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# Dial Log

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## A Note From Our Director

As 2014 comes to a close, let's take time to reflect on the changes we have seen at the Telecommunications History Group.

Early in the year we lost our dear friend Don Ostrand who was Curator of the Herbert H. Warrick Jr. Museum of Communications in Seattle, as well as a THG Board member. Don is truly missed and we appreciate the other Board Members and volunteers who have really stepped up in an effort to fill his shoes.

I took over as Executive Director in May and continue to be amazed at the dedication of our volunteers and at the rich telecommunications history that is represented in our museums and archives.

We added two new Board members. Welcome to Marsha Barger and Ed Mattson. They are a great addition to our Board.

Welcome back to our Founder and first volunteer, Herb Hackenburg!

We have added a few new volunteers and are always looking for more to help in the building and maintenance of our collections. Volunteers are our life's blood so please consider joining us in 2015. Here are some of the activities we perform:

- Conduct historical and academic research
- Help preserve historical documents, photographs, video materials, etc.
- Database entry and management
- Repair antique equipment
- Conduct tours of the 1929 telephone company headquarters building
- Present educational talks and exhibits at schools and other organizations
- Develop museum and traveling exhibits

Thanks to those who have renewed your memberships, our fundraising has been very successful this year. If you haven't sent your renewal, there's still time – you don't want to miss a single issue of *The Dial-Log*. Your memberships enable us to continue our preservation and education efforts.

Happy Holidays to all.  
Lisa Berquist

## To Speak Across the Continent

The first transcontinental telephone call officially occurred on Jan. 25, 1915, a day timed to coincide with the Panama-Pacific Exposition celebrations. However, as discussed in the Summer 2014 issue of *Dial-Log*, the line was completed on June 27, 1914, and test calls were made throughout the remainder of that year. (A 1998 U.S. postage stamp commemorates the completion of the line.)

To recap, the original long distance telephone network started in 1885, in New York City. By 1892 this line reached Chicago. After introducing loading coils in 1899, the long distance line continued west, and by 1911 it reached Denver, Colorado.

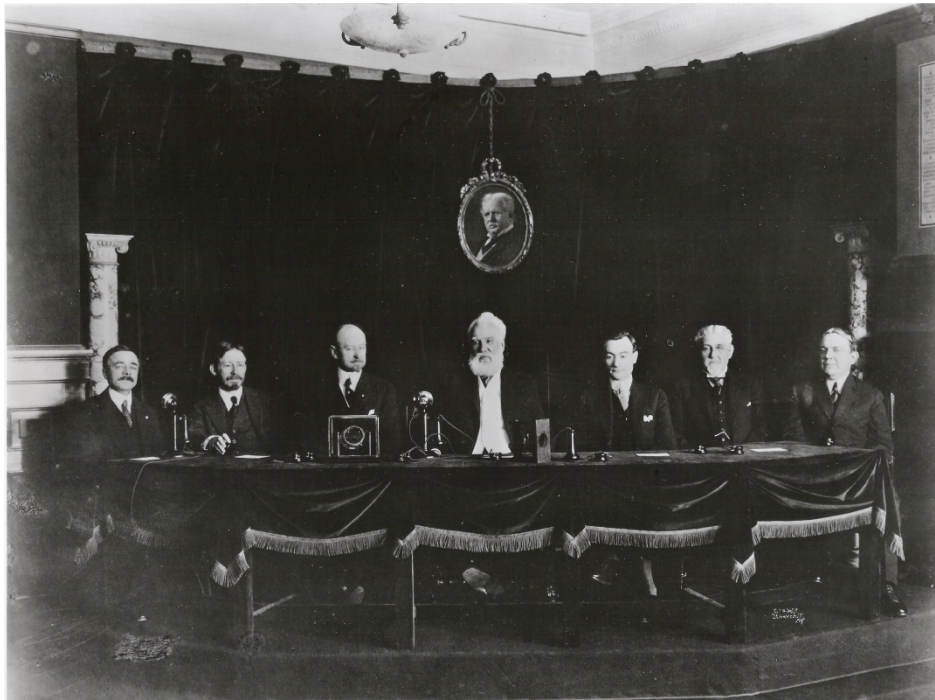


On June 27, 1914, after affixing 4,750 miles of telephone line, workers raised the final pole at Wendover, Utah, on the border between Nevada and Utah state lines. Theodore Vail, then president of AT&T, succeeded in transmitting his voice across the continental U.S. in July 1914.

