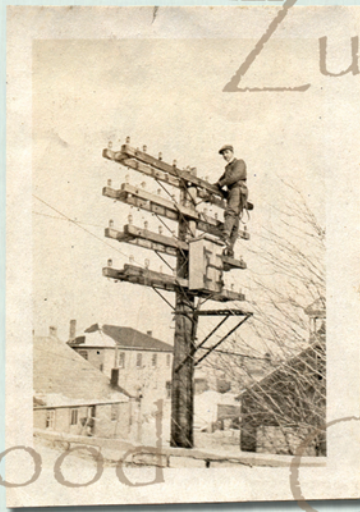


Connecting Our Communities



100 Years - A History of Hay Communications

Written by Pat and Max Morden



Dashwood Grand Bend

This Indenture

made the *Seuth* day of *July* *eleven*
in the year of our Lord one thousand ~~eight~~ ^{nine} hundred and ~~ninety~~

Between *Edmund Feller, of the*
Village of Zurich in the
County of Huron Conveyance,
of the first part.



"Bobby" Willert, left and Irvine McIsaac working the Dashwood telephone switchboard in 1915. The switchboard was located in the front part of Tieman's Furniture Store.

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Since even before the official formation of the Hay Municipal Telephone System in 1911, “the telephone company”, as it’s affectionately known, has had a profound impact on the economic and social development of the local communities in which it operates. Whether enabling community events, helping growing businesses or providing life line links to its members; our local communities would not look as they do today without the ongoing involvement of the telephone company.

And just as the communities would not be the same, Hay Communications Co-operative Limited would not look the same and would perhaps not exist but for the dedication and foresight of its founders and all those people that have supported the company throughout the past 100 years. People are the difference that ensures the success of this company. The customers and members of the co-operative that support us through the purchase of both traditional services and newly launched services are the reason we exist and the life blood of this company.

The originating owners of the telephone system, the municipal councilors, the members of the boards of directors and the employees all firmly believe that we can provide service that is “better than Bell” and that our family, friends and neighbours deserve nothing less. It is this principle that has guided major strategic decisions within this company since its inception and continues to guide our operations on a daily basis.

It has only been my pleasure to serve as the General Manager of Hay Communications since 2004, a mere 7 years out of the century of service. I am awed on a regular basis by the innovation and dedication of the employees and the support of the company by the wider Hay Communications community. I hope that you enjoy this reflection of the past 100 years of service and join us throughout 2011 as we look both to our past, and forward with anticipation to the challenges that the future holds.



Angela Schneider, General Manager

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the efforts of:

Pat and Max Morden of Morden Communications who sifted through an incredible amount of information from our archives and provided a story that was interesting to read.

All of the staff at Hay Communications who participated in interviews, helped identify people in photos, check facts and edit content.

The Board of Directors of Hay Communications for supporting the production of this book.

Bill Wagner who had the foresight to coordinate the compilation of formal archives from existing minutes, documents and photos.

Hay Communications Co-operative Limited also gratefully acknowledges the people in the community who contributed their time and knowledge to help compile this history of how the “Telephone Company” evolved over the past 100 years.

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Jim Hoffman

Cliff & Doris Penhale

Herb Klopp

Laurene Zehr

“Connecting Our Communities”

Researched and Written by Pat & Max Morden

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“Don’t keep forever on the public road, going only where others have gone. Leave the beaten track occasionally and dive into the woods. You will be certain to find something you have never seen before.”

Alexander Graham Bell

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Zurich around 1911-1912 and the telephone poles that serviced many of the local businesses. The view is Victoria Street looking north.

CHAPTER

1

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These days, we don't give much thought to telephone service. It's part of everyday life. Most of us carry our phone with us wherever we go. We can be in touch with virtually anyone on the planet, instantly.

It was not always so. The coming of the telephone in the early 20th century changed life profoundly, especially in rural areas. To understand the true value of the independent telephone system created in Zurich a century ago, we must begin by understanding what life was like in the years leading up to it.

Imagine for a moment living in Huron County in the mid-nineteenth century.

Your cabin is surrounded by thick forest. Each acre of cleared land takes months of back-breaking labour. The roads are muddy tracks, often passable only in the winter. In summer there's no escape from the heat and disease-carrying mosquitoes. In winter there is little protection from the bitter cold, and there is always wood to chop. Supplies are many weary hours of travel away.

Michael Zeller, one of the earliest inhabitants in the Zurich area, later remembered his experience growing up in the bush. Before moving to Zurich, his father bought a 100-acre farm in Waterloo County, with eight acres "partially cleared." The family home was 8' X 8' with a 5'8" ceiling. Zeller remembered: "It was hard work to clear a farm, split rails for fences, draw stones to make the land fit for cultivation... I worked even bare-footed and had on many days sore feet by trampling on shrubs and roots.... After six o'clock in the evening I had to hunt the sows in the woods, at times two miles from home." One of his most vivid memories was of waking up in his bed under the roof of the cabin after a winter storm, and stepping into a foot of snow. "I tell you, it opened my eyes very quickly!"

Zeller moved to Hay Township in 1856, one of the first settlers in the area. He built a two-storey log house and by 1871 he and his wife were raising eight children. Frederick Knell moved to Hay in 1856, too. He established the town of Zurich, setting up a post office and general store, and soon building a

grist mill and saw mill. By 1863, Zurich had churches, blacksmith shops, wagon makers, a shoe shop, a doctor, a tailor and a hotel. By 1866 it had a population of 300, a town hall and a school with 90 children. George Hess arrived in 1867, opening first a jewellery store and then a photographic gallery.

Dashwood developed at about the same time. Brothers Noah and Absalom Fried settled in the area in 1853, and built a saw mill and grist mill. Grand Bend began as a lumber town, Brewster, in the 1830s and then developed further when the road to Goderich was built in 1850.

Travel between these small settlements was difficult, as was communication with the outside world. Life on the farms around these towns – and indeed anywhere in rural Canada — remained very isolated. When an emergency struck, such as fire or sudden illness, help was hard to come by.

The answer to rural isolation came from the mind of an extraordinary young Scotsman by the name of Alexander Graham Bell.

Bell was born in Scotland. His father and grandfather were both specialists in speech. His mother was profoundly deaf. He and his brothers often helped their father in his work, giving demonstrations of his innovative “Visible Speech,” a code of symbols that indicated how spoken sounds were made.

The family moved to Brantford in Canada in 1870, in the hope that the change of climate would improve Bell’s weak health. It did, and in 1871 he moved to Boston to open a school for teachers of the deaf.

Bell was fascinated by the potential of telegraphy and the idea of transmitting sound over wires. During his vacations in Brantford he conducted experiments with his assistant Thomas Watson.



Alexander Graham Bell.
Courtesy of Library of Congress

Early in 1875, Bell was working in his lab in his parents’ home in Brantford when he spilled acid on his clothes. He called out to his assistant in the next room, “Mr. Watson, come here, I want you.” His words were carried through the prototype transmitter he was holding, proving that it was possible to transmit the human voice over an electrically-charged wire. The telephone, in its crudest form, had arrived.

How did Bell’s telephone work? It was a deceptively simple concept, familiar to children who have spoken to one another using two cans connected by a string. Instead of empty cans, the telephone used a transmitter, which converted sound waves into low-voltage electric impulses that are carried

along the telephone wires. At the other end, the electrical impulses were converted back into sound. In 1876, Bell, again at home in Brantford, made several successful long-distance calls, including one from Brantford to Paris, Ontario via Toronto. In 1877, on the strength of his invention, the Bell Telephone Company was formed.

The first telephone exchange was installed in Hartford, Connecticut in 1877, and the first exchange linking two major cities was established between New York and Boston in 1883. An exchange involved a group of operators working at a large switchboard. The operators answered incoming telephone calls and connected them manually to the parties being called.

The first telephone exchange in Canada, and the second in the world, was established in Hamilton in 1878. There were eight lines and a total of 40 subscribers, with wooden phones weighing ten pounds each. In 1880 the Bell Telephone Company was granted a charter by Parliament, giving it the exclusive right to manufacture telephone equipment and sell telephone service in Canada. The monopoly was ended in 1885, and competing companies began to spring up.

The telephone arrived in Zurich in 1895, courtesy of the Bell Telephone Company. Bell supplied seven people in Zurich with phones and ran a party line to three homes in St. Joseph. The switchboard, located in the post office, was operated by postmaster Dan Faust. The lucky subscribers were: Dr. George Buchanan, physician; J.J. Merner, general merchant; Dr. B.A. Campbell, physician; Charles Harlieb, hardware storekeeper; John Preeter, general merchant, J.A. Williams, flour mill operator, and Faust himself.

Imagine the excitement of the first phone calls in Zurich. Surely a small crowd gathered at each location. The telephones were unwieldy wooden boxes, called “coffin telephones,” with hand-cranked magnetos, two bells on the outside as ringers, stationary speaking tubes, and hand-held receivers for listening. (A magneto was a type of generator used to convert the mechanical motion of the crank into enough energy to ring the exchange.) It wasn’t easy to make a call, but when the first connection was made and the two men exchanged pleasantries, what a miracle it must have seemed!

By the first decade of the 21st century, Zurich was a busy and prosperous country town. The first electricity system was installed in 1895. Zurich became a police village in 1896, with village business conducted by three police trustees, elected annually. A newspaper, the *Zurich Herald*, began publishing in 1900. Concrete sidewalks were laid in 1903. The only limitation on its growth was that it was



The Coffin Telephone or magneto phone was in use right in to early 1900's. This set was part of the Harry Hoffman Collection.
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not on the railway, an important factor in the development of any town at the time. In June 1906, the *Herald* noted:

“The residences being erected this summer will add much to the beauty of our pretty little village. They are being built of brick and will compare favourably with the modern city homes. It would be a hard task, indeed, to find a more suitable town to live in, or a more sociable and enlightened people to live with than we have in Zurich. Although we lack the facilities afforded by a railway connection with outside points, it does not necessarily handicap us in the amount of business and trading done here. It has often been remarked, and truthfully so, that more business is done in Zurich than in many towns twice its size. The village depends largely on its trade with the farming community and we may safely say that there is no more thrifty or prosperous class of farmers in the Province of Ontario than those living in this section.”

The mood was equally buoyant in October, when the paper printed this vivid portrait:

“It will be seen at a glance that the business men here are alive and progressive, and that anything tending to promote the town’s interests merits their co-operation and support.

“Zurich is one of the busiest marts of commerce in this county... There is a public school, and three churches, Evangelical, Roman Catholic and Lutheran, with earnest and zealous pastors administering to the spiritual wants of their various congregations. There is a good brass band here and the young people take a very active interest in sports, shooting, etc. Zurich is also the headquarters of the Farmers’ Fire Insurance Company... and also the Huron Weather Insurance Company... With the proper railway facilities there is no doubt but that Zurich would grow very materially.

“It is a matter of surprise to many outsiders who visit the village to find what a busy place it is. Its churches, school, splendid hotels and integrity of the business men, their sound financial standing and enviable record for fairness, go to make Zurich one of the best business centres in this part of the country.”

The Bell Telephone Company had little interest in making the major investment required to provide service to the farms outside Zurich. Edmund Zeller, publisher of the *Zurich Herald*, decided to launch a private rural system, the Zeller Telephone Company, in 1906. His mechanic and linesman was William G. Hess, son of George, who was already an experienced telegraph operator and electrician.

The first two telephones of Zeller’s system were installed in a



Harry (standing) and William G. Hess, son of George.

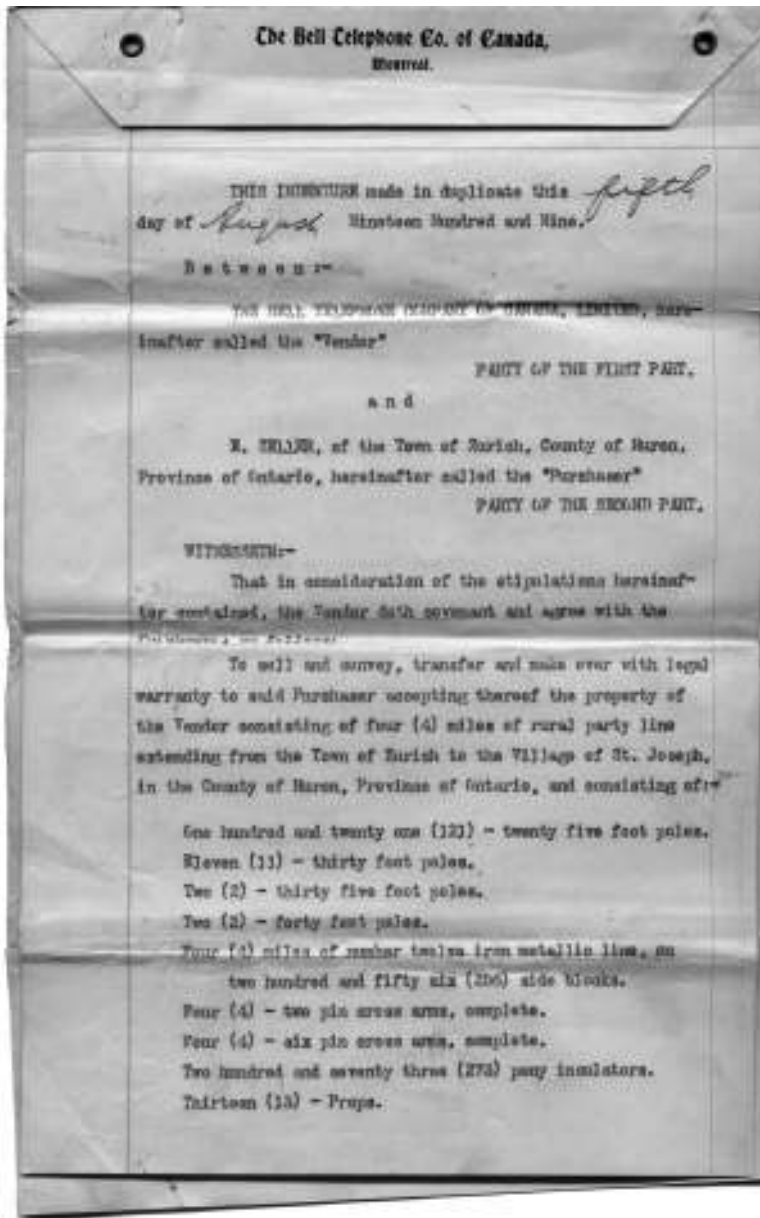


The names of the operators are unknown as they stand in front of the Zeller Telephone Company in the early 1900's.

bicycle shop owned by Hess, and the jewellery store of his brother Fred. The two telephones were installed with a single line and no switchboard, as an experiment. Fred Hess, perhaps making a pun about this exciting development, ran an advertisement in the Herald, under the headline “Ring Up!” He advised young men that, “Now is the time of the year to buy a ring. You will find them here – all sizes and prices, gold only.”

The experiment was a success, and an exchange was installed in the Zurich Herald printing office. In June, the paper announced that telephones had been added at, “Dr. Campbell’s office and residence, the Sovereign Bank, Commercial Hotel, Herald Printing Office, Preeter’s and Charlesworth’s stores, J.J. Merner, Dominion Hotel, and P. Lamont’s house on his farm.” The paper added proudly, “There is free exchange between all places in Hensall, Zurich and St. Joseph.”

The first rural line was extended to Jacob Haberer’s farm on the Blind Line. If the use of phones in Zurich itself was revolutionary, imagine what it must have meant to have service on farms. Suddenly the doctor, the fire brigade, family members, neighbours and suppliers were just a call away.



Bill of Sale from 1909 between Edmund Zeller and Bell for \$900.

Gradually lines extended out in all directions. Lines in the south part of Hay Township were connected to the exchange Bell had established in Dashwood.

In 1909 Edmund Zeller bought the Bell exchange and phones in Zurich and St. Joseph for \$900. Bell retained the trunk line between Zurich and Hensall. The bill of sale provides a detailed list of the assets purchased by Zeller, including:

- Eleven 30-foot poles
- Two 35-foot poles
- Two 40-foot poles
- Four miles of number twelve iron metallic line
- Four two-pin cross arms
- Four six-pin cross arms
- 273 pony insulators

The demand for telephone service was growing by leaps and bounds, and it seems that Zeller could no longer finance the growth himself. In February 1910 a joint stock company under the name South Huron Telephone Company was formed, with the intention of buying the Zeller Telephone System for \$8,700.

The company was divided into 500 shares, with a total capitalization of \$25,000. Five directors were named: Edmund Zeller, Dr. Campbell, John Preeter, John J. Merner and Peter Lamont. The objects of the new company were “for the purpose of giving telephone connections to farmers in rural districts and to business men and others in villages not now supplied with an exchange service.” In March the Township of Stephen gave the company permission to “erect, equip and operate and maintain their telephone system on the public highways in the Township of Stephen for a term of ten years.”



Leonard Wagner up the pole and Edgar Wuerth below.

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brought all independent systems under the control of the Ontario Railway and Municipal Board, which later became the Ontario Municipal Board. The Act gave the Board powers to approve all tariffs and agreements between telephone service providers. The Board and its Supervisor of Telephone Systems, Francis Dagger, were enthusiastic about municipal telephone systems. In an early report, Dagger said he believed that municipal systems were the best solution to the problem of providing service in rural areas, because they could be funded through municipal debentures.

Three days after the public meeting in Zurich, Hay Township Council met and agreed to buy the telephone company. The Bill of Sale between Edmund Zeller and the Township included “the telephone plants, and full equipment owned and operated by the said party” in Zurich, Dashwood and the Townships of Hay and Stanley. The Council of the day consisted of Reeve Peter Lamont, Clerk Fred Hess, Treasurer Thomas Johnston, and Councillors William Consitt, Louis Kalbfleisch, Henry Neeb, and Fred Willert. The sale was completed on

The Township of Hay made a similar 10-year commitment.

The Letters Patent noted that “Owing to the ever increasing popularity of the telephone it is assured that a large and profitable service can be established in South Huron.” It was a reasonable assumption, but for some reason the privately-held company did not proceed.

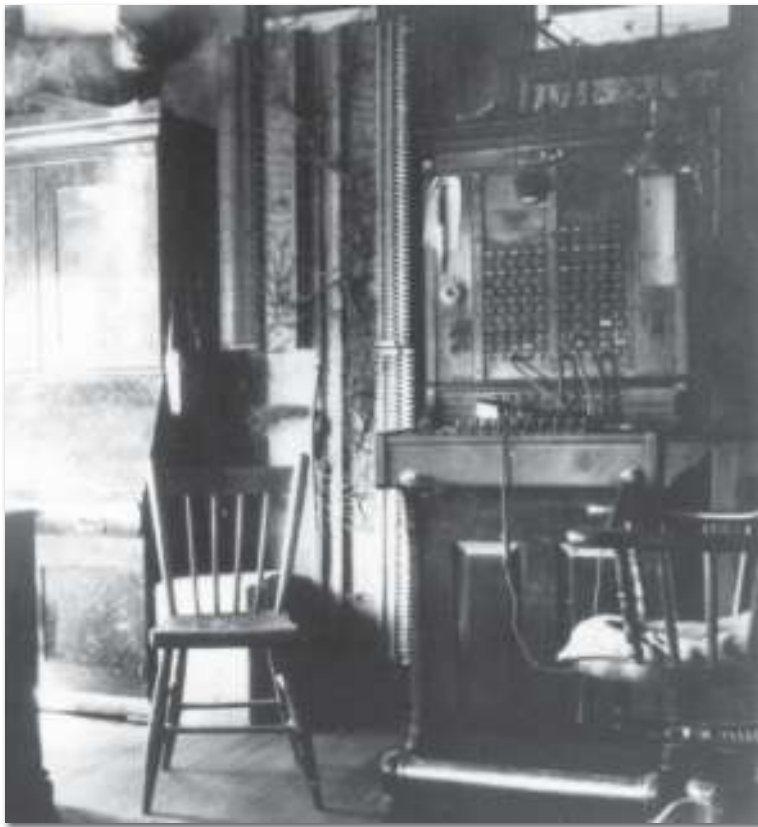
Meanwhile there was growing pressure for expanded telephone service. On May 10, 1911, a meeting was called in the Zurich town hall by interested Hay Township rate payers. We have no description of this meeting, but it was probably very lively. The people of Hay had seen what telephones could do, and they wanted more. A petition signed by 170 ratepayers asked Hay Township Council to buy the Zeller Company, to be owned and operated by the township under the Ontario Telephone Act.

