

**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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters
Other names/site number DO09:0124-056

2. Location

Street & number 100 South 19th Street Not for publication
City or town Omaha Vicinity
State Nebraska Code NE County Douglas Code 055 Zip code 68102

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

/s/ Michael J. Smith May 31, 2009
Signature of certifying official Date
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
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 Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. _____
 - see continuation sheet. _____
 - determined eligible for the National Register. _____
 - see continuation sheet. _____
 - determined not eligible for the National Register. _____
 - removed from the National Register. _____
 - other, (explain): _____
- _____
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters
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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

Private
 Public-local
 Public-state
 Public-federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

Building(s)
 District
 Site
 Structure
 Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| <u>1</u> | <u> </u> | Buildings |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> | Sites |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> | Structures |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> | Objects |
| <u>1</u> | <u> </u> | Total |

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Business

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Multiple Dwelling

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Modern

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation CONCRETE

Walls BRICK

Roof SYNTHETICS/Rubber

Other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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.)

- 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.
- 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 a 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMUNICATIONS

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1957-1964

Significant Dates

1957

1964

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Leo A. Daly

9. Major Bibliographical 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 for additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other Omaha Public Library, UNL
- Name of repository: Architecture Library

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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 | 253577 | 4571510 | 3. | | | |
| 2. | | | | 4. | | | |

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.) See Map Entitled "Key Plan," Section 10, Page 16.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) See Map Entitled "Key Plan," Section 10, Page 16.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Christina A. Jansen
organization Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture date May 21, 2009
street & number 1516 Cuming Street telephone 402-341-1544
city or town Omaha state NE zip code 68102

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/title Vern Dolleck
street & number 10730 Pacific Street, Suite 242 telephone 402-391-7030
city or town Omaha state NE zip code 68114

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, (15 USC 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Located within Omaha's Central Business District, the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters is located on the south side of Dodge Street between 19th and 20th Streets. The building occupies the entire half block and is surrounded by sidewalk on the north, east and west sides and a city alley on the south. The highest point on the site is located on the west end and slopes down approximately fourteen feet to the east side of the half block.

The large rectangular twelve-story building stands as one uninterrupted building mass void of upper-story setbacks. The structure was completed in two building phases, the first begun in 1954, completed in 1957 and the second begun in 1962, completed by 1964. The 1957 building campaign included construction of a 112'-0" x 132'-0" twelve-story building on the east side of the half block. In 1964 a twelve-story 111'-0" x 132'-0" west addition was completed.

The short time period between construction dates and strategies utilized by the communications company further discussed in Section Eight, provide evidence that the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company planned for the 1964 expansion during the 1957 design and construction phases. As a result, the 1964 addition mimics the 1957 in regards to the design, materials and structural organization. Although additions are ideally distinguishable from original constructions, in this case, the 1964 addition was a consequent expansion of the 1957 building.

Northwestern Bell also constructed the other two buildings located on the block bounded by Dodge Street on the north, Douglas Street on the south, 19th Street on the east, 20th Street on the west. The fifteen-story 1918 building is located on the southeast corner of the block while the 1970 fifteen-story building is located on the southwest corner of the block. Both the 1918 and 1970 building are unfortunately ineligible for listing on the National Register. Modifications to the interior of the 1918 building as a result of increased equipment installation along with removal of much of the ornamental façade left that building with very little historic integrity and the 1970 building is currently ineligible due to age. Therefore, the 1957 Building is the best representative of Northwestern Bell's role in Omaha's communications and commercial development.

CONSTRUCTION

A steel skeleton serves as the structural system for the building. Cream brick and granite veneers, aluminum frame windows and asbestos spandrel panels provide infill between structural components. In addition to the typical concrete and corrugated steel floor deck, another layer of corrugated steel deck was installed on the underside aligning to create one-direction wiring raceways, an ingenious precursor to the modern-day computer flooring systems.

EXTERIOR

All three street facades are horizontally organized in the tripartite hierarchy. The two story¹ base of the building is finished with reddish-brown, black and gray granite, aluminum frame fixed or pivot windows and asbestos spandrel panels. The nine-story body of the building is sheathed in a cream colored brick masonry veneer with narrow bands of alternating aluminum frame windows and spandrel panels. The openings are the only indication of each floor. The single story attic of the building is simply emphasized with a higher proportion and larger window/spandrel panel openings.

The building is divided vertically by simply detailed masonry or stone veneered steel columns. There are six vertical bays on the east and west facades and ten vertical bays on the north and south. Utilizing vertical ribbons of windows, spandrel panels, and black granite adjacent to each veneered structural column, the verticality of the building's base is emphasized and contrasts with the horizontality of the window/spandrel ribbons found in the body. The verticality of the crown is also emphasized through the use of vertically oriented aluminum frame windows and spandrel panels.

¹ The base is only a single-story on the west façade due to the slope of the exterior grade.

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The primary entrance into the building is found on the east façade in the fourth structural bay to the north. Recessed slightly into the building, an aluminum-framed entrance assembly contains two pairs of revolving doors flanked on either side by a pedestrian door. Above the doors, reddish-brown granite panels supported stainless steel letters that expressed the company's name. A small rectangular display window is centered in each of the two adjacent structural bays.

The center bays on the north façade are occupied by a secondary pedestrian entrance in the eastern bay and a large overhead door in the western bay. This façade is the only building face where, only at the cornice, the juncture between the 1957 building phase and the 1964 building phase is noticeable. Additional penetrations on the west façade are a display window in each of the center-flanking structural bays.

INTERIOR

A tight six-bank elevator and stair core is located slightly south and east of the center of the building. Although the floors at each elevator lobby have a terrazzo finish, the wall finish differs per floor. Both the terrazzo floors and wall finishes throughout each respective floor are continuous within the 1957 building and 1964 addition. The majority of the walls of the first floor elevator lobby are sheathed in red marble while the walls on floors two through eleven have a limestone finish. The twelfth floor elevator lobby is not finished in stone; instead, wood panels were installed and are still intact. All Modern-styled aluminum/chrome controls are in place. The elevator lobbies also featured a pair of porcelain-and-chrome drinking fountains set into a limestone veneered recess along the north wall. The first floor lobby exhibits a few stainless steel/aluminum doors and door frames.

Two additional steel stairs penetrate most floors on the south side of the building; one is located on the southeast end of the 1957 building and the other in the southwest corner of the 1964 addition. Exterior walls in these stairs are finished with a glazed clay tile. A third stair is located on the north side of the building provided egress from the first floor to exterior grade and the second floor. At some point in the building's history, the opening to this stair on the second floor was infilled. On floors one through six, directly adjacent and to the west of the elevator/stair core, ghosting on the walls and a large floor opening indicate the location of an escalator that is no longer extant.

Since the flooring material, pipe insulation, adhesives and steel fireproofing material contained high levels of asbestos, areas other than those constructed of masonry and sheathed with stone or wood applied directly to wood studs have been remediated. The elevator and stair core constituted the building's public space on each floor, and remain representative of the construction period.

The structural system, extant interior wall construction / finishes, and floor finishes are continuous throughout the 1957 building and the 1964 addition. There is no noticeable seam between the design strategies, construction strategies or materials used that indicate the building was constructed in two separate phases.

INTEGRITY DISCUSSION

The Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters maintains a high degree of all seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The 1964 addition is clearly a continuation of the 1957 building and does not detract from the overall structure's historic integrity. The window fenestration, primary entrance, elevator lobbies and open floor plan convey the property's use as a corporate office. The size, scale and location of the building symbolize its importance to Omaha's downtown and a sense of the area in the mid 20th century. Each of these aspects contributes to the property's ability to maintain integrity of location, setting, feeling and association.

In addition, the building retains all key exterior masonry veneers, spandrel panels, aluminum windows and doors. Elevator lobbies, serving as the hub of office circulation demonstrate the efficient, understated elegance of the company. Workmanship qualities common to the building's period of construction are demonstrated in the use of corrugated steel

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deck raceways, aluminum windows, spandrel panels and stone veneers. Therefore, both the integrity of the materials and workmanship found in the building contribute to the property's overall integrity.

The historically significant extant features mentioned above keenly convey the property's historic character. Historical contemporaries easily recognize the property as it exists today. The Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters is an excellent example of modern architecture in Omaha which is characterized by horizontal and vertical planes forming an uninterrupted building mass, expressing a rejection of historical references and ornamentation. Traditional materials such as brick and stone are used as veneers and are mixed with modern materials like aluminum and steel to speak in a modern language appropriate to Omaha during its period of construction.

