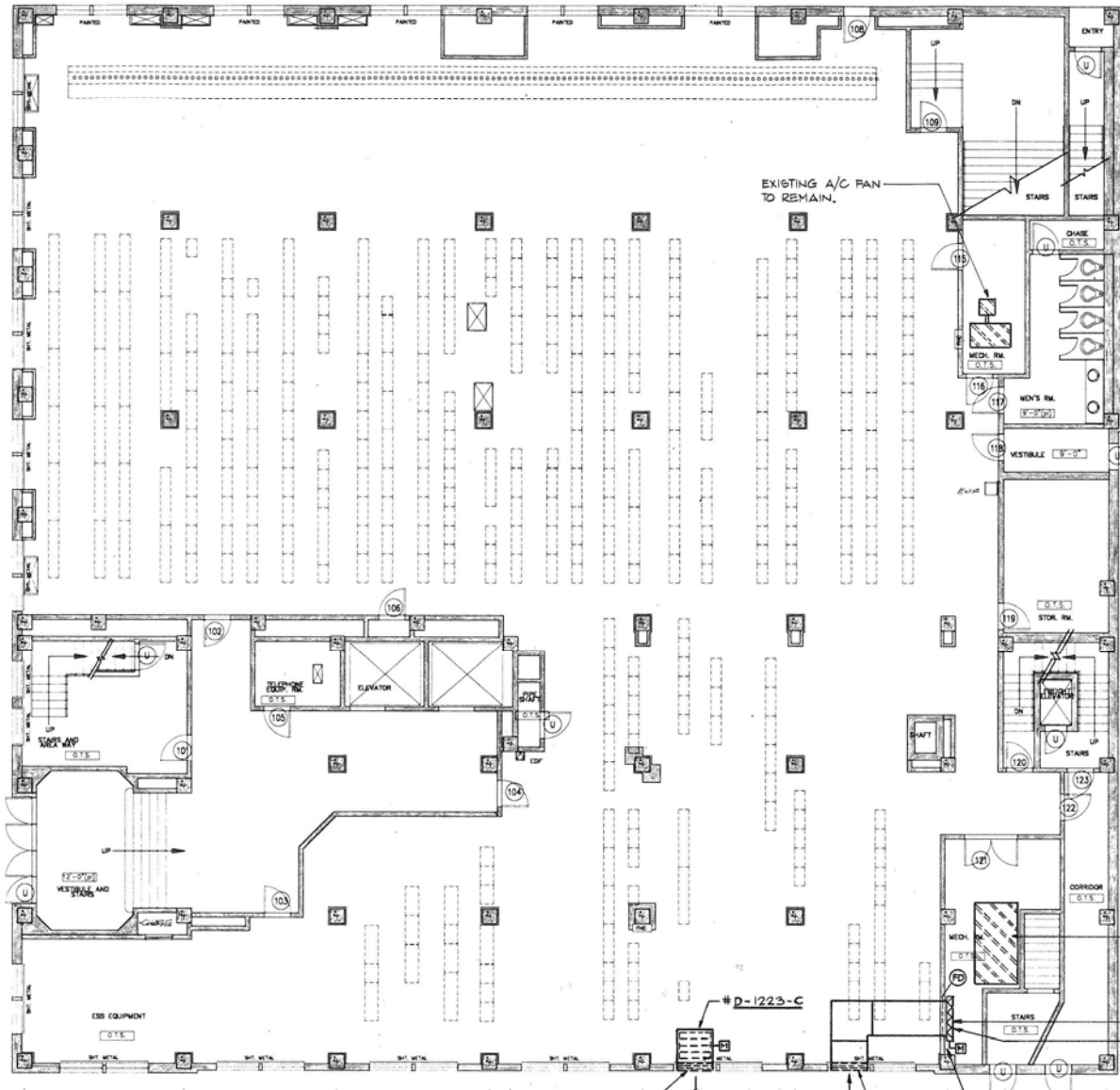


Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

First Floor

1121 Capitol Central Office, SWB Engineering Dept. drawings 1984.

Capitol Street Entrance looby at left and telephone switching equipment and computers

