

Dial Log



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Jody Georgeson, Editor

Director's Report

By Jody Georgeson

We've had a busy summer at THG. Our sweet **Leah Be** left to rejoin her family in Oregon. We all miss her very much. However, it's true that every cloud has a silver lining; ours is that **Marty Donovan** has returned to be our secretary. So we're not nearly as bereft as we might otherwise be!

We've accepted a number of new donations, ranging from a piece of the original Denver-to-Leadville line over Mosquito pass from **Larry Volmer**, to a Calculagraph from **Bob Timothy**. Mr. Timothy has also donated a number of publications recently.

Allen True's beautiful murals will be featured in two upcoming events. The first is a joint effort by the Colorado History Museum, the Denver Art Museum and the Denver Public Library. It emphasizes his work as a muralist. The exhibition runs October 2, 2009 through March 28, 2010.

The second event is a Colorado Public Television one hour documentary on Allen True's West which will feature the murals from the historical MST&T headquarters building. The documentary

will premier at 8:00 p.m. on Channel 12 on Thursday, October 1st with encore presentations October 4th and December 27th.

THG has worked closely with these organizations to make these events happen. We can arrange a tour for you and your team as a group or individually by calling 303-296-1221. You can see a virtual tour of the murals at :

www.telecomhistory.org/vm/MMurals.shtml



Mystery Objects

Many of you answered our mystery about **Ralph Crawford's** object. Steel bowls provided the base for red flags that preceded warning cones, placed around vehicle and/or equipment. Mystery solved! Thanks to Les **Axling** (Blackwater, WA), **Jim Stearns** (Madison, SD), **Burnell Gaskins** (Nisland, SD), and **Charles Rike** (Pine City, MN) for cluing us in.



Laurel Wadley of Sandy, Utah, was the only one willing to hazard a guess about the spoon/fork object donated by Jewell Pratt. She guesses that it's a little garden tool used for indoor plants. I'm guessing she's right!



Speaking of mysteries, **Joe Hersey**, of the Pioneer Museum in Phoenix, has come across this pair of unusual climbers. He's hoping we can help identify them. Can any of you tell us anything about them? Call 303-296-1221 or write to us at telcomhist@aol.com.



Free Telephone Here

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, hobos placed markings on fences, posts, bridges, railroad trestles, and other structures to help each other find aid or steer clear of trouble. Hobos used an elaborate sign system that included symbols like a cross (religious talk will get a good meal), a shovel (work available), and arrows (showing the way to go). Others included a cat (kind lady), fish bones (good garbage), and a circle with two arrows leading away from it (danger!). A bird like the one above indicated a free telephone. Modern hobos now communicate with their cell phones and through email.

Cheyenne



THG volunteer **Jack Bol** recently visited the historic Governor's Mansion in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Each room in the house has been restored to a different period and Jack learned that the museum had need of a 1905 desk set for their 1905-era library. So THG was delighted to provide one. (The THG director was also more than happy to make a road trip of the delivery!)

While there, we also toured the Wyoming State Capital, which has its own set of Allen True Murals, and stumbled upon the original Rocky Mountain Telephone Company building, built in 1906.



Cheyenne was the site of the first Yellow Pages (around 1881). When the Wyoming Telephone and Telegraph Company ordered its directory that year, the printer didn't have enough white paper to fulfill the job. He printed the classified section on yellow paper, and "Yellow Pages" were born.

Cheyenne Daily Sun editor E.A Slack placed the first long distance call in the Rocky Mountain region (February 1878) through Telephone Canyon to Laramie Boomerang editor, Bill Nye. Laramie had the first dial phones in Wyoming, indeed in the whole Mountain States area, in 1921. Denver didn't get dial capability until 1929; Cheyenne not until 1931.



The Rocky Mountain Telephone Company building in Cheyenne

Dom Pedro Revisited

In last issue's article about the 1876 Exhibition, we incorrectly referred to "Dom Pedro II, emperor of Peru." Roger Conklin wrote from Palmetto Bay, Florida to tell us:

"In the interest of historical accuracy I must, point out that Dom Pedro . . . was the emperor of Brazil rather than Peru. 'Dom' is the Portuguese equivalent of the English title 'Sir.'

There is an extremely interesting account of the events which culminated in the taking of this photo at the Philadelphia Exposition in 1876. It can be found on pages 38-41 of the book *The History of the Telephone* by Herbert N. Casson, published in 1911. I am sure a copy of this book is in the THG library (*there is*).