The Telephone Act, passed in 1910,

Chapter 1

July 10, 1911, at a cost of \$7,150 (considerably less than Zeller would have been paid by the joint company). The new organization operated 150 telephones. On July 22, Council agreed to purchase the Bell Telephone lines in Zurich for a sum of \$1,100.

The Hay Municipal Telephone System was born.



A picture of the Zurich Telephone Office in the early 20th century.

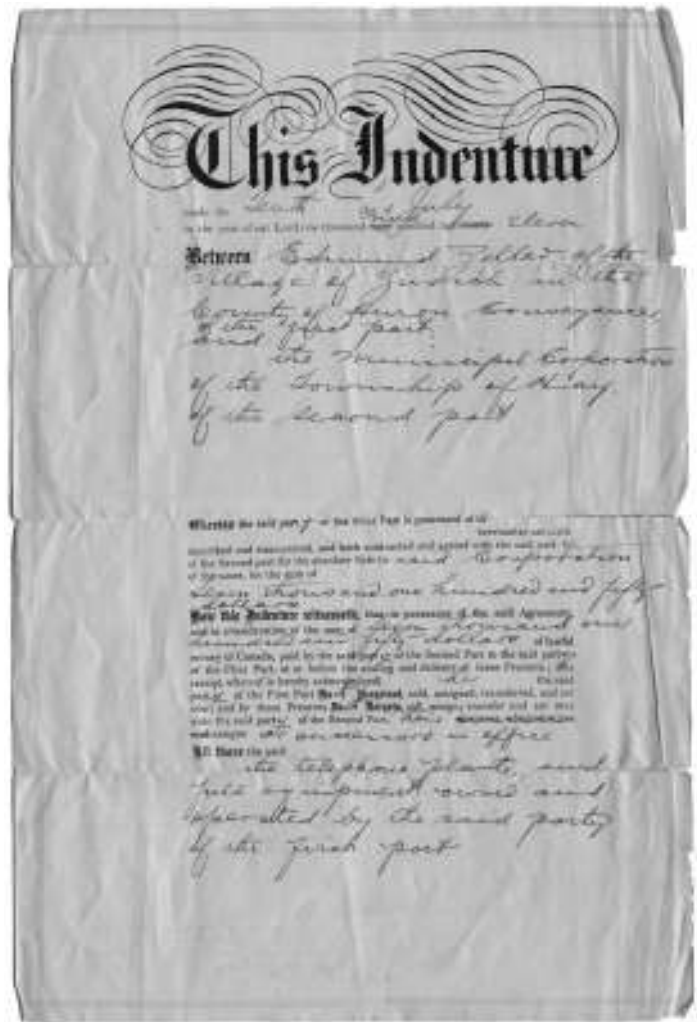
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CHAPTER 2

1911 – 1940

When people in rural areas wanted telephone service, they had two choices: they could establish an association or company, or they could form a municipal system. As the South Huron Telephone Company experiment proved, it was often difficult to find people willing and able to finance the expensive business of extending phone lines through rural areas. With a municipal system, those who wanted service didn't have to produce cash for their share of the project. They petitioned the local municipality to issue debentures to cover the cost, and pledged their land as security. An annual levy was placed on the tax roll, charging each subscriber with an equal share of the costs of carrying the debentures and maintaining the system.

It was this system that made the expansion of the Hay Municipal Telephone System possible.

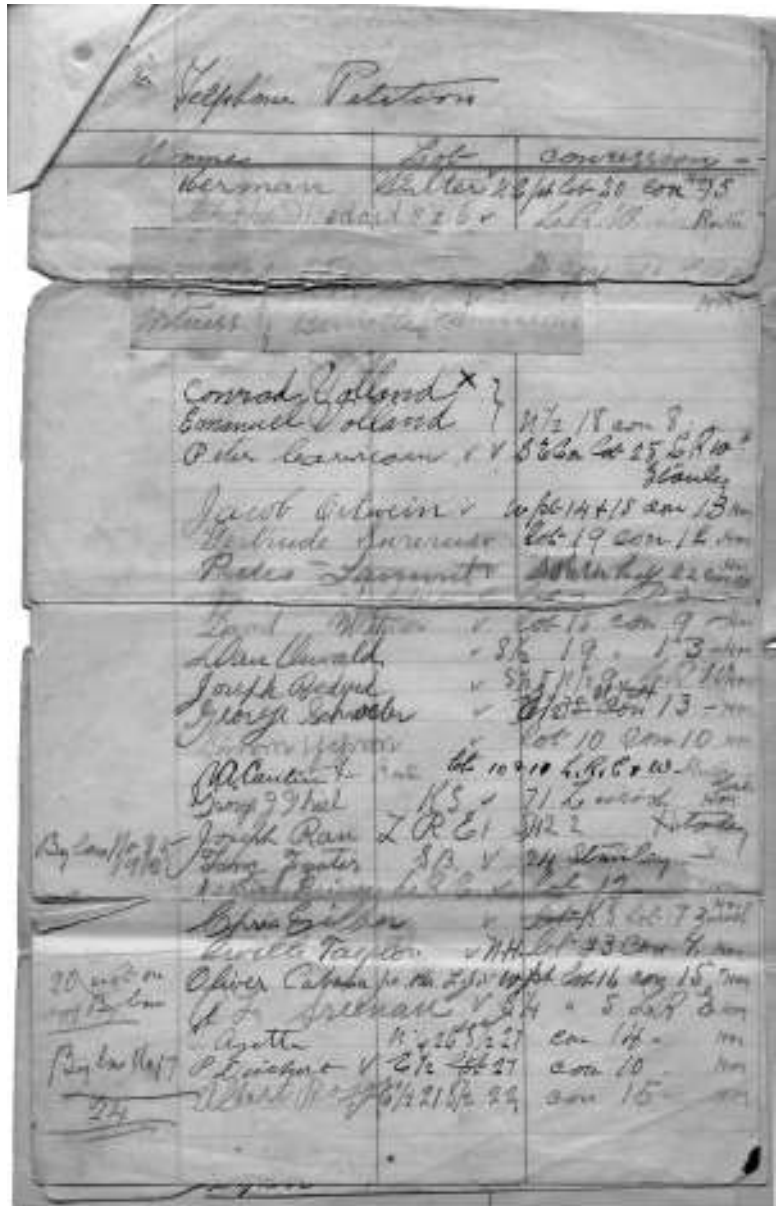


Original Bill of Sale between Edmund Zeller of Zurich to The Municipal Corporation of the Township of Hay, the 10th of July, 1911 in the amount of Seven Thousand One Hundred and Fifty Dollars.

Rural Expansion

Once the purchase was complete, former owner Edmund Zeller was appointed manager at Zurich, on a salary of \$720 per year. Peter McIsaac was put in charge of the Dashwood office at \$400 per year, and was also contracted to provide a building with all the heat, light, fuel, operators and maintenance required to run it. William Hess was appointed linesman and foreman. He was paid \$2.50 a day to supervise all the new construction and telephone installations.

The township council immediately began the work of raising money to expand the system. Reeve Peter Lamont and William Hess were appointed to canvas the townships of Hay, Stanley and Stephen, encouraging landowners to sign on for telephone service. Some 150 people signed up in the first year, effectively doubling the number of existing subscribers. The telephone rate was set at \$7.18 per year for debentures and \$4.82 for switching fees, for a total of \$12 per year for 10 years. After 10 years, the rate was set at \$10. The Township issued debentures totalling \$18,000. The by-law read in part:



A 1912 petition from residents asking for telephone service. Note some local names such as Bedard, Hoffman, Rau and Eilber.

“Whereas the persons whose names appear in Schedule A attached hereto . . . have petitioned the Municipal Council of the Corporation of the Township of Hay . . . to establish a Municipal Telephone System and also to extend such Municipal Telephone System into the Townships of Stephen and Stanley . . . and whereas at a meeting of subscribers of the said petition held on the 10th day of May 1911 at the Town Hall of Zurich, the Council of the Township of Hay was by resolution authorized to purchase or acquire any existing telephone system of Hay, and whereas the council has purchased the existing telephone system know as the Zeller Telephone System . . . and whereas the persons whose names

appear in Schedule A have prayed the Council of Hay Township that payment of the cost of work may be extended for a period of ten years and that debentures of the said Township of Hay may be issued to pay the cost of the said work . . . the Reeve of said Township of Hay may borrow on credit of the Corporation . . . the sum of \$18,000.”

[Canadian history timeline 1911: Laurier defeated, Robert Borden becomes Prime Minister]



Raymond D. Fisher with a truck that read HESS Radio - Electric Zurich. Look at the take up reel attached to the back tire. The 35 to 36 Ford Sedan Delivery was put up on a jack and the vehicle put into drive to spin the reel. This was done to reclaim the steel wire to be reused at another location. Innovative technology for the time.

Getting Used to Telephones

Telephone technology was new to most people in Hay and elsewhere in Ontario. There are many stories of women who took off their aprons and tidied their hair before answering the phone, or worried about getting sick from germs coming across the telephone lines. One story that has come down through years in Hay concerns a subscriber who asked if he could speak German over the phone. He was assured that he could. A week later, he complained that he had phoned his English-speaking daughter-in-law and spoken German, and she still couldn't understand him! Another subscriber looked quizzically at his new telephone and commented, "Can't see how anybody can talk through that wire – it isn't even hollow!"

But there is no doubt that people wanted and valued telephone service. The Hay system continued to grow quickly, with a number of new debentures issued every year. By 1913 the system was serving almost 400 subscribers. In November 1915, 27 people in Stephen Township and 18 in Hay Township were added. In March 1918, 30 people in Hay, 16 in Stephen and five in Stanley agreed to join the system.

The telephone switchboard in Zurich was moved from the Zurich Herald building to a new location. Early operators included Zeller and his sons, Marshall, Russel and Hazen, Miss Ivy Weber, Miss Flossie Hartleib, and Harry Hess. At Dashwood, Peter McIsaac was assisted by his wife and sons Milfred and Ervin, and daughter Sadie, and Harry Hoffman, who later took over as manager of the Dashwood and Grand Bend operation.

[Canadian history timeline 1914: Canada automatically enters First World War when Britain declares war on Germany.]

Hay and Bell

The Hay system depended on a good relationship with Bell to provide a full service, including switching with long distance lines and other telephone systems. In November 1915 Bell agreed to “abolish the line charge of 10 cents on conversations between interchanges between Hay Municipal Telephone System and Tuckersmith Municipal Telephone System connected to our Clinton exchange, so that the toll rate of the Bell company between Hensall and Clinton shall only apply on this traffic.”

In March 1916, Hay asked Bell to sell its remaining Dashwood telephone system. The sale, which included a few poles and four telephone sets, was completed in December for \$100. The same month, an agreement was reached on connections with Bell at Hensall, Exeter and Dashwood for long distance service. In 1917, Hay was appointed the “Local Manager” of the Bell Telephone Company at Dashwood.

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[Canadian history timeline 1917: Canadians capture Vimy Ridge after British and French attempts fail.]

Hess and McIsaac

William Hess’s son Harry replaced Zeller as manager of the Zurich office, probably in 1917 or 1918. Like his father, Hess was an experienced electrician who ran the direct current dynamos that provided Zurich with electricity until 1915. He also helped with preparations for introduction of hydroelectric power in 1916, and was responsible for wiring homes for alternating current when it arrived. An annual financial



Harry G. Hess in front of the switchboard that he operated to service the Zurich area.

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statement in 1919 notes that Harry Hess was paid \$300 per quarter, or \$1200 a year. Peter McIsaac received between \$234 and \$261 per quarter. Others were paid on an occasional basis for “work on the line” and “teaming poles,” part of the ongoing work of extending service to new subscribers. Mr. Walper, owner of a local hotel, received a payment for “meals for lineman.”

With World War One over, the system continued to grow quickly through the early 20s. By 1923, the

Township held a total of \$22,222 in debentures. That year, the rate was set for subscribers who had paid off their debentures at \$12 per year, with the provision that, “The moneys so raised in excess of maintenance and switching charges shall be used to establish a reserve fund for the system.” But subscribers didn’t think much of that decision and petitioned for a lower rate. In January 1925, the rate was reduced to \$10, with those who signed the petition getting an immediate decrease and others benefiting after 10 years.

At the annual meeting in January 1929, subscribers expressed their appreciation for Harry Hess’s work by moving that “Council see fit to give a substantial increase to the superintendant’s salary.” Two months later, Peter McIsaac also got a raise, with his salary fixed at \$2,000 a year. Hess’s company, Hess Electric, held the contract for maintaining the telephone system.

[Canadian history timeline 1929: New York stock market crash]

Worshwood June 27/19

The amount for long distance collected by Peter McIsaac for the New Municipal Telephone System, as follows:

Er Brenner ✓	40,30
B. Cassenberg ✓	32,00
Kess & Kavelle ✓	39,40
Mrs L Kavelle ✓	1,95
Ray Green ✓	3,80
Geo Carrier ✓	1,65
Daly Allan ✓	1,10
	<u>140,20</u>

P.S. You find on cheque 13¢ and 35¢ coming to me, will take credit next time, more will follow. Peter McIsaac

STATEMENT

July 4 1919

Local & Long Distance

By Harry S. Hess Dr

Ray Green	22 75	✓
W. J. Grew	2 40	✓
Wm O'Brien	1 55	✓
A. Marshall	1 50	✓
Stad & Winton	2 70	✓
Ray Green	3 60	✓
F. H. Winton	7 60	✓
Geo H. Rink	1 30	✓
Leaac Hudon	95	✓
Wm Lamont	1 70	✓
Wm Hoffman	2 55	✓
A. Edgshofer	3 00	✓
Melburn Oak	7 45	✓
F. C. Kallblinck	3 35	✓
Williams Bros	6 15	✓
Young & Reichel	7 15	✓
C. J. Prester	17 40	✓
Dr A. J. Winton	9 25	✓
	<u>95 65</u>	

Original stubs for Long Distance charges collected by Peter McIsaac and Harry Hess in 1919.



Taking a break from setting telephone poles. From the left (both photos): Leonard Wagner, Edgar Wuerth and Harry G. Hess.

The Growth of Grand Bend

The focus of the Hay system was changing by the late 20s, as Grand Bend began to develop as a beach resort. Council minutes for August 1929 indicate that the Bell Telephone Company was intending to put pay telephones in Grand Bend the following year. The wisdom of that move was quickly recognized and in May 1930, Hay installed four “pay stations” in Grand Bend and purchased Bell’s two telephone booths. Eventually Bell indicated that it was ready to sell its line between Dashwood and Grand Bend. A letter from the Bell representative provides an interesting window into the developing resort:

“The more I see and hear of Grand Bend and Oakwood, the more it looks to me as if it would turn into a large and attractive summer resort. I understand the number of people playing golf this summer is 40% greater than last year. This means that both your system and our company will have to look ahead and cooperate, especially in connection with long distance service, and the remark you made at the last meeting that I attended of the Commissioners about having to install a switchboard at Grand Bend for summer business, looks as if it might be required much sooner than you thought, and it looks to me, providing you and the Commissioners are satisfied as to price, as if you could make good use of this copper circuit from Dashwood to Grand Bend.”

Peter McIsaac was asked to look further into the proposed purchase, and reported to Township Clerk A.F. Hess as follows:

“We counted poles from Dashwood to Art Baker’s, that is where their line takes our poles to Grand Bend. There being about 95 posts averaging about 20 ft. and about 50 posts averaging 30 ft. and from Grand Bend out there are nearly all 30 ft. poles except a few which were re-set. As far as the



Harry G. Hess up a 4 – 10 pin cross arm telephone pole in the early 1900’s.

copper wire is concerned we know very little about it as the line has given very little trouble within the last couple of years. We could use the wire from here to Bakers all right, that taking us a line through to Grand Bend which we will no doubt need next summer. Another thing to consider is the removing of the poles & wire which have been there for 36 years as it would be no small job by any means.”

Council agreed, and completed the purchase at a rate of \$20 per circuit mile, early in 1931. In 1935 another pay phone was purchased “for installation at the club house, Oakwood Grove, Grand Bend, for use by tourists and others.” Later the same year, rates were set for telephones installed in cottages for the summer. The “renters,” for they would not be Hay Municipal Telephone System subscribers, were to pay for \$1 each for the installation and removal of the phone, a deposit of \$5, and a rate of \$1.50 per month. When these rates were sent to the Ontario Municipal Board for approval, James A. McDonald, the OMB’s Inspector of Telephone Service, approved them but added:

“It occurs to me that it might be well to add a clause in the schedules somewhat as follows – The above charges will apply to persons whose residences are located within 100 feet of the existing pole lines of the system. Others will be required to pay an initial installation to be agreed upon. You will know better as to whether or not such a clause is necessary.”

Council decided it was, but changed the distance from 100 to 300 feet.

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[Canadian history timeline 1934: Dionne quintuplets born in Callander, Ontario]

An Inspector Calls

In 1937, A.D. Morton, the Bell Telephone Company’s Connecting Company Service Inspector, arrived to take a close look at the Hay operation. His report provides a fascinating window into the System. “Your Central Office operating room is most attractive and well kept,” he wrote approvingly. “The one thing lacking is a counter to separate the operating room from the business office. The public have ready access to the central voice equipment and the operator is not protected from interference when making connections.” He suggested that a counter with a swinging door be built to separate the two areas, and even included a sketch of the proposed renovation.

Morton went on to note that the switchboard had been in service for many years, and only due to excellent care had lasted much longer than expected. He suggested replacing it with a “common battery



From an original copy of the 1926 Stromberg-Carlson, Telephones, Switchboards, Radio Apparatus & Supplies Catalogue.
.....

board which has a capacity of 200 circuits,” adding, “As most of your lines are urban, the common battery board will save considerable time in the handling of the operating service as the board will be equipped with lamp signals on line drops and also on cord circuits.”

Telephones had changed radically since the early days of the large walnut “coffin” magneto wall sets. Candlestick-style desk sets became popular in the late 19th century and dials were introduced in the early years of the 20th century. By the 1920s phones with a single handset, including both transmitter and receiver, were available. The Northern Electric Uniphone, introduced in the mid-30s, had a single handset and all the components, including the ringer, built into the phone. Obviously, there was demand for the sleek new sets. Hay established the following policy:

“That a subscriber of the System wishing to change the telephone equipment now installed on his premises shall pay extra for the following mentioned equipment:

- *A Uniphone hand set to new subscribers \$3.50 extra*
- *A Uniphone hand set to old subscribers at \$14 extra*
- *A Uniphone hand set to old subscribers with desk set at \$11.50 extra.*

In October 1939, following the death of Peter McIsaac, Harry Hoffman was appointed as manager of the Dashwood office. Hoffman had started working in the office as an operator at the age of 14. In 1940, his salary was set at \$2,200 with an additional allowance of \$100 for rent of the building that housed the office. Harry Hess was also to receive a salary of \$2,100.

