Virginia Department of Historic Resources PIF Resource Information Sheet

This information sheet is designed to provide the Virginia Department of Historic Resources with the necessary data to be able to evaluate the significance of the property for possible listing in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. This is not a formal nomination, but a necessary step in determining whether or not the property could be considered eligible for listing. Please take the time to fill in as many fields as possible. A greater number of completed fields will result in a more timely and accurate assessment. Staff assistance is available to answer any questions you have in regards to this form.

General Property Information		For Staff Use Only DHR ID #:
Property Name(s):	Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co. of Virginia Building or "Alexandria Communications Center"	
Property Date(s):	1940, 1947	Open to Public? ☐Yes ☐Limited ☒No
Property Address:	1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue City:	Alexandria Zip: 22301
County or Ind. City:	Ind. City of Alexandria USGS Quad(s):	Alexandria, VA-DC-MD
Physical Character of General Surroundings		
Acreage: 0.1377 Setting (choose one): Urban Town Village Suburban Rural Transportation Corridor		
Site Description Notes/Notable Landscape Features: The building is situated on level ground within a rectangular lot encompassing 6,000 square feet, situated on the southwest corner of E. Alexandria and Mt. Vernon avenues. It contributes to the commercial character of Mt. Vernon Avenue, the main thoroughfare of an 1894 subdivision which was incorporated as the Town of Potomac in 1908 and annexed by the City of Alexandria in 1929. Secondary Resource Description (Briefly describe any other structures (or archaeological sites) that may contribute to the significance of the property: Ownership Category: Public-Local Public-State Public-Federal		
Individual Resource Information		
What was the historical use of this resource? Examples include: Dwelling, Grist Mill, Bridge, Store, Tobacco Barn, etc		
Telephone Exchange and offices		
What is the current use? (if other than the historical use) Offices (utility)		
Architectural style or elements of styles: Art Deco		
Architect, builder, or original owner: Merrill C. Lee, FAIA, architect; Davis, Wick and Rosengarten Co., contractors; Consolidated Engineering Co., builder		
# of stories 2 Condition: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated Poor Ruins Rebuilt Renovated		
Are there any known threats to this property? Apparent deterioration		

Resource Component Information

Please answer the following questions regarding the individual components of the resource. If the component does not exist, answer "n/a." If you feel uncomfortable in answering the question, please leave the space blank. Photographs of the features can also help our staff identify specific feature components. Usually, priority is given to describing features on the primary (front) façade of the structure.

Foundation: Describe the foundation that supports the structure. Examples include piers, continuous brick, poured concrete. Concrete and brick, granite faced

Structure: Describe the primary structural component of the resource. Include primary material used. Examples include log, frame (sawn lumber), and brick. Also include the treatment, such as a particular brick bond or type of framing, if known. Steel columns and frame, concrete and brick

Walls: Describe the exterior wall covering such as beaded weatherboard or asbestos shingles.

Limestone, yellow brick laid in a stretcher bond

Windows: Describe the number, material, and form of the primary windows. This includes the number of panes per sash, what the sashes are made of, and how the sashes operate (are they hinged or do they slide vertically) Have the windows been replaced? Metal frame, 1/1-light, fixed-pane double-sash windows, 6 on the first story, 5 on the second story

Porch: Briefly describe the primary (front) porch. List the primary material, shape of the porch roof, and other defining details. N/A

Roof: Describe the roof, listing the shape and the covering material.

Flat built-up

Chimney(s): List the number of chimneys and the materials used. Include the brick bond pattern if possible.

N/A

Architectural Description of Individual Resource: (Please describe architectural patterns, types, features, additions, remodelings, or other alterations. A sketch of the current floor plan would be appreciated.)

The Art Deco building at **1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue**¹ was built for the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company of Virginia as an office building and a telephone exchange. Designed by Richmond-based architect Merrill C. Lee, the building was constructed in two phases: the first block (facing Mt. Vernon Avenue) was completed in 1940, while the addition (facing Ramsey Street) was completed in 1947.