The telephone museum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Museu do Telefone), has a large wall mural depicting, both pictorially and in Portuguese words, the events described in Casson's book. The actual words uttered by Dom Pedro were in Portuguese: "Meu Deus, isto fala," which Casson has correctly translated into English as "My God – it talks." Brazilians are not at all hesitant to highlight the important part that their emperor played in drawing the attention

of the judges to Mr. Bell's invention and the fact that this led to his invention being the star entry of the Centennial which earned him a well-deserved award.

As a sidelight, the Summer Royal Palace in Petropolis, up in the mountains about an hour and a half from Rio de Janeiro, which is now a historical museum, includes a room with Emperor Dom Pedro's desk on which one of the two reputed original telephones which the emperor ordered from Professor Bell is on exhibition. He used this telephone to communicate with his cabinet chief in another room. You can't get close enough to the desk to be able to examine the telephone, but

there it is; big as life.

The whereabouts or fate of the other telephone of that original pair today is unknown.

The next time you plan a vacation I suggest you include Rio de Janeiro in your itinerary, along with a side trip to Petropolis. There are day tours for tourists to Petropolis which include a leisurely couple of hours at this museum."



Roger lived in Brazil from 1970-1977. He wrote a story for Singing Wires on this very subject. Thanks, Roger, for this fascinating addition to our story!



Artifact or Pile of Rust?

By Herb Hackenburg

There it sits baking and rusting under the hot Kansas sun. All around it sit various colorfully painted, finely crafted machines designed and built to help their owners farm large, build big, carry heavy, or race fast. Since this story appears in THG's *Dial Log*, it must have something to do with telephone history. It does.

It's a powered telephone pole-hole digger that belonged to Art Herrs. Art was a lineman/installer for the Palmer Telephone Company in Washington County, Kansas. The digger was one of the first powered pole-hole diggers used by independent phone companies in the state. Throughout telephony history, very few linemen worked with their own power pole-hole digger.

The story began in 1942, when Art and his cousin, Alfred Herrs, set out to create a power pole-hole digger. Both men were farmers and were handy with tools. Also, Alfred owned a garage and had a large amount of powered hand tools.

However, parts were hard to come by. Since the country was embroiled in World War II, the government used a lot

of metal scraps and junk parts. The two men had to look in many unlikely places to find parts to build their digger. The following year, the men were fortunate to scrounge up enough metal scraps by digging in the ground and sifting through weeds. Now they could begin building their machine.

Art and Alfred improvised every step of the way to construct their new pole-hole digger. The cousins built the machine on the chassis of a 1926 Model T Ford one-ton truck. They used a 1928 Model A Ford engine and transmission, and a transmission from a 1918 Buick. Art and Alfred operated the digger by using a gas tank and differential from the Model T. They also incorporated a 1925 Model T Ford ton-and-a-half truck that hung from an A-frame boom, to create the digger's "bendable" drive shaft. Finally, they assembled the drilling stem from assorted tractor parts.



Detail of the bolted-on cork-screw of the well casing auger.

The cousins were very creative in coming up with parts to operate their machine, and had to be equally innovative to put it together. Since they didn't have a welding machine or an auger to fit on the drilling stem, they

could not complete their project. So they took a length of well casing and began to bolt the sheet metal in a cork screw pattern around the shaft. They also used two radiators to cool the engine, since it ran continuously while the rig was standing. Art and Alfred scavenged the rest of their parts from old tractors, threshing machines, manure spreaders, and hay bailers.

The concoction, consisting of a pile of chains, sprockets, shafts, levers, and gear boxes was transformed into a cohesive machine that drilled pole-holes and planted phone poles in northeastern Kansas for more than fifty years.



Detail of the boom.

The Herrs' machine is on display at the Herrs' Memory Lane Museum in Washington, Kansas. Alfred's son and daughter-in-law, Lawrence and Cara, own and operate the museum which houses more than 100 historic vehicles. Most of these, including the pole-hole digger, are operational. Even though it is part of the museum collection, the digger remains unpainted. According to Lawrence, "The thing was never painted from the start, so if I paint it, it won't be authentic."

If you visit the museum, be sure to see Art and Alfred's pole-hole digger. Another interesting piece is a 1918 Buick racer, which Lawrence will drive around the Belleville, Kansas high-banked dirt track next year to celebrate the track's 100th birthday.



Author's Note: After this story was written, a Bell System retiree visited, who had a couple of pike poles and a spoon to give to the museum to finish equipping the digger. Pikes are long steel-pointed wooden poles used to prop up a phone pole until it can be tamped into the hole. A spoon is a long-handled "bent shovel" used to clean loose dirt and stones from a newly dug pole hole.

In Memory

We are sad to report the loss of several of our members this summer.

