United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Telephone Distribution House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 4250 Duncan Street N/A not for publication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 63110

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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide _X_ local

Mark A. Miles May 24, 2011

Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles, Deputy SHPO Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this 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 of the Keeper Date of Action

Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House
Name of Property

St. Louis (Independent City), Missouri
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

X	private
	public - Local
	public - State
	public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

X	building(s)
	district
	site
	structure
	object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	**Total**

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/Communications Facility
INDUSTRY/Industrial Storage

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/Communications Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE
walls: BRICK
roof: OTHER/Tar and Gravel
other:

Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House
Name of Property

St. Louis (Independent City), Missouri
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [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
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
COMMUNICATIONS
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1947-1961

Significant Dates
1948

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
The Austin Company

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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 # _____
- ____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:
- ____ State Historic Preservation Office
- ____ Other State agency
- ____ Federal agency
- ____ Local government
- ____ University
- ____ Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House
Name of Property

St. Louis (Independent City), Missouri
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.9 acres

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	739251	4279862	3			
2				4			

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Emily Ramsey

organization MacRostie Historic Advisors LLC date February 25, 2011

street & number 53 West Jackson Blvd, Suite 1357 telephone 312-786-1700 ext. 7013

city or town Chicago state IL zip code 60604

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Photographs.**
- **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 Southwestern Bell LP (Parcel #45860000150)

street & number One SBC Center RM 36-M-1 telephone

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63101

name Bi-State Development (Parcel #45860000500)

street & number 707 North First Street telephone

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63102

Summary Paragraph

The Western Electric - Southwestern Bell Distribution House is a one- and three-story masonry industrial structure of reinforced concrete construction located at 4250 Duncan Street in the industrial portion of St. Louis' Central West End neighborhood. The building, designed in the Art Moderne architectural style by The Austin Company and completed in 1948, features exterior walls of tan brick with long horizontal bands of steel sash windows separated by simple brick piers. The center entrance bay on the north elevation features staggered geometric brick piers; an entrance surround of geometric brick banding frames the doorway. The interior of the building houses office spaces at the eastern end and a large open warehouse at the western end; a one-story garage extends from the rear. The main lobby space, accessed through the center north entrance, retains original tile detailing and an open stair with metal balustrade.

The Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic association as a regional telephone supply and repair center and its architectural significance as an Art Moderne industrial building designed by The Austin Company. The building's exterior is well-preserved with no major alterations or additions. Although the interior office spaces were reconfigured as part of a 1970s renovation, the main lobby and warehouse portion of the building remain largely as constructed in 1948.

SITE AND SETTING

The Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House is situated on a large rectangular lot at the southeast intersection of Duncan and South Boyle avenues, one block south of Forest Park Avenue, which is a major east-west thoroughfare in St. Louis. A railroad line, currently the Metrolink and formerly the Wabash and Rock Island Railroad, runs east-west to the rear of the building. The triangular area between Forest Park Avenue, Interstate 64, and Forest Park, within which the Western Electric Company and Southwestern Bell Telephone Company Distribution House is located, contains light industrial and commercial buildings; residential development in the vicinity is found to the north of Forest Park Avenue. The building is surrounded by light industrial and commercial buildings ranging in height from one to four stories.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The Western Electric - Southwestern Bell Distribution House is a one and three story building constructed between 1947 and 1948. Although one building with a unified Moderne-style design, permits were issued separately for the Southwestern Bell Telephone section (western portion) and the Western Electric section (eastern portion). The eastern portion is three stories with a one-story covered loading dock area, and the western portion has a three story section with a one-story garage at the rear. The three story portions of the building are covered with a flat roof and parapet, the one-story garage has a monitor roof, and the covered loading dock has a shallow gable roof. A circular brick smokestack is located at the rear of the three-story portion of the building.

Exterior walls are laid in a five-course American bond of thin bricks in shades of tan; the rear elevation of the eastern portion is finished with red brick. The primary elevations are the north (Duncan Avenue) and east elevations. The north elevation holds the historic main entrance bay. The bay projects slightly from the remainder of the elevation and is framed with staggered brick piers. A stepped parapet also

ornaments the bay. The entry is composed of three single-leaf metal doors with a three-light transom. The entry is framed with staggered brick piers similar to the overall entrance bay. All brick piers are topped with concrete trim. The second and third stories of the entrance bay each feature two window openings separated by a brick pier; the brick pier has two columns of canted brick. Window openings hold original 42-light steel sash windows with operable 4-light sections; plywood covers some portions of the windows. A flagpole rises from the top of the entrance bay.

The western portion of the north elevation is composed of five bays delineated with brick piers that run from the base of the building to slightly above the roofline. The piers, similar to the entrance bay, feature two columns of canted brick and concrete trim at the top. Window openings on this portion of the north elevation were altered ca. 1969. Openings were infilled with concrete panels and smaller windows were created. These openings hold non-historic 3-light metal windows. An entrance is located in one of the first story bays on the western portion of the north elevation. This entrance holds a non-historic metal door.

The eastern portion of the north elevation (six bays) and the east elevation (nine bays) are punctuated by large window openings on all stories, with the exception of four first story loading dock doors on the east elevation. Openings hold three windows in a combination of 28-, 21-, and 28-light steel sashes. Operable 4-light sashes are found on the 28-light windows and operable 2-light sashes are found on the 21-light windows. Window sashes are original to the building. Window openings are delineated with brick piers. The piers, similar to the entrance bay, feature two columns of canted brick and concrete trim at the top.

The west elevation of the building features a three-story section and a one-story garage section. A projecting three-story stair tower is sited on this elevation. Fenestration on the three-story section has been altered similar to the western portion of the north elevation. Concrete panel infilled larger openings ca. 1969 and smaller window openings were created. Windows have non-historic 3-light metal sashes. An entrance holding a single-leaf non-historic door is located south of the stair tower on the three-story portion of the west elevation. A roll-up garage door on the one-story section is located in the bay adjacent to the pedestrian entrance. The one-story portion of the west elevation is punctuated with window combinations of 14-,28-,14-light steel sashes. The 28-light windows have operable 4-light sashes. Brick piers with concrete trim delineate the window bays. The west elevation of the eastern portion of the building is visible above the one-story garage. The upper stories are punctuated with window combinations of 12-,24-,12-light steel sashes. Steel sashes are original to the building. A stair tower rear of the three-story portion rises to a fourth story.

The rear (south) elevation of the one-story garage at the western portion of the building features two vehicular entrances. A metal canopy spans the distance between the two vehicular entrances. A one-story covered loading dock extends from the rear elevation of the eastern portion of the building. The loading dock has pressed metal walls with large openings and a clearstory of 6- and 4-light metal windows. The rear portion of the loading dock runs parallel to the railroad track and is open at the east and west end; pressed metal siding creates the rear exterior wall.

INTERIOR

The building retains its original lobby off the Duncan Avenue elevation. The lobby is finished with white glazed brick with yellow glazed brick detailing. The lobby provides access to both the Southwestern Bell portion of the building and to the Western Electric portion of the building. Access points between the two sections of the building are also located off a central stairwell and at the garage.

The three-story portion of the Southwestern Bell section of the building has been altered several times since the building's construction in 1947-8. A major renovation occurred in the mid-1970s, when the building was repurposed for new use as a training center for Southwestern Bell employees. Consequently, no historic fabric remains inside the building aside from stairwells and access points. Currently, the space provides offices, training rooms, emergency response facilities, and garage functions. Corridors are double-loaded on the upper floors and finishes are non-historic.

