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Story of the Welland County Telephone Company ,as related by C.N.Glenny, Fort Erie, Ont.

I was born at Cayuga ,Ont. and when I was about a year old my parents moved to a farm of seventy-five acres,located about three miles east of the village of Stevensville, and about six miles west of Fort Erie , and about five miles north east of Ridgeway.

My father did not do much farming, as he was mechanically inclined, having worked as a Blacksmith for a Gypsum Mines Company near Cayuga for nine years previous to moving to the above mentioned farm.

He built a blacksmith shop at the farm and did work for the farmers in that section, mostly in the winter months. One of the major projects which he worked at in the shop was the making of large numbers of Post Hole Augers during the winter months and at other times as the demand increased. This was an auger which he had invented that had a hollow stem which automatically opened when the auger was to be lifted. This allowed the air to pass down the stem to fill the space underneath the load of dirt , so that the auger could be lifted without contending with the suction. Beside this work my Father did various kinds of contract work, home building Bridge building ,etc.

I started going to a country school about a mile from my home(School Section number seven, Bertie, Township) in 1887, when I was five years old. As I got a little older I began helping my Father in the shop after school and when he was away doing other work I began to tinker at projects of my own. When I got a little older, one of my greatest pleasures was hunting and trapping. Strange to say for the last fifty years I have had no desire for any such sport except fishing. I do not think I have shot off a gun during that period.

The township lot in which our farm was located was 100 acres, and as our farm was seventy-five acres this left a corner at the back of the lot of twenty-five acres and on this plot , a lady Mrs. Henry Wrench lived with a daughter and a son who was about my age, his name was also Henry .

We had a few cows, as did Mrs Wrench, and it was Henry's and my job to bring in the cows toward evening , so that we often met at the boundary fence and talked sometimes much longer than our mothers thought we should, and the consequences was often a scolding from each of our mothers.

Like a good many boys, we had a great many plans and dreams to talk over, one of these plans which we talked over very often was, how would it be possible to get a couple of telephones so that we would be able to talk to each other at other times, than when we met at the back fence or the few times when we had a chance at school. At that time telephones were still quite a novelty and the Magazines carried ads telling how you could win a telephone set or how you could earn one by selling subscriptions to various periodicals.

At this time we were about eleven years old and we thought that we could sell subscriptions enough to get two sets of telephones and then if we could manage some way to get a ~~few~~ mile of wire , we could have a telephone line.

I forgot to mention that Henry had two older brothers who had gone to California some years before and were working at carpentry work

the wires. We had no insulators so we trimmed down the top of the poles and then got a number of the old fashioned heavy pop bottles . By tying a string around the bottle soaked in kerosene, then lighting it , the bottle would snap off at that point. These were slipped over the top of the pole and the wire tied to the neck of the bottle.

We just used one wire with each instrument grounded on one side. This worked very well and we were soon on the way to becoming Telegraph Operators.

Many happy evenings were spent in sending messages back and forth and it was a great source of interest to the young people in the neighborhood who were dropping in at one place or the other very often. Many other young people got interested in learning to send and receive messages and soon they persuaded their parents to get instruments and attach on to the original line. It must be remembered that in those days there were no cars, radios, practically no phones in the country, no movies or television, so that all amusements had to be provided by the young people themselves, by having parties at each other's homes, etc.

The first neighbors to join onto the original line were A. Storm's family where there were ~~five~~ children , two boys and two girls, Peter Storm was the older brother and later he took quite an active part in helping to take care of the lines. Before the Storm family came on , Henry Wrench and I found some used receivers in Buffalo which had been discarded by the Police Department when they were making some changes in their private system. As we had thought the telegraph instruments were a little slow we started to use the phone receivers by making the calls by the telegraph instruments and then using a switch to cut out the telegraph and start to talk by speaking first into the receiver then putting it to the ear to listen. It is rather amazing how clear it seemed to sound with no transmitter. This was about 1896. By this time I was getting to be quite a blacksmith , so I decided to try and make up a small walnut box with a hook for the receiver and in the form of a switch so that when the telegraph call was completed we just lifted the receiver and started to talk. As others wanted to come on the line I would make more of these ~~boxes~~ boxes. The next to come on was the Nicholis Cline Family. Then Josiah Winger. Finally we got along until we reached the Village of Stevensville. The batteries we ~~##~~ used were the wet batteries in glass jars, about one gallon, containing a zinc crow foot, copper , and blue stone solution.

As the line had extended it was no longer possible to run along fence lines so it became necessary to get some poles . The easiest to obtain at that time were tamarack poles , so that the line was jokingly called the tamarack line.

Along about the time our line arrived in Stevensville, there was feeling growing throughout the Country, both in Canada and the United States, toward a more general telephone service especially in the country districts.

About the beginning of the century I began helping my Father in his building business and as most of his work was in Bridgeburg (later Fort Erie) I spent about five years boarding in Bridgeburg and working at building homes, During this time more farmers came on to our line from Stevensville south west ward. It was during this time that a representative of the Century Telephone Co.