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SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

As the regional headquarters of Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, the 100 South 19th Street building is locally significant under Criterion A as representative of Omaha's status as a regional center during the 1950s and 1960s in the areas of communication and commerce. The building's period of significance begins in 1957 and lasts until 1964. This period reflects an uninterrupted plan of expansion necessitated by post World War II growth throughout the company's five-state territory.²

The building is also locally significant under Criterion C as a structure that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the modern corporate office building in Omaha, Nebraska. A product of the 1957 construction period, the building utilizes rationalized, flexible and standardized spatial relationships and exterior façade organization. This approach is reflective of Northwestern Bell Telephone Company's service ideology, the Bell System's design standards and modern architectural discourse occurring during the building's period of construction.

HISTORY/GROWTH OF AT&T PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II

The history of Northwestern Bell and American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T), sometimes referred in this document as the Bell System or National Bell, is in many ways the history of the telephone in the United States. Alexander Graham Bell, Gardiner Hubbard and Thomas Sanders officially founded the Bell Telephone Company in 1877, a little over a year after Alexander Graham Bell spoke into the "talking telegraph" instrument that would eventually change the lines of communication forever.

During that first year most of the telephone service provided by the company consisted of connecting two phones that were located in two different places. It was at this point that Hubbard made the decision to sell service as opposed to just selling the equipment. This would be one of the savviest decisions made in the company's history. He began licensing local businessmen in cities across the country to sell telephone service using the patented Bell telephone, in effect creating telephone franchisees. A standard contract was worked out which gave Bell Telephone Company, by that time reorganized as American Bell, a stock interest in each newly formed operating company. The contracts defined territories and set out the basic relationship between operating companies and American Bell.

Since American Bell's dominance of the telephone market would be jeopardized by the expiration of Bell's telephone patents, the company determined the best way to insure their success was to provide connection service between franchisees and eventually other independent companies. In 1885, nine years before the patents were to expire, American Bell set up a brand-new subsidiary, The American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) whose mission was to build and operate the nation's first long distance network.

As a result of government antitrust lawsuits in the early 1900's and 1910's AT&T, by then the parent company, continued to prosper functioning as a legally-sanctioned, federally-regulated monopoly. AT&T made a steady progress towards its goal of universal service, which "in the twenties and thirties came to mean everyone should have a telephone. The percentage of American households with telephone service reached fifty percent in 1945, seventy percent in 1955 and ninety percent in 1969."³

By the mid 1940s, the nation-wide Bell System network, composed of AT&T, Bell Telephone Laboratories (established in 1925), Western Electric (1881) and 22 local operating companies (often referred to as Baby Bells) was one of the largest employers in the United States. The company continued to make huge strides in new technologies such as the transistor, the television, microwave relay systems, coaxial cable and satellite communications.

HISTORY/GROWTH OF NORTHWESTERN BELL TELEPHONE COMPANY PRIOR TO & DURING WORLD WAR II

² Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, Minnesota and North Dakota.

³ AT&T corporate histories available online.

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As a Baby Bell in the Bell System, the genealogy of Northwestern Bell Telephone Company is complex. Although officially organized in 1921, the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company was preceded by a number of smaller companies. This was in part due to the geographical size and scattered populations of the service area the company covered.

By 1907 the president of the Nebraska Telephone Company,⁴ Casper Yost, became president of the region's other two largest companies, the Iowa Telephone Company and Northwestern Telephone Exchange.⁵ Together these companies were known as the Northwestern Group of Bell Telephone Companies and in 1909 a single general office and staff was established in Omaha. Two years later, they constructed a new building on the south side of Douglas Street between 18th and 19th Street. By 1918 they were constructing a larger, 15-story headquarters building on the northwest corner of the intersection at 19th and Douglas Streets.

The group of companies finally merged in 1921 to become Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, a Baby Bell under the Bell System umbrella. The new company was officially an Iowa corporation, but since the headquarters had already been established in Omaha, the city remained the home of the corporation's headquarters until divestiture of AT&T in 1984.

The prosperity and growth of the 1920's required a new company organizational plan that divided the region into four area divisions: Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska-South Dakota and North Dakota. Each was assigned a general manager and a division headquarters building. By the close of the decade Des Moines had completed their new 10-story division headquarters building, Minneapolis was developing plans for a 24-story office/equipment building and Omaha completed a substantial addition to their 1918 regional headquarters building.⁶

The fall of the stock market in 1929 ushered in trying times for the company along with those of the rest of the country. During the early 30's approximately one of every five Northwestern Bell telephones were taken out of service.⁷ Despite the difficulty, Northwestern Bell continued with eyes on the future. The company executed as many scheduled improvements as possible, "betting that new facilities would be needed when better days returned."⁸ In addition, the paychecks laborers were able to receive for completing company improvements helped keep the local economies afloat.

During World War II, the needs of the military became a primary concern for Northwestern Bell. Although the Bell System was not transferred to government control as it was during World War I, citizens were asked to curtail their long distance calls due to the heavy demands on the system from the war effort.⁹ Construction of military or government facilities took precedence over residential and commercial development so by the close of the war in September 1945 the company had approximately 59,000 unfilled requests for private sector service.¹⁰

POST WORLD WAR II ECONOMIC IMPACT

After the war, Northwestern Bell Telephone Company recognized that as the country was rebuilding with new jobs, new homes, etc., the telephone was one of many material things people wanted access to. In 1945 the company had 454 construction people in five states; by 1947 that number had quadrupled.¹¹ By 1951, the ten-year increase in telephones

⁴ In addition to serving most of the territory in the state of Nebraska, Nebraska Telephone Company also served parts of South Dakota.

⁵ Northwestern Telephone Exchange served parts of Minnesota and North Dakota.

⁶ This building was constructed by the Northwestern Group of Bell Telephone Companies, the consortium of companies under the control of Casper Yost. All were franchisees of AT&T, but until 1921 the companies were not officially merged. Histories state that before the 1921 merger Yost agreed to use the appropriate company's letter head when addressing Bell System corporate to help reduce confusion between the which Nebraska, Iowa, or Minnesota company he was representing at any particular given time.

⁷ Rippey, James C., *Goodbye Central - Hello World: a Centennial History of Northwestern Bell: the Diary of a Dream*. (Davenport, Iowa: Wagners Printers, Inc., 1975), 220.

⁸ Ibid., 221.

⁹ Ibid., 226.

¹⁰ Ibid., 233.

¹¹ Ibid., 233.

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equaled nearly "three-fourths of the total telephone growth in the preceding 63 years."¹² By 1953 the company was serving 1,750,000 telephones and was spending \$50 million in construction to satisfy the rising demand for service. The numbers continued to climb as the necessity of enlarging and improving telephone infrastructure/equipment and constructing or renovating facilities increased.

The construction and employment campaigns that resulted after the war made enormous impacts on the region's economy. As an article in the Bell Telephone Magazine states, "money taken in, in return for telephone service, goes back into the community in the form of telephone wages, expenditures for supplies, taxes, dividends and service improvements. It is a continuing process stimulating other businesses and making an important contribution to the over-all prosperity..."¹³

The ripple effect the company had on thousands of large and small communities throughout its service area is immeasurable. Northwestern Bell employed 21,888 men and women (7,228 men and 14,660 women) by 1951.¹⁴ By 1953 the company had employees working in more than 1,100 buildings in nearly 1,000 cities and towns throughout the region.¹⁵ Throughout its history Northwestern Bell's corporate philosophy affirmed that to provide their customers with outstanding telephone service, they needed to hire and retain skilled telephone men and women. A 1953 Company Annual Report expressed the importance of providing good compensation, benefits and proper working conditions since "the way they (employees) feel toward their job continues to be the greatest factor in providing good and pleasing telephone service."¹⁶ Employees were not only offered stable, well-paying employment, but they were also eligible for savings plans such as the Payroll Allotment Plan started in the 1920's, Disability Benefits and Death Benefits offered since 1913 and Accident Prevention and Health Conservation education.

In 1960 the company invested approximately \$250 million into the regional economy through Northwestern Bell's payrolls, construction expenditures and purchases of materials and services. On top of this, the company's operations contributed \$88 million to local, state and federal taxes.¹⁷ Out this \$250 million, over \$106 million was consumed by construction costs.

A MODERN COMPANY

The innovative nature of the telephone business and Bell Labs' advancing technological developments made AT&T and its Baby Bells truly modern, cutting edge organizations particularly during the 1950s and 1960s. Residential customers were provided with faster and more efficient telephone service as the results of advances with coaxial cable and installations of crossbar equipment in Northwestern Bell's territory.¹⁸

Commercial interests also had a large impact on the service the company provided and helped to pioneer. Prior to 1953, Northwestern Bell and the University of Nebraska College of Medicine had begun experimenting with sending electrocardiograms (heartbeat) and electroencephalograms (brainwave) over the company's network.¹⁹ Eventually the transmissions were perfected through the Bell System's Data-Phone and the equipment became an effective tool for rural doctors to keep in touch with medical centers in larger cities.

After World War II the needs for strategic civil defense planning and secure defense communications became increasingly vital to national security. For Northwestern Bell, its work with Strategic Air Command (SAC), with its national

¹² *Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Annual Report for the Year 1951*. By Eugene J. McNeely, president. (Omaha, Nebraska: Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1951), 3.