The Western Electric portion of the building provides warehouse storage. Each floor has an open plan with minimal partition walls. Regularly spaced concrete mushroom columns are visible throughout.

INTEGRITY

The Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House retains sufficient integrity of design, workmanship, feeling, association, setting and location to convey its historic association as a regional telephone supply and repair center and its architectural significance as an Art Moderne industrial building designed by The Austin Company. On the exterior, the building remains largely as it was constructed in 1948, with no major alterations or additions; although the original steel sash windows on the western half of the north elevation were removed in 1969, the original openings are still evident. On the interior, the small office portion at the northwest corner of the building was remodeled in the mid-1970s. The main entrance lobby at the center of the north elevation retains original glazed brick detailing, metal and glass entrance doors, and an original stair with stainless steel railings. The warehouse and garage spaces retain their historically open and utilitarian floor plans with exposed structural systems.

Summary Statement of Significance

The Western Electric - Southwestern Bell Distribution House is locally significant under National Register Criterion A for Communications for its association with the post-World War II expansion of the telephone industry in St. Louis. Constructed in 1947 to serve as the main supply house and repair center for Southwestern Bell's eastern Missouri operations, the building was a product of the tremendous growth that occurred in the telephone industry following World War II and a reflection of the integration of the Western Electric Company and the American Bell Telephone Company, two of the most powerful corporations in the United States during the twentieth century. The Distribution House was a critical component of Southwestern Bell's operations, providing for the efficient distribution and repair of a wide array of Western Electric products, including telephones, teletypewriter equipment, switchboards, electronic equipment, and the telephone lines themselves. The St. Louis Distribution House was one of four in the United States operated by Southwestern Bell. The St. Louis Distribution House serviced customers throughout Southwestern Bell's five-state territory, which included Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, through the 1970s. The building continued to serve as a training and emergency response center for Southwestern Bell and its parent company AT&T through the 1990s.

The building is also locally significant under National Register Criterion C for architecture as a well-preserved example of an Art Moderne industrial building in St. Louis designed by The Austin Company, a nationwide engineering, design, and construction firm that specialized in large industrial structures. Constructed in 1947 during a time when post-war scarcity limited the construction of new buildings throughout the country, the Distribution House's clean lines and austere exterior, with large expanses of steel-sash windows and unadorned brick surfaces, epitomized the streamlined aesthetic of the Art Moderne style. The building's modern architecture served as a visual representation of the Bell Companies' pioneering role in the development of new communications technologies. Surrounded primarily by one-story vernacular brick industrial buildings from the 1910s and 1920s, the Distribution House is a distinctive architectural presence in the industrial and manufacturing district of St. Louis' Central West End neighborhood.

The Western Electric - Southwestern Bell Distribution House operated as a regional supply house and repair shop for Southwestern Bell through the mid-1970s. Thus, the period of significance begins in 1947, the date of the building's construction, and ends in 1961, the fifty-year cut-off for period of significance.

THE TELEPHONE INDUSTRY IN ST. LOUIS

Perhaps no means of communication transformed the lives of everyday Americans in the early twentieth century more than the telephone. When Alexander Graham Bell first demonstrated his invention at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, the only means of instant communication available to the American public was the telegraph, which could transmit messages via electrical impulses but could not reproduce sound. Bell filed the first patent for the electric telephone in March 1876 and by January 1877 held three additional patents for the device. Bell's father–in-law, Gardiner Greene Hubbard, established the Bell Telephone Company in July to control the valuable interests associated with Bell's telephone patents. American Bell Telephone operated by granting licenses to companies across the country seeking to provide local telephone services. Over the next several decades, this licensing system would expand into the colossal "Bell System" of numerous local and regional telephone companies operating under a parent company, American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T).[1]

[1] Albert B. Iardella, *Western Electric and the Bell System: A Survey of Service,* (New York: Western Electric Co. 1964), 7-9.

The telephone was first introduced in Missouri in 1877 when the American District Telegraph Company (ADT), headed by general manager George Durant, was granted a license by American Bell to provide local telephone service in St. Louis. Durant opened the first telephone exchange in Missouri in April 1878, with twelve subscribers routed through a central switchboard located in the Third National Bank building at 417 Olive Street (demolished). On September 3, 1879, ADT was incorporated as the Bell Telephone Company of Missouri. Although the technology at the time limited service to local calls, the company claimed 600 subscribers by 1880. That number grew larger as the company developed separate exchanges in the eastern and northwestern portions of the state, which it sold to the Missouri and Kansas Telephone Company in 1882. By 1890, Bell of Missouri counted nearly 3,000 subscribers in the St. Louis area. The company constructed an imposing Richardsonian Romanesque-style building at 920 Olive Street in downtown St. Louis (Bell Telephone Building, NR listed 8/5/1999) to house its main exchange and offices.[2]

While Bell Telephone of Missouri was establishing itself as the leading provider of telephone services within St. Louis, parent company American Bell was expanding rapidly into new territories and gaining control over its major competitor, Western Union. After an 1879 settlement gave Bell control over the majority of the telephone exchanges previously operated by Western Union, the company turned its attention to the manufacturing side of its operations. In an effort to standardize the quality and compatibility of the telephone equipment it provided to its expanding network of territorial telephone companies, American Bell acquired majority control of the Western Electric Company in 1882. The decision to acquire Western Electric, then the largest maker of electrical apparatus in the United States, would have far-reaching implications for the future of both companies. Majority ownership of Western Electric gave American Bell the power to control production, pricing, and distribution of its telephone products. Western Electric, in turn, would eventually become a functionally-integrated subsidiary of the Bell Telephone System, responsible not only for manufacturing but for product research, development, and design, as well as general purchasing and as a supply agent for Bell. By turning these responsibilities over to Western Electric, American Bell was freed to focus on servicing its customers and connecting the scattered exchanges across the country into one unified network. To this end, in 1885 the company formed another subsidiary called the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T) to build the lines needed to interconnect the exchanges throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico.[3]

By the early 1900s, American Bell had reorganized to make AT&T the central organization of the Bell System. In 1911, AT&T began a push to consolidate the numerous local operating companies into larger regional units that would function as autonomous companies with local control and identities. In St. Louis, Bell Telephone of Missouri merged with three other companies—Missouri and Kansas Telephone Company, Southwestern Telephone and Telegraph Company in Texas and Arkansas, and the Pioneer Telephone and Telegraph Company of Oklahoma—in 1920 to form the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company. Southwestern Bell, in turn, became one of twenty-three companies within the Bell System's nationwide network operating under AT&T. In 1923, Southwestern purchased Kinloch Telephone System, its primary competitor in St. Louis, and gained an additional 30,000 subscribers. The acquisition also meant that for the first time, all St. Louis telephone customers could communicate with each other.[4]

Southwestern Bell established its headquarters in St. Louis and constructed an impressive thirty-one story Art Deco skyscraper in the center city to house its main operations in 1926. Designed by the architecture firm Mauren, Russell & Crowe and completed at a cost of $8 million, the building remained

[2] Lynn Josse, "Bell Telephone Building," National Register of Historic Places nomination form dated April 1999, 7-9.
[3] George David Smith, *The Anatomy of a Business Strategy: Bell, Western Electric, and the origins of the American telephone industry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 12-14, 76-80. Iardella, 8.

