



Dial - Log



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Jody Georgeson, EDITOR

Director's Report

By Mary Riffle

It's been a quick three months since I became the Executive Director of the Telecommunications History Group. I'm grateful to the Board of Directors for this opportunity to become more directly involved in securing THG's future as we strive to preserve and promote our rich telecommunications heritage. My gratitude extends also to THG's staff and volunteers who have welcomed me warmly and are patiently showing me the ropes.

As the executive director, responsible for carrying out the initiatives of the Board, I anticipate 2005 to be a watershed year for THG. Our future depends on broadening our base of support and expanding our outreach programs. In the next year -- along with our normal archival work -- we will: apply for a government grant to create a virtual national telecommunications museum on the Internet; partner with schools on preservation projects and to develop an educational curriculum for grades K-12; provide opportunities to capture oral histories of men and women who created telecommunications history;

and apply for additional grants to further preservation efforts.

Activities are now underway on most of these fronts. For example, Board members are busy contacting telephone history enthusiasts to ask them for letters in support of a virtual national telecommunications museum. (See related article.) We are partnering with Hill Middle School in Denver to receive a grant from The History Channel. THG is collecting oral histories from telephone family members who participated in Qwest ads about generations of families in the phone business. We're launching an 800 number to call with one's own oral history of his or her work in the telecommunications industry. (Initially, we are seeking stories from women about their work experience in telecommunications). And we're seeking additional grant opportunities. I'll keep you posted on our progress.

You can help achieve our biggest goal of securing a government grant for a national telecommunications virtual museum on the Internet. Please write us a letter in support of a national telecommunications museum. And please ask another influential person who

is interested in historical preservation to write a support letter as well. Suggested messages to include in such a letter are bulleted in a brief article below. Such letters will be attached to the grant proposal. Please call me if you need more information about the project.

Once again, I'm really glad to be here and look forward to talking with you.



Send Your Letter of Support

We need your letter of support for the national telecommunications museum on the Internet. THG is applying for a government grant to help build a virtual national telecommunications museum in order to make our rich heritage available on the world-wide Web. This is important because THG must expand the audiences it serves and its sources of funding to continue to do business beyond 2005.

Experts in writing grant applications tell THG to exhibit broad-based support – enthusiastic letters of support from as many constituencies as possible. For example, we need letters from THG members in various states and cities, corporations that compete with each other, national and local unions, other museums, educators, school boards, teachers, Chambers of Commerce, and from industry celebrities and politicians.

Please help us reflect this broad-based coalition in support of THG's efforts by sending us a letter of support and/or by asking other persons of

influence to write letters. Please send letters to: The Telecommunications History Group, P.O. Box 8719, Denver CO 80201-8719, or email to telcomhist@aol.com. Your letters will be attached to future grant applications.

Below are a few bullets to consider in writing such a letter:

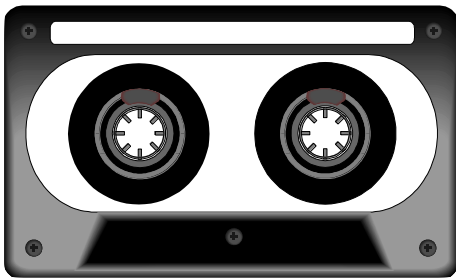
- I recognize the need for and the importance of preserving the history of the development of the world's most outstanding telecommunications system.
- This history is about more than the advancement of technology. It is the history of America's business and financial progress, and is at the heart of this nation's cultural progress and maturity.
- The Telecommunications History Group is leading a broad consortium of separate companies, industry organizations and individuals involved in communications in endeavors to capture and preserve this history, which are so vital to future progress.
- The consortium of museums and archives will showcase their unique exhibits and holdings in an electronic museum available globally on the Internet.
- Virtual guide tours in narrative form will be supplemented by historic documents, excerpts from oral histories, photographs, videos of working antique technologies and information about related subjects.
- Lesson plans and teacher guides will be available for students to explore the industry and its impact on society.

If a preview of such a virtual museum would help in your letter-writing efforts, please call the THG staff and ask for a mini-tour at 303-296-1221.

Volunteer Corner

Our volunteer ranks are swelling. As you know, **Herb Hackenburg** has retired as our Director, but is accomplishing great things as our most frequent and productive volunteer. He is currently recording stories for the virtual museum, conducting several important oral history interviews, and writing articles for telecommunications industry publications. Whew! We're very lucky that Herb is able to spend so much time being our resident historian. He will also continue to contribute articles for *Dial-Log*.

