

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

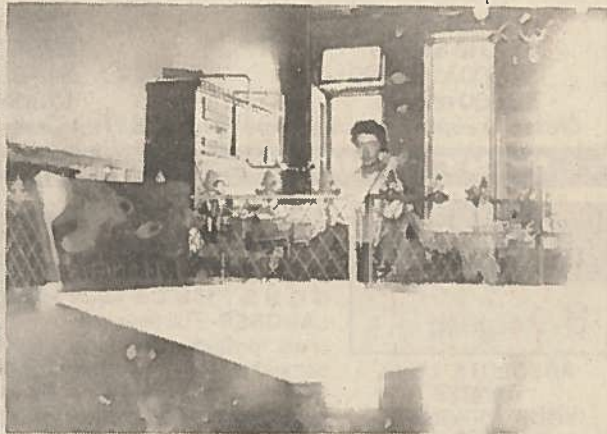
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## TELEPHONIC COMMUNICATION



The United States Post Office will soon be issuing a stamp relating to the first transcontinental telephone line. In response to this, John Dale, Albion Postmaster, has asked that some facet of local telephone history be the subject in this column.

"With the invention of the telephone came the associated problem of interconnecting an ever increasing number of subscribers and the related problem of transmitting over ever long lines - as lines reached out further and further, signals became weaker and weaker. After much research and many experiments the first transcontinental line was opened and the first call made on January 25, 1915 by Alexander Graham Bell. Mr. Bell was in New York City and phoned Mr. Watson who was in San Francisco. The first conversation was a duplication of the very first phone call: "Watson, come here, I need you."

Before we got to this point, telephonic communication was very limited. The 1905 Souvenir Book of Albion has a number of advertisers listing two phones. It seems there was the Bell Phone Co. and the Home Phone Co. The two telephone companies were not inner connected so you had to have two telephones in order to make or get all the calls you may have desired.

Our two pictures date to around the turn of the century. They both show Anna T. Hughes in the old telephone building on East Bank St. in Albion. I first find her in the 1903 Orleans County Directory listed as a telephone operator. The 1911 directory lists her as "Chief Operator New York Telephone Co." The 1915 directory lists her as "Cashier N.Y. Tel. Co." Her name does not appear in a directory after this period of time.

Customers would have heard her say "number please". The customer replied with the telephone number of the person they wanted to call and the operator or "Central" rang the phone and made the connection at the switch board. You will note here the switch board unit in each photo with the protruding mouth piece the operator spoke into.

I know my grandparents on the Gaines Basin Road had a phone as early as 1906. It was the only one in the entire neighborhood for many years and was often used by the neighbors as well for incoming and outgoing calls. Dial phones did not come into use in our area until the early 1960's.

However, the dial phone idea is an old one. The dial phone was invented by Almon B. Strowger back in the 1880's for which he was issued a patent in the year 1891. The first dials to be used in a public exchange were installed in Albion, N.Y. in 1896. These were rather large and cumbersome in nature. "The equipment had flanged dials and was used until 1898 when finger holes in the same locations replaced the flanges." The dial system was short-lived in Albion and was soon replaced with the more standard apparatus of the era which is shown in the pictures. In 1898 there were only 111 telephones in Orleans County. Incidentally, when these pictures were taken Anna Hughes was the only operator at the Albion Exchange.

Imagine the astonishment of those people back then if they could see us driving around today talking on car phones. An extension of this article and pictures will be on easel display in the lobby of the Albion Post Office beginning Wednesday, March 25.