Rebecca “Becky” Meadors passed away on August 19. She was a 30 year Bell System employee, from Chesapeake & Potomac, Pacific Bell and U S West-Qwest. She retired from U S WEST on January 1, 1990 as a Supervisor in Network.

Joan Lammon died on August 21. She began her career with Southwestern Bell in Topeka, Kansas, and retired from mountain Bell in 1984.

R. Jack Schuh died in July. Jack was hired by Mountain States in 1949, worked in plant throughout Colorado for more than 20 years, before becoming a foreman in Fleet. Jack retired from U S West in 1988. We are lucky to have a copy of his *“Memories of Jack Schuh, MST&T Outside Plant; 1931-1997”* in our archives.

Got Me a Job

By R. Jack Schuh

Many of you may remember reading excerpts from Jack’s memoirs in these pages. As a tribute to him, we’d like to publish this memory of his very earliest days with the telephone company.

When high school ended, I needed a job. Jimmy Schuth, the Colorado Construction Superintendent for Mountain Bell Telephone Company, lived across the street from [us in Denver]. He sent me downtown to the telephone company office to apply for work. When I applied, they sent me to

see the company doctor, Doctor Thompson to be given a fitness evaluation. Doc Thompson was an alcoholic; he must have been drunk when he gave me my physical. He held up his watch behind me and asked if I could hear, he listened to my heart and then asked how I felt. I was hired just that easily. . . I would never have gotten the job if I had been given a health questionnaire or a real physical. [*Jack had had rheumatic fever as a child and his heart was damaged as a result.*] I was afraid that if anyone found out, I would lose my job, and I needed that job to feed my wife and family. I lived with this fear for the 39 years of my career.

I was to report to work at 1175 Osage Street for \$36 per week. My pay days were twice a month, on the 15th and the end of the month. On June 13, 1949, I went to work for Mountain Bell as a groundman, or utility man. My duties consisted of laying conduit, building cement forms for man holes, mixing and pouring concrete, driving dump trucks, operating a tracked loader, bull dozer and an air compressor. I learned to run air tools—jack hammer, tamp, and rock drills. The best thing was the opportunity to learn the use of dynamite for blasting pole holes.



12th and Osage, Denver

I worked for a big Swede named Niles Sorenson. Every morning when I arrived for work, Niles would put a full nelson on me and bounce me the whole

length of the Osage Garage. He liked me (?)—anyway, I think he did.

We worked out of an old WWII hard-rubber-tire work wagon. It looked like the wagons you see in movies about gypsies. It was a shack mounted on four wheels, with a tongue to tow it. The wagon was left on the job site to store tools and material at night. Once at quitting time, I was in the wagon throwing empty lunch pails out the door to another worker to catch and stack outside in preparation for quitting time. Well! It just happened that Sorenson walked behind the wagon as I threw a pail. It hit Sorenson in the head and I was stuck in the wagon with no place to run. I was sure he'd kill me, but I was lucky that he liked me and he cooled down before he got ahold of me. I never threw anything out that door again. No sir; I carried things out.

I would pick up a 1936 Ford 1 ½ ton, 2 ½ yard dump truck, equipped with a V-8 engine and mechanical brakes, at 1175 Osage every morning. I'd then drive to the work site. We were cutting a ditch on old Colfax Avenue under the viaduct in preparation for laying an eight duct conduit line. My job was to load the asphalt and concrete that had been cut from the road surface into the truck by 10 a.m. each morning. The time was important because that's when Sorenson would come down the ditch, get into the passenger seat and inform me to which location I was to drive. We would end up in an alley or some other remote place. Strange as it seems, these places were always near a coffee shop. At eighteen, I never drank coffee, but Sorenson always ordered us each one. He drank that coffee so hot, I knew he had no feeling in his throat or mouth. I'd put in cream and ice cubes, and blow on it enough so I could manage to drink

about a half a cup while he drank down two. He's then say, "Let's go!" and we'd go to the dump to unload the truck. Then I'd return to the job site for my second load of the day.



As mentioned, my first job involved the placing of a six-duct tile conduit on Old Colfax from Osage to Federal Boulevard. First we had to dig a ditch at least two feet wide, smooth and level on the bottom. Two men would carry a section of six duct tile conduit to the ditch by placing pick handles in both ends of one of the ducts. When the tile was in position on the edge of the ditch, it was lowered with a rope or a tractor's hydraulic system. Once it was in, two two-inch long steel pins were inserted into the guide holes in the end of the conduit. The whole thing was then guided into the previous laid conduit. A gauze cloth filled with cement was wrapped around the joint in the tile to prevent dirt from filtering into the ducts. To complete the job, sand was placed in the ditch covering the conduit. A four inch cap of concrete topped the job off.

