

Telephone History - Jefferson County, Missouri

By Lisa K. Gendron (includes info from Howard Litton's Tanglefoot book)

Before the 1920's, when making a phone call you would have to contact an operator first who would then connect the call for you. Candlestick style telephones became popular in the '20s and typically had a separate mouthpiece and receiver.

AT&T's operating companies started installing dial telephones in the mid to late 1920s. By the 1930s, it was common to see rotary phones in people's homes. Customers could now dial numbers themselves, instead of having an operator place them as before.

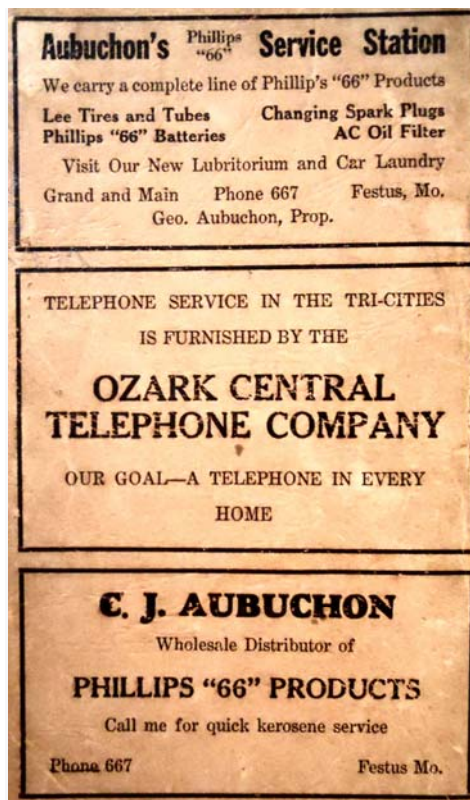


Rather than use all digits to indicate a telephone number, AT&T hit upon a hybrid system of letters and numbers. The Bell System thought abbreviations would prevent misdialing, a mnemonic device to help callers unaccustomed to using dial telephones. AT&T's William G. Blauvelt designed a dial with letters and numbers, one without a Q or Z, or letters for the digits 1 and 0.

AT - Atlas 7 - Arnold
BU - Butler 5 - Cedar Hill
CY - Cypress - Maxville
ES - Essex - High Ridge
FL - Flanders - Imperial
GI - Gibson - De Soto
GR - Grover 9 - Herculaneum
HO - Hobart 7 - Imperial/Barnhart
JU - Justice 6 - De Soto

SU - Sunset 9 - Goldman, Hillsboro
WH - Whitehall - Antonia, Ottoville
YE - Yellowstone 7 - Festus, Crystal City
Fleetwood 8 - Bonne Terre
Geneva 1 - Flat River
Whitney 4 - Ware
Hemlock 8 - Potosi
Orchard 8 - Richwoods
Oxford - Cedar Hill

If you had just a number, you had a private line. A number with a letter was a party line. When you picked up the phone, the operator would ask you what number you wanted and would connect you. If you were on a party line, you would be able to hear the other party talking and you would have to wait for them to get off the phone before you could use it. When your phone rang, you had to listen to the number of rings to know if it was for you or someone else on the party line. Yours might be 2 short rings and if it only rang once it was for someone else.



1939 Back cover of the Festus-Crystal City Telephone Directory

How to call another party on your line in 1960:

Dial 119 then the code number of your telephone (furnished by the Telephone Co.)

Dial the phone number you are calling

Hang up

Both telephones will ring until the call is answered. When it stops ringing, pick up your receiver and begin your conversation. If the called phone does not answer, briefly lift your receiver and hang back up and the call will cancel.