In November 1938, the C&P Telephone Co. purchased Lot 14, Block 5 of Park Addition from Frank E. Smoot, widow. On 21 January 1939, the Consolidated Engineering Co. of Baltimore filed an *Application for Permit for Repairs, Alterations, etc.* to "excavate and install concrete columns and walls (footings)" on the Bell Telephone Building on Mt. Vernon Avenue. The applicant described the "new proposed" building as a two-story commercial structure of brick, stone, and steel which measured 75-feet by 82-feet. The building's nearly-square footprint appeared on the 1941 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Alexandria, Virginia labeled as a stone-faced, steel and concrete frame, fireproof construction built in 1940. The C&P's offices were denoted on the first floor and the exchange on the second. The map also depicts two dwellings (facing E. Alexandria Avenue) in the rear of the block bounded by Ramsey Street, an alley, E. Alexandria and Mt. Vernon avenues. [Figure 1]

Lee designed the two-story addition which local contractors Davis, Wick and Rosengarten Co. built at the cost of \$250,000. [Figures 2-3] Extending from the rear (west) elevation of the existing building and measuring 83.5-feet in the front, 75-feet in the rear, with a depth 83.5-feet, the annex was constructed of concrete, brick, and stone with steel columns and frame atop a concrete and brick foundation. [Figure 4] The Ramsey Street front was clad in limestone, while the flat roof was covered with slag. By the time the 1958 Sanborn map was published, the two dwellings had been replaced by the addition, which was

¹ This was numbered 1306 Mt. Vernon Avenue until 1952.

dated to 1947 and labeled as an air-conditioned, steel and concrete frame structure with concrete floors and roof, brick curtain walls, and a stone-faced façade. [Figure 5]

Despite the seven-year lag between the two construction phases, the building reads almost seamlessly, since both halves were designed by the same architect and an attention to obtaining similar building materials obviously was made. The building comprises yellow brick laid in a stretcher bond that is accentuated with a granite water table and a stone belt course and cornice. The five-bay-wide Mt. Vernon Avenue façade is monumentalized by a stone surround in which four fluted pilasters rise to the belt course, separating five recessed niches that hold symmetrical rectangular apertures on the first and second stories. The fenestration includes 11 metal-frame, one-over-one, fixed-pane double-sash windows in masonry surrounds. The main entrance is centered in the façade and accessed by a shallow flight of five granite steps. A single-light, full glass door with a full-height, single-light sidelight and a decorative aluminum transom rest under a stone surround carved with a dentilated cornice and keystone. The belt course is decoratively carved with acanthus leaves and reeds while the cornice bears decorative striations.

Forty-four paired windows march down the north (side) elevation (which is 11 bays deep), while recessed brick panels between first- and second-story fenestration add visual relief. A change in brick color marks the transition to the rear addition, while the rearmost bay of the addition is completely clad in limestone that wraps around to the Ramsey Street façade. Although it is the rear elevation and faces a secondary, residential street, the Ramsey Street façade is nearly as monumental as the Mt. Vernon Avenue façade, albeit more austere. Completely faced in unornamented limestone panels, the façade features a centralized entrance flanked by three recessed, vertical niches that hold windows on the first and second stories separated by recessed stone panels. The 13 windows are the same shape and comprise the same materials as those on the front and side elevations. The single-light, full glass door with full-height, single-light sidelight and metal grille transom rest under a similar limestone surround as on the front, yet this surround is itself surrounded by a massive, projecting stone surround with decorated lintel. The door is accessed by a shallow flight of four stone steps. The southern elevation is fenestrated similarly to the northern, but also holds industrial-sized chimney stacks and exhaust flues.

General maintenance and alterations to the building were made in successive decades. In 1968, Perry & Wallis, Inc. (builders) removed the men's lounge and constructed a new one, which necessitated removing a brick wall and replacing it with a masonry wall for \$2,000. In 1977, the owners awarded Virginia Roofing the contract to re-roof the slag built-up roof for \$23,361. A costly renovation (at \$240,574) was undertaken by Kerr Construction Co. according to drawings prepared by Ward and Hall Associates, AIA (architects based in Springfield, Virginia) in 1979, in which unspecified alterations were made to the "Alexandria Communications Center."

