

---

---

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 09-06

### Cleveland-Emerson Exchange

4268 Wisconsin Avenue NW

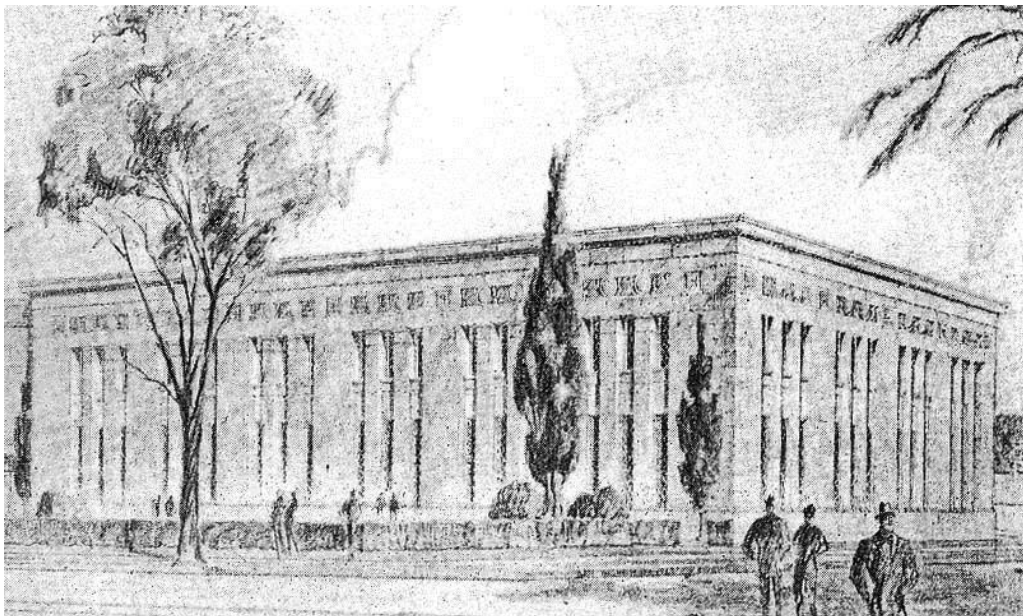
Square 199, Lot 0832

Meeting Date: November 17, 2016  
Applicant: Tenleytown Historical Society  
Affected ANC: 3E  
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

---

---

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company Cleveland-Emerson Exchange building at 4268 Wisconsin Avenue a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and forward the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for listing at the local level of significance with a Period of Significance 1927-1962.



#### *Preservation Background:*

The Cleveland-Emerson Exchange building in Tenleytown has been identified in two separate National Register Multiple Property Documents: *Telecommunications Resources of Washington, D.C., 1877-1954*, and *Tenleytown's Architectural and Historic Resources, 1791-1941*. The Telecommunications MPD provides a context statement on the early history of the telephone, the

rise and growth of the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, and the changing telephone technology in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The MPD identifies several associated property types of which the telephone exchange is one, and includes evaluation criteria by which to evaluate such resources. The Tenleytown MPD provides a historic context for Tenleytown from its early history as a rural village to its suburbanization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The context details the residential, commercial, institutional and municipal growth of Tenleytown and identifies a number of Associated Property Types, including Public Utilities such as the Cleveland-Emerson Exchange. According to the Registration Criteria in the MPDs and as detailed in the Evaluation below, the Cleveland-Emerson Exchange is eligible for listing under both of these MPD cover documents and meets Criteria A and C of the National Register.

Several other buildings associated with the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company are listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites including the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, Old Main Building (1903-04) at 722 12<sup>th</sup> Street, NW; the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, Dial Exchange (1927-28) at 730 12<sup>th</sup> Street, NW; and the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company Warehouse (1926-1927) at 1111 North Capitol Street, NE. Also, several other branch exchange buildings are included as contributing resources in historic districts.

#### *Architecture*

The Cleveland-Emerson Exchange building at 4268 Wisconsin Avenue was constructed by the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in several phases to accommodate the ever-increasing number of telephone subscribers in the vicinity as well as evolving telephone technology. The existing building, which dates from 1926-27; 1931-1932; and 1960-62, occupies the site of the first telephone exchange building constructed in Tenleytown in 1907-08.

The Cleveland-Emerson Exchange building is an expansive, two-story, smooth-cut limestone-clad brick building with elegant stripped Classical *bas relief* detailing. The building was principally constructed in 1931-32, incorporating two walls of the earlier 1927 building into it at the rear, and was then significantly enlarged 1960-62 towards Wisconsin Avenue. The 1931-32 building was designed by locally prominent architect Waddy B. Wood and is emblematic of the company's corporate image to build highly artistic buildings reflecting the aesthetics of their period and place. The 1960s addition, which doubled the 1931-32 building and brought the building closer to Wisconsin Avenue, abuts and replicates the earlier building in design, materials and stylistic detailing, and may actually include re-used parts. Two walls of the 1926-27 building, designed by C&P Company architects, McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, survive at the rear of the 1931-32 building.

