

Telephone Co. Celebrates Its 60th Birthday

Modern Dial System Serves This Community

The Mt. Pulaski Telephone and Electric Company was originally incorporated on the 6th of May, 1901. H. S. Beckemeyer was the first president, Dr. J. W. Collins was the vice-president, and L. B. Collins was the secretary-treasurer. Fred G. Mayer was the first manager and served from the inception of the company until his retirement on the 31st day of December, 1945.

The first telephone office was in the Sefer building on the south side of the square and they moved to the west side of the square in 1906 on the property still owned by the company. In 1908 they had 532 subscribers. On January 1, 1961 there were 1065 subscribers.

The early system was what is known as a magneto system where you had to turn a crank on the side of the phone to contact the operator. The system was converted to what is known as common battery operation in March, 1941, and was converted to dial operation in September of 1959.

Incidentally, the dial plant is the most modern and up-to-date of its kind and is equipped for DDD, which means Direct Distance Dialing, which will go into effect as soon as the Illinois Bell Telephone Company converts its Decatur toll center to DDD. Sometime in 1962 subscribers in Mount Pulaski, Latham and Chestnut and the contiguous rural territory will be able to use Direct Distance Dialing.

The present Mount Pulaski telephone system has over 10 miles of underground cable and more than five million feet of wire in the cable. There are 138 miles of pole line with 630 miles of wire and in 1960 over one hundred thousand toll calls were made. In Mount Pulaski there are more than an average of 4,000 calls per day, both local and toll.

Employees of Company

When the system was converted to dial in September of 1959, Viola Drobisch had completed 40 years of service with the company; Frances Turner had completed 37 years of service; Norma Kautz had completed 12 years; Treva Bobell had 8 years; Annie Buckles, 4 years; Hilma DePoister 3 years; and Elwanda Drake, 2 years of service. Fred L. Mayer, the present manager, has been in the employ of the company 38 years. He was made manager Jan. 1, 1946. Harold Haynes has 15 years of service and Howard Scroggin has 14 years of service.

The Latham exchange was purchased in July of 1914. The first operators were Ruby Stennett and Hazel Turner. Ethel Turner started work in 1918 and continued until the dial system was installed. There are now 290 subscribers. In Latham there are 8,000 feet of cable and 56 miles of pole line with 242 miles of wire.

The Chestnut Exchange was purchased in 1911 and had 30 subscribers originally. Today there are over 180. The dial system here was also installed in 1952. In Chestnut there are 3000 feet of underground cable, 30 miles of pole line, with 117 miles of wire. The George Suedmeier family was the early operators. Mrs. Alta Abbott was the last operator.

The new dial building in Mount Pulaski was constructed in 1959 and is the most modern in every respect. It is fireproof and had an installation that controls the humidity inside the building. Everything has been done to make the present dial system in Mt. Pulaski, Latham and Chestnut the most modern, up-to-date system known to the industry today.

The preparations for a very elaborate Eighth Reunion were made for August 12, 1880, in Mt. Pulaski. All old settlers were considered anyone who had settled in Illinois before the year 1840.



MAYOR ELMER SCHAFFENACKER is shown making the first dial telephone call Monday morning, September 29, 1959 at 1:00 a.m. The publisher at least got his old rain hat into the picture to attain a small degree of notoriety.—Times-News Photo.



LAST OF THE "HELLO GIRLS" in an era of telephone service in Mount Pulaski, that began in 1901 and was replaced in 1959 with the dial system. Pictured are the operators whose cheery voices have been replaced by the robot that says,

"Sorry, you've either called the wrong number or the phone has been disconnected, etc." Left to right, are: Jane Kirby, Hilma DePoister, Viola Drobisch, Frances Turner, Treva Mayer, Norma Kautz, and Annie Buckles.—Times-News Photo.

DAYLIGHT ROBBERY OF FARMERS BANK WAS EXCITING EVENT

Employees Made To Lie On Floor. Capture Robber

(July 17, 1952)

Mount Pulaskians were thrown into startled excitement Tuesday morning about 11:45 when word spread over the city square that the Farmers Bank had just been held up.

Although the lone gunman, who held up the bank and made off with approximately \$3,000 in currency, was apprehended about an hour and a half following the robbery, as he left a cornfield on the Fred Boy farm a mile north of the city. He was identified as Harold Paneitz of Racine, Wisc., by Charles Fox of the Springfield FBI, as having served two terms at Joliet prison.

Paneitz entered the Farmers Bank and approached the front teller's window at which Harry Elliott was stationed. Laying down a white paper sack on the ledge, Paneitz pulled a revolver from it and pointed it at Elliott, demanding that he hand over the money from the drawer he was working at Harry did!

Others in the bank at the time were Austin Schaffnacker, cashier, who was waiting on Raymond Hahn; Dr. R. N. Hamm, who was endorsing checks at the

counter; George Volle, bank president who was working at his desk nearby and two bookkeepers. Harriet Schroth and Doris Damarin. With Volle, Schaffnacker, and Elliott stretched out on the floor of the president's office, the bookkeepers, Hahn and Hamm with their hands elevated the scene was set for the drama which was enacted by Mrs. Wilham Kautz.