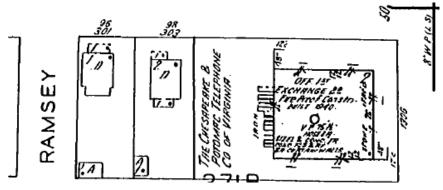


Figure 1, left: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Alexandria, Virginia, 1941, Vol. 1, Sheet 42.

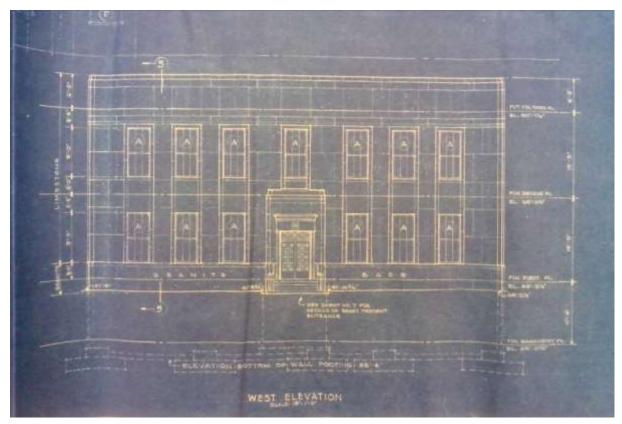


Figure 2: West (Ramsey Street) elevation of the addition to the C&P Telephone Co. building by Merrill C. Lee, FAIA, ca. 1947. Repository: Local History/Special Collections Division of the Alexandria Library, Barrett Branch.

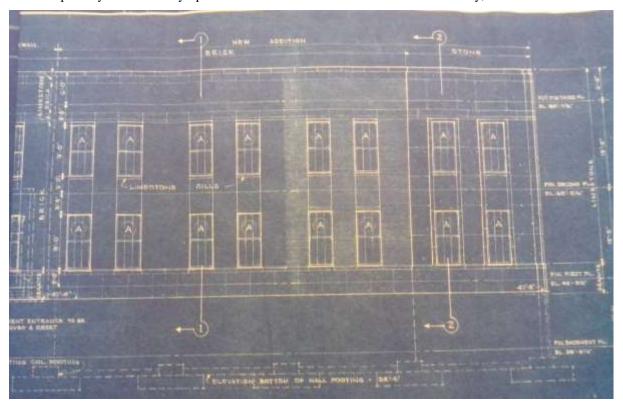


Figure 3: North elevation of the addition to the C&P Telephone Co. building by Merrill C. Lee, FAIA, ca. 1947. Repository: Local History/Special Collections Division of the Alexandria Library, Barrett Branch.

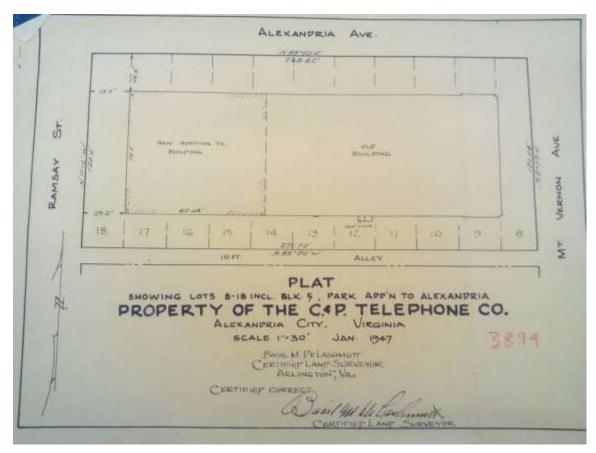


Figure 4: Site plan for the addition to the C&P Telephone Co. building by Basil M. DeLashmutt, Surveyor, 1947. Repository: Local History/Special Collections Division of the Alexandria Library, Barrett Branch.