¹³ Wood, Kenneth P. "Business is a Good Neighbor, Too." *Bell Telephone Magazine*, Autumn 1950, 166.

¹⁴ *Annual Report 1951*, 13.

¹⁵ *Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Annual Report for the Year 1953*. Omaha, Nebraska: Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1953, 10.

¹⁶ *Annual Report 1953*, 22.

¹⁷ *Annual Report 1960*, 2.

¹⁸ Crossbar is a faster and more efficient switching system (how calls are transferred over communications lines) than the previously used panel equipment.

¹⁹ "Of Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Part 4: The Growing Years: Phones, TV and Telstar." *Northwestern Bell Magazine*, July-August 1964.

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headquarters south of Omaha at Offutt Air Force Base, became a growing responsibility. SAC requested millions of dollars worth of communication equipment including the famed red telephone. The “red phone” system connected 200 SAC operating locations internationally to the SAC underground command post at Offutt. The phone came to be a symbol of instant global readiness. Northwestern Bell’s SAC staff continued to grow throughout the Cold War as the complexity of defensive communications increased. In light of the need for instant communication, SAC was also the Bell System’s first customer to use Touch Tone dialing instead of the standard rotary dialing.²⁰

In addition to implementing modern communication tools for the residential customer, commercial interests and the military, the telephone company also worked to insure their “look” was modern. Northwestern Bell Company histories note new glass-and-aluminum phone booths and more streamlined telephone sets as hallmarks of the 1950’s and 1960’s.²¹

MODERN CONSTRUCTIONS

The design of the Bell System’s regional and area headquarters buildings prior to and during the depression, World War II and the post war years typically reflected public architectural discourse. Discussions regarding iconic, modern, tall office buildings were physically reflected in buildings such as the 1925 San Francisco Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Building, begun only two years after the influential Chicago Tribune building competition. Prior to the stock market crash, the Bell System and its Baby Bells had constructed numerous buildings²² in the “American Perpendicular”²³ style. In Northwestern Bell territory, the Minneapolis, Minnesota area headquarters building (1931) reflects these same design principles. After the depression, building blocks with fewer setbacks, many designed in the Art Deco aesthetic, began to appear in buildings throughout the Bell System like in Indianapolis, Indiana (1933), Baltimore, Maryland (1941), Cincinnati, Ohio (1943) as well as many others.

By the mid 1950s buildings designed within the Bell System followed newly developing standards for modern company design which were greatly influenced by modern architectural discourse, particularly in regards to building mass, siting and materials. The 1955 New Haven, Connecticut administration building, the 1956 Des Moines, Iowa area headquarters, the 1957 Northwestern Bell headquarters building in Omaha and the 1960 Denver, Colorado administration building represent this shift in building design. Although all buildings are constructed of traditional materials, the materials have been simplified and appear as solid planes as opposed to decorative masses. Each utilizes a well organized structural system and aluminum frame windows and spandrel panels as the only form of decoration. A 1956 Bell periodical, “Architecture for Today’s Telephone Buildings” uses an illustration of the Omaha Headquarters building as an example of modern design that exhibits such characteristics.²⁴

On a local level, construction activities in Omaha’s civic core were being greatly affected by impending changes that took shape in the mid-1940’s after the war. Like many other cities throughout the country the downtown core was immensely impacted by suburbanization, urban redevelopment, renewal, the interstate highway program and the overall decline of the mercantile sector in downtown. Many Art Deco and Streamlined Moderne-styled buildings were constructed in Omaha after the Second World War, however the new expression of Modern architecture, “the typical form of skyscraper construction in America after the War found little currency in Omaha until the late 1960’s.”²⁵

²⁰ Rippey, *Goodbye Central*, 263.

²¹ “The Growing Years,” July-August 1964.

²² New York, NY (1926); St. Louis, MO (1926); Cleveland, OH (1927); Newark, NJ (1929); Denver, CO (1929); Dallas, TX (1929)

²³ Coe, Richard Storrs, “Bell System Buildings – An Interpretation,” *Bell Telephone Quarterly*, July 1929, 207.

²⁴ The same article mentions that materials should be restricted to two, such as stone and brick, and windows, doors and trim could be used to obtain variety. Cool colors are ideal for large masses located on urban blocks, but warm colors are appropriate to forms and details around the entrance or lower parts of the building. Granite is also recommended for the base of larger buildings adjacent to the sidewalk.

²⁵ Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, *A Comprehensive Program for Historic Preservation in Omaha* (Omaha, Nebraska: Klopp Printing Company, 1980), 88.

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Design and construction of the 12-story Northwestern Bell Regional Headquarters at 19th and Dodge Street began in the mid 1950s and was designed to house the offices for the company's headquarters. Prior to design and construction of the building much of the company's staff had been moved into leased office space due to large additions of equipment in the Douglas Street building (1918). The new 200,000 square foot building was completed and occupied in 1957 by 1,000 employees. It was also structured so that the lower floors could be used for equipment if it was required in the future. Newspaper articles of the time referred to the \$3.5 million structure as "an office building of modern lines, constructed of brick and limestone with granite trim."

The building was designed by Leo A. Daly, one of the largest architectural, engineering, planning and interior design firms in the United States today. Although the Omaha based firm was founded in 1915 by Daly, it was during the 1950's that it experienced the most extensive growth. This growth was a result of winning multiple design contracts for hospitals, schools, highways, military facilities and utility facilities throughout the region, the country and eventually internationally. During the 1950's the firm was responsible for the design of a number of modern structures in Omaha including the 1955 Clarkson Hospital and the 1956 Strategic Air Command Headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base.

In 1962 plans were made public for an addition to the 1957 building. Increased demand for telephone service enlarged departmental requirements and equipment needs. To house the necessary additional equipment in the 1918 building, existing staff needed to be relocated and newly hired staff needed to be facilitated. In 1964, a twelve-story, 192,000 square foot addition was constructed extending from the west of the 1957 building. Also designed by Leo A. Daly, the addition was constructed in the same fashion, of the same materials and repeated the well organized vertical bays and horizontal divisions of the 1957 façade.

A RESPONSIBLE AESTHETIC

The architectural style of the building and its addition was not only a stylized modern aesthetic but also a functional fit for Northwestern Bell's philosophy of providing universal service for the lowest practicable cost to the consumer. The Modernist style, as quoted from Gelernter's "A History of American Architecture," was successful in expressing a desirable self image for the company "rational, efficient, the confident possessors of immense power and wealth, and yet not flashy or desirous of individual expression."²⁶ The connection between the company's ability to provide quality customer service in an appropriate office environment is illustrated by a Bell Telephone Magazine article which mentions "the tone of service is further improved by providing modern, attractive quarters, tastefully, but not extravagantly appointed..."²⁷

Since the phone company was a government-regulated, corporate monopoly there was always concern regarding the balance between capital investment, required need and public perception. Even before the Great Depression, the Bell System was making informed decisions regarding expansion. A 1929 company periodical discusses providing appropriate space to fulfill needs for a period of eight years²⁸ and providing a design that will permit future extension upward or on adjoining lots.²⁹ By 1952 Bell Magazine was publishing that, "current experience indicates costs are about in balance with a period of about four years, where additions can be made at a reasonable cost. Building space too far ahead of current needs ties up capital which could be used for other purposes."³⁰ Therefore it was very common for architects to provide studies for additional expansion before the initial building was constructed, so that "the architecture may be satisfactory as the building grows...particularly in the case of lateral expansion, placement of the building on the lot is affected by the plans for enlargement."³¹

²⁶ Gelernter, Mark, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1999), 266.

²⁷ Wood, "Good Neighbor," 158.

²⁸ Coe, "Bell System Buildings," 210.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁰ Pilliod, James J, "Engineering Bell Telephone Plant," *Bell Telephone Magazine*, Autumn 1952, 182.

³¹ Phillips, Howard E, "Architecture of Today's Telephone Buildings," *Bell Telephone Magazine*, Autumn 1956, 151.

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Because it was ideal to construct only the amount of building necessary at the time, there are many buildings throughout the Bell System that reflect this ideology since almost every Bell headquarters building was added to at some point throughout its history. The original structure in Dallas, Texas for Bell South was completed in 1929 and multiple additions, infills and construction on an adjacent lot was completed in 1963. In Indianapolis the original 1933 building also underwent a similar transformation by 1968.

