

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION FILE  
Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office

Listing Name: Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building  
Address: 203 West 2<sup>nd</sup> North Street  
City: Morristown  
County: Hamblen  
Associated MPS: N/A

Listing Date: 3/10/2025  
Reference Number: SG100011502



7109 Hermitage Street,  
Pittsburgh, MP100011513,  
LISTED, 3/14/2025  
(Educational Resources of Pennsylvania MPS)

PENNSYLVANIA, ALLEGHENY COUNTY,  
Belmar School,  
7109 Hermitage Street,  
Pittsburgh, MP100011513,  
LISTED, 3/14/2025  
(Pittsburgh Public Schools TR)

PUERTO RICO, PONCE MUNICIPALITY,  
Casa Serrallés,  
45 Calle Reina Isabel, esq. Salud,  
Ponce, SG100011511,  
LISTED, 3/13/2025

TENNESSEE, HAMBLÉN COUNTY,  
Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building,  
203 West 2nd North Street,  
Morristown, SG100011502,  
LISTED, 3/10/2025

TEXAS, HARRIS COUNTY,  
San Jacinto Warehouse,  
1101-1125 Providence Street,  
Houston, SG100011510,  
LISTED, 3/13/2025

VIRGINIA, CHESTERFIELD COUNTY,  
Vawter Hall and Old President's House (Additional Documentation),  
Virginia State University campus,  
Ettrick, RS80004180,  
ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION APPROVED, 3/11/2025

VIRGINIA, VIRGINIA BEACH INDEPENDENT CITY,  
Keeling House (Additional Documentation),  
3157 Adam Keeling Rd.,  
Virginia Beach (Independent City), AD73002297,  
ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION APPROVED, 3/10/2025

VIRGINIA, WESTMORELAND COUNTY,  
Woodbourne,  
10908 Cople Highway,  
Kinsale, RS100011145,  
LISTED, 3/10/2025



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**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

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

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register** 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/communications facility

COMMERCE/business

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

VACANT/Not in Use

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: ART DECO

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)  
Principal exterior materials of the property:

BRICK; CONCRETE; SYNTHETIC: rubber;  
OTHER: clay tile

**Narrative Description**

The Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building is an Art Deco influenced two-story, rectangular, flat roofed, painted brick commercial building set on a raised basement. It is oriented on a northwest-southeast axis facing West 2nd Street. All bays on all elevations are separated by brick pilasters that extend to concrete caps at the parapet. Unless otherwise noted, all windows openings on the first and second stories have brick soldier course lintels and masonry sills. All sashes in window openings are missing and are filled with temporary, framed protective plexiglass installed between 2013-2018, based on a comparison of Google Streetview Images, unless otherwise noted. All window openings have soldier course lintels and concrete sills. Removal of the window sashes occurred between 2008-2013, also based on a comparison of Google Streetview Images. Unless otherwise noted, all door openings are infilled with framing and protective plexiglass. The flat roof is composed of a synthetic rubber membrane and metal coping is attached at the parapet on all elevations that was installed as part of the ongoing rehabilitation. The historic roof material is unknown.

The current building footprint was constructed in two periods, and if read from the N. Henry Street elevation, the northernmost three bays (Bays 6-8) comprise the original 1929 footprint (painted blonde brick); Bays 1 -

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5 are the ca.1940s addition (painted grey brick) (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).<sup>1</sup> Exterior brick work is laid in a running bond pattern. On the addition, a concrete string course separates the basement level and upper stories and forms the lintel for all openings on each elevation of the addition, except on the west and north elevations.



Figure 1. Undated photograph showing the original footprint of the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building prior to the addition in the mid-1940s. Photograph courtesy of Christopher Simmons, current building owner.

<sup>1</sup> An exact date for the addition of the building is unknown. It could have been early as the mid-1930s or as late as the early 1950s. The new dial system building, located in a separate area of the city, was constructed in 1955, and shortly thereafter, primary telephone services moved to that building. The January 1931 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map shows the form of the building at the time to be a square. The February 1962 revised Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map shows the form of the building as a rectangle. Based on relevant newspaper coverage, it is possible the addition was most likely added ca. 1940s.

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Figure 2. November 2023. Photograph of the east elevation of the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building, which most clearly shows the mid-1940s addition. Photograph courtesy of Dr. Lane Tillner, Tennessee Historical Commission.

### ***Site and Setting***

The Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building sits on a sloped, 0.25-acre, rectangular parcel. The building occupies the northeast corner of the parcel, with a small, paved area to the south of the building. The remainder of the parcel is covered in uncontained vegetative growth consisting mostly of trees, bushes, and grass.

The Southern Bell Building is bound on the north by West 2nd North Street, to the east by North Henry Street, to the south by an adjacent lot containing an auto repair shop, and to the west by an adjacent residential property. Late-twentieth century single-family residences are located next to the parcel to the west and across the street (West 2nd North Street) to the north and northeast. A municipal building and parking lot are located across the street (North Henry Street) to the east. Nearby National Register-listed properties include the Rose School (NR Listed 10-18-1976) to the northwest, the U.S. Post Office (NR Listed 04-25-1983) to the south, and the Morristown Main Street Commercial Historic District (NR Listed 03-22-2016) also to the south.

### ***North Elevation (Façade)***

The North (front) elevation is comprised of two stories, set on a full-height, partially visible basement, with three bays in each of the upper stories. The basement story partially visible on the North elevation contains one bay. This bay is filled with a fixed three-vertical light wood window that is partially obscured by overgrown vegetation. At the first story (ww-entryway-ww), a series of four concrete steps leads to a centered,

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inset entryway. The entryway features a painted scalloped, concrete surround, the upper portion of which is missing and replaced with a temporary wood plank. The entryway is floored with square clay tiles and features painted brick walls and painted concrete ceiling. Single leaf entrances are located on the west, north, and east walls. The west entrance maintains the original trim and opening but is currently enclosed with protective plexiglass; the south entrance is filled with a single light, single panel wood door covered with protective plexiglass; and the east entrance is missing its door and filled only with protective plexiglass. A single light transom is located above each entrance. Flanking the entryway are paired window openings with soldier course lintels and masonry sills. The opening to the east of the entryway contains original 3/3 wood single-hung windows. Each bay on the second story contains paired window openings (ww-opening -ww). The central bay opening on the second story is larger in height than the other paired windows and shows evidence of enlargement, which occurred between 2008-2013, according to a comparison of Google Street View images (See Figure 3 and 4). The opening shows evidence of the removal of the concrete sill, a portion of the painted blonde brick, and the upper portion of the concrete surround on the first story.



Figure 3. Screenshot of Google Street View from February 2008 showing the intact, albeit deteriorated, second story central bay on the façade of the building. Google Maps Streetview. Screenshot taken November 2024.

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Figure 4. Screenshot of Google Street View from July 2013 showing the altered second-story central bay on the façade of the building. Google Maps Streetview. Screenshot taken November 2024.

### ***East Elevation***

The East (N. Henry St.) elevation is comprised of two stories set on a raised basement, each with eight bays. The first two bays on the south edge of the basement level contain single window openings. The first bay is filled with a highly deteriorated 3/3 wood single-hung window, covered with plexiglass for protection. The second bay contains a mostly intact wood single-hung 3/3 window, also covered with protective plexiglass. The third and fourth bays are infilled but appear to have ghosting marks, suggesting at one time these bays had openings. The fifth bay contains an inset entryway located at the basement level. The landing and three steps are covered with square clay tiles, and the walls and ceiling are brick. A comparison of Google Street View images shows that the opening previously contained a solid, plywood door with sidelights and a transom, which was mostly infilled with plywood between 2008-2013 (See Figure 5 and Figure 6) and was removed, except for the sidelights and transom, and covered in wood framing and protective plexiglass between 2013-2021 (See Figure 6, Figure 7, and Photograph # 6). The entrance, added outside the period of significance in the 1960s, was used to access the basement when it served as the temporary location of the Hamblen County-Morristown Public Library. A metal jalousie vent is located in the sixth bay immediately north of the entrance. The seventh and eighth bays, the northernmost, contain small, rectangular grille vents. All bays in the first and second stories contain single window openings. A metal drainpipe runs the height of the eighth bay. Vegetative incursion is present on the seventh and eighth bays.

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Figure 5: Screenshot of Google Street View from February 2008 showing the basement entrance on the East Elevation. Google Maps Streetview. Screenshot taken November 2024.

