United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name _Bell Telephone Building_

other names/site number_Adams, S. G., Building_

2. Location

street & number_920 Olive Street_ [n/a] not for publication

city or town_St. Louis_ [n/a] vicinity

state_Missouri_ code _MO_ county_St. Louis [Independent City]_ code _510_

zip code_63101_

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [x] 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 [x] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [x] locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Signature of certifying official/Title Claire F. Blackwell/Deputy SHPO   Date _25 June 1999_

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is: Signature of the Keeper   Date

[ ] 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 see continuation sheet [ ].

5.Classification

Ownership of Property

[X] private
[ ] public-local
[ ] public-state
[ ] public-Federal

Category of Property

[X] building(s)
[ ] district
[ ] site
[ ] structure
[ ] object

umber of Resources within Property

contributing	noncontributing	
1	0	building
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Name of related multiple property listing.

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

INDUSTRY; communications facility

COMMERCE: business

Current Functions

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification
LATE VICTORIAN: Romanesque

see continuation sheet [ ].

Materials
foundation STONE: Limestone
walls BRICK
STONE: Sandstone
STONE: Limestone
roof ASPHALT

other

see continuation sheet [ ].

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION
See continuation sheet [x]

8.Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

[X] **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

[ ] **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

[X] **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

[ ] **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

[ ] **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

[ ] **B** removed from its original location.

[ ] **C** a birthplace or grave.

[ ] **D** a cemetery.

[ ] **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

[ ] **F** a commemorative property.

[ ] **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
COMMUNICATIONS
ARCHITECTURE

Periods of Significance
1891-1926

Significant Dates
1891
1919

Significant Person(s)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge
Bonsack, Frederick C.

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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:

[x] State Historic Preservation Office

[ ] Other State Agency

[ ] Federal Agency

[ ] Local Government

[ ] University

[X] Other:

Name of repository: Landmarks Association of St. Louis, Inc.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property ___less than one acre___

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

    Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing
1 15 744 220 4279320 3 __ _____ _____
2 __ ___ ___ _____   4 __ _____ _____
   ___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title_____Lynn Josse, Research Associate_____

organization_Landmarks Association of St. Louis___ date_April 1999__

street & number_917 Locust 7th Floor_____ telephone_(314) 421-6474__

city or town_St. Louis_____ state_MO__ zip code_63101-1413__

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:
Continuation Sheets
Maps
   A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
   A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.
Photographs
   Representative black and white photographs of the property.
Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _Nine Twenty Olive Partners, L.P._____

street & number_ 3201 Arsenal Street_____ telephone_(314) 773-7333___

city or town_St. Louis_____ state_MO__ zip code_63118__

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7   Page 1   Bell Telephone Building
                              St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

The Bell Telephone Building (1889) is a seven-story Richardsonian Romanesque commercial building constructed of red sandstone and brick located at the southeast corner of Olive Street and Tenth Street in downtown St. Louis, Missouri. Two bays wide at the north (Olive Street) elevation and four bays wide at the west (Tenth Street) side, the building's primary elevations are organized with three-story arcades springing from ground-level storefronts. The fifth and sixth floors use progressively smaller windows, grouped at each bay. Minor alterations include the blocking of fourth story sidelights (expected to be reversed in rehabilitation) and addition of exterior doors for fire escapes long since removed. In some areas, the sandstone trim is spalling or has been sheared (this is visible primarily as a change in color of the sandstone). The addition of a seventh floor in 1919 was a major alteration which falls in the historic period and contributes to the building's Criterion A significance. Constructed in a compatible style, the addition alters the building's appearance but does not obscure the original Richardsonian design. The other major alteration was the addition of limestone sheathing to the first floor in 1940, a fate typical for commercial storefronts in downtown St. Louis. Despite this modification, the first story still establishes the rhythm of bays, carried out in the intact arcades and fenestration of the upper stories. The loss of integrity of materials at the first floor is likely to be at least partially mitigated in future remodeling as the limestone is removed. As it exists today, the building retains the architects' clarity of organization despite subsequent modifications.

Exterior

Originally, battered sandstone piers established two bays on Olive Street and four bays on Tenth Street. Storefronts faced both streets; the original main entrance was located in the eastern bay of the north elevation. In 1920, still under Bell

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __7__   Page __2__   Bell Telephone Building
                                               St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

ownership, the ground floor was remodeled along more classical lines. The massive rock-faced blocks were smoothed and given foliated bands near the top of each pier. At the northern pier of the western elevation, the width of the stone pier was reduced by at least half to provide more window space. Limestone sheathing was applied over the ground story in 1940 and storefront windows were replaced with plate glass. The division of bays remains the same, and recent tests have revealed that original material exists beneath the limestone facing. Entrances were moved to the west bay of the north elevation and the south bay of the west elevation.

The broad arcade rising above the ground floor through the fourth floor at both Tenth and Olive Streets is characteristic of later Richardsonian architecture. Sandstone blocks outline the arcades as quoins and voussoirs, adding further definition as spandrels, mullions, belt courses between stories, and quoins at the building's corners. At the second story, small-paned leaded pastel glass is used at all of the windows except the two southern bays of the Tenth Street elevation (where it appears only at the transoms). A simple heraldic shield centers each transom.