Without original building plans as a reference³², this context explains why the Omaha building was constructed in two phases despite the company's steadily increasing growth and ownership of the entire quarter block west of the 1957 building. Three years prior to construction of the 1957 building, company president S.B. Cousins expressed in the public local newspaper that land was available for future expansion as it "might be required later."³³ During that same month, an inter-company magazine article mentions the building "will be designed so that its size may be doubled by expansion to the west."³⁴

Functional and efficient designs were critical to providing flexible space ready to adjust to the company's changing needs. In 1927 Mies van der Rohe wrote, "today the factor of economy makes rationalization and standardization imperative...the increased complexity of our requirements demands flexibility."³⁵ Since increasing demands for telephone service and advancing technologies were constantly being developed, thoughts on smart infrastructure and plant expansion for the future were always at the forefront of any company development. "It is not too much to say that a large share of the success of the Bell companies in providing steadily improved service is directly related to the attention which has been given to standardization and uniformity in plant design."³⁶

The building's regularly spaced steel structural skeleton provided necessary flexibility in moving offices, departments or equipment as needed to facilitate growth along with a compact elevator and primary stair core. The company's belief in the importance of flexible space is further illustrated in the extra capital invested in the flooring system constructed. In addition to the typical concrete and corrugated steel deck, another layer of corrugated steel deck was installed on the underside. The back-to-back decking created one-directional wiring raceways. At certain areas in the floor, through-floor access points were installed every 12" or so to provide easy access to these raceways.

LOCAL IMPACT OF BUILDING'S CONSTRUCTION

As "one of Omaha's largest companies"³⁷ the leadership at Northwestern Bell had a lot at stake in the development of the city of Omaha. They benefited from the city's ability to attract talented and hardworking individuals who were either potential customers or potential employees.

Three of the company's five presidents between 1945 and 1973 emerged as powerful figures in city planning activities. Russell J. Hopley (1942-49), A.F. Jacobson (1955-70) and Thomas S. Nurnberger, Jr. (1970-75) all actively participated in multiple civic organizations, served on various committees and put the prestige of their firm behind favored projects.³⁸ Throughout its history, Northwestern Bell "...had a particular interest in the viability of the downtown core because its corporate headquarters and a good deal of its equipment were located there."³⁹ Much of this equipment had been there since the first telephone office in the city was opened in 1879.

³² Original drawings and process documents were disposed of by the architect of record and as the building changed ownership after the company moved to a new Omaha headquarters building (1314 Douglas Street) in 1981 drawings were lost.

³³ "Phone Firm Tells Plan for Huge Office: 3.5 Million Structure to be Ready in 1957; Region Growth Cited," *Omaha World Herald*, 2 December 1954.

³⁴ "NWB to Erect New Office Building in Omaha," *Northwestern Bell Magazine*, December 1954, 17.

³⁵ Frampton, Kenneth, *A Critical History of Modern Architecture* (London, England: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 164.

³⁶ Pilliod, "Engineering," 192.

³⁷ Daly-Bednarek, Janet R, *The Changing Image of the City, Planning for Downtown Omaha 1945-1973* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 58.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

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The building was heralded as the first downtown office project in 25 years⁴⁰ when it was constructed.⁴¹ Most construction prior to this time had been focused on new commercial and suburban public structures, suburban residential buildings, the associated schools to serve them, factories constructed in outlying industrial parks and the suburban office campus such as Mutual of Omaha's large complex located at 38th and Dodge.

In 1957, shortly after construction began on Northwestern Bell's Regional Headquarters, Northern Natural Gas (2223 Dodge Street) began construction on a 15-story addition to their six-story building. During that same year Union Pacific's five-story addition also began construction. By the early 1960's Creighton University (2500 California) began a \$24 million, eight-building construction campaign which included some office space and the insurance giant, Woodman of the World (1700 Farnam) finished construction of their 30 story building in 1969. Between 1974 and 1983 nineteen large-scale buildings were erected and twenty-four existing structures were renovated in the downtown area.⁴²

CONCLUSION

Humanity could not have envisioned the impact Alexander Graham Bell's "talking telegraph" would have nor could any of the gentlemen involved comprehend what Gardiner Hubbard's foresight would mean to the fledgling company when he opted to sell telephone service as opposed to simply telephone equipment. As American Telephone and Telegraph grew and its regional offices consolidated and expanded, its status as a corporate, government-regulated monopoly became entrenched in American life and representative of the country's post-World War II legacy.

Locally significant under Criterion A and Criterion C with a period of significance spanning from 1957 to 1964, the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters is a product of both 1957 and 1964 construction periods. Rapid expansion after the war throughout Northwestern Bell territory, necessitating further construction endeavors, created additional employment opportunities and supported community growth. The building echoes modern philosophic ideals and is representative of Omaha's status as a regional center for communication and commerce. Construction of the Northwestern Bell Regional Headquarters was indicative of the prosperity of the post-war years, the rising prominence of the company, an uninterrupted plan of expansion and a commitment to Omaha's downtown during the 1950s and 1960s. Development of the "block that talk built"⁴³ provided a tangible new focus for Omaha's civic core.

⁴⁰ "Building Gets Frigid Start: First Downtown Office Project in 25 Years," *Omaha World Herald*, 15 December 1955.

⁴¹ A city published economic survey and market analysis defined the downtown as an area bounded by the Missouri River on the east, Leavenworth Street on the South, the Interstate Highway (at 28th Street) on the west and Cuming Street on the north (Daly-Bednarek, *Changing City*, 168).

⁴² Daly-Bednarek, *Changing City*, 232.

⁴³ Northwestern Bell Telephone Company owned the entire block surrounded by 19th Street to the east, 20th Street to the west, Dodge Street to the north and Douglas Street to the south. Northwestern Bell's Douglas Building (1918), the 1957 and 1964 buildings along with a 1970 fifteen-story equipment building (windowless from the second story up) fill the entire block. Unfortunately, the 1918 and 1970 building are ineligible for listing on the National Register. Modifications to the interior of the 1918 building as a result of increased equipment installation along with removal of much of the ornamental façade left that building with very little historic integrity and the 1970 building is currently ineligible due to age.

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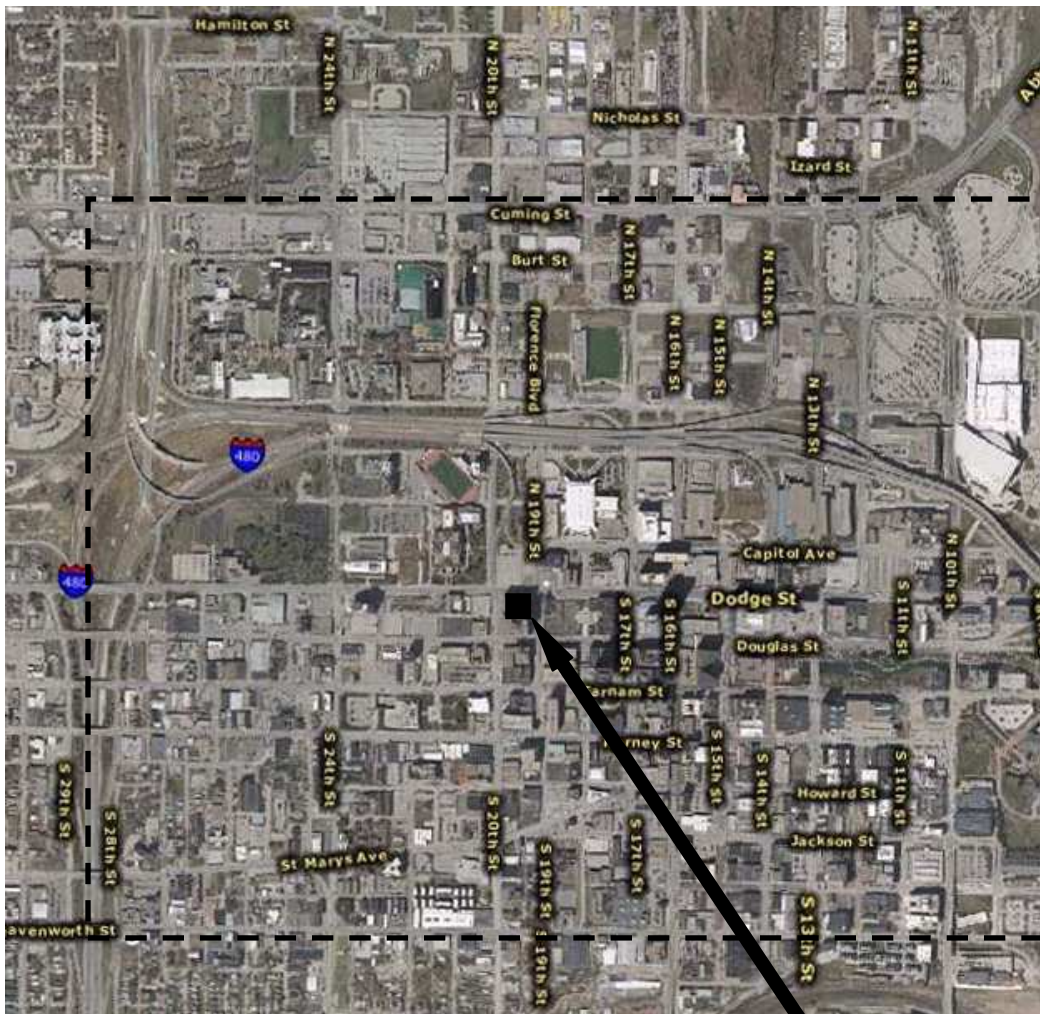
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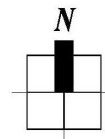
VICINITY MAP

ARROW INDICATES PROPERTY
DASHED AREA INDICATES DOWNTOWN OMAHA



The Northwestern Bell Company building is located on the south side of Dodge Street between 19th and 20th Streets.