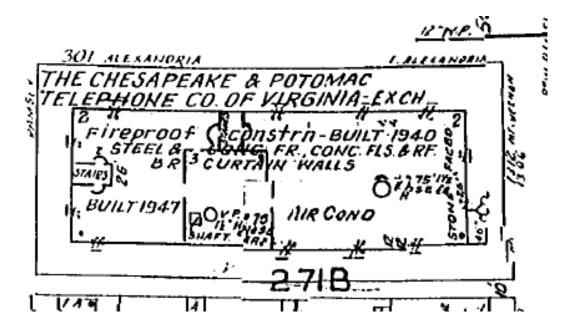


Figure 5: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Alexandria, Virginia, 1958, Vol. 1, Sheet 42.

Significance Statement: Briefly note any significant events, personages, and/or families associated with the property. (Detailed family genealogies are not necessary.) Please list all sources of information. It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or genealogies to this form. Normally, only information contained on this form will be posted for consideration by the State Review Board.

The Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company of Virginia building occupies a rectangular parcel originally platted as lots 8-18 of block 5 in the Park Addition to Alexandria, subdivided circa 1892. Originally within the Jefferson Magisterial District of Alexandria County, the area known as Braddock Heights and the western half of Park Addition (including all but the northeastern corner of this block) were annexed by the City of Alexandria in 1915. [Figure 6] The area remained rural and under-developed for decades after the annexation: the 1921 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Alexandria, Virginia shows the half-block on which the C&P building would be erected nearly twenty years later as virtually empty, save for one dwelling on the westernmost lot. [Figure 7] By the time the 1931 Sanborn map was published, only two houses graced the half-block, concentrated on the western end.

Despite its rural character, by 1915, the Jefferson Magisterial District was crossed with five miles of telephone poles erected by the Capital City Telephone Company and over 16 miles of wire strung by the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company, which had extended its service to the Town of Potomac in 1911.^x The Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company was founded in 1883 and serviced Washington, D.C. and parts of Maryland. The Virginia arm was established in 1903 and merged with Southern Bell in 1912.^{xi} By the early 20th century, after decades of aggressively consolidating and absorbing small, local telephone exchanges throughout Virginia,² the C&P was the leading public utility in the region. In 1927-1928, having outgrown its fin-de-siecle office building, the company erected a massive, seven-story telephone exchange building in downtown Washington, D.C., as well as a warehouse and maintenance facility in northeast Washington, D.C.³ Designed by the New York firm Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker and constructed by local contractors David, Wick and Rosengarten Co.,⁴ both of the C&P Telephone buildings exhibit Art Deco ornamentation. In fact, the use of this modern style on both buildings suggests "the emergence of Art Deco as an accepted decorative style for a powerful utility's corporate image in Washington, D.C."

The choice of Art Deco for corporate branding directly influenced the design of the C&P Telephone Co. building in Alexandria. The style radiated an aura of modernity befitting an expanding technology company, and its presence in Alexandria suggested that the city itself was keeping pace with the times. In fact, a promotional pamphlet circulated by C&P circa 1940 shows a sketch of "the new telephone building" at 1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue under the title "Historic Alexandria, A Growing City." [Figure 8] When the city published a Bicentennial booklet in 1949 entitled *200 Years of Progress*, which promoted the city's historic resources alongside its modern amenities, it highlighted the presence of C&P, stating "An excellent yardstick with which to measure Alexandria's growth over the past half century or more is the telephone development." A photograph of the building appears alongside the fact that "a modern dial telephone equipment was installed" in 1940. xiv [Figure 9]

The high quality of the Art Deco execution on the Alexandria C&P Telephone Co. building can be attributed to the architect, Merrill Clifford Lee, FAIA, a leader in Virginia architecture throughout the mid-20th century. Lee was born in Hazleton, Pennsylvania on 13 December 1893 and was educated at

² The Virginia State Corporation Commission's 1921 annual report (see endnote ix) lists (on page 16) a slew of C&P mergers and acquisitions, including: Southern States Telephone Company of Baltimore city (1910); Princess Ann and Virginia Beach Telephone Company (1911); Citizens Telephone Company of Newport News (1911); Atlantic Coast Telephone Company (1911); Accomac and Northampton Telephone Company (1912); The Diamond State Telephone Company of Virginia (1912); Warrenton Telephone Exchange (1913); West Point Telephone Company (1913); Virginia and Tennessee Telephone Company (1916); Staunton Mutual Telephone Company (1916); Leesburg Telephone Company (1916); Falls Church Telephone and Telegraph Company (1916); and Farmers' Mutual Rural Telephone Company (1916).