The rhythm of openings quickens above the arcade. At the fifth story, large square-headed transomed windows, divided by sandstone stiles and accented with dentil moldings, are grouped by threes at each bay of the two primary elevations. At the sixth floor, quadruple arcades are carried on a continuous sandstone sill course. A seventh floor was added in 1919 by Bell Telephone to accommodate the expanding company's needs. Each bay hosts two pair of double-hung windows in dentiled brick frames; the building is capped by a corbel arcade at the roofline. The simplicity of the cornice design is a likely reason that it is has survived when so many other historic downtown buildings have lost their crowns.

The rear elevation (facing south) is less elaborated than the two primary

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __7__   Page __3____   Bell Telephone Building
                                    St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

elevations, but features the same organizational ideas. The brick ground story, two bays wide, has a loading bay at the east side and windows at the left.   Above, the all-brick arcade rises three levels; rectangular sash windows with transoms (grouped two pairs in each bay) at the fifth story are surmounted by round-arched windows in the same arrangement at the sixth. At the seventh story, irregularly spaced openings include sash windows at either end, and a sash window and fire escape door in the center. Sandstone is only used on this elevation for window sills. Above the ground story in the western bay, there has been sporadic infill of the windows to accommodate the elevator and emergency stairs. Most floors also have been retrofitted with fire escape doors (historic but not original), leading to a fire escape that no longer exists.

The eastern wall of the building is a plain unarticulated brick surface as it rises above the four-story building it abuts. An 1888 newspaper article describing the Bell Telephone Building before its construction noted that the building to the east was designed to have additional stories added (although this never took place), perhaps explaining why the eastern wall was left blind.

The roof of the building is essentially flat, although a gentle slope from the center to the north and south walls allows drainage from the asphalt surface. A parapet wall, sandstone and brick, crowns the building on all four sides. Both elevator shafts terminate in a one-story tower on the roof, and an additional room is built along the east side of the roof for storage.

Throughout the exterior, the Bell Telephone Building's sandstone trim is weathered and in some areas deteriorated. Records indicate that in 1968, some sections of the sandstone were sheared off (up to 4 inches, according to the permit record) in the name of pedestrian safety. At the fourth story of the west and north elevation, the outer windows inside the round-arched top of the arcade have been filled

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __7__   Page __4____   Bell Telephone Building
                                      St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

in.   The doors which appear rather incongruously at each of the top five stories of the Tenth Street elevation's northernmost bay were likely added in a mid-1920s alteration to the fire escape (since removed).

Interior

The Bell Telephone Building's interior, seven stories plus a basement, is largely open and unsubdivided. Flooring on the second through sixth floor is soft wood; the added seventh story has a concrete floor with some wood sections. The hollow clay tile and concrete floor structure is carried on steel beams (construction of the added seventh floor may be a different method; no record has been found and the structure is not currently exposed). Each floor is bisected by a north-south row of seven structural columns, plain on the lower floor, finished with foliated cushion capitals at the fifth and sixth floors, and square at the seventh.

A freight elevator at the rear of the building and a passenger elevator at the front are not original, although one or both may be in the location of an original elevator or stairs. The location of the original elevator is not known, although a newspaper account prior to the construction of the building called for an elevator at the "rear at the Tenth Street side."   Next to the rear freight elevator in the southwest corner of the building, a stairway rises to the seventh floor. This stairway is not original although it may date from the time of the 1919 addition. Another stairway connects the basement, first floor, mezzanine and second story at the front of the building next to the passenger elevator. A third stairway rises from the seventh floor to the roof midway along the eastern side of the building.

The first story is ringed by a windowless mezzanine level, possibly an addition by S. G. Adams in 1940. At the second story, interior partitions obscure the pastel

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __7__   Page __5__   Bell Telephone Building
                                                    St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

colored glass windows. At the fourth floor, a separate room for HVAC equipment is planned to be removed. There are few historic interior finishes in evidence, although some beaded tongue and groove wainscoting is used at the sixth floor. The interior is in generally good condition.

The current owner's plans for the Bell Telephone Building call for the creation of loft apartments (rentals) in the upper stories of the building, with retail or commercial uses on the first floor. The owner has expressed an interest in removing the limestone veneer from the first floor and using any salvageable original materials underneath to create a more compatible design. The HVAC room on the fourth floor, which has caused the blocking of some rear windows, will be removed. Windows currently blocked by plywood (including the arches of the sixth floor) will be re-opened.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __8__   Page __6____   Bell Telephone Building
                                       St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

___

Statement of Significance

Constructed between 1889-1891, the Bell Telephone Building is locally significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of Communications for its association with the early development of the telephone industry in St. Louis. It served that industry as Bell Telephone's main exchange and largest center in the St. Louis area from 1891 until 1926, the proposed period of significance.   It is also locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as one of only a few remaining commercial examples of the Richardsonian Romanesque style in a city where examples of the style once flourished. It is further significant as one of only a few remaining Richardsonian Romanesque buildings designed by Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge, the firm which succeeded the style's originator, H. H. Richardson.