Some popular phone numbers from the 1960 Festus Telephone Book

Bolgar, Bertalan MD	YE7-2116
Crystal City State Bank	YE7-3603
Duffner Ice & Ice Cream Co.	YE7-5256
Gateway Drive-Inn	YE7-2861
Heiligtage Funeral Home	HO7-2934
Horine Service Station	GR9-4276
Indian Foot Lake	GR9-5139
Jefferson County Abstract Co	SU9-2671
Kohler City Market	HO7-3476
Magre's Liquor & Sport Gds Store	YE7-3812
Opal's Covered Wagon	SU9-2813
Pittsburgh Plate Glass	YE7-3621
Ray Rose Studio	YE7-2500
Vreeland Clover Farm Store	SU9-2400
White Grill	YE7-8849

Pevely & Festus Telephone History

The Meisner Telephone Co. was housed in one room of the Herman Heiner residence from 1919-1922. The company operated about 400 phones. Calls to St. Louis cost 15 cents and calls to Festus cost 5 cents. Mr. Heiner paid his operators \$10 per week for 40 hours. When the office was moved to the second floor of the Pevely bank, the name was changed to the Scotia Telephone Company. Ozark Central Telephone Co. later bought out Scotia in Pevely.

Training to become an operator was unpaid. When the telephone company moved to Festus, everything went to automatic operation.

Newspaper article June 5, 1919

~NOTICE TO TELEPHONE SUBSCRIBERS~

On account of the increased cost of all material and supplies used in the maintenance of the telephone plant, and also the necessary increase in wages for all classes of labor, we are compelled to ask the State Public Service Commission for permission to increase our rates for telephone service at Pevely, Fenton and Beck exchanges.

The proposed rates are as follows.

Class of service	Rate per month
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Business

Direct line – Wall set - - - - -	\$2.50
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Direct line – Desk set - - - - -	2.75
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Extensions – Wall set - - - - -	.75
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Extensions – desk set - - - - -	1.00
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Residence

Direct line – wall set - - - - -	1.75
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Direct line – desk set - - - - -	2.00
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Extensions – wall set - - - - -	.50
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Extensions – desk set - - - - -	.75
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Rural Lines

Residence - - - - -	1.50
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Business - - - - -	2.00
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Calls between Pevely, Fenton and Beck exchanges, 5 cents for each three minutes or fraction thereof.

We have asked that the above proposed schedule of rates be allowed to go into effect July 1st 1919 Each subscriber is therefore notified that if there is any reasonable objection to the proposed increase, that such objection should be made in writing to the Public Service Commission at Jefferson City, prior to the effective date of the proposed schedule. 23.2 Meismer Telephone Company. By H.

HEINER, Jr., President

Festus Telephone

On March 27, 1898, the City Council resolved that a permit be granted to Dr. J.R. Pritchard to erect and maintain for 10 years a telephone line and posts in the alley between Main & Haefner (North Second) Street from Adams Street to Mill Street to western boundary line so as not to interfere with public travel. On May 19, 1899, Bell Telephone Co. requested a permit to extend their lines into the city.

The Festus Telephone Co. was organized in 1903. After several years, the local telephone company, which was owned by several Festus business men, was sold to

P.K. Higgins. He brought Thomas L. Leonard into his organization, who revolutionized the telephone system by installing miles of underground cable, talking all the poles off of Main Street in Festus, and replacing all the old hand crank boxes with automatic phones.

The Festus Telephone Company became the Scotia Telephone Company in about 1915. An article in a February 18, 1916 issue of the Tri-City Independent stated that "The Platin Missouri Telephone Company is rebuilding some of their branch lines this week, so we will have better service."

An application with the Missouri Public Service Commission was filed in December 1932 to sell The Scotia Telephone Company to Ozark Central Telephone Company. In 1944, the Ozark Central Telephone Company moved its office to the Citizen's Bank building in Festus. Southwestern Bell purchased the Festus location in 1953.



Telephone switchboard located on the second floor of the Citizens Bank of Festus

Howard Litton, in his book, Tanglefoot Vol. II, says that C.E. Miller is credited with erecting the first telephone line in **Festus** - from his home at North Third and Grand Avenue in 1900 out to his brickyard.