³ Both of these buildings have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. See Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company Building (1988) and Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company Warehouse and Repair Facility (2007), NRHP.

⁴ These Washington, D.C.-based contractors also built the C&P building at 1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia.

Pennsylvania's State College, the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design in New York, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.), from where he was graduated with a B.S. in architecture in 1917. Lee worked for the successful Boston firm Cram & Ferguson in 1919-1920, and while serving as the firm's supervising architect for the Millhiser Gymnasium at the University of Richmond, Lee was introduced to Richmond, Virginia. He settled there in 1920, joined the American Institute of Architects, and announced in *American Architect and Architecture* that "Clifton Lee, Jr. and Merrill C. Lee have opened an office for the practice of architecture and engineering at 918-½ East Main street, Richmond, Va." Lee & Lee operated for three years, until the firm reorganized as Lee, Smith & VanDerVoort, which lasted from 1923 until 1932. In 1934, he opened an independent practice under his name. ⁵

Although Lee is known for such works as the Deanery on the University of Richmond campus (1925), the Home for Needy Confederate Women (1932) in Richmond, and later, the theater wing of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (1955) in Richmond and Randolph Macon College in Ashland (1954), he acted as the contract architect for the Bell Telephone Company in Virginia (a.k.a. the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company of Virginia) between 1932 and 1955. During his tenure with C&P, Lee designed over 40 buildings for the company. He became a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1940, the same year he completed the Alexandria C&P building. Lee continued to receive high profile commissions into the mid-1970s, including the unrealized master plan for Capitol Square in Richmond.

The C&P Telephone Co. building, designed by a notable Virginia architect at the start of his rising professional career, was the area flagship of a powerful communications conglomerate. The building has been occupied continuously by a single communications utility since its inception. Its stalwart presence on Mt. Vernon Avenue adds to the commercial character of the thoroughfare. Because the building lies four blocks south of Bellefonte Avenue (the historic southern boundary of the 1894 streetcar suburb, Del Ray), it lies outside the boundaries of the Town of Potomac Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. However, the building meets Criteria A and C of the NRHP, having significance in its association with the C&P Telephone Company, a leading public utility that has had significant impact on the local community. It also was designed by a noted Virginia architect and is a noteworthy example of Art Deco, a style not common to most of Virginia. It retains integrity in its setting, location, design, materials, and feeling.

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Virginia, Inc., which was renamed Verizon Virginia, Inc. after a merger in 2000.

⁵ Aside from his professional achievements, Lee married Hope Gravely of Henry County in 1922, and they had one son, Harry G. Lee, born in 1926. The 1940 U.S. Federal Census lists the family as dwelling on Monument Avenue in Richmond ⁶ Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company of Virginia rebranded its corporate identity in 1969, becoming C&P Telephone, which has been used here for brevity. In 1994, after anti-trust suits, C&P Telephone became Bell Atlantic -



Figure 6: Map of the City of Alexandria, Office of City Engineers, 1948. Repository: Local History/Special Collections Division of the Alexandria Library, Barrett Branch: Map collection, drawer 8.

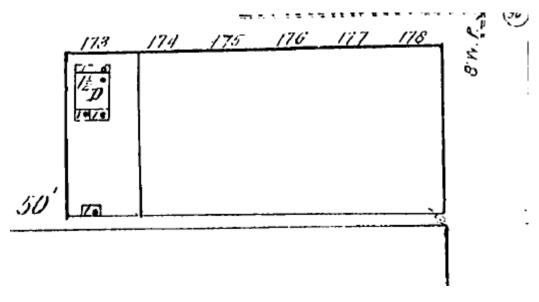


Figure 7: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Alexandria, Virginia, August 1921, Sheet 29. The parcel on which the C&P Telephone Co. building would be erected 20 years later is virtually undeveloped.