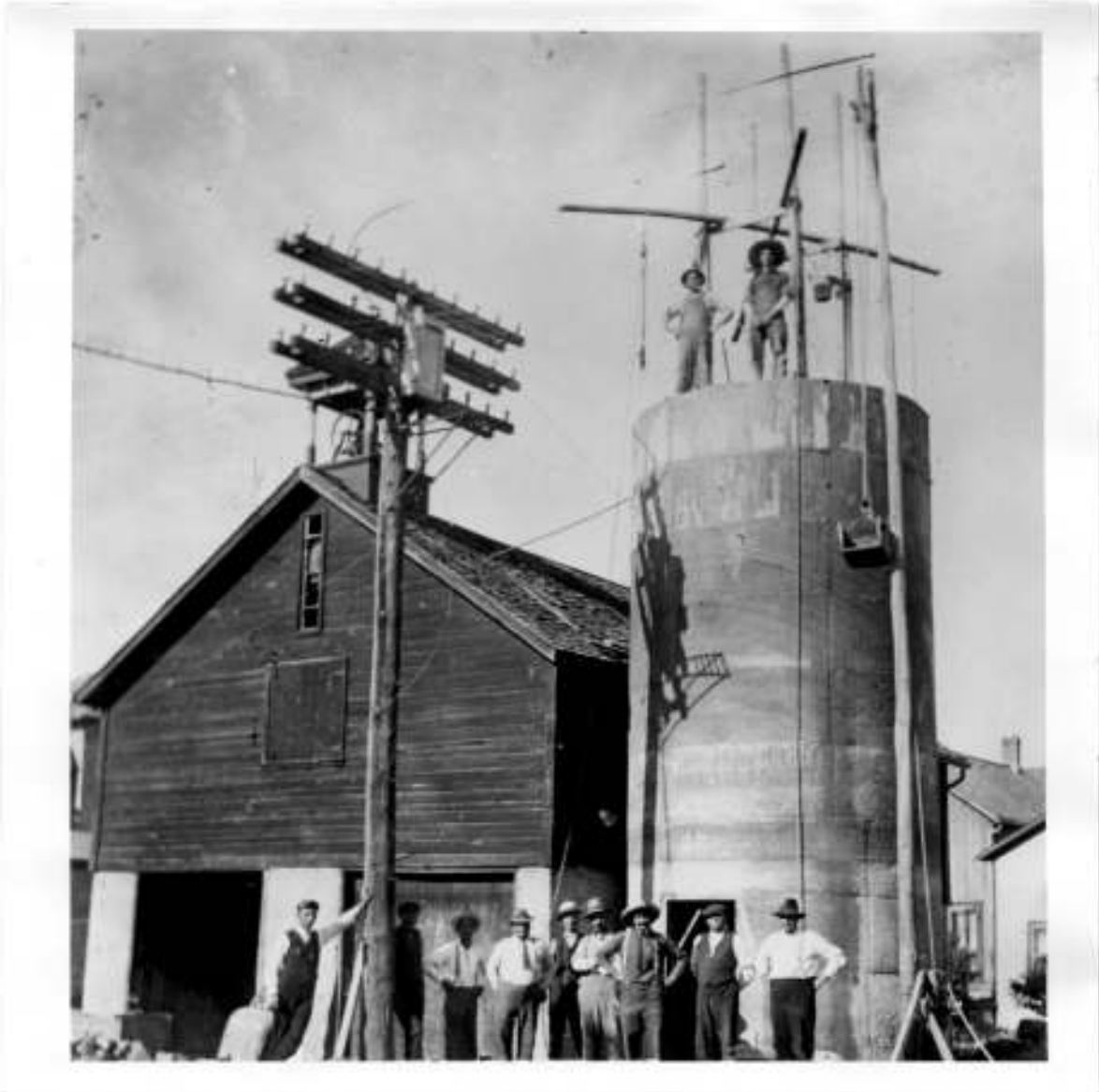
.....
[Canadian history timeline 1939: Canada enters World War II]



Rosella Krueger, left and Lottie Gascho at the Zurich switchboard.
.....

The Day of the Operator

In the early days of the telephone, the operators were often men. But women were felt to have more pleasant telephone voices, and soon replaced them. Telephone operators were important people, with their fingers on the pulse of any small community. Gertrude (Thiel) Fleischauer and Martha (Thiel) Heywood, wrote a reminiscence of their time as operators with Hay in the 1930s and 1940s that was first published in Hay Township Highlights (Hay Township Book Committee, 1996):



The town of Zurich was growing in 1917. A water tower was being constructed by the fire house which was one of the first buildings to receive phone service.

“During thunderstorms, especially those that were severe, the switchboard numbers on the operating panel would keep dropping down, and we would push them up again. If one or so of the numbers would buzz, then we would answer it since it might have been a fire call. During thunderstorms, we would see the electricity sparking from the cables behind the switchboard. When storms blew up, we resorted to using the hand-operated crank at the switchboard when the power failed. It was our only means of making the switchboard work and very inconvenient for the operator. We had to use one hand on the crank to keep the line alive and the other hand to connect the incoming calls. At times like these, three hands would have come in handy!

The night operators (and we took turns) would pull up a rollaway cot in front of the switchboard. The

buzzer would be operating at night, so we would be aroused by incoming calls. Usually there were not too many calls at night, but some nights we hardly got any sleep if there was a prolonged storm crossing the area. Any calls directed to the Fire Department were in our hands. We had to call the fire brigade and provide them with instruction on where the fire was located.

Oh yes, we had prank calls too. There were customers who could put the receiver to the mouthpiece, which caused feedback, and we would get a shrieking squeal in our ear. There were times we had to tell someone on a party line, who had been using the line to visit rather than to relay a message, that there were others who needed a line out.

There were no toilet facilities on the premises but we did have an outdoor toilet in the back shed. Sometimes we made some mighty quick trips to this old-fashioned accommodation! We had a pot-bellied stove, and had to start our own fires and keep those fires stoked. We washed our own bedding and kept the place clean so that it looked nice. All the switchboard connections had to be cleaned with Brasso every night, just to be sure the connections would work the next day.

There was never a dull moment in the Zurich telephone office. As we remember, there were holes near the top of the wall in our office. Sometimes, we would see the rats peeking through. There was a feed mill nearby which attracted the rodents.

The only public telephone booth in Zurich at that time was in a corner of the telephone office. There wasn't any counter between the booth and the switchboard. When some customers came in to use the telephone and began interfering with the operator on duty, it was necessary to install a counter to provide a barrier between the operator and the customer. It was scary at times, as the outside door had to remain open to the public until 10 p.m. at night.

Sometimes the doctor would be out on house calls and no one would be home to take his calls. He would ask the operator to keep track of these calls. He would then phone in to get the calls that had been collected by the operator when he returned from his rounds.

Telephone numbers were certainly much simpler in those days. The Dominion Hotel was 70, Wagner's Confectionary was 91 and Harry Hess's number (our boss) was 107. Basic operator's pay in these years started at \$5 per week and finally rose to \$7 and \$10. Those were certainly memorable days – times we all enjoyed and will never forget.”

Other operators at the same time included Lil Dinnin, Anne Overholt, Shirley Kruegar, Elda Wagner, Annie Turkheim, Anna Datars, Beatrice Geoffrey, Elda (Reichert) Laidlaw, Helen (Miller) Walker, Doris (Willert) Penhale, Dorothy Restemeyer, Francis Gibson, Marion (Tyler) MacDonald, and Alice Teiman.

Romance bloomed along the telephone lines. Harry Hoffman met his wife, Maud, when she was a switchboard operator at the Oakwood Inn. According to his son Jim, his father began to wonder about the woman he was talking to so often, and then met her when he visited Oakwood to install a phone.



Harry Hess, Raymond Fisher, Unknown, and Leonard Wagner in front of the pole truck.

CHAPTER 3

1941 – 1960

By 1941, the Hay Municipal Telephone System had been in operation for 30 years. There were 846 telephones in the system, nearly six times the original 150 phones. The approximate value of the system was \$63,000, a sharp increase from the original purchase price of \$7,150. The people of Hay had created a strong rural telephone system. They had also made a good investment.

In 1941, Hay Council decided to purchase a parcel of land in Dashwood that was adjoining the George Kellerman property on Main street (Kellerman property is presently the red brick building at Main and Centre), for the purpose of erecting a telephone switching office. W. H. Haugh was appointed to oversee the construction. The frame building burnt to the ground in the year 2003.

[Canadian history timeline 1942: Canadian raid on the French port of Dieppe is a disaster.]

Despite bad news from France, by 1941 World War Two had lifted Ontario out of economic depression and revived the farm economy. Air bases were established at Clinton, Centralia, St. Joseph's and Grand Bend, because military experts felt the terrain was similar to the beaches of Normandy.

Bell made an agreement with the Department of National Defence to install and maintain telephone facilities to serve the Grand Bend airfield of the Royal Air Force. Construction of the telephone circuit from Dashwood to Grand Bend was handled by Hay.

In 1942, as the war pushed salaries higher and made it more difficult to find qualified people, Harry Hess was granted a budget increase of \$42 per month, "to meet the increased cost of switchboard operators for the duration of the war."

During the war, new telephones were hard to come by. Harry Hoffman began to make telephones, using working parts from old telephones and often making the wooden cases in which the phones were assembled. This spurred Hoffman’s interest in old telephones, and he eventually collected more than 100 of them, the earliest from 1880. He created a “Telephone Room” in the basement of the funeral home.

Meanwhile, Hay Municipal Telephone System began to invest its reserve funds in Victory Loans to support the war effort. By 1944, Hay had \$5,000 invested in government bonds.

[Canadian history timeline 1944: Canadian troops advance further inland than any other Allied unite on D-Day.]

1944 To 1947

Document No.
25

PETITION AS REQUIRED FOR APPLICATION SHOWING THAT MUNICIPAL TELEPHONE SYSTEM

Petitioners are requested to this or have it read to them before signing.

PETITION AND CONTRACT

TO THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF THE TOWNSHIP OF HAY

ENCLOSURE

We, the undersigned assessed land owners in the Township of Hay, petition your honorable body, pursuant to Section 6 and 11 of "The Telephone Act" praying for the extension of the Telephone System in the Township of Hay, known as "The Hay Municipal Telephone System" to our respective premises in accordance with the provisions of Part 3 of the said Act; and we further pray that the payment of the cost of the work may be extended over a period of ten years and that debentures of the Municipality of the Township of Hay be issued to pay the cost of extending the said System.

Your petitioners hereby agree each with the other and with the Municipal Corporation of the Township of Hay to pay the same annual amount of principal and interest as was charged each subscriber to the establishment of the original system, or such other amount as may be approved by the Municipal Board, and in addition thereto to pay also the cost of maintenance by an annual special rate to be levied upon the respective properties, for the term of ten years, and we further agree to be governed and obey such regulations, and by-laws as may be necessary and are consistent with the said Act.

AND YOUR PETITIONERS WILL SWORN PRAY

In WITNESS WHEREOF we have this day affixed our signatures therein:

Date	SIGNATURE	LOCATION OF PROPERTY	TOWNSHIP
Dec 12/44	Harvey Clausius	Vol. 5. Pk 173 Zurich	WestBrookmanish
Mar 5/45	John Gallina	Vol. 5. 109 4110	WestBrookmanish
Apr 10/45	Louisa Reichert	Con. 5 Lot 27	WestBrookmanish
May 1/45	Louisa Reichert	Vol. 5 Lot 134 Zurich	WestBrookmanish
Sept 25/46	Wesley Hregill	Vol. # 104 Zurich	WestBrookmanish
Oct 3/46	Mary Stephan	K.S. P4 PK A Zurich	WestBrookmanish
Nov 1/46	Martin Bunch	K.S. H Lot 14 Zurich	WestBrookmanish
Dec 7/46	W. B. Bunch	K.S. P4 PK B Zurich	WestBrookmanish
Nov 1/46	Alfred Spang	Vol. 5. PK 123 Zurich	WestBrookmanish

Land owners continued to petition for debentures to the Municipality for phone service. The cost of the work to be extended over a 10 year period.

Post-war Growth

Improvements to the Hay system were on hold during the war, but in early 1945 Council made the decision to purchase a new telephone switchboard for the Zurich office from the company Stromberg-Carlson for a price of \$968.51. In July, Council issued new debentures to cover the cost of the switchboard, and cable and line extensions. When the OMB's Inspector of Telephone Services questioned the need for the debentures, Reeve Hugh Brokenshire sent the following response:

“In recent years the tourist trade at Grand Bend has become gigantic and extensions have been made in and around that place so that the trunk line extending out of Dashwood Central (a mass of individual wires) needed to be replaced with a cable for a distance of nearly three miles . . . In the extreme south end of the system there are six persons (four in Stephen and two in McGillivray) who want to be served with new phones . . . The system is changing the switchboard in Zurich Central and this will involve about \$1,000.”

Fun at CITA

In October 1945, Hugh Brokenshire, Harry Hoffman and Harry Hess traveled to Toronto to attend the Canadian Independent Telephone Association (CITA) convention. CITA was formed in 1905, bringing together existing telephone associations and other independent telephone systems. For the employees and officers of independent systems, the main function of CITA was to sponsor the annual conference, which became a



Sitting centre is Harry Hoffman, to his left is Harry Hess. The other gentlemen are unknown.

two-day outing and an opportunity to connect with friends in the telephone business. Manufacturers and suppliers of telephone equipment displayed their wares, underwrote the cost of the banquet, and maintained hospitality suites at the hotels where the conferences were held.

We don't know if Hay representatives attended every CITA conference, but we do have an amusing account of the 1945 event, written by Harry Hess.

“The delegation met at the Clerk’s office at 6 a.m. and shortly motored to Toronto via motor car. After considerable circulating around, getting in and out of parking lots where we were not wanted, and one-way streets, we finally made a landing half on a parking lot, and half on the sidewalk. We were all very much concerned about Hoffman’s car, expecting to find at least two of the tires missing when we returned, nevertheless the car was again moved that evening with apparently nothing missing.”

“Half the night I tried to sleep and the other half I tried to pull myself out from under the Reeve, who insisted that during this nightmare of his, he occupy the entire bed, which he certainly accomplished up to the time he awoke at 6 a.m.”

“We made it to the convention hall just in time to hear the last of the address on, “are we going from magneto to common battery or dial.” After the night I had, I wasn’t interested to go anyplace with or without anything.”

Joking aside, Hess reported on a talk by Ralph Hackbusch of the Stromberg-Carlson company. Mr. Hackbusch was clearly a man before his (or any) time!

“Although his talk was most theoretical, he pointed out that the telephone will eventually swing to the higher frequencies in transmission and use power lines to the remote sections of our country, as well as right here in Ontario. Mr. Hackbusch also touched on walkie-talkie point-to-point telephone service and television, which may be a reality in less than five years using some system of re-broadcasting by means of an aeroplane which would circle in an area of seven miles at 3,000 feet entirely controlled wirelessly. This all seems very far fetched, nevertheless much has been accomplished in electronics in the last five or six years and will no doubt continue.”

Financial Clouds Gather

Growth continued with the installation of 12,000 feet of aerial cable west of Dashwood in 1946, and the purchase of the western portion of the Crediton Rural Telephone System in 1947. The purchase was based on a petition received from Crediton subscribers. At a special meeting in April, “there was a lively discussion in regards to the cost of the addition, financing, etc.” Ultimately, the purchase was approved by Hay subscribers. Council immediately authorized borrowing \$9,000 to finance the purchase, reconstruction and extension of the Crediton line.

At the annual meeting in February 1948, George Armstrong, speaking on behalf of Harry Hess, who was ill, noted that “the years 1945, 1946 and 1947 were years of heavy expenditures, and due to this the report showed a picture that was not too bright financially.” One of the major expenses was moving telephone poles to accommodate highway widening. There was considerable discussion about the “not too bright” financial outlook, and ultimately a motion to raise debentures from new subscribers was passed.

At a special meeting of subscribers in November, a motion was passed to raise the telephone rates, but the decision didn't sit well with everyone. By January 1949, James MacDonald, the Supervisor of Telephone Systems for Ontario, wrote to Hugh Brokenshire about a letter he had received from Dashwood subscribers. In the letter, the subscribers complained that,

“The telephone board was to get in touch with the Municipal Board and reach an agreement as to the rates. They have let things get away from them and now the finances of the system are in a muddle. The system seems to be going in the red every year, so they owe now to the Hay Council from Ten to Fifteen Thousand Dollars.”

Brokenshire responded that expansion of the system to the south “hadn't paid for itself, and in that lies the trouble.” MacDonald attended the 1949 annual meeting in February. He told the subscribers that the system should have a reserve fund of 5% set aside for emergencies and depreciation. He also recommended that the system repay its debt to the Township of Hay, and determine a rate increase that would allow for debt repayment and the creation of a reserve fund.

In May, there was an attempt to take the system out of the hands of Hay Township Council and create a three-person telephone commission, but the motion was rejected. In December, Harry Hess was hired to manage the entire Hay System, at a salary of \$11,500.

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[Canadian history timeline 1949: Newfoundland becomes Canada's tenth province.]

The Challenges of Growth

The challenges of growth continued in 1950 and 1951. In December 1950, the system reached an agreement with E.J. Frederick to lease his property in Grand Bend for a central office and switchboard. Moving poles to accommodate the widening of Highways 81 and 83 and the establishment of the Grand Bend office were major expenses. In July 1951 subscribers received a letter from Brokenshire outlining more rate increases. Paid-up subscribers would now be paying \$18 per year, with higher rates for new subscribers based



Bill Haysom – Bell Telephone Manager of Goderich Area looks on at Grand Bend Operators from left, Luella Desjardine, Olive Webb and Shirley Grigg

on when they joined the system. Renters were to be charged \$30 per year. There were also additional charges on private lines for each quarter mile from the nearest town limit, for extension telephones and bells, conversion to a modern handset, and other services. Subscribers had an opportunity to “present any substantial argument in favour of or opposed to this application.” The rates appear to have been approved.

Despite all the financial concerns, the Hay Municipal Telephone System continued to offer the personal service for which independent telephone companies were known. In June 1952, for example, the Council entertained a request from Frank Fields. Fields was in the Tuckersmith Telephone System area, but it was explained that “he is married to a Reichert girl and all his connections are south from his farm.” To help Fields stay in touch with his family without incurring long distance charges, Council formally requested permission from Tuckersmith to provide the requested service!



Company van in front of the Grand Bend switchboard office. The office was located right where Highway 81 would eventually be straightened through to the main lights. This view would have been from the bridge.

.....
[Canadian history timeline 1952: First television stations in Canada begin broadcasting]

Life of a Linesman

Steve Meidinger began working with Hay Municipal Telephone System in 1953, and retired 47 years later in 2000. In the 50s he remembers that there were two or three linesmen and one truck. He recalls the daily routine: trouble-shooting with subscribers in the morning, and construction in the afternoon. Each telephone had a battery that lasted a year or longer, depending on how much it was used. The linesmen often went out to replace batteries for subscribers. “We didn’t have much to work with,” he remembered in 2010. “Just old equipment that we had to keep working. There was a lot of wind and snow damage. Lightning was bad, too – it could affect the phone and the battery.”

The crew worked six days a week, nine hours a day, but the pace was leisurely. “Visiting in the homes was a good part of my work. We would visit, but still get to all the places that needed repairs. Service to our customers always came first.”

