A Message from Our Director

It's Fall and soon the leaves will be turning. My favorite time of the year! It's been a pretty hot summer all over the world; cooler weather will be welcome.

This summer THG has been busy. Tours have been plentiful in both Denver and Seattle. The Denver Architectural Foundation brought over 50 folks through the "Bell Palace". We have enjoyed giving tours again and meeting so many interesting people. (To schedule a tour of the building and Connections Museum Denver, contact telcomhist@aol.com.)

Tours of Connections Museum Seattle are held every Sunday and have had a lot of visitors (for information, contact info@connectionsmuseum.org). We are working hard at sprucing up the museum and updating displays.

Thanks to all who participated in our recent fundraisers and a special thanks to the donor for matching it.

Enjoy the Fall, and thanks so much for your support. Cheers,

Renee Lang, Managing Director

Hard to believe I once had a phone attached to a wall, and when it rang, I picked it up without knowing who was calling.

Farewell, Les Anderson

Leslie "Les" Anderson, a long-time volunteer at THG's Connections Museum, was born at his family home in Puyallup, Washington on January 29, 1924. He graduated from Sumner High School in 1942 and spent that summer as a fire lookout for the Forest Service. Les then took a job with Western Electric where his uncle Lester already worked.

In 1943, Les joined the United States Marine Corps, and after six weeks of basic training was sent into the Pacific Theater, where he served as a radioman until the end of the war. Les was stationed on Iwo Jima as a radio operator for Gen. Holland Smith, the task force commander there.

After his discharge from the Marines, Les returned to work at Western Electric, becoming an installer. One of his first jobs was at the Longview-Kelso office in Washington. Les said the chief operator in Longview was like his drill sergeant in the Marines and did her best to make sure no socializing took place during her watch. Les did manage to arrange a blind date with one of the operators who worked there, Dorothy May Ballard, and they soon married.

He was assigned primarily to lead crews in the installation of new crossbar systems in Bell System central offices throughout the Northwest. Les often told how the first task he and his crew usually had to do was drill holes into the concrete floor of the new building, by anchor the frames.

Les Anderson (right) with former co-worker Jake Englet at the Connections Museum, January

Les was also an accomplished musician, among his favorite instruments were the accordion and a home-built glass harp.

Retiring from Western Electric in 1988, Les was approached by Seattle Museum founder Herb Warrick who told him "Now that you will have free time on your hands, why don't you come and help us build the museum." And so began Les Anderson's next career as a docent, a maintainer of museum pieces, and mentor to all the younger volunteers in Seattle. He volunteered at the Connections Museum almost every day that it was open through July of this year.

Les passed away surrounded by his family on August 22, 2022. He was interred at the Tahoma National Cemetery in Kent, Washington. Les had six children, five still living, and many grandchildren, great grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren. Everyone in the Telecommunications History Group, especially the volunteers at the Seattle Museum, will miss him greatly.

Photo Organization Improving

A library sciences intern turned volunteer at the Connections Museum in Seattle is helping tackle the enormous task of organizing thousands of THG photographs.

"It's much easier to search through the photos now," says Andrew Le, a graduate student at the University of Washington. "Organizing archival material helps reconstruct historical details by putting photos in context."

Le is concentrating on archives and special collections within the Masters of Library and Information Sciences at UW. He describes the effort at THG as a vital step in progressing in his career.

"I first toured the Connections Museum in 2019 and saw how the volunteers really value and enjoy their work," says Andrew. "My background is in archival material. In the MLIS program, I determined my skill set could be of value. As it turns out, I am living my dreams."

Although he did not have a particular interest in telecommunications, Andrew says archivists must adapt to new information. "Working at the Connections Museum was an excellent test and I have gained a lot of valuable knowledge."

His goals were to inventory, describe, and process the photo files. "In other words, figure out what we have, explain it, then preserve and record it." He initially identified over 3,000 prints, some from as early as 1890. The size of the collection means achieving the final goal is likely to take more time. In addition, the Seattle and Denver photo collections have to be capable of being searching alongside one another, a process known as interoperability.

"We started by determining what was possible, what was most beneficial, and what we already had," he says. "Some items had categories, but most were not organized. It was helpful to understand the rigorous filing system that Denver was already using."

After an the initial inventory, Andrew realized the scale of the project was larger than he anticipated. Even with help from THG volunteers, he says the entire time could have been spent just indentifying unknown people in the photographs.