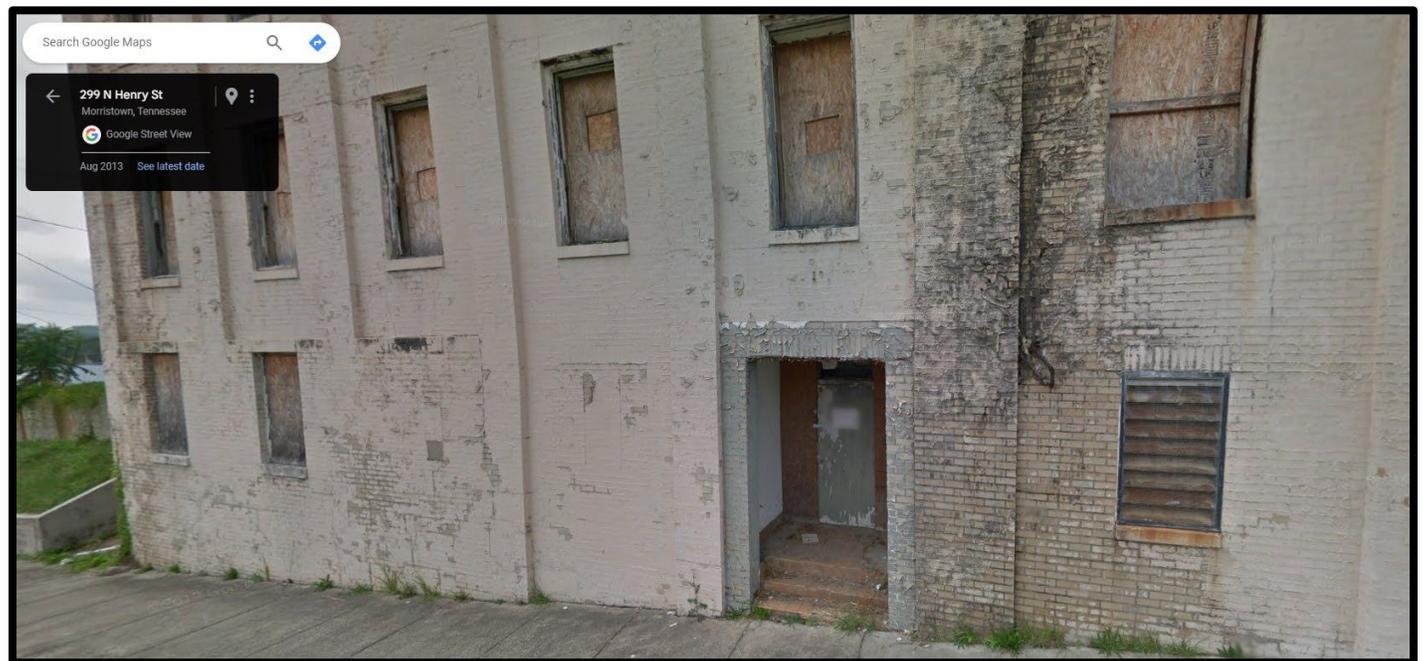


Figure 6: Screenshot of Google Street View from August 2013 showing the basement entrance on the East Elevation. Google Maps Streetview. Screenshot taken November 2024.

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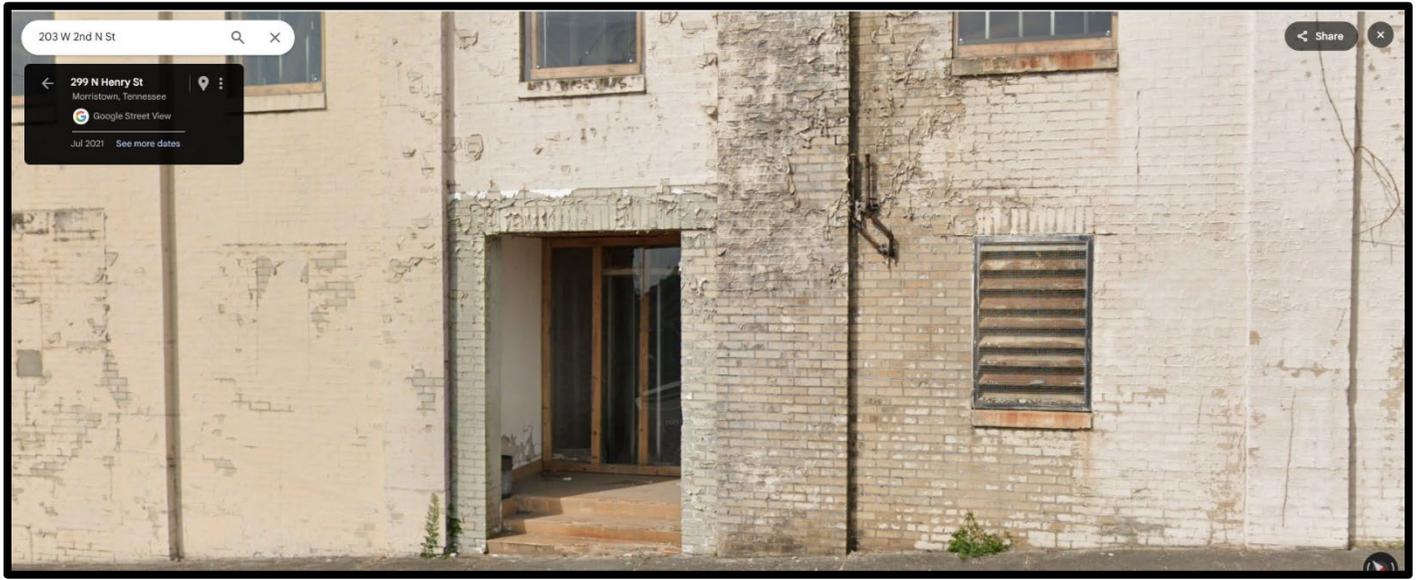


Figure 7: Screenshot of Google Street View from July 2021 showing the basement entrance on the East Elevation. Google Maps Streetview. Screenshot taken November 2024.

### ***South Elevation***

The South (rear) elevation is two stories set on a raised basement. At the basement level, from N. Henry Street, a narrow pathway formed by a concrete retaining wall and four concrete steps, leads through the rear yard and to a single-leaf basement filled with a wood, single panel, three-light door. Single, multi-light steel casement windows flank each side of the basement entrance. The first story has four bays (w-w-d-w). The third bay is a single-leaf replacement three-fanlight door. All remaining bays are single window openings. The second story has four bays (w-w-d-ww). The first and second bays are single window openings. The third bay is an entrance with a rectangular wood transom and no door. The fourth bay is a paired window opening. A metal fire escape provides access to entrances located on the first and second stories, and a metal ladder from the second story provides access to the roof.

### ***West Elevation***

The West elevation is comprised two stories set on a raised basement that is partially visible on the south end of the building. The partially visible basement in the first and second bays contain a single, wood fixed window. Each of the stories contains eight bays with single window openings. The sixth and eighth bays have metal, full-height drainpipes. Vegetative incursion is present on all bays.

### ***Interior***

For structural support, temporary, structural metal studs run the length of the building on all floors approximately six feet from the east and west walls.

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***Basement***

The basement level can be accessed two ways: 1) an interior concrete staircase consisting of fourteen steps and a simple metal pipe railing located in the original footprint of the building; 2) the exterior entryway located in the addition and accessed via N. Henry Street. All spaces are characterized by plaster walls, painted brick walls, linoleum tile and concrete flooring.

An irregularly shaped, single loaded hallway with a concrete floor leads from the stairs to the rear (south) of the building. The north end is arranged with three restrooms that have plaster walls, as well as a boiler room. The rear (south) portion of the basement is a single large room with painted brick walls, plaster ceilings, and linoleum tile flooring. Two smaller rooms are located on the west side, each finished with plaster walls and ceilings, and linoleum tile. Interior brick in the addition is laid in a common bond pattern. A crawl space exists on the northwest corner of the basement adjacent to the stairs.

***First Story***

The first floor is a large open space with remnants of original tongue-in-groove wood flooring and original plank subfloor. The ceiling is not extant, leaving the second story floor joists exposed. The walls are comprised of exposed hollow tile and brick wall finishes. Brick walls in the south portion of the first story are covered in a black adhesive material. Some walls have remnants of previous plaster finish. Ghosting of the original central corridor can be seen in the flooring. Round metal poles also follow this former corridor to one side. A simple straight wood staircase of twenty steps, with central landing, accesses the second story. The staircase is centrally located on the north end of the building and is accessed on the first story. Most of the window framing and sills remain intact, with a degree of deterioration.

***Second Story***

The second story is divided into two large open spaces with remnants of square, possibly ceramic or stone, tile flooring overlaid on original tongue-in-groove wood flooring. Subflooring is visible in some areas. The ceiling is not extant, leaving the roof system exposed. Wall systems are exposed brick and hollow clay tile. Brick walls in the south portion of the first story are covered in a black adhesive material. The framing of a historic wall remains and runs centrally north to south down the building. Evidence of earlier finishes, of what appears to be plaster, is sparse, following the removal of finishes by a previous owner. Much of the window framing and sills remain intact, though in a deteriorated state.