Jefferson County Press Feb. 9, 1937 - J. R. Funk writes.....The first telephone line from **Festus to Crystal City** was private and extended from Dr. Donnell's office in the drug store in the east side of the Thomure building to Dr. J. W. Pickel's office at Crystal City. Service was not very dependable, but we managed to get many messages across.

Dr. James Prichard established the first telephone line to **Hillsboro from his office in Festus**. He also had a line connected with his home, and when "static" was so bad that no words could be distinguished, he worked out a system of signals by which he could convey messages to his wife. For instance, two taps meant, I'm going out on a call."

Jefferson County Press Feb. 9, 1937

E. Kerruish Manager of Telephone Company In Its Early Days

Back in the days when Festus and Pevly had independant telephone companies serving their respective communities and when telephone calls to St. Louis cost as little as 15 cents, Jefferson countians prided themselves on the fact that their telephone exchanges were home-owned. Scarcely sixteen years after Festus became a city, a telephone company was organized by local business leaders and the first telephones were installed.by 1913, when H. L. Marbury published his now famous "magazine edition" of the Festus News, the telephone exchange was a source of great local pride. Said Editor Marbury in his December 19, 1913 edition: "In Festus, with such wide-awake, far-seeing business men as Frank Brickey, E. Kerruish, Horace Waggener, Charles England and many others like them, it was natural that they should jump to the front, ten years ago, and organize a telephone company, thus making the city and community they served independant of foreign corporations or monopolies."

Mr. E. Kerruish vice president and general manager

Frank Brickey, president

Horace Waggener, secretary and treasurer

Charles England, C. E. Miller, Frank J. Sewald, Dr. J.F. Donnell, directors



Harry Wilson, Mayor of Festus, and Harold Bond, Mayor of Crystal City in the first dial phone call between Festus and Crystal City, April 25, 1951.

DeSoto Telephone

Long Distance Rates from De Soto, MO in 1948

To: Festus - 10¢ Station to Station and 15¢ Person to Person
 Imperial - 20¢ Station to Station and 25¢ Person to Person
 St. Louis - 35¢ Station to Station and 50¢ Person to Person

Some popular numbers from 1948 De Soto Telephone Book

Dr. C. E. Fallet	4
Elks Club	69
Coxwell Furniture	25
Dietrich Funeral Home	337-A
Olson's Chipper Chicks	348
Plamore Bowling Alley	340
Laurella Studio	286
Meyers & Datillo Motor Co	160
Police Department	128
Taxi Joe	502
Stanley Williams Texaco	185-R

Georgia Ann Style Shop	18
Edwin Matthes Insurance	1
Arlington Hotel	19
Artesian Bottling Works	21
Hamel & Rowe Hardware	59
De Soto School Lunch Room	29-R

6 Dairy—Druggists

**LOOMIS DRUG CO.
and Beauty Shop**

Walgreen Agency

"YOU'RE ALWAYS WELCOME
AT WALGREEN'S"

- FOUNTAIN SERVICE
- BORDEN'S ICE CREAM

ANIMAL SERUMS
AND VACCINES

Harold Loomis — Registered Pharmacist

Telephone 347

For Expert Beauty Service
IT'S LOOMIS BEAUTY SHOP

Telephone 76

106 N. MAIN — DE SOTO, MO.

CLASSIFIED TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

Dairy Product Companies
Peoples Dairy 610 S. Main 362
(See Advertisement This Page)

Dead Animal Removal Service
FLAT RIVER RENDERING CO.
Flat River Mo. Toll Flat River-24

Dentists
Dickman R. H. Dr. Edgar Bldg. 60
Huffer A. M. Dr. Rohn Bldg. 200
McDonough M. P. Dr. 1124 N. Main. 410
Wieman W. W. Dr. 108 N. Main. 38

Department Stores
DE SOTO DEPARTMENT STORE 116 N. Main. 46
Gilmans Department Store 122 S. Main. 28
Sherman Dept. Store 206 S. Main. 90

Dresses—Mfg
Susan Shaw Dress Factory 201 E. Main. 122

Druggists
Binghoff Drug Store 222 S. Main. 81
(See Advertisement Following Page)
(Continued Next Page)

This DIRECTORY is arranged to help YOU in shopping and buying. USE it . . . to save time and need-less effort.