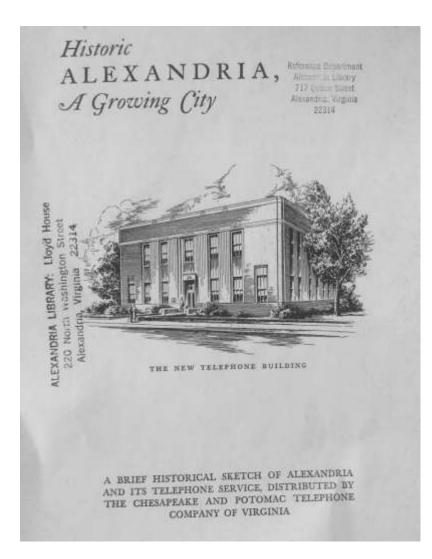


Figure 8, left: Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. brochure. Repository: Local History/Special Collections Division of the Alexandria Library, Barrett Branch: Manuscripts, Box 240-3, VF Communication

Figure 9, below: This page from a Bicentennial booklet published in 1949, promoting the City of Alexandria and entitled 200 Years of Progress, lists the C&P Telephone Company. Accessed 5 May 2014 at https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/o ha/info/BicentennialBooklet1949.pdf

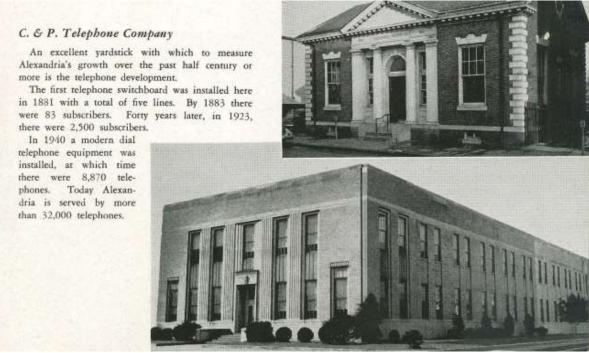
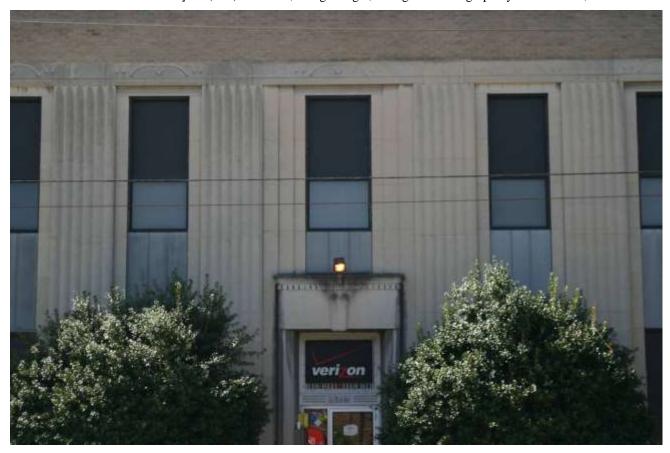




Figure 10: "Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company. C&P building at 1306 Mt. Vernon Ave., Alexandria, Va." Theodor Horydczak, photographer. September 1947. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. Accessed 5 May 2014 at http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/thc1995005729/PP/



1. 1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue. Façade (east) elevation, straight angle, facing W. Photograph by Gwen White, 4/6/14.



2. 1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue. Façade (east) elevation, detail, straight angle, facing W. Photograph by Gwen White, 4/6/14.