[4] Josse, 9-10. "Southwestern Bell Telephone Company," *St. Louis Commerce,* April 1979, 34.

the tallest structure in St. Louis until the Laclede Gas Building was constructed in 1969. The new headquarters building supplanted the Bell Telephone Building at 920 Olive. Following the consolidation, an existing office building owned by the company in Kansas City was expanded and new buildings were constructed in Dallas and Oklahoma City in 1929. By 1930, more than 1.3 million telephones were in operation within Southwestern Bell's territory.[5]

During the Great Depression, Southwestern Bell continued to expand its operations by purchasing numerous small telephone companies that still operated in its territory. The long-range development of the nation-wide Bell System also continued through the 1930s. Several key innovations were introduced by Bell Laboratories and Western Electric during this time. The first combined handset telephone, the 300 desk set, was distributed for commercial use to Bell customers in 1937; the first coaxial cable was installed between New York and Philadelphia in 1936; and in October 1937 the company introduced a new type of central office switching equipment called the crossbar, which greatly improved call speeds and made direct dialing between customers possible for the first time.[6]

American entry into World War II forced the Bell System to redirect its energies towards the war, since communications were a vital component of the nation's defense efforts. The Western Electric manufacturing arm in particular transitioned rapidly to war production mode to service enormous government contracts, shifting 85% of its manufacturing to the production of war-related products. The first of these, a $700,000 order for the manufacture of Signal Corps test sets, was received in June 1939. In 1940, Western Electric sold $3.5 million in communications equipment to the United States Government. By 1941, the figure stood at $41,000,000. Bell Laboratories and Western Electric engineers also developed and produced numerous electronic devices, including gun directors, bomb release computers, radar systems, and underwater warfare equipment, as part of the war effort. Between 1942 and 1945, Western Electric provided more than $2.3 billion in equipment to the United States Armed Forces.[7]

Wartime production led to shortages of materials and supplies for the Bell System's non-military phone services. Copper, rubber, and telephone sets were in short supply throughout the country. The increase in telephone calls across AT&T's network caused long delays, and Southwestern Bell launched an advertising campaign to encourage customers to limit calls to five minutes. Additions and non-essential improvements to Bell System facilities were also put on hold by the War Production Board.[8]

When World War II ended in 1945, the Bell System and Western Electric shifted "from war emergency to the demands of peace," and the telephone industry expanded rapidly to meet the pent-up consumer demand for phone services. Over two million customers were waiting for service; "forecasts for the Bell System's post-war needs showed clearly that restoration of pre-war production facilities would be wholly inadequate… and that a substantial enlargement of practically all shops would be necessary."[9] Western Electric employees in the massive Hawthorne Works in Chicago, the Kearny Works in New Jersey, and the Point Breeze Works in Baltimore worked round-the-clock shifts to reconvert the facilities for telephone production within a matter of days. At the end of 1945, despite being hampered by continuing shortages in copper, cotton, lead, lumber, and steel, Western Electric produced record numbers of telephones, central office equipment, switchboards, cable and wiring, radio equipment, and other apparatus. The

[5] David G. Park, Good Connections: A Century of Service by the Men & Women of Southwestern Bell, (St. Louis, Mo: Southwestern Bell Telephone Co., 1984.), 286. "Nearly 100 Years of Telephone Service Here," *Saint Genevieve Herald,* April 15, 1976. Vol. 19 of the St. Louis General Scrapbook, page 43, located at the Missouri Historical Society.
[6] Iardella, 33-34.
[7] Ibid. 35.
[8] Park, 286. *Telephone Production Since V-J Day*, (Western Electric Company, Inc., 1947), 1, 31-40
[9] *Telephone Production Since V-J Day*, 8.

company also embarked on an ambitious plan for expansion of facilities for the manufacture and distribution of equipment and supplies for the Bell System.[10]

THE WESTERN ELECTRIC-SOUTHWESTERN BELL DISTRIBUTION HOUSE

At the end of the war, Southwestern Bell had a waiting list of 205,000 potential customers. Between 1944 and 1948, the number of phones operated by the company grew from two million to over three million. Southwestern Bell also stepped up the marketing of enhanced telephone equipment and services, which had been stymied during the war. In order to effectively service its growing network of telephone lines and provide equipment to its new customers, part of Southwestern Bell's post-war expansion included the construction of new distribution houses in key cities.[11]

Distribution houses had been an integral part of the Bell System's operations since the turn of the century. These facilities served as supply centers and repair shops that linked Western Electric directly to the Bell Telephone companies that they served. In St. Louis, the primary components of the Southwestern Bell system were the downtown headquarters building, which served as the main operations center and housed the company's administrative offices, the dozens of exchange buildings scattered throughout the city which housed the actual equipment for each exchange, and the distribution house. Prior to 1900, the Bell companies placed orders directly from Western Electric factories, and Western Electric did not provide any repair services. However, as Western Electric's role in the Bell System expanded, so did the need for a more efficient means of supplying parts and services to Bell customers. The first distribution house was established in Philadelphia in 1901, the same year that Western Electric and the Bell companies implemented a Standard Supply Contract that outlined the materials and services that Western Electric would supply to each operating company. By 1930, there were twenty-seven Western Electric-Bell Telephone distributing houses operating throughout the country, from New York to Los Angeles.[12]

St. Louis established its first distribution house in 1902, when the city's Bell telephone lines were still controlled by Bell Telephone Company of Missouri. The building, located at 814 Spruce Street and operated by Western Electric, is no longer extant. When Southwestern Bell was formed in 1920, the company also gained control of existing distribution houses in Kansas City (1903), Dallas (1908) and Houston (1912).[13]

Distribution houses became even more important in the post-World War II era, when Bell and Western Electric were expanding rapidly. A 1964 Western Electric publication titled *Western Electric and the Bell System: A Survey of Service*, outlined the important functions of the distribution houses:

> Typically, a WE [Western Electric] Distributing House stocks about 10,000 different items including materials of WE manufacture and the many supplies—from stationary to lineman's tools—that the company purchases and stocks for the Bell Telephone Companies. Some 10,000 telephone sets are reconditioned in the Distributing House repair shops annually, along with many other types of communications apparatus…At each Distributing House, the physical plant, shipping, repair functions, and billing procedures are based on the concept of service…Illustrating Bell System teamwork,

[10] Ibid, 8-13.
[11] Park, 286.
[12] Iardella, 58.
[13] Ibid, 58-59.

> distribution people work side by side with telephone company personnel to get the job done economically, swiftly, and accurately.[14]

During the post-war period, the outdated distribution houses that had been constructed in the early 1900s were replaced with more modern facilities and new distribution houses were established in Syracuse, NY, Nashville, TN, Charlotte, NC, Phoenix, AZ, Miami, FL, Westchester, IL, Salt Lake City, UT, and Omaha, NE.[15]

In St. Louis, the 1902 distribution house in downtown St. Louis was replaced in 1948 with the modern three-story masonry building at 4250 Duncan Street, in the industrial district of the city's Central West End neighborhood. Surrounding lots were developed during the first decades of the twentieth century with low-scale light-industrial brick buildings. The majority of buildings in the vicinity were one story height, making the three-story West Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House a visual landmark in the area. The new location, with its close proximity to major roads and to the railroad, allowed for more efficient transfer of goods to and from the site.

