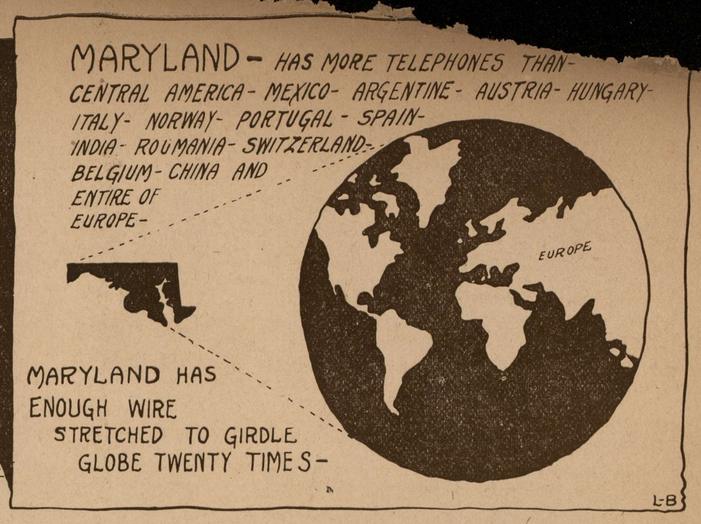
FIRST TELEPHONE IN COUNTY

INSTALLED IN LEE'S STORE, TOWSON IN 1879

HERE'S WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE



Telephone service in Baltimore county was first established thirty-nine years ago when an exchange was opened at Lutherville in September, 1885. Among the first subscribers were General Felix Agnus, Chattolanee Hotel, Harry Parr, Alexander Brown and other families in the Green Spring Valley.

In 1890 the second exchange established in Baltimore county was located at Mt. Washington. In 1900 there were approximately 75 telephones connected with the Lutherville exchange, and about 30 with the Mt. Washington. At first only a few lines were connected with these exchanges which were served by crude switchboards. There were no individual lines, every line serving from 8 to 16 parties. The telephones were also crude affairs, in fact were more of a novelty than of business and social use.

From this modest beginning developed the telephone system of Baltimore county. When telephone service was first introduced in Baltimore city in 1879, the County Commissioners of Baltimore county, Towsontown, visited Baltimore and asked Dr. Lyons, manager of the Telephone Company, to extend the telephone connection to Towsontown. Dr. Lyons informed the Commissioners that a telephone line from a transmission standpoint could not be used for a distance of 8 miles from Baltimore. Later other interviews between the Commissioners and Dr. Lyons took place, and finally a telegraph circuit was installed, the Towsontown end of the line being located at Lee's Agricultural and Implement Store, and the Baltimore station at the Telephone Company's central office in the old American Building. Messages received at either point were delivered by messenger at the rate of 25 cents for ten words and 2 cents for each additional word. This line remained in service until 1899 when the Tuxedo Central Office was opened and multi-party service established between Baltimore and Towsontown with stations enroute, one of which was located at Govanstown.

Baltimore county was one of the first counties in the country to have telephone service established. Growth was naturally slow at first. In 1900, fifteen years after the first installation, there were only 105 telephones in use. The expansion, however, has been enormous for the past twenty-four years. From two central offices and 105 stations in 1900, there are today eleven central offices and approximately 7700 telephones, or one telephone for every eight persons. Today the area served by the Towson exchange with a population of approximately 9300, has in use about 1400 telephones.

The telephone system of Baltimore county forms a part of the State-wide system conservatively estimated to be worth about $30,000,000, serving approximately 162,000 telephones in 91 cities, towns, hamlets and villages in an area of 9,941 square miles with an estimated population of 1,500,000. This system handles with 2200 operators about 300,000,000 originating calls annually, and on busy days approximately 250,000 hourly.

The telephone is the greatest means of person-to-person communication known to man. It makes it possible for a person to be in two places at one time—that is, stand in one place, throw the voice to a distant point, and get an instantaneous reply.