4 Candy—Clothing

Candy
Wease A. E. Candy & Tobacco Store 126 S. Main. 314
(See Advertisement This Page)

Cemeteries
Woodlawn Cemetery Vinland rd. 281-R

Chiropractors (DC)
Rehm C. A. Dr. DC Rohn Bldg. 223

Churches
Assembly of God 2nd & Easton. 269-R
Baptist Church 4th & Boyd. 540
Catholic Church Rectory 312 S. 3rd. 54-M
Church of God 3rd & Mineral. 309-M

Look in the Classified Section
You Will Find It There

**A. E. WEASE
CANDY & TOBACCO STORE**

CANDY and TOBACCO
FOR EVERY TASTE
RETAIL — WHOLESALE
TEL. 314 126 S. Main

Churches—(cont'd)
Congregational-Evangelical Church
3rd & Easton. 344-J
Fourth St. Methodist Church 200 S. 4th. 244
Methodist Church 2nd & Boyd. 165-R

Cleaners & Dyers
DeSoto Laundry & Dry Cleaners E. Main. 22
HARRIS CLEANERS 406 N. Main. 82
(See Advertisement This Page)
Service Cleaners 322 S. Main. 307
(See Advertisement This Page)

Clergymen
Burton C. P. Rev. 120 S. 3rd. 309-R
Clark W. J. Rev. 10 W. Kelly. 569
Dunking Walter Rev. 605 S. 8d. 70-J
Dunphy P. J. Rev. 512 S. 3rd. 54-M
Fosterland F. A. Rev. 711 Block rd. 250-W
Johnston L. I. Rev. 208 S. 4th. 321-M
Kendall J. F. Rev. 2nd & Easton. 269-R
Schwartz R. L. Rev. 426 S. 1st. 9-10
William John & Rev. 11th rd. 151-J

Clothing
DeSoto Department Store 116 N. Main. 46

Merchants and business firms appreciate being told how you found them. Tell them you used the Classified Telephone Directory.

**EXPERT
CLEANING**

Same Day Service
If Necessary
Our Motto
"Service and Quality"
TEL. 307

SERVICE CLEANERS

322 S. Main De Soto

**HARRIS
CLEANERS**

Alterations
Fur Storage

CALL 82

406 N. Main
Cash and Carry
De Soto

**Dry
Cleaning**

Call 22

LAUNDRY SERVICE
DE SOTO
LAUNDRY & DRY CLEANERS

East Soto East Soto

Busy

People Save Time — They

Buy

with the

**Classified
Telephone Directory**

1948 De Soto Missouri Telephone Directory

Newspaper article - abt 1950

De Sotoans don't think of the exchange without thinking of the Coxwells. R. P. Coxwell, secretary of the company, manages the exchange. E. G. Coxwell is president. The three sons of the latter, Charles, E.G. Jr., and William are employed by the company. E. G. and R. P. Coxwell are sons of the late Ernest Coxwell, who with his brother, the late Metford Coxwell, was among the De Soto men who founded the company in 1895. The late Jack Barth promoted the idea at the start.

The Coxwells, while among the first stockholders, did not buy the controlling stock until 1914.

The first switchboard was small and crude compared to the present battery type, installed in 1936. The latter does not sway with the crank on the telephone. The second switchboard was a one position magneto type, and before the present board, a two position magneto board was used. R. P. Coxwell says he recalls all but the first board.

Subscribers were few at first. People were slow to take the new-fangled gadget into their homes. The first switchboard was located in the Zollman Bldg., now replaced by Gillman's Department Store. One operator was on duty each day. She worked 10 hours and there was no service at night.