Building permits dating from May through December of 1947 illustrate how the construction project was divided between Southwestern Bell Telephone Company and Western Electric. Southwestern Bell constructed the office and garage portion of the building, while Western Electric was responsible for the one-and three-story warehouse space. The layout of the St. Louis distribution house followed the general requirements for all of Bell's distribution houses, with office space for Southwestern Bell employees, warehouse space to house supplies from Western Electric, and "special areas engineered and equipped for telephone company truckloading."[16] Thus, each distribution house was set up to provide day-to-day service, load and repair its fleets of vehicles, and respond quickly during emergencies to repair communications systems across the network. Southwestern Bell's distribution house at 4250 Duncan Street was designed specifically to serve these three important functions. Although no architect is listed on any of the available building permit records, plans for the building dating from December 1947 were drawn up by the Austin Company, a nation-wide design, engineering, and construction firm that specialized in industrial building systems. The total cost of the building was approximately $1.15 million.

The building at 4250 Duncan Street served as Western Electric's primary distribution house in Missouri through the 1960s, and as such was the supply and repair center for the company's telephone network throughout the region. The distribution house, along with the downtown headquarters building and the dozens of exchange houses scattered throughout the city, was part of a network of facilities that made St. Louis the center for Southwestern Bell's operations. In the mid-1970s, the building was repurposed for new use as a Southwestern Telephone Company Training Center, which necessitated a renovation of the interior space within the office portion of the building—the first floor plan was reconfigured with new classrooms and office space, and the upper floor offices were converted into classrooms. The warehouse portion of the building remained a supply house for Western Electric, with open spaces and an exposed structural system, and the garage remained largely unchanged as well.

In 1974, the United Stated Department of Justice initiated an anti-trust suit against AT&T. A settlement was reached in the case of United States vs. AT&T in 1982 that outlined the divesture of the Bell system into seven independent regional holding companies. Following the official breakup of AT&T in 1984, Southwestern Bell Telephone Company was managed by the Southwestern Bell Corporation, one of the

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid. St. Louis building permits dated March through October 1947.

regional holding companies created as part of the divesture. AT&T assumed corporate charter of Western Electric in 1984.[17]

ARCHITECTURE

The Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House is a well-preserved example of an Art Moderne industrial building designed and built by the Austin Company, one of the largest and most well-known industrial design firms in the country. Constructed in 1947 during a time when post-war scarcity limited the construction of new buildings throughout the country, the Distribution House's clean lines and austere exterior, with large expanses of steel-sash windows and largely unadorned brick surfaces, epitomized the streamlined aesthetic of the Art Moderne style.

The Art Moderne style of architecture arose during the 1930s in reaction to the ornamental Art Deco style and as a reflection of the austere economic climate brought on by the Great Depression. The style was influenced not only by the rise of specialized industrial design in America but also by the rise of European Modernism and the growing recognition of the International Style of architecture practiced by Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe. The Art Moderne structures constructed throughout the country during the 1930s and into the 1940s were designed to express technology and function above all else. Ornamentation was eschewed in favor of clean lines and uncluttered surfaces. Buildings featured long horizontal lines and often incorporated curved elements to suggest an aerodynamic quality and a sense of motion. Glass block elements and large expanses of windows created a sense of transparency and lightness.

As historian Martin Greif notes in *Depression Modern: The Thirties Style in America,* the widespread acceptance of the streamlined modern aesthetic, which was embraced not only by architects but by designers of everyday objects ranging from clocks and radios to cars and household appliances, "marked probably the first time…in America in which the purely functional was made to appear beautiful" and designers realized "the decorative inherent in the functional." According to Greif, in no other place was this truer than in American industry, which produced the machine itself and provided the purest expression of the machine "in its architectural counterpart, the factory."[18]

The Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House served as a visual representation of the pioneering role that both companies played in the development of modern communications technologies. As one of the nation's largest manufacturers of modern electronics and a leader in cutting-edge technology, Western Electric products, most notably its telephones, epitomized the type of streamlined modern design sense that the Art Moderne style expressed through architecture. Southwestern Bell had embraced the opulent Art Deco style for its signature downtown headquarters building, but utilized the sparer Art Moderne style for the Distribution House. The Austin Company's design, with its long bands of steel sash windows, simple brick piers, and geometric entrance surround, reflected the building's purely functional nature.

The Austin Company, based in Cleveland Ohio, was particularly well-versed in Art Moderne interpretations of industrial buildings and produced many of the largest, most impressive, and most ubiquitous examples of the style during the 1930s and 1940s. Founded in 1904 by carpenter Samuel Austin and his son, engineer Wilbert J. Austin and incorporated in 1916, the Austin Company pioneered

[17] "SBC Communications Inc.," Accessed January 28, 2011, http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/SBC-Communications-Inc-Company-History.html.
[18] Martin Greif, *Depression Modern: The Thirties Style in America*, (New York: Universe Books, 1975), 31-33.

the "design-build" concept of industrial construction by incorporating full-service design and engineering services with construction services under one contract. By the late 1920s, "The Austin Method" of industrial construction had been utilized successfully on factory buildings throughout New England, the Midwest, and the West Coast, including the massive Oakland Motor Car Company manufacturing plant in Pontiac, Michigan, the world's largest building at the time of its completion in 1927. The company opened district offices in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Seattle, Portland, Dallas, Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco to handle scores of new contracts, and continued to develop innovative new building technologies to solve the problems of its increasingly complex industrial projects. The Austin Company constructed the first reinforced concrete building in Cleveland for the H. Black Company in 1907, introduced standardized prefabricated building designs in the 1910s, and experimented with electric-arc welding to produce all-welded steel structures during the 1920s. The company designed the world's first "controlled conditions" factory—the Simmonds Saw and Steel Company in Fitchburg, Massachusetts (1929)—that allowed for control of all internal environmental conditions, including lighting, temperature, humidity, and sound. During the 1930s, the company established a separate division that provided pre-fabricated porcelain-enameled steel service stations for major oil companies like Standard Oil, Gulf Oil, Texaco, and Pennzoil.[19]

Although certainly not the largest or costliest among the Austin Company's many commissions in the post-World War II period, the Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House is a representative example of the company's work. The Austin Company first began designing for communications companies in the late 1920s, constructing some of Hollywood's first sound stages and film studios, including NBC's Radio City of the West (1938). During the post-war period, the company was responsible for the design of dozens of local television stations across the country.[20] Although it is not known if Austin designed other buildings for Southwestern Bell or for other Bell subsidiaries of AT&T, the company had a proven track record with the design and construction of the type of specialized industrial structures that the Bell System required.

Within the industrial and manufacturing district of the Central West End neighborhood west of downtown St. Louis, the Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House is a distinctive architectural presence. The building is surrounded primarily by one-story vernacular brick industrial buildings from the 1910s and 1920s. The only manufacturing concern within the district that is comparable in size and prominence to the Distribution House is the former Ford Assembly Plant at Forest Park Boulevard and Sarah Street, which was constructed between 1914 and 1915 as a standard brick loft building with Classical Revival detailing. The plant, which served as Ford's primary manufacturing facility in St. Louis until 1948, has been rehabilitated for residential use.[21]

CONCLUSION

The Western Electric – Southwestern Bell Distribution House in St. Louis' Central West End is locally significant under National Register Criterion A for Communications as a reflection of the expansion and refinement of the communications industry in Missouri. The building was purpose-built to serve as the supply and repair center for the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company and was a critical component of

[19] "The Austin Company." Reference for Business: Encyclopedia of Business 2nd Ed., http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/history/St-Th/The-Austin-Company.html, accessed January 26, 2011.
[20] Martin Greif, *The New Industrial Landscape: The Story of the Austin Company*, (Clinton, N.J.: Main Street Press, 1978), 126-127.
[21] "The History of the Ford Motor Company in St. Louis, Missouri." http://www.bluesarthouse.com/ford/plant.htm, accessed January 20, 2011.