Peter Amstein and Æstrid Smith supervised the formal 10-week project. Now, Andrew continues as a volunteer. He also organized a demonstration and museum tour for his colleagues in the Society of American Archivists. "Andrew's work has already been very helpful to me and other volunteers," says Peter. "We were quickly able to locate possible photos to go new exhibit we are building and choose the best ones."

Andrew says one his favorite photos shows a Pacific Northwest Bell van with what appears to be smoke from the rear. The photo is labeled "Mt. St. Helens 1980", and the smoke is actually volcanic ash. "Those workers probably risked their lives to restore phone service," he observes.

Andrew, who is from Wichita, has an under-graduate degree from Kansas State University, where he worked in the university archives. He also was employed at the university/medical archives at the University of Illinois-Chicago before moving to Seattle about a year ago.

Phone company tries unusual transportation

A photograph from the THG archives in Denver illustrates exploration of vehicle design and use during the 1950s. Shown in the photo, a three-wheel Cushman Truckster is a telephone installation and repair vehicle. A Bell System logo appears on the rear of the scooter truck.   An extremely close examination of the lettering indicates the name is probably Northwestern Bell Telephone Company.

Although dated 1958, the photo was likely taken some time earlier, since the newest car visible is a 1955 Oldsmobile.

The Cushman company started making engines in 1903 in Lincoln, Nebraska. According to Jim Frederick of the Cushman Club of America, the company began manufacturing highly popular scooters in the 1930s as a way to sell more engines. In World War II, Cushman built a reinforced scooter that could be dropped by parachute. Scooter production ended in 1965.

Cushman made Trucksters from 1958 to 2002. The light-duty commercial vehicles were possibly modeled after the iconic three-wheel Ape (ah-pay) from the Piaggio company of Italy. Designed to meet post-war transportation demands, the Ape (meaning 'bee' in Italian) is essentially a scooter with a roof and a cargo box. Scooter trucks from various manufacturers are still widely used in the Indian sub- continent, Africa, and South America.

Clearly, at least one Truckster was a telephone van. The small cargo vehicles met a variety of light-duty demands, even as patrol cars for the New York Police Department. Trucksters made since 1965 are considered "specialty vehicles," mostly made-to-order.

A telephone company's use of a Truckster exemplifies how the 1950s were a time of great re-evaluation of transportation. New and even radical designs for cars and light commercial vehicles ranged from very small – such as Crosley's two-cylinder microcar – to very large, like nine-passenger station wagons from the Big Three automakers.

The popularity of the Volkswagen "Beetle" led to the importation of small European cars including the original British Mini, and unorthodox BMW Isetta with one door that opened in front.

In addition to evolving panel vans and pick-up trucks, the White and International companies produced some almost experimental designs for commercial use. By the end of the decade, most telephone companies had settled on standard, moderately-sized, box-shaped vans.

This may be the only photo of the telephone scooter van. Neither the Cushman Division of Textron Corporation nor the Cushman Club could provide any additional information.

Pay phones fading into history

Urban landscapes have the disappearing phone booth blues

Once ubiquitous, public phones are now mostly gone from the streets of New York City. Workers officially removed the last working street pay phone from Midtown's Times Square area on May 26.

In a statement, the city called the dual open-front "boothette" at 7th Avenue and 50th Street "the final New York City public pay telephone."

Technically, this was the last pay phone on public property. About a dozen phones are still scattered around the city on private property. There are four official phone booths to be maintained in perpetuity on the upper West Side of Manhattan.

The removal is part of a decade-long city project to transition to high- speed Wi-Fi kiosks operating as LinkNYC. This year, the kiosks will be upgraded to 5G service.

Pay phones, known as coin in telephony lingo, were an essential part of 20th century life. The expression "drop a dime on someone" (to report or snitch) came into the language. Mild mannered Daily Planet reporter Clark Kent went into phone booths and emerged as Superman. Jim Croce sang "Operator" and Chuck Berry asked for assistance in his recording "Memphis."

Divestiture, deregulation, and changing technology brought a decline in public phone usage. The widespread adoption of mobile phone service was perhaps the biggest factor in the decline of the public phone.