Norman Birt of Longmont, Colorado is another new volunteer. Norm is a former computer programmer who is embarking on a new career as an archivist. He's just finishing up his second semester of classes for a Master of Library and Information Science degree at Emporia, Kansas. Norman is married with four teenagers ranging in age from 13 through 18. He and his wife, Anita, also have two Boston terriers. Norm has begun the nearly overwhelming task of inventorying and arranging our audio tape archives.



There's still plenty of work to be done -- so if you have a few hours a week and would like to join us in this fascinating and important work, give us a call at 303-296-1221, or contact us via email at telcomhist@aol.com.



December 7

By Herb Hackenburg, THG Historian

It's important to note that the interview for this little story took place on December 6, 2004, and this story was cobbled together a bit later.

I called **Deb Kruse** in Waterloo, Iowa about THG's "Family Legacy" project. This is part of THG's renewed emphasis on oral history. We've conducted oral history interviews since we began operation in 1990, but were never really serious about it.

Now we're serious -- on several levels. On the Board level, we have a new Director, **Dr. James Whiteside** (professor of History, University of Colorado at Denver) whose specialty is oral history. On the staff level, Carol Baird's job description says she is to spend half her time transcribing oral histories. To date, she's been busy transcribing the backlog while we've been busy recording even more. On the volunteer level, I've begun to contribute my own oral history, and we're gearing up to record oral histories from our membership (more about this when it's all set up). We are also working with Qwest to gather histories from the families who participated in the popular "Generation" series of television ads. We're calling this last phase the "Telephone Family Legacy" project.

I called Deb about the Legacy Project. It's not that big of a stretch to say that nearly half of the telephone employees in Iowa must be related to Deb, who is a Qwest Customer Assurance Supervisor in Directory East in Waterloo.

It all began with her grandmother **Rosina Pierce-Grapp**, a telephone operator in Plainfield, Iowa in 1920. Rosina had three sisters -- all operators. Each sister married and started a family. Most of the husbands worked for assorted phone companies and, of course, many of the children and *their* children worked/are working in the business. (Deb has written a brief story about her family that I suspect may be published in a future issue of *Dial-Log*.)

Anyway, I was talking to Deb and mentioned that I was old enough to remember the day in 1941 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, a "day which will live forever in infamy," to quote F. D. Roosevelt.

Deb had a family story for the occasion. It seems her great aunt **Ethel Hastings** was "Central" in Plainfield, Iowa on December 7, 1941. Ethel and her husband Carl lived in the house along with the switchboard, which was common in small towns at the time. This meant that Ethel was the town's only operator on duty 24X7. Late on this sleepy Sunday afternoon, the board "lit up like a Christmas tree" and Ethel was unable to handle the ruckus. She called for Carl to come help, and for the next few hours the two of them handled the traffic. Carl was, by the way, the town repairman for the company.



Archives Month Display at 931 14th St.

THG Celebrates Archives Month

In September and October, cultural institutions throughout Colorado and Wyoming held special events in honor of Archives Month.

This year, the theme was "History is a puzzle . . . You hold a piece of the past. THG celebrated with a month-long exhibit in the lobbies of the 931 14th ST. and 1005 17th St. buildings in Denver, and a full day of tours that included celebrating Herb's 70th birthday.

Thanks to all of you who took part. We had a wonderful time, and hope even more of you can attend next year's events. To see more pictures of THG's Archives Month celebration, go to our web site at: <http://www.telcomhistory.org/Events.html#OpenHouse>



Herb leads a tour and demonstrates his batting stance.

The Museum of Communication

By Don Ostrand

Don is Director of the Museum of Communications in Seattle, WA. This is the sixth in a series of articles by Don.

The Panel Story

The Panel technology was designed and manufactured by the Western Electric Company in the 1910s and early 1920s. It did not enjoy widespread acceptance and was installed in a limited number of cities throughout the Bell System. Seattle was one of those locations.

The panel equipment in our museum was from the Rainier exchange serving the Rainier Valley community within Seattle. This equipment is unique in that the May 1923, installation and “cut-over” into service brought the first mechanized telephone system and the first dial tone in the city. Prior to that cut-over, all calls were handled by operators. Concurrently, two additional Panel switching units were brought on line in 1923.

In the Panel system design, utilization of terminal banks, rods and brushes, motors, gear cases, cork rollers, clutches, and sequence switches were all employed. As the piece-parts were packed and shipped to the location individually, all the assembly and wiring was done on-site. To put the size in perspective, all equipment frames or bays were 11 feet, 6 inches tall. The overall length of a complete frame ranged up to 13 feet.