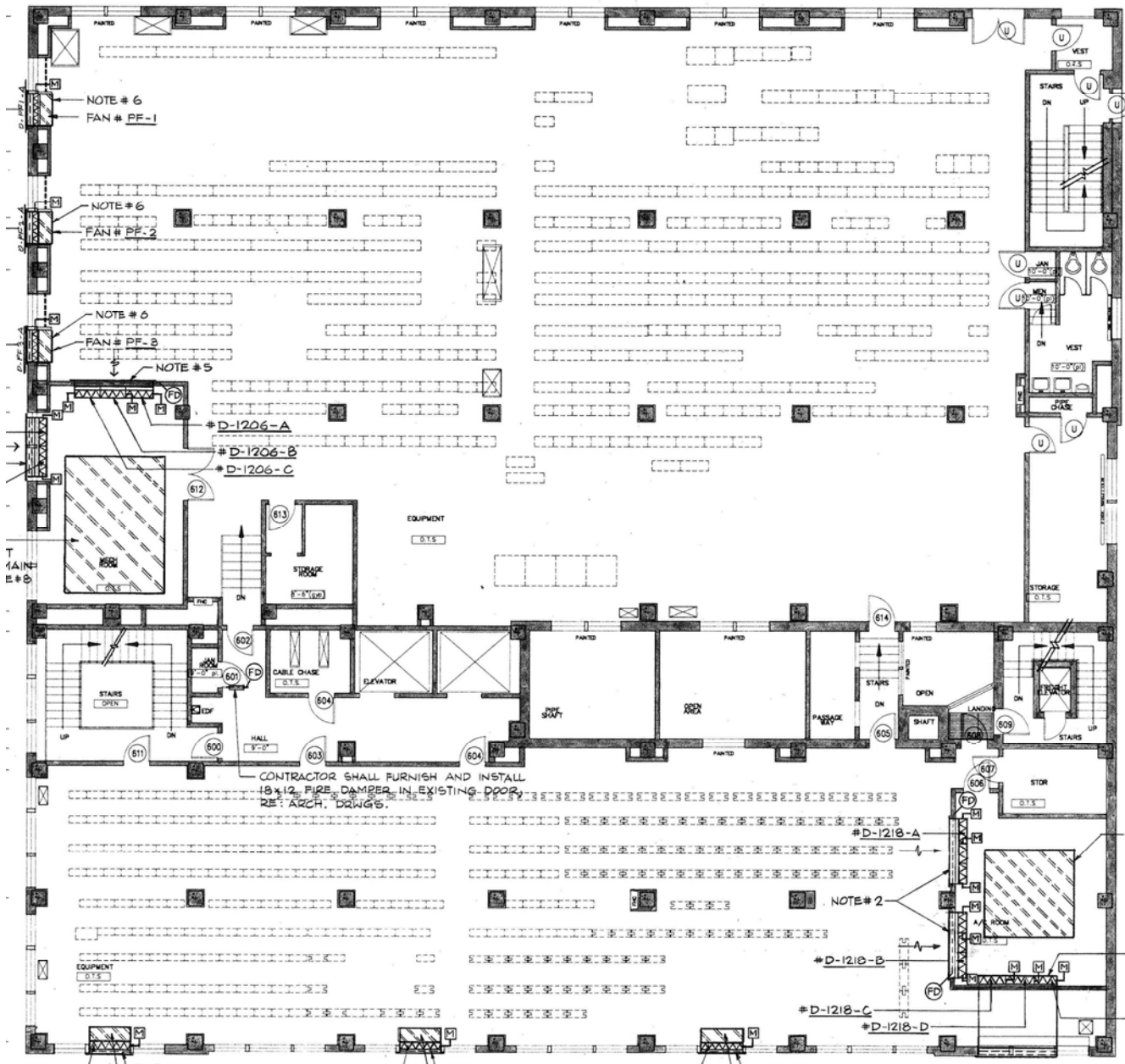




Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Sixth Floor

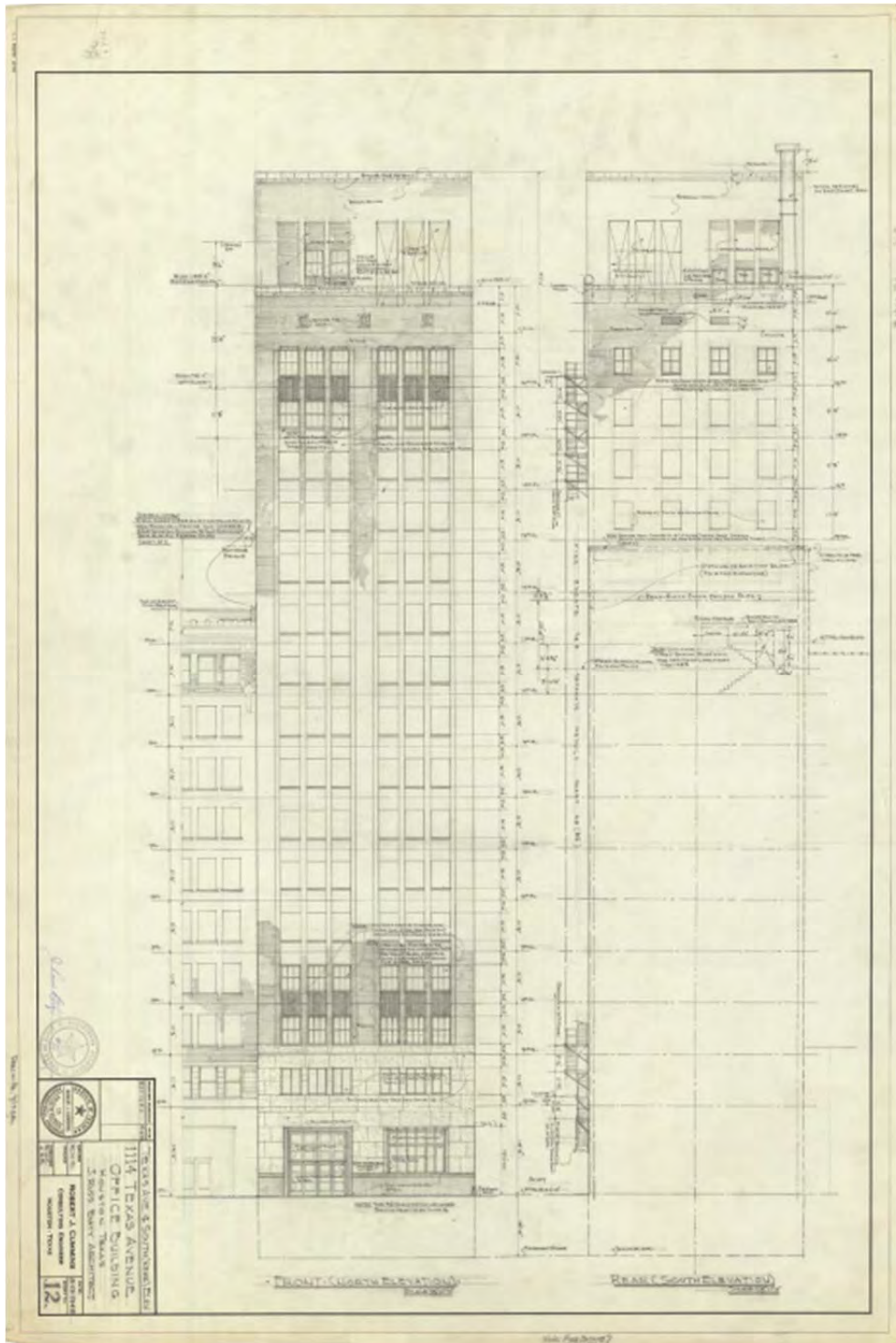
1121 Capitol Central Office, SWB Engineering Dept. drawings 1984.  
Telephone switching equipment and vacant space, accessory offices.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