Source: 2008 Omaha Downtown Aerial Photographs



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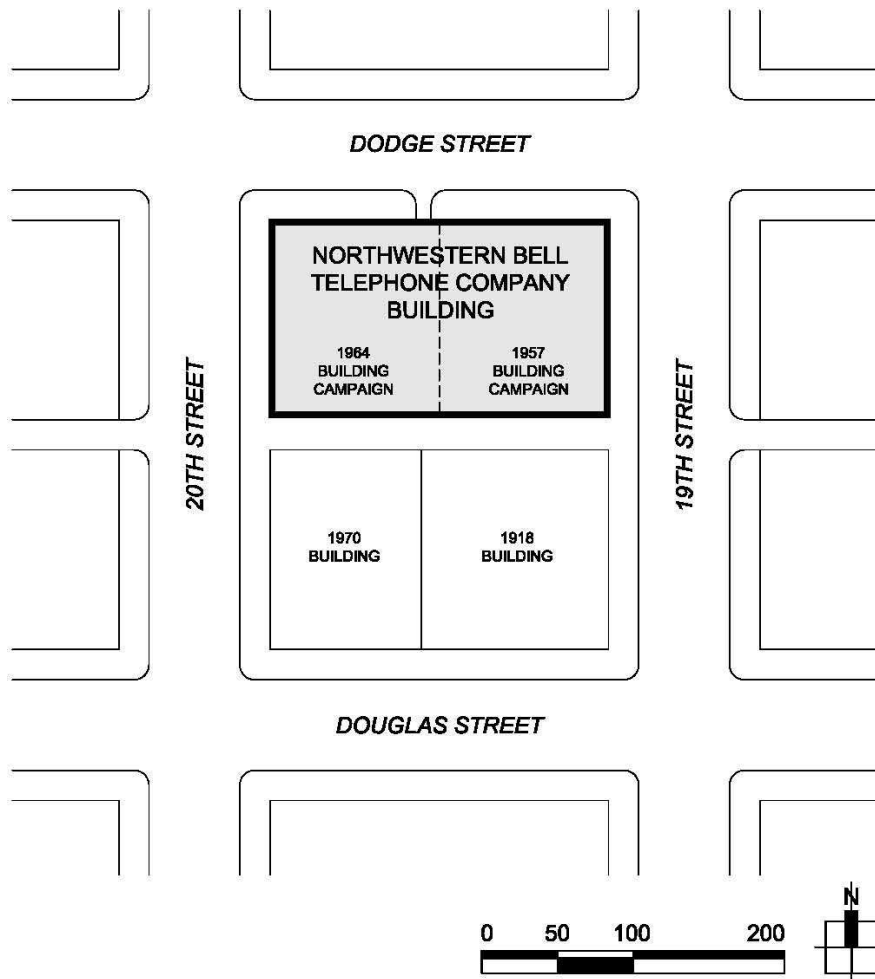
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KEY PLAN



Source: Office of Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture, Omaha, Nebraska, 2009

Boundary Justification: The property boundary depicted above includes the entire parcel associated with Northwestern Bell's 1957 and 1964 building campaigns.

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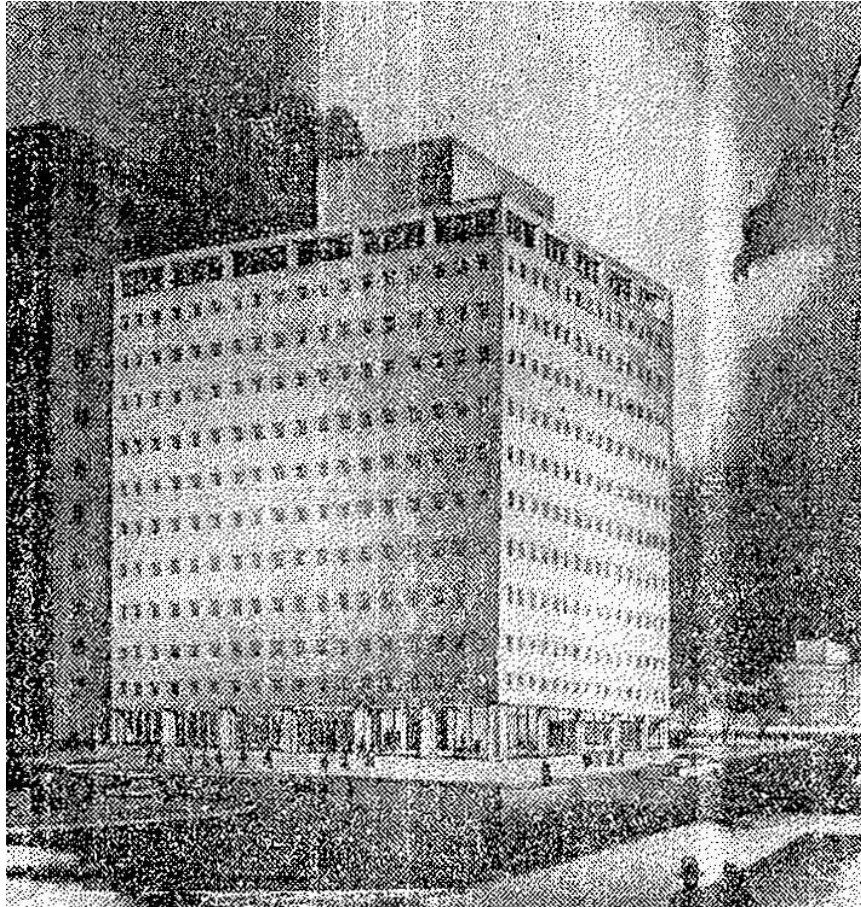
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Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional
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1954 Architects Rendering



Looking Southwest, this rendering pictures the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Building for publication in a 1954 Omaha World Herald newspaper article. Note the window organization and treatment of the façade at the first floor.

Source: "Phone Firm Tells Plan for Huge Office: 3.5 Million Structure to be Ready in 1957; Region Growth Cited." *Omaha World Herald* (Omaha, Nebraska). 2 December 1954.

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**Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional
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1956 Architects Rendering



Looking Southwest, this rendering pictures the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Building for publication in a national 1956 Bell Telephone Magazine Article as an example of an appropriate contemporary building for the telephone company.

Source: Phillips, Howard E. "Architecture of Today's Telephone Buildings." *Bell Telephone Magazine*, Autumn 1956, 144.

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**Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional
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1958



Looking Southwest, this photograph pictures the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Building after its construction in 1958. The 1918 building can be seen in the background.

Source: Quest Archives (Omaha, Nebraska). June 1958.