Communications

Prior to Alexander Graham Bell's patent of the telephone, the only means of instant communication available to the American public was the telegraph. This device could transmit electrical impulses but could not reproduce sound. Despite its inherent limitations, telegraph technology had local applications beyond the prototypical image of the Wild West operator receiving Morse code transmissions. In St. Louis in the 1870s, the American District Telegraph Company (ADT) local office provided a dispatcher service: by turning a dial on their home machine, customers selected the electrical impulse received at the central office. The dispatcher would be able to tell which of several prearranged messages the customer had chosen and would then send out a runner to call a carriage, summon the husband home, or complete another task.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __8__   Page __7___

Bell Telephone Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

The transmission of speech over electrical lines was a major leap forward in technology. Perfected by Bell and demonstrated at Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition in 1876, it would be another year before telephones were used commercially. American Telephone & Telegraph company publications date this event to May, 1877.[1]

The few private telephone owners in St. Louis in 1877 were connected to each by private lines which usually connected only two locations. In November 1877, Bell's company granted a license to ADT to provide local telephone service in St. Louis. At first, general manager George Durant leased equipment for customers' private lines, then went into the business of constructing telephone lines for direct communication between two or more points. By the following February, after the visit of a Bell representative, Durant decided it would be more efficient and profitable to route all calls through a central switchboard. Opened in April 1878 with twelve subscribers, the exchange was the first in what would become the Southwestern Bell territory (including present-day Missouri, Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas).[2] Like all early exchanges, the St. Louis service used a modified telegraph board to connect calls. Switchboard and operators were located in the Third National Bank building at 417 Olive (demolished).

In late 1879, ADT became the Bell Telephone Company of Missouri. Growth was rapid, and by 1880 the company counted about 600 subscribers to the new technology. Service was limited to local calls; in 1883, lines existed to the suburb of

---

[1]American Telephone & Telegraph Company Information Department, *The Telephone in America.* New York: AT & T, 1938. 6.

[2]A subsidiary of Western Union began to offer telephone service later in 1878, but Durant's company bought out its equipment in 1879.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __8__   Page __8__   Bell Telephone Building
                                               St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Clayton just outside the city limits, but longer distances were not technologically feasible. Still, by 1890 Bell claimed some 2885 subscribers.

In 1885, the Exchange's downtown office was destroyed by fire. The company then moved into new quarters at the southeast corner of Fourth and Pine. Still occupying only one floor of space, the exchange's rapid growth led to the commission of a new signature building. According to a newspaper article, the company invited architects to submit plans. Of the ten submissions, fewer than half met the special needs of a telephone exchange.[3]

According to the same article, building was delayed by attempts in the Municipal Assembly to regulate telephone rates. When the Supreme Court ruled in December 1888 that the city had no power to set telephone rates, the suppressed plans for construction were revisited.[4] Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge's Richardsonian design was accepted, and ground was broken in 1889. The building permit estimated the cost at $126,000; Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge firm records show a final cost of $154,225.[5] The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* related that the program called for seven floors, with Bell occupying half of the sixth as offices and locating the telephone exchange on the seventh (Figure 1). The rest of the building was to be used for offices and commercial space.[6] At completion in 1891, only six stories were built (the fifth and sixth stories on the perspective drawing were compressed into one). The heart of the Bell operation,

---

[3]"New Bell Telephone Building," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 25, 1888. p.8.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Summary sheet from the files of Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott, Boston.

[6]Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge located their new St. Louis office in the Bell Telephone Building when it opened, as did the job's contractor, F. C. Bonsack.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __8__   Page __9__   Bell Telephone Building
                                              St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

the switchboard room (a great open space lined by machines), was located on the top floor as envisioned.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was a period of great activity in the telephone industry. St. Louis was connected with both New York and Chicago in 1896. In the same year, capitalizing on the expiration of Durant's original patents, a second phone company was formed in St. Louis. The Kinloch telephone company began subscribing in 1897, and for over two decades operated a separate and competing service. Both companies had their own exchanges and subscribers; the lines were not connected and customers of one company were unable to communicate with subscribers of the other. With over 30,000 customers by 1920, Kinloch still accounted for fewer than a third of the phones in St. Louis.

The St. Louis Bell company's reach expanded dramatically in 1913 when it allied with three other companies serving western Missouri, Texas, Kansas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Known as the Southwestern Bell Telephone System, the four companies formally merged between 1917 and 1920. The new Southwestern Bell Telephone Company soon purchased Kinloch, and work began in 1923 to combine the separate systems.

Even before the acquisition of Kinloch, Bell's expansion had pushed the capacity of its headquarters building to the limit. The company had already located offices in other buildings downtown; the problem was temporarily solved with the 1919 addition of a seventh floor to the existing building. Opened in 1920, the added story included a new kitchen, dining room, and "rest room" which featured a piano and two rugs.[7] The previous kitchen and dining areas were apparently given over to switchboard use.

---

[7]One of the two rugs was "usually rolled up for dancing," according to an in-house article. "Our New Rest Room at Main-Olive, St. Louis," *Southwestern Telephone News*, June 1920 (148).

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __8__   Page ___10___

Bell Telephone Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

With the addition of the Kinloch system, 88 new sections of switchboard were added.

Before 1915, many of the company's administrative functions had moved to rented space a few blocks away, leaving two exchanges and the maintenance, construction and equipment departments at 920 Olive.[8]   By the mid-1920s, after absorbing Kinloch, Southwestern Bell operated 20 offices serving greater St. Louis.[9] Construction of a modern operations center, which housed equipment for the new dial phones as well as administrative offices, began at about the same time the merger with Kinloch was finalized. At its completion in late 1926, the new tower just southwest of the old building was said to be the tallest in Missouri (31 stories). Its Gothic/Deco style was a harbinger of modernity. Still occupied, the Southwestern Bell Building was joined by a modern tower to the east in the 1980s. The three telephone buildings now stand within sight of each other as a testimony to the progression and importance of the telephone industry in St. Louis.