Steve's brother Ivan also worked with Hay, also putting in 47 years of service. On his retirement in 1998, Ivan recalled the terrifying experience of climbing a telephone pole for the first time. "I climbed a 45-foot pole. I had spurs on, the pole was frozen and I didn't know how to climb!"



Constructing and splicing an aerial terminal, contract splicer Jack Keller of Seaforth (on the elevated work platform) is assisted by Hay employee Bill Ingram while Ivan Meidinger preps a "Ready Access Cabinet".

.....

Winter Storms

Winter storms were a constant challenge for the maintenance of the system. A major sleet storm in March 1956 brought down 200 poles. During an interview in 2010, Steve Meidinger remembered needing a bulldozer to push the downed lines off the highway. “We had to rebuild the whole thing. We would get people from other systems to help us out, and we hired local help to dig poles. We worked seven days a week until we had it back in service.”

At the annual meeting a year later, the former Reeve, Earl Campbell, commended the linesmen for getting lines back in order after the storm, well before neighbouring systems were able to restore service.

Gordon Hess represented his father Harry, who was ill, at the 1957 annual meeting. Gordon worked with his father at Hess Electric and Hay, and bought Hess Electric in 1953. At the meeting, he noted that it had taken 12 men to do the repair work after the storm. Many of the repairs were temporary, with final repairs and line splicing to accommodate growth in the Grand Bend area completed later in the year. He also reported on moving poles to accommodate more road widening, and installing phones in each town fire hall. Growth had slowed in Zurich and Dashwood, with just 11 new subscribers, but 41 phones were installed in Grand Bend. The meeting ended with the Reeve noting that the system still owed \$30,000 in loans and debentures.

Changing of the Guard

By 1958, much had changed. Harry Hess died in 1957. Gordon Hess sold the family business and joined the telecommunication division of Northern Electric Company, later known as Northern Telecom. He went on to build an office, warehouse and cable yard in Zurich, and continued to play an important role as a supplier and advisor to Hay.

The Council re-organized Hay, naming Reg Black as Secretary Treasurer and Harold Zehr as Line Foreman, later Plant Manager.

Zehr had been employed by Hess Electric since 1949, so he was familiar with the telephone operation and enjoyed the work. During an interview in 2010, his wife Laurene says that he often worried about the future of the company because it was so small. “He sometimes expressed a fear that Bell would one day take it over,” she remembers. “It was always in the back of his mind.”

His son Terry remembers: “He was a perfectionist, quite outgoing, a community man who liked to get out in the public. He got together with the Reeve and Council once a month. They got along well, although he used to laugh about one councillor who always said no before he said yes! Council usually went along with his wishes.” When Terry himself joined Hay in 1988, a councillor told him



Steve Meidinger, Junction of Highway 21 and 83, Port Blake.

that if he was half the man his father was, he'd be okay.

At the 1958 annual meeting Reeve V.L. Becker spoke appreciatively of the legacy of Harry Hess, calling for a moment of silence in his memory. He went on to explain the reorganization of Hay and then handed over the meeting to Reg Black. Black delivered a thorough review of the system's finances.

Like MacDonald nearly a decade earlier, he pointed out that by failing to depreciate equipment, the financial statements of previous years had painted a much rosier picture than was justified. "I would suggest," he said, "that to some extent at least a profit has been shown by keeping in use equipment that was long outmoded by other systems, and by failing to allow that when a \$6,000 cable was installed it might well have to be replaced in years to come, or that a phone of 1925 vintage might well be worn out by now." Black noted that the system faced major expenses, including moving poles due to widening on Highways 84 and 21 and the Goshen Line, replacement of old phones and lines, and replacement of aging switchboards.



Chapter 3: 1941 – 1960

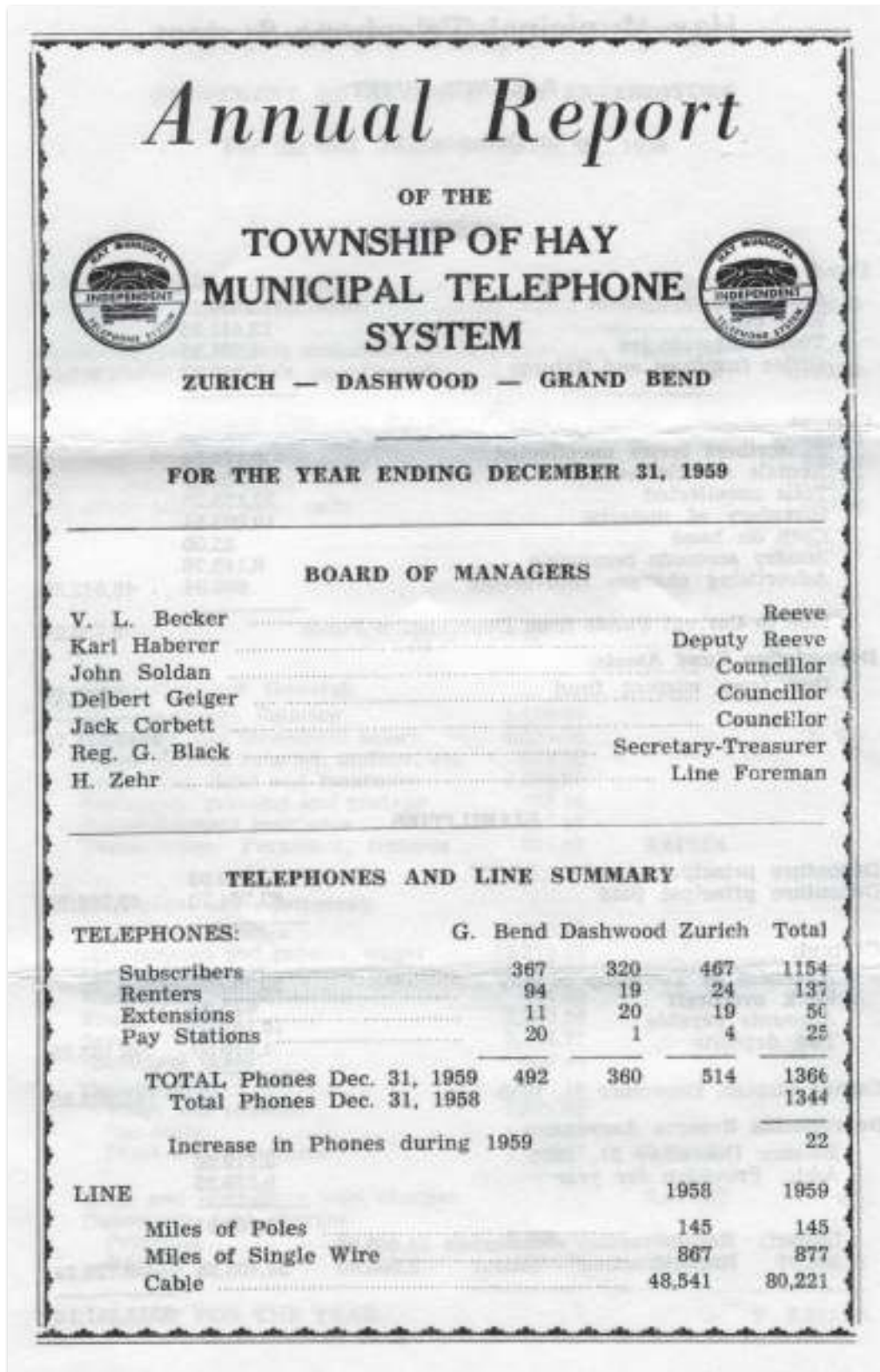
Black also reported that Hay had begun collecting telephone rates from village phones on a quarterly basis, rather than annually as part of the municipal tax roll. He pointed out that this system provided steady revenue throughout the year, and spread payment for subscribers. He ended by strongly recommending an increase in rates.

The Hay Municipal Telephone System was in good hands. A new era of technological advances lay ahead.

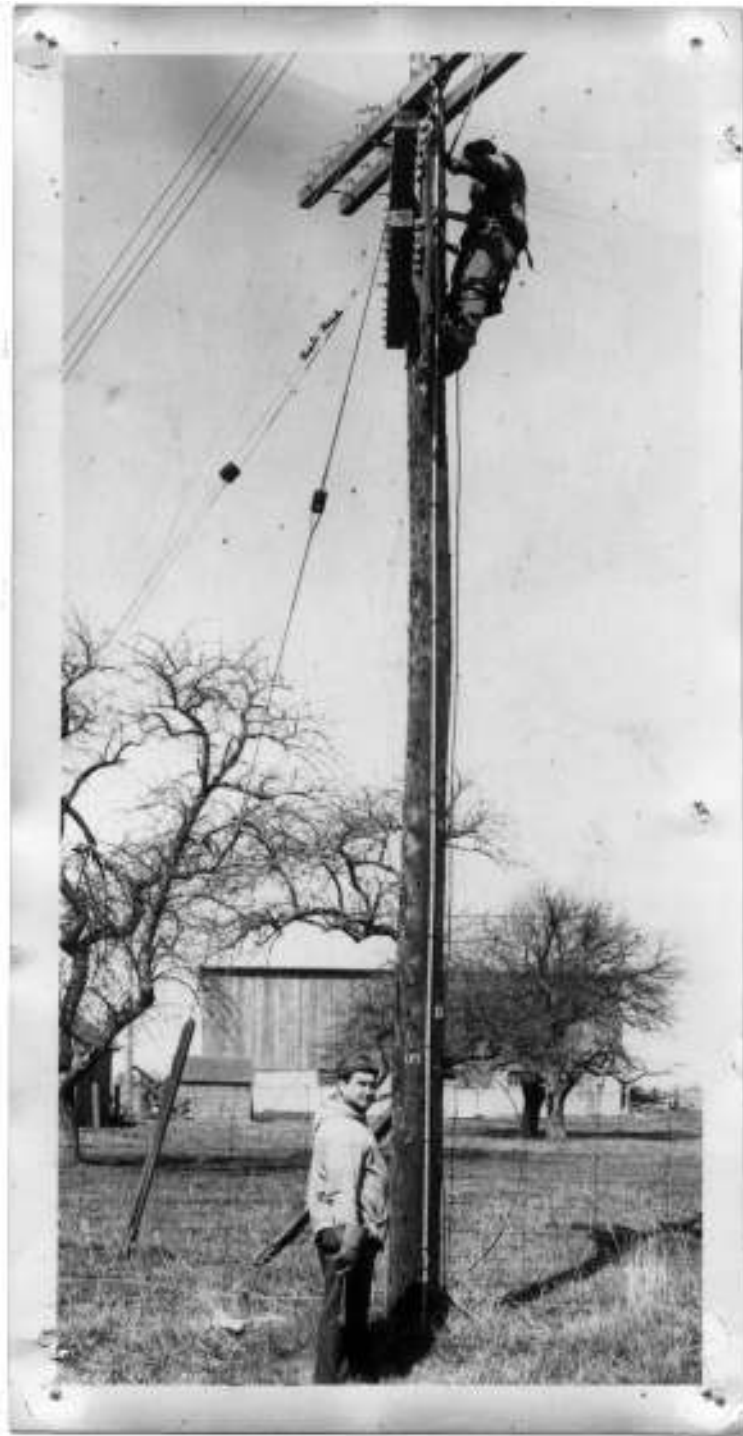
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[Canadian history timeline 1959: St. Lawrence Seaway opens]



An aerial tent. This unknown Hay employee hauls up all his tools and even a heater if necessary to work on a cable splice. The sides of the tent can also be dropped down if needed. The photo was taken in Grand Bend.



The 1959 Annual Report was the first visible example of the use of a logo in print by the telephone company. The logo painted on the company vehicles was more simplified.



CHAPTER 4

1961 – 1976



A November, 1962 newspaper article states that *“Much work has gone into the preparation of the telephone system at Grand Bend for cutover to dial.”* Shown here from left to right is Harold Zehr, foreman at Hay, James Orr, installation technician of Northern Electric, and Bill Ingram also of Hay.

There were limitations to any telephone service based on operators. As a newspaper article in August 1960 pointed out, visitors to Grand Bend were fond of complaining about the old-fashioned phone service, making comments such as “I guess it must be coffee break at the telephone office,” and “Someone should give those girls no-nods so they can stay awake longer.” The reporter went on to give a behind-the-scenes view of the Grand Bend exchange.

“As soon as we walked in the door we were faced with a maze of wires that slightly resembles the launching pad at Cape Canaveral and looks like it

would take a team of well-trained engineers to figure out which end is which. Although it was hard to see through the mass of wires, we knew that there must be someone there as we could hear polite voices asking ‘Number please.’ On closer inspection we could see the cheery faces of three operators as they diligently went about their work of keeping Grand Bend connected with the outside world. Because we couldn’t see any lights flashing, nor hear any bells ringing, it was hard to determine just how these ladies knew when to say ‘Number please’ . . . One operator (too busy to talk) pointed to a little flap

that had just opened beneath a number. Immediately (almost before it had dropped completely) she had inserted one of the connections into the hole and was saying, 'Number please.'

Despite the herculean efforts of the operators described in the article, it was clear that things had to change. As early as 1959, Reg Black had noted that “conversion to dial central equipment would be somewhat more expensive but would give the best possible service to the users and would eliminate the heavy costs of operator salaries.”

By the early 60s, Hay was moving aggressively into the era of dial telephone service. Grand Bend was the first exchange to be converted. It was a move strongly supported by the Ontario Telephone Service Commission, which provided engineering and commercial support to any independent system making the move.

In May 1961 representatives of Hay, the Grand Bend Public Utilities Commission, the Grand Bend Chamber of Commerce, and the Grand Bend Council met to discuss plans for a new underground cable route in preparation for switchover. After some discussion, it was agreed to split the cost of burying electrical and telephone cables 40/60 between Hay and the PUC. On behalf of Hay, V.L. Becker thanked “all who attended the meeting for the splendid spirit of co-operation which had enabled finalizing, that could have taken several meetings if less interest and co-operation had been displayed.”



NUMBER PLEASE—Shown here, taking a slight pause from their hectic job of keeping Grand Bend connected with the outside world, are three members of the Hay Municipal Telephone System. The three operators are part of a staff of seven. They are from left to right: Shirley Grigg, Corrie VanDongen and Mona Tyler.

Battle of the switchboard: some days you can't win

Shirley Grigg, Corrie VanDongen & Mona Tyler – Grand Bend Switchboard Operators

In November Harold Zehr, Reg Black, two councillors and representatives from Bell, Northern Electric and the Ontario Telephone Service Commission met at the office of the Chief Engineer of the Ontario Telephone Service Commission in Toronto to organize the Grand Bend cut-over. December 16, 1962 was chosen as the date and plans for the Grand Bend building were reviewed, to ensure that they met the requirements for Bell and Hay. The following May, the Council “motored to Grand Bend” for a sod-turning ceremony for the new dial exchange building.

.....
[Canadian history timeline 1962: Trans-Canada Highway officially opens]

On Strike

In November 1962, perhaps sensing that their time was coming to an end, operators in Zurich went on strike. They were concerned that a new switchboard installed in their office (“necessary to tie in with the switch-over to dial in Grand Bend”) was too long for them to reach easily. The operators suggested to Reeve Becker that members of council be invited to drop by the telephone office and see the problem for themselves, but Becker refused. A news report went on to say:

“While the rates of pay for the operators is not an issue in the strike, the girls told this newspaper that they are badly underpaid for the work they are called upon to do. They receive 70 cents per hour for the time they work. In addition to being telephone operators, they are asked to look after the fire alarm, the bank burglar alarm system, the water pressure gauge, and sometimes they have to act as babysitters.”

The operators stopped connecting calls at 6 p.m. on November 10. When Reg Black and the Reeve arrived just after 7 p.m., three-quarters of the circuits were calling for service, including all the outside trunk lines. Black told the striking operators to leave and took over the switchboard until help arrived from Grand Bend. Full service was quickly restored.

In a subsequent statement from Hay, management claimed the root issue was in fact wages. A special meeting of Council was held on November 17 to hear the concerns of the four operators, Helen Walker, Beatrice Geoffrey, Marjorie Hesse, and Irene McCann. It’s clear that Council was not impressed. After the women had presented their case, the following motion was passed:

That after hearing the report of the operators we feel they have done a great injustice to both the public and their employers that we therefore continue with the present staff without re-hiring them for a period of about one month and that we then allow re-employment in a relief capacity or full-time as is required after the assurance of continued full-time employment for the two operators who remained faithful to the system, providing further that it is intended that they should make public apology to the people they serve, and the Secretary is advised to notify the four operators as to the Council’s decision.”



Zurich switchboard operators - Left to Right: Mrs. Helen Walker, Mrs. Beatrice Geoffrey, Mrs. Marjorie Hess & Mrs. Irene McCann.

Meanwhile, things were moving quickly in Grand Bend. A new exchange building was constructed at a cost of \$11,000. Debentures totalling \$250,000 were sold to fund the entire project, including the underground cabling.

To ensure that service continued while the new system was put in place, each subscriber in Grand Bend had two telephones, the existing magneto set and one wired for the dial service. This was not popular with subscribers. A newspaper article interviewed Harold Zehr about the problem, and reported:

“His men were having trouble convincing people to allow them to put in the new sets. He said most of them wanted his men to come back later and put in the dial. ‘This is impossible,’ he stated, ‘because we have to install over 600 new sets before cutover.’ He also warned that persons who wouldn’t let his men put in the new phones wouldn’t have a telephone at all when cutover is made.”

Grand Bend Cut-Over

As the great moment neared, Reg Black praised Harold Zehr for the careful planning and scheduling, noting that the crew was also dealing with pole relocations on three highways during the same period. Credit was also due to three experts from the Ontario Telephone Service Commission, Martin Pritchard, Francis Gemmel and Victor Handforth.



Staff in front of the newly constructed "CO" (central office) building in Grand Bend, 1962. From left to right: Steve Meidinger, Gerry Chapman, Unknown, Lloyd Denomme, unknown, Bill Ingram, Ivan Meidinger & Harold Zehr.

On the night of the cut-over, employees and councillors

dressed in formal suits and dresses and marked the occasion solemnly at the new exchange building. The moment arrived at 2 a.m. on December 17, the switch was thrown, and Grand Bend was on dial service.

Rates went up for the 600 Grand Bend area subscribers, but as Black proudly observed, "We're still about 10 percent lower than Bell rates."

Once the cut-over was successfully completed, Hay staff visited each home to disconnect and remove the old phones that had been left in operation. Some people chose to buy their old phones from Hay for \$5 as souvenirs of an earlier era.

By the 1964 annual meeting, the Reeve was able to proudly announce that, "Dial is in operation at Grand Bend exchange and the results of the first complete year of operation prove that revenues from that exchange will easily repay the debt involved." In fact, business was so brisk in Grand Bend that there was already talk of expanding the facilities.

A further investment of \$125,000 was made in 1963, so that Hay could move ahead with conversion of the Zurich exchange. By the meeting, the exchange building was complete and installation of the dial equipment was about to start. Conversion at Dashwood was more complicated however, and the Reeve promised to "call in top rated engineering assistance to assist us in our planning." Hay had an annual revenue of about \$110,000, and in the previous six years, 308 phones had been added to the system.



Zurich and Dashwood Cut-over

The cut-over in Zurich happened in November 1964. In advance of the big event, the newspaper noted:

“It will take about two minutes early Sunday morning to complete the change-over from a manual to a dial telephone system in Zurich, Hensall and the surrounding areas. The nearly magical conversion will be made efficiently by trained personnel after literally thousands of man hours of thinking, planning and worry. . . When the signal is given for change-over, telephone men in Hensall and Zurich will disconnect all the lines to the old switchboards, an operation requiring about 30 seconds. The moment the old system is ‘dead,’ the new system will be activated by another crew who will remove the ‘blocking tools’ from the dial switching equipment. This takes only a few seconds and immediately the dial system is in operation.”