Southwestern Bell's operations in the region, providing for the efficient distribution and repair of a wide array of products manufactured by subsidiary Western Electric, ranging from telephones and switchboard equipment to paper for phone directories. The building is also architecturally significant as a well-preserved example of an Art Moderne industrial building designed by The Austin Company, a nationally-known industrial design firm.

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the property encompasses the two parcels of land associated with the Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House at 4250 Duncan Street in St. Louis, Missouri. Legal descriptions of the two parcels are: CB 4586 Duncan, SBC Subdivision Lot A; C B 4586 Duncan, Boyces S. Lindell Addition, Block 1, Lot 7 to 12 Including 31 to 36 & N-7 to 12.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary corresponds to the two parcels that were historically associated with the Western Electric-Southwestern Bell Distribution House at 4250 Duncan Street in St. Louis, Missouri.

Name of Property: Western Electric – Southwestern Bell Distribution House

City or Vicinity: St. Louis

County: St. Louis City **State:** Missouri

Photographer: Elizabeth Breiseth, MacRostie Historic Advisors
53 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1357
Chicago, IL 60604

Date Photographed: January 2011

Digital images on file at MacRostie Historic Advisors LLC

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

Photograph 1 of 14: View southwest along façade (north elevation)

Photograph 2 of 14: View south toward main entrance on north elevation

Photograph 3 of 14: View southwest toward north and east elevations

Photograph 4 of 14: View west, window detail on east elevation

Photograph 5 of 14: View northwest along east elevation

Photograph 6 of 14: View southeast along façade (north elevation)

Photograph 7 of 14: View of east toward west elevation

Photograph 8 of 14: View northeast toward west and south (rear) elevations

Photograph 9 of 14: View east toward west and south (rear) elevations and loading dock

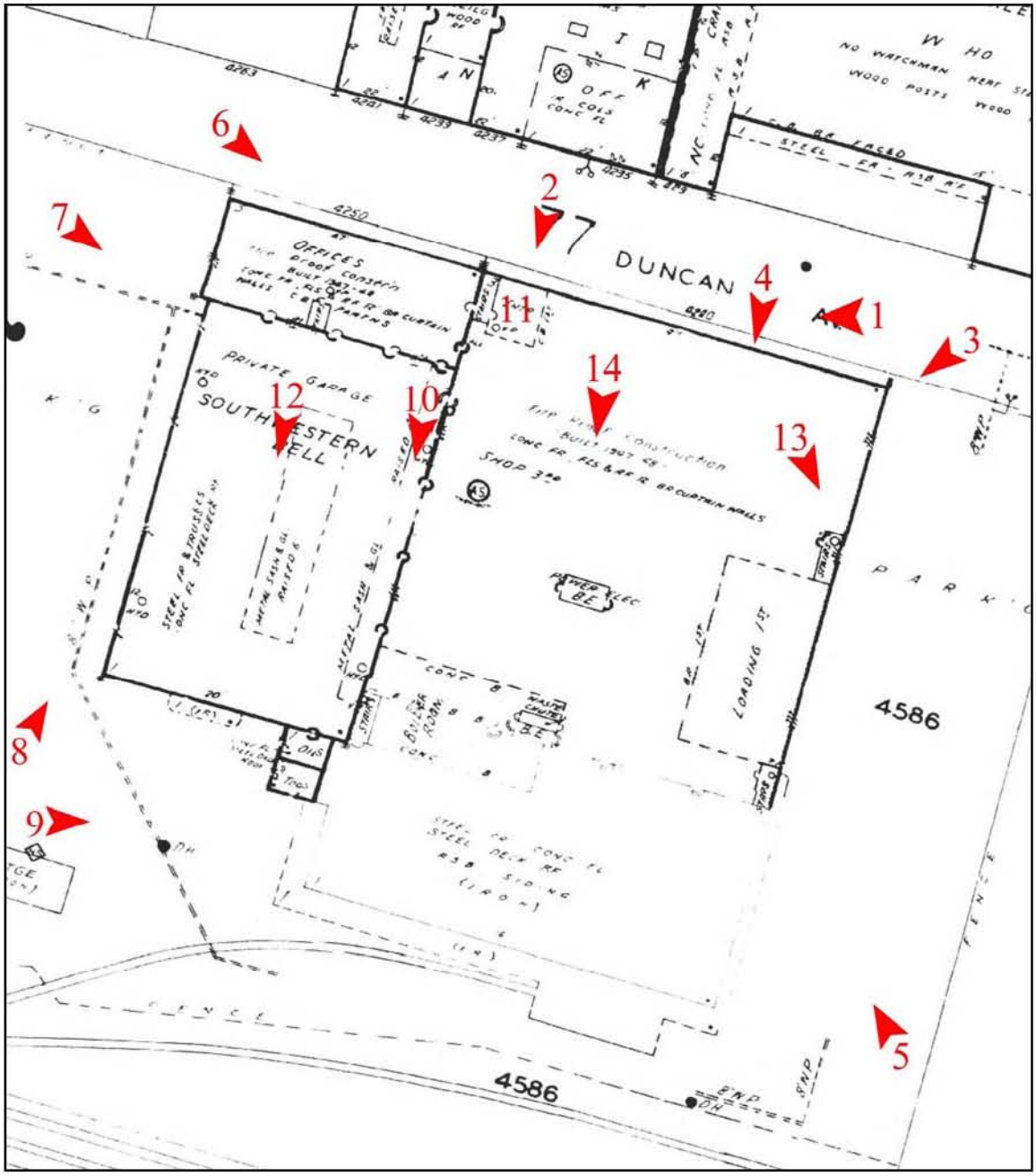
Photograph 10 of 14: View south along garage component roof, garage monitor roof at right

Photograph 11 of 14: View northeast across lobby

Photograph 12 of 14: View south across garage

Photograph 13 of 14: View southeast, interior window detail, second floor Western Electric portion of building

Photograph 14 of 14: View south across second floor of Western Electric portion of building