The official first transcontinental telephone call took place on January 25, 1915, during the celebrations surrounding the Panama-Pacific Exposition. Four locations participated in the first call. Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone and co-founder of AT&T, led a group of dignitaries in New York. His one-time assistant Thomas Watson, led a group in San Francisco. AT&T President Theodore Vail spoke from Jekyll Island, Georgia. And U.S. President Woodrow Wilson spoke from the White House. The symbolic call officially initiated AT&T's transcontinental service.



*In San Francisco, Watson (3<sup>rd</sup> from left at table) initiates the call.*



*Alexander Graham Bell (center) waits for the call in New York.*

The transcontinental telephone line, stretching between New York City and San Francisco, crossed through 13 states. Four copper wires, the means to transmit the telephone signal, were held up by 130,000 wood poles. On the day of the historic phone call, approximately 1,500 AT&T employees were positioned across the entire length of the line, east to west, and on the lines between Jekyll Island, Washington, D.C. and New York City. The workers were prepared to fix or repair any problem that might impede the ceremonial phone call.

Desk set telephones, called "candlesticks" along with multiple hand held receivers were located at each site participating in the inauguration. The additional hand held receivers, a device often dubbed a "watch case" in turn-of-the-century society, allowed others to listen in to the telephone conversations taking place.



*Listening in in San Francisco.*

Cost for a 3-minute coast-to-coast call:

1915	\$20.70 (about \$278 in today's dollars)
1992	.75 cents (\$1.27 today).

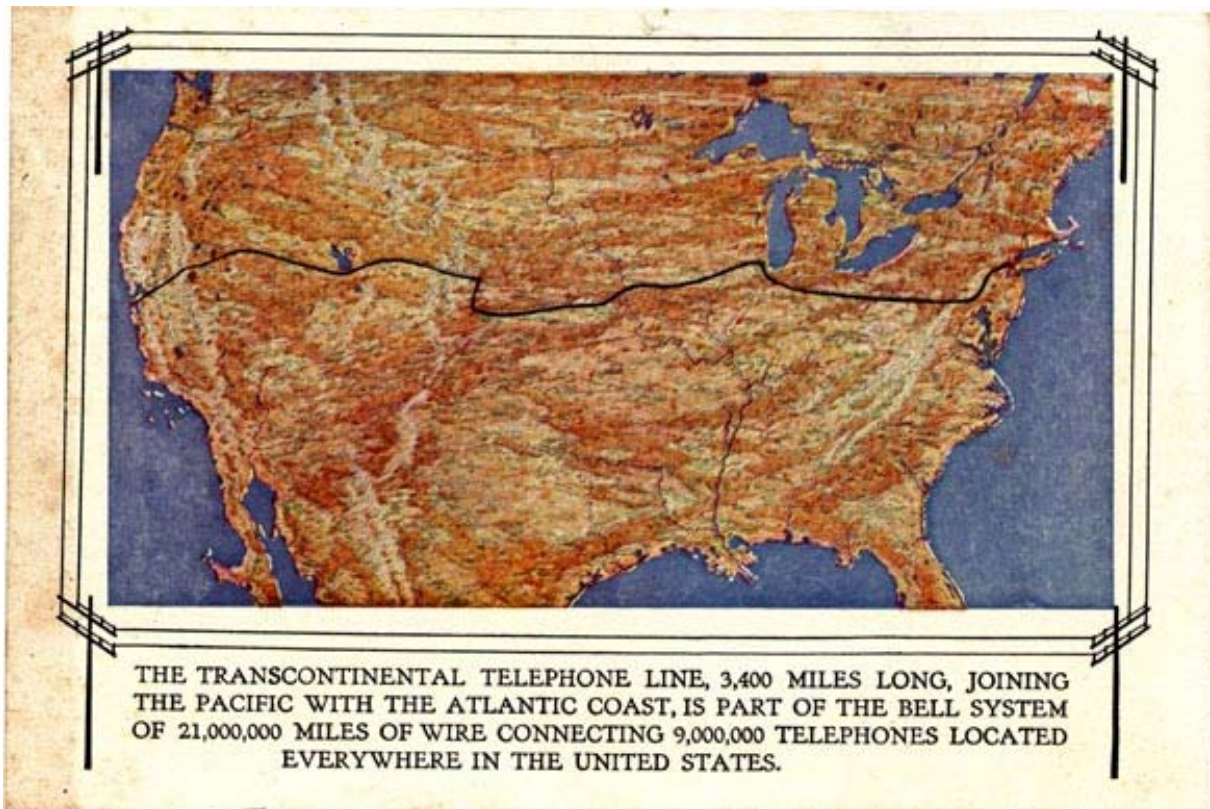
Most cell phone plans now include long distance calls. So as long as one stays within their allotted usage, a call from San Francisco to New York is effectively free of charge.