The occasion was marked by a melancholy ode, penned by a nameless poet.



This photo taken in 1966 shows a magneto to dial conversion at the Bank of Montreal in Dashwood. Lloyd Denomme is the installer, Peter Regier is the installer's helper and the accountant from the bank is unknown.

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A November 1966 newspaper article accompanying this picture stated "Delicate Operation – The installation of dial equipment in the Dashwood exchange of the Hay Municipal System is a touchy operation, and requires the highest quality of skilled men to do the work. In this photo supervisor Jim Orr, left, of Northern Electric, is watching the work being done by Art Martin, centre, another employee of the same company. At the right is Bill Wagner, an employee of the Hay System. The dial exchange is to be completely ready for the cut-over by the middle of October."

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Steve Meidinger a Hay employee and Wayne Horner, Council member, shown here during the Dashwood Cut-over.

.....



This now well aged photo from the mid 60's was used in a newspaper article showing Lloyd Denomme installing a new fire alarm telephone on the premises of Fire Chief Milton Deitz. Above the phone is a switch to turn on the fire siren when a fire call was received on the special telephone. Below the new phone is the old style set that was in use for years.

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A newspaper article which accompanied this photo states: *"SPLICER AT WORK - A big part of the work involved in changing the Dashwood exchange of the Hay Municipal Telephone System to dial is the endless amount of cable splicing required. Shown here at the tedious job is Jack Keller, of Seaforth, who does most of the splicing for the Hay System. He works inside a tarpaulin hut, with a small propane heater helping to keep his fingers warm. Dashwood residents will be seeing quite a bit of this hut over the next few weeks."*

.....





A newspaper article from the Citizen in May 1966 shows the devastation of a sleet and wind storm that went through the area. Shown here are two employees of the Hay Municipal Telephone System, Bill Wagner and Lloyd Denomme removing downed telephone lines from Highway 81 in front of Bell Aerospace, southeast of Grand Bend. Three or four miles of lines were destroyed in that particular area, while losses in other sections were as bad or worse.



Hay staff takes part in many local parades including this one in the 60's. Standing on the left is an unknown women, sitting on the left is Dorothy Wagner, and sitting at the old switchboard is Linda Stade.

Village of Grand Bend, Ontario

MURRAY A. DES JARDINS

Clerk-Treasurer

PHONE 43

September 19, 1961

Hay Municipal Telephone,
Att: Mr. Reg. Black,
Surich, Ontario.

In reply to your letter of request of September 17, 1961 re- the location of a double pay phone at the corner of Lake Road and Highway #21 in the Village of Grand Bend, please be advised that the following motion was duly moved, seconded and passed by the Grand Bend Village Council at their regular meeting of Sept. 18, 1961.

" That the Hay Municipal Telephone System be permitted to erect TWO telephone booths on the North East corner of the junction of Lake Road and Highway #21, in the Village of Grand Bend"

The Village of Grand Bend will expect that these phone booths will be erected upon cement foundations, placed such that they will not impede vision of approaching traffic, and conform to the general surroundings.

Yours very truly,

Murray A. Des Jardins
Murray A Des Jardins,
Clerk of the Village,
Grand Bend Ontario.

In this letter, dated September, 1961, from the Village Council of Grand Bend, Hay is granted the right to install a double pay phone at the corner of Lake Road and Highway #21.

The double phone booth in Grand Bend. In the rear you can see the building which eventually became Sharen Realty.





This image of Hay work trucks was captured in this 1962 photograph in front of the newly constructed "CO" or Central Office in Grand Bend.

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Taken in the early 60's Jack Keller is at the controls of his trenching machine installing new underground cable. In the background a nice look at the Bedford van that was used during that time period.

.....



Zurich Business Office - General Manager Bill Wagner, Owner of Weber Contracting, Don Weber and Plant Supervisor, Bob Hendrick take a leisurely moment to catch up on the latest news.

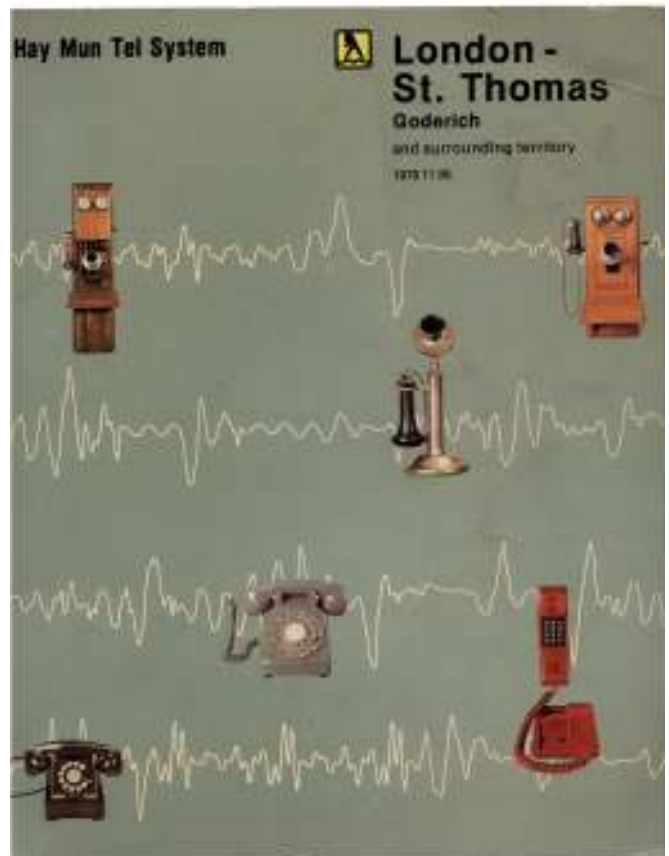
.....



Steve Meidinger in 1964 splicing underground copper cable preparing for the Zurich cut-over.



Above: An interesting Bell advertisement from the 1970 London and area phone directory. Top right: A section of the yellow pages from the 1963 Goderich and Area phone book. Notice that some of the hotel phone numbers are still two and three digit dialling whereas the Grand Bend Cut-over had been completed so those numbers are the full 7 digits. Right: Cover of the London - St. Thomas, Goderich 1979 phone directory.





History of the Brand Logo

The original logo on the 1959 Annual Report was the first visible example of the use of a logo in print by the telephone company. Although it changed to green at some point on letterhead, this logo of a telephone surrounded by wording was basically unchanged on print material until Hay became a co-operative in 1995.

The logo painted on the company vehicles was only slightly different from the one that was on printed material. Unknown when the use of a logo appeared on vehicles, this great close-up taken in the late 50's or early 60's of Harold Zehr alongside one of the Bedford vans (top right), displays the logo with the telephone in blue and the wording in gold. The same logo is also seen on the trucks of the same time. In the image on the right you can see Robert Prang on the left holding the new Northern Electric 500 Dial Desk Set and on the right, Lloyd Denomme holds the Northern Electric 500 Dial Wall Set.



At some point the telephone depicted in the Hay Municipal Telephone System logo was simplified further on the company vehicles.

The colours also changed where the gold was dropped and blue and red were adopted. It is likely at this point that the logos were silkscreened on to vinyl instead of being painted on the vehicles. The photo on the left shows, from left, Erich Freiter, Ken Clarke and Dave Clarke and was taken in 1986 as they worked at removing retired overhead lines as more underground buried cable took its place.



This is a badge that was worn on the hats of Hay employees for many years starting in the 80's.

.....

This great fleet shot taken in the late 90's shows the trucks with the newly incorporated logo (shown to the right) adopted after the conversion to Hay Communications Co-operative in 1995. From the left is Erich Freiter, Terry Zehr, Rick Fisher, Kevin Gingerich, Lloyd Denomme, Bob Hendrick, Marty Merner, Keith Semple and Ken Clarke. The one colour logo, in either green or gold, was in use for 10 years.



The current logo adopted in 2005, maintained the gold and green, but greatly changed from the circle of text around a telephone. This reflected the changing trend to becoming more than just a telephone provider. In 2010, this new sign was installed at the main office on Blind Line in Zurich to commemorate the 100 year anniversary.



Harry Hoffman collected many phones over the years. This shot is of just one the walls of phones he had collected. The collection was housed in the basement of the Hoffman Funeral Home.



Paul Klopp on the left and Marty Merner on the right accepts the EUSA "Presidents Award" on behalf of all Hay staff for Safety in the workplace.

A lightning strike not only peels the bark off two trees, but also takes down some of Hay's aerial service wire that was attached to the trees.



Reminiscing old times at the Hay Telephone display with Hay employee Terry Zehr, is Harry Hoffman shown in period clothing at the Hay Days New Year's Levee in January 1996.

Subjected to adverse conditions. In 1993, Weber Contracting is directional drilling conduit under Mud Creek along Hwy 83 through Hay Swamp. Shown here are from the left: Erich Freiter, Darrell Konings (Weber Contracting), Rick Fisher and Marty Merner.





Top: From the left, Judy McKinnon, Rosie Rothenberg, Judy Voogel, Angela Schneider and Jill Kipfer enjoy a retirement celebration for Judy Voogel in 2006.

Middle: A dedicated Chad Ramer tests a phone line after digging out a terminal.

Bottom: Angela Schneider gives her yearly report to Hay Co-operative members at the 2010 annual meeting held at Community Living in Dashwood. At the front table from the left, Director Paul Klopp, Accountant Eugene Bender and Directors Jim Hoffman, Don Oesch, Louis Schilbe and John VanderBurgt. Attendees are unnamed.



Hay Communications takes part in the Town of Zurich's 150th Anniversary parade in 2006. Here Kenny Clarke aka "Superman" jumps out of the cake to celebrate the event.



2009 - Construction workers inside the new wireless internet tower in Mt. Carmel. The equipment will service customers outside of Hay's traditional coverage area as many of these customers are still on dial-up internet service.



Top left: A "Family Hay Ride" for The Grand Bend Winter Carnival Parade in 2008. The wagon "horses" in front shows Angela Schneider standing alongside Alex Stasik on Long Distance Digger and behind is Samantha Stasik on Sunfire Security. On the big "horse" on the float is Dan Drennan, with Mackenzie Stasik and Jason Schneider on the back of the float.

Top right: Grand Bend Winter Carnival Parade in 2011. "Back to the Beginning". From the left, Bob Hendrick, Val Gingerich, Kelli Phillips and Erich Freiter in authentic period clothing. On the left shows many of the specialty channels carried by Hay's new IP Digital TV service in 2009. Below shows the inside cover of the 2009-10 Phone Directory.



Climbing poles is now a thing of the past, but here Chad Ramer climbs on a beautiful day in 2000.



Zurich and Dashwood Cut-over continued...

Eulogy to a Country Switchboard

*Good-bye to the good old switchboard,
With its trials, its joys and its tears.
Now the dial is installed and it's over
A job we've had many years.
There's Olive and Annie and Grace,
And Helen and Betty and Marge.
They're retired and say it's all over
And no more calls free of charge.
We have many a story to tell you,
About questions and answers we give.
We wonder how many a farmer,
Will make all his cattle live.
Many memories we'd like to remember,
And many we'd like to forget.
As like the kind and sweet old lady,
Who says, "I didn't get them yet."
And then there's the blustery farmer
Who has never a kind word indeed.
He'll give you a tongue lashing
always,
And never says thanks for your deed.
Many years have gone by and I ponder,
Of how we can take and forget.
Though kindness and insults we've taken
Much happiness fills our hearts yet.
Many friends we have made through these years.
And simply because we all know,
It's hard to believe that stupid operator
Doesn't know how everything should go.
The moral to this story,
Is hard for you to believe:
But just put your finger in the right hole,
So you will never hear, "Number please."*



Telephone subscribers will no longer hear "Number Please". Mrs. Don Hesse, left and Mrs. Neil Walker from the Zurich exchange, "Soon to Disappear".



Shirley Grigg on the left and another operator from the Grand Bend Switchboard shortly before the office closed.

In Dashwood, a new exchange building was completed by March 1966 and the cut-over was

completed on November 6. As part of the project, Dashwood subscribers received free calling to Exeter and all cables in the village were buried. The old exchange building became the office for Exeter Coach Lines. Although rates were raised to cover the investment in dial technology, Hay pledged to keep rates below Bell Telephone for the same service. Equipment was also added to the Grand Bend exchange to meet the increase in service demand, and by 1967, an addition had been completed to the Grand Bend exchange building.



Last Operator, Frances Gibson shown in the Dashwood office as switchboards in all Hay exchanges become obsolete. Harold Zehr standing in behind. November 1966.

Not every independent telephone system was faring as well. While Hay grew and upgraded, the number of independent telephone companies in Ontario

dropped from more than 400 to just 126 between 1954 and 1966. Most simply couldn't keep up with technological changes and hold off the competition from Bell.

[Canadian history timeline 1965: The Auto Pact is signed between U.S. and Canada.]



Everything Ready for conversion to dial in Dashwood. Inspecting some of the last minute details are Francis Gemmel, of the Ontario Telephone Services Commission; Harold Zehr and Bill Wagner, both of the Hay Municipal System.

The Storm of '66

In May 1966 Hay Township was hit by a vicious sleet and wind storm that damaged up to 40 miles of telephone lines. Although Harry Hoffman had retired from Hay he continued to help out in emergencies. During an interview in 2010, Harry's son Jim, who went on to serve as Chair of the Board of Directors at Hay, provided a vivid



A gathering of management, operators and their husbands on the night the Dashwood "CO" was closed in 1966. In the image on the left, Ivan Meidinger locks the door to the office while Marion MacDonald stands in front of him and Doris Penhale beside. Right hand image. The festivities move over to the new "CO" building. From the left Harold Zehr, Doris Penhale, Clarence Geoffrey, John MacDonald, Beatrice Geoffrey (dialling the phone on the test cabinet) and Mary MacDonald.

description of the process of restoring service.

"All the phone lines were above ground, up on poles, and the sleet storm took them down. Hay lost lots of lines. There were telephone companies coming in from all over to help Hay get service restored. They needed whatever help they could get, and they knew Dad could restore service. My uncle Jack was a farmer south of Zurich. He'd come down and he and dad would take the pickup truck out. Dad would go up to the telephone office and get the supplies he needed, and then go out and restore lines. He would take the lines up off the ground, put up a terminal post on the side of a fence and get the lines strung so they wouldn't get grounded. Whatever was there, he would connect the lines together, clear the debris off, and restore to service. As time went on, Hay guys would come back and put in new poles and fix them properly. I was just a teenager – I came back from school and helped my Dad by moving limbs, stretching wires and pulling them together."

It was increasingly clear that buried cables offered real benefits. At the 1967 annual meeting it was reported, "Figures have shown that it is more economical to install buried cable than overhead wires, and our plans are to replace overhead lines with buried cable whenever the occasion arises." The occasion arose on Parr Line in 1967, and from St. Joseph to the north boundary of the system and from Khiva to Mount Carmel in 1968. The process continued in 1969 and beyond.



From the Citizens News May, 1966: "A number of extra hands were needed by the Hay Telephone System to restore service as quickly as possible following last Wednesday's vicious storm. Shown here working on the 14th concession of Hay are, left to right, Lloyd Smith, former Councillor John Soldan, Mike Soldan, and former Hay Telephone System lineman, Harry Hoffman. Other recruits worked in various areas which the Hay System serves."



Also from the Citizen, "Miles and miles of telephone lines in the Hay Municipal System were broken down by the unseasonable sleet and wind storm throughout this area last Wednesday.... Shown here is line foreman Harold Zehr supervising the replacement of a broken pole, as fellow workman Stephen Meidinger operates the truck hoist. This activity was taking place on the Bronson Line north, in Hay Township. (Citizens News Photo)"

Work was also ongoing on “Extended Area Service” agreements with other telephone companies, which allowed Hay subscribers to phone nearby communities without incurring long distance charges.

After fighting leukemia for several years, Harold Zehr passed away in 1970. Bill Wagner, who had joined Hay in 1965, took his place as Plant Manager, and went on to serve the system for more than three decades.

Competing with Bell

Hay always prided itself on offering equivalent service to Bell Canada, but at a lower cost. This was a common goal among independent telephone companies, and became a source of concern to the Ontario Telephone Service Commission. The Commission actually recommended to many systems that they raise their rates to cover the cost of improvements, but Hay, like others, was concerned that subscribers wouldn’t accept the changes. In 1971, Bell received approval to raise its service rates. Hay kept rates steady, but at the 1971 annual meeting, it was noted that “if we are to continue to improve our services to our subscribers, it is inevitable that it will be necessary to increase our rates.” Bell applied for another rate increase in 1974, and Hay again planned to follow suit.

By 1974 Grand Bend was growing so quickly that Hay was forced to enlarge the exchange building again and install new equipment. Many old lines were to be replaced and several new ones were installed. A special meeting was held in June to approve the estimated cost of \$800,000 for this project. Bill Wagner pointed out that the system had seen significant growth – from 1576 phones in 1962 to 2475 phones nine years later. More than 600 of the 900 new phones were added in Grand Bend. “This alone points out the fact that Grand Bend exchange is by far the fastest growing and most lucrative area in our System,” he said. “Therefore it is of utmost importance that this capital expenditure be approved in order to facilitate anticipated future growth.” The project was approved.



This 1960’s photo was taken by the Quonset hut in the yard at Hay with the line truck and a trencher. Shown from the left are Steve Meidinger, Jack Keller, Doug Armstrong and Gerry Chapman.



From the top left, Gerry Chapman and Ivan Meidinger stand on the cable plow and Doug Armstrong stands on the ground.

More Winter Storms

Lake Huron is known for its ferocious winter storms driven by strong winds. With many miles of overhead wires, Hay staff members constantly battled the elements to maintain phone service during the winter months.

Ken Clarke, who joined Hay in 1970, clearly remembers the big snow storm of 1971. He was working with Lloyd Denomme and Steve Meidinger in Grand Bend on a Tuesday morning when the wind started to howl. By mid-morning it was snowing hard and they decided to drive to Dashwood, thinking it might be better further from the lake. “It was even worse and we couldn’t turn around to get back. We kept going to Dashwood and there was a flour truck in front of us that kept getting stuck. Five times we got out and pushed him out, so we could keep going. We got to Dashwood and decided to have a coffee at the diner, thinking the storm might clear by noon. We didn’t get home until Friday!”

Another major storm hit in 1976. Bob Hendrick, who joined the System a year before Clarke, later recalled the scene.

“The morning after the storm everything was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop. And then every once in a while you’d hear a tree limb break – just crack and crash. By morning the wind had gone down and everything had an inch of ice on it. We didn’t know where to start. On some roads, everything was wiped out. At the time we only had one generator on wheels and three dial offices to keep the power going. First thing, I hauled out the generator. I’d go to one office and run it for four hours, and go to the next office and run it for four hours, to try to keep the batteries charged. The only time you really gained anything was at night when people were sleeping!”

Even in less dramatic storms, Clarke says service provided by overhead wires was easily disrupted. “There were times when we’d go out after a wind storm to where the line wasn’t working, and we’d go up and down the road and eventually find a branch lying across the wire, which would short the line so the phones wouldn’t work. Or a branch would come down and break the wire, so we had to re-splice it and put it back together.”

Replacing a telephone pole once it was downed was not a simple task. Clarke provided this vivid description in an interview in 2010.

