

# Mr., Mrs. Harry McCreary Retiring After Operating Phone Company 42 Years

Feb. 25, 1964

After 42 years in the telephone business as operators of their family-owned telephone system, Harry and Lena McCreary of Latta are going to call it quits this week.

On Thursday the Thurlow telephone system, serving parts of Thurlow and Tyendinaga townships, will be taken over by Bell Telephone and Mr. and Mrs. McCreary will take the long holiday which they feel they have coming to them.

The Thurlow system with approximately 360 subscribers will be operated "as is" by Bell for about four years, with maintenance handled by their Madoc service crew.

## TOOK OVER IN 1922

It has been a full-time job for Mr. and Mrs. McCreary since they took over the operation of the then Bradden Telephone Company back in 1922.

Since then Mr. McCreary has either carried out or supervised maintenance details while Mrs. McCreary, as chief operator, has been away from the job for only one extended holiday—a two weeks' jaunt to Florida about ten years ago.

"In all those 42 years I don't think I have been away from the job for more than a total of six weeks," Mrs. McCreary said.

Once she went for a full month without having been spelled off at the switchboard.

Mr. McCreary got into the telephone business on the whim that it was something he would like.

He started out as a farmer, then became a carpenter and it was while working on the construction of the Bell Telephone office on Pinnacle St. that he decided he would like to get into the telephone business.

## STILL CLIMBS POLES

Now at 70 he still helps with line maintenance and still does a bit of pole climbing. He has one assistant installer, while Mrs. McCreary has two girls to spare her at the switchboard.

Both Mr. and Mrs. McCreary belong to the "Telephone Pioneers of America."

The McCreary system had its beginning in 1906 when three Thurlow township residents, Henry A. Fairman, William J. Allison and James H. Bradden, formed what was known as the Thurlow Telephone System.

That first year it had a total of nine phones.

The three men operated the system until 1918, when Mr. Bradden bought out his two partners.

Mr. and Mrs. McCreary took over the system four years later.

"Telephones were a luxury then," said Mrs. McCreary. "They are a necessity now and we feel there is a good future for owners of independent systems. But it needs someone a bit younger."

Mr. and Mrs. McCreary said they had considered installing dial phones but felt it was too big a project for people their age.

But in most other respects the McCrearys kept up with the times in telephone improvements.

For instance a mechanical auger was purchased to take care of hole digging and miles of multi-wire cables have been installed to reduce line maintenance.

Telephone cable has its advantages and disadvantages, according to the McCrearys.

The advantages are reduced maintenance but when troubles do come they are grossly multiplied.

## SHOT HIT CABLE

For instance there was the time when a township resident out shooting squirrels accidentally fired into a cable, cutting telephone service for numbers of subscribers.

"When they couldn't get central they came down to enquire, thinking that something was wrong at the house," Mrs. McCreary laughed.

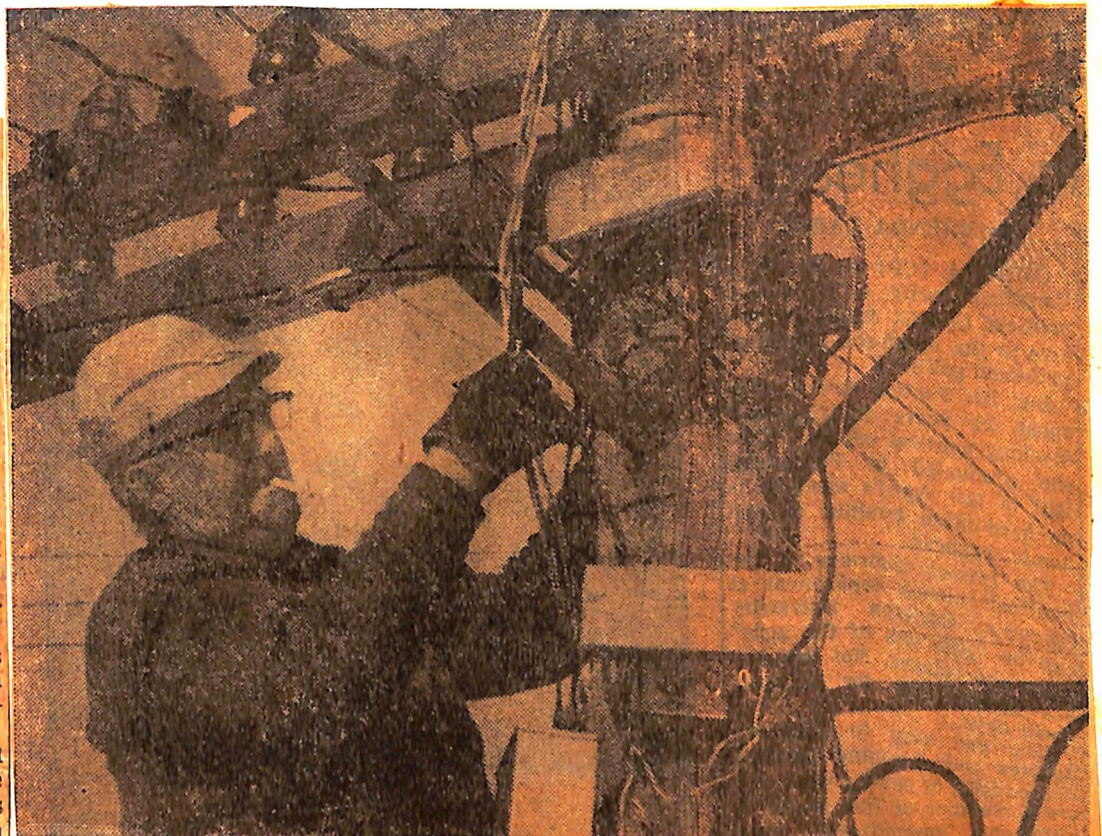
Originally the McCreary system took in the Foxboro area but about 10 years ago the Foxboro exchange was sold out to Bell.

Now the area served by the McCreary line is bounded by the Moira River on the west and the Shannonville Gravel on the east and runs from Roslin on the north to just north of Corbyville on the south.

## DEPRESSION TOUGH

Toughest times for the McCrearys in their telephone operations was during the depression years of the 1930's.

The number of subscribers dropped from well over 300 to 90; Mr. McCreary looked after maintenance duties alone and, with revenues lower than operating costs, the assistant operator was allowed to go and Mrs.



**STILL A LINEMAN** — Despite his 70 years, Harry McCreary still takes his turn doing line maintenance. He is seen above on pole outside "central" office at Latta.

McCreary looked after the switchboard alone — 24 hours a day.

Mrs. McCreary got her initiation as owner-operator during an exciting period shortly after the line was acquired back in 1922.

There had been a murder in the area and police were using the phone all hours of the day and night as the chase closed in on the suspect.

"I didn't get nervous until it was all over," she said.

Now, one of 250 independent telephone systems still operating in Ontario, the McCreary line has its share of long distance calls which today are merely routine.

Last month, 3,800 long distance calls originated from Thurlow subscribers. There were just as many incoming long distance calls and hardly a day goes by that someone doesn't call overseas, to Texas or to Alaska.

The Latta central provides 24-hour service but calls are few during the night shift from midnight to about 5 in the morning.

Then it starts to get busy and calls are frequent until the afternoons, which are quieter. Calling again picks up in the evening, slacking off again just before midnight.

"We were never sorry that we went into the telephone business", Mrs. McCreary said,

"but we are sorry that we have to give it up."

Possibly their greatest regret is that their son Garth didn't share his father's liking for the telephone business.

He is associated with a hardware business in Belleville.