The Bell Telephone Building is believed to be the first building constructed for the telephone industry in St. Louis; it is almost certainly the oldest extant. The Kinloch Building, 1905, is the next oldest known telephone building. It still exists just a block northeast of the Bell Building, covered by a stone sheathing (installed by the Bank Building & Equipment Corp., 1961) which obscures all evidence that anything historic may be underneath.[10]

---

[8]*The Pulse of A Metropolis*, The Bell Telephone Company of St. Louis, c. 1913. Photocopy located at Landmarks Association of St. Louis.

[9]Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, *A Monument to Communication* (St. Louis: Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, c.1925.)

[10]Photocopy of newspaper clipping labeled "Kinloch," dated 1961, vertical files, St. Louis Public Library Fine Arts Room.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __8__   Page __11____   Bell Telephone Building
                                        St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

The period of significance in the area of communications is 1891 through 1926. This era begins with the first use by Bell Telephone and ends when the new Southwestern Bell building was occupied.

Architecture

In the 1890s St. Louis boasted a good collection of downtown commercial Romanesque Revival buildings which followed the manner of the style's greatest proponent, H. H. Richardson. Almost all of them have been demolished. The Bell Telephone Building exhibits the power and strength which is characteristic of the style, and is one of the only extant examples in downtown St. Louis. Its significance is enhanced by its position as the only extant commercial work of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge (Boston) in downtown St. Louis dating from the firm's short-lived Richardsonian phase.

One of the nation's most pervasive (if brief) architectural trends in the late 1880s was based on the highly personal style of prominent Boston architect H. H. Richardson. Although his early career was marked by the adaptation of various medieval styles for modern buildings, his later designs developed an approach to massing and silhouette that were all his own. Biographer James O'Gorman calls Richardson the "most colorful and influential member"[11] of his profession by the mid-1880s. (Many critics actually place Richard Morris Hunt as the top architect of that period, but there is no doubt that

---

[11] James O'Gorman, *Living Architecture: A Biography of H. H. Richardson* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 9.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __8__ Page __12___   Bell Telephone Building
                                     St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Richardson carved himself a greater place in architectural history.) The style which
came to be known as the Richardsonian Romanesque was widely imitated in the 1880s
and into the 1890s. Characteristics include the use of heavy rugged masonry,
particularly stone (sometimes polychrome); Romanesque arches or arcades; battered
bases offering the appearance of greater mass; compact silhouettes (a feature of
Richardson's later career which was not always appreciated by his imitators); and
carved stone detail, particularly Romanesque or Byzantine foliated motifs. His best late
work exhibits a power and simplicity of form which was rarely found in the work of his
followers.

By the 1890s, examples of Richardson-inspired Romanesque Revival had
flowered across America.   Architects took from the style as fitted their own programs:
some borrowed decorative detail without regard for form, others offered almost exact
replicas of Richardsonian masterpieces. In commercial buildings, followers frequently
picked up the arcaded rhythms of two great commercial buildings from the end of
Richardson's career, the Marshall Field Warehouse (Chicago, 1885-86 - Figure 2) and
the Ames Store (Boston, 1886). Interpretations varied in the extent of their fidelity and
creativity.

When Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge (SRC) received the commission to design the
Bell Telephone Building in 1888, St. Louis already had a significant body of downtown
buildings in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Foremost among these was SRC's
Lionberger Building (1887-88, demolished - Figure 3), a seven-story stone warehouse
which derived its battered first story, fenestration, and general massing from the much
larger Marshall Field Warehouse. It has been celebrated as one of the country's best
examples of Richardsonian design; purist biographer Henry-Russell Hitchcock singled
it out among the firm's work for its "really Richardsonian quality as well as passable

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __8__   Page ___13___   Bell Telephone Building
                                       St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

application of the familiar formulas."[12]

Other Richardsonian buildings extant or underway in this period include SRC's Newcomb Building (1889, also known as the Shepley Building);[13] Thomas Annan's Boatman's Bank Building (1890-1891, demolished 1914 after a disastrous fire); the Mercantile Library Building by Henry Isaacs (1890; extant but completely sheathed); the same architect's Odd Fellows Building (1888, demolished); Charles Ramsey's Hauser Building (1888, demolished), which has been compared to Burnham & Root's Rookery in Chicago; and Alfred Rosenheim's small, mid-block United Missouri Bank building (1888). Also in this period, Isaac Taylor's Merchandise Mart (1888, NR) and the first buildings of the Cupples Station complex (NR) led the local version of the Romanesque away from Richardson's powerful rock-faced masses into a more refined expression of the style. While the Bell Building was being completed, ground was broken for the city's most prominent exposition of the style, Link & Cameron's Union Station just outside of the downtown core (1891, NHL).