“It would take three people to put in a pole. We had an old line truck that had a derrick on the back with a winch cable. The winch would pick up the pole and you could guide it down into the hole. We had to dig the holes by hand with a spud bar and a spoon. A spud bar was a 10 or 12-foot bar that had a flat edge on it. You could chip the hole away and then the spoon would go down and dig it out,

taking it down five or six feet. One guy would bar and the other would spoon and you would trade off. The hole would be about 10 to 12 inches around. Once the pole was in the ground, you would turn it until it looked really straight. Any pole that looked crooked on the ground, once you got it in and turned it the right way, it would be pretty well straight. Once the pole was level, you'd put the dirt in and tamp it down with the bar and pack it tight. And then climb the pole to get the wires up. Setting a pole took about an hour."



Lloyd Denomme directs a telephone pole that is being hoisted off the trailer by the line truck. It is then guided into the previously dug hole.



Sitting on the "Contempera Phone" parade float is Delores Gingerich, left and Diane Zehr.

- - PROXY - -

I/WE the undersigned Subscriber of the Township of Hay Municipal Telephone System do hereby cast a ballot by Proxy in accordance with Sec. 79(1) of the Telephone Act R.S.O., 1960, on the following motion to be presented at the Annual Meeting of Subscribers of the System, to be held in Zurich, March 30, 1965.

MOTION: 31,
"That the subscribers of the Township of Hay Municipal Telephone System hereby give approval to the making of Capital Expenditures in an amount not exceeding \$140,000.00 for the purpose of installing equipment and plant necessary to convert the System's Dashwood exchange to automatic dial operation, and it is further approved that the Telephone System apply to the Corporation of the Township of Hay for the issue of Debentures to provide the Capital required."

VOTE: Affirmative X Negative _____

Subscriber M. Merner Address Dashwood

Witness Lloyd Devenome

The outcome of the Proxy vote was 154 affirmative and 3 negative.



SOD-TURNING CEREMONY — The first sod for the new dial building of the Hay Municipal Telephone System at Grand Bend was turned at a special ceremony last week. The \$12,000 contract for the new station was awarded to Zurich Hardware and Builders' Supply Ltd., the lowest of three tenders received for the project. Shown participating in the ceremony are left to right, Reg Black, secretary-treasurer of the system, Harold Zehr, line foreman, Jack Corbett, commissioner, Karl Haberer, commissioner, Bill Sturdevant, reeve of Grand Bend, V. L. Becker, reeve of Hay, Delbert Gelger, commissioner, John Seldan, commissioner and Charles Thiel, president of the construction firm. The 30'x30' building is to be completed by July 1. (Staff Photo)

sureur of the system, Harold Zehr, line foreman, Jack Corbett, commissioner, Karl Haberer, commissioner, Bill Sturdevant, reeve of Grand Bend, V. L. Becker, reeve of Hay, Delbert Gelger, commissioner, John Seldan, commissioner and Charles Thiel, president of the construction firm. The 30'x30' building is to be completed by July 1. (Staff Photo)

CHAPTER 5

1977 – 1994

In the late 1970s, Hay began making big plans for the future. Although costly for a small independent telephone system, these initiatives resulted in significant savings over the years.

At the time no-one could have foreseen the huge changes about to take place in the telecommunications industry. Yet the steps that Hay took in the late 70s and 80s ensured its readiness to take advantage of these changes. In hindsight, these steps were clearly an example of visionary leadership.

From Overhead to Underground

The company had already begun to bury cable, and the devastating ice storm of 1976 was another reminder of the fragility of wires strung from pole to pole. At the time of the storm, about 90 percent of the lines were overhead, except in the villages of Zurich, Dashwood, and Grand Bend.



G.M Gest Construction contracted to install concrete encased duct structure. Photo taken at Severn Park adjacent to Huron Woods looking south to the Klondyke remote office.

In some areas, broken lines were spliced together and laid on the ground until a crew came along to bury them. The goal was to eventually eliminate all overhead lines, thereby protecting them from windstorms and fallen branches for all time.

The decision was a timely one. In those days there was very little man-made in the ground to interfere with digging. Today there are a myriad of sewers, hydro, cable, and natural gas lines. Checks and permits are required before digging can start, slowing the process considerably.

Burying cables also required some planning for the future. Although the maintenance of underground lines was less costly, the advantage was lost if Hay had to dig every time it wanted to add a new line. In the past, linesmen could always add an arm to a telephone pole. This option wasn't available underground. If, for example, a cable was designed to carry enough wire to provide service for 25 homes, planning had to take into account how many homes or businesses might be there in the future.

By the late 80s, nearly the entire “outside plant” was underground. Although there have been some ferocious storms since, the big ice storm of 1976 is the last to appear in this history book.

.....
[Canadian history timeline: 1980 – The majority of Quebecers vote to reject separation from Canada]

Duct and Manhole System

One of the most important decisions made by Hay during this time was to build a concrete-encased duct and manhole system. This was a very expensive undertaking, virtually unheard of for an independent telephone system. But many employees say that this was one of the most important decisions that Hay made.



Marty Merner, 1989

The duct and manhole system
ensured that the company didn't have to dig again to add new cable. The new wire was simply fed through the pipes in the ducts. This saved enormous expense down the road, particularly in the villages and along the main highways, because it avoided having to tear up streets and obtain multiple permits.

A duct and man hole system covering a combined total of 43 kilometres was constructed in all the villages and along the main highways. The largest single section of the structure runs 30 kilometres along Highway 21 from the north tip of the service area to the south. Of course, when the duct and manhole system was created, no-one foresaw the advent of fibre optic cable. But when it came along the underground structure was there to lay it cheaply and efficiently.

Party Lines

The move to bury wires coincided with the commitment to gradually eliminate party lines. By the late 70s the old multi-party lines with up to 22 subscribers were gone, but there were still lots of four-party and two-party lines.

Although needs were changing, many people were content with party lines. They were cheaper than private lines, which were subject to quarter mile charges. Because the switching equipment was housed in Grand Bend, Zurich, and Dashwood, the customers in the villages paid a base rate on private lines. But subscribers elsewhere paid a surcharge for every quarter mile outside the base rate area. A two-party line was less expensive, and there were no quarter-mile charges on a four party line.

Prior to the 70s many of the cottagers along the lake didn't own a phone. Those who did often used their phones for only a couple of months in the year. Phones were needed for emergencies and basic access to the outside world, but people didn't require the connectivity that they have today.

HAY MUNICIPAL TELEPHONE SYSTEM		
SCHEDULE OF RATES — EFFECTIVE OCT. 1/76		
DASHWOOD — GRAND BEND — ZURICH		
	Monthly	Yearly
1 Business	8.95	119.40
2 Business	7.90	94.80
Multi Party Business	5.60	67.20
1 Residence	4.85	58.20
2 Residence	3.65	43.80
Multi Party Residence	3.45	41.40
GRAND BEND ZONE RATES		
ZONE 1:	Monthly	Yearly
1 Business	10.70	128.40
2 Business	6.65	101.40
1 Residence	5.85	67.80
2 Residence	4.20	50.40
ZONE 2:	Monthly	Yearly
4 Business	6.50	78.00
4 Residence	3.75	45.00
SUPPLEMENT RATES		
	Per Month	
Extension (on premises) Res.	1.30	
Bus.	1.75	
Extension (off premises) Res.	1.85	
Bus.	2.25	
PBX Extensions	6.00	
Extension Bells (small)	.85	
(large)	.90	
Portable Extension Jack	.45	
Princess Type Telephone	1.00	
Contempra Type Telephone	1.50	
Extra Exchange Mileage Charges		
beyond Basic Rate - 1/4 mile individual	.50	
- 1/4 mile two-party	.30	
Colour Telephone (non-recurring)	9.00	
Installation PBX Trunk Bus	25.00	
Installation Residential	15.00	
Reconnection: Main Station	12.50	
Installation - On Prem. Extension	12.50	
Installation - Off Prem. Extension	15.00	
Non-Published Numbers	1.00	
Additional Listings	.30	
Push Button Telephones	2.50	

Business, residential, single and multi-party line rates and other telephone charges starting, October, 1976.

In the early 80s more and more people wanted the privacy of their own lines, and some were beginning to ask for teen lines and fax lines. Although party lines were still appealing in some of the rural areas, they were becoming a thing of the past. This trend was accelerated with the introduction of automatic number identification and the enhanced 911 service, which required a dedicated private line.

Along with the commitment to get rid of party lines came the decision to eliminate the quarter mile charge. Everyone on a private line was charged the same rate, regardless of where they lived in the Hay area. This removed any remaining resistance to the conversion to private lines.

The move to private lines also had an impact on the burying of cable in the rural areas. Dedicated lines required more wires, at least two to each house. When going underground, the company wanted to make sure that it had enough wire buried to prevent digging again in the future. As a result, the number of future homes and private lines had to be anticipated, to ensure that the lines buried beneath the ground were sufficient for future needs.

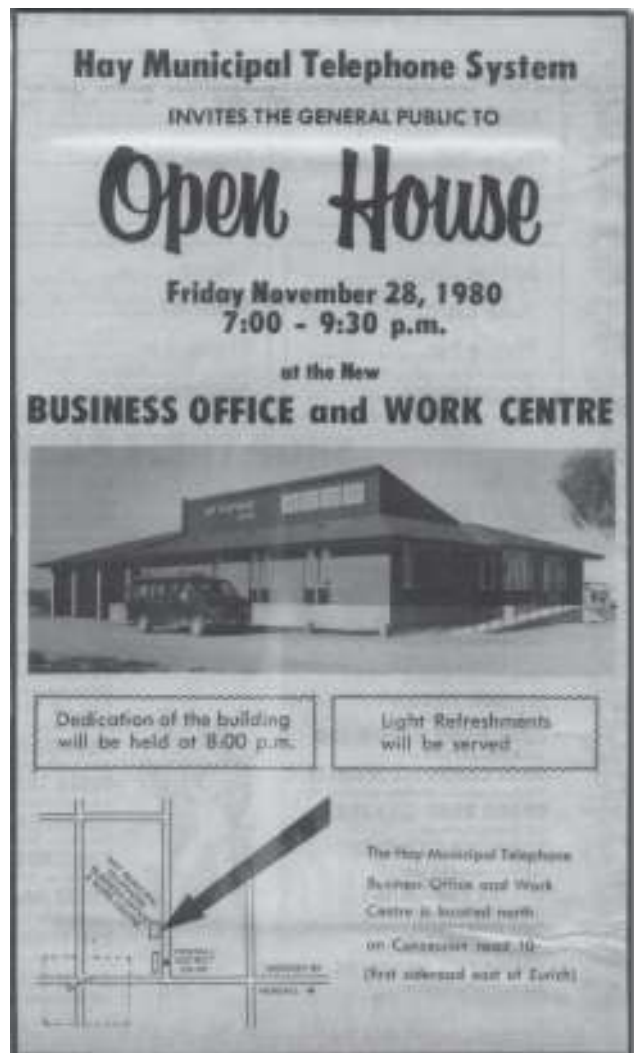
New Building in Zurich

With the expansion in the 70s, Hay found itself running out of space. Office staff and outside workers were housed in different locations. The central office was just off Main Street, and a work shed and trailer on Blind Line contained the construction equipment.

In May 1979 the company decided to build a new business and work office on Blind Line, beside the shed. At the time an editorial in the Zurich Advance questioned the move:

“Would it not be possible for the System and Hay Township to build a combined township and telephone office in the same location? It would appear a two-storey building on the same location would handle present and future needs for both parties.”

But the project went ahead. The new building was completed in 1980, and an open house held.



The building has served the needs of the company well, allowing for future expansion and bringing staff together in a modern, functional facility.

Hay Switches to Digital

During the 60s and 70s, most of the growth in Hay took place in Grand Bend. It was clear that the Grand Bend central office needed to replace the existing step equipment to keep pace with the growing demand.



At the time, Northern Telecom had just begun to replace the old mechanical switches with new computer-controlled digital switches. These new digital switches ushered in the era of touch tone, which offered customers a host of custom calling features, such as call forwarding, call waiting, three-way calling, and speed dialling.

At the annual meeting of 1979 Manager Bill Wagner announced that a new digital extension would be installed in Grand Bend. “This computer-based switcher is one of the newest and most sophisticated switchers in the world,” he wrote at the time. The estimated cost of installing the equipment was \$350,000. To finance this and other projects a new debenture was raised for more than \$800,000.

Hay was only the second independent telephone company in Ontario to install a digital switch, just after Quadro, then known as Blanshard Telephone, installed one at its Kirkton exchange. At the time there were only about 90 digital switches in North America.

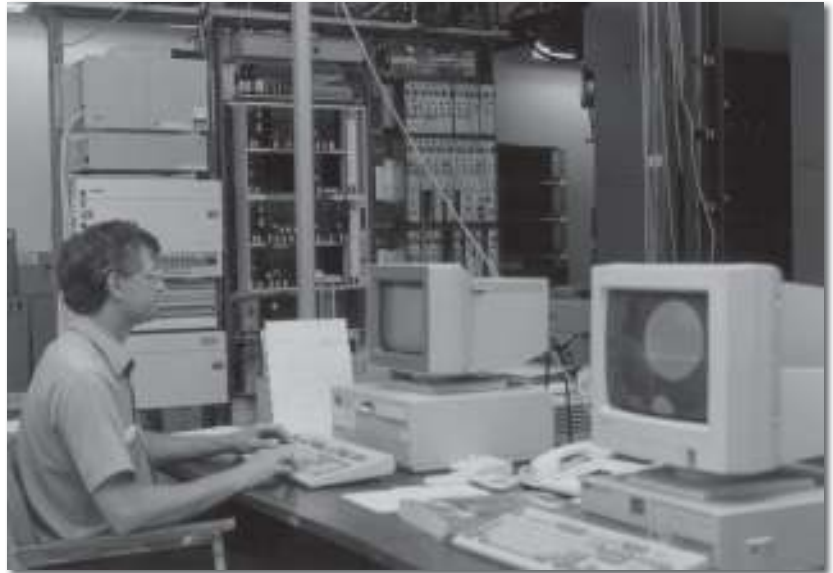
The new DMS-10 switch increased line capacity in Grand Bend from 1400 to 1600 lines. Now a staff



person in the Zurich business office could disconnect and connect most private and two-party services through a computer, without anyone being physically present in the Grand Bend Office.

The move to digital switching was a decision important to the future of Hay. It proved a make-or-break point for many of the independent telephone companies. Because of the costs involved in going from mechanical to computer-controlled switches, some companies held back. As technology advanced and costs increased, many of these companies decided to sell, or were forced to do so.

Even at Hay there was some concern about making such a big expenditure when digital technology was still in its infancy. One councilor who opposed the purchase at the time admitted many years later that Hay had clearly made the right decision.



With the move to digital, more inside computer work is required by Hay staff. Here, Keith Semple at work in the Dashwood “CO” building.

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Digital Cut-over

The cut-over from the mechanical step switch to the new DMS-10 digital switch was a big event. It was just past midnight on June 25, 1980 when the lines were all cut. Despite the late hour, most employees were there to witness the change. People didn’t dress as formally as they did for the cut-overs in the 60s, but the mood of anticipation and excitement was the same. Gordon Hess, the son of Harry, was there on behalf of Northern Telecom.

Planning for the cut-over had begun well in advance, with everything tested and re-tested. Bob Hendrick took over as plant manager about the time of the digital conversion, and he remembers preparing for the cut-over with Keith Semple, then a recent hire.

“We used to go in practically every night and run jumpers from the new equipment to the cable pair on the frame. The new lines were kind of breached together but you didn’t have power on the new lines until the cut-over. On the night for cut-over we had to cut all the old stuff off, and plug in the new stuff at the switch itself to give the dial tone. Once you’ve cut, if the new stuff isn’t working you can’t go back. That was the scary thing.”

Each subscriber received a flyer describing how the new system would work and pointing out advantages, such as,

“Grand Bend telephone users with private lines or two-party lines will no longer be asked, ‘Your number please?’ when dialling long distance calls. The new equipment automatically identifies the telephone number from which the long distance calls are made and will eliminate the need for you to give your telephone number when dialling a long distance call.”

The cut-over went smoothly. While a few of the employees continued to troubleshoot, others opened champagne and began to celebrate.

Despite the heady mood, people soon began drifting off to their homes. A new day had arrived and there was work to be done.

When morning came the office staff began fielding phone calls from customers complaining that their long distance wasn't working. Some people were still expecting an operator to come on the line asking for their number. Others did not wait the few seconds necessary to make the connection at the other end. The line was so quiet that people, particularly those who were impatient, thought they had been disconnected.



First staff picture in new building taken in 1980. From back left: Ken Steckle, Lloyd Denomme, Bob Hendrick, Ken Clarke, Dave Clarke, Keith Semple, Ivan Meidinger, Judy McKinnon (Ducharme), Bill Wagner, Judy Voogel (Clausius) and Steve Meidinger.

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The new digital system ensured that long distance calls were accurately charged to the telephone number from which they were placed. In the past, either by mistake or on purpose, people sometimes gave a wrong number. This gave rise to occasional disputes with Hay, with people claiming they were wrongly billed for calls not made.

Although this move to digital switching put an end to the problem, long-term Hay employees admit that it was never too serious. This was due to either the honesty of Hay customers, or the fact that the operators recognized many of the voices!

For a short time long distance calling was still the same for those who lived within the Zurich and Dashwood exchanges, which were still on dial switches. On October 1, 1980, Hay installed automatic number identification equipment for customers with private or two-party service in Zurich and Dashwood. Calls were automatically charged to the number that made the call, and customers were no longer required to give their numbers.

It was estimated at the time that the new equipment would increase toll revenue by approximately \$30,000 annually.



In 1983, the Hay Municipal staff were given an award from EUSA (Electrical Utilities Safety Association) for 15,000+ man hours without a workplace injury. Front Row: Ken Clarke, Ivan Meidinger, Keith Semple. Back Row from the left: Dave Clarke, Lloyd Deonmme, Steve Meidinger & Bob Hendrick.

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“Worth Keeping, Not Selling”

As the value of municipal telephone systems increased during the 70s and 80s, the question arose: who actually owned them?

Although Hay Township operated the telephone system and raised capital, the ownership was vested in the subscribers. The subscribers were those who had signed up for telephone service, and had pledged their land as security for debentures raised by the Township. As telephone systems rose in value, some subscribers saw an opportunity for a windfall profit by selling them.

Municipal telephone systems originally had been devised to support the growth of the local telephone sector. They had never been seen as a way for a group of people to make a profit. Still, if the subscribers were the owners of the system, they were technically entitled to the proceeds on a sale.

The legal rights of subscribers were very murky. The most difficult question was to determine who exactly they were. The subscribers were changing constantly, every time a piece of pledged land changed hands. It was also argued that subscribership could pass from one person to another without being tied to land.

Although pressure to sell the system by subscribers never became an issue at Hay, it was certainly on the mind of Bill Wagner during the annual meeting of 1982.

“It is impossible to reconstruct the records to make an accurate list of subscribed property. In my estimation we would be wasting a considerable amount of time and money to try to reconstruct the records which would be open to contention at a future date. . . This system was set up by our forefathers to promote telephone service. It was not set up to profit certain individuals. Therefore, let’s be positive and concern ourselves with the preservation and the advancement of the system. The system is not worth selling; it is worth keeping.”

In 1989 there was a major legal ruling involving the Bruce Municipal Telephone System. The judge in the case held that subscribers had no right to decide the sale of a municipal telephone system unless there was an accurate and verifiable subscriber list. Without such a list, all the assets of the system reverted to the municipality. This decision helped pave the way for a smooth transition when Hay converted from a municipal system to a co-operative corporation in 1994.

“A Living Organization”

Customer service had always been a top priority for the company. To create an even better impression, management decided in 1982 to provide an employee clothing allotment. The announcement at the time read:

“The primary purpose of the company provided clothing is to project a good image of the company.... Each employee is expected to maintain the clothing in good repair and the employee is expected to report to work wearing the clothing supplied except when the occasion is warranted.”

