

"Carroll's Early Telephone History, Part II"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

Last week's column, presented the first half of a history of the telephone industry in Carroll written by Emma J. Grady in 1937. Her history continues with the development of telephone service and concludes with the state of the industry in 1937:

"The stability of Westminster as a good town in which to live is demonstrated by the succeeding generations of the first subscribers to the telephone service having remained there, and by the earlier business firms surviving the changes and the chances of the years. The First National Bank, the Union National Bank, the Farmers and Merchants Bank and the Westminster Savings Bank were among the first users. They all carry on with the assistance of their telephones in 1937. A fact that loudly bespeaks the stability of Carroll County. The newspaper that so stoutly championed the new industry, The Democratic Advocate, was one of the very first subscribers. Its name appears today in the Carroll County Directory of 1937-the Centennial Number. In accordance with the item appearing in the Advocate in 1884, a telephone was installed in the County Court House. A picture of that historical building adorns the cover of the Centennial Number of the telephone directory; the inside pages show that the County Officials now need 14 telephones to conduct the County's business. In the days of the first telephone construction in Carroll County, the American Sentinel, also a weekly publication of that time, kept its readers advised of progress. One item catches the eye because of the quaint place named: "The people of Double Pipe Creek are to have telephonic communication with the telegraph office at Bruceville." Miss Mary Bostwick Shellman, the first manager-operator of the new exchange, supplied some interesting items concerning the first telephone workers at Westminster. Miss Shellman remained in the service about six years. Miss Flora McNeil assisted her when she needed additional help. Harry Crouse, who still lives in Westminster, was at times a faithful assistant to Miss Shellman when need arose. One of Miss Shellman's cherished memories of her telephone days is of the visit of Dr. Bell, the inventor of the telephone, to the Westminster office. On that occasion she served him a luncheon. Several days later she received from the inventor a miniature wall telephone with a gold plated front and silver bells, mounted on a piece of jet. The diminutive receiver was also of black jet, and the cord of twisted gold. Miss Shellman still has this highly prized souvenir. Frank Frazier was lineman and night operator. When he needed help men were sent from Frederick or Baltimore. Harry Jangling [sic] succeeded Mr. Frazier as lineman when the latter was transferred to Waynesboro. Frank Rhodes often came from Frederick on inspection tours. By August 2, 1884, other points in Carroll County were enjoying telephone service. At Uniontown the subscribers were Devilbiss and Son, and O. M. Hiteshew. At Union Bridge, Thomas Jones, at Linwood, Joseph Englar. New subscribers in the County were being added daily. The telephone in Westminster was early recognized as a speedy medium for obtaining sports returns. In the latter part of August, 1884, a baseball game between the Frederick and the Westminster Clubs was played at Frederick. The citizens of Westminster were given reports of the game by innings, by arrangement of the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company. From a line at the baseball grounds the results of each inning were reported as soon as played. The score appeared on bulletins posted at the telephone office and at the Advocate Building. The Manager of the Telephone Company was thanked in the next issue of The Advocate. Later in the season a similar arrangement was made to report the progress of a game played in Westminster. Bulletins were posted at several points in town for the convenience of fans unable to attend the game. Westminster obtained connections to Baltimore through Frederick until March, 1885, when a direct line was completed. At that time plans were also made to build lines to Bruceville, Taneytown, and New Windsor. For more than a half a century Carroll County and the

telephone system have traveled hand-in-hand, cooperating in progress and expansion. Eight central offices are now in operation throughout the County. In alphabetical order they are: Hampstead, Mt. Airy, New Windsor, Silver Run, Sykesville, Taneytown, Union Bridge and Westminster. The Sykesville Offices serves parts of Carroll, Howard and Montgomery Counties. The Silver Run Office is well served and an unlimited market open for the disposal of produce. The Westminster Office now serves 1,386 telephones. The fact that daily calls number 4,518 on an average proves the usefulness of the service to the community. Mr. A. C. Allgire, Manager of the Westminster Telephone Office, states that when he entered the service there in 1903, only 198 telephones were working on the switchboard. When six of the subscribers ordered their service discontinued he thought it a pretty bad beginning and called on them to try to persuade them to retain it. Five of them decided that, after all, they really needed their telephones. Mr. Allgire has seen the greatest development in the history of Carroll County. The year following his arrival central offices were established in Hampstead, Taneytown, New Windsor and Union Bridge. All of these offices have enjoyed a steady growth.

Beginning with one operator, the force at Westminster has increased to 15, including the Chief Operator, Miss M. P. Oursler."

Although demand has greatly increased, technological improvements since 1937 eventually rendered the local switchboards and operators obsolete. The local pioneers have long since become a chapter in telephone history.

Photo caption: Mr. L. C. Card (right), Manager of the C. & P. Telephone Co. office in Westminster, presented the miniature telephone once owned by Mary B. Shellman, to Historical Society president Dr. Theodore M. Whitfield in July 1959. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, Gift of John Byers, 1959.