The desire had been steadily growing in the rural districts of Welland County for some form of telephone service, so that when Mr. Hoover came to interview the members of the Farmer's Mutual group about enlarging their horizon of telephone service, most of them became quite enthusiastic about it. There were one or two who were quite opposed to it however and felt that things were very satisfactory as they were. However the majority prevailed, and in the latter part of 1905 it was decided to apply for a Charter. My father had told me of the discussions which were going on, and as I was planning on getting married and living in Bridgeburg, I was naturally pleased that there was some prospect of having telephone service with my old home and the district around there, so I encouraged the idea. In December, 1905, a final meeting was held and the Welland County Telephone Company was organized, and a Charter was applied for.

The Provisional Directors were as follows. John Pirson, Charles Sauer, Sidney Tripp Peter A Storm, Thomas W. Glenny, William Robinson, and C.N. Glenny. I might say here, that I am the only person still living of this group.

As it was not customary at that time to carry on much carpentry work or building in the winter time, I was asked to start out selling stock and signing up new subscribers for this new company. I am not sure of the number, but I think that soon after the Charter was granted, we had over three hundred applications for service, and quite a substantial amount of stock sold. I have often thought afterwards that it was rather surprising that very few people seemed to be concerned as to any profits to be made in this venture, and I made no promises or estimates as to the earnings which might be made.

When the Charter was granted, a general shareholder's meeting was held April first 1906., and the following Directors were elected from the various shareholders whom I had contacted.

Chas. E Steele,	Port Colborne	President.
F.W. James	Bridgeburg	General Manager
A.H. Ward	"	Treasurer
J.R. Tuck	Port Colborne	Director
Sidney Tripp	Stevensville	"
John Young	Ridgeway	"
Paul Winger	Ridgeway	"
E. Sowersby	Fort Erie	"
George H. Pettit	Welland	"
Menno House	Bridgeburg	Secretary
C.N. Glenny	"	Superintendent

April 14th 1906 . The Port Colborne Franchise was acquired from Chas. Steele and J.R. Tuck. for the sum of \$400.00 and suitable by-law was drawn up covering same. The rates established at this time was \$ 15.00 per annum for single line and \$10.00 for rural party line.

Note- # 12 soft steel galvanized wire at that time cost \$ 2.67 per Cwt. present price \$ 12.54 per Cwt.

A Shareholders meeting was held, January 9th at which meeting, the following were elected as Directors. and Officers.

George H. Pettit	Welland	President.
F.W. James	Bridgeburg	General Manager

I believe that all of this Board of Directors have passed on.

During 1906, materials were got together and construction was started on a line from Stevensville to Ridgeway, which was about five miles south from Stevensville. An office had been established at the residence of Mr. James Tubby in Stevensville and when the line reached Ridgeway that summer, a central office was established in the residence of Mr. Thom, south of the Canadian National Railway. Some local phones were installed in and around Ridgeway during that fall and winter and in the spring of 1907 a start was made on a trunk line from Stevensville to Bridgeburg, about ten miles. Ten pin cross arms were used on this line, part for local lines and part for # trunk lines. I might mention here that in 1907 there was a quite severe depression and we were continually beseiged by men looking for work. I recall one man in particular who came along and would not take no for an answer. He had been a Pullman Car finisher in a plant in Buffalo and his hands were very soft, as he had not done any kind of work for a good while, which would have been nearly as hard work as we had to offer. I tried to persuade him that he could not stand the kind of work which we had. The steel bars we used were one and one eighth steel about nine feet long. He said that he must get a job as he had a wife and two children and he insisted on starting at once. The next morning the palms of his hands were like raw beef steak and he had leather mits and pads of cotton batten inside to try and ease the pain. I told him he should go home but he insisted on working. I gave him the easiest work we had to offer so that in a few days his hands began to heal, he worked with us until the line was about into Bridgeburg and then he came one morning and said he had been called back to work on his old job and he was very happy but also very happy that he had been able to work for us. I am convinced that his case would stand out among thousands according to present day conditions. In those days men did not think anything of walking five or six miles to get to work at seven A.M. and work till six.

We arrived with our line in Bridgeburg about the first of September, and established a Central Office in the store of Menno House and his daughter Mabel was the first operator. We immediately started building local lines and by the end of the year we had nearly 300 phones connected up, including Stevensville and Ridgeway, exchanges.

In the meantime we had established a long distance connection with the Frontier Telephone Company in Buffalo by means of a submarine cable across the Niagara River from Bridgeburg to Black Rock or north Buffalo. The Officers of the Frontier Company at that time were Mr. B. C. Hubbell, President, and Mr. G. Barrett Rich, General Manager.

This long distance connection with New York State continued until the Frontier Company was merged into the New York Telephone Company about 1916 after which we a long distance connection over the Bell Company's lines.

Shortly after the lines were built into Bridgeburg an office was opened in the Anglo American Hotel at Fort Erie. This Hotel was owned by Mr. Wm. Hunt and the operator was Miss Annie McCosh who later became Mrs. Hunt. Lines were extended along the north shore of Lake Erie and a great many Americans subscribed for phones, they being mostly summer residents. They were the source of a large proportion of the Toll Business especially to the United States.

Many phones were connected up in Crystal Beach and along the Lake Shore to-