***Integrity***

The Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building retains integrity to communicate its local significance. The building remains surrounded by domestic dwellings to the west and north, with commercial or civic enterprises to the south and east, respectively, with the exception of the dwellings along N. Henry Street to the northeast that have been demolished and replaced with a rectangular parking lot. Likewise, the setting of the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building remains mostly intact with landscaping on the parcel kept to a minimum, though vegetation has grown due to the building's present vacant state. At the south elevation, a concrete pad was added at an unknown time, serving as the location for the fire escape egress.

The Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building retains integrity of materials, design, and workmanship needed to communication its local significance. Initially built in 1929, the building was expanded circa mid-1940s to address the increased demand for telephonic services. The hollow clay tile construction and brick

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cladding remain intact. The form and massing of the building remain unchanged from the time of the addition in the mid-1940s. The interior was gutted at an unknown time outside the period of significance, likely between 2008-2021 if interior alterations coincided with the minor alterations on the exterior, by a previous owner. While there have been interior alterations, the exterior of the building retains integrity of materials, design, and workmanship through the retention of the building footprint and original openings. Much of the original door and window trim remains intact as well as the original staircase. Ghostmarks, of the original double-loaded corridor on the first floor, remain and will be used to re-establish the corridor as part of the rehabilitation.

Because the building possesses sufficient integrity of location, setting, materials, design, and workmanship, it is able to communicate its integrity of feeling thus making it eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Furthermore, the building has integrity of association due to its direct historical role in the development of Morristown's communications network.

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**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:

N/A

- 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**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Communications  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**  
1929—1958  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**  
ca. 1950  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

**Cultural Affiliation**  
N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**  
Barge Thompson & Company  
Troubaugh-Cary Company  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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### **Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Communications. Built in 1929, the Southern Bell Building facilitated the growth and expansion of the communication industry in both Morristown and Hamblen County. The property housed communication equipment, offices for workers, and customer service facilities. These services provided Morristown and the surrounding region access to communication technology that fueled both economic growth and closer social and economic connections than before. The installation of a new dial telephone system in a building elsewhere in Morristown in 1958 brought the property's use as the major and primary communications facility to a close. It then served a number of years as a library before falling out of use. The Period of Significance is 1929 to 1958, which corresponds with the year it was constructed and the year it ceased housing the company's exchange equipment and related operations.

### **Narrative Statement of Significance**

The Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building, located at 203 W. 2nd North Street in Morristown, Tennessee, is associated with the larger history of the spread of technology and innovation from large cities into smaller ones. It served as a hub of vital communication for Morristown and the regional community as an operations building for the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company. Construction began on the building in July 1929. It was designed by Atlanta-based architectural firm Barge Thompson & Company and constructed by local Morristown contractors Trobaugh-Cary Company, Inc. The building was constructed of hollow clay tile and yellow brick face and was touted in the local newspaper as "modern in every particular [sic]," referencing the use of the fireproof hollow clay tile as well as the installation of the new common battery telephone technology.<sup>2</sup> It was a modern building for a modern service.

The first telephone transmission in 1876 forever transformed how individuals communicated with each other. Two years later, the first commercial telephone exchange opened in New Haven, Connecticut on January 28, 1878. At the time, the Bell Telephone Company (established in 1875) served as the premiere and only telephone innovator. As such, the company created lease and license programs for use by local providers while maintaining control of the technology, the equipment, and the service.<sup>3</sup> Not long after establishment of the company and the first telephone exchange, telegraph company Western Union attempted to incorporate telephones (based on a design by Thomas Edison) into their offices. Claiming patent infringement, the Bell Telephone Company successfully squashed Western Union's attempts to break into the telephone industry in 1879. In exchange, the Bell Telephone Company agreed to stop all telegraph services.<sup>4</sup> The Bell Telephone Company underwent a name change in 1880 to the American Bell Telephone Company.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "City Board Grants Permit to Telephone Co. to Erect Bldg.," *Morristown Gazette and Mail*, June 22, 1929, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 31, 2023.; "Local Firm Awarded Contracts," *Morristown Gazette and Mail*, July 15, 1929, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 1, 2023.; "Work Progressing on New Telephone Building," *Morristown Gazette and Mail*, August 20, 1929, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 1, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Claude S. Fischer, *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>5</sup> John Brooks, *Telephone: The First Hundred Years – The Wondrous Invention that Changed a World and Spawned a Corporate Giant* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976), 73.

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The company continued installing telephone lines across the nation, which included the opening of the Atlanta Telephonic Exchange in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1879. The Atlanta Telephone Exchange operated as a franchise of the larger American Bell Telephone Company. By 1882, the franchise was known as Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company. Southern Bell went on to become the Bell System's operating franchise for nine southern states: Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the increased capital needed to finance the expansion of long-distance lines across the nation, the American Bell Company created a subsidiary under the name of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) in 1885. As business practices consolidated over time, AT&T and "the Bell System" became synonymous terms to describe the company.<sup>7</sup>

AT&T maintained a virtual monopoly on the telephone industry until the mid-1890s when the patents that served as the impetus for the industry expired, allowing for small, independent competitors to move into the field. These small competitors edged out AT&T in mostly rural service areas where AT&T considered the costs too extensive to attempt to develop exchanges and install lines. However, many of these small exchanges relied on the Bell System's lines to put through calls, and many were absorbed into AT&T's monopolistic practices, an act that was essentially sanctioned by the United States Justice Department in 1913 with the signing of the Kingsbury Commitment.<sup>8</sup> The Kingsbury Commitment, "allowed AT&T to provide connections to independent telephone companies but ordered it to curtail purchase of or consolidation with them unless 'the transaction [was] desirable for the protection of the general public service or Bell System property.'"<sup>9</sup> With an essentially government-sanctioned monopoly, free from recrimination, the Bell System continued to expand telephone services throughout the early twentieth century. As a result, estimates suggested that "80 percent of telephones in the United States were Bell telephones, and 98 percent of the remainder connected Bell lines."<sup>10</sup>

Telephone exchanges worked by passing subscriber calls via switchboards. Telephone operators were on hand to connect the caller to their intended recipient. Telephone exchanges, often served by the same telephone lines, were able to connect to each other, regardless of the caller's subscription, creating the opportunity for almost immediate communication across vast geographic expanses. The creation of the "dial system" in the early twentieth century shifted how individuals communicated and their telephoning experiences. The dial system created the opportunity for individuals to directly dial the number of the phone they intended to call

<sup>6</sup> "Southern Bell Telephone Company Building," History Atlanta: Historic Buildings, People & Things in Atlanta History, last modified February 21, 2024, <https://historyatlanta.com/southern-bell-telephone-company-building/>; *Early History of the Southeastern States – As Series of Brief Historical Accounts of the Nine States Served by the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Co.: As Published in the Southern Telephone News, 1957 and 1958* (Atlanta, Southern Telephone News, 1959).

<sup>7</sup> Brooks, 90-91.

<sup>8</sup> Louise Brown, Robert Clemons, Mick Hicks, and the History Book Committee of the Tennessee Telephone Association, *Telephones for Tennessee* (Nashville: Tennessee Telephone Association, 1995), 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Fischer, 51.

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and removed the need to connect via an operator and switchboard. This phenomenon, in turn, reduced the need for operators and large telephone exchanges.<sup>11</sup>

One such rural area served by this expansion of communication technology was Morristown in Hamblen County, Tennessee. Morristown was incorporated in 1855 and serves as the county seat of Hamblen County, which was incorporated in 1870. One of the smallest counties within Tennessee, Hamblen County maintained a largely agrarian economy that continues to characterize the county.<sup>12</sup> As the largest city in the county, Morristown became the urban center of Hamblen County and was typically the first city to experience growth and modernization. Throughout the early twentieth century, Morristown was served by a variety of smaller, independent telecommunications entities that operated under Bell System lines. This changed in 1928 when the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company acquired the People's Telephone Co. of Knoxville, an independent telephone company that had operated exchanges in Morristown and other smaller East Tennessee cities and towns. Within a year, construction began on the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building in Morristown for the purposes of installing a modern and upgraded common battery phone system throughout the city. Installation of wiring and the switchboard followed. The inaugural call was placed on February 22, 1930, signaling the expansion of telephone services and communication in Morristown and the surrounding region.<sup>13</sup>

In Hamblen County, there are no other surveyed or National Register-listed properties directly associated with the rise and spread of the telegraph/telephone in rural Hamblen County. Statewide, the only known contributing National Register-listed resource related to telephone communications is the Millington Telephone Company Building (c. 1960), listed as part of the Rosemark Historic District (NR Listed 05-03-2013) in Shelby County. The building is described as “a one-story brick utility building with a flat asphalt roof.” A contributing metal telephone signal tower is located on the roof of the building.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> “1870s-1940s: Telephone,” *Imagining the Internet: A History and Forecast*, Elon University, last modified 2023, <https://www.elon.edu/u/imagining/time-capsule/150-years/back-1870-1940/>; “First Commercial Telephone Exchange – Today in History: January 28,” *Connecticut History*, last modified January 28, 2020, <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-first-commercial-telephone-exchange-today-in-history/>; Greg Daugherty, “The Rise and Fall of Telephone Operators,” *The History Channel*, last modified October 2, 2023, <https://www.history.com/news/rise-fall-telephone-switchboard-operators>; “Goodbye to the Hello Girls: Automating the Telephone Exchange,” *Science Museum*, last modified October 22, 2018, <https://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/goodbye-hello-girls-automating-telephone-exchange>.