The Bell Telephone Building fit in well with the new Romanesque face of downtown. Although not as large as the Newcomb Building or as acclaimed as the Lionberger Warehouse, the Bell Building was a fairly straightforward exposition of the style. The use of stone added weight to the base of the building and definition to the arches and other details above. The first floor, although part of the four-story arcade which is the building's chief feature, was set apart by a wide course in the manner of the Lionberger and Marshall Field buildings; overall, the organization is similar to both.

---

[12]Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times*. First edition, 1936. Revised edition, 1961. 6th printing, 1986 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press).

[13]Dates on the Lionberger and Shepley Buildings from Lowic, 138.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section _8_   Page __14___   Bell Telephone Building
                                        St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

The rough treatment of the stone base and detailing marks the building as a Richardsonian design.[14] Its original wide bracketed cornice was not Richardsonian in derivation; interestingly, the corbeled arcade which was built as a cornice after the seventh story was added in 1919 is more consistent with the Richardsonian style than the original Renaissance cornice.

A good example of the style, the Bell Building gains significance because of its rarity. As noted in the narrative above, the majority of Richardsonian buildings in the downtown core have been demolished. Although the alterations noted in Section 7, particularly the sheathed first floor and the added seventh story, affect the integrity of design and materials, there are no buildings remaining in St. Louis' downtown core which better convey the spirit of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

The Bell Telephone Building has added significance as the city's only commercial building dating from the short-lived Richardsonian design phase of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge. After Richardson's death in April 1886, his employees George F. Shepley, Charles H. Rutan and Charles Coolidge formed a partnership to complete unfinished designs and to accept new commissions. Shepley had been Richardson's right-hand-man in the years preceding his death; his marriage to Richardson's daughter Julia further strengthened his firm's succession to the legacy of the master.

In St. Louis, writes one local scholar, "Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge provided as nowhere else in the nation a direct, if imperfect, living link with the achievements of

---

[14]An early drawing for the building appears to use stone instead of brick as the primary exterior material, and shows seven stories instead of six (Figure 1).

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __8__   Page __15___   Bell Telephone Building
                                                 St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

---

Richardson. . . . "[15] The city had a ready connection to Richardson's office through native son George Shepley. After Shepley's sister Louise married, her father-in-law John R. Lionberger became a patron of the firm. Contracting with Richardson for three houses in 1886, he later commissioned a warehouse from the successor firm. The Bell Telephone commission, although chosen by the Board of Directors from a competition, was very likely influenced by *two* of George Shepley's relatives by marriage: Bell Treasurer John Lionberger, and President Ethan Allen Hitchcock, the father-in-law of George's brother John Shepley. With so many commissions in St. Louis, Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge opened a branch office there which would remain affiliated until 1900.

By the early 1890s, the firm had designed four Richardsonian buildings downtown: the three mentioned above, and the Famous Building (1892).[16] Of the four, all but the Famous Building were probably designed from the Boston office,[17] and only the Bell Telephone Building still exists.

By the mid-1890s, the popularity of the Richardsonian style for commercial and civic buildings had run its course, largely supplanted by a search for appropriate Renaissance and classical forms. Increasingly hybridized in their approach to the Romanesque, Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge had begun to produce pure Renaissance

---

[15]Lawrence Lowic, *The Architectural Heritage of St. Louis 1803-1891* (St. Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art, 1982), 138.

[16]Date on the Famous Building from St. Louis building permits; the firm's records show an 1890 date.

[17]The Boston office has financial records for the other three; the building permit for the Famous Building gives the St. Louis office address for the architects.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section __8__   Page __16____

Bell Telephone Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Revival designs by 1891.[18] It is not, therefore, all that surprising that the same firm would be responsible for one of the first two Renaissance Revival buildings in St. Louis' burgeoning commercial and warehouse district (Mallinkrodt Building, 1892; Washington Avenue East of Tucker District, NR).

With commissions such as the Chicago Art Institute and the Chicago Public Library, the firm forged a new identity for itself in the 1890s as one of the leading exponents of the academic revivals that flourished in that decade. Although it continued to produce some designs in the Romanesque style through at least 1895, in St. Louis the firm offered no known commercial buildings in the style after the Bell and Famous Buildings. Although the alterations discussed in Section 7 (especially the ground floor modifications and added seventh story) affect the building's integrity of design, the historic association with the firm is still conveyed by the exterior of the building, most of which is substantially intact. As their only extant local work in this mode, the Bell Telephone Building is a worthy example of the work of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge in the style which defined the firm's first phase of existence.[19]

[18]Forbes, 22.

[19]The firm still exists as Shepley, Bulfinch Abbott & Richardson, Boston.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8   Page 17

Bell Telephone Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Figure 1: Rendering of Bell Telephone Building (early plan, later modified to six stories)
D. A. Gregg, c.1888
Source: Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott, Boston.

