

These stories are from the Telephone Pioneer Bulletin which was published in the 1950's by its editor Jerome L. Delvin.

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75th. Anniversary of the Telephone in Arizona

75 years ago, on April 1, 1881 the first telephone exchange in Arizona was established at Tucson.

Tucson began to take on a new look about this time. The previous year, the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks were laid into town from the west and the first train arrived, making rail connections with the coast via Yuma. This was the first railroad link with the outside world and was the beginning of the end of the stagecoach era in these parts.

Suppose you have just arrived in Tucson on the overland stage, let's get an on-the-spot account of what you would have experienced at this time. One Mr. Banes , an Army telegraph operator who just arrived by stage from points east, gives us a little 1880 Tucson atmosphere for our story.

He says: "Half the town is out to see us arrive on the "Butterfield Overland Stage." To an easterner who has just rolled into town, this is a sorry-looking little Mexican village with narrow, crooked streets lined with one-story houses built of sun-dried adobe bricks with mostly dirt floors and dirt roofs. There is but one two-story business building "The Palace Hotel" and two main restaurants, the "Shoo Fly" and the "Can Can."

"It looks like every other business on the main street is a saloon each filled white teamsters, bull-whackers, soldiers, army officers, miners, Mexicans, Indians and common, ordinary citizens. Nearly everyone is armed with a gun or a knife. The gambling games are running steadily. They run twenty-four hours around the clock. You can have your choice of faro, cut-poker, keno, roulette, monte bank or just straight poker.

"There goes that big six-hours "Concord" stage tearing out through the narrow, alley-like streets hellbent for Maricopa Wells, a 24-hour run. Look at those huge freight wagons drawn by eight and ten yoke of oxen or as many mules . They are slowly plodding along to the accompaniment of jingling bells. and cracking whips and many oaths.

"The streets and building are filled with every race and color, red, white, black. Practically everyone is talking Spanish.

"Why am I here? The Army sent me out here to replace another operator. I'm under orders to report by wire to San Diego on arrival at Tucson. The military telegraph line is the one link that

keeps the natives in touch with civilization. The office is a busy place and it takes two operators to handle the business. The receipts, at the low government rate of a cent a word for five hundred miles, averages fifteen hundred dollars a month. Official business, mostly Army messages, go free. Mails are very slow, hence everyone uses the wire whenever they can.

Mr. Barnes goes on to relate in his book, *Apaches and Longhorns* by Will C. Barnes: "The wonder of the age to the Apaches, however, was the telephone. Late in 1880, what I always believed to be the first 'phones in Arizona Territory were brought there by Robert C. Lord, one of the military telegraph operators fresh from Washington. He put one set on the telegraph line at the Camp Thomas and another at San Carlos. Everything considered, they worked very well indeed. To the Indians, they were the most mysterious things imaginable. I was at Camp (Fort) Thomas at the time, examining the wire. The operator got an Apache in the Thomas office and had his squaw come in to the San Carlos office and talk to him. Such shrieks of astonishment were never before heard. They would talk a little, then drop the receiver and tear out of the door hoping to catch the other person just outside the building. They called the telegraph operator "baish nalsuse nantan" ("baish", iron; "nalsuse," paper; "nantan" chief) - "The Iron Paper Chief." (Ed. Note: I wonder if the above mentioned Robert C. Lord was any relation to Charles H. Lord, postmaster of Tucson and head of the first telephone company there in 1881. Trying to get historical telephone fact on Arizona together is like putting a jigsaw puzzle together. You find pieces of information here, there and everywhere. Someday I hope a lot of these notes I pick up will eventually give us a good historical record of the telephone in Arizona. If you have any of the pieces, no matter how small, be sure and put me in on them.)

1881 - Tucson

Our Bell System Telephone Almanac lists the first telephone exchanges in the United States and shows the first exchange at Tucson on April 1, 1881. But an editorial from the Tucson Weekly Star on March 10, 1881 says: "In order to be up with the progressive spirit of the times, the Star's editorial rooms have been put in telephonic communication with the telegraph office. We take this occasion to caution the operator that we won't stand and backtalk whenever it becomes our painful duty to admonish him. The telephone has become a necessity of modern civilization = almost as great a convenience, in fact, as its elder brother, the telegraph. A few years hence, we shall find ourselves wondering how we managed to get along without this marvelous little contrivance of metallic diaphragms and polished mahogany, as we now wonder how we ever contrived to make life endurable without the lucifer match, the sewing machine and a thousand other conveniences that modern ingenuity has contrived to smooth our rugged pathway through this vale of tears".

