

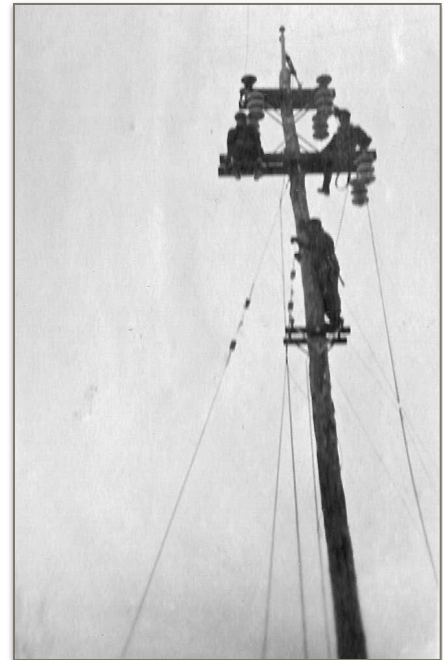
The Great Depression: Down But Not Defeated

Although the diaries do not mention it, there was an open letter in April 1927 in the "Blue Bell" magazine from D.S. to T.H. Ashley, Special Representative for The Bell Telephone Company, expressing his thanks to the company for inspections done by a Mr. A.D. Morton. He had brought special testing equipment that was, as D.S. said, "beyond the finances of most independent systems". Bell provided free use of the apparatus which could pinpoint faults in the system quickly. He had recommended equipment appropriate to the needs of the small company, and D.S. had purchased some of it. D.S. declared that "the ringer and routine tests and soldering equipment are certainly labour and time saving beyond anything we have ever owned." Jack also took a course in Toronto to learn more about cable work. These were obviously steps toward making the Murray-Brighton Telephone Company one of the best.

Nothing much is mentioned in the diaries about the stock market crash of October 29, 1929 or the ensuing downfall in the economy. For whatever reason Jack stopped writing in his diary on October 27th and did not start again until November 23rd. The telephone office journal describes that fateful day simply as cold and cloudy with Jack working in Frankford and D.S. at the farm of his daughter Grace.

During The Great Depression of the 1930's the company was very close to being bankrupt. D.S. handled the finances and Jack had no idea how bad things were. After the big crash, two of the major industries closed in Frankford. Not only was there a loss of factory business, but the Paper Board Company threw two hundred people out of work and they could not afford to pay for their telephones. As time passed, the telephone company ended up carrying accounts for subscribers upwards of two hundred dollars which was a great deal in those days. Every month the company had to pay Bell Telephone their share of the long distance fees whether the subscribers paid their bills or not. The company accepted everything as payment: hay, grain, vegetables, anything the farmers had to offer. One local lady gave them fried cakes. At the same time they were stacking up hundreds of telephones for people who gave up. Bell Telephone was so large that a few thousand telephones did not mean much to them, but it was devastating for the small independent companies. Bell said that people could not do without telephone service but they were wrong because many people just could not afford to pay for it.

Times were tough. Telephone revenues for December were not "any too good". That was about all D.S. would divulge in that area; however, he wrote enthusiastically about a hydro project. D.S. was always interested in strides forward, and for the past few years, he and some other forward-looking residents of Wooler were thinking about a "great boon to mankind" also known as hydro electric power. D.S. had used a gasoline generator to produce electricity for his house and Jack's for many years, but the generator was noisy and one neighbour in particular frequently complained about it. In January 1930, he and some others persuaded Mr. Natrass, "a very well informed gentleman on the subject of rural distribution of hydro electric power" to come to Wooler to speak on the subject. D.S. and Rev. Neal picked up Mr. Natrass at the train station in Trenton.



When hydro electric power came to Wooler, D.S. and Jack were ready with their expertise and work crews to set poles and string wire. These men, having installed cross arms, are ready to string wire.