BELL TELEPHONE BUILDING, ST. LOUIS

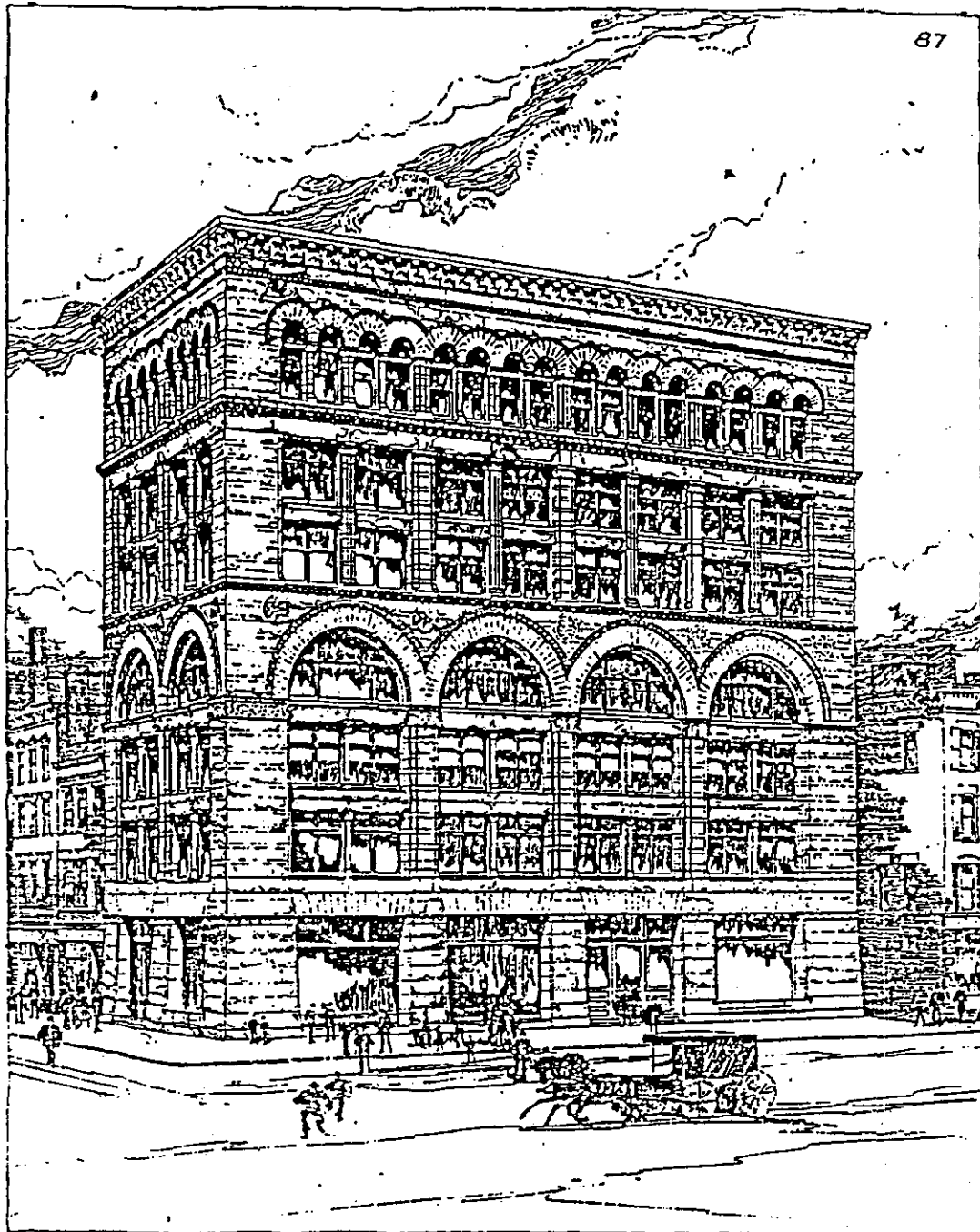NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8   Page 18

Bell Telephone Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Figure 2: Rendering of H. H. Richardson's Marshall Field Wholesale Store. Chicago Historical Society, reprinted in Whiffen.
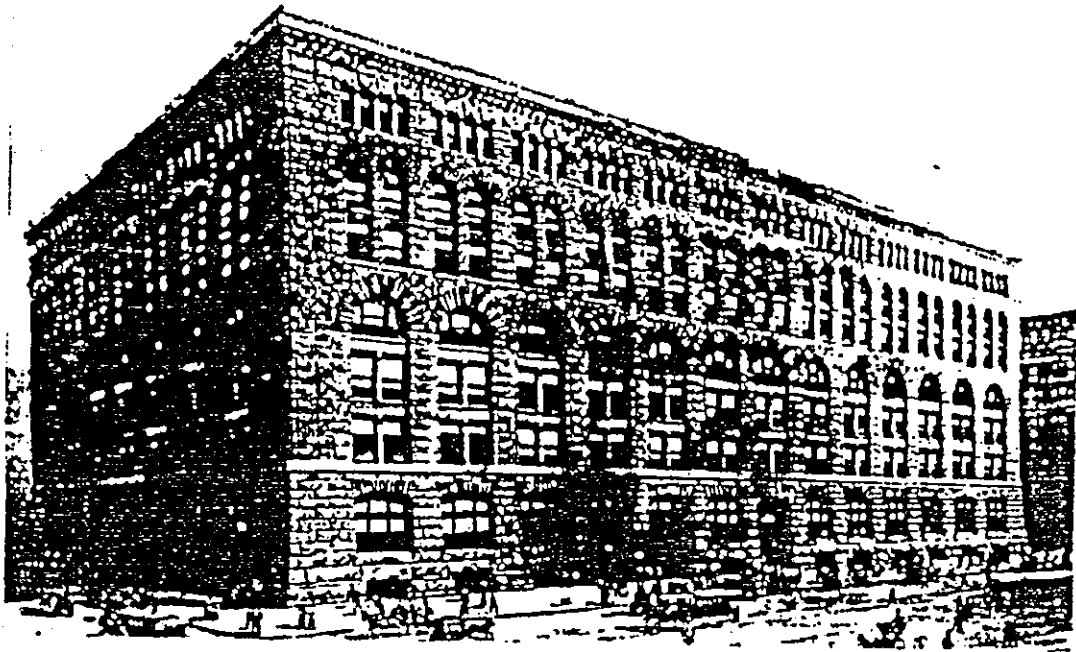

