



Dial Log



Published by the
Telecommunications History Group, Inc.

DENVER, COLORADO

(303) 296-1221
Autumn 2007, Vol. 11, no. 3

www.telcomhistory.org
Jody Georgeson, Editor

Director's Report

By Jody Georgeson

As always, we've been very busy this quarter. We've had a bunch of researchers come in, including people from the Qwest legal and pensions departments, genealogists, and authors. One of our favorites was a fellow from Wyoming PBS who is making a documentary about the history of the telephone in Wyoming. It will air early next year, and should contain parts of an interview with our own **Herb Hackenburg**.

Those of you who are Pioneers have probably received your 2008 Pioneer calendar. THG and our colleagues at AT&T provided the historic photos, and it's been very good exposure for us. We've already sold several reproductions as a direct result of the calendar.

Last issue we reported that volunteer **George Howard** was leaving us. Luckily, he came to his senses and returned to Colorado and THG. Welcome back, George!

We are delighted to have the opportunity to employ an intern this fall.

Kirk Watson is a Masters degree candidate in the Library and Information Science program at the University of Denver, and will perform his "practicum" here at THG during the autumn semester. This involves 100 hours of hands-on work. Kirk will be developing our audio-video project.

We are setting up a "virtual gift shop" on our web site. We'll be offering duplicates of books, reproductions of historic photographs and some telephone-related memorabilia. Watch for it in the next few months, and be thinking about Christmas gifts!

Finally...you have probably received our 2007-2008 fundraising letter. As you know, the cost to do business increases every day, and our funding from corporate sources has decreased dramatically. If you enjoy receiving this newsletter and want to help us continue to save our important telephone heritage, please return your check as soon as possible. You can also contribute to an endowment fund that will ensure that our history will continue to be preserved. Contact us for more information about how you can make a long-term difference.

Northfield Telephone History

by Craig Dunton and Carol Roecklein

Craig Dunton has worked in the telephone industry for 37 years, including stints at AT&T NWB and his own company, Dunton Telephone. In 1989, he became the director of telecommunications at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN. It was his idea to start a CLEC (competitive local telephone exchange) to service local businesses in Northfield. St. Olaf College was authorized to operate as a telephone company by the state of Minnesota on March 11, 2004. The following excerpts from Northfield Telephone History are used with his permission.

When Alexander Graham Bell displayed his telephone for the first time at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, it didn't make the front page or even the back page. The initial discovery of the telephone wasn't news and its importance wasn't recognized. Its impact in Northfield was similarly received. With the exception of a few residents, it took the majority of citizens' time to realize the telephone's importance as illustrated in the *Rice County Journal*, September 20, 1883, P.2, Col. 3.

"Northfield will have no telephone exchange. The company couldn't get signers enough. Like Waseca, she can do gossiping enough by word of mouth and face to face."

A Brief Encounter Although the city of Northfield first received telephone service in 1895 following the passage of an ordinance on April 6, the first record of a telephone conversation took place in 1880. From the *Rice County Journal*, August 26th, 1880, page 3, column 1.

"A telephone has been put up by Mr. Fryer which connects the Ames Mill

with the Dundas Mill, and also forming a connection between the residences of Mr. Ames of this city and Mr. Archibald of Dundas. This is a great improvement, or innovation."

Late 1800s - Telephone Service Abundant in Northfield In 1895, the Tennant Brothers, Northwestern Telephone Exchange Company, and the Northfield Telephone Company were offering telephone service to residents. Two years later, newspaper reports mention The Western Union Telegraph Company and the Brooks-Church Telephone Company. In the coming years, some of the telephone company names will fade; new names will appear, until one company will ultimately emerge.

In the early years, the Tennant Brothers telephone service is frequently mentioned.

"In about six weeks, the Tennant Brothers will have their telephone system completed and a large amount of business can be done over the wires," an April 13, 1895, *Northfield News*, page 6, story states. "The instruments already ordered make a connection with the system of value to everyone doing business in the city."