1411 Texas Avenue.

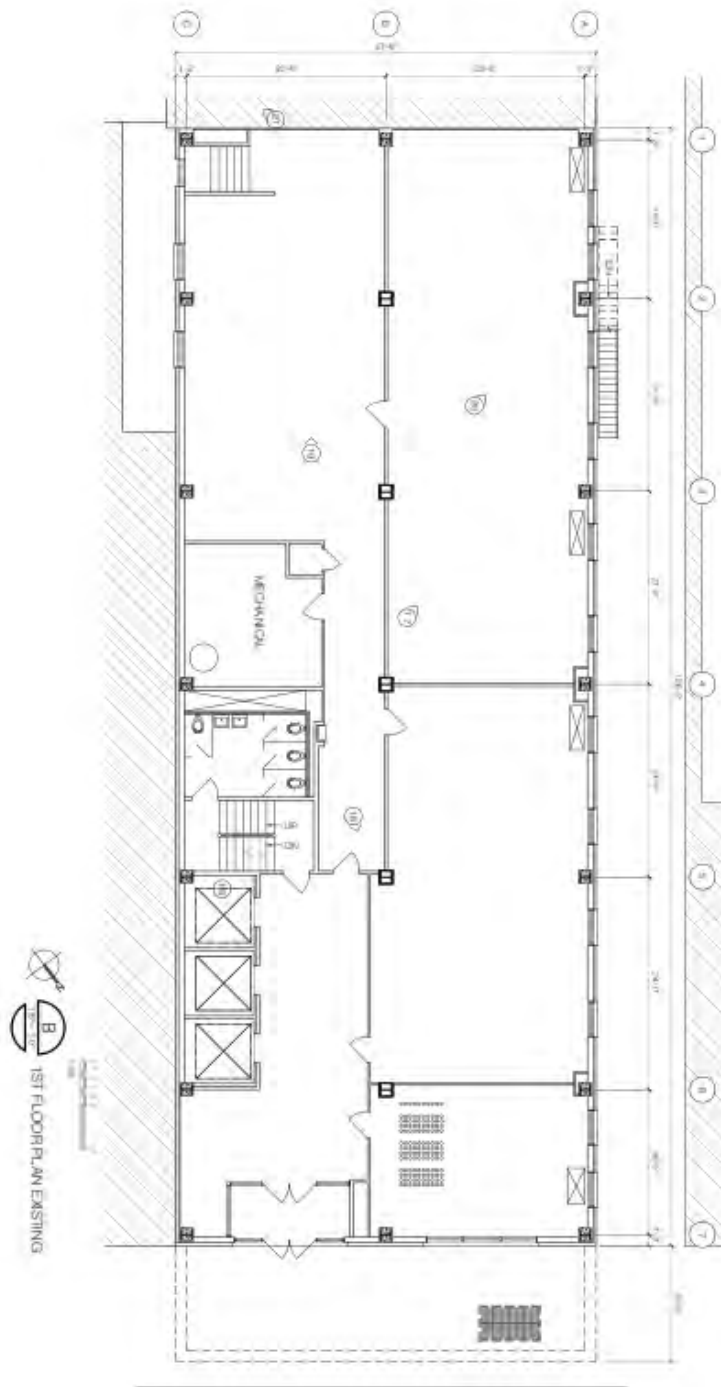
Front and rear elevations; Construction drawings, sheets 12, dated 8-19-1948. J. Russ Baty, Architect.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

