



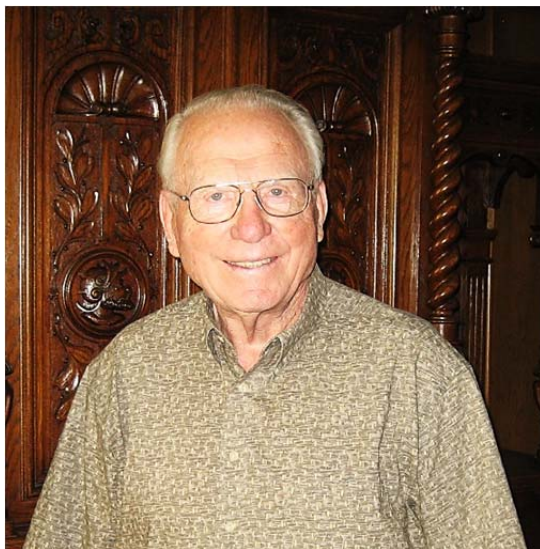
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Jody Georgeson, editor

### Director's Message

Spring is a time of renewal and transformation. The days get longer, the flowers begin to bloom and change is in the air. As you can see, the Telecommunications History Group has a new look that we are very excited about. Our new logo is designed to unify our two locations, Seattle and Denver, and we are updating our newsletter and calling it Connections News. We hope you like the new look. Take a look on pages 2 and 3.

We are sad to note the passing of our great friend and supporter, Howard Doerr. Howard joined Northwestern Bell in Omaha, Nebraska in 1950. Except for a period serving as an USAF Lieutenant during the Korean War, Howard worked at NWB until 1982, when he left his position as EVP and CFO of Northwestern Bell to become EVP and CFO at the newly formed U S West. Howard retired in 1991.



Howard Paul Doerr (June 3, 1919 – March 17, 2017)

Howard was one of the original incorporators of the Telecommunications History Group and became its first President at the first Board meeting on May 21, 1992. He served on the board in various capacities for the past 25 years.

Howard was instrumental in raising money for the THG endowment fund, going so far as to address and stuff envelopes, and to write personal notes to potential donors. (You can honor his memory by donating to the endowment in Howard's name.)

Howard will be missed dearly by all of us here at THG.

Warm regards,  
Lisa Berquist



# TELECOMMUNICATIONS HISTORY GROUP

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We've changed our look! Notice our new logo on the facing page, and the newsletter banner. You will also be seeing the following logos, as appropriate:



## Changes at the ConnectionsMuseum in Seattle:



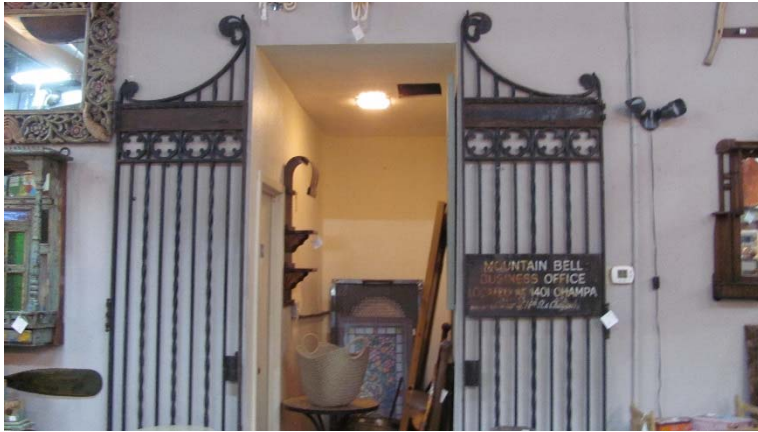
In Seattle, we are in the process of rearranging our second floor display area to tell visitors the story of PBX systems and switchboards in a better way. On our third floor, we have Central Office switching systems that represent each generation of technology from manual through crossbar. PBX (Private Branch Exchange) equipment used the same technological innovations from each generation but in a smaller form. Our historic PBX equipment had been located in various areas on both floors of the Seattle Museum, but now we are gathering it together in one dedicated section and displaying it in chronological order.