In March 1887, newspaper articles report that the Tennant Brothers telephone system is almost complete. "The new exchange will compromise about 80 residences and stores and connections made at any time of the day or night. Already connections have been made with the residence of D.D. Turner and President Mohn and also St. Olaf College and the phones are working in a satisfactory manner."

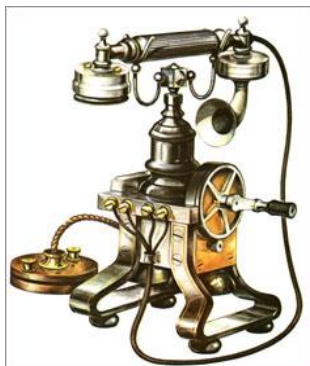


Gang of Diggers and Pole Setters Halted by Mayor

In July 1899, the Northfield Telephone Company was working hard to erect new poles and wires. Connections from Northfield were being made to Minneapolis and St. Paul using two double circuits with the help of a new exchange business in the Twin Cities, the Mississippi Valley Telephone Company. As the 1800s comes to a close, the 1900s begins with a bit of drama. The *Northfield News* reported in its Jan. 23, 1904, issue that Mr. Bowe, the general superintendent of the Tri-State Telephone Company, was in town to establish a pay station in a local store and run a telephone line into the city's center.

Just when everything was looking up for the Tri-State Telephone Company, the mayor put a halt to their work. The *News* reported, "On Tuesday the company had a gang of diggers and pole setters at work and got as far as the Fifth Street Bridge when the gang was ordered to stop work by Northfield Mayor Ware. The Tri-State Company has experienced all kinds of trouble in getting into towns along its route and seems to have struck a snag in Northfield."

In our next issue, read about woodsheds, restrooms and "That \$65 A Month Man" in the early 1900s



Frontier Days Phone History

By Herb Hackenburg

Cheyenne Frontier Days, the world's largest outdoor rodeo and western celebration, are a big deal in this part of the country. "The Daddy of 'em All" just concluded at the end of August. The following event took place in August 1909. What does bull ridin', calf ropin' and bronc bustin' have to do with telephone history, you may ask.

Here's the story as told in the *Rocky Mountain Bell Telephone News*:

"The annual Frontier Days celebration was ushered in this year with a day of automobile racing. The events of the week brought many strangers to Cheyenne and the telephone people were especially busy.



"The telephone played an important part in the auto races, the Motor Club having arranged for a telephone and attendant at each of the four mile posts on the course. The telephone employees advised men with megaphones of changes taking place in the race who passed the word to those in the grandstands long before the cars came into view. There were several accidents and in each case relief was sent to the distressed cars upon word received at the starting point by telephone.

"The automobile races were preceded by an exciting series of motor-cycle races, foreman Curtis of the

Cheyenne exchange winning second place in the twelve-mile event.

“The newspaper men reporting the Frontier events and the races were very appreciative of the enterprise of the telephone company in providing up-to-date means of communications and the local press gave space to several congratulatory notices.”

So there you have it. This may be an account of the world’s first car race broadcast.



MUSEUM OF COMMUNICATIONS

Part of the TELECOMMUNICATIONS HISTORY GROUP, INC.

The Telephone in Seattle: The Early Days

Don Ostrand found the following in a 1935 rate case filing for Pacific Tel & Tel. There is some controversy about the precise date of the first telephone in Seattle. According to the rate case material, it was in 1884. Most historians agree that it was March 7, 1883. In 1882, Pacific Telephone's John Sabin sent his secretary, E.W. Meise, to pre-subscribe customers. The Sunset Telephone Company, a division of Pacific T & T, began with around 90 customers.

The plant consisted of a small magneto switchboard and an aerial wire distributing system, which was almost entirely wiped out by the fire of 1889, and reestablished as the city recovered from the fire. At that time Seattle was growing steadily in importance as a business center, but had not as yet

made any very decided steps towards becoming the metropolis it now is.

The growth of the community and the consequent telephone development continued to be rather gradual until 1896, when more rapid progress began. Between that year and 1898 the city's population increase very rapidly and the demand for telephone service grew proportionately.