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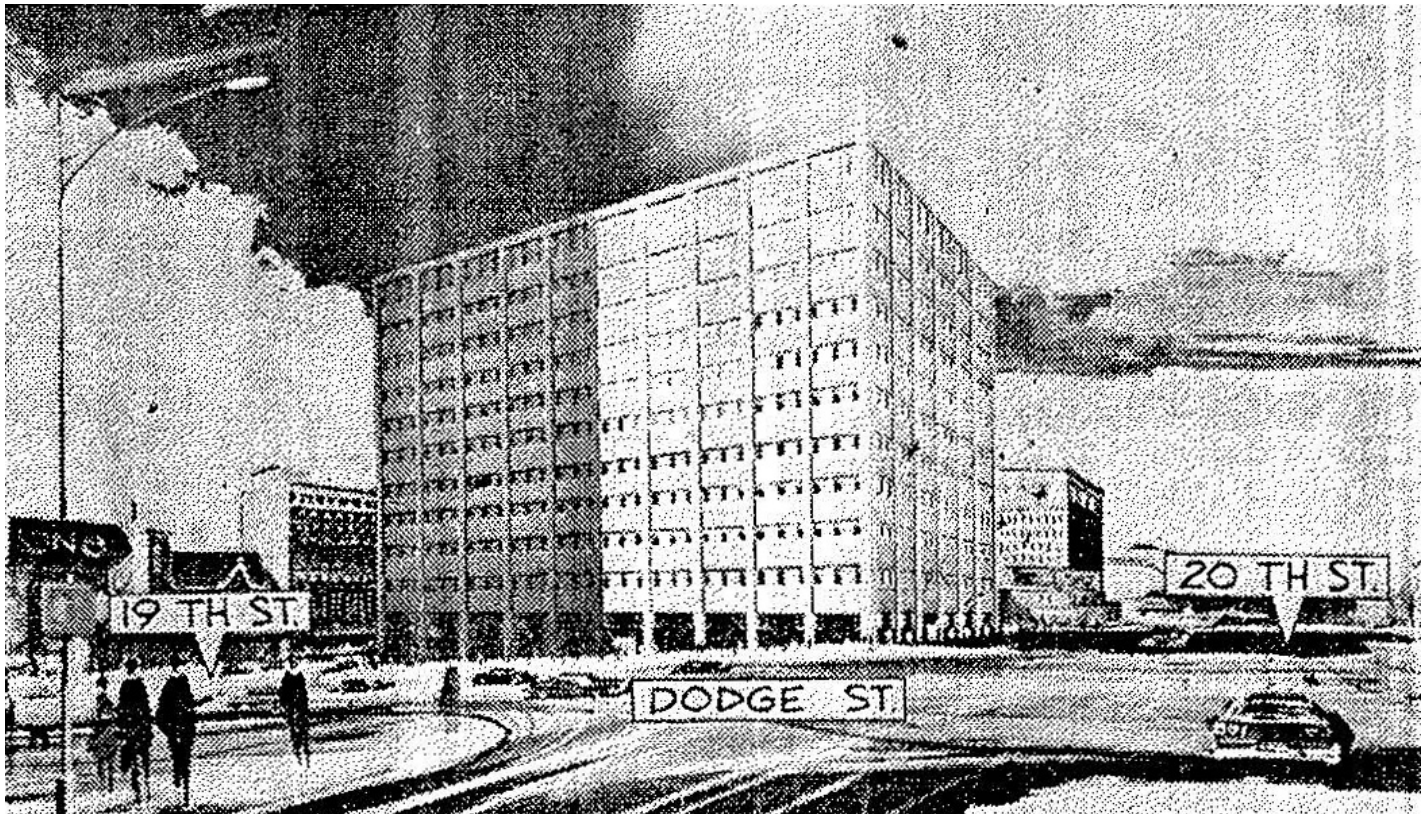
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Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional
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1962 Architects Rendering



Looking Southeast, this rendering image used in an Omaha newspaper to illustrate the current company headquarters building (shown shaded) and the proposed addition.

Source: "Phone Firm to Build \$3,500,000 Addition: Job Extends Structure to 20th Dodge." *Omaha World Herald* (Omaha, Nebraska). 11 July 1962.

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Name of Property

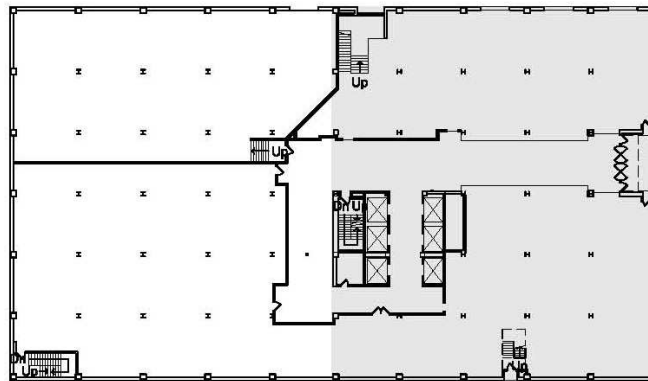
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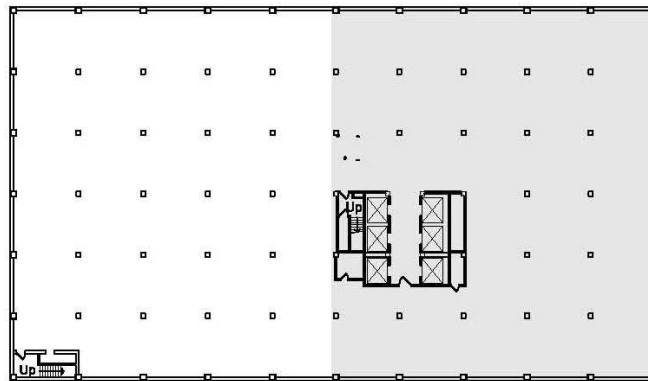
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**Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional
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Basement and First Floor Plans

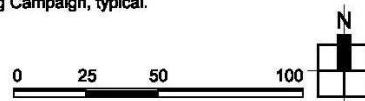


FIRST FLOOR PLAN



BASEMENT PLAN

*Shaded area indicates 1957 Building Campaign, typical.



Source: Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture, Omaha, Nebraska, 2009

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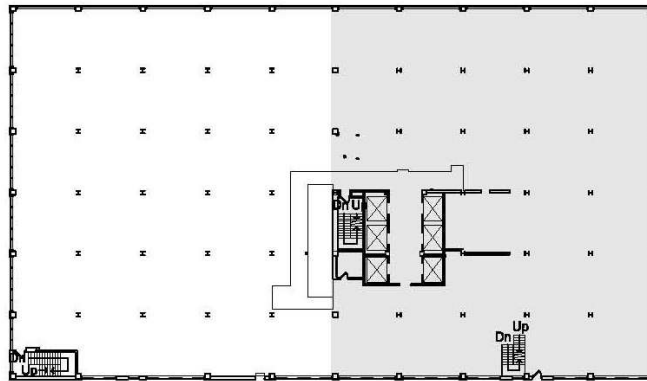
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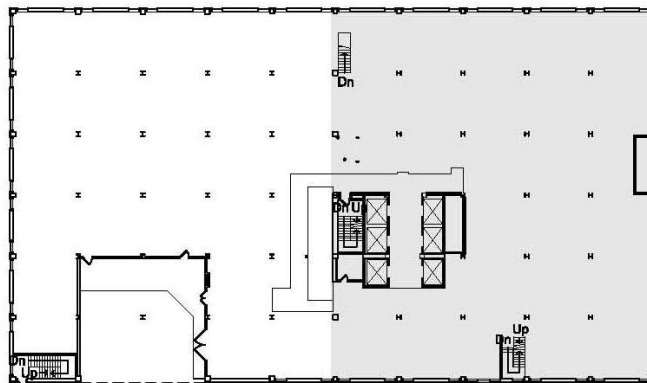
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Second and Third Floor Plans

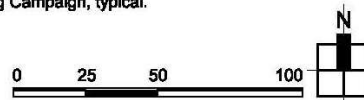


THIRD FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

*Shaded area indicates 1957 Building Campaign, typical.



Source: Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture, Omaha, Nebraska, 2009

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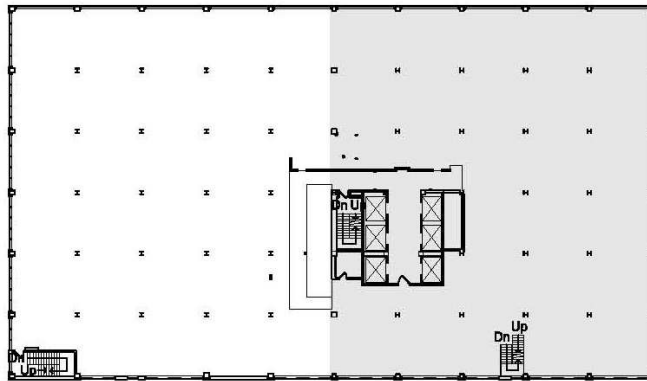
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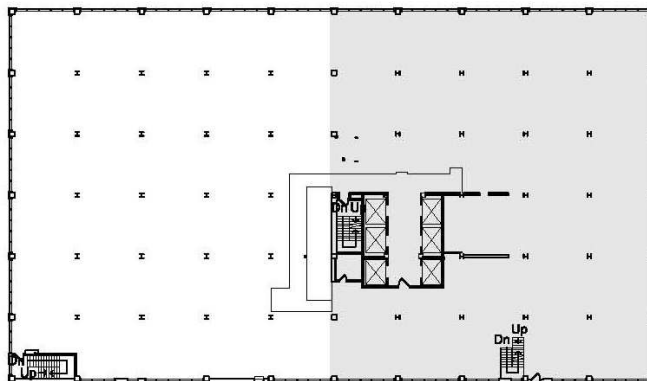
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Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional
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Fourth and Fifth Floor Plans

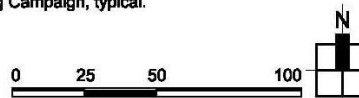


FIFTH FLOOR PLAN



FOURTH FLOOR PLAN

*Shaded area indicates 1957 Building Campaign, typical.



