



MCHS BUILDING HISTORY

119 South Main Street - Edwardsville, IL

By Cindy Reinhardt, Updated 2026

AT&T Long Range Repeater Station

The building at the corner of South Main and Park is a handsome, rare example of an Art Deco building in Edwardsville. Built in the midst of the Great Depression, this architectural gem provided jobs in a depressed economy and, due to its unique profile, has become a local landmark. According to architectural historian Joe Weber, it is a textbook example of commercial Art Deco design as illustrated by the relief brick work in geometric patterns.

Plans for the American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) Long Line Repeater “booster” Station were made public on August 20, 1930. The booster station was needed to improve connections and long-distance services on the New York – St. Louis Cable Line. An amplifying station was required every 50 miles at that time to “boost” the voice in long distance calls.

The economic impact of this decision was recognized immediately by the editor of the *Edwardsville Intelligencer* who urged the city council to do “anything within reason ...to insure the construction of the booster plant here.” AT&T’s request to the city council for permission to tear up streets along a two-mile route where cables would be buried under streets and sidewalks was granted with replacement considerations.

The station was to be a two-story, fire-proof, modern building with “sufficient foundation to carry an additional four stories.” The plan was to fulfill future needs for expansion by constructing additional floors on the building. Although the actual cost is unknown, the preconstruction estimate was \$75,000 for the building alone with an additional \$100,000 in



A photograph of the AT&T Building after it was purchased by Stahly Cartage Company. It is now home to the Bank of Madison County.

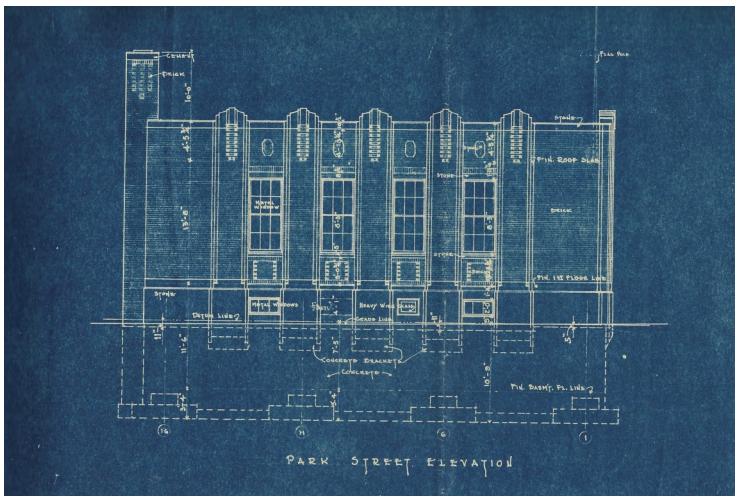
equipment plus the cost of laying the underground conduit.

But before they could start the new building, they had to purchase and remove a house already on the property. The Louis Hartung family sold their home at the corner of South Main and Park Streets to AT&T and within a few months were settled in a house on Center Street.

The contract to build the station was awarded to Hellrung Construction of Alton with the stipulation that as many local workmen as possible be hired for the project, and that was the case. William Tomasek of Edwardsville was hired for excavation work. It was considered a two-story building but actually consisted of a basement plus a first floor five feet above ground level. Contrary to impressions today, the building was reported as having a deep set-back from the street. Since then, the street has been widened to the extent that many wonder why the building was placed so close to the street.

The contract for roofing went to Edwardsville Roofing Company, operated by Ray Crossman. The roof was considered the first of its kind in Edwardsville, with an insulating layer of cork, followed by a layer of tar, topped with gravel. The roof was supposed to withstand any type of weather and provide a fireproof surface as well.

In July 1931, equipment for the building began to arrive, four freight-car loads according to an *Intelligencer* source at the time. Included in the equipment were 50 large batteries,



1930 blueprints of the AT&T building

enough to keep the station running for up to 24 hours in case of a power outage. By September, the plant was in operation.

In the beginning, the building served only as a booster station. The local Illinois Bell Telephone Company was down the street at 131 N. Main St. next to the Edwardsville National Bank building near the corner of Main and St. Louis Streets. Illinois Bell had a business office open to the public as well as an “exchange” for operators in a separate area.

After renovations at the booster station in late 1946, the Illinois Bell Telephone business office was moved to the first floor of the AT&T booster station at 119 S. Main Street. Many residents of Edwardsville today remember paying their phone bill at that location.

In March 1958, the Edwardsville National Bank decided to expand their facility. Plans were already in the works for a big technical advance in phone usage: direct dial service. With direct dial on the horizon and the loss of their building, a new facility for the telephone operators was not sought in Edwardsville. Instead, operators were offered positions in existing facilities in Collinsville, Alton or East St. Louis. Direct-dial service which eliminated many operator positions was implemented in 1962.

In 1974, Illinois Bell Telephone Company purchased the former Malench medical building at 220 St. Louis Street. In an interview at the time, Manager Kenneth Evers said the company had outgrown the old building and that the new location would be more convenient for customers. Renovations were completed and the new office at 220 St. Louis St. opened in January 1975.

The Art Deco building at South Main and Park Streets was put on the market the following fall. On Dec. 12, 1976, Stahly Cartage Company announced an Open House for their new business office. According to Jeff Wohlford of Stahly Cartage, since it was designed to be fire-proof, the building had no wood in it when they purchased it. Since then the cavernous rooms of the booster station have been divided into offices and conference space. Headquarters for Stahly Cartage, a transportation company with terminals all over the Midwest, was located at the former booster station for over 35 years.

The architecture of this building certainly made a contribution to our community. But more importantly, when it was built, the financial contribution of AT&T was desperately needed in Edwardsville. Louise Ahrens, a former employee of Illinois Bell, told the story of how in just one month in 1932, forty-five people in Edwardsville cancelled telephone service, because they could no longer afford it. Telephone operators took a cut in pay as well as a cut in hours. While the local company, Illinois Bell, was suffering, the national network of AT&T continued to build services. This major construction project brought both jobs and beauty to Edwardsville.

In the years since then, the building was empty for nearly a decade. In 2023, it was purchased and renovated by the Bank of Madison County. The bank may be new, but they have connected to Edwardsville history, and this particular contribution is greatly appreciated.



From a March 17, 1961 Edwardsville Intelligencer Telephone Special; “The business office at 119 S. Main will remain at its present location. Customer records are kept here, where the customer may pay his bill.”

Front desks from left: Rosalee Boland and Betty Ashauer; Manager Kenneth Evers is pictured far right



From the 1961 Telephone Special: At left, “Rosalee Boland points out the time of the changeover to dial service. It’s March 19 at 1 a.m. The time was chosen at 1 a.m. because that’s when the least number of calls are being made. Immediately after the changeover, dials will start spinning in Edwardsville for the first time.” At right, “Yep! That’s our new telephone number, says the staff at the telephone business office. Shown (left to right) are Ken Evers, manager; Bernice Morello, business office supervisor; John Ricker, commercial representative; Rosalie Boland, service representative; Marion Treat, teller; Betty Ann Ashauer and Mary Moore, service representatives.”

Photos by Le Roy Eichmann.



Madison County Clerk Eulalia Hotz places the first direct dial call from Madison County Court House; Ken Evers at right, Photo by M & W Ltd, photographers, Edwardsville.

(All Illinois Bell photographs from the Joan Evers Collection.)