Entering the bank to make a deposit, Mrs. Kautz thought for a second that they were playing games, but glancing to her left saw three men prone on the floor and Volle shaking his head at her in warning. Then as full realization of what she had walked into struck her, she started running from the bank. The holdup man ordered her to stop but she kept right on going. Paneitz knowing that she would spread the alarm, rushed out too, to make his escape. He headed north right behind Mrs. Kautz, who thought he was still after her and expected a have him shoot her down any second. She turned into the Clear shoe store 2 doors away and to her consternation saw three strange men in the front of that store, and at first she thought perhaps these were accomplices and were holding up the Clear store.

First Telephone Installed Here

(Jan. 31, 1935)

From gossip we picked up in a local store last week we learned that the first telephone to put in an appearance in Mt. Pulaski was installed in the S. L. Beidler Drug Store.

The event was one of the most talked of happenings that the town had ever experienced. Folks stood around and marveled at the fact that they were hearing a voice from another town.

As one old fellow remarked when he came into the store and Mr. Beidler was talking over the phone: "What are ye doin' Sam?"

"Why, I'm talking to Lincoln," replied Mr. Beidler.

"You're a darned liar," replied the questioner.

Bankers and other prominent citizens of this community recall the days when they were kids and used to make spending money by taking messages or going after people to come down to the store to talk on the "telephone"! And when a fellow called his girl it was just too bad for him and it took a lot of courage to date her up with half the town listening in from the sidelines.

One incident of the early telephone days was the contrivance Dr. Popelle had, connecting his office and house. It was a wire with a can or box on each end with a racket making device attached so that if the doctor was at home his clients could twist the sound making contraption and a clatter would be heard at the house and Doc knew he had a patient on the other end of the line.

Frank Capps, who later became an assistant to Edison in the developing of the phonograph, and is still prominent in this sort of work, figured out a way in the early days while here, how to throw a wire over the connecting line between here and Lincoln and with a receiver, listen in.

So, the novelty of yesterday is the modern convenience of today in most homes, and has been one of man's greatest friends and a time saving asset to business.

What? No Telephone Poles

One of the signs that Mount Pulaski has gone modernistic at least around the square, was the discovery of a poster of official note made last week when he attempted to locate a light pole or telephone pole upon which to make his posting. He couldn't find one.

We are happy to state that there are no telephone poles and wires hampering the view and scenery around the square, and the 16 light standards are of granite, with all wire under seven inches of concrete.

There are no wooden structures around the square so no unsightly billboards spoil the looks of the business section.

LATHAM - CHESTNUT INSTALL DIAL PHONES

(Sept. 11, 1952)

Telephone history was made in Latham and Chestnut last night at 8 o'clock CST when Mayor Everett Purcell of Latham, placed a call to Clifford Leimbach, of Chestnut, cashier of the Chestnut Bank, on the new dial system which was put into operation for the first time.

First Twins Born Here, 1850

The thought of the Sil-tenial in Mount Pulaski in 1961 brings to mind a great many interesting things concerning the 125 years since the city was founded in 1836.

One of these is about the parents of the first twins born in Mount Pulaski. Note the following:

"In Sodus Point, Wayne County, New York, on Sept. 20, 1828, Ruth A. Bushell was born. In the fall of 1836 she came with her parents and settled near Waynesville, Ill., where her father operated a saw mill, grist mill and a carding machine. After the death of her father the family moved to Mt. Pulaski in 1849. She taught school for three years, the old school house standing on the slope on the site of the first house south of the Dick Shull Motor Co.

On Oct. 5, 1853, she was united in marriage with William LeMaster, and to this union nine children were born, four dying in infancy. Her husband died on June 16, 1887, and Mrs. LeMaster died March 7, 1912, in the home of her daughter, Mrs. May O'Connor.

It was to this union that in the days of 100 years ago the first pair of twins were born in Mt. Pulaski. The best known members of the LeMaster family in after years were the late Mrs. May O'Connor, wife of Al O'Connor, and Mrs. Maude Huck, wife of George A. Huck. The only descendant left in Mt. Pulaski is a granddaughter Lois, wife of Wilford K. Scroggin, Sr.

Mount Pulaski Had Race Track Back In 1890's

Many youngsters of the last three generations may not have heard their fathers and mothers tell about a race track in 1890's in the northeast corner of Mount Pulaski. The track was located east of Vine street and between the home of Mr. and Mrs. Karl Dittus and the present State Route 121 curve. The half-mile track extended east and was used primarily to train horses. Small grain was grown each season on the inside of the track.

In those days the Mount Pulaski Fire Department trained their members on that track, and then went on to gain glory at the Illinois State Firemen's Association Tournaments by becoming state champions.

There was an amphitheatre along the south side of the track, but it was not large enough to hold a big crowd. Some few events took place at the track, but not like the big ones held on the public square. This little article may recall to memory to many Mount Pulaskians that the city, before the days of the automobiles, had a race track, but not a ground to hold county fairs or other big events.