Photograph Key

Images

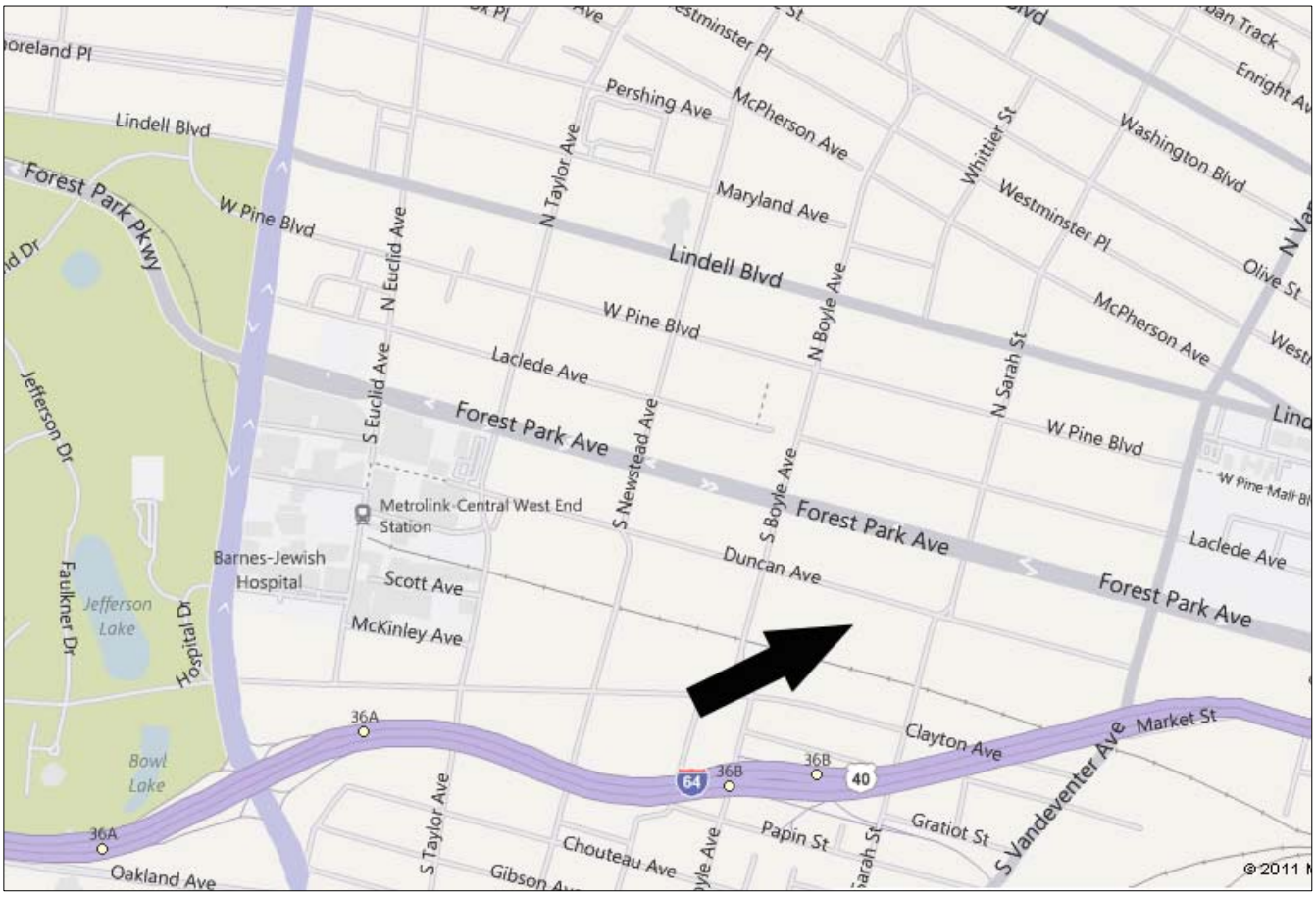


Figure 1: Location Map

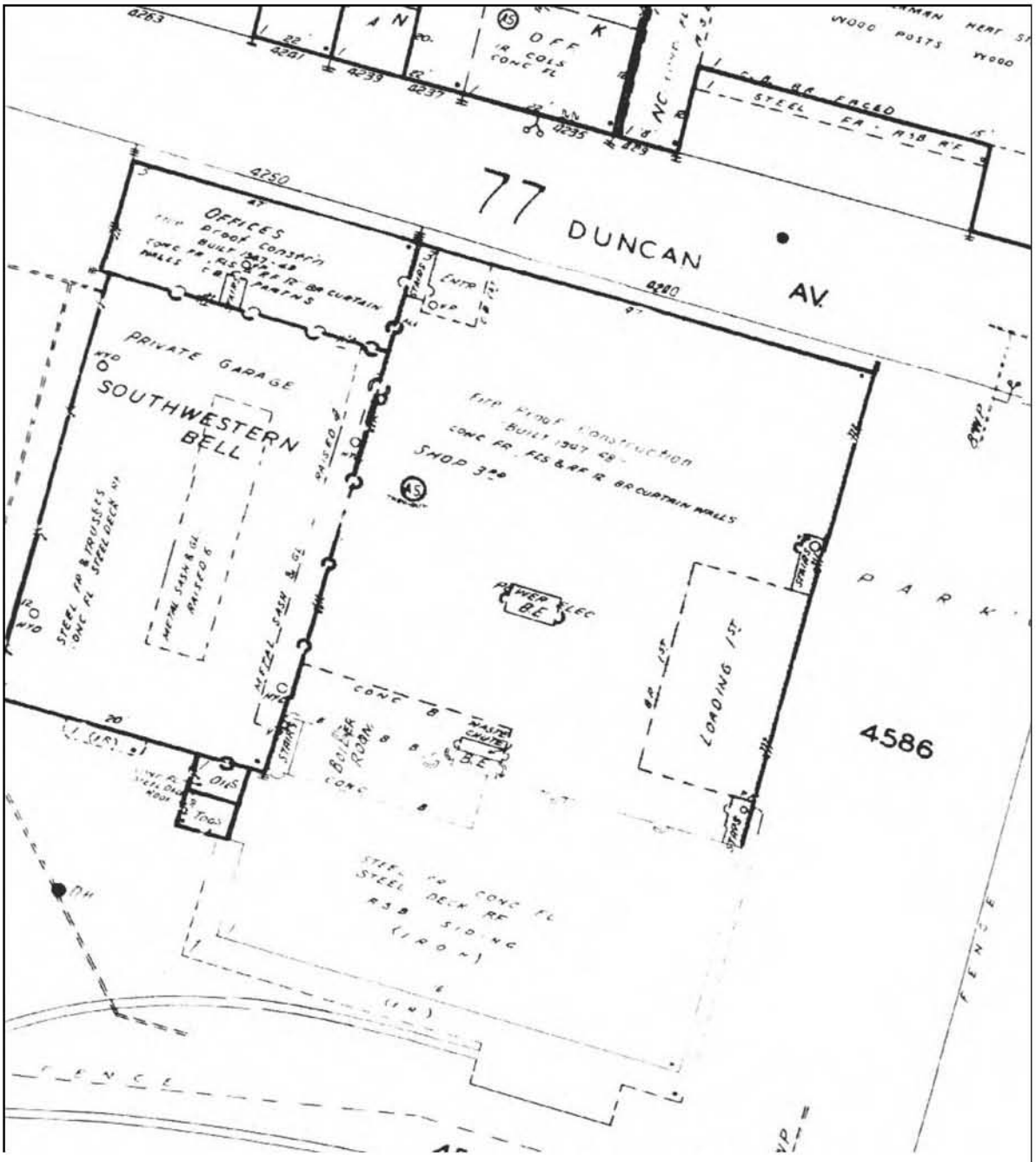


Figure 2: 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing Distribution House

Figure 3: Southwestern Bell advertisement from 1940

Figure 4: Western Electric advertisement from 1946 that explains the activities of the company.