Telephone inventor Alexander Graham Bell started the event around 4:00 pm Eastern Standard Time by speaking from New York to his assistant Thomas A. Watson in San Francisco. The ceremony included phone speeches by officials, discussion of the lines' superb operation, as well as a brief talk between Vail and another person about the weather conditions in Georgia and California. Then, to help fill time before President Woodrow Wilson joined, Bell and

Watson were asked to recreate the first words transmitted by phone. Thomas Watson was pulled away from reporters in San Francisco and Alexander Graham Bell plugged in a reproduction of their circa 1876 telephone. Bell, with spectators laughing and applauding, uttered the words, "Mr. Watson, come here please, I want you" for a long distance call of 3,400 miles.

The crowd applauded. Dr. Watson replied, "It will take me five days to get there now!"

A short time later, President Woodrow Wilson congratulated everyone from a phone at the White House in Washington, D.C. saying, "It appeals to the imagination to speak across the continent."



Postcard from AT&T's exhibit at the 1915 Exposition

*Theodore N. Vail, President of AT&T, was recuperating from a leg injury on Jekyll Island, so instead of traveling to New York for the inauguration, Theodore Vail opted to stay in Georgia and participate in the event from there.*



*Left to right, Welles Bosworth, S. B. P. Trowbridge, J. P. Morgan, Jr., William Rockefeller, Theodore N. Vail*

The Telephone Review, a magazine printed in 1915 to commemorate the event, offers an account of the telephone conversation between President Wilson and Vail. Near the ceremony's end, according to the periodical, AT&T chief engineer John J. Carty in New York asked, "Is Mr. Vail there? Hello Jekyll Island." Carty, still speaking, proclaimed, "Mr. Vail has talked today from Jekyll Island up to New York and then across the continent, making a distance of 4,500 miles."

Another voice then interjected, "Hello, Mr. Vail."

Vail responded, "Who is this?"

"This is the President. I am glad to hear your voice. I have just been speaking across the continent this afternoon," announced President Woodrow Wilson.

Theodore Vail replied, "Oh, yes."

"Before I give up the telephone," continued President Wilson, "I wanted to extend my congratulations to you on the consummation of this remarkable work."

"Thank you," said Vail.

President Wilson commented, "I am very sorry to hear that you are sick."

"I am getting along very nicely. I am sort of a cripple, that is all," asserted Vail.

"I hope you will be well soon. Good-bye, Mr. Vail."

"Thank you, Good-bye, Mr. President."

## We Saved You a Seat!



We celebrated our hard-working Denver volunteers at a recent luncheon in their honor at the downtown Broker restaurant. From left to right: Andrew Cook, John Berquist, Ken Pratt, Executive Director Lisa Berquist, Jody Georgeson, Executive Secretary Renee Lang, Ron Swanson, Tom Scanlon, Herb Hackenburg, Jerry Wild, Carrie Cunningham and Dave Felice. Missing are Betty Vigil and Mike Nearing.

There's always room for one more. If you're interested in volunteering, please give us a call on 303-296-1221, or contact us at [telcomhist@aol.com](mailto:telcomhist@aol.com).

## What was happening . . .

### 100 years ago – 1914

- Advances in vacuum tube technology enabled engineers to begin developing carrier systems for wire circuits and radiotelephone systems.
- Congress passed the Clayton Anti-trust Act to supplement existing laws against unlawful restraints and monopolies.

### 75 years ago – 1939

- At the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco, the Bell System exhibited the Voder (Voice Operation Demonstrator), a Bell labs invention that demonstrated synthesized speech.
- Telephone cable pairs were used for a successful remote live television feed of a bicycle race held at Madison Square Garden.

### 50 years ago – 1964

- The first transcontinental Picturephone® call was made between the Bell System exhibit at the New York World's Fair and Disneyland, California.