1411 Texas Avenue.

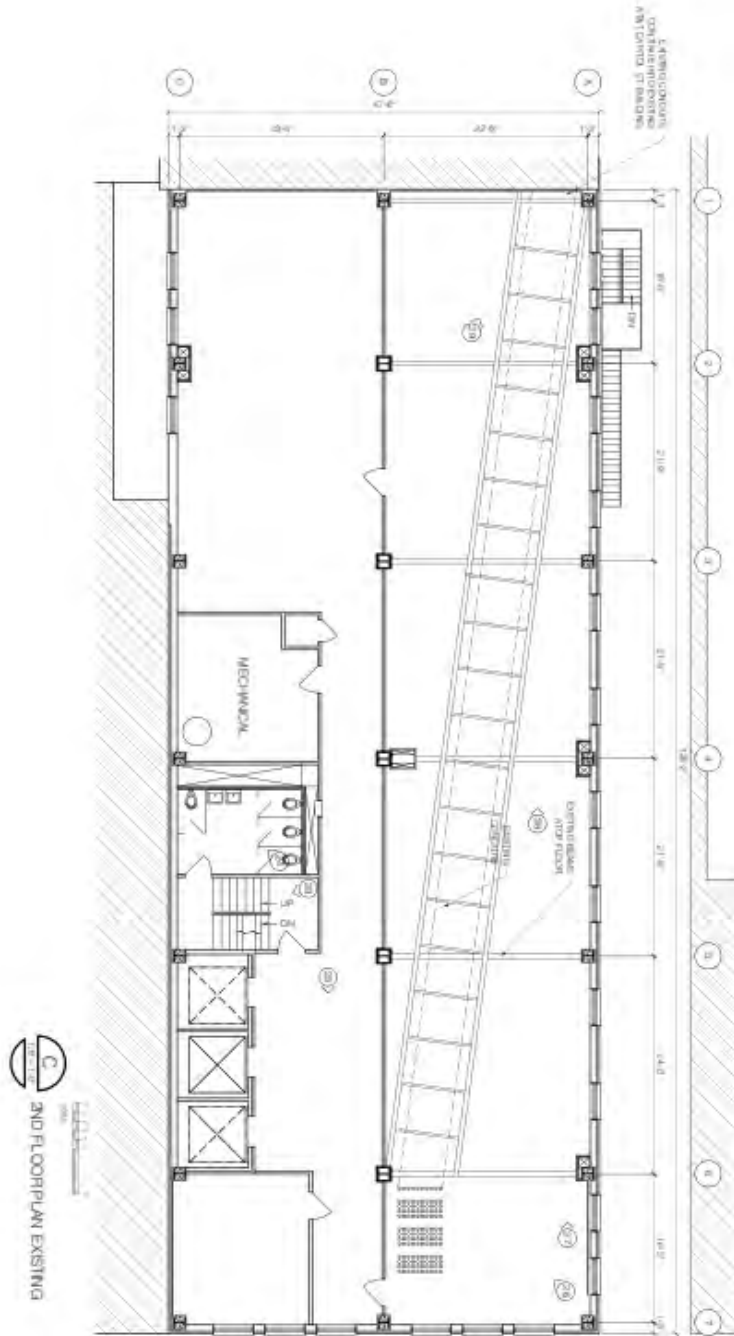
First Floor, Existing conditions. 130 Conduits shown at lower right. Stair at rear accesses patio that leads to door at Fairfax-Capitol Exchange building.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

1411 Texas Avenue.

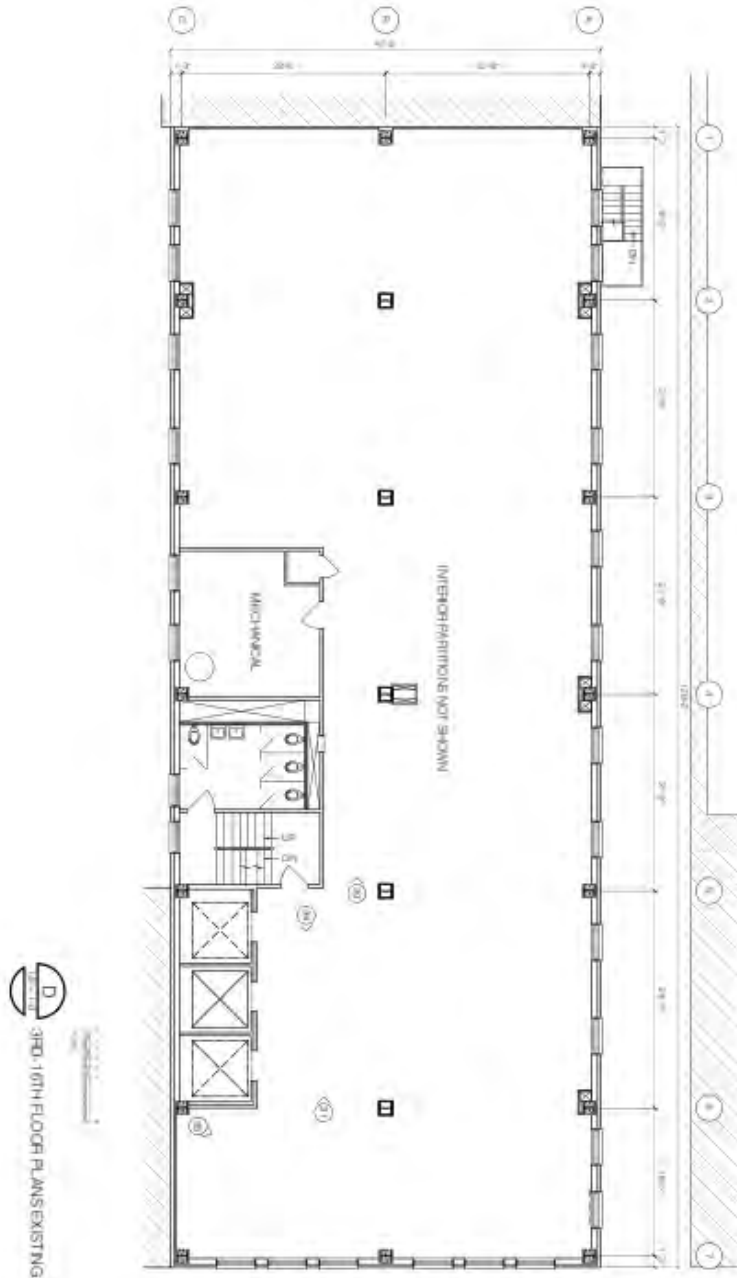
Second Floor, Existing conditions. 4" Conduits continue the length of the building and enter the Exchange building at the rear.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

1411 Texas Avenue.

Third through Sixteenth Floors, Existing conditions. Interior partitions vary per floor. Common core in all the floors shown.