#### *History*

The C&P Company was incorporated in 1883 with 896 telephone subscribers in the city. Over the course of the next two decades, significant technological improvements in communications resulted in the growing acceptance of the telephone as a means of communication. By 1905, the company had expanded to over 40,000 users. In order to accommodate the growth, the C&P Company engaged in an intensive building campaign that included numerous branch exchange offices in residential neighborhoods. In 1907, as part of this campaign, the C&P Company

established Tenleytown's first exchange building, the Cleveland Exchange, to service the Tenleytown and Cleveland Park areas. The Cleveland exchange, named for President Grover Cleveland who had lived in Cleveland Park, consisted of the letters CL followed by one, two or three digits.

In 1926-27, to again accommodate an increase in subscribers, the C&P Company built an addition to the Cleveland Exchange, comprising a new exchange called Emerson. However, the new manual exchange was completed at the same time that telephone technology was evolving from manual technology to the new dial technology, essentially rendering the Emerson Exchange building obsolete upon its completion. In fact that same year, the company had constructed a new main office downtown on 12th Street to accommodate dial-switching equipment and soon began the process of converting the company's 60,000 phones in downtown DC over from the manual system to the dial system. So, in 1931-32, just a few years after completing the 1927 manual Emerson Exchange, the C&P Company erected a substantial new building to accommodate dial technology for both the Cleveland and Emerson exchanges, referring to the new building as the Cleveland-Emerson Exchange.

This new exchange was designed by Waddy Butler Wood (1869-1944) a talented and prominent local architect who practiced architecture in Washington for 48 years from 1892 to 1940 during a period of great development in the city. Wood is well-recognized in historic preservation as a master architect for his quality designs for a variety of building types that ranged from single-family dwellings to large-scale private and government office buildings. Wood's first major commission came in 1895, when he was retained by the Capitol Traction Company to design the company's new car barn on M Street in Georgetown, soon to be followed by the East Capitol Street Car Barn for the same client. Soon, Wood's personality and talent allowed him access into Washington society and he was designing houses for some of the city's most distinguished residents. In 1902, Wood formed a partnership with Edward Donn, Jr. and William I. Deming. The popularity of the firm grew with Wood serving as the principal designer. After the dissolution of his firm in 1912, Wood continued to work independently to capture prestigious commissions. He focused his attention on commercial and government work, undertaking residential work for Washington's elite. During this period, Wood designed buildings for large corporations such as the Potomac and Electric Power Company (999 E Street, NW), the Union Trust Company (738-740 15<sup>th</sup> Street), the Masonic Temple (801 13<sup>th</sup> Street, NW), the Southern Railway Company (1500 K Street), the Commercial National Bank (1405 G Street, NW), the Department of the Interior, and the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company. In Tenleytown, in addition to the Cleveland-Emerson Exchange, Wood designed one of the still-extant water towers at the Fort Reno Reservoir..

*Evaluation:*

The Cleveland-Emerson Exchange building is an excellent example of the telephone exchange as a building type and meets National Register Criteria A and C under the Multiple Property Document, *Telecommunications Resources of Washington, D.C., 1877-1954*. According to the Associated Property Types in the MPD, telephone exchanges built as part of the dial technology were larger than their manual counterparts, accommodated equipment necessary for the new technology, while eliminating service offices and facilities for operators. These exchanges were deliberately designed to impart the telephone company's corporate image through distinctive

design, and are significant for their associations with and are physical manifestations of the early history and evolution of the telephone. As such, the Cleveland-Emerson Exchange serves as an excellent representation of the building type, has important associations with telephone technology, and retains high integrity.

The Cleveland-Emerson Exchange building also meets National Register Criteria A and C under the Multiple Property Document, *Tenleytown's Architectural and Cultural Resources in Washington, D.C.* The building is a premier example of the public utilities that emerged in Tenleytown during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to service the growing community of Tenleytown as it evolved from a small, 19th-century rural village to an urban/suburban neighborhood of the city.

Furthermore, the Cleveland-Emerson Exchange building is an excellent example of the work of master architect Waddy Butler Wood.

For the same reasons stated above, the Cleveland-Emerson Exchange meets D.C. Designation Criteria B for its association with institutions, achievements, and patterns of growth that contributed to the development of the District of Columbia; Criterion D because it embodies the distinguishing characteristics of architectural styles and building types; Criterion E because it possesses high artistic value that contributes to the appearance of Washington; and Criterion F as a notable work of Waddy Butler Wood.

The building retains integrity of location, setting, materials, design, workmanship, feeling and association. The Period of Significance for the building, 1927-1962, spans the period of construction for the various phases of the building.