In the years after Bell System Divestiture in 1984, coin service became a separate, competitive business. Customers could own the phones, known as COCOTS (Customer Owned Coin Operated TelephoneS). Other companies provided management services such as rating, routing, and coin collection. PTS Providers, formed in 1986, is one of the largest service management companies.

Instead of just managing the phones, the Titan company focused on the multi-billion dollar advertising revenue. Titan bought hundreds of Verizon phones and kiosks in 2009-10. Ownership and operation of the phones gave Titan access to the lucrative advertising space at the phone locations.

Customer-owned coin phones contain most of the necessary electronic circuitry and generally use a Central Office connection only for dial tone.

Manhattan's "last public phone" is going to the Museum of the City of New York as part of a new Analog City exhibit.

At his web site, The Payphone Project, Mark Thomas has been carefully tracking public phones and commenting on their history. A brief ceremony with Mayor Eric Adams communications officials marked the removal of the last public booth.

The two-and-a-half minute preview of Colin Farrell's 2003 movie "Phone Booth" typifies the historic importance of a Times Square coin phone. One commenter says it's "brilliant" that the movie is filmed in phone booth. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDGY8GoEbQ0)

Known as "The Phone Guy", Mike Davis of Levittown, New York specializes in acquiring pay phones. At his web site, http://www.mvtelonline.com, Davis says his collection "illustrates the progression of subtle change beginning with the early coin collectors of the 1890s through the introduction of the 50A pay station around 1912 until the end of production of the three-slot around 1970." Davis also demonstrates the single slot phones which are "fading from view on the streets and in the lobbies of America."

Some three-slot phones were mounted on display bases and sold to customers in Bell System Phone Center Stores in the late 1970s.

Story by Dave Felice
Photographs provided by LinkNYC

Of the many tales of what happened to his clothes when Clark Kent donned his Superman costume, one story line suggested the Man of Steel compressed his office clothing and tucked it into a secret pouch in the cape.

The Telecommunications History Group
Archives
By Jody Georgeson

What are Archives?

The word *archives* refers to the permanently valuable records—such as letters, reports, accounts, minute books, draft and final manuscripts, and photographs—of people, businesses, and government. These records are kept because they have continuing value to potential users. They are the documentary evidence of past events, the facts we use to interpret and understand history. Archival records serve to strengthen collective memory and protect people's rights, property, and identity.

An *Archives* is an organization dedicated to preserving the documentary heritage of a particular group: a city, a province or state, a business, an industry, a university, or a community. The Telecommunications History Group (THG) archives the heritage of the telecommunications industry.

The word *archives* is also used to refer to the building or part of a building in which archival materials are kept, i.e., the archival repository itself. THG Archives is housed at 1425 Champa Street in Denver, Colorado.

What do we do with the records?

Assess: Not every record has enduring value, and archivists don't keep every record that comes their way. Instead, we select records, a process that requires an understanding of the historical context in which the records were created, the uses for which they were intended, and their relationships to other sources.

Collect and Organize: Archivists arrange and describe the collection of records in accordance with national and international standards of practice. At THG, a description of each archival record is entered into a database, so we can find them when someone needs them.

Preserve: Because materials in archival collections are unique, specialized, or rare, archivists strive to protect records from physical damage and theft so that they can be used today and in the future. This involves removing metal fasteners and unneeded materials, rehousing in acid-free folders and containers, and, sometimes, performing minor repairs.

Provide Access: We identify the essential evidence of our industry and ensure its availability for use by students, teachers, researchers, business leaders, historians, and a wide range of individuals with information needs. We also plan and direct exhibitions, publications, and other outreach programs to broaden the use of our collections, helping people find and understand the information they need.

Who uses the THG Archives?

Historians and genealogists rely on our materials to understand past events and to help reconstruct family histories. Information in our directory collection is used by lawyers and individuals to establish residency in areas downwind from mid-century atomic testing. The EPA has used this collection to locate possible trouble spots.

Authors request materials to analyze or confirm past events. Recently, we helped an author define terms used by a telephone operator in the 1970s. Another needed to know if and how one would send a telegram from the U. S. to Eastern Europe in the 1890s; a third requested information about Susan Parks, the brave operator who helped save Columbus,

New Mexico from a raid by Pancho Villa. An historian asked for information about President Harding's trip to Alaska for a class he was giving. (Our Howard Santee Collection contains an extensive scrapbook about this trip.) We are frequently asked by telecom companies to verify rights-of-way.