<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Burwin Haun, “Hamblen County,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, last modified March 1, 2018, <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/hamblen-county/>.

<sup>13</sup> “Work Progressing on New Telephone Building,” *Morristown Gazette and Mail*, August 20, 1929, *Newspapers.com*, Accessed November 1, 2023.; “Work Started on Under Ground Telephone Cables,” *Morristown Gazette and Mail*, August 20, 1929, *Newspapers.com*, Accessed October 31, 2023.; “Telephone Building Finished; New Service To Be Ready in January,” *Morristown Gazette and Mail*, October 24, 1929, *Newspapers.com*, Accessed November 1, 2023.; “Morristown’s New Telephone System Goes Into Use on February 22<sup>nd</sup>,” *History of Company*, *Morristown Gazette and Mail*, February 17, 1930, *Newspapers.com*, Accessed October 30, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Within the Second Avenue Commercial Historic District (NR Listed 02-23-1972) in Davidson County contains the AT&T Building, which was considered non-contributing at the time of the nomination due to age. The building has since undergone extensive and unsympathetic alterations and did not retain enough integrity when re-evaluated.

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The building was constructed with public service in mind. The three points of entry on the façade porch were designed to create spaces for use by the public and spaces for use by private business operations. The public entered the right (west) door and conducted their business in the general offices. The center door (north) led directly to the second floor where operators worked at the switchboards. The “apparatus room” was accessed through the left (east) door. This room housed the mechanisms for the repair and maintenance of communications equipment. During the 1930s and 1950s, the importance of the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building extended beyond connecting the region through communication. The company created employment opportunities for local women who worked as switchboard operators, or “Hello Girls,” as they came to be called in the early twentieth century. The building was frequently hosted “open houses” so that the citizens of Morristown might better understand the operations of the telephone system and promote its usage.<sup>15</sup>

In Tennessee, the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company experienced an increase in usage and demand for telephone connections throughout the 1940s. In response, the Southern Bell building in Morristown expanded its work force to accommodate the increased demand, likely in the same period when the building addition occurred, adding a depth of four bays to the south (rear) of the building. Many local women worked in the Southern Bell building as it rapidly transformed into a hub of regional activity. In 1951, the telephone exchange located in the building served as the primary exchange for connection stations in local and rural communities, including nearby Sneedville and Lowland, until full, independent exchanges could be established in these locales. In response to an increased demand for Southern Bell services, a 250-foot telephone tower was erected at a nearby location to expand long-distance services for Morristown citizens in 1955.<sup>16</sup>

As local and long-distance telephone services expanded in Morristown, the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company requested rate increases to accommodate the increasing demand. Despite an initial outcry from citizens, the rate increases directly benefited the local community. Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph, like many other communication companies in the state, created financial opportunities that outweighed initial rate increases. The Southern Bell location in Morristown created some of the largest tax revenues in both the local community and Hamblen County, according to *The Morristown Sun*, with a payment of \$11,683.77 for the 1953 fiscal year. The Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company paid \$5 million

<sup>15</sup> “Telephone Building Finished; New Service to Be Ready in January,” *Morristown Gazette and Mail*, October 24, 1929, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 1, 2023.; “Many Visit Telephone Building,” *Morristown Gazette and Mail*, May 22, 1930, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 3, 2023.; “Hello Girls: Topics in Chronicling America,” Library of Congress: Research Guides, <https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-hello-girls>. The moniker “hello girls” was greatly popularized because of the necessity of telephone operators during WWI as part of the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Women primarily held all telephone operator roles, and the greeting of “hello” is what led to the rise and application of the name to telephone operators in and outside of wartime settings. For more information on “Hello Girls,” see Elizabeth Cobb, *The Hello Girls: America’s First Women Soldiers* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Howard Hill “Morristown’s ‘Eiffel Tower’ Under Construction,” *Morristown Gazette and Mail*, March 16, 1955, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 30, 2023.; “Telephone Co. Offers Reward,” *Daily Gazette and Mail*, August 2, 1950, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 30, 2023.; “Commission Grants Telephone Franchise For Sneedville,” *Daily Gazette and Mail*, May 13, 1951, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 30, 2023.

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in taxes to the State of Tennessee for the same accounting period. This positive economic impact continued well into the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>17</sup>

Morristown's Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building was not immune to sweeping cultural changes across the nation. March and April 1955 saw nationwide strikes by members of the CIO-Communications Workers of America, which sought, and eventually won, pay raises for communications workers within the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company. Violence and destruction frequented telephone buildings across the nation, as strikers attempted to disrupt service and force communications companies into talks and compromises. Acts of protest varied wildly across the nation. For example, protestors used "stink bombs" in one Georgia building while others fired shots into a Kentucky building. Southern Bell offices and buildings across Tennessee experienced a wide array of strike-related activities, with bricks thrown through windows in Maryville, mass picketing in Jackson, and an explosion in Greenback. In Morristown, the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building was a potential site of violence when what was thought to be an unexploded bomb was discovered on the roof of the building, coinciding with explosions at the personal residences of company employees in the city. Tensions surrounding the strike in Morristown grew so strained that the Hamblen County sheriff released a notice in *The Morristown Sun* warning the CIO-Communications Workers of America, and directly naming over forty local individuals, against any violence or threatening behaviors or activities towards the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company, the building at 203 W. 2nd Front Street, its workers, or any personal property. After ten weeks, the nationwide Southern Bell strike ended in June 1955 in favor of the workers, who received wage increases and recognition of the right to strike.<sup>18</sup>

Following the strike, operations continued at 203 W. 2nd North Street as the local demand of telephone services continued. In 1958, the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company erected a new building to house a dial telephone system in the city. Leaving behind the switchboard of the 203 W. 2nd Front Street building, Morristown transitioned to dial telephone operations in July 1958. The building at 203 W. 2nd Front Street remained an active part of the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company, serving as the business

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<sup>17</sup> "Young Women," Advertisement, *Daily Gazette and Mail* (Morristown), May 1, 1947, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 30, 2023.; "Southern Bell Making Good Progress Improving and Enlarging 'Phone Service," *Daily Gazette and Mail* (Morristown), January 19, 1949, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 3, 2023.; "Commission Grants Telephone Franchise for Sneedville," *Daily Gazette and Mail* (Morristown), May 13, 1951, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 30, 2023.; "Southern Bell Delivers One of Biggest Hamblen County Tax Payments," *The Morristown Sun*, February 26, 1954, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 30, 2023.; "Bell Telephone Pays Highest Tax for Hamblen Co.," *Daily Gazette and Mail* (Morristown), February 28, 1954, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 30, 2023.; "You're Invited...To Open House at the Telephone Building" Advertisement, *The Morristown Sun*, September 16, 1954, Newspapers.com, November 1, 2023.

<sup>18</sup> "Bricks Thrown Thru Windows of Phone Co. Bldg.," *Daily Gazette and Mail* (Morristown), March 30, 1955, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 3, 2023.; "Sheriff's Notice," *The Morristown Sun*, April 17, 1955, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 30, 2023.; "Explosion Destroys Exchange," *The Morristown Sun*, April 28, 1955, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 3, 2023.; "Loan of 1 ½ Million Made by Unions to Aid Idle Strikers," *Daily Gazette and Mail* (Morristown), May 3, 1955, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 3, 2023.; "Telephone Workers Union Resolution Against Phone Firm," April 12, 1955, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 30, 2023.; "CWA History," Communication Workers of America, accessed November 3, 2023, [https://cwa-union.org/about/cwa-history](https://cwa-union.org/about/cwa-history;);

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offices for Morristown though no longer serving as the hub of telephone activity within the city.<sup>19</sup> Throughout its productive lifetime, the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building was as an active hub of technology, communication, and connection for the local community.

