CERTIFICATION OF PUBLICATION:
Omaha Preservation Administrator certifies publication in the Daily Record, the official newspaper of the City of Omaha, on Wednesday, April 29, 2009, notice re: Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission meeting, May 13, 2009.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Albert Macchietto, Vice Chairman
Adrian Ferguson
Bryan Zimmer
Edward Quinn
John Schleicher
Sarah Burt
Eduardo Santamaria

MEMBERS ABSENT: Douglas Bisson, Chairman
Nicholas Hogan

OTHERS PRESENT: James Krance, Preservation Administrator

Mr. Macchietto called the meeting to order at 1:40 p.m. with seven members present.

Mr. Quinn moved to APPROVE the minutes of the April 8, 2009, meeting. Mr. Schleicher seconded the motion.

AYES: Zimmer, Quinn, Schleicher, Burt, Santamaria, Ferguson, Macchietto

Motion carried 7-0

NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION:

Case #H5-09-04
Christina A. Jansen
Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture PC
1516 Cuming Street
Omaha, NE 68102

REQUEST: Approval of National Register Nomination Northwestern Bell Telephone Regional Headquarters

LOCATION: 100 S. 19 Street

At the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission meeting held on May 13, 2009, Ms. Christina Jansen, Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture PC, 1516 Cuming Street, Omaha, NE, presented this request.

Mr. Macchietto, Vice Chairman, noted that he would abstain from voting on this request due to a possible conflict of interest.

Ms. Jansen stated the Northwestern Bell Telephone Regional Headquarters building is being presented under Criterion "A" as a structure that is representative of Omaha's status as a regional center of commerce and communication during the 1950's and 1960's. It is also being presented under Criterion "C" as a building that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Omaha corporate modern office building.

The history of Northwestern Bell is many ways tied to the history of the telephone in the United States. Alexander Graham Bell, G. Hubbard and Thomas Sanders founded the Bell Telephone Company in
1877, a year after Alexander Graham Bell first talked into the “talking telegraph” instrument that would change the lines of communication forever. The image shown is a rendering of the Philadelphia Expedition where the telephone that was put on display, received the most publicity in its beginning. They began by connecting two phones in two different locations to each other and eventually decided to sell a service and not just the equipment. By licensing local businessmen in cities across the country, they were able to sell telephone service using the patented Bell telephone thus creating telephone franchisees. A standard contract gave the company stock in each operating company and defined territories and set out the basic relationship between the operating companies and American Bell.

Three of the four men that actually went to the expedition and saw the telephone exhibit were incredibly excited. L. H. Korty was a telegrapher that returned to Omaha. In 1879 the first telephone building in Omaha was located 18th & Farnam Street. The image of the men standing on telephone pole reminds us how rough and rugged the business was - men had to dig post holes, set the telephone poles that were used to string the telephone lines across the country.

Since the company’s dominance in the telephone market would be jeopardized by the expiration of Bell’s patents, the company determined the best way to insure their success was to provide connection service between franchisees and any other independent phone companies. In 1885, the company set up a new subsidiary, The American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T), whose mission was to build the first long distance network across the nation. By the 1940’s, the nation-wide Bell System network, composed of AT&T, Bell Telephone Laboratories, Western Electric and 22 operating companies which became known as the Baby Bells. The network continued to develop new technologies such as the transistor, telephone, microwave, coaxial cable and satellite communications.

The genealogy of Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, which was considered a Baby Bell, is quite complex. By 1907, the Nebraska Telephone Company located in Omaha. The president of Nebraska Telephone Company was also the president of two other large companies throughout the region. In 1909, a single general office was established in Omaha. Two years later a new building was built and by 1918 a 15-story building was constructed which indicates the growth experienced by the company.

Although the company was extremely successful prior to World War II, the economic growth was staggering afterward. In 1945 the company had 454 construction people and two years later that number quadrupled. The ten-year increase in telephones equaled nearly “three-fourths of the telephone growth in the preceding 63 years.” In 1960, the company invested approximately $250 million into the regional economy through the Northwestern Bell’s payrolls, construction expenses, purchases of materials, services, etc.

Technological advances made the company truly modern. Prior to 1953, Northwestern Bell and University of Nebraska College of Medicine had begun experimenting by sending heartbeats and brainwaves over the transmission wires. 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. This was very important for the scattered population in the region.

After World War II, strategic civil defense planning and secure defense communications were vital to national security. Strategic Air Command (SAC) located at Offutt Air Force Base became a growing responsibility. SAC requested millions of dollars worth of equipment including the famed “red telephone”. The red phone system connected 200 SAC operations located internationally to SAC underground command post at Offutt.

In addition to implementing modern communication tools, the telephone company also worked to ensure that their “look” was modern. The company histories note new glass and aluminum phone booths and more streamlined telephone sets as hallmarks of the 1950’s and 1960’s. Many of the promotional brochures paired a scientist working at Bell labs and someone in their home or office using the equipment that the scientists were discovering at that time. The transistor was actually invented in the Bell labs.