We work closely with other institutions. This year, we have loaned materials to, or provided information for exhibits at the Molly Brown House, the Castle Rock Museum, and the Colorado Railroad Museum. The Windsor Fire/Rescue Museum asked for information about fire and police call boxes and slugs given to first responders to use in pay telephones.

For more information, or to schedule a visit to the THG Archives, contact us at telcomhist@aol.com.

This photo shows a section of THG archive material in Denver.

Your telephone story is important

If you have a story you'd like to share, an idea for a story, or something you'd like to see, send e-mail to telcomhist@aol.com. Put the word Editor in the subject field.

If you have documents or artifacts you think might be worth donating to the Telecommunications History Group, contact THG at telcomhist.com for an advance evaluation.

The Abilene Paradox

By JAN ZIEGLER,
United Press International Science Writer

August 31, 1983

WASHINGTON -- Why did the Watergate conspirators bug the Democratic Party headquarters even though individually they agreed the plan made no sense?

Why do some couples get married even though they have told friends privately they want to stay single?

Why do businesses sometimes embark on projects when individual managers and technicians know they are doomed to failure?

Jerry B. Harvey, a professor of management science at George Washington University, has a theory about all this. He calls it "the Abilene paradox."

"The Abilene paradox is a pervasive form of organizational mental illness," Harvey wrote in an article for ChemTech, the journal of the American Chemical Society.

He defined it as organizations taking actions that 'contradict the desires of their individual members, thus defeating the very purposes the organizations are designed to achieve.' Finger-pointing and excuses afterward are all part of the syndrome, he said in a telephone interview, using as an example the behavior of the participants in the Watergate scandal.
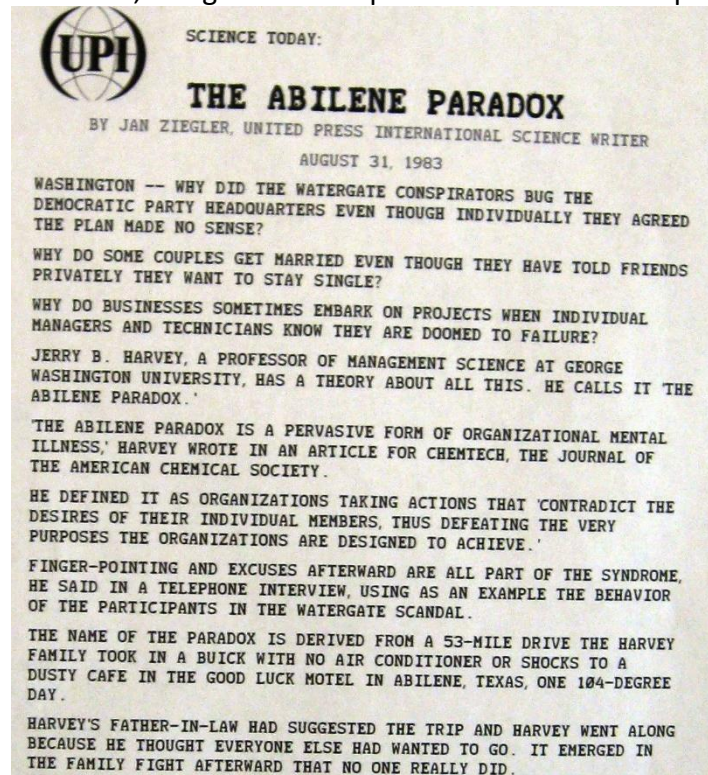
The name of the paradox is derived from a 53-mile drive the Harvey family took in a Buick with no air conditioner or shocks to a dusty cafe in the Good Luck Motel in Abilene, Texas, one 104-degree day.

Harvey's father-in-law had suggested the trip and Harvey went along because he thought everyone else had wanted to go. It emerged in the family fight afterward that no one really did.

Harvey said he came up with the theory when serving on a building committee for a building no one wanted to build and found existing psychological theory lacking when he sought an explanation.

Harvey says the Abilene paradox has several causes, but what they boil down to is fantasies or fear that speaking out will cause rejection, such as firing, or other disaster.

This re-creation shows how the story looked in the original wire service typeface.

"The psychological advantage of these fantasies for such individuals is to release them at least in their minds from responsibility for taking problem-solving actions."

The catch is, by not speaking up, you may be fired anyway, he said.