At the annual meeting of 1985, Bill Wagner expressed confidence in the future, while acknowledging the big decisions that the company had recently made.

“It is where we have come from and where we are going that are important, rather than where we are today. Companies such as ours do not live or plan their strategies and futures by the quarter or even the financial year. They are living, continuing organizations that, to be successful, have to plan from three to 10 years ahead. Often the actions taken to prepare for the future penalize their short term image.”

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[Canadian history timeline: 1983: Jeanne Sauve appointed Canada’s first female Governor General]

At 2 a.m. on March 30, 1985 the Zurich step switch was replaced by a new DMS-10 digital switch. Although the cut-over was not as nerve-wracking as the one in Grand Bend five years earlier, there was a moment of suspense when all the jumper wires to the old switch were cut. The cut-over went off with little trouble.



The Hay truck fleet in 1988.



From left, Marty Merner and Terry Zehr are staff rookies in May 1988 with Erich Freiter and Dave Clarke in front of the retiring 1972 line truck.

In 1985 the company purchased computer equipment and a software package for customer billing. The software was developed by Quintrex Data Systems of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which sent trainers to help Hay employees familiarize themselves with the new system. Bill Wagner wrote about the importance of this purchase for Hay.

“In retrospect it was a big move for a small backwoods independent to make. This in-house computer system has opened the door to enable us in the very near future to capture, record and rate our own long-distance toll. We intend to do this when we convert the Dashwood step x step office to a digital exchange with centralized automatic-message-accounting. Again we will have taken another step to gain more control of our own affairs.”

Remote Switches

In the mid-80s, the company began preparing for anticipated growth along Lake Huron north of Grand Bend, due to the construction of the water pipeline from Port Blake. The closest switching office to this area was Zurich, but it was still far enough away that Hay was concerned with the quality of transmission. Beyond a certain point, the length of the telephone line between the home and switching office begins to affect the quality of the sound. Quality also depends on the number of phones on the line.

One option was to run a very large cable all the way from Zurich. Instead, the company decided to solve the problem by installing a remote switching office in Drysdale. The cost was \$415,000, but Hay management felt it was a good investment. Moving the switching equipment closer to the customers ensured good quality transmission, and allowed for future growth.

In later years Hay also installed remote switching offices at Poplar Beach, Klondyke Road, Shipka, and Mount Carmel. In each area the company purchased a small plot of land and built a small building to house the switching equipment.

These remote switching stations proved invaluable for the roll-out



Rebuilding of Oak St., concrete-encased duct structure. Working in the trench are Hay staff Ken Clarke in front and Erich Freiter behind. On the bank is Terry Zehr, front and Keith Semple.

of the Internet and Internet Protocol TV. For technologies that depend on large amounts of data being transmitted at high speeds, the feed has to be close to the customer. The remote stations were large enough to allow extra equipment to be installed as the technology became more advanced. They are all now connected by fibre optic cable.

Forging Ahead

The economy slid into a recession in the early 90s. Although business activity declined overall, the one bright spot was the telecommunications sector. Hay continued to do relatively well financially, reaping the benefits of good planning and efficiently-run operations.

The Dashwood Exchange was upgraded to a new digital switch on December 3, 1989, for a cost of about \$450,000. This was the third and final cut-over to digital, and it went very smoothly. Every customer in the system was now connected to a digital switch, with access to all the advanced custom calling and service features. By this time, nearly the whole area had been converted to private or two party lines, and nearly all the wires were underground.

[Canadian history timeline: 1989: Canada and U.S. sign a free trade agreement.]

At about the same time the company built approximately two and a half miles of ducts and manholes along Highway 21 from the southern limits of Grand Bend to the Klondyke Road for a cost of some \$600,000. Hay also installed remote centralized subscriber line test equipment for all three exchanges.



Ken Clarke stands by the Grand Bend "CO" as multiple ducts are installed.

The company bought generators for the Dashwood Central Office, the host digital switching office that collected all the long distance toll information. “With such a great dependence on the computer system it is imperative that power interruptions do not interfere with our operations,” reported Bill Wagner at the time.



New subdivisions requiring more lines means upsizing of existing facilities. 612 meters of 900 pair cable pulled all at once. From left, Rick Fisher, Marty Merner and Steve Meidinger, May 1992 at Merrywoods subdivision.

Hay continued to gear up for more growth. Huron Woods, a large new development in Grand Bend, was getting underway, and Grand Cove was expanding. At the 1998 annual

meeting, Bill Wagner talked about the importance of preparing for the future.

“There is a danger in over-reacting to a situation. However, a far worse scenario would be to sit idly by and do nothing. The Hay Municipal Telephone System has good fundamental plant in place such as duct and manhole systems in our villages, digital switchers, portable generators, and automatic-start in-house generators. We must, and we will, forge ahead, providing our customers with excellent telecommunications services at reasonable rates, and striving to improve that tradition.”

CITA

In 1990 Bill Wagner was elected to the Board of Directors of the Canadian Independent Telephone Association. At the time CITA represented 41 independent telephone systems within Canada, including 28 in Ontario. Wagner quickly became very involved in the organization. He was a member of the Consultative and Toll Compensation Committee, the Cellular Telephone Committee, the Policy Committee and the Nominating Committee.

As an interesting footnote, the September 27, 1989 issue of the Exeter Times Advocate reported that a CITA convention in Prince Rupert was attended by spouses of the Hay directors and senior managers at the expense of the company. At the next annual meeting, Wagner noted that the report was not accurate. “The travel costs of spouses of the Board and managers are paid to functions which are held within Ontario, but not out of province. It was decided that the damage was done and very little recourse would have been gained by issuing a correction.”

Having Fun

Hay has always had a strong tradition of older employees helping the younger ones.

Marty Merner remembers that he was never pushed out on his own when he first started at Hay. He took turns going around with long-term employees Lloyd Denomme, Ivan Meidinger, and Steve Meidinger, to get a better understanding of the company and all the different jobs. Along the way, they had fun by playing pranks on one another. Merner remembers working with Lloyd Denomme on a telephone line in a customer's home. The voltage on a home line is low, except when the phone rings. "I'd be working on the telephone jack, and Lloyd would be on another jack," recalled Merner in a 2010 interview. "Then he would call in and I got zapped. He couldn't talk he was laughing so hard. The customer would be right there, and Lloyd would play it all up."

Merner found a way to get back at Lloyd, who didn't like snakes. When Lloyd went down into a crawl space, Merner planted a rubber snake. Merner didn't like snakes either, and Lloyd got back at him by playing the same trick.

Little pranks were part of the job, a way to keep it entertaining. Ken Clarke was once working with Erich Freiter on a big telephone box on the Goshen Line. One of the other employees got inside the box dressed up as a gorilla. "We asked Erich to come down and look at the box," remembered Clarke. "We said there was something wrong and you've got to check this out. Erich was annoyed and opened the door. The guy inside went Aaaaaahhhh, and Erich went flying backwards. It was priceless!"

Increased Competition

With the 90s came signs that the telecommunications industry was ready for a shake-up. The advent of cellular phones and the internet, along with regulatory changes, ushered in an era of greater competition.

Competition was a good thing for customers, who first felt the benefits with the introduction of long distance calling plans. Bell Canada had always been Hay's long distance provider. Now Bell was going head to head with new entrants like Unitel. Although this change didn't affect Hay directly, it had an impact on the way the company settled long distance charges. In December 1993 both Bell Canada and Unitel signed agreements with Hay.

In the early 90s cellular phone technology was in its infancy. In the late summer of 1989, Bell Cellular began offering cellular telephone service to the surrounding area through its Dashwood cell site. The Canadian Independent Telephone Association was in the process of negotiating a partnership agreement with Bell for sharing revenue and providing cellular telephone service on

behalf of the independent telephone systems in Ontario. Bill Wagner played an important role as a member of CITA's Cellular Telephone Committee. In 2007 Hay purchased the Dashwood cell site from Bell Mobility and used it in the roll out of its own Hay cell service.

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[Canadian history timeline: 1992: Kim Campbell becomes Canada first female Prime Minister]

At the 1994 annual meeting, Bill Wagner reported:

“There are several new developments in telecommunications which are clouding the traditional roles of the Cable TV companies and the telephone companies. This convergence of the heretofore distinct technologies will bring an era of uncertainty to other sectors for a period of time. We are evaluating these technological advancements with a view to the possible impacts on our outside plant network. Specifically, we are monitoring these advancements in the outside plant to determine when and where to install fibre optic cable – from the digital switch to the remote switch only, or right to the curb, or to the home.”

Wagner's comments were prescient. No one could have foreseen at the time the explosion of high speed internet, or that one day Hay would be offering Internet Protocol Television (IPTV). These technologies are made possible by fibre optic cables. As Wagner contemplated in 1994, Hay is now running fibre optic right to the home, an upgrade that will ensure a competitive advantage well into the future.



The 1994 executive and staff of the Hay Telephone System were: (back row, left to right) Bob Hendrick, Ivan Meidinger, Lloyd Denomme, Erich Freiter, Judy McKinnon, Terry Zehr, Jill Kipfer, Brian DePaepe, Judy Voogel, Steve Meidinger and Manager Bill Wagner. (front row) Ken Clarke, Keith Semple, Kevin Gingerich, Marty Merner and Richard Fisher.



In front of the Dominion Hotel in Zurich, Marty Merner preps the winch preparing to pull cable.
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CHAPTER 6

1994 – 2010

The law suit involving the Bruce Municipal Telephone system in 1989 created a great deal of uncertainty about subscriber-based systems like Hay's. Technically, the subscribers owned the System, but it was almost impossible to figure out who they were.

In the early 90s Bill Wagner began investigating other forms of corporate ownership. In anticipation of changes about to come, Hay and six other municipal telephone systems jointly engaged the law firm of Blake, Cassels & Graydon in April 1991 to investigate the conversion of the municipal system to another corporate structure. The other six systems were Huron & Kinloss, Blanshard, Tuckersmith, Brooke, Mornington and Gosfield North. From the beginning, Wagner was interested in the co-operative model as the best way to stay true to the original intentions of the System's founders.

Changing the Playing Field

The independent telephone companies in Ontario had always been subject to The Telephone Act, which was provincial legislation. They operated under the Ontario Telephone Service Commission, formerly the Ontario Telephone Authority.

This all changed in April 1994 with a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. The Court ruled that all telephone companies operating in Canada were federal undertakings under the jurisdiction of the federal Telecommunications Act and the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

This posed an immediate problem for subscriber-based municipal systems like Hay. The federal legislation said that only Canadian owned and controlled corporations could operate as

“telecommunications common carriers.” Because it was not a corporation, the Hay Municipal Telephone System did not meet the requirements of the Act.

Municipal telephone systems had the option of either selling their businesses or converting to a different form. The Blake law firm recommended some alternate forms of legal ownership to meet the requirements. The one that resonated most with Wagner was the co-operative corporation, which best reflected the idea of local community ownership. He actively promoted the idea among the other participating municipal telephone systems, and was a strong influence in their joint decision to go the co-operative route.

“Drink it while it’s still warm”

On September 21, 1994, Hay held an information meeting to get input from the public about its plans to become a co-operative. Brian DePaepe, Business Office Manager, remembers one of the farmers standing up at the meeting and saying:

“My two cents is that this company needs to stay local. If it doesn’t become a co-operative, we risk losing it entirely. It’s not worth that risk. I like the fact that if I have a problem with my phone, I call the repair line and leave a message, go into the kitchen and put on a pot of coffee, and before the coffee’s brewed the van is driving up the driveway. I always make them a cup of coffee because I know they’ll be here to drink it while it’s still warm.”



Taken in December, 1997. From the back left: Ken Clarke, Erich Freiter, Terry Zehr, Kevin Gingerich, Rick Fisher. Middle Row: Steve Meidinger, Ivan Meidinger, Lloyd Denomme and Keith Semple. Front: Marty Merner

In October 1994 the Blake firm gave an opinion that it was not possible to identify all the subscribers of the Hay Municipal Telephone System to get their approval for the restructuring. As a result, the law firm said, the decision to dispose of the assets was up to the Township Council.

On November 4, Hay Township Council passed a bylaw to transfer all the assets of the Hay

Municipal Telephone System to Hay Communications Co-operative Limited. The by-law notes that the Council of Hay Township “. . . is satisfied that the overwhelming public support in the local community is in favour of the transfer.” The purchase agreement shows the value of the assets less liabilities as \$9,573,816.

On November 15, 1994, the Township sent out a letter to all customers to notify them of the change and explain the new form of ownership. The letter said that all present customers of the Hay Municipal Telephone System would continue to receive service and be customers of the new co-operative. The co-operative was owned by the members, and the cost of becoming a member was set at \$1. Members had the right to vote at annual meetings and elect directors.

The First Vote

The articles of incorporation provided for a minimum of five and a maximum of 10 directors with a term of three years each. The incorporators and first directors named in the Articles were Lionel Wilder as President and Chairman, Murray Keys, Blaise Ducharme, James Love, and Gerald Shantz. Bill Wagner, Secretary-Treasurer and Bob Hendrick, Plant Manager, were later named as officers of the company. The first annual meeting of Hay Communications Co-operative was held on April 23, 1996, with 218 members in attendance. There were 14 nominees for five director positions. As required by the Co-operative Corporations Act, each member was required to select five nominees on the ballot. In alphabetical order, the first elected directors of Hay Communications Co-operative were Blaise Ducharme, James Hoffman, Murray Keys, Paul Klopp, and Lionel Wilder.

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[Canadian history timeline: 1997: Confederation Bridge links Prince Edward Island to the rest of Canada.]

Changes to the Business System

The change from a municipal system to a co-operative had little impact on the technical side of the business. The delivery of telephone services and upgrades to the system continued as usual. There were, however, some changes to the business side of the operations. One difference between a municipal system and a co-operative corporation was that a co-operative must pay income tax.

It was also necessary to keep close track of members. As owners of the co-operative, members are entitled to patronage dividends from the profits, based on the value of the services they purchase. Patronage payments have been a real benefit for members, working out to the equivalent of approximately one month of free services each year. The citizenship and residency of members had to be tracked as well, as CRTC requires that 80 percent of the co-operative be held by Canadians.

At the time Hay became a co-operative, all billing was done through Hay’s business office. As billing systems became more complex, particularly with long distance calling plans and the launch of the Internet, a number of independent telephone companies decided to pool their resources. Bill Wagner was a leader in this initiative. Co-operative Synergies Inc. was formed in 1996, a joint venture of 17 independent telephone companies. Its offices are located next door to the Hay building on Blind Line in Zurich.

Hay recognized a cost savings from the arrangement with CSI. Now Hay can launch new products, such as cellular and digital TV, without worrying about the impact on billing systems.

Long Distance Plans

Long distance rates continued to drop during the 90s, as competition in this market heated up.

In the beginning, all long distance service was provided through Bell. A long distance call from a Hay customer would connect up with the system through Bell switching equipment at the Dashwood exchange. In the 1980s, the connection



In 1996 Hay staff participated in a Zurich’s Hay Days. On the float from the Left is Ken Clarke, Bob Hendrick, Ivan Meidinger and Robb Wagner.

with Bell took place at the perimeter of the Hay boundaries. The long distance charge was set by Bell, and a small portion was paid to Hay. The share each company received was the subject of ongoing negotiation and regulatory review.

[Canadian history timeline: 1999: The territory of Nunavut created.]

Hay got into the long distance market in the early 2000s. In partnership with other Ontario independent telephone companies, Hay developed a suite of long distance plans under the brand name Alto. Alto was similar to the Bell long distance plan but cheaper.

Hay had been tracking and billing long distance charges to its customers on behalf of Bell, but Bell decided to take over its own billing so it could market directly to its long distance customers. This meant that customers of Hay who decided to keep Bell as their long distance carrier would get two bills, one from Hay for local service and one from Bell for monthly long distance. The Alto long distance plans were popular with customers, with very good rates when bundled with other Hay services. In 2005, 80 percent of Hay's customers were on an Alto long distance calling plan.

On January 31, 2005 the CRTC released a Direct Toll decision, which set the compensation received by independent telephone companies for interconnecting with long distance providers. General Manager Angela Schneider reported to the annual meeting that the ruling would result in a significant reduction in long distance settlements.

Extended Area Service

In the past, any call outside the area served by Hay was long distance. This was sometimes a source of irritation for people who lived on one of the boundaries. A customer could live less than a mile away from another family member, yet have to pay long distance charges.

Over the years Hay did its best to accommodate such customers by negotiating special agreements with other neighbouring telephone companies.

Hay had been negotiating extended area service agreements (EAS) with Bell for some time, but the issue became more pressing in the 1980s. Many people with recreational homes in Grand Bend, for example, wanted to call their friends and family in London toll free. When the CRTC took over regulation of the telecommunications industry, it began a push to extend local calling areas.

Hay began negotiating with Bell for a dramatic extension to the local calling area in the early 90s. At the time Exeter, Parkhill, and London were all long distance calls, and Hay wanted them all toll free. Bell accepted the idea of London as a toll-free calling area, plus any exchange along the way. However, Bell argued that only one pathway to London would be allowed in the toll free area. This meant either Exeter or Parkhill, but not both. Although Hay objected to this, the company decided it would be better for its customers to accept the agreement than to have a prolonged dispute. In the end it was decided that the preferred toll-free route for Hay customers was through Exeter.

The expansion of the local calling area resulted in slightly higher local telephone rates, but customers were happy with the new toll-free arrangement.



Huron Shines in '99

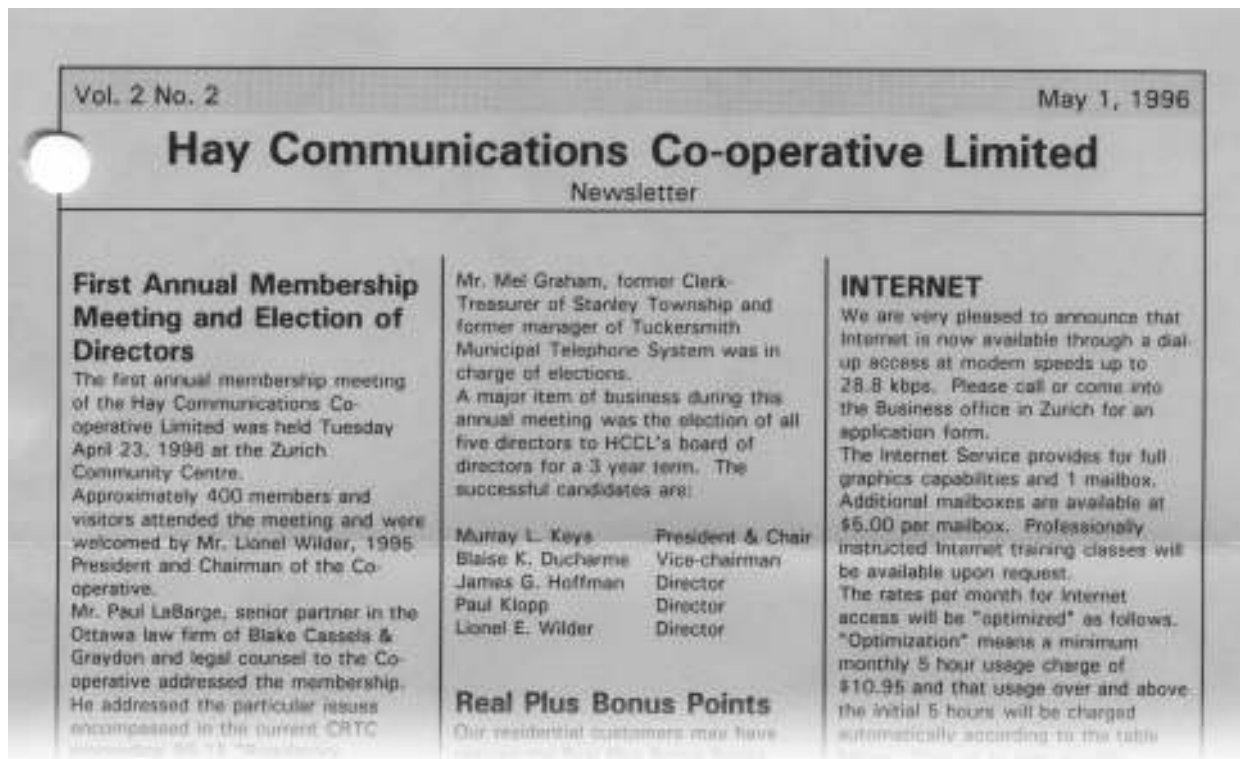
In cooperation with other area independent telephone companies: Tuckersmith Communications, Huron Telecommunications and Quadro Communications; Hay Communications had an exceptional exhibit at the 1999 International Plowing Match in Dashwood. Before high speed DSL was officially available to customers, it was showcased at the plowing match. Visitors to the Independent Telco booth could surf the web on a T1 connection which was much faster than the traditional dial-up speeds available at that time.