"During the years the company expanded considerabley, and there are now twice as many operators as there were six years ago," manager Coxwell pointed out. "Within those six years over 700 telephones have been installed."

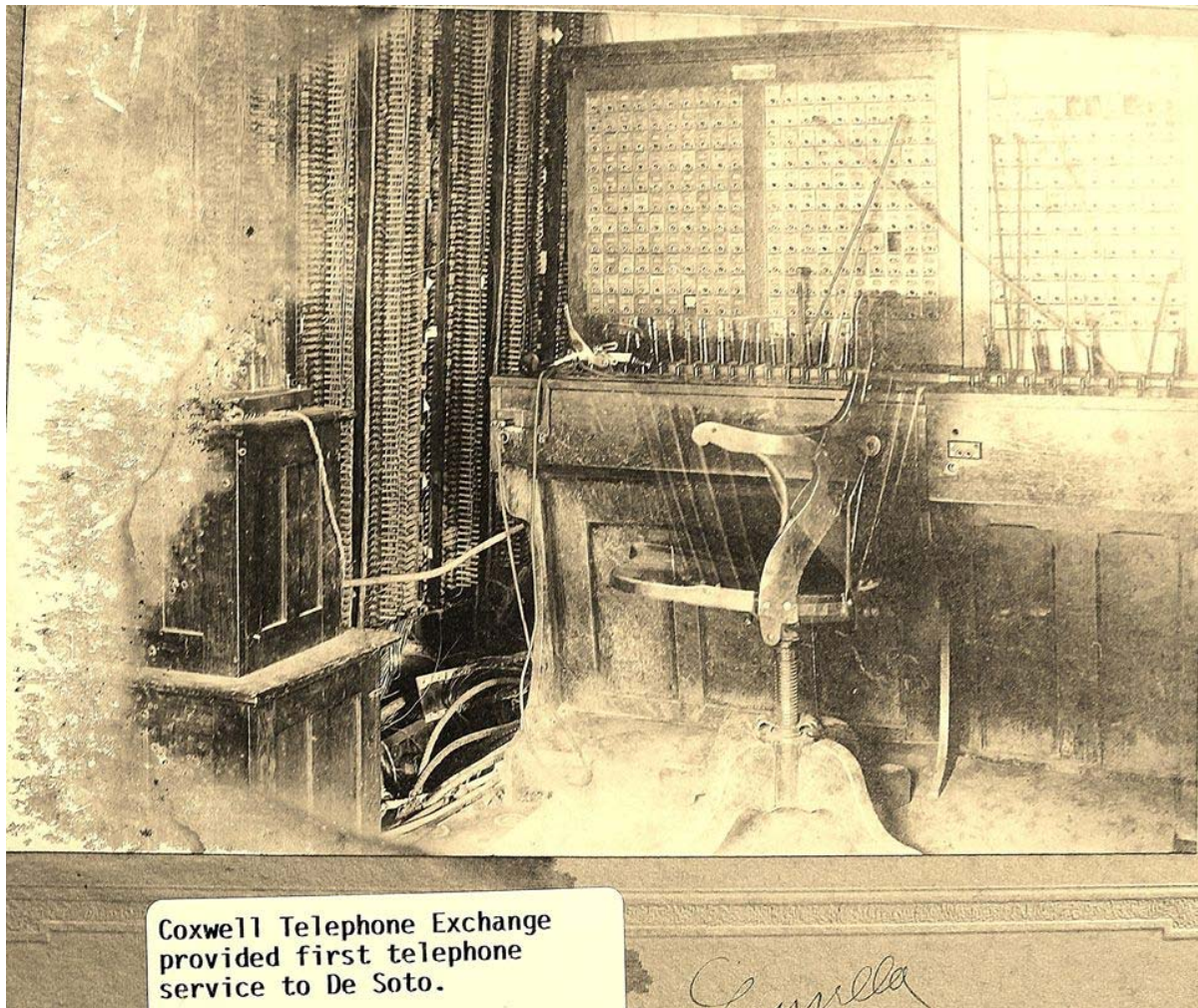
Until 1933, Southwestern Bell Telephone had a long distance office in the old opera house building. A trunk line between the two offices was necessary. In 1933 the local company took over the long distance service. Other improvements include new cables installed in parts of the town in 1949, and several miles of new lines giving service for the surrounding rural acres.