During this period the present Main Office building on Third Avenue was constructed and the old "magneto" switchboard at Yesler and Occidental, along with the equipment in a small branch office, which had been established at Second and Pike, was replaced by a divided "Express" system in the new building.

The distributing system was likewise improved by the addition of new plant and the substitution of improved types for obsolete equipment. Underground conduit was laid on Third Avenue from Pine Street to Yesler Way, and much of the old aerial wire was replaced with cable. These additions and improvements were designed to provide a reasonable margin for growth.

Only one central office, Main, was being operated at the time. In 1898, about 2000 stations were being served. The area covered approximately what is now the Main Office District with a number of long lines into outside areas, which included Ballard, Fremont, Georgetown and Youngstown. These towns were operating as separate governments.

In 1900, approximately 4,000 subscribers were being served. Ballard had grown into an important business center due to the lumber industry and residential community, prospects for telephone businesses were excellent, and a central office was opened and

outside plant constructed. These served practically all of the settlement west of the present University District and north of Salmon Bay and the Lake Washington Canal. *(The development was confined to a relative small area just north of Salmon Bay. There was little development between this area and the business district of Seattle, so very long lines were required to serve Ballard district from the Main Office. Accordingly, a central office was opened in 1901 and outside plant constructed to serve the city of Ballard, west of the present Eight Avenue West and north Salmon Bay.)*



Seattle around 1900

This installation also relieved the Main Office of the Ballard stations, which it had previously operated. During this same year, the distributing plant in Main had become congested due to rapid growth, and it became necessary to extend the cable and conduit system and generally enlarge the plant.

In 1901, an extension to the Main Office building was necessary to accommodate additional central office equipment that would be placed in 1902. This coincided with an equipment change from divided to the multiple express type.

In 1902, The Independent Telephone Company entered the field as a competitor of The Pacific Company. Their central office was located on Fourth Avenue in the same block as The Pacific Main Office and about 1,350 stations were served. The outside plant was mostly aerial cable

and aerial wire, the underground construction limited to the business district.

In the period from 1902 to 1906, it became evident that Seattle was becoming a commercial center of the Northwest, the growth in population and increase in business were very marked, and telephone stations were being added at the rate of about 2,000 per year by the Pacific Telco and 2,200 by the Independent Telco.

During this period, the city was spreading out in all directions. In order to meet the demands for service, both companies made extensive additions to their systems, but were nevertheless unable to provide sufficient plant to handle all of the available business. The growth was so rapid that in large areas it was necessary to care for businesses before the street work could be done.

While the streets were being graded, large expenditures were incurred to maintain the plant in service and, upon completion, to reconstruct the plant to conform to the new grades and curb lines.

The Independent Telephone Company established two additional central offices during this period, North and East, at Warren Avenue and Harrison Street and 20th Avenue and Columbia Street, respectively. *(Note: Vol. 2 states "North" at First Ave and Mercer, and "East" at 20th and Columbia)*

In 1903, the Pacific Telephone Company relieved the loads on Main and Ballard Offices and provided for

new business north of the Canal by opened a new central office known as North to serve the territory between Ballard and the present University District. At the end of 1903, three central offices, Main, Ballard, and North served about 11,200 stations. The Main Office handled everything south of the Canal.

In 1905, the Main Office equipment and outside plant became congested and two additional central offices were established, Queen Anne and East. Queen Anne Office served the rapidly developing district bounded by the North limits of the business area on the south, the canal on the north, Lake Union on the east, and Puget Sound on the west. East office served the residential section bounded by the summit of First Hill on the west, Lake Union on the north, and Lake Washington on the east and extended south to include all settlements in that direction.

In connection with the establishment of these new central offices and while providing for the rapid increase in stations in the existing central offices, extensive additions to the plant were made. At the end of 1905 five central offices--Main, Ballard, North, Queen Anne, and East-- served 15,200 stations. The equipments in all but Main were of the "Common Battery" type, the "Express" systems in Ballard and North had been replaced in 1905 and 1906 respectively, and the original installations in Queen Anne and East were of "Common Battery" type.