- A call between President Lyndon B. Johnson and Japan's Premier Hayato Ikeda inaugurated service on the first cable between the U. S. and Japan.

## What Do THG Volunteers Do?

By Herb Hackenburg

Awhile back I made the 420 mile trip from Salina, Kansas, to Denver to visit the Telecommunications History Group and look for a place to live. It was a very successful visit. I found a place to live and ended up helping with the THG Open House. The Open House was really held to recruit new volunteers for the Telecommunications History Group. I got to conduct a tour of the THG museum and archive, which is one of my favorite things to do. The one question I got asked that I didn't have a good answer for was, "What do THG volunteers do?"

I was shocked at myself that I did not have a good answer to that very basic question. I gave myself my next assignment; to interview the volunteers working in the archive and find out what they were doing and write an article so both the readers and I would know what THG volunteers do.

**Ken Pratt** – Ken joined THG in 1995 and has probably processed more historic material than any other volunteer. Processing is entering a description and/or content of an item - an insulator, a document, or an 1890 IBEW union contract - into the THG data base, then preparing the item or document to be preserved and stored.

When I interrupted Ken for an interview, he was going through a box of newspaper clippings and items labeled "Other." The box contained material I was working on about ten years ago and these items didn't fit in our file system as it was set up at the time. Ken was rapidly distributing items into our newer, bigger and more well-organized filing system. He filed a booklet from the Sioux City Telephone Company, *Do's and Don'ts Telephone Tips*; and he decided to put "*Little Blue Book No. 1327*" in the very large file titled "Mountain Bell," as he was answering my questions..

Soon after Ken joined THG I received a frantic call from **Cynthia Hadsell**, a long-time THG member in Omaha who had helped write the history of Northwestern Bell. Cyndi and I managed to save 26 tons of historic Northwest Bell material that had been destined to be dumped.

The next Wednesday (THG volunteer day) Ken showed up and I took him to the mailroom and showed him all the pallets of Northwest Bell history. On the same floor was 18 tons of Mountain Bell history. I told Ken if he started the Northwest Bell stuff, I'd start with the Mountain Bell stuff. He said, "OK." Then he opened the first box of documents. It took him nearly 10 years, but Ken, with some help along the way, processed the entire Northwestern Bell collection.

**Betty Vigil** – "THG's Queen of Directories" joined THG in 1997. She processes every telephone directory that enters the THG archive. Currently, we have a deal with Dex One (the nation's largest directory publisher) to receive one copy of each telephone directory it publishes. As the books arrive, Betty inputs each information about each into THG's database, and shelves them appropriately. Later, the new books are sent to a bindery where they receive hard covers to protect them for decades.

Why fuss with a bunch of old phone books? According to Eleanor Gharries, one-time THG board member and head of the Denver Public Library's Western History

Department, phone books capture a highly detailed and accurate history of the locale and time they represent. A few examples. “Downwinders” suffering from cancer caused by the 1944 atom bomb tests in New Mexico have proof that they lived downwind of the tests by their listings in Mountain Bell phone books, and are eligible to receive compensation from the federal government. Want to know “Unsinkable Molly Brown’s” phone number? It’s in the book under her husband’s name. Then there is the Denver phone book that helped put a mass-murderer in prison for life. The book, now containing an evidence sticker, is back in the archive.

The THG archive contains more than 20,000 directories, ranging from 1879 to today, and from cities and towns in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

**Jerry Wild** — Jerry joined THG in 1993. One of my neighbors while I worked at Mountain Bell was Kenny Dunn, district plant manager. He told me that Jerry Wild was the smartest guy he ever hired. “Whenever we had a central office that just wouldn’t work right, we’d send Jerry to fix it. He’d go to the office, shoot the trouble, and have the damned thing up and running in 10-minutes to a couple of hours.”

Here’s the thing. Jerry does the exact same thing for the Telecommunications History Group. Modern archives simply could not operate without modern computers, networks, and software. Jerry spends most of his THG volunteer hours programming, reprogramming, fixing, installing, upgrading, THG’s computer system. Then there is THG’s high-speed black and white printer/copier/fax machine and our new color printer to tend.

When Jerry first came to THG, floppies were the in thing. And a three computer network was as big deal. I had brains enough to send Jerry to a three-day computer training class. Jerry had a young lady classmate who pretty much was raised with a computer. She taught Jerry the practical uses for the new computers and programs they were learning about in the class.