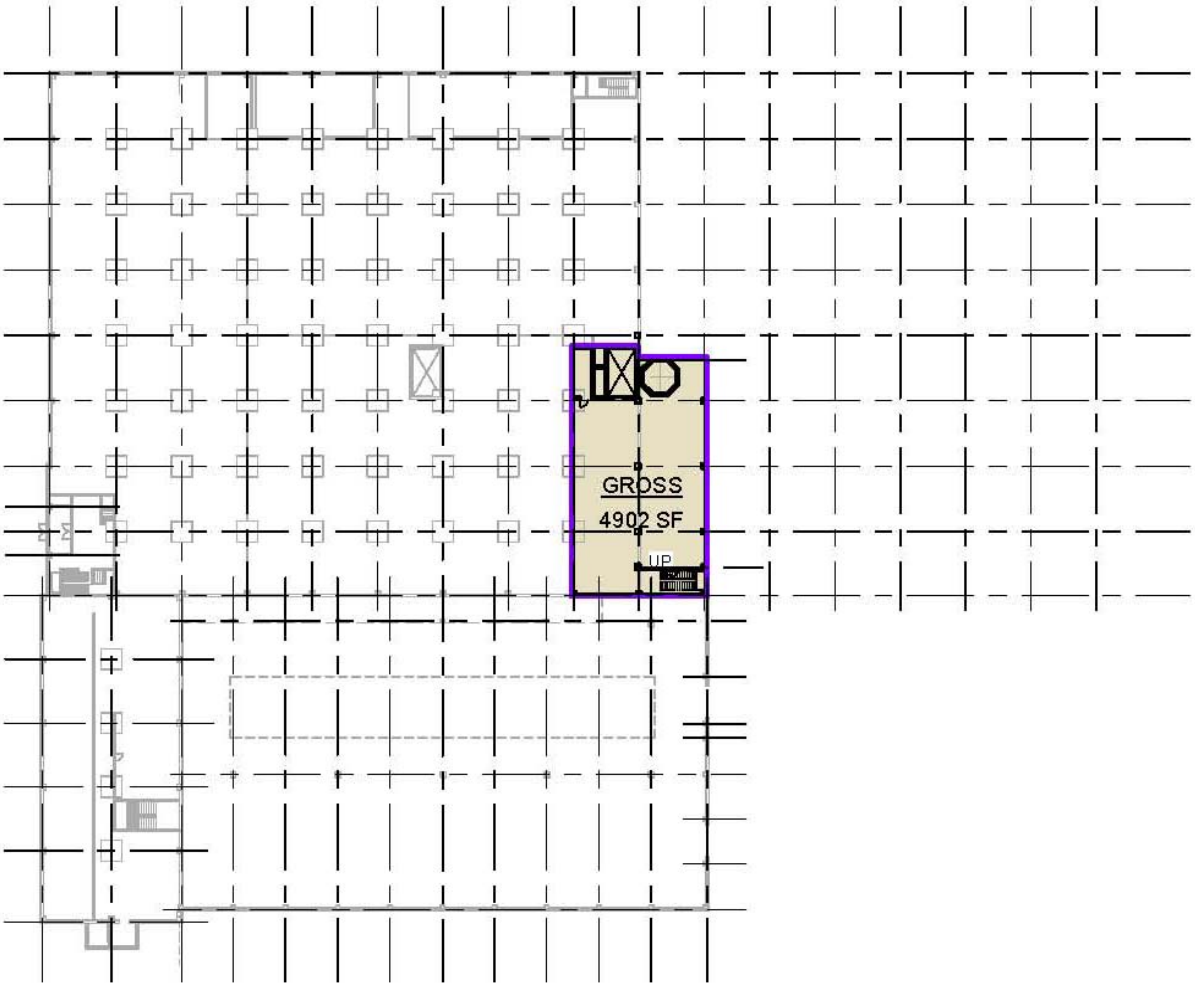


Figure 5: Basement Floor Plan (2011), HO+K Architects

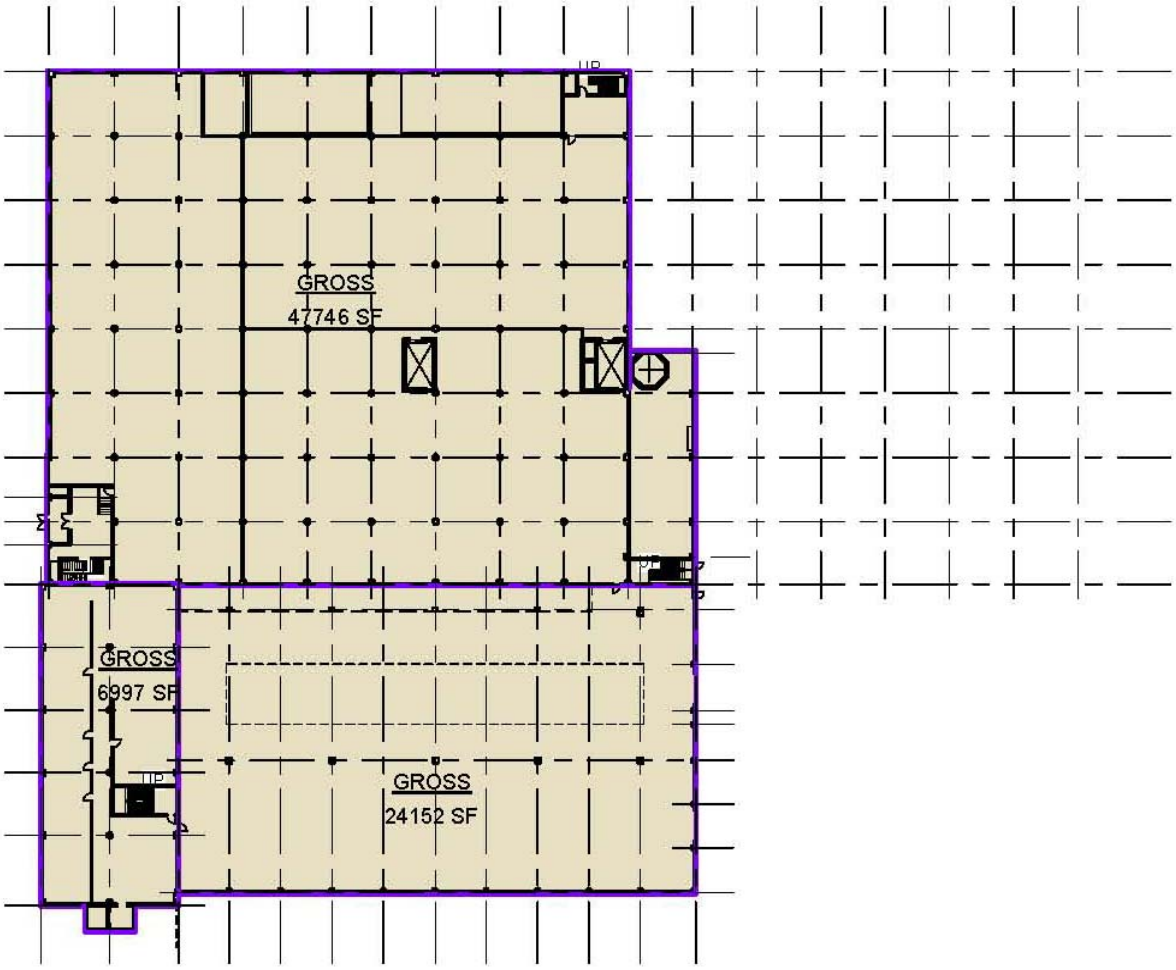


Figure 6: First Floor Plan (2011), HO+K Architects

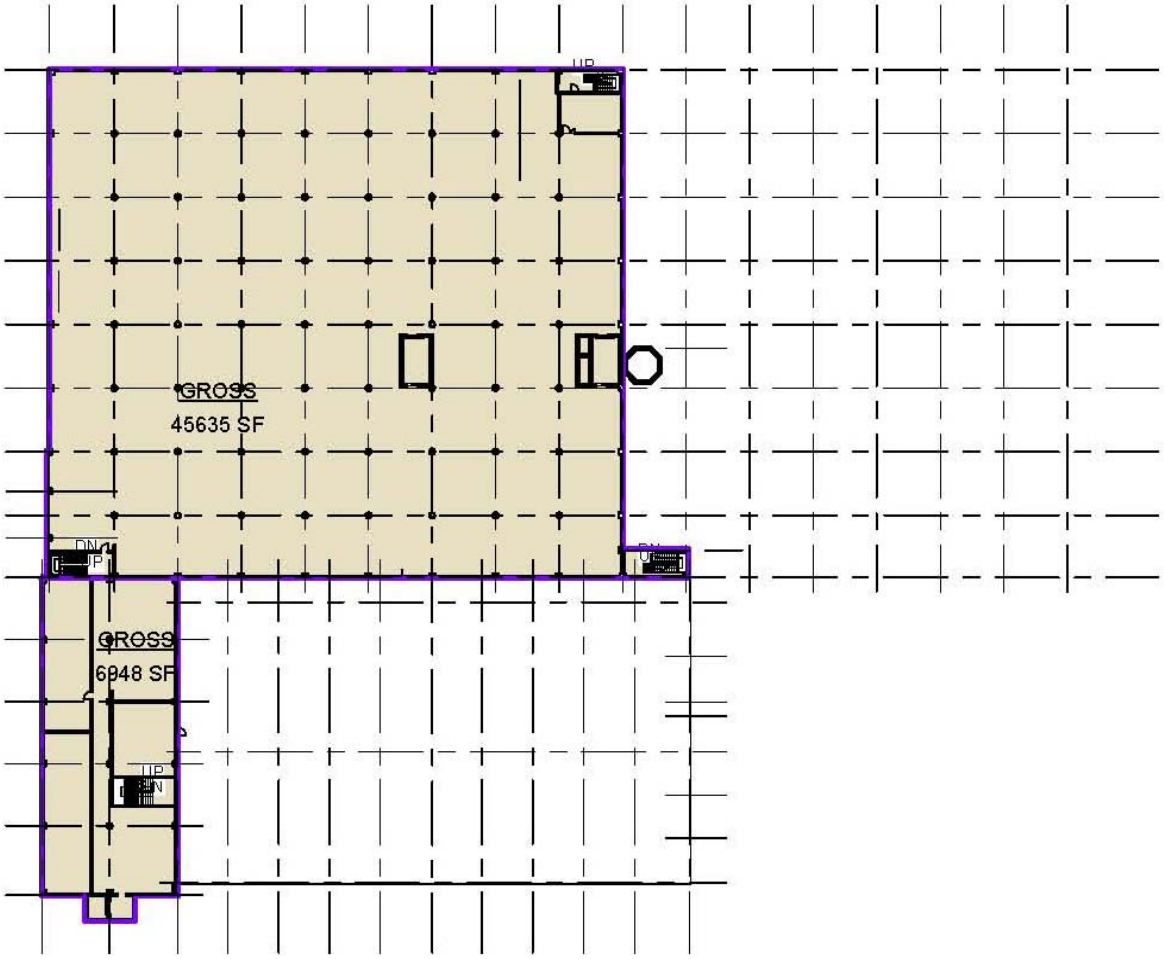


Figure 7: Second Floor Plan (2011), HO+K Architects

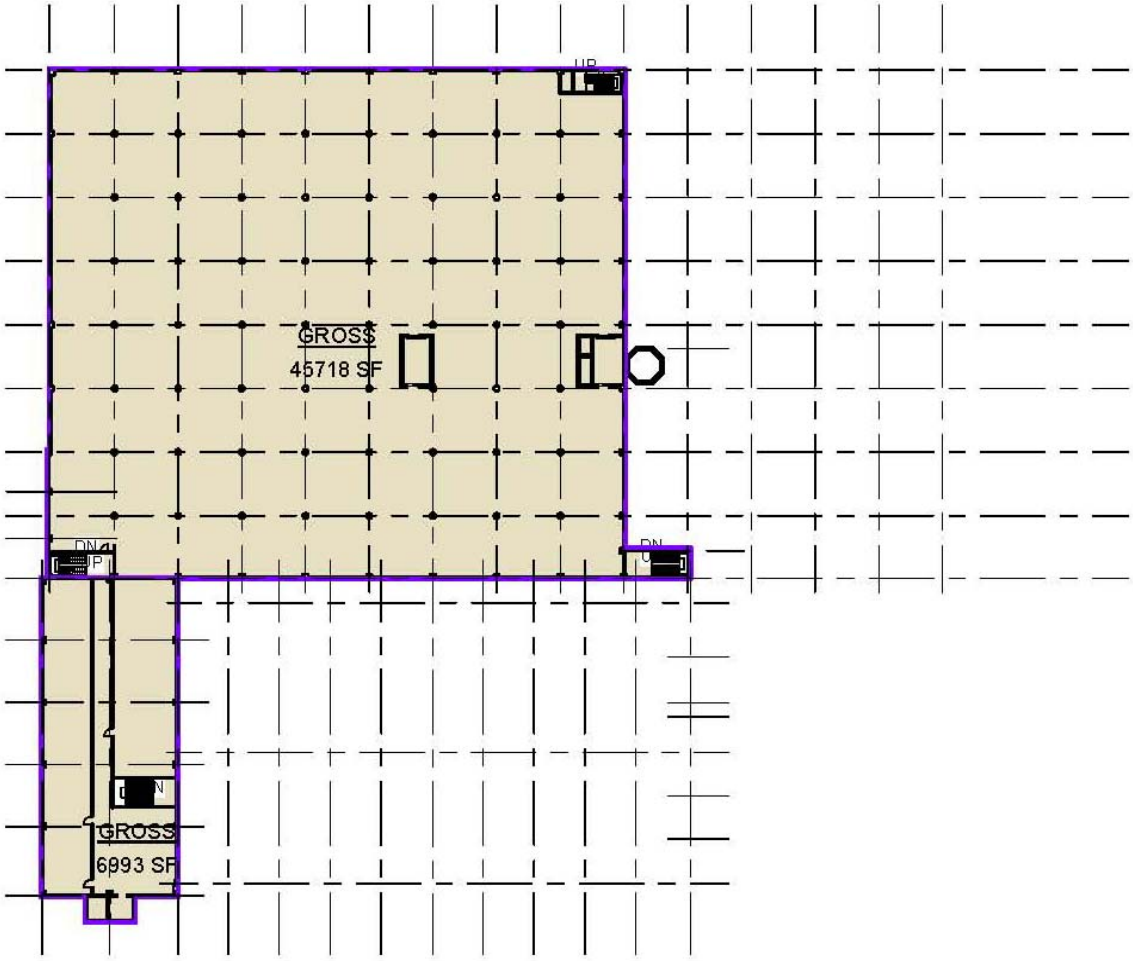


Figure 8: Third Floor Plan (2011), HO+K Architects


Ferguson
Dellwood
Bellefontaine Neighbors
Glasgow Village
Jennings
Normandy
Northwoods
Pine Lawn
Baden
ST LOUIS
Richmond Heights
Maplewood
Tower Grove Park
Lemay
MADISON CO
ST CLAIR CO
ILLINOIS RIVER
MISSISSIPPI RIVER
ST LOUIS CO
ST LOUIS CITY
45'
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320
427
300
310
Western Electric
Southwestern Bell
Distribution Hdqrs
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ST. LOUIS
(INDEPENDENT
CITY)
MISSOURI


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