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1912 Central Office, originally "Preston Central Office"  
Local operators. ca. 1918  
credit: AT&T Archives and History Center



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

1912 Central Office, originally "Preston Central Office"

View of first floor public lobby showing contract order clerks with patrons applying for service. ca. 1918  
credit: AT&T Archives and History Center

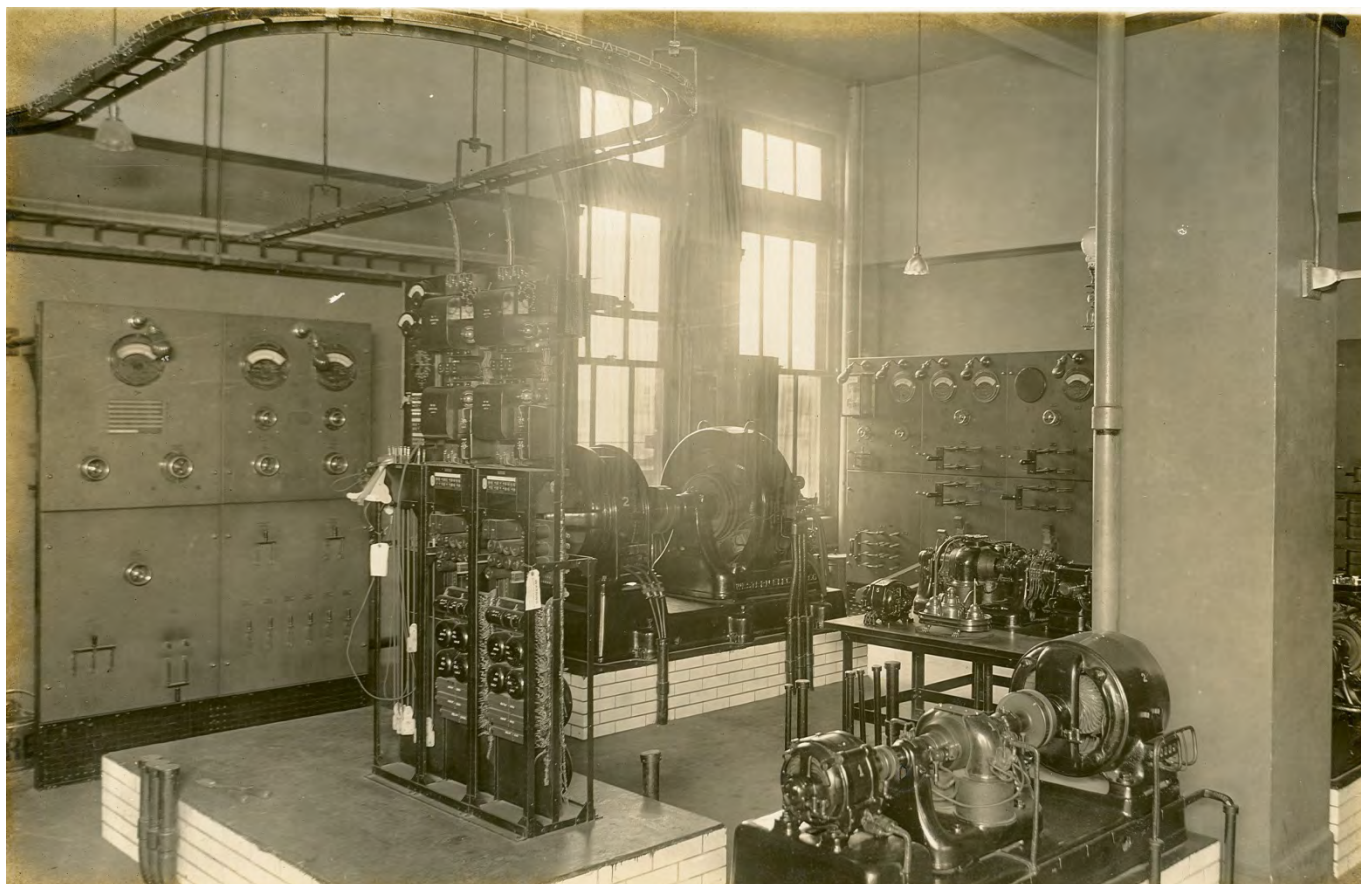


Interior view of public lobby at Preston exchange building, showing contract order clerks with patrons applying for service.

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1912 Central Office, originally "Preston Central Office"  
Battery room. ca. 1918  
credit: AT&T Archives and History Center