It is unknown when the company ceased using the building as business offices. Briefly, between 1960 and 1969, the basement of the building served as the temporary location of the Morristown-Hamblen County Public Library. This followed a pattern of the library moving from temporary space to temporary space as the needs of the community grew. Within this period, the needs of the library quickly outgrew the size of the space. This quickly became evident to both the City and County, and planning for a new, purpose-built building started in July 1961. In 1975, the building was deeded from the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company to Sidney Renert.<sup>20</sup> In recent decades, the building has been vacant. A previous owner had plans to use the building and removed interior office walls, but those plans never saw fruition. Currently, efforts are underway to rehabilitate the building using the federal historic tax credits for use as multi-family housing.

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<sup>19</sup> “Modern Dial System Said In the Offing for M’town,” *Daily Gazette and Mail* (Morristown), July 8, 1956, Newspapers.com, Accessed October 30, 2023.; W.N. Flowers, “Telephone Talk,” *Daily Gazette and Mail* (Morristown), June 14, 1957, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 3, 2023.; “Morristown’s New Dial Telephones May Be in Operation by Latter Part of 1958,” *Daily Gazette and Mail* (Morristown), July 2, 1957, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 3, 2023.; “Change to Dial ‘Phone System Effected Today,” *Daily Gazette and Mail* (Morristown), July 20, 1958, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 1, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Shelly Shropshire, “History of the Morristown-Hamblen Library,” *Tennessee Libraries* 59, no. 4 (2009): <https://www.tnla.org/page/331>; “Public Library To Be Open For Service Tuesday,” *Morristown Gazette Mail* (Morristown), May 23, 1960, Newspapers.com, Accessed November 30, 2024.; New Morristown Library Planned, *Morristown Gazette News* (Morristown), July 14, 1961, Newspapers.com. Accessed November 30, 2024.; Hamblen County, Tennessee, Warranty Deed 1102, County Register, Filed November 21, 1975, 221-222, Hamblen County Archives, Morristown, Tennessee.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):		Primary location of additional data:	
X	preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)	X	State Historic Preservation Office
	previously listed in the National Register		Other State agency
	previously determined eligible by the National Register		Federal agency
	designated a National Historic Landmark		Local government
	recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #		University
	recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #		Other
	recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #	Name of repository:	
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): HB-515			

Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph  
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### 10. Geographical Data

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**Acreage of Property** 0.25 **USGS Quadrangle** Morristown 163-NE

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

1. Northeast Corner:	Latitude: 36.214374	Longitude: -83.295125
2. Southeast Corner on N. Henry Street	Latitude: 36.214032	Longitude: -83.294854
3. Southwest Corner	Latitude: 36.213915	Longitude: -83.295052
4. Northwest Corner on W. 2 <sup>nd</sup> North Street:	Latitude: 36.214276	Longitude: -83.295331

#### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries correspond to the legal parcel boundaries of Hamblen County Parcel 033L G 007.00. In general, these boundaries are bound by West 2<sup>nd</sup> North Street to the north and North Henry Street to the east. The west and south boundaries are formed by the parcel lines of adjoining properties to the west and south, respectively. These boundaries are depicted on the enclosed Boundary Map.

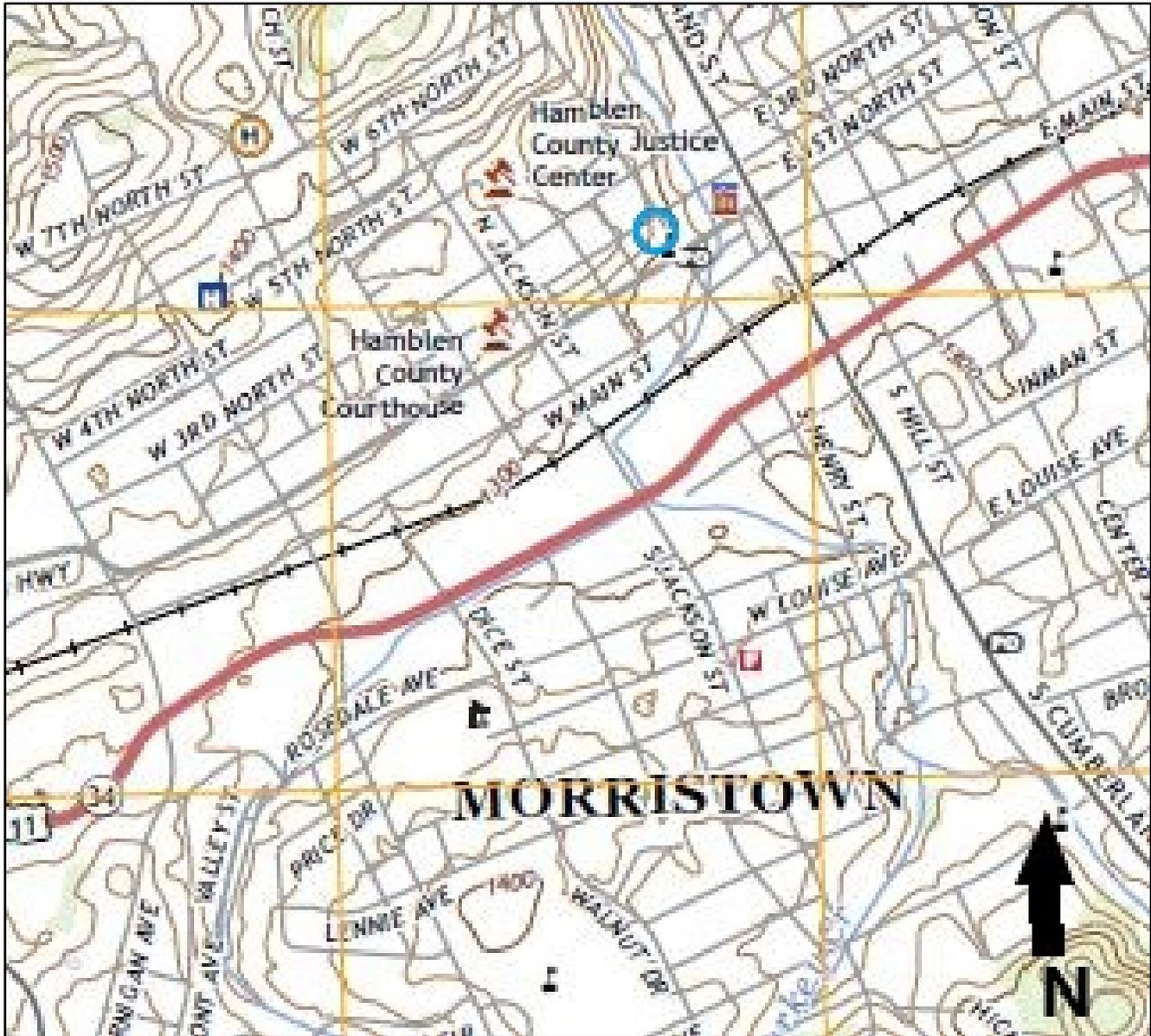
#### Boundary Justification

The selected boundaries encompass the building and the land that were historically associated with the ownership of the building.

Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph  
Building  
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USGS Topographic Map