The design of both regional and area headquarters prior to the depression and World War II and post war years typically reflected public architectural discourse. By the mid 1950’s, buildings were developing new standards for modern company design. Although the buildings are constructed of traditional materials,
the materials have been simplified and appear as solid plane as opposed to decorative masses. A couple of examples of buildings that were built during the Bell System were indicated. The San Francisco building was built in the architectural perpendicular style. The Indianapolis building is an example of a building that was built in the art deco aesthetic.

The image of the Omaha building was published in a 1956 Bell magazine article as “the appropriate modern office building”. The Omaha building was being used as an example for all Bell Telephone Company buildings throughout the country. The structures that were built afterward followed the same lines, the solid planes.

Design and construction of the 12-story Northwestern Bell Regional Headquarters at 19th and Dodge Street began in the 1950’s to house the offices for the company’s headquarters. 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.” Modern design was not usually brick and limestone and granite trim, it was usually glass, aluminum and metal panels.

On the interior, flexible or universal space is key. A regularly spaced steel structure skeleton with compact elevator and primary stair core made it easy to shift the functions around as well as another layer of corrugated steel deck that was actually installed on the underside of the typical concrete and steel deck to create one-direction wiring raceways.

In 1962 plans were made for an addition to the 1957 building. In 1964 a 12-story 192,000 square foot addition was added to the west of the 1957 building. It was designed and constructed in exactly the same manner and exactly the same fashion and doubled the size of the original building. The only difference is the structural system is turned 90 degrees.

The design was not only a stylized modern aesthetic but also a functional fit for Northwestern Bell’s philosophy of providing universal service to the customer at a profitable cost. The modernist style is quoted from “A History of American Architecture” and expressed a desirable self image for new companies. A Bell Telephone magazine that was printed in 1950 mentions that “the tone of service is further improved by providing modern, attractive quarters, tastefully, but not extravagantly appointed….."

The building that is limestone and some marble is clean with no relief, very modern and very contemporary. The building was herald as the first downtown office project in 25 years when it was constructed. Most construction prior to this time had focused on suburban construction. As one of Omaha’s largest companies, the leadership of Northwestern Bell had a lot at stake in the development of the city of Omaha. The company had a particular interest in the downtown core especially since the equipment had been located downtown since 1879.

Locally significant under Criterion “A” and Criterion “C”, the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company Regional Headquarters is a product of both the 1957 and 1964 construction period. Rapid expansion after the war created additional employment opportunities and facilitated community growth. The building echoes modern philosophical ideals and is representative of Omaha status as a regional center for communication and commerce throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s. Construction of Northwestern Bell’s Regional Headquarters was indicative of the prosperity of the post war years, the rising prominence of the company and an interrupted plan of expansion and a commitment to Omaha’s downtown. Development of the block that “talk” built provides a tangible new focus for Omaha civic.

In response to Mr. Santamaria, Ms. Jansen stated the current status of the building is non-occupied. The National Register process is to make the building eligible for tax credit programs therefore renovation of the building for apartments and commercial space. The listing on the National Register will give the building an opportunity to be viable again. The option to buy was made available by Anderson Demolition before razing. Vern Dolleck stepped in and purchased the building.

In response to Mr. Quinn, Ms. Jansen stated the exterior will remain intact, the windows will be refurbished and the spandrel panels will be replaced but the exterior is in fantastic shape, the building was built very soundly and the elevators are still intact and will remain. It was standard for any building within the Bell Systems to wait four years before building unneeded space due to tie up of capital
investment that could be used for other services. There are buildings throughout the system that are one unified building that were designed as one unified building but built in phases. The addition was a continuation of the same design, which is the way the nomination is being presented. The 1957 building was fully occupied when it was originally constructed with approximately 1,000 employees. Many of the employees moved from the 1918 building when the addition was built in 1964.

In response to Mr. Zimmer, Ms. Jansen stated the building was originally built for office space, although the first two floors were very stout and was designed for equipment. Northwestern Bell used their older buildings to store equipment. The 1918 building at 19th & Douglas is a handsome building but because they stored all the equipment in the building, the façade was stripped off and the fabulous interior was gutted.

Mr. Schleicher moved to APPROVE the nomination. Mr. Quinn seconded the motion.

AYES: Quinn, Schleicher, Burt, Santamaria, Ferguson, Zimmer

ABSTAIN: Macchietto

Motion carried 6-0-1
Ms. Honebrink asked to present both nominations at the same time. Mr. Macchietto agreed to hear Case’s #H5-09-05 and #H5-09-06 at the same time but there will be two separate votes.

Ms. Honebrink stated the purpose of both nominations is to assist individuals in the nomination process for both apartment buildings and attached dwellings to the National Register without doing the background research. The focus can be on the individual building and placing it within the larger context. The overall goal for the State SHPO is to assist the average homeowner or smaller business person, especially with the attached dwellings, be able to list the property on the National Register and take advantage of the tax credit programs. The study was divided into two separate studies because of the scale of the buildings. The attached dwellings are typically smaller and owner-occupied where the apartment buildings are typically larger and rent driven.