At first people did not depend on the telephone to save time in transacting business. In fact, it was a novelty, and but few people availed themselves of its use. However, it soon become recognized as a business medium.

The present day efficiency of telephone service cannot be compared with the first use of the telephone, but the history of the art of communication is no less interesting by reason of comparison.

John Mills in his book "Magic of Communication" tells in an interesting way the history of the telephone from its earliest beginning to the present time.

Before our earliest ancestors could communicate their thoughts and ideas they had to learn to talk. Spoken sounds came to be words and language began. In time men learned to write, and much later to print. When men could write, his words could be preserved. No longer was it necessary to be within sound of a man's voice to get his words. Written messages could be sent from one man to another. But written messages take time to write, and to send, and to be read.

What man has always needed is some method of communication that would enable his actual speech to be heard miles away and only by the particular person addressed. For thousands of years this was so impracticable that it was not even a dream.

After the discovery of electricity men learned how to make batteries, send currents of electricity through long wires. They learned about electromagnets which a current of electricity would operate. When the current flowed, the electromagnet would attract a little piece of iron, pulling it up sharply until it struck with a click.

The electromagnet and the battery could be far apart, with only wires to connect them. And with this idea the telegraph was born and for years it has permitted communication between persons widely separated. Of course, there has to be some agreement as to how the clicks shall stand for letters, and each word of a message has to be spelled out in dots and dashes according to a code.

And then in 1875 came a more marvelous discovery. Alexander Graham Bell, a teacher of elocution and a student of electricity, had the vision of a new machine which would carry not dots and dashes but the human voice. In the ear the tiny disc of the eardrum responds to a spoken word. Could he make a disc of iron catch this sound and send it electrically to another disc which would give it out again? In 1875, working with strips of clock springs, he built a transmitter which could send the feeble twang of a vibrating reed and a receiver which could reproduce sound.

This he called the "Harmonic Telegraph" by which he hoped to send several telegraph messages simultaneously over the same wire. It was while experimenting with this apparatus that he discovered the way to make a speaking telephone of which he had dreamed for years. But it required more than a year of further experimenting to make his instrument transmit an intelligible sentence.

"Watson, come here," he called into the instrument, and his assistant, listening intently at the other end of the line, bounded up the stairs from the basement shouting, "I hear you, I can hear the words."

Forty years later at the official opening of telephone service between New York and San Francisco they repeated their historic words. A model of the original instrument was used by Bell who spoke at New York while Watson responded from San Francisco. The first telephones were, of course, relatively rude, just as were the early models of the automobile and the airplane, so that this repetition of their conversation would have been impossible had it not been for other inventions, some of which will be described later.

At its time the invention was too wonderful for belief. Judges at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia almost passed it by. Perhaps they would have, if it had not been for Dom Pedro, Emperor of Brazil, who had known and admired Bell as a teacher of speech to deaf-mutes. He passed Bell's small exhibit just as the judges came along. He recognized him and spoke. Then Bell went into another room and spoke into his transfitter while Dom Pedro listened at the receiver and the judges watched. "My God—it talks," cried the emperor. What is the telephone? A marvelous device—it catches a spoken word and turns it like magic into something we cannot see or hear which speeds along the wires to another telephone and there the magic is undone and the hidden word comes forth. In the old fairy stories there was always an enchantment and then later a charm which broke the spell and freed a living person. Our modern fairy story is the story of electricity. The transmitter in your telephone set casts a spell upon each word it catches, sending it noiselessly away along the telephone wires, bearing its message from a far distant speaker.

What is the spoken word? It is a motion of the tiny particles or molecules which compose the air about us. But it is a particular kind of a motion which our ears can receive and our brains appreciate. It is stated by the voice of the person who is speaking. His breath and tongue and lip positions control it. As he changes these he changes the kind of motion which he gives to the air molecules. And so they produce a different motion of the delicate drum of the ear, of the bones and fibres within, and hence a different sound for the listener.

(Continued on Back Page)

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