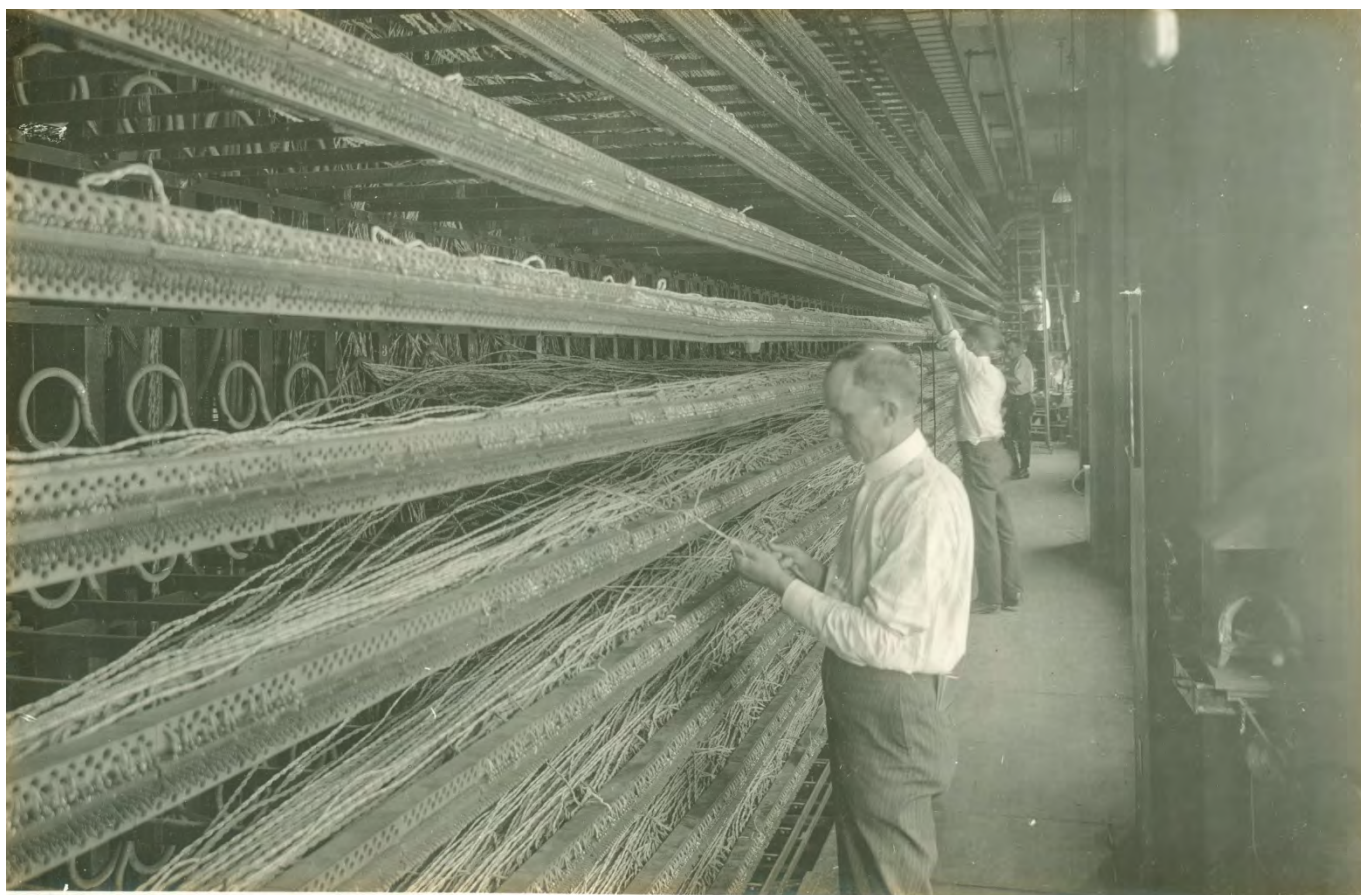


Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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1912 Central Office, originally "Preston Central Office"

View of typical main distribution frame showing cross connecting wires and a workman placing them. ca. 1918  
credit: AT&T Archives and History Center

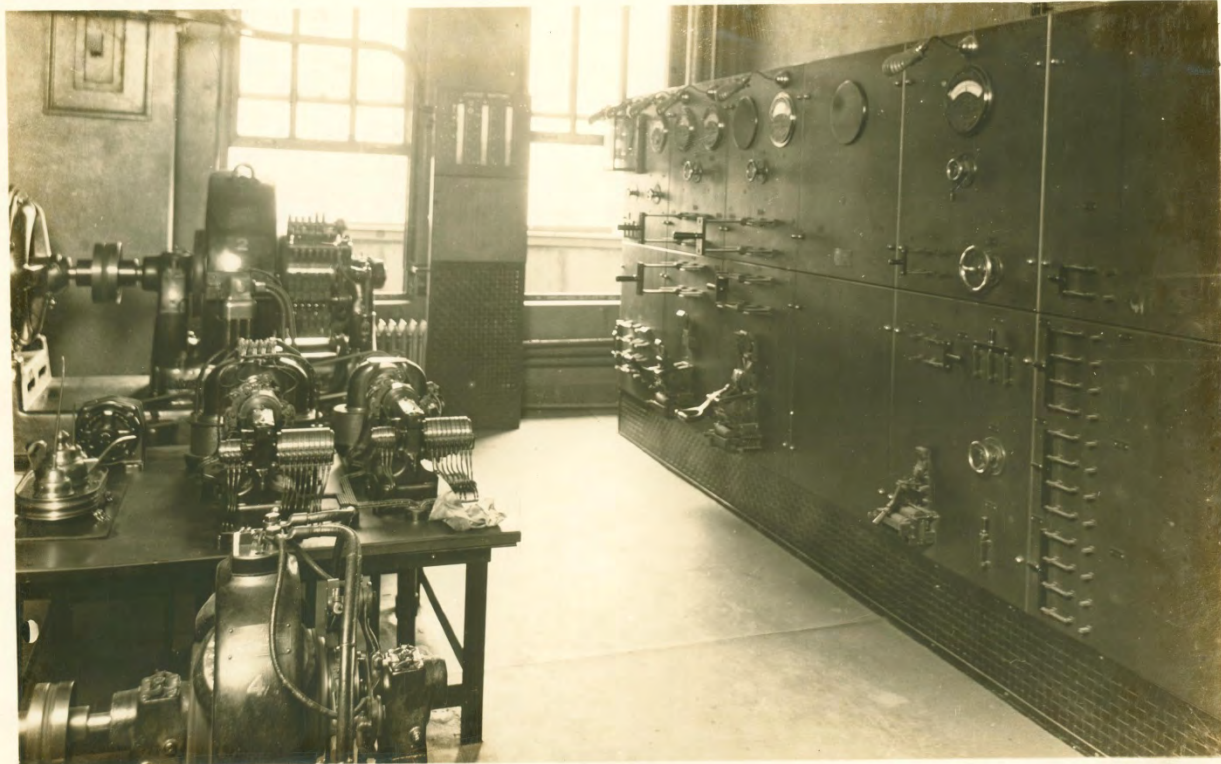


View of typical Main distributing frame in one of the Houston Central offices, showing cross connecting wires and workmen placing them.

Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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1912 Central Office, originally "Preston Central Office"  
Ring Machine and Power Board. ca. 1918  
credit: AT&T Archives and History Center

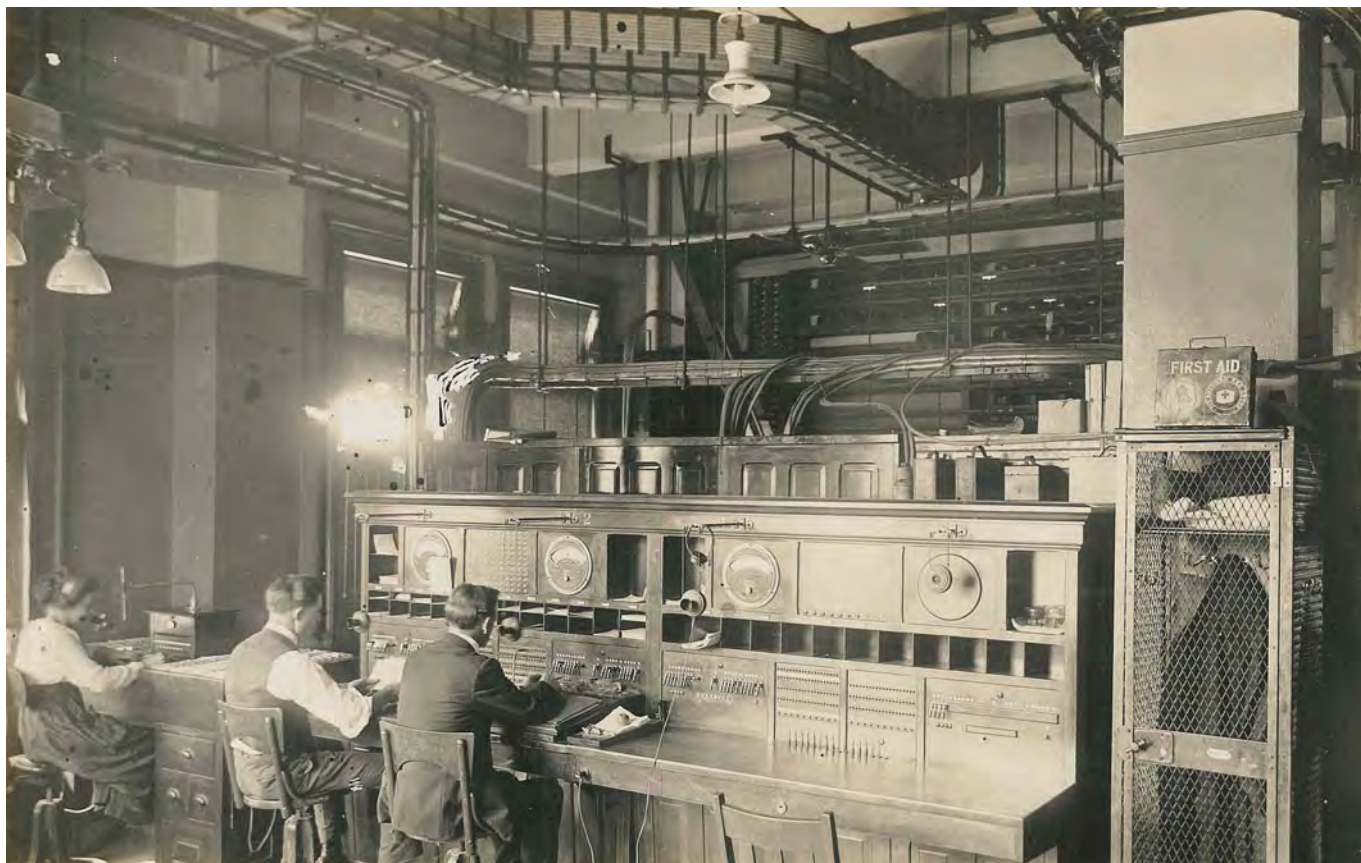


Ringing Machines and Power Board, Preston Building.

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1912 Central Office, originally "Preston Central Office"  
Test board. ca. 1918  
credit: AT&T Archives and History Center



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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1912 Central Office, originally "Preston Central Office"  
Toll Operators. ca. 1918  
credit: AT&T Archives and History Center



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Southwestern Bell switchboard, ca. 1930s. Location Unknown. By this time operator assisted manually switched local calls had been replaced by automated switching. Long distance and toll calls and directory assistance still remained assisted by operators.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Information, or later called “directory assistance” operators, ca. 1940s. Location Unknown.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Photo 1

Corner of Texas Avenue and San Jacinto Street showing front of Southwestern Bell Texas Avenue Building at right between the Keystone Lofts and Magnolia Hotel. The Southwestern Bell Capitol Central Office Building is shown at left corner.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Photo 2

Capitol Central Office from the corner of Capitol Street and San Jacinto Street. View from Southeast.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Photo 3

Capitol Central Office with the Southwestern Bell Texas Avenue Building Expansion in the background. View from Southwest.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Photo 4

Capitol Central Office with the Southwestern Bell Texas Avenue Building expansion abutting it. View from Southwest.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Photo 5

View down Texas Avenue from Northeast. Southwestern Bell Capitol expansion at center left.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Photo 6

Southwestern Bell Capitol expansion at center left. View from Northeast.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Photo 7

West side of building, abutting the Capitol Central building with original brick, windows and galvanized steel fire escape. Mechanical penthouse at roof. Camera view from Southwest towards Texas Avenue.