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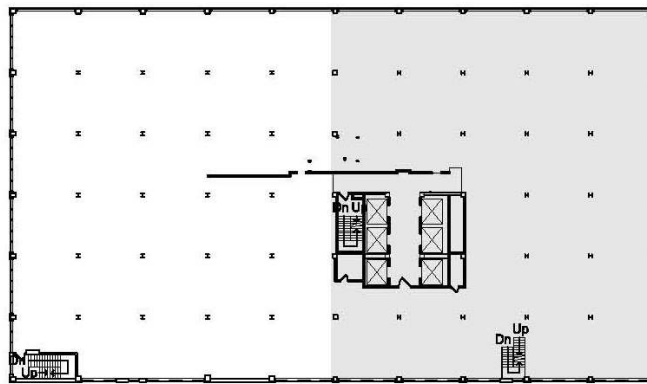
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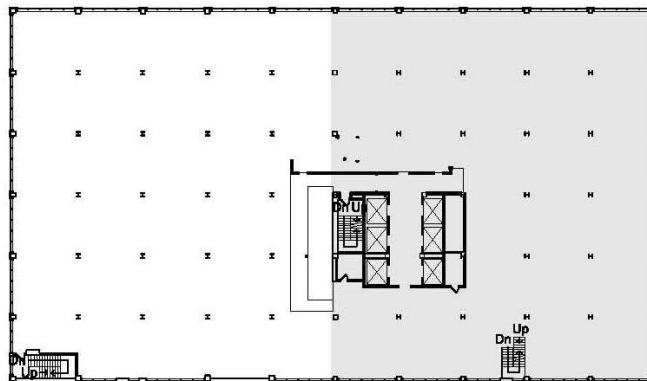
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Sixth and Seventh Floor Plans

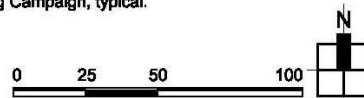


SEVENTH FLOOR PLAN



SIXTH FLOOR PLAN

*Shaded area indicates 1957 Building Campaign, typical.



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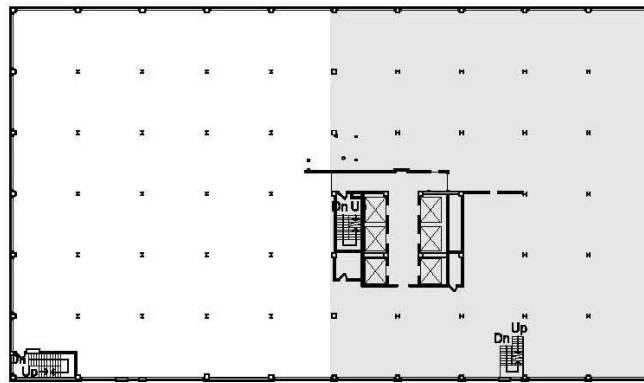
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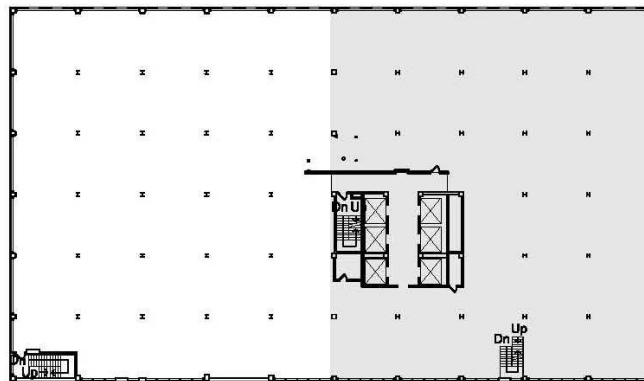
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**Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional
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Eighth and Ninth Floor Plans

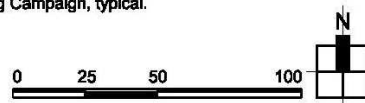


NINTH FLOOR PLAN



EIGHTH FLOOR PLAN

*Shaded area indicates 1957 Building Campaign, typical.



Source: Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture, Omaha, Nebraska, 2009

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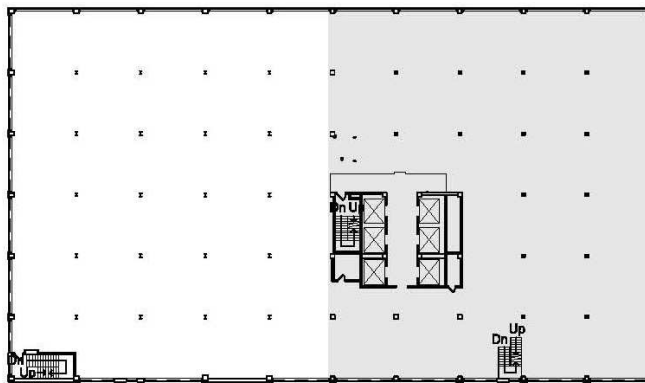
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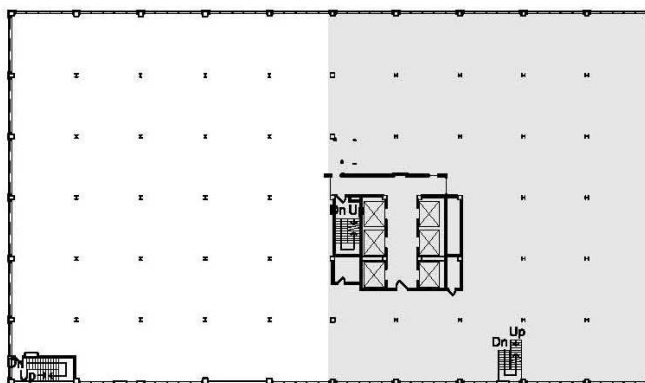
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Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional
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Tenth and Eleventh Floor Plans

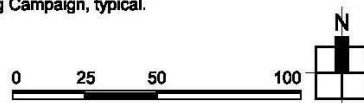


ELEVENTH FLOOR PLAN



TENTH FLOOR PLAN

*Shaded area indicates 1957 Building Campaign, typical.



Source: Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture, Omaha, Nebraska, 2009

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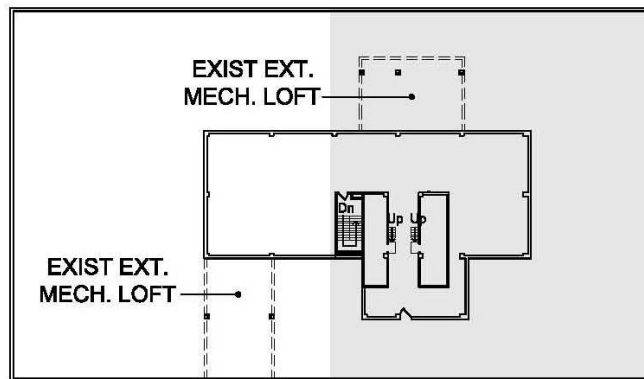
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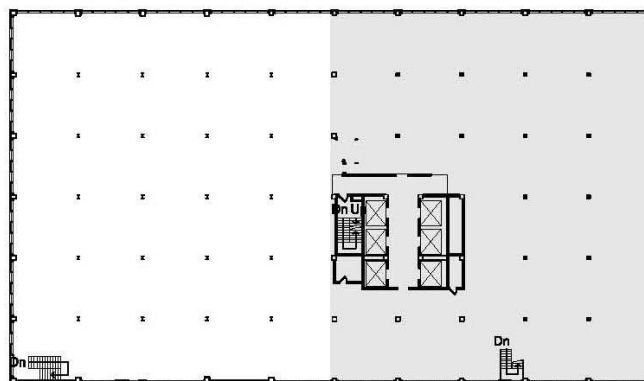
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Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional
Headquarters

Twelfth and Roof Plan

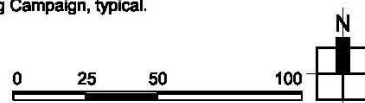


ROOF PLAN



TWELFTH FLOOR PLAN

*Shaded area indicates 1957 Building Campaign, typical.