 $3.\ 1316\ Mt.\ Vernon\ Avenue.\ North\ elevation,\ oblique\ angle,\ facing\ SW.\ \ Photograph\ by\ Gwen\ White,\ 4/6/14.$



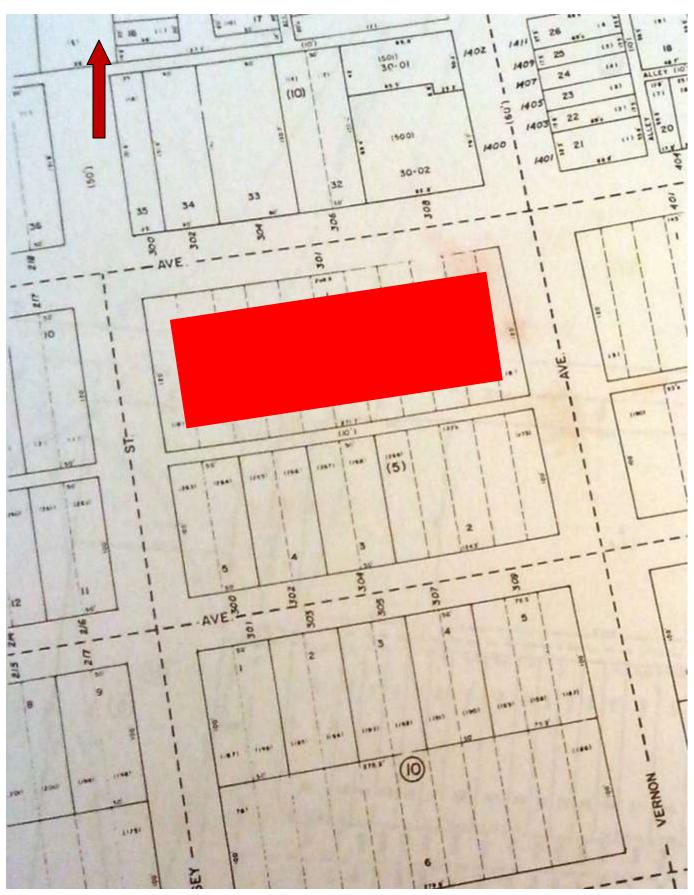
4. 1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue. North elevation, detail last bay, straight angle, facing S. Photograph by Gwen White, 4/6/14.



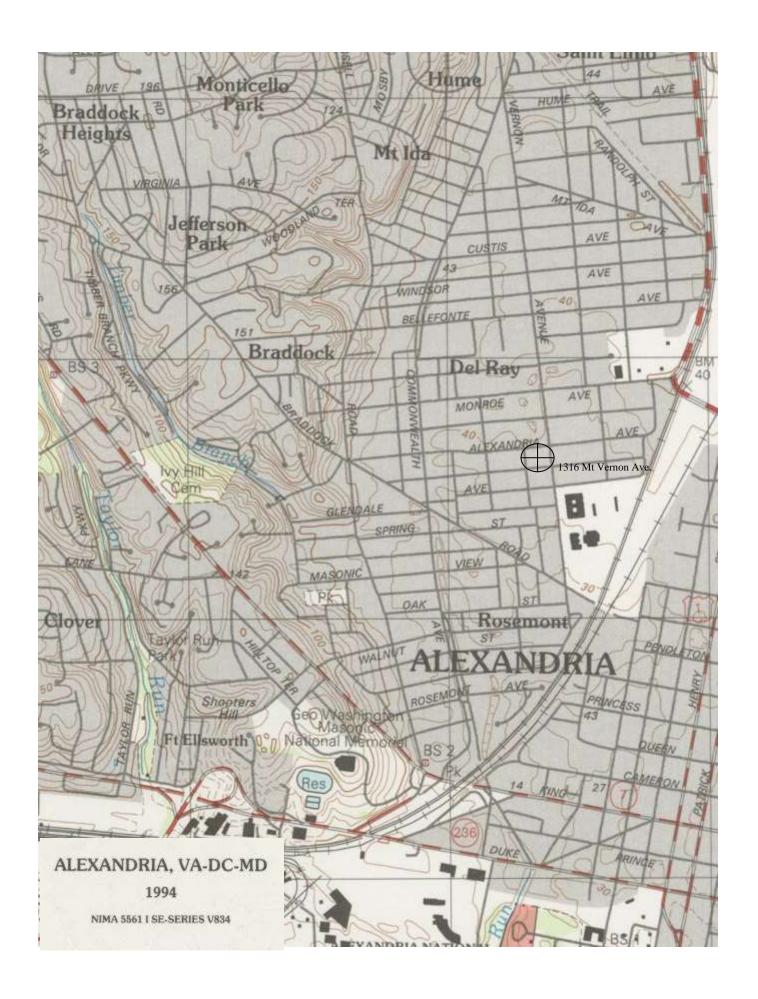
5. 1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue. Rear (west) elevation, oblique angle, facing SE. Photograph by Gwen White, 4/6/14.