Not only did all staff of Hay Communications participate with the exhibit at the match, many were also actively involved in the communications planning for the event. Bill Wagner and Bob Hendrick were on the Communications Committee and many of the other staff attended organizing events over two years leading up to the event. This event was the first match ever to have all telephone cables run under ground. Approximately one hundred exhibitors requested phone and/or internet service to their booth. One week of intense installations prior to the match and immediate removal afterward of all evidence of the service was required by Hay staff. Overall the International Plowing Match was a successful community event, and one which will not be soon forgotten.

Rolling Out the Internet

The internet represented a huge change, both for the industry and Hay. Although few foresaw the internet, Hay was quick to respond to the opportunity. All the improvements to its infrastructure during the 70s and 80s ensured that it was well positioned for the next stage in telecommunications.

Like other key Hay employees, Ken Clarke felt that the roll-out of the internet was one of the most important initiatives in Hay's history. But he saw it with some irony. During the 80s everyone was working very hard to bury cables, complete the duct and manhole system, and get everyone on private lines. Sometimes staff wondered what they would have to do once it was all done. "Then the Internet comes along," said Clarke in an interview in 2010. "All of a sudden we don't have enough lines. We have to start going back out!"



A portion of a newsletter from May 1996 with the announcement of both the dial-up internet service and also the first annual membership meeting of Hay as a Co-operative.

Hay launched its internet access in April 1996. The original forecast was for 250 customers in the first year and projected annual growth of 50 customers. After an initial agreement with Tuckersmith Communications, Hay entered into a joint venture with six independent telephone companies to share a web and email server in Ripley, Ontario.

The first internet service was dial-up. For a short time, providers in the London area offered free

internet service. But because London was still a long-distance call, this was not a good option for customers in the Hay area. The basic rate for Hay’s first offering was \$10.95 per month.

The internet service was popular with Hay customers, and expanded rapidly. In 1997 the average internet use was approximately 17 hours per month. By the year 2000 it was 30 hours per month, with more than 1000 customers signed up.

Fibre Optic

High speed internet was made possible by the introduction of fibre optic. Fibre optic lines are very thin strands of glass that are used to transmit large amounts of data over a long distance. Because of their capacity and speed, fibre optic lines are gradually replacing copper lines.

Hay began using fibre optic cables in the mid-90s to connect the exchange offices at Dashwood, Grand Bend, and Zurich, enabling them to carry more data. In subsequent years Hay began to

build a fibre ring, to protect the system from cuts and outages. The company also began to run fibre from the main switching offices to the remote switching offices.

When fibre optic first began to be used, its future was uncertain. At that time, there were many manufacturers of fibre optic wires, and few standards. Hay always bought top quality fibre, which has ensured a state-of-the-art system.

In 2005 Hay completed the installation of a fibre optic ring that connects Hay’s system to four other independent telecommunications companies in southwestern Ontario. This system is “fully redundant,” which means it has been equipped to enable automatic re-routing and failover in the event of a fibre cut or outages.

Hay’s fibre optic network extends as far as Stratford and Wingham. It was initially used to enable local hospitals to exchange data, but now other public and private enterprises are benefitting.



Kevin Mulvale of Fiber Optics Canada was brought in to assist with the fibre installation. In this picture Kevin is testing each fibre strand before they are put into the ground.



Today fibre optic makes up the entire backbone of the system, and is connected to more than one hundred homes. The ultimate goal is to connect all of Hay's customers with fibre optic, paving the way for future advances in technology.

In 1995, a main fibre ring was completed that connected all "CO" (Central Office) buildings together to create a loop or redundancy in the system. This picture shows part of the fibre pull team, from left, Rick Fisher, Marty Merner, Ken Clarke and Erich Freiter

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In 2010 fibre to the community and to the home was initiated. Shown here, Dan Drennan, left and Matt Janmaat assemble the fibre splice case prepping for the splice. They are in the new environmentally controlled fibre trailer where highly precise fibre splices are completed.



In this photo Janmaat and Drennan install a new fibre box in the home of a local resident.

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High Speed Internet

Hay launched its first high speed internet service in 2000. At first it was only available to 80 percent of Hay's customers, but soon it was offered to everyone. This was well in advance of other service providers. Even today, Bell is only able to offer one half of its rural residents a high speed service.

High speed has a number of advantages. In addition to providing more data at faster speeds, it doesn't tie up the phone line, so a second line was not necessary. It has become the modern day version of the railroad and the telephone, responsible for eliminating the distance between rural and urban life.

Over the years Hay has continued to upgrade its system and install more fibre optic, enabling higher and higher speeds. Hay continues to roll out new services, including on-line backup, wireless modem and router rentals, and even home security monitoring.

Working Together with Other Independent Telephone Companies

Hay's goal is to ensure that all its clients have the same high level quality of service. It's easy to give everyone the same service in an urban setting, but over a rural and sparsely populated area it's a real challenge.

Most independent telecommunications companies serve rural areas. In recent years the independents became very good at sharing resources and exploring opportunities to work together.

In 2005 Hay Communications and other independents in Ontario and across Canada participated in a regulatory proceeding with the CRTC to set the regulatory framework for independents across Canada. On March 30, 2006 the CRTC laid the groundwork for potential local competition within Hay's traditional serving boundaries. While a facilities-based competitor has yet to enter Hay's territory, Hay has already felt the



The front lobby and reception area were renovated in 2007. Pictured here from the left are Jill Kipfer, Justin Groot, Brian DePaepe, Judy McKinnon, Angela Schneider and Val Gingerich.

impact of competition from cellular and VoIP. In addition, there are organizations that have expressed interest in becoming a direct competitor in Hay's territory.

Hay has always been an active participant in the Ontario Telecommunications Association and the Canadian Independent Telephone Association. Both organizations promote the interests of independent telecommunications companies at the CRTC and within the industry. One of the goals is to make sure the CRTC understands the unique challenges of serving rural communities. In 2010, Hay's General Manager Angela Schneider was serving as Vice President of the Ontario Telecommunications Association.

Hay also developed a close network with other independent telecommunications companies in southwestern Ontario. After moving to a co-operative form of ownership, Hay was part of successful joint ventures to provide wide area network services, internet protocol television services, and cellular services throughout the region. As competition intensifies and boundaries are blurred, independents will continue to share resources and explore other joint ventures to accomplish projects that don't make sense to tackle individually.

Retirement of Bill Wagner

Bill Wagner retired in 2004, after nearly 40 years with Hay. During that time he became a legend in the independent telephone industry. A visionary leader, he always made sure that Hay stayed one step ahead of the competition. He also understood the importance of working closely with the other independents.

He was passionate about the telephone industry, and cared deeply about the company and its staff. He was also a colourful and folksy character, warmly remembered by everyone.

He had a lot in common with a Roman God called Janus. Bill sometimes referred to Janus in his annual reports. At the annual meeting in 1993, he reflected on the wisdom of Janus:

“Janus was strange looking fellow with two faces. One was always looking back from where he had come, and the other was always looking ahead at where he was going. Many Canadians and indeed almost everyone in the world is looking at the past year with no reflection at all. But if we take a cue from Janus we should be looking ahead to a new year with new opportunities and prospects. Janus after all was not a government or an organization. He was an individual who knew that looking at one side of life was a mistake. It's a lesson we can learn from anyone – even an old Roman God.”

Bill's son, Robb Wagner, took over as General Manager in 2003. He was succeeded by Angela Schneider in 2004. Schneider, a Chartered Accountant, first worked with Hay in 1995 while an

employee of Hay’s auditor, Eugene Bender. In 1996, she was hired on contract by Hay and five other communication co-operatives to provide accounting expertise. This gave her a strong base of knowledge and contacts when it came time to step into the broader General Manager role.

Cellular

Wireless communication has brought about huge changes in the telephone industry over the last 15 years. Some people, particularly younger ones, don’t feel the need to own a land line at all.

From the very beginning Hay understood the potential and significance of the new technology, and began to explore options to roll out its own service. After an initial foray into the cellular market, Hay began negotiations with Bell Mobility. Hay and Bell Mobility have now formed a long-partnership that allows Hay to offer cellular clients state-of-the-art service and handsets.



From left, Kelli Phillips, Chad Ramer and Kraig Gingerich stand in front of the new cell phone display.

Hay’s new cellular service is part of the company’s strategy to “own the pipe” to the customer. “Our goal is to own the communications pipe to the customer,” said General Manager Angela Schneider in 2010. “The pipe may be the copper or fibre optic in the ground, or it may be the cellular service over the air. But if we are to remain as a viable company for the long term we need to own that pipe.”

Branching into TV

Delivering television through the phone line sounds like a strange idea, but Bill Wagner thought about it back in 1970. Just after Bob Hendrick started with Hay he remembers Wagner saying there was no reason why television couldn’t be delivered over copper telephone wires.

It was the expansion into fibre optic that really made television feasible for telephone companies. In December 2008 Hay launched its internet protocol television service (IPTV). By early 2009

the company already had 85 customers and a waiting list for installation. The goal is to offer IPTV services to all parts of the service area.

Hay's strategy to "own the pipe" resulted in another key purchase in 2009. Hay joined with two independent telecommunications co-operatives, Tuckersmith and Quadro, to purchase the Mitchell-Seaforth Cable TV Group. This company had been providing cable TV and internet services to Zurich and Grand Bend and other surrounding communities for more than 35 years.

Even though the cable company competes with Hay's IPTV service, there is a clear advantage in owning a key competitor. It ensures that the cable company is not owned by an aggressive competitor in the heart of Hay territory. Without that immediate threat Hay is free to focus its efforts and resources in other areas and work towards its mission of delivering high quality services to all of its

6,000 customers. The purchase ensures that everyone in the area is either served by IPTV or cable.

Hay is continuing to investigate opportunities to combine service offerings in cable television and IPTV.

During her remarks at the 2010 annual meeting, Angela Schneider noted that 2011 marked the centennial of Hay. After outlining the achievements of the company, she concluded, "I believe that as a result of the strategic decisions I spoke about earlier, Hay Communications is well positioned to be the telecommunications provider of choice for its members for the next 100 years."



From the left standing is Joe Hendriks, kneeling, Rob Rau, and Coop Student Jason Masse install a set-top box required for IP Digital TV service.



Advanced Tower workers erect a wireless tower at the Zurich Business office that will provide cellular service in Hay's territory.



Upgrades continue with the installation of the new CS1500 softswitch in the Dashwood "CO" in 2008. Keith Semple standing and Kevin Gingerich on the ladder.



In 2007, Hay began offering annual scholarship awards of \$1000 each to two students. These pictures show the first winners: on the left is Shayne Andrews accepting a cheque from General Manager Angela Schneider and the image on the right shows, Amanda Noël accepting from Jack Riddell.



Supporting health care – Hay Communications recently donated \$10,000 to the Bluewater Area Family Health Team (BAFHT) to be used for the Zurich Health Centre. Pictured above is Hay Communications board chairperson Jim Hoffman and chairperson of the BAFHT board of directors Janisse Zimmerman. *(photo/submitted)*



From the left, Chuck Erb, Jack Riddell, Angela Schneider, Jim Hoffman, Paul Klopp, Pat O'Rourke and Louis Schilbe.

Conclusion: The Next 100 Years

People who settle in this community are pleasantly surprised by the amenities we have here. One such amenity is Hay Communications. New residents and businesses, whether setting up a home telephone or a state-of-the-art office, are delighted by the quality and friendliness of service. We have good reason to be very proud of our telephone company. Hay has achieved success in a turbulent and competitive environment, where size is often an advantage.

The telecommunications industry is not for the faint of heart. Over the years, 1,100 independent telephone systems have operated in Ontario. Today there are only 21. With some 6,000 customers, Hay is one of the largest.

Since 1911 a number of decisions stand out as key to the company's success. The initial purchase of the Zeller Telephone System set the stage for high quality service in rural areas. The expansion of operations in the early days, particularly to the Grand Bend area, helped establish a strong base for growth. Among the key decisions: the early conversions to dial and digital; building the duct and manhole system; installing remote switching stations; adopting fibre optic cable; rolling out the internet; launching cellular technology. Each decision required clear-eyed vision and a willingness to invest in the future.

Another key part of Hay's strategy was the formation of a strong network with other independent telecommunication providers. This allowed them to share resources, explore initiatives, and act on joint projects.

Much of the credit, of course, goes to Hay's management and staff. Dedicated leaders like Edmund Zeller, Peter McIsaac, Harry Hess, Harry Hoffman, Harold Zehr, Bill Wagner and Angela Schneider ensured that Hay kept pace with advancing technologies and delivered outstanding service.

It's also important to remember the role played by the Hay Township Council over the years. Despite the substantial costs that they were being asked to underwrite, Council members never forgot the value of having a local telephone provider that reflected the needs of the community.

Hay customers have always been and continue to be the backbone of the company. They are loyal and knowledgeable. They demand access to the full range of telecommunications services, and they value the service they receive. They understand that as owners they represent the community. In turn, Hay gives back in many ways, supporting charities and community groups generously.

Hay's roots grow deep in the community. At its heart, it is an organization of people who take their jobs personally and get to know their customers. Throughout the company's history, they

have followed two guiding principles. The first is to provide an affordable service that's as good as anything available in a large city. The second is to make sure that equal service is offered to everyone in the area, no matter how remotely they live.

In the last 100 years, Hay has done two things very well - looked bravely to the future and stayed true to its values. If the past has any bearing on the future, the people of this area can look forward to Hay as their telecommunications provider for many years to come.

Staff List Over the Years

Fred Hess Sr
Edmund Zeller
Peter McIsaac
Wm. G. Hess
A. F. Hess
Milton G. Deitz
Harry G. Hess
T. Harry Hoffman
H. Whitney Brokenshire
Reginald G. Black
Harold Zehr
Wayne C. Horner
W. Barrie MacLaren
Leonard L. Wagner
Raymond Fisher
Orland Gerber
Seth Ammans
Milfred Schilbe
Edgar E. Wuerth
William H. Fuss
Gordon H Hess
Charlie Steinhagen
Albert Goetz
Ray Snell
Glen Walper
Grant Wildfong
Gordon Eagleson
Hugh Clausius
Elmer Oesch
Ken Willoughby
Gerry Chapman
Bill Ingram
Norm Koehler
Albert G. Hess
Martha Heywood (Thiel)
Lilian Dinnin (Rader)
Anne Coxon (Overholt)

Annie Turkheim
Anna Datars
Beatrice Geoffrey
Marjorie Hesse
Helen Walker
Irene McCann (Dietrich)
Grace Bloch
Irene Clausius
Gertrude Fleischauer (Thiel)
Rosella Krueger (Schilbe)
Elda Laidlaw (Reichert)
Lennita Oesch
Erma Rose (Ayotte)
Lottie Gascho (Turkheim)
Margaret Yungblut (Schilbe)
Lulu Scotchmer (Albrecht)
Shirley Holden (Krueger)
Fannie Bender (Kipper)
Flossie Cudmore (Kleinstiver)
Gertie McCrae (Hoffman)
Thelma Garvie (Elsie)
Jean Walper (Willert)
Bernice Weiberg (Tyler)
Dorothy Taylor (Rader)
Shirley Van Dorsselaer (Haugh)
Dorothy Restemayer
Pearl Kraft
Marion Rader (Smith)
Loretta Zimmer
Madeline Kelly (Corriveau)
Barbara Corriveau (Hartman)
Mona Watson (Tyler)
Greta Miller
Francis Gibson
Doris Penhale (Willert)
Marion MacDonald (Tyler)
Annabelle Sherritt
Georgina Desjardine (Whilsmith)
Audrey Ashworth (Page)

Eunice Smith (Desjardine)
Marguerite Farquhar (Stephan)
Marguerite Luther (Datars)
Phyllis Desjardine (Desjardine)
Luella Desjardine
Valeria Vincent
Olive Webb
Shirley Grigg
Carrie Dalton (VanDongen)
Shirley Hanlon (Mason)
Judith McDonald (Willert)
Romayne McLinchey
Elda Wagner
Margaret Willert
David Clarke
Ken Steckle
Mary Jane Shea (Pennings)
Lloyd Denomme
Ivan Meidinger
Stephen Meidinger
William Wagner
Robb Wagner
Judy Voogel
Bob Hendrick
Ken Clarke
Keith Semple
Erich Freiter Jr.
Marty Merner
Chad Ramer
Kevin Gingerich
Angela Schneider
Kraig Gingerich
Jesse Gingerich
Rick Fisher
Terry Zehr
Rob Rau
Joe Hendriks
Dan Drennan
Brian DePaepe

Judy McKinnon (Ducharme)
Jill Kipfer (McLellan)
Rose Marie Rothenberg
Kelli Phillips
Val Gingerich
Justin Groot
Matt Janmaat
George Willits
Scott Regier

Board of Directors Over the Years

Lionel Wilder
Murray Keys
Blaise Ducharme
James Love
Gerald Shantz
Paul Klopp
James Hoffman
Louis Schilbe
Donald Oesch
Jack Riddell
John Vander Burgt

Prior to the conversion to a co-operative,
township councilors for the Township of Hay,
served as members of the Telephone Board.



By 2011, the entire fleet of Hay vehicles except for the line truck are now silver. Staff from the left are Matt Janmaat, Dan Drennan, Erich Freiter, Marty Merner, Bob Hendrick, Rob Rau, Jason Masse (co-op student), Terry Zehr, Rick Fisher, Joe Hendriks, Chad Ramer, Keith Semple, Ken Clarke, Jesse Gingerich and Kevin Gingerich.



This is the current Staff and Board of Hay Communications. From the left, front kneeling: John Vander Burgt, Paul Klopp, Lou Schilbe, Jim Hoffman. Front Standing: Justin Groot, Rick Fisher, Marty Merner, Kevin Gingerich, Kelli Phillips, Val Gingerich, Ken Clarke, Chad Ramer, Kraig Gingerich, Jill Kipfer. Middle Row: Don Oesch, Keith Semple, Jesse Gingerich, Rob Rau, Bob Hendrick, Terry Zehr, Angela Schneider, Judy McKinnon, Joe Hendriks. Back Row: Matt Janmaat, Erich Freiter, Brian DePaepe, Dan Drennan.