An important requirement for this operation was that all frames were 100% level, 100% plumb and 100% square. When installers built the frames, they were required to place the base angle perfectly level. In almost all situations, this was accomplished by placing

bricklayers' mortar under the base angles to fill in the gaps of the irregular floors. Once the base angle was in place, the uprights and top angles could be installed and plumbed. With the 100%-accurate basic frames built, the terminal banks, relay plates, drive mechanisms, clutches and motors could be added and wiring could begin.

This brief explanation of the original equipment installation provides a perspective of what our relocation crews were facing. An on-site review of the Panel system revealed that the cabling had aged, the color-coded wiring had faded beyond recognition and had become brittle. In our best judgment, we could not disassemble the individual frame wiring with hopes of restoring and making it operational again.



This is a close up of a panel final frame in our museum. It shows a terminal bank and select rods, and the rotary sequence switches unique to the panel office. The rods are driven by electric motors and clutches, and move up and down to make connections. On the left, sequence switches control the operation of the rods. This office has been returned to operational condition and is thought to be the only operational unit remaining in the world.

After a careful inventory of all frames, we identified and designated (with colored ribbon) the lowest numbered frame of each frame type,

thereby saving one of everything for relocation to the museum. An analysis of the actual exit path was made and some frames that were easier to access were selected to replace those earlier designated.

A new problem arose: the size of the frames (11 foot 6 inches in height and up to 13 feet wide) made it impossible to exit via the 8-foot tall, 4-foot wide equipment door. Read the next issue to see our solution.

In the next issue -- The Panel Move

Marketplace Mosaic

Earlier this holiday season, THG participated in a gift sale in which all the vendors were nonprofit organizations. The sale took place at the historic Denver Firefighters museum in downtown Denver. Some of the other participants were Gilpin County Historical Society and Museum, The Denver Botanic Gardens, UNICEF, The Wildlife Experience, and The Central City Opera.



Volunteers staff THG's booth at the Marketplace Mosaic. From left to right -- Carol Baird, Herb Hackenburg and Renee Lang.

THG volunteers made and sold candles made from insulators, note cards featuring some of our historic photographs, copies of Herb's book (*Muttering Machines to Laser Beams*) and telephone refrigerator magnets.

A valuable benefit of participating in the sale was the opportunity to network with other nonprofit organizations. One result is the loan to the Firefighters Museum of a wooden 1916 magneto wall set. It will be placed in the telephone booth in their restored firehouse at 1326 Tremont Place in Denver. Stop by and visit it (and the other interesting exhibits) if you have a chance.

Watch for announcements for next year's Marketplace. If you are interested in purchasing gifts before then, please call or email us for prices and shipping arrangements.

The Mississippi Valley Telephone Company

By Jody Georgeson

We were contacted recently by a woman in California who possessed a stock certificate from the Mississippi Valley Telephone Co. She was hoping to find out more information about her husband's ancestor, one Mr. Hubinger, who she knew had owned the company. The following is from research conducted entirely in the THG Archives.

The first commercial exchange in Northwestern Bell territory was opened at Keokuk, Iowa in September 1878. It was owned by Western Union, and under patent agreements, could not use Bell equipment. When the Bell patents expired in 1893, many exchanges were formed to compete with existing companies. In some cities two or three companies competed, so in order to be connected to all his neighbors, a telephone user had to have two or more telephones, directories, and bills.

Promoters of these "Independent" (non-Bell/AT&T) companies typically

used the following arguments to sell their service:

- We will furnish better instruments and build a better plant than Bell.
- Everything we use will be new. (Bell sometimes moved old equipment into rural areas and small towns from cities as they were upgraded.)
- We will connect with farmers (many of whom had their own lines that didn't connect with Bell System).
- This is a hometown company, owned by your neighbors. The profits stay here in town.
- Rates will be about one-half what Bell charges. (Actually, many promoters, including Hubinger, offered free service in order to entice new customers. As you might imagine, this caused trouble later.)

In developing rates, the new companies often made no allowances for depreciation of equipment, repair expense or service upgrades. They were able to charge significantly less than the Bell System companies, but many rapidly lost money. Promoters, however, often took their money off the top, leaving investors and customers in the lurch.



AT&T managers recognized Hubinger as a formidable opponent. According to O. C. Michelman, "In Minnesota, competition of sizeable dimension came from the Mississippi Valley Telephone Company . . . a Mr. Hubinger, a Burlington, Iowa starch manufacturer and financier, was the backer of this company which had telephone exchanges in Muscatine, Keokuk and Burlington, Iowa as well as St. Paul and Minneapolis."