6. 1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue. South elevation, oblique angle, facing NW. Photograph by Gwen White, 4/6/14.



Building outline not to scale. 2014.



ENDNOTES

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ⁱ City of Alexandria Real Estate Assessment database, Account No. 14760500, Assessment Map 043.04-05-01. Alexandria Clerk of Court - Court of Records.

ii City of Alexandria Deed Book 148, page 577, from 29 November 1938: Frank E. Smoot, widow, Grantor to Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co., Grantee, "being art of the property acquired by the will of J. Clinton Smoot, husband," Will Book 44, page 462, from 26 March 1923. For derivation of title, see Alexandria County Deed Book Liber N. No. 5, page 231. Alexandria Clerk of Court - Court of Records.

Alteration/repair permit #2868 from 21 January 1939: Consolidated Engineering Co., builder; Merrill C. Lee, architect; C. & P. Telephone Co. of Virginia, owner; for the Bell Telephone Building at Lot 4, Block 22, Map 210, Mt. Vernon Ave. The full description of the proposed work reads "All general excavation, columns and wall footing excavation for the new proposed Bell Telephone Building as described above and install concrete (reinforced) column and wall footings. It is expected that the excavation will be carried to a depth of about ten feet below present grade. It is understood however that no footing shall be poured until same has the approval of the building inspector." The projected cost was \$4,000. City of Alexandria Archives and Records Center.

iv Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Alexandria, Virginia, 1941, Vol. 1, Sheet 42.

^v New construction permit #3894 from 5 June 1946, for the southwest corner of Mt Vernon and Alexandria Aves., Lots 1-4, block 22, map 210: a telephone exchange. A enclosed blueprint reads: "PLAT showing lots 8-18, block 5, Park Add'n, Jan. 1947, Basil M. DeLashmutt, Surveyor." City of Alexandria Archives and Records Center.

vi Alteration/repair permit #25507 from 8 July 1968 for 1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue. City of Alexandria Archives and Records Center.

vii Alteration/repair permit #33793 from 26 September 1977 for 1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue. City of Alexandria Archives and Records Center.

viii Alteration/repair permit #35477 from 18 June 1979 for 1316 Mt. Vernon Avenue. City of Alexandria Archives and Records Center.

ix See Alexandria County land records, Liber N, No. 4, folio 231.

^x Susan Escherich, "Town of Potomac Historic District," National Register of Historic Places, 1992, section 8: page 49.

xi Virginia State Corporation Commission, Annual Report to the State Corporation Commission of Virginia. Compilations from Returns of Railroads, Canals, Electric Railways and Other Corporate Companies. Richmond, VA 1921, page 16.

xii Judith Helm Robinson and Julie Mueller, Traceries, "Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company Building," National Register of Historic Places nomination, 1988, section 8.7. Accessed 6 May 2014 at http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/88001112.pdf

xiii City of Alexandria 200 Years of Progress, Bicentennial booklet, 1949. Accessed 6 May 2014 at https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/oha/info/BicentennialBooklet1949.pdf
xiv ibid.

xv American Institute of Architects (AIA), *American Architects Directory, First ed., 1956.* R.R. Bowker, 1956. Accessed 7 May 2014 at http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/1956%20American%20Architects%20Directory.aspx xvi *American Architect and Architecture*, Vol. 117 (1920): page 622.

xvii AIA, American Architects Directory, First ed., 1956. Accessed 7 May 2014 at http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/1956%20American%20Architects%20Directory.aspx