In 1906, the City of Seattle started work on an improvement scheme that involved the re-grading of a large part of the business area and the adjoining section of the residential area. This was an immense undertaking and involved enormous expenditures by the city and

property owners. The heaviest portion of this work was done from 1905 to 1910. Practically all telephone plant in the sections re-graded was affected and had to be either rearranged or entirely rebuilt. Advantage was taken of these conditions to place certain conduit extensions in advance of permanent paving. This work of re-grading and the resulting telephone reconstruction extended over a period of about four years.

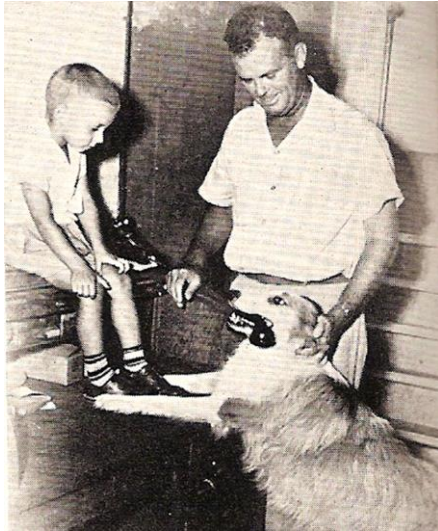
During 1906, the Pacific Telephone Company added about 4,000 stations and many additions to the plant were necessary. In 1907, 3890 stations were added. In this same year, the Independent Telco opened two new central offices, Green Lake and West, the latter expanding into a territory heretofore without telephone service. At the end of this year their total stations numbered about 13,400 compared to the Pacific Company's 23,190.

Next time -- the two companies become one. . .

In Memory - We're sorry to report that **Herb Hackenburg's** wife Margaret died at home on August 22 after a lengthy illness. Several THG members have made contributions in her memory:

Leah Be
Jody Georgeson
Bob and Annetta Haack
John Herbolich
Pamela Laird
Susan and Lester Lynn
Dale Norblom
James O'Boyle

All of us at THG join in expressing our sympathy to Herb and his family.



Trapped Collie Calls for Help

We found this story in the November 1951 issue of the Mountain States Monitor.

The Paris, Kentucky telephone directory contains 2,400 listings, but it omits one very important personality--Rex, the collie who knows how to use the 'phone.

Rex displayed his unique talent recently when he used the telephone to get himself released from a packing plant where he was trapped after business hours. The first indication that Rex was a "talking dog" came late one hot July night, when Southern Bell operator Katherine parent noted a signal on her switchboard, indicating that someone at the packing plant wanted to place a call.

Answering the signal, Mrs. Parent heard a gasping sound and quickly decided to alert the owner of the plant, Robert Owens. Arriving on the scene, Owens found Rex in the office with the receiver in his mouth. Left behind when he visited the plant earlier in the day with his young master, Owens's son Phillip, the dog evidently stood on his

hind legs and removed the receiver from the phone cradle, holding it in his mouth until something happened. The small office in which Rex was trapped was practically airtight and the dog might have suffocated had he not "called for help."

Looking Back 1907

- ☎ The financial panic of 1907 caused the Bell System to consolidate company staffs.
- ☎ On April 30, Theodore N. Vail was elected president of American Telephone and Telegraph for the second time, succeeding Frederick P. Fish.
- ☎ Up until August 1907, all telephones and apparatus made by Western Electric had been tested in Boston by AT&T engineering staff. Now inspection was taken over by WECO as part of its manufacturing processes.
- ☎ Reduced rates, in effect since the earliest days of inter-city service, were canceled "in view of the large number of calls lost and delayed in the evening hours, and due to the congestion of traffic which occurs when night rates take effect." (E.J. Hall to the Associated Press)



No drug, not even alcohol, causes the fundamental ills of society. If we're looking for the source of our troubles, we shouldn't test people for drugs, we should test them for stupidity, ignorance, greed and love of power.

-P.J. O'Rourke, writer (1947-)

Telecommunications History Group
P.O. Box 8719
Denver, CO 80201-8719



Save AMERICA'S TREASURES
OFFICIAL PROJECT