In the spring of 1897, Casper E. Yost, President of Northwestern Bell,

wrote, "Our friends of the Mississippi Valley Telephone Company are active, vigilant and determined." By June, Hubinger was in Omaha, soliciting for subscribers on five-year contracts, promising metallic circuits and long-distance transmitters. (The Omaha Telephone Company won out over both Mississippi Valley and Bell.)

The J.C. Hubinger Company was incorporated in Iowa and Illinois and was owned in equal partnership by three brothers: J. C., Nick and Joe Hubinger. In 1898, it was the largest manufacturer of prepared starch in the United States. Besides the starch factory, the brothers (through the Hubinger Company) owned the Electric Street Railway (Trolley Company) in Keokuk, Iowa, the Keokuk Electric Light Plant, real estate and telephone properties.



Their real estate holdings consisted of business and residential buildings (including the opera house) in Keokuk, and farmland in Illinois and Missouri. The trolley company, in addition to its lines and vehicles, owned an amusement park and casino. According to Mr. Hubinger, "The place is a veritable fairy land." In addition to the casino, the park had two lakes with bathing and/or ice-skating facilities, a theater, bicycle track, football and baseball fields and a horse racing track. Altogether, the holdings of the Hubinger Company were worth a total of over \$3 million.

The Mississippi Valley Telephone Company began business in Keokuk on April 1, 1897. The Burlington exchange opened October 1 of that same year and

those in Ft. Madison and Muscatine followed on October 1, 1898. There was a 45 mile-long toll line between Keokuk and Burlington, and agreements with other telephone companies in the area, which allowed interconnection between over 200 towns in Iowa, Illinois and Missouri. The company also operated franchises in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The Keokuk exchange began business with 440 subscribers, Ft. Madison with 140, Burlington 400, and Muscatine with 16. All increased rapidly. Most subscribers agreed to a five-year subscription, with rates of \$24 per year for businesses and \$18 per year for a residential line. Rates in Minneapolis and St. Paul were \$48 for businesses and \$30 for residential.

The Articles of Incorporation for the company were dated February 24, 1898, and were signed by John C. Hubinger, V. M. Hubinger (his wife), D.R. Craig, A.E. Gregory, and J.P. Christy in the presence of Wm. Getty and Chas. F. Weismann (Hubinger's son-in-law). Authorized capital was \$1 million. By March 1901, J.C. Hubinger had himself invested another million dollars in the company.

In June 1897, Hubinger applied for and was granted franchises to compete against Northwestern Bell (the AT&T company) in Minneapolis and St. Paul. According to an unpublished history written in 1945 by Geo. Robinson of Northwestern Bell, "lack of sufficient capital necessitated a reorganization."

The Minnesota Valley Telephone Company was purchased by Tri-State in December 1905 for \$82,998.78. They continued to do business in Iowa as "The Minnesota Valley Telephone Company" until purchased by the Iowa Telephone Company (Northwestern Bell's predecessor) upon order of the U.S.

District Court in 1913. (According to some documents, this occurred in 1910).

At a Board of Directors meeting on March 5, 1901, the name of the corporation was changed to "Twin City Telephone Company," and the principal office was changed from Keokuk to Minneapolis. Authorized capitalization of the new company was \$2.5 million.

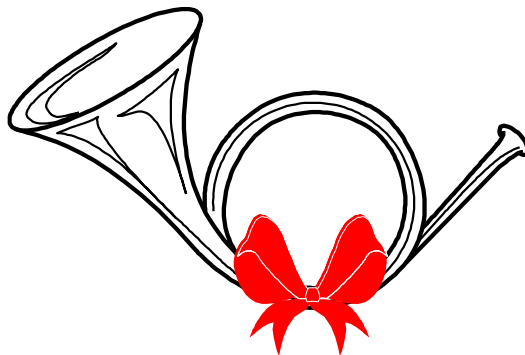


Growth of the company in Minnesota was rapid, but connection to toll lines remained a problem. In 1903, the owners of Twin Cities incorporated a new company, Tri-State Telephone and Telegraph, to build toll lines and exchange properties outside of St. Paul and Minneapolis. By 1906, the financial resources of the Twin Cities company were nearly exhausted, and in April, Tri-State acquired their assets at book value and assumed all liabilities. The holders (mostly Hubingers) of preferred stock received \$1,167 worth of 6% preferred stock for every \$1,000 of 7% Twin City preferred stock surrendered.

For more information about the formation of the Tri-State company, see the excellent book Goodbye Central; Hello World, by James Crockett Rippey.

Peace On Earth

*All of us at THG wish you and your families a
Happy Holiday Season
& Wonderful New Year!*



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