Jerry’s first network handled eight computers. Today, THG’s network will handle 20 machines and currently has 14 machines on line. And, the History Group recently came up with enough money to buy four brand new machines for Jerry to program.

**Ron Swanson** — Our “jack of all trades” joined THG in 2003. Ron’s Wednesday starts with a six-block walk to Denver’s main post office where he picks up the mail. If it’s donation time, hopefully there are a whole bunch of letters with nice checks enclosed. The mail may include a small box containing an operator’s charm bracelet, a few telephone penny post cards, or a retired lineman’s photograph of telephone line knocked down by an ice storm.

After helping fellow volunteer Betty Vigil by sorting the new directories by city and state, Ron may go the archive’s workshop where he is rebuilding a wooden telephone booth, or he might inventory telephone equipment in the THG warehouse — everything from insulators to PBX’s; lineman’s climber hooks to a test frame control panel for a crossbar switch. Ron’s years in the Plant Department has provided him with a “graduate degree” in old telephone equipment. And he hasn’t even started to inventory the scores of old telephones ranging from magneto to touchtone.

One of Ron’s more interesting jobs was keeping a working telegraph key working, in a display THG had in the Denver Public Library’s Colorado History section. We also had a display at the Molly Brown House, as part of their Titanic exhibit. Visitors could use the telegraph key to send an “SOS” just as the Titanics’ telegrapher had done after the



ship struck an iceberg. “Telegraph keys were built to take a beating. Ours was about worn out by the time the exhibit closed,” Ron said.

**Renee Lang** — Renee began volunteering at THG in 2002, while still a full-time Qwest employee. She’s THG’s secretary so she is both a volunteer and a staff member. One of her jobs is “interior decorator.” The Denver archive is sort of an “archive/museum” with scores of archive boxes full of processed historic material, photographs, books, posters, manuals, maps and other records, all of which has been entered into the THG database. In the THG archive, however, there are “nests” of telephone memorabilia, insulators, toys, old phones, even liquor bottles that look like old phones.

Renee and Jody are close friends. When the two are antique shopping, no telephone memorabilia is safe, from little telephone refrigerator magnets, to a miniature Hallmark Playschool phone pull toy Christmas tree ornament. They have yet to find a Bell System spittoon, however

Jody and Renee decided the History Group should be a part of this year’s Rocky Mountain Book Fair, which took place on a weekend in August. They had three tables and a glass showcase at the Fair, displaying old phone books, my book *Muttering Machines*, photographs, telephones, stock certificates, phone toys, insulators. “All the different items allowed us to talk about nearly everything we do at the archive,” Renee said. The two passed out hundreds of THG pamphlets and signed up some new members.

**Jody Georgeson** — Jody joined THG 1996. Jody and I are both retired executive directors of THG, and now we’re both volunteers. My original mission was to save as much of the phone company’s history as I could one way or another; get volunteers to process it: and organize a non-profit organization to get financing enough to sustain the archive.

When Jody became the THG executive director, THG was a very amateur outfit with a group of loyal old guys doing the best they could. Jody retired from U S West, and went back to school at Denver University for a graduate degree in Library Science and Archive Management.

Basically, Jody “professionalized” the THG archive operation. Acid and disorganization are the two main enemies of a healthy archive. Other enemies of historic papers are staples, paper clips, rubber bands, ball point pens, and sticky notes. Metal rusts; rubber rots; ball point pen ink is messy; and the sticky on the notes bleeds through the paper it’s stuck on—real bad on the back of a photograph.

Jody also designed work sheets the volunteers use to enter information into the database. After she retired from THG, Jody became a volunteer and keeps busy processing historic telephone material using the routines she designed. Her next project will be getting THG’s rather extensive (and growing) resource library reorganized.

**Dave Felice** — Dave has been around since 1990. He started with Mountain Bell in 1978, he was around for the beginning of U S West, he was around for the beginning of Qwest and he’s still around for Century Link. And all the time he’s been doing good things for THG.

Dave has been instrumental in all of the successive companies donating used equipment to non-profit organizations, including THG. As an active steward, Dave also provides an important link to our friends in the Communications Workers of America union.

Several of our volunteers weren't available to be interviewed, but also provide much appreciated time and expertise. They include **Jon Berquist, Carrie Cunningham, Andrew Cook, and Tom Scanlon.**



*We wish all of you a happy, peaceful and prosperous New Year!*



**THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS HISTORY GROUP, INC**