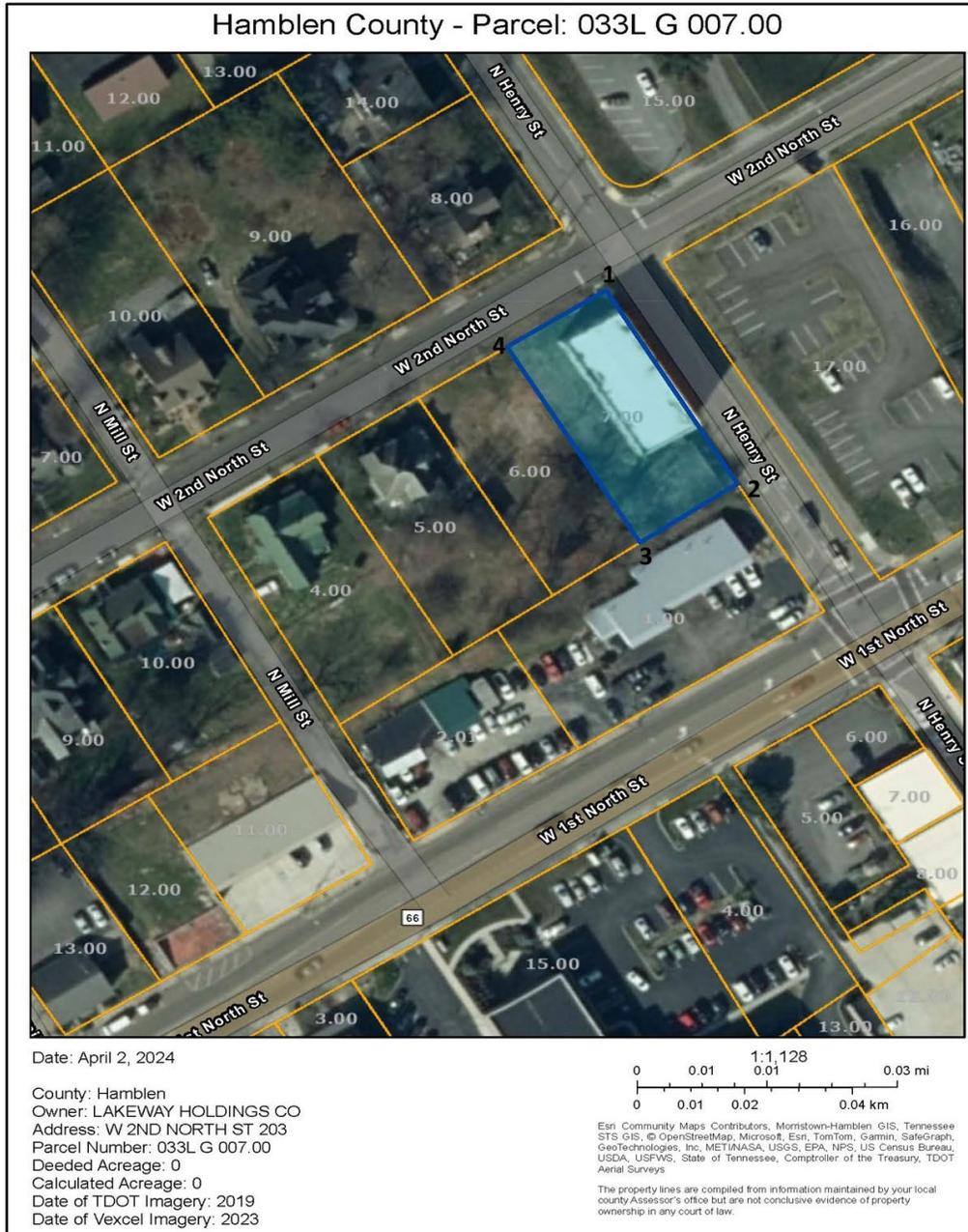


Location of Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building is indicated by blue circle. Morrissetown 163-NE  
Quadrangle. Original Map Scale 1:24,000.

Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph  
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### Boundary Map



National Register Boundaries are shown by the blue shaded area.  
Map provided by the State of Tennessee Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury

Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph  
Building  
Name of Property

Hamblen County,  
Tennessee  
County and State

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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Name	Dr. Lane Tillner		
Organization	Tennessee Historical Commission		
Street & Number	2941 Lebanon Pike	Date	August 16, 2024
City or Town	Nashville	Telephone	615.770.1092
E-mail	Lane.Tillner@tn.gov	State	TN Zip Code 37214

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Photographs** (refer to Tennessee Historical Commission National Register *Photo Policy* for submittal of digital images and prints. Photos should be submitted separately in a JPEG or TIFF format. Do not embed these photographs into the form)
- **Additional items:** (additional supporting documentation including historic photographs, historic maps, etc. can be included on a Continuation Sheet following the photographic log and sketch maps. They can also be embedded in the Section 7 or 8 narratives)

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

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

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph  
Building

Name of Property

Hamblen, TN

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N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos and PlansPage 27**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building

City or Vicinity: Morristown

County: Hamblen

State: Tennessee

Photographer: Justin Heske

Date Photographed: November 7, 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 30. Front (North) façade. Photographer facing Southeast.
- 2 of 30. Front (North) façade, Inset Entryway. Three single leaf doorways. Only central door is original. All have original transoms. Photographer facing Southeast.
- 3 of 30. Front (North) façade, Inset Entryway, East (Left) Door. Photographer facing Southeast.
- 4 of 30. Front (North) façade, Inset Entryway, West (Right) Door. Photographer facing Southwest.
- 5 of 30. East Elevation from North Henry Street. Photographer facing Southwest.
- 6 of 30. East Elevation, Inset North Henry Street Entryway on ca. 1950s Addition. Photographer facing Southwest.
- 7 of 30. Rear (South) elevation as seen from North Henry Street. Photographer facing Northwest.
- 8 of 30. Basement Entryway on Rear (South) elevation. Only original entry door left on rear elevation. Photographer facing Northwest.
- 9 of 30. Rear (South) elevation. Photographer facing Northwest.
- 10 of 30. West elevation. Photographer facing North.
- 11 of 30. West elevation. Photographer facing East.
- 12 of 30. First Floor Interior. Photographer facing Southeast, Looking from East of Stairs.
- 13 of 30. Interior Front Stair. Photographer facing Southeast.
- 14 of 30. First Floor facing front entryways and stair. Photographer facing Northwest.

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National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph  
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- 15 of 30. First Floor West wall. Photographer facing Southeast.
- 16 of 30. First Floor looking to front of building. Photographer facing Northwest.
- 17 of 30. First Floor East wall. Photographer facing Northwest.
- 18 of 30. Second Floor, top of stairs facing front entryways. Photographer facing Northwest.
- 19 of 30. Second Floor, northwest corner of the building. Photographer facing Northwest.
- 20 of 30. Second Floor, Interior of Front (North) façade and Northeast corner of the building. Photographer facing Northeast.
- 21 of 30. Second Floor, view of rear and West walls from front of building (stairs to left). Photographer facing Southeast.
- 22 of 30. Second Floor, view from Rear (South) of the building to the Front (North). East portion of second floor. Photographer facing Northwest.
- 23 of 30. Second Floor, East portion of second floor, view to Rear (South) of the building. Photographer facing Southeast.
- 24 of 30. Second Floor, view of deteriorated floor tiles over original tongue-and-groove wood floor. Photographer facing South.
- 25 of 30. Basement stairs leading to first floor. Photographer looking South.
- 26 of 30. Basement boiler room in original building footprint. Photographer looking Northeast.
- 27 of 30. Basement hallway in original building footprint. Photographer looking Northwest.
- 28 of 30. Basement entryway at North Henry Street. Photographer looking North.
- 29 of 30. South wall and portion of basement. Photographer looking Southeast.
- 30 of 30. View of basement from rear (South) to front (North). Photographer looking Northwest.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

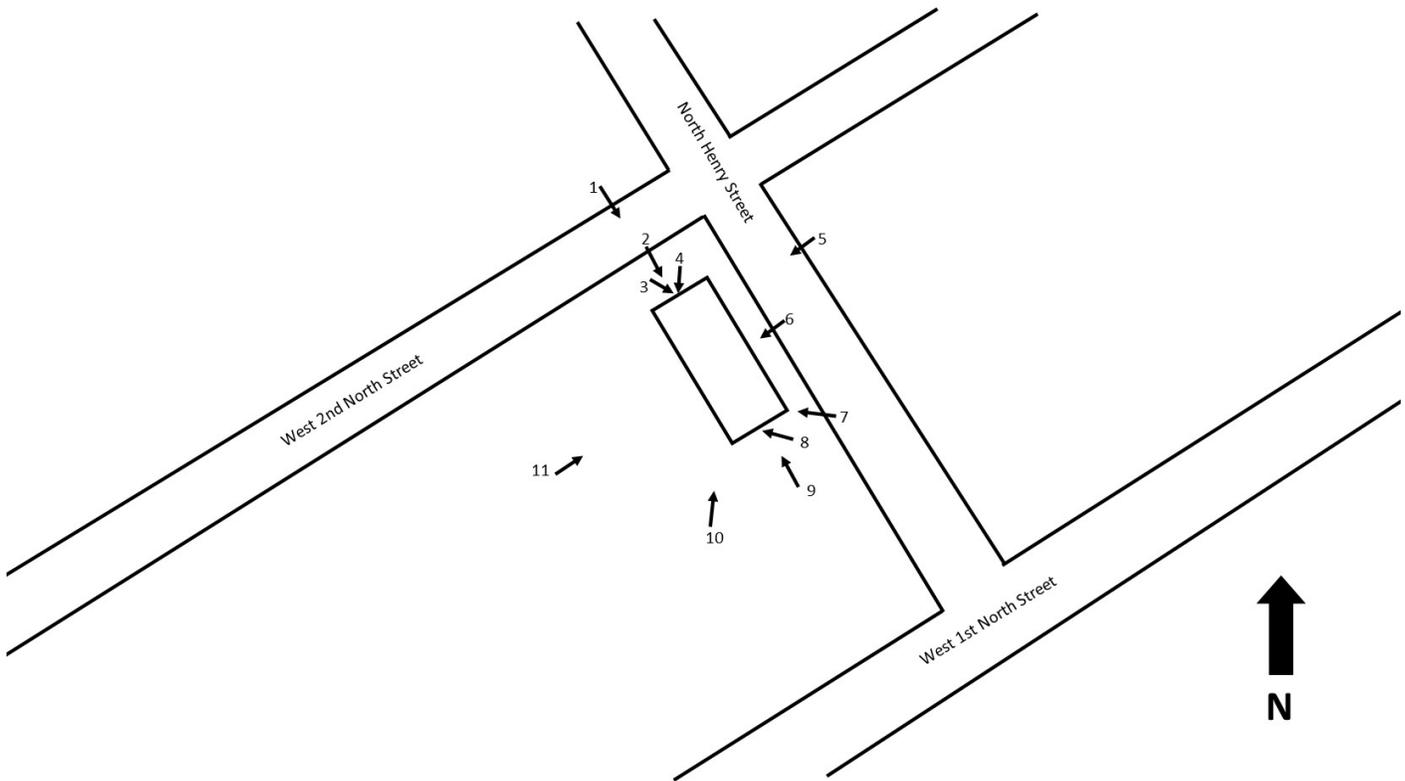
National Register of Historic Places  
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Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building
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Site Plan with Photos Keyed



