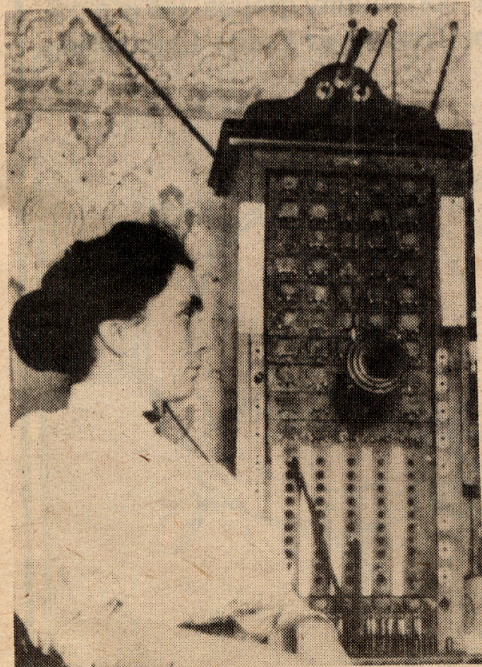


Telephone service began in a jewelry store

Streets were illuminated by gaslight, the horse and buggy was the fashionable form of transportation, and barber shop quartets harmonized popular melodies in the days when the telephone first came to Oakville.

That was back in 1887, sixty years after Col. William Chisholm had purchased the townsite for 12.5 cents an acre, the 30th anniversary of Oakville's incorporation as a town, and only 13 years after Alexander Graham Bell invented his telephone.

Bell company line crews erected a telephone line from Toronto to Hamilton through Oakville in 1887, and the town's first telephone exchange, a small, primitive switchboard with associated apparatus, was set up in a corner of a store operated by William Busby, a jeweller and watchmaker on Colborne Street. Busby was appointed the telephone company's first agent in Oakville.



Operator watches typical telephone exchange of the early 1900's. When customer turned crank on his telephone, a drop fell on the switchboard, signalling the operator.

Service was available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. weekdays, 2 to 4 p.m. Sundays and 10 a.m. to 12 noon and 2 to 4 p.m. on holidays.

A year later, there were nine telephones here, all located in business premises; Busby's title was changed from Agent to Local Manager. Within two years 19 more telephones were installed. Telephone numbers were not assigned until 1899.

In 1901, when the census showed a population of 1,643 in Oakville, there were 32 telephones in service.

During 1907, which ended with 82 telephones, 24-hour service was inaugurated in Oakville and this community was linked with Port Credit by long distance. An additional long distance line between Oakville and Toronto was built the following year.

In 1909 Oakville's 100th telephone was installed, and by the end of the year there were 112 telephones in service. Sixty-two were in business premises, three in the town hall and 47 in residences.

Oakville and the telephone system serving the town both grew rapidly in the next few years. The 1911 census showed a population of 2,372, and in that year the 200th telephone was installed.

After 25 years of service, William Busby was succeeded as Bell Telephone Local Manager in 1913 by A. A. Busby, although the elder Busby's store continued in operation under his name. The Oakville telephone system continued its steady growth under his direction and in 1916 it reached another important milestone with the installation of the 500th telephone.

J. H. Hamilton succeeded Busby as local manager in 1918 and in 1919 the telephone company purchased land at the corner of Dundas and Randall Streets as a site for a new building.

The structure was erected and equipment installed and on Sept. 28, 1923, the cutover was made from the old magneto system, with which callers had to turn a crank to reach the operator, to a common battery system.

Miss R. Litchfield became local representative of the Bell Telephone Company in Oakville in 1925, replacing Hamilton and the Oakville office was placed under the supervi-



First 'H' type telephone poles were erected in Oakville area in 1914. Members of this crew included Jack Stowe, George Mills, Ray White, Bill Bird, Harry William (foreman) Harry Smith, Ernest Stewart, Len Sykes and 'Curly' Hamilton.

sion of Frank D. Laurie, district manager at Hamilton.

He was succeeded in that post in 1925 by J. A. Gorrie, Jr. The following year J. V. Markle was appointed to the Oakville office as local manager.

The 1,000th telephone was installed in 1926.

J. V. Markle, after 16 years of service in Oakville, was transferred to Hamilton in April 1936. Replacing him as manager was F. J. Jewell. The latter served until 1940 when he was succeeded by R. W. Graham. T. A. Reynolds was the next manager here, taking office in 1944.

Another important telephone milestone was reached here in 1946 when the 2,000th instrument went into service. The 3,000th came a relatively short time later in 1949.

A new manager, J. T. M. Ashley replaced T. A. Reynolds in 1947.

An extension was added to the rear of the Oakville manual exchange building in 1949; in 1950 four operating positions were added to the switchboard and facilities to provide 400 more telephones were placed in service. A. A. Francis was appointed Bell Telephone manager here in July of that year.

To meet the continuing high demand for telephone service, 14 more switchboard positions were added to the Oakville exchange in 1952, the year the 4,000th telephone went into service. To make room for the additional facilities the business office was moved to temporary premises on Randall Street across from the Exchange building.

Meanwhile, plans were already underway to provide Oakville with dial telephone service. A Balsam Avenue site was purchased and an exchange built to house the dial equipment.

In February 1954 Oakville's telephones were converted to dial operation. Four years later in the spring of 1958 direct distance dialing was introduced.

The city's 10,000th telephone was installed in 1957 and the 20,000th in 1964.

All number calling — no letters, seven figures was gradually introduced in the Oakville area. The new numbers first appeared in the 1962 telephone directory.

Touch-tone calling first became available here when it was introduced to customers served by the 844 and 845 switching units in 1968.

(Courtesy Bell Canada Telephone Historical Collection.)