Southwestern Bell Capitol Main Office, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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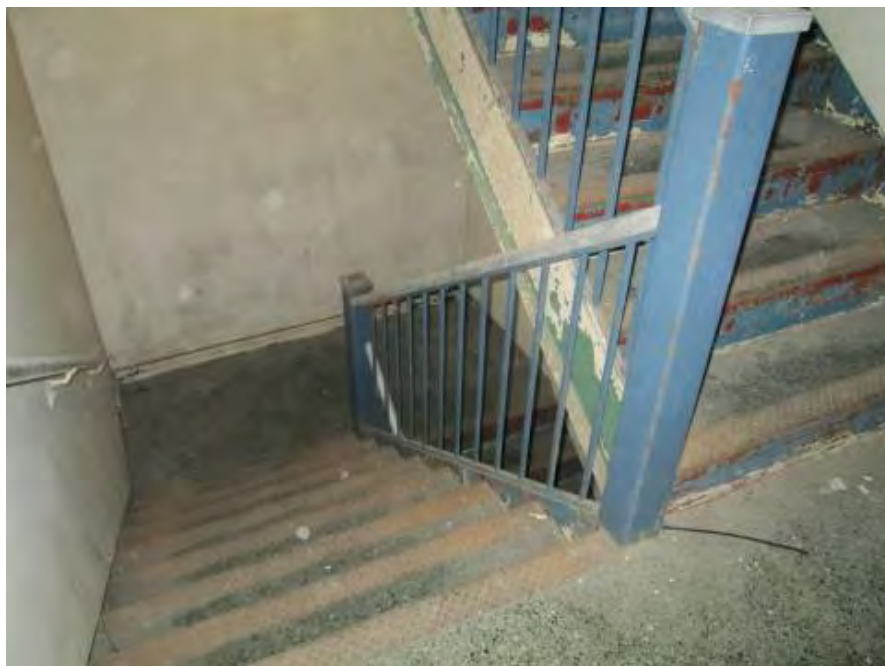
Photo 8

View of 1<sup>st</sup> floor elevator (three) lobby from the entrance foyer towards rear of building. Original ribbed panel hoistway doors and marble jamb. Wood posts, beams and marble strips added in the late 1970s.



Photo 9

Typical stair, guard rail, and handrail. There is one interior stair and one exterior fire escape.



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Photo 10

West side wall view at 5<sup>th</sup> floor. Painted galvanized steel double hung 2/2 windows with wire glass.



Photo 11

Galvanized steel telephone conduits at 2<sup>nd</sup> floor ten feet high. Camera view from northwest towards the rear of the building.



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Photo 12

Transition of PVC plastic pipe to galvanized steel as the conduits penetrate the common wall between the Texas Avenue building and the Capitol St. building. Camera view from the east.

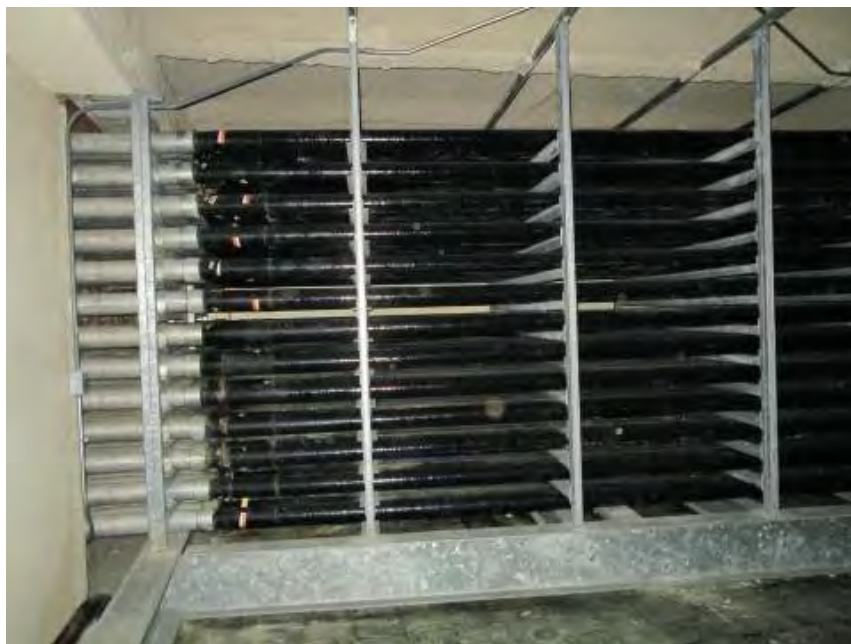


Photo 23

Telephone line testing tables from the 1970's. Note rotary dial 6<sup>th</sup> floor.



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P  
A  
R  
K  
P

ELEVATOR  
LEVEL









1114  
TEXAS  
HOTEL

TEXAS HOTEL