Not to Scale

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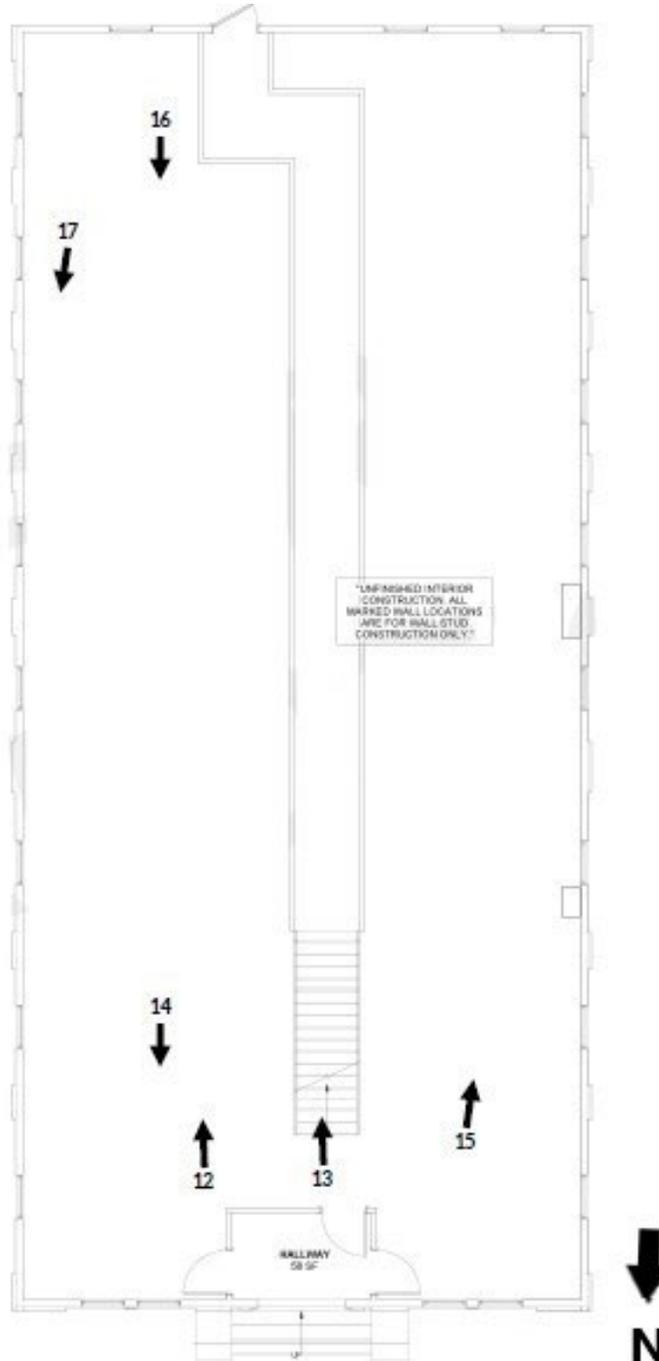
National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building
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First Level Floor Plan with Photos Keyed



Not to Scale

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

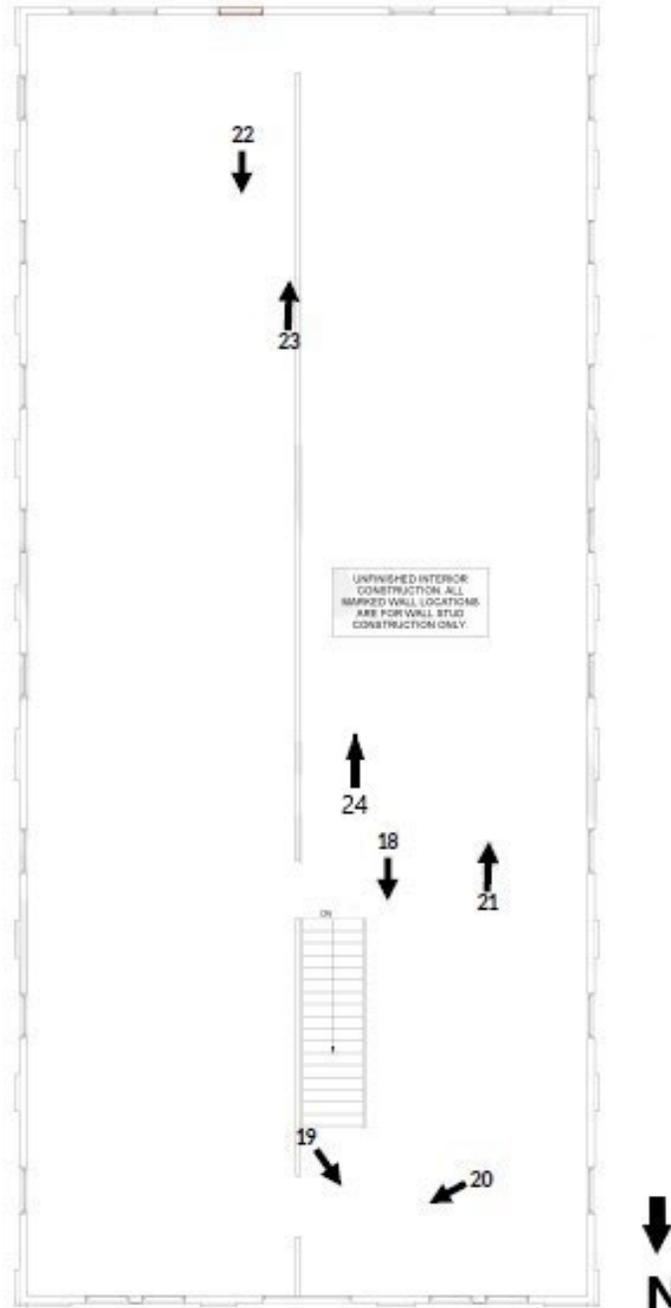
National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building
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Name of Property
Hamblen, TN
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County and State
N/A
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos and Plans

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Second Level Floor Plan with Photos Keyed



Not to Scale

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

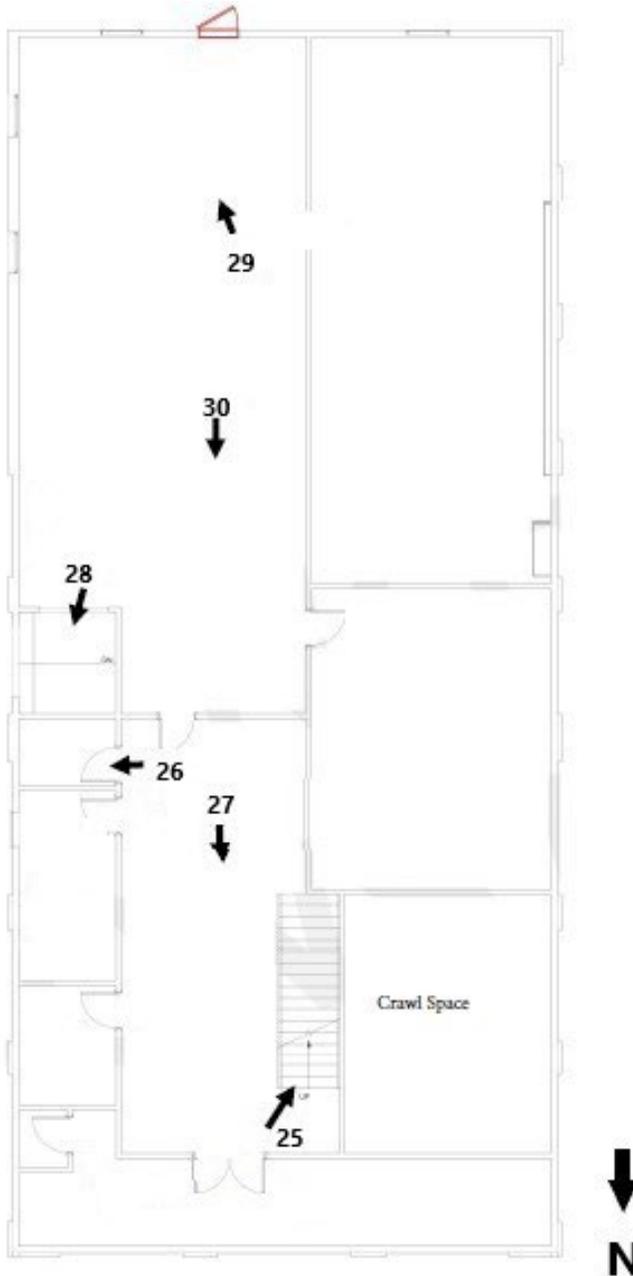
National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Building
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Name of Property
Hamblen, TN
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County and State
N/A
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos and Plans