Charles H. Lord was president of this first telephone company called the Arizona Telephone Company. Mr. Lord also being the postmaster, it is believed that telephone office was in the postoffice and stage station on Congress Street opposite the intersection of Warner Street.

This same year, it is noted that Tucson had six schools with an attendance of over 800.. The city waterworks were nearing completion; and the street railway and gas works were under construction,

1888 - Tucson

This year the telephone office was moved to the "Tower Building" by Charles G. Hoff, owner , The exchange was installed on the second floor of this building Monte Mansfield and Stanley Kitt reminiscing; of the introduction of the telephone to Tucson tells the following about the first night telephone service: "if the night operator did not wake up when the phone bell was ringing, someone who happened by would start throwing rocks through the upstairs window. If the bell stopped ringing, they knew they had scored a hit and that the night operator (a man) had wakened to answer the incoming call. If no one was around and the night operator didn't wake up, then the bell went on ringing until the caller would just become tired of turning the bell crank on the side of the oak box housing his magneto type wall telephone and give up trying to get the operator."

1894 - Tucson

The telephone company owned by Hoff in 1888 was purchased by H. W. Hinchcliff at this time and was called the Arizona Telephone and Telegraph Company.

1896 - Tucson

The Sunset Telephone and Telegraph Company with headquarters in California owned the local telephone company this year and moved to quarter on the second floor of the Radulovick Building at Stone and Congress. According to a statement at this time by Charles G. Hoff, then manager: "In the matter of telephone communications, Arizona is not a whit behind the rest of the world. There are about 150 subscribers in Tucson and the central office is kept constantly busy answering calls."

1902 - Tucson

The first long distance wire was strung from Tucson to Nogales.

1904 - Tucson

The infant telephone business was having growing pains at this time. The Telephones were few and far between. The long distance lines between various communities were similar in construction to that of the towns. Many circuits were single wire grounded circuits and mostly

of iron wire so that the range of transmission was limited. A number of lines between various towns and districts were in such bad condition that service was unreliable. The result was that while telephone service was supposed to exist between a large number of cities and towns in the State, it was really confined to a limited number of low standard services as judged by the standard of service which was given at that time in other states. As a result, the Sunset Company this year sold their various holdings back to Hinchcliffe from whom they had originally purchased the telephone company at Tucson. In order to get out from under the business in Arizona, they practically gave the company to Hinchcliffe for little or nothing. The new company was then organized as the Consolidated Telephone, Telegraph and Electric Company with the general offices for the state at Tucson. For a few years Hinchcliffe was just a jump ahead of the sheriff - lots of maintenance and little profit to pay the bills.

1906 - Tucson

Mrs. Jessie Lohse now living in Tucson was sent to Tucson as an operator in 1906 to help organize the switchboard operations. She was Miss Jessie Anderson, Chief Operator, when she started to work in the latter part of 1906 and was with the Company until October 1, 1907. At this time, Hinchcliffe had a Mr. Snider as Manager and a Mr. Summers as Chief Auditor.

1908 - Tucson

By this time the company had moved to the upper floor of the Reibel Building at Scott and Congress where it remained for the next nine years. A new number 10 Western Electric switchboard was added.

1911 - Tucson

From 1904 until 1911 this new company slowly built more lines and exchanges and purchased a few others. To do this, new people came into the picture. Some with telephone experience from other telephone companies, some with business and building know-how and others with new capital to invest. One such person was Epes Randolph who was also connected with the Southern Pacific Railroad with his office at Tucson, and who helped to build the Southern Pacific from Nogales to Mexico City. This year the telephone company again reorganized as the Arizona Telephone and Telegraph Company with the following heads: Epes Randolph - President, C. W. Hinchcliffe - Vice President and General Manager, J. H. McDonald - Auditor, E. J. Anderson - Plant Superintendent and E. T. Wright - Commercial Supervisor. No traffic head is listed in the 1912 directory. A telephone line was completed this year to the coast connection with the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company. A line was also connected later this same year to El Paso and points east. The Tri-state Telephone and Telegraph Company built and owned the line from Benson to El Paso.

1912 - Tucson

The Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Company purchased the Arizona Company at Tucson together with all its holdings in the State.

1915 - Tucson

Considerable underground conduit was constructed in order to remove the heavy pole from the main streets.

1917 - Tucson

The office was move to its present location at 124 East Pennington St.