

TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION

BY C. W. LATTIN
Orleans County Historian

3-4-10

Shown in our photo is Leona Haines of Kendall — a telephone operator at her switchboard. In rural areas, the telephone company switchboard may well have been located in the operator's residence, as seen here in the 1920s.

From the 1880s to the 1960s, before dial telephones became common, all calls went directly through the operator. Upon lifting the receiver, the operator stated in a friendly, warm voice, "Number please." There was an element of the human connection with each call. The operator knew the customers by name and gave those she knew personally some extra assistance or conversation.

Now it seems every time you make a call, it's like you are working for the phone company, because of all the buttons you sometimes have to push. Not so years ago. My grandmother Lattin was blind in her later years, therefore when she wanted to know what time it was she'd call "central" on her candlestick phone to inquire. The operators in the Albion office were always more than courteous.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

party line. People into gossip were always ready to listen in frequently when the neighbors got a call. Naturally, when the neighbors were on the phone you couldn't call out.

I was in high school when we got dial phones in the Albion area in the early 1960s. I distinctly remember a school assembly when a representative from the phone company was present to explain to all the students how the new dial system would work.

I recall in the early dial days it wasn't 589- but rather LT 9 for Albion. In Waterport, it was MU 2 rather than 682, and in Holley it was NE 8 instead of 638.

In my own lifetime I've gone from "number please" to dial, to touch tone, and now cell. It's invasive but it's also very convenient.

Do I want to go back to the good old days? Not really. Of course back then we didn't miss what we never had.

In truth, I'd sure miss not having a cell phone. Wouldn't my grandparents, who died more than 60 years ago, just be astonished that you could carry a wireless telephone in your pocket and make calls anywhere.

Directory, I can find my grandfather's name: NA Lattin Gaines Basin Rd. 818-F-4.

There were, of course, no private lines in those days. Instead you were on a party line. When your phone rang, it might be two long rings and a short ring. That same ring could also be heard in everyone else's residence, on your party line. Likewise, when you heard three short rings you knew not to answer because that was the neighbor next door.

Conceivably there were up to eight residences in a neighborhood on the same

Bethinking of Olde Orleans

Vol. XXXI, No. 9

The name "central" was used in describing the operator.

According to my father, his parents had a telephone as early as 1906. It was the only one in the neighborhood for years.

In a 1915 Bell Telephone