There are 13 operators. Those on full time work an eight hour day, five days a week. Some of them can handle as many as 250 to 275 calls per hour.

Miss Gertrude Rohlfinding (supervisor of the girls) has been with the company over 40 years - longer than any other operator. Her first day with the company was Friday, May 13, 1910. Edward (Jack) Denny, wire chief, has been with the company over 30 years. Miss Rohlfinding came to the company just out of high school and has never worked any where else since. When she first started there were two operators, and each worked a ten hour shift. The exchange has 12 operators in addition to Miss Rohlfinding. Mrs. Rose Koch, night operator has been with the company for 20 years. The other girls are Miss Virginia Knapp, Mrs. Betty Bowen, Mrs. Mae Barnes, Mrs. Mildred Mahn, Miss Elaine Kuhlmann, Miss

Anna Mae Bucher, Miss Alta Ladd, Miss Shirley Williams, Mrs. Florence Peppers, Mrs. Hattie Drew, and Mrs. Jane Stephens.

Coxwell phone company switch board. If you walk out the front door at Mahn plumbing you will be looking at Coxwell building, the phone company was up stairs.



Grace Manley remembers that you didn't have to dial in those days. The operator would say "number please," you told her and you were connected! If they didn't answer, you she would keep trying until she got them and have them call back. They also got your messages to Santa Claus and once in awhile they helped you say your prayers at night!



47 Years at Telephone Switchboard

By FRED FITZGERALD

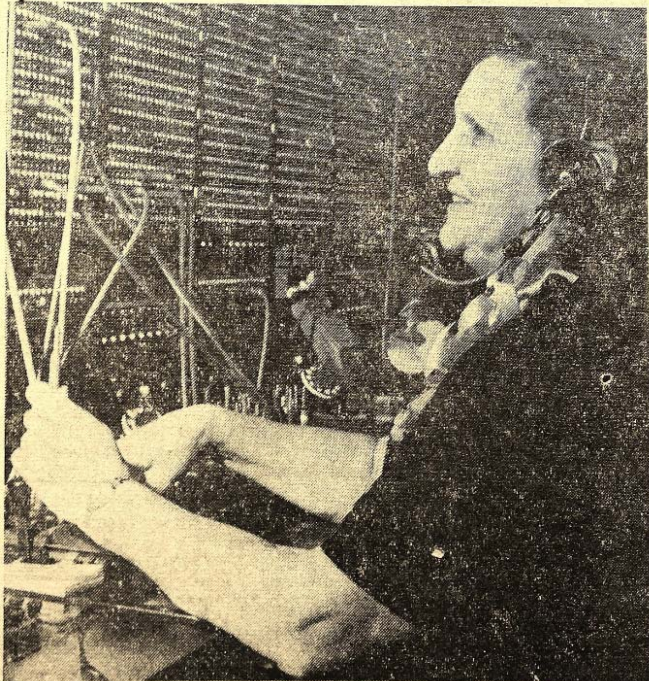
Miss Gertrude Rohlfing, West Pratt, De Soto, retired last Dec. 31 as a telephone operator after a continuous employment with the local company since May 13, 1910.

She was honored with a party Dec. 3 held at the telephone building and sponsored by the company and members of the Communications Workers of America union. The union presented her with \$100, and the district traffic superintendent gave her a beautiful orchid corsage. She received other presents.

STARTED AT 17