Later this year, we anticipate that all the PBX equipment will be powered up and connected to appropriate telephones of the type that would have been used with that PBX. Visitors can then enjoy the experience of using a telephone in a typical business establishment over the different eras.



## Curtis Street Gates Returned

By Renee Lang



Back around 2002, I asked Dick Notebart, then U S West CEO, if we could return the original gates to the Curtis Street entrance of the old headquarters building in Denver to help protect the Allen True murals. I had been told they were stored in the basement. He said it was not possible due to safety requirements for fire releases on the doors.

Fast forward to 2015 - Jody and I were visiting an antique store when we saw the Mountain Bell gates for sale. We took pictures and asked the proprietor where they had gotten and how much they wanted for the gates. I notified the building manager, Donna Maas, who called the construction company who had sold the gates. She told them they had no right to sell CenturyLink property and that they needed to return them to 931 14th Street. We all felt there must be a way to re-attach the gates and fix them so they would meet safety standards.

Donna found someone to re-hang them and to build side panels that match the originals perfectly. This artist reminded me of all the wonderful artists that worked on our "Bell System Palace" back in 1929. We are so happy to have them back home where they belong.



## I'm Home!

by Renee Lang

In January we received from storage the window that graced the Colorado Telephone Building at 1421 Champa here in Denver. Our archive is in the AT&T building at 1425 Champa, where that building used to be.

AT&T agreed to put it in the lobby where it can be seen through the window. It will be even better to see it from our lobby when you come to visit!



## THE NEW TELEPHONE BUILDING

When the general offices and the main exchange of the Colorado Telephone Company were moved, three years ago, from the old Lawrence street building to the new four-story building at 1421 Champa Street, there was great



rejoicing among the several departments because of the increased "elbow room". It gave them the comfortable, light and airy quarters it afforded. And while provision was made by the architects for increasing the size of the building, little did anyone suppose that the offices would become so congested and so completely inadequate in so short a time. The necessity for increased floor space having arisen, however, the erection of four additional stories to the building was rushed as rapidly as possible, with the result that the Telephone building is now one of the most substantial, modern and up-to-date brick and steel structures in the city. It is also as nearly fire-proof as present methods of building could make it, and contains all the conveniences and points of excellence in equipment known to modern mechanics.

*From "The Transmitter." Denver, Colorado, June, 1906. Vol 1, No. 1*



**1906**



**1909**

## Person to Person – Betty Kiniston

by  
Don Warsavage

*This article first appeared in the AUSWR Guardian. Thanks to the author for allowing us to reprint it.*

It was in Lamar, Colorado in 1944. Betty French was driving into town with her boss's words running through her mind. "Honey, you're not going to get anywhere doing this job," she'd said. "I hear they're hiring on down at the phone company." She was a pretty self-confident teenager; after all she could handle the tractor and all the major farm chores for her dad. Waitressing wasn't that hard. It didn't pay much and there were no benefits.

She parked at the building with the sign that said, "Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Company." She was hired that day as a telephone operator.

Lamar sits on the Eastern Plains of Colorado, nestled against the Arkansas River along with a string of other small farming towns that follow the river east from Pueblo.

Betty learned to connect any one of the nearly 800 subscribers (most of them on eight or ten partly lines) to their long distance friends and relatives across the country. But the war permeated everything people did in those days and could make the long distance operator's job very complicated. As she tried to route the customer's call through certain cities, a voice would often interrupt saying, "Sorry. PRIORITY ONE. The government needs this circuit right now." Betty had to start all over again, and she'd notify the customer she'd call back when she had reached the distant party.

She was also the 1944 version of 9-1-1 for the community. When she heard a subscriber say, "Operator, we need the police. Please hurry!" she would push a button at her position which would set off a red light mounted high on a pole on Main Street and while waiting for a response she would collect all the information to pass on to the policeman when he saw the light and called in.



Several circuits ran seventeen miles to the east, connecting Lamar to the Granada War Relocation Center, also known as Camp Amache, where over seven thousand Japanese-American citizens were interred.

When the war ended, things changed again. The Japanese were permitted to try and pick up their interrupted lives and many young men began returning from their battles overseas. One of these young men was Elmer Kiniston. When he returned to Lamar, he met Betty. They fell in love and were married.