Figure 3: The Lionberger Warehouse, Shepley Rutan & Coolidge, St. Louis. Reprinted in Lowic.
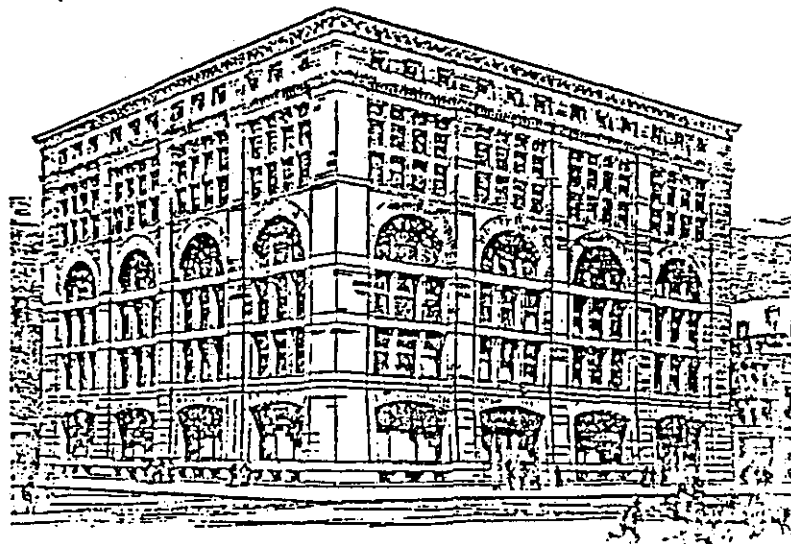

Figure 124. Lionberger Building,
1890. Shepley, Rutan, and
Coolidge. From Jones and Orears,
*Commercial and Architectural
St. Louis*, 1888.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9   Page 19   Bell Telephone Building
                                                       St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

BIBLIOGRAPHY

American Telephone and Telegraph Company Information Department. The
    Telephone in America. New York: American Telephone and Telegraph
    Company, 1938.

Bell Telephone Company of Missouri (?), The Pulse of a Metropolis. n.d. Photocopy
    located at the offices of Landmarks Association of St. Louis, St. Louis.

City of St. Louis Building Permit records. St. Louis City Hall Comptroller's office.

City of St. Louis Deed Abstracts. St. Louis City Hall Assessor's office.

Forbes, J. D. "Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott, Architects: An Introduction."
    Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians XVII, No. 3, 19-31.

History of the Kinloch Telephone System. n.a. Typescript, 1933. St. Louis Public
    Library.

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times. First
    edition, 1936. Revised edition, 1961. 6th printing, 1986. Cambridge,
    Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press.

Larson, Paul Clifford and Susan M. Brown, eds. The Spirit of H. H. Richardson on the
    Midland Prairies. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1988.

Lowic, Lawrence. The Architectural Heritage of St. Louis 1803-1891. St. Louis:
    Washington University Gallery of Art, 1982.

"New Bell Telephone Building." St. Louis Globe-Democrat. December 25, 1888. p.8.

Park, David G. Good Connections: A Century of Service by the Men & Women of
    Southwestern Bell. St. Louis, Missouri: Southwestern Bell Telephone Company,
    1984.

Randall, John D. The Art of Office Buildings: Sullivan's Wainwright and the St. Louis

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 20   Bell Telephone Building
                                                       St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Real Estate Boom. Springfield, Illinois: self-published, 1972.

Singleton, Jordan C. "The Telephone Comes to St. Louis." Missouri Historical Society
        Bulletin X, No. 1, 27-36.

Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, A Missouri Telephone History. Southwestern
        Bell Telephone Company, 1941.

_____. A Monument to Communication. n.d. (1926?).

Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott, Boston. Miscellaneous files and records.

St. Louis Daily Record. Various editions, 1889 - 1940.

Southwestern Telephone News. June 1920, 148.

Van Rensselaer, Mariana Griswold (Mrs. Schuyler). Henry Hobson Richardson and His
        Works. Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888; reprint, New York: Dover
        Publications Inc. 1969.

Washington Avenue East of Tucker National Register nomination. Landmarks
        Association of St. Louis, 1986. Landmarks Association files.