Ms. Honebrink asked the commission to look at the apartment and attached dwelling images that are posted on the wall including Sanborn maps from 1887 to 2008. The double tenement and tenement house do not exist any longer. The tenement houses were concentrated in the original downtown area and were lost to new construction by 1900. The double tenement building was ruled out in the 1920’s due to the zoning changes and zoning laws. There were buildings that were literally thrown up in order to house people but no longer exist. The illustrations show the different architectural styles within the city. The attached dwellings are divided by decade.

In response to Mr. Schleicher, Ms. Honebrink stated the definition of a tenement is a multi-family dwelling that is rented rather than owned and housed more than one family. Most tenements had a particular kind of floor plan where everyone had to walk through everyone else’s rooms. Because of the time and period there was often times cooking out back or cooking on a hot stove. There were many shared facilities but when people started living in flats they started to have their own bathrooms and kitchens.

An attempt was made to set up as many potential Criteria as possible so an individual could enter their nomination under Category “B” or if it fits better under Category “A” because of type and representative of the style. There are approximately 800 attached dwellings and approximately 500 apartments for possible nomination.

In response to Mr. Krance, Ms. Honebrink stated people use different definitions for the same term such as a double house or a flat. A double house is more like a duplex whether it is on top of each other or side by side. Some units are still in question because they were converted to flats over time. They were counted as flats because there was no other basis. There are some units that look like conversions but once inside there is evidence that they were built as a flat. Any units, especially in the midtown area that were converted into apartments, would be excluded from nomination. They would have to have been built either as an attached dwelling or as an apartment. Some units were built as a row house and then later converted to a row flat or it was built as a duplex and then converted to a house. There was a time when no one could afford to build brand new and so to double his or her income the interior was rearranged for a minimum amount of money and converted to an apartment. The smaller flat types were not included but many of the conversions were included. There were two different categories: 1) buildings that were converted into apartments and home offices included in the city directory and 2) another group of apartments that were never included in the city directory.

Ms. Honebrink stated she has a database list of buildings that are still in existence. Mr. Krance asked if the list could be included in the nomination.

In response to Mr. Schleicher, Ms. Honebrink stated this nomination is different from a Historic District and there is no requirement to have 51% or the majority of the homeowner’s permission.
Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission
Minutes – May 13, 2009
Page 6

Mr. Krance stated that one advantage South Omaha has is the downtown area did not outgrow the surrounding area therefore there are many more of the older buildings still in existence. Ms. Honebrink stated there are a couple in Florence and the Benson area; also.

Mr. Krance stated significant alterations are in question for older buildings. Kitchens and bath alterations are acceptable because they age and go obsolete. The last paragraph talks about the exterior and significant alterations which include major changes made to buildings and structures such as structural alterations, additions and façade changes. Mr. Krance questioned if windows would be included in façade changes and if a building has new windows, is it automatically disqualified? Ms. Honebrink answered that it depends on what the rest of the group looks like. For example, most commercial buildings that were built before 1900 most likely do not have the original windows. In that case, altered windows would almost be expected but if window alterations are significantly different in form or in layout than the original building then it would probably be disqualified. It will be a value judgement as it comes through. In response to Mr. Quinn, Mr. Krance stated the State has very specific guidelines regarding windows.

Mr. Ferguson moved to APPROVE the Apartment Building Multiple Property Documentation Nomination. Mr. Zimmer seconded the motion.

Mr. Zimmer offered an amendment to the motion to APPROVE the Apartment Building Multiple Property Documentation Nomination subject to an addition of a list of all known existing structures in the required categories as listed. Mr. Santamaria seconded the motion.

AYES: Schleicher, Burt, Santamaria, Ferguson, Zimmer, Quinn
ABSTAIN: Macchietto

Motion carried 6-0

Case #H5-09-06
Jennifer Honebrink
Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture PC
1516 Cuming Street
Omaha, NE 68102

REQUEST: Attached Dwellings Multiple Property Documentation Nomination
LOCATION: City of Omaha

At the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission meeting held on May 13, 2009, Ms. Jennifer Honebrink, Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture PC, 1516 Cuming Street, Omaha, NE, presented this request.

Mr. Macchietto, Vice Chairman, noted that he would abstain from voting on this request due to a possible conflict of interest.

Mr. Quinn moved to APPROVE the Attached Dwellings Multiple Property Documentation Nomination subject to an addition of a list of all known existing structures in the required categories as listed. Ms. Burt seconded the motion.

AYES: Burt, Santamaria, Ferguson, Zimmer, Quinn, Schleicher
ABSTAIN: Macchietto

Motion carried 6-0
Discussion:

Mr. Jim Krance, Preservation Administrator, stated the Northern Natural Gas Building would be presented at the next meeting.

Ms. Honebrink stated the above three nominations along with several other nominations will be presented before the State Historic Preservation Commission. The next meeting will be at 1:00 on Friday, May 15, 2009 at the office of Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture located at 1516 Cuming Street.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Ferguson moved to ADJOURN the meeting. Mr. Quinn seconded the motion.

AYES: Santamaria, Ferguson, Zimmer, Quinn, Schleicher, Burt, Macchietto

Motion carried 7-0

The meeting adjourned at 2:38 p.m.

Debbie Hightower
Recording Secretary