Betty left the telephone company after they were married and set about starting their family. She returned to her job of telephone operator in the nineteen fifties and was soon promoted to Service Assistant.



The Arkansas River raged over its banks in 1965. The entire Arkansas Valley from Pueblo, Colorado through all the small farming towns along the river was affected. Telephone and power lines went down, crops were ruined, and roads were washed out. Lamar was inundated. Water was several feet high against the Lamar telephone building. Operators still needed to be on duty to handle any emergency calls that



could get through. Elmer Kiniston, Betty's husband, came to the rescue. He had a truck big enough to drive through the flooded streets without stalling. The operators, including Betty, were loaded on to the truck bed and Elmer drove to the telephone building. He backed the truck up till it touched fire escape on the rear of the building and the operators stepped from the truck bed to the stairs, never having to wade, and go up to the second floor switchboard. Elmer with his truck was the flood commuter special for them until the water receded.

Over the years, as technology advanced and long distance calls could be dialed from home, the Lamar Operator Office was closed. This was a difficult time for the operators. Not only would many lose their jobs, they had formed life-long friendships sharing personal stories, recipes, and socializing with each other. They were given the chance to transfer to Outside Plant Operations, but the transition wouldn't be easy. They must learn new skills and work in a new location. Betty, still confident in her own abilities, decided to give it a try.

In 1976 she was sent to Denver to attend line school. She had to learn to climb poles. Betty was more than a little startled and dismayed when she looked down and saw the tiny little hooks attached to her boots were all that kept her from falling off the pole. Her solution was to climb the pole by looping the safety belt around the pole, then climb up, scooting the belt along as she took each step.

The pole climbing instructor was adamant, "You don't do it that way! You could slip and slide down the pole and do real damage to.... well, up front...you know....and anyway, what on earth is a grandmother like you doing out here in the first place? You're in your fifties. You should be at home with your family!"

In spite of it all, Betty passed line school and was assigned to Monte Vista, Colorado on the Western Slope in the San Luis Valley. She got so she didn't have to slide her belt up the pole as she climbed and her new boss was surprised at how neat she was in cutting in new cable terminals.

One of the most exciting jobs that Betty worked was when she and a younger man (she wished she could remember his name) laid the buried cable that ran from Creede, Colorado to Lake City over Slumgullion Pass (11,000 feet above sea level), replacing the open wire circuits for a distance of some 49 miles.

Creede was far from their homes so they were lodged at the Creede Hotel for the duration of the project. There were eight other men staying at the hotel—a crew brought in to clean up one of the silver mines. They filled up the rooms of the little hotel which had only one bathroom and one shower to be shared by all. Betty was the only woman. Her room was right above the restaurant and bar. She couldn't get to sleep for all the noise so she decided to join in. That's where she says she learned to drink beer and play poker with the guys.

Toward the end of the project, Betty jumped across the ditch where the cable was being buried. She landed on a dirt clod resulting in a broken ankle. The injury, along with some damaged back vertebrae, ended Betty's climbing career. She was transferred to Greeley, Colorado plant department and she retired from there on Labor Day, 1980, with 28 years of service. Sadly, Elmer Kiniston passed away in 1997 after 51 years of marriage with Betty.

When I first interviewed Betty back in early November, she was much too busy and we had to postpone until January. She was helping at the polling place in Lamar, verifying ballots. She heads up the Senior Center in Lamar and is a member of the Transportation Board and several other organizations.

She loves to bake and her son's favorite is chocolate buttermilk cake taken from one of many recipes she has that are all filed on the backs of toll tickets where she first recorded them; jotting them down as she heard them from her companion operators on the switchboard in Lamar.

Betty will be 90 in March of this year.

### What Happened in History?

1917 – Early in the year, the first practical trials of the radiotelephone in connection with anti-submarine operation took place. Satisfactory communication between sub chasers about five miles apart was obtained. Equipment was sent overseas for further trial under war conditions.

1967 – President Johnson received a gold Trimline® telephone with Touch-Tone® service. H.I. Romnes, board chairman of AT&T, presented the President with the phone to commemorate installation of the 100-millionth phone in the U.S. service. He used it to talk with governors, other state officials and telephone people throughout the country over special communications network. The call went to 47 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. H.I.



*Happy Spring!*