Whiffen, Marcus, and Frederick Koeper. American Architecture Volume 2: 1860-1976.
        Cambridge, Massachusetts: the M.I.T Press, 1983.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 10   Page 21

Bell Telephone Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the nominated parcel are indicated with a heavy broken line on the accompanying map entitled "Bell Telephone Building Boundary Map." (Continuation Sheet 22)

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary is the same as the footprint of the building, which is the parcel of land purchased by Bell Telephone for construction of the building.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10   Page 22

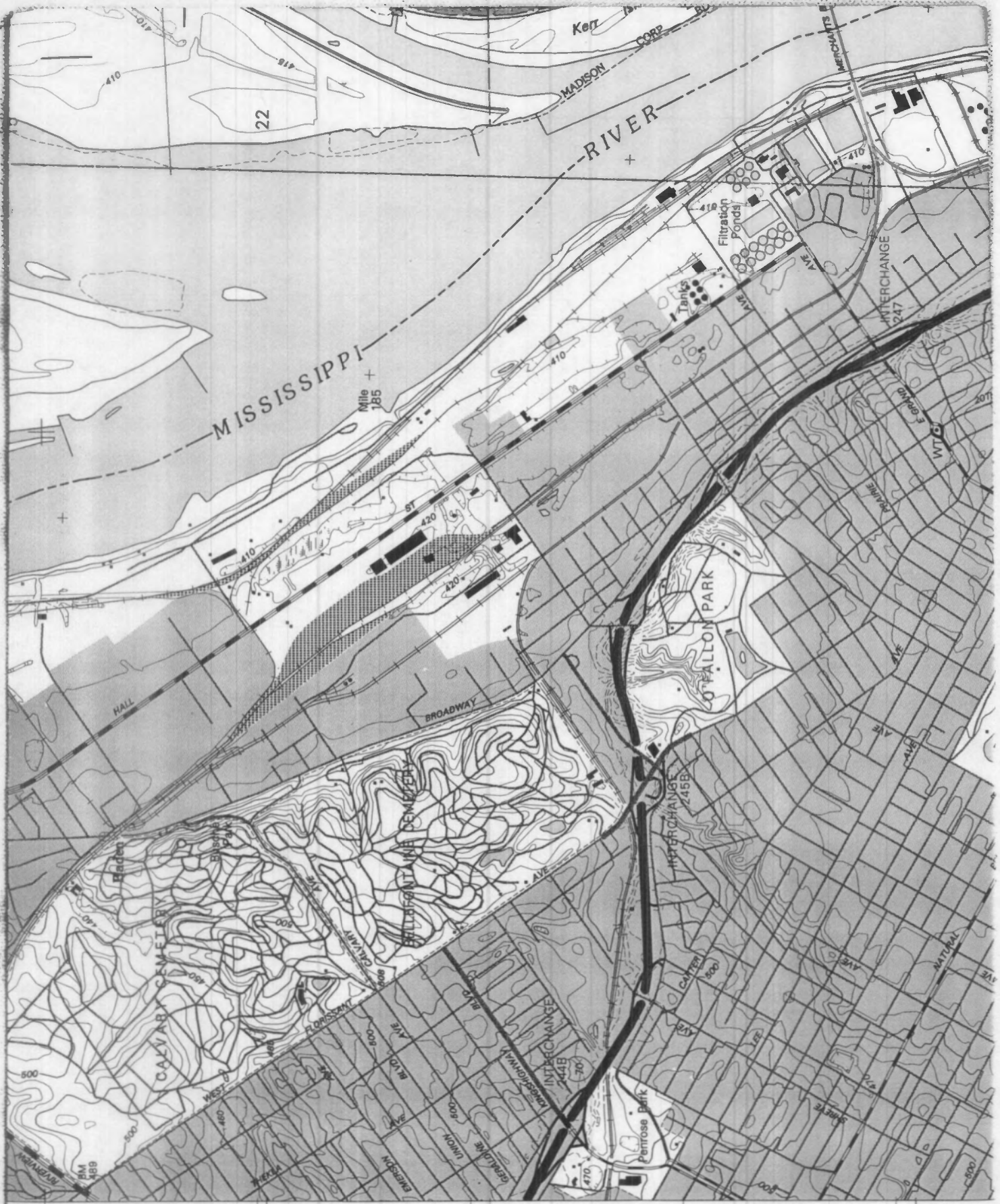Bell Telephone Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Bell Telephone Building Boundary Map
source: Sanborn Map, 1968

— — — — NOMINATED PROPERTY

SCALE OF FEET

50   0   50   100

COPYRIGHT SANBORN MAP COMPANY, INC

Telephone
ding
Dine Street
is
dependent
D, MO

4287

~ 15

TING-
1220

THING-
79 320

42' 30"

22

Kerr

MADISON

CORP

MERCHANTS

RIVER

Filtration
Ponds

410

Tanks

AVE

INTERCHANGE
247

MISSISSIPPI

Mile
185

410

420

ST

410

420

WT

O'FALLON PARK

HALL

BROADWAY

INTERCHANGE
245B

AVE

AVE

CALVARY CEMETERY

BELLEFONTAINE CEMETERY

AVE

CARTER

500

INTERCHANGE

BLVD

FLORISSANT

Baden

Broadway

500

WEST

500

UNION

EMERSON

THEKLA

GERALDINE

BLVD

INTERCHANGE
244B

Penrose Park

410

NATURAL

BM
489

500

4286

4285

4284

Bell Telephone Building
St. Louis (Independent City), MO
Cynthia Longwisch
2/25/99
Landmarks Association of St. Louis

Camera facing SE

1 of 3

Bell Telephone Building
St. Louis (Independent City), MO
by: Cynthia Longwisch
2/25/99
Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis
Camera facing NE

#2 of 3

Bell Telephone Building
St. Louis (Independent City), MO
by: Lynn Josse
2/1/99
Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis

9th floor interior facing N
#3 of 3