As our job neared the Star Bakery Company, we started sending one man over at coffee break time to buy day-old long johns. One day, we all had coffee or pop to drink and were sitting around eating our pastry when one of the crew screamed and spit the long john out of his mouth onto the ground. We all stared and inquired what was wrong. He excitedly answered, "There's a

cockroach in it!" He'd taken a big bite and as he was looking at the cream filling when he was surprised to see a cockroach staring back at him. As one might expect, our fetish for long johns was over. As a matter of fact, we never purchased anything more from the old Star Bakery.



In looking back over his career, Jack had the following to say:

My mother always said, "Robert Jack Schuh, you are too lazy to work." I guess she was right, because subsequently my job as a supervisor equated to being a teacher or instructor, both of which titles required others to do the physical work while I watched.

I must have been fairly efficient at getting others to work; my crew was always the furthest from the home office. I was always sent the linemen that no one else could tolerate; consequently I called my crew the "Penal Colony."

My personnel were trained until each and every one of them could do my job. They could out-work any other crew and were called in time and time again to work jobs that others could not do. . . was always the last to leave a

storm-break. In considering all of the above, it's no wonder the other supervisors would try to woo my personnel over to their crews."

There are so many wonderful stories in this historically valuable document. I invite you all to come in and read it for yourselves. And thanks, Jack, for continuing to instruct us.

The Last of the "A" Cable

A piece of telecommunications history
from NWB in Iowa

By Connie Crow

*Our good friend **Cindy Hadsell** in Omaha sent us a chunk of cable along with this story. Connie is in Bellevue, Nebraska. She worked at NWB-USW from 1970 to 1996.*

In this box may be the only existing piece of the first transcontinental telephone cable installed by AT&T Long Lines. Let me tell you how it came into my possession.

Back in the 1980s, I worked as a photojournalist for Northwestern Bell News, the official employee newspaper. I was the reporter assigned to do a story on the removal of the "A" cable, the very first transcontinental cable AT&T ever installed. The cable was being removed and recycled all across the country. It was completely coated in a thick lead sheath and was full of copper. Heavy, hard to splice, hard to repair and certainly not environmentally friendly. The last few miles of it were in Iowa, far away from highways and roads.

I drove from Omaha to Des Moines and joined the NWB wrecking crew, out in the middle of a remote Iowa cornfield, to watch, photograph and otherwise

document this “milestone.” Somewhere in the NWB newspaper archives is the story that came out of this field trip. It was also placed in *Telephony*.

It was not an easy task. Huge bucket trucks carefully manipulated the cable off its supports and to the ground. The cable was so heavy that when the weight of a section was removed from the pole arms, the arms and poles would act as springs, bouncing wildly upon being released from their load.



The crew was afraid the bouncing would snap other poles and cause major damage to the newer lines also hanging on the cross arms. As I watched the cable being fed into a chopping machine, it occurred to me I was indeed watching history disappear. This first long distance telephone line tying the country together was disappearing forever, carefully chopped into 9” pieces, destined for the recycler.

I asked the crew chief if I could have a section for the company historical archives. He nearly had a heart attack, staring at me as though I had asked him to strip for a photo. He fairly sputtered his refusal, saying that all the cable pieces had to be accounted for—every tiny inch.

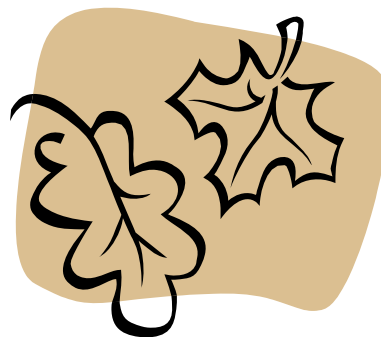
I apologized for suggesting diverting a piece of the cable for historical

purposes, and continued photographing and making notes for my story. I got the feeling when I left that the crew chief really wanted to search my bag and car to make sure I wasn’t absconding with any of his precious cable. I filed the stories and photos and went on to my assignments for the next issue of the paper.

Several months later, this box arrived on my desk at corporate headquarters in Omaha. No name, no return address, no note—nothing. Just this perfectly chopped section of the “A” cable. Just like the one I had held in my two little hands in that isolated Iowa cornfield. Someone on the crew had decided I was right and that a little bit needed to be preserved for future generations to see.

I do thank whoever sent it to me years ago. I think now is the time to put it in a safer place than my basement. It belongs in the museum, along with the rest of the history of this great industry.

*And a safe place it shall have,
Connie, in our museum. Thank you so
much for saving it for all of us to enjoy!*



We are very thankful for our members’ continued support. We hope you have a long, lovely Indian summer and a Happy Thanksgiving!