Source: Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture, Omaha, Nebraska, 2009

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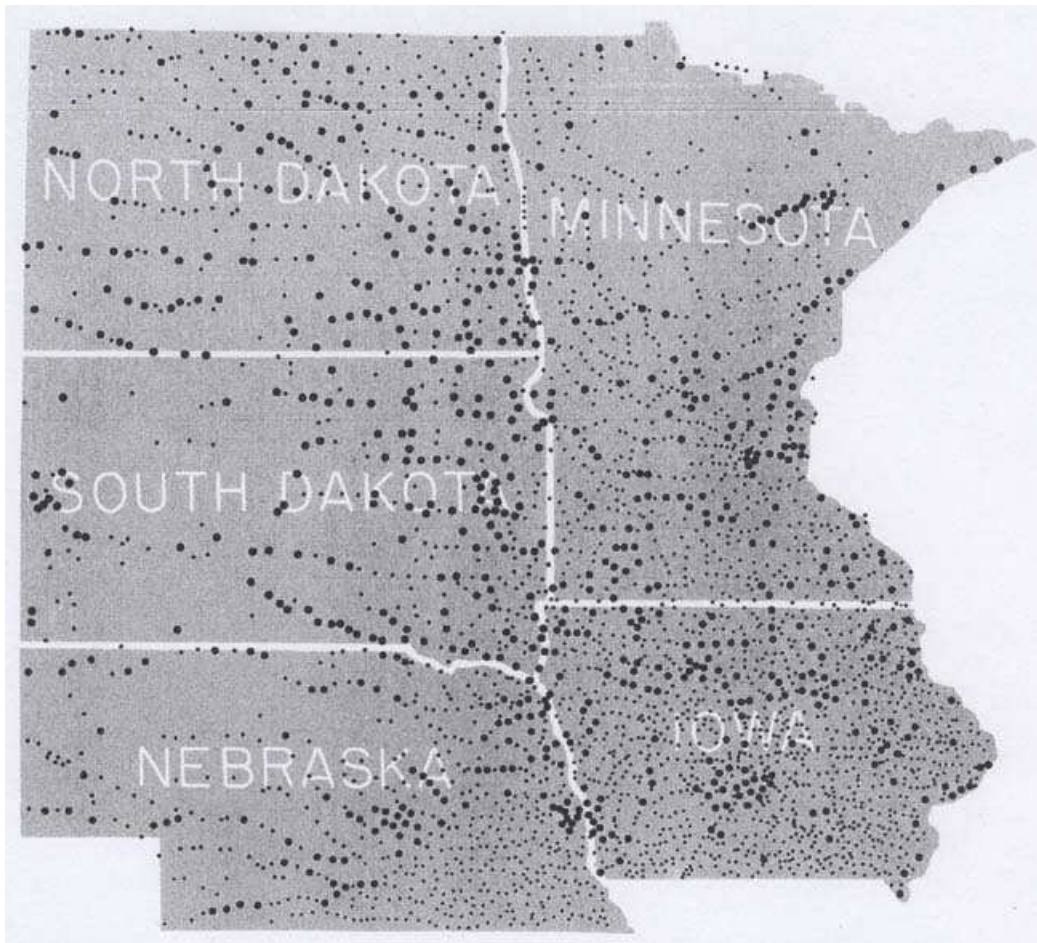
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**Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional
Headquarters**

Map Illustrating NWB Service Area



This map was used by Northwestern Bell Telephone Company to illustrate its five-state service region and the locations of 2,602 interconnected telephone exchanges. The large dots denote Northwestern Bell exchanges and the smaller dots, exchanges of smaller companies who are connected to the system to utilize long distance service.

Source: *Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Annual Report for the Year 1951*. By Eugene J. McNeely, president. Omaha, Nebraska: Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1951, p 5.

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Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters

Modern Constructions



Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Building (1925),
San Francisco, California.
Source: Johan Hagemeyer photographer, 1928.



Minnesota Area Headquarters (1931),
Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Source: Wayne Lorentz/Artefaks
Corporation photographer.



Indian Bell (1933), Indianapolis, Indiana.
Source: The Telecommunications History
Group, Denver, Colorado.



Cincinnati and Suburban Telephone
Company Building (1943), Cincinnati, Ohio.
Source: Greg Hume, photographer.



Baltimore Telephone & Telegraph Building
(1941) Baltimore, Maryland
Source: The Telecommunications History
Group, Denver, Colorado

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Modern Constructions



Southern New England Telephone Company Administration Building (1955), New Haven, Connecticut
Source: AT&T Archives and History Center, San Antonio, Texas.



Iowa Area Headquarters, (1965) Des Moines, Iowa
Source: The Telecommunications History Group, Denver, Colorado.



Mountain States Telephone Company Administration Building (1960) Denver, Colorado
Source: The Telecommunications History Group, Denver, Colorado.

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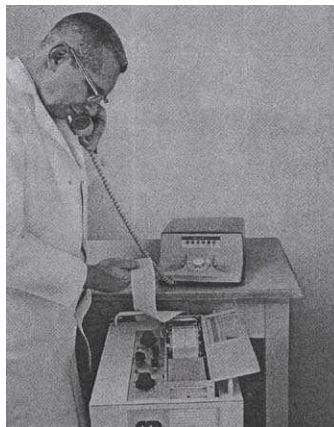
Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters

A Modern Company



This image was used to illustrate the modern "Princess" telephone. The original photo caption pronounces the newly marketed phone is, "smartly styled in low, modern lines...takes little space and has a dial the glows softly in the dark."

Source: *Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Annual Report for the Year 1960*. By Alma F. Jacobson, president. Omaha, Nebraska: Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1960, p 10.



Photograph of the Data-Phone used by a heart specialist as he reads heart tracings of a patient having an electrocardiogram taken in a distant town.

Source: *Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Annual Report for the Year 1963*. By Alma F. Jacobson, president. Omaha, Nebraska: Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1963.

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Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters
A Modern Company



Communications console at Strategic Air Command (SAC) headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha. In the bottom of this photo at the far left is the "red alert" telephone. The "red phone" system connected 200 SAC operating locations internationally to the SAC underground command post at Offutt. The phone came to be a symbol of instant global readiness.

Source: *Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Annual Report for the Year 1961*. By Alma F. Jacobson, president. Omaha, Nebraska: Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1961, p 4.

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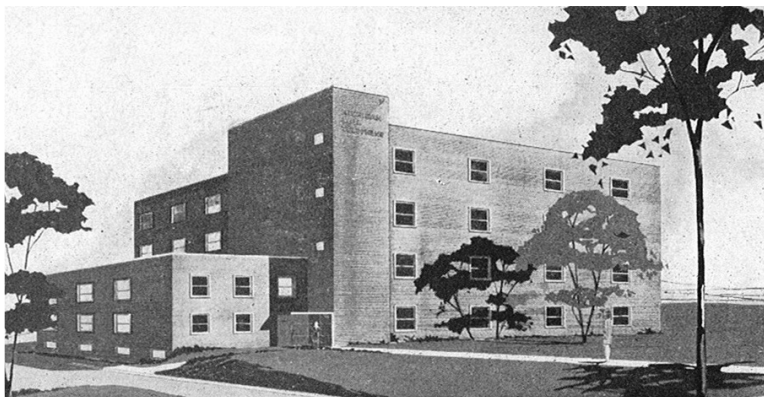
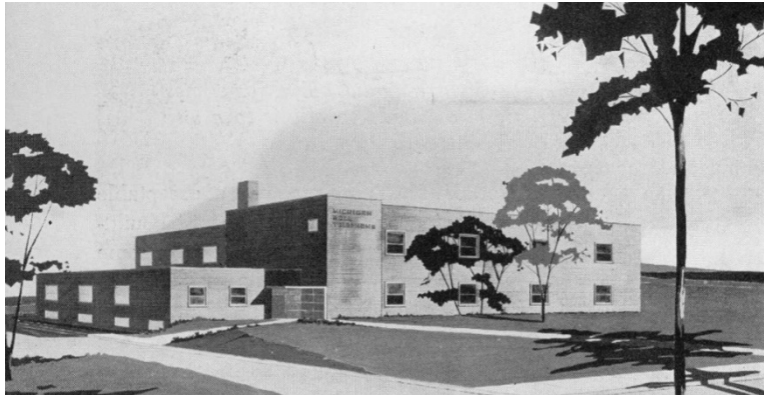
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Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters

An Expanding Company



These renderings illustrate the Bell System's strategy regarding building expansion. The caption reads, "Flexible for growth: Above, the original building; below, the ultimate building."

Source: Phillips, Howard E. "Architecture of Today's Telephone Buildings." *Bell Telephone Magazine*, Autumn 1956, 152.

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Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters

An Expanding Company



The image on the left shows the Southwestern Bell Telephone Building in 1929; to the right is the same building in 1963. The highlighted area illustrates the original 1929 building. Both images are courtesy of AT&T Archives and History Center.



The image on the left shows the Indiana Bell Telephone Building in 1933; to the right is the same building in 1968. The darkened area illustrates the original 1933 building. Both images are courtesy of The Telecommunications History Group, Denver, Colorado.

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Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters

An Expanding Company



The photograph shows the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters in 1961 before construction on the 1964 addition began. Since this time Northwestern Bell has constructed high-rise buildings to fill the entire block.

Omaha Skyline: 1886-1961 A History. Part III 1936-1961. Omaha, Nebraska: J.J. Hanighen Company, 1961. Cover Image.

All photos by Chris Jensen, Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture, Omaha, NE



E façade



E entrance looking NW



N façade looking S



W façade looking SE



1st floor elevators



Drinking fountain alcove

All photos by Chris Jensen, Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture, Omaha, NE



1st floor directory & clock



1st floor entrance doors



4th floor, typical wiring raceway



5th floor, elevator lobby looking S



12th floor elevator lobby looking S



12th floor looking NW

All photos by Chris Jensen, Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture, Omaha, NE



12th floor letter box



interior stair tower