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Basement Level Floor Plan with Photos Keyed



Not to Scale

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**Property Owner(s):**

(This information will not be submitted to the National Park Service, but will remain on file at the Tennessee Historical Commission)

---

Name	Chris Simmons		
Street & Number	180 Art Drive	Telephone	865-993-2082
City or Town	Bean Station	State/Zip	<u>TN/37708</u>

**SOUTHERN BELL TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING  
MORRISTOWN, HAMBLLEN COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

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**SOUTHERN BELL TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING  
MORRISTOWN, HAMBLLEN COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

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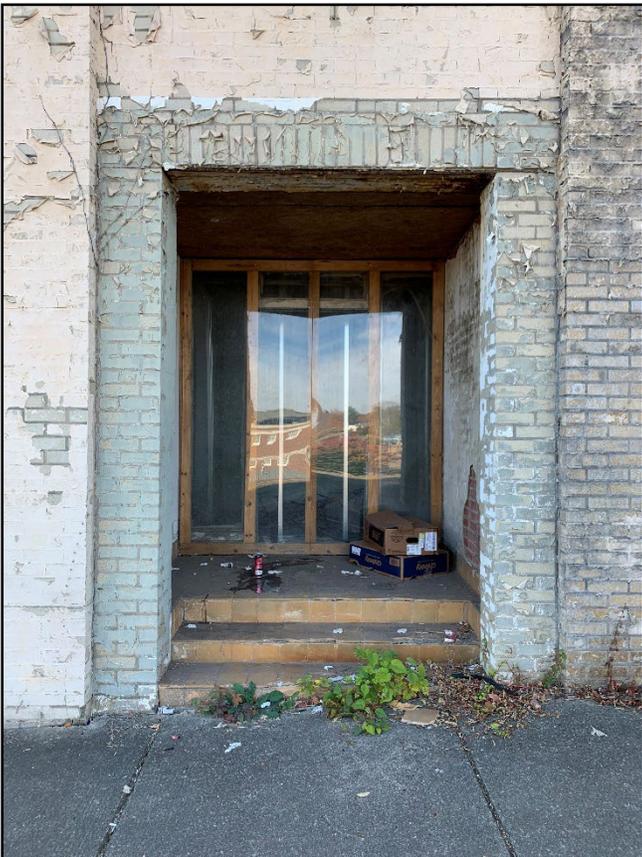
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**SOUTHERN BELL TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING  
MORRISTOWN, HAMBLLEN COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

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**SOUTHERN BELL TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING  
MORRISTOWN, HAMBLLEN COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

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**SOUTHERN BELL TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING  
MORRISTOWN, HAMBLLEN COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

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**SOUTHERN BELL TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING  
MORRISTOWN, HAMBLLEN COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

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**SOUTHERN BELL TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING  
MORRISTOWN, HAMBLLEN COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

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**SOUTHERN BELL TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING  
MORRISTOWN, HAMBLLEN COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

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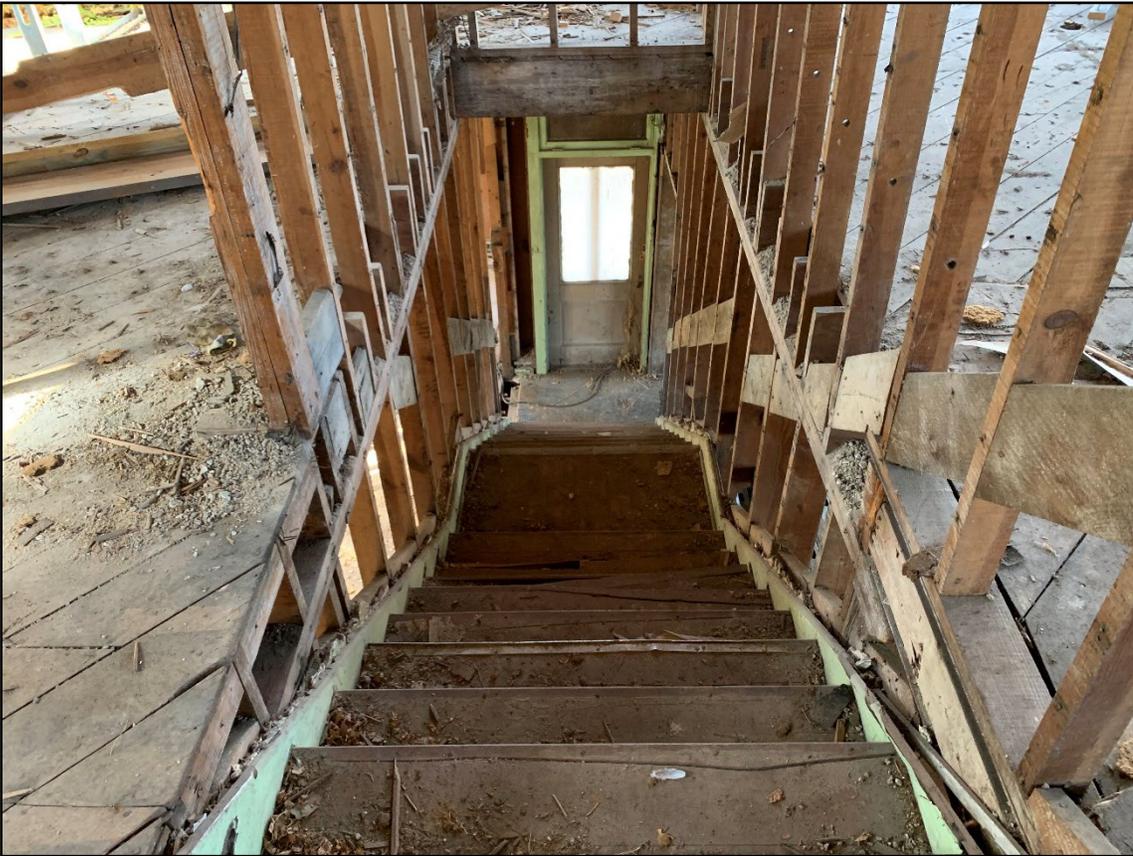
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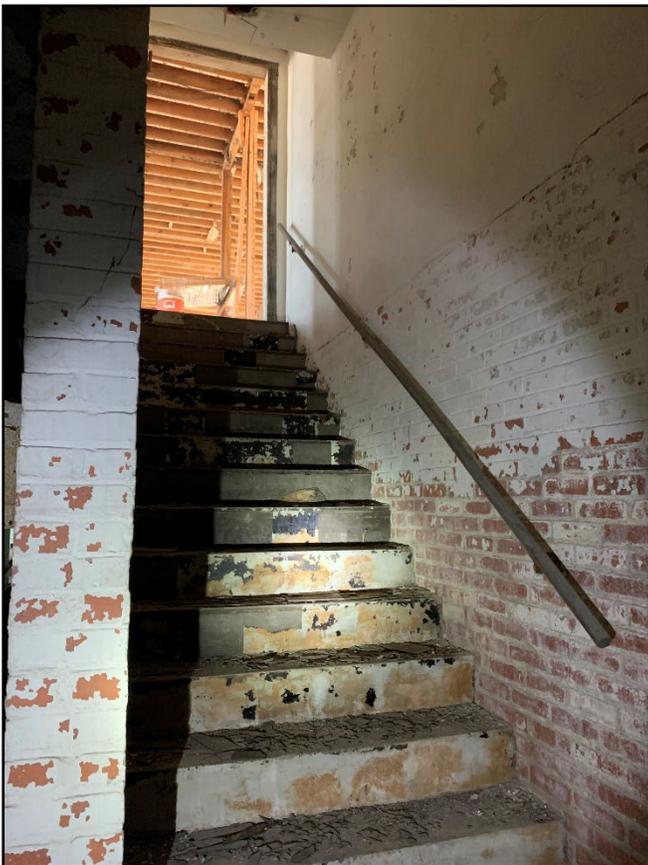
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