Harvey said you're on your way to Abilene if you know what actions you would like to take to solve a problem, but you put off acting for reasons described above; you fail to speak frankly with people who are involved in the project in question; you seek to escape the problem.

You may also notice other people tend to talk about the problem one way in private and other ways in public.

There are several ways to stop the trip, Harvey said. One is to "acknowledge your personal responsibility for solving the problem."

"Each organization member has as much responsibility as any other for turning around the Buick," he said. "Relying on authority figures to take the initial step toward confrontation and solution of the issue is merely a way to avoid responsibility and use others as scapegoats."

Another step is to calculate the risk involved in the confrontation. What are the odds you'll be ostracized, demoted or worse? The third step is to learn how to "own up," that is, state in detail what you think about a problem and then ask others what they think. This is aimed at freeing all to acknowledge their true beliefs.

It's still possible you may be fired if you speak out, Harvey said. But you may be better off.

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United Press International transmitted this story by Teletype over AT&T Long Lines or MCI satellite and wire facilities to newspapers nationwide. A slightly condensed version was distributed for radio and TV use. The full story is reprinted here, with a sample of the way it appeared originally, using the Teletype 1945-1985 font. The typeface prints at a sending rate which only reproduces capital (upper case) letters.

The actual wire service copy is lost to time, but prior to advent of the Internet, the story was re-keyed in 1983 by Russ Carrick, a blind typist. Carrick worked in the Mountain Bell stenography pool at 930 15th Street in Denver. The re-typed version hung at the editor's work areas for nearly four decades.

Jerry Harvey went on to write a book about the Abilene Paradox. The subject was covered in numerous publications, including the highly-regarded Psychology Today magazine.

At some phone company meetings, somebody might say: "It's a good idea, but I wonder if we're on the road to Abilene."

While some may argue that changes in telephony over the last half-century were unknown at the time, ardent Bell System proponents might suggest Divestiture was an Abilene Paradox.
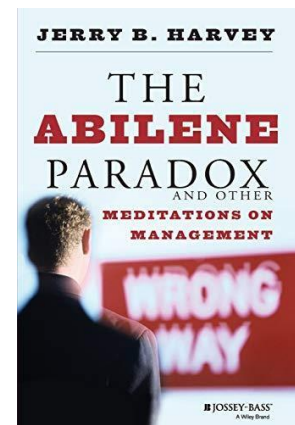
British Mint honors A.G. Bell

In observance of the 100th Anniversary of the death of telephone inventor Alexander Graham Bell, the British Royal Mint is issuing a series of £2 coins. This is the first time Bell has been honored on a coin of the United Kingdom. Bell was born in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Somewhat ironically, the Mint describes Bell as "one of the UK's greatest inventors," despite actual creation of a working telephone in the United States. The coin design, by artist Henry Gray, depicts the 12-key dial of a contemporary push-button phone. Cleverly side-stepping completing claims over the actual invention, the words "PIONEER OF THE TELEPHONE" are inscribed on the buttons. Traditionally, only the effigy of the reigning monarch is shown on the obverse (heads side) of a UK coin. This is one of the last coins of the United Kingdom to feature the image of Queen Elizabeth II.

In a Mint interview, designer Gray said the dial depiction was intended to be immediately recognizable: "I wanted the design to be instantly understood, for everyone to know what it was they were looking at."

Gray says the relief design should evoke a tactile sense, "much like a phone." The designer says he is honored with the responsibility for the coin because the telephone is "one of the greatest breakthroughs in human history, profoundly affecting society from the moment of implementation." According to Gray, "Finding a happy medium between the design narrative and the historical development of AGB's invention as we know it today was the biggest challenge."

The Alexander Graham Bell coin is available from the mint is several formats: Gold Proof, Silver Proof, Silver Piedfort, and Brilliant Uncirculated Cupro-Nickel. Piedforts are oversized coins for special presentation. The proof coins are double-struck and highly polished. The everyday coins are made of an alloy of copper and nickel.

The £2 (Two Pounds) coin was introduced in 1998 as the first and only two-color (golden rim and silvery center) British coin. It is 28.4mm (1 1/8") diameter, slightly larger than a U.S. quarter and twice as heavy. According to the Mint, £2 is one of the most popular denominations. The Alexander Graham Bell coin is part of the Royal Mint's Innovations in Science series.

Adapted from Mint text. Photo by British Royal Mint.

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