

# Mural's removal stirs outcry among lovers of history, art

The Boston Globe



Verizon plans to donate "Telephone Men and Women at Work," which was taken down after the company sold the building. (Pat Greenhouse/Globe Staff)

By [Meghan E. Irons](#)  
Globe Staff / October 2, 2009

E-mail | Print | Reprints | Yahoo! Buzz | ShareThis Text size - +

The mural graced the old Verizon building in the Financial District for more than a half-century, a towering illustration that paid homage to the men and women who toiled as telephone operators, connecting distant relatives and dear, old friends.

But Verizon sold the building last year and quietly took the mural down over the summer as part of the sales agreement. The removal has triggered a storm of protest among local preservationists, who worry about the loss of a significant piece of New England history, as well as the future of the Art Deco building where it long resided.

"We are outraged about the removal," said Tony Fusco, president of the Art Deco Society of Boston. "This is undoubtedly the most important mural of its kind in Boston."

Fusco said the removal is tantamount to stripping the murals out of Rockefeller Center in New York or the Boston Public Library.

## LOCAL NEWS ON TWITTER

Lighthouse off Scituate draws potential suitors - <http://is.gd/3T6HI> 40 minutes ago

Strip club dancer killed outside her Everett apartment - <http://is.gd/3SfsK> about 3 hours ago

Education officials to discuss fate of Gloucester charter school - <http://is.gd/3SUB9> about 3 hours ago

FOLLOW GLOBEMETRO ON TWITTER

[Follow other Boston.com Tweets](#) | [What is Twitter?](#)

“It is that important,” he said.

Verizon said it removed the mural at the request of the new owner, Commonwealth Ventures, a Connecticut-based company that wants to renovate the interior of the building, including the lobby, where the mural was located.

Philip G. Santoro, spokesman for Verizon, said the company recognized the historical significance of the mural and hired a specialist to carefully remove it. Verizon plans to donate the artwork, he said.

The mural is now in storage, its destination unknown.

Santoro said Verizon has consulted with representatives from several museums across the country, including the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, on how to properly preserve the mural and relocate it for public display.

“Since the building was sold last year, Verizon has undertaken an extensive process at considerable expense to carefully remove the mural from the lobby and preserve it until we find a new home for it,” Santoro said.

An announcement on where the large mural will be located is expected in coming weeks, he said.

But Fusco is miffed that neither Verizon nor the new owners contacted area preservationists to confer about the mural or the historical significance of the building it occupied at 185 Franklin St., on Post Office Square park.

Sarah Kelly, executive director of the Boston Preservation Alliance, said the mural is a well-known artwork.

“A lot of people feel that this is an important piece of art,” she said. “It tells the history of New England Telephone and Telegraph Co. and the emergence of the telephone. It’s a really dramatic and significant mural, and that is why this has created some alarm.”

Going forward, Fusco said, he is hoping the companies can be persuaded to return the mural to its original setting.

The New England Telephone and Telegraph Co. commissioned Dean Cornwell to craft the mural in 1947. It took him three years to create the oval structure, which is 160 feet long by 12 feet high with 197 life-size images, Fusco said.

Commonwealth Ventures, which did not return a call for comment yesterday, notified the Boston Redevelopment Authority yesterday of its renovation plans, which include upgrades to the building’s façade and lobby and the addition of retail space.

Kelly said her group has not seen the renovation plans but is concerned, in general, that renovations can damage the architectural integrity of Art Deco skyscrapers.

“This is a highly significant Art Deco building,” Kelly said. “And Boston doesn’t have a great number of them. We want to make sure that any restoration is done in a sensitive manner.”

*Meghan E. Irons can be reached at [mironsglobe.com](mailto:mironsglobe.com).* ■

© Copyright 2009 Globe Newspaper Company.

Start your week off right with in-depth coverage. [Subscribe now to the Globe.](#)

## INSIDE BOSTON.COM

### CELEBRATION IN RIO



[50,000 cheer in the host city of the 2016 Summer Olympics](#)

### RED SOX PETS



[Photos of your furry Sox fans](#)

### BILL BRETT'S PARTY PHOTOS



[See who was out and about in Boston this week](#)

### TOP 20 ZOMBIE MOVIES



[See which film is number one](#)

PLUS...

[Blogs](#) | [Crossword](#) | [Comics](#)  
| [Horoscopes](#) | [Games](#) | [Lottery](#)  
| [Caption contest](#) | [Today in history](#)

**Rent Movies From Netflix**

**Only \$4<sup>99</sup> a month**

**No Late Fees**  
**100,000+ Titles**  
**Free Shipping**

[Click here](#)

## MOST E-MAILED

- [Her message finally got across](#)
- [Top 20 zombie movies of all time](#)
- [Surfing the Net with kids: Phonics](#)
- [Reader Red Sox pet photos](#)
- [Strip club dancer killed outside her Everett apartment](#)
- [Rio de Janeiro celebrates for 2016 Olympics](#)
- [Sick of pink](#)

## RECOMMENDED SEARCHES

- [Fall foliage](#)
- [Adrian Walker](#)
- [RECIPES Tacos](#)
- [Steven Syre](#)
- [Horoscope](#)
- [Crossword puzzle](#)

[ABOUT THIS LIST](#)



**READER COMMENTS »**

[View reader comments \(37\) »](#) [Comment on this story »](#)

Ads by Google

[what's this?](#)

**Evening & Weekend Courses**

Cambridge College - Part Time Master of Management with several..  
[www.SelectCambridgeCollege.com](http://www.SelectCambridgeCollege.com)

**House Blend, Inc.**

Boston's most innovative Staging and Design firm  
[www.house-blend.com](http://www.house-blend.com)

**Own a Small Business?**

Apply for an American Express® Card & Earn Rewards—Browse Cards Here.  
[www.AmericanExpress.com/business](http://www.AmericanExpress.com/business)



Let your new home find  
you with email alerts

[Home](#) | [Today's Globe](#) | [News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Lifestyle](#) | [A&E](#) | [Things to Do](#) | [Travel](#) | [Cars](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Local Search](#)

[CONTACT BOSTON.COM](#) | [Help](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Work here](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [Mobile](#) | [RSS feeds](#) | [Sitemap](#) | [Make Boston.com your homepage](#)  
[CONTACT THE BOSTON GLOBE](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Manage your subscription](#) | [Advertise](#) | [The Boston Globe Extras](#) | [The Boston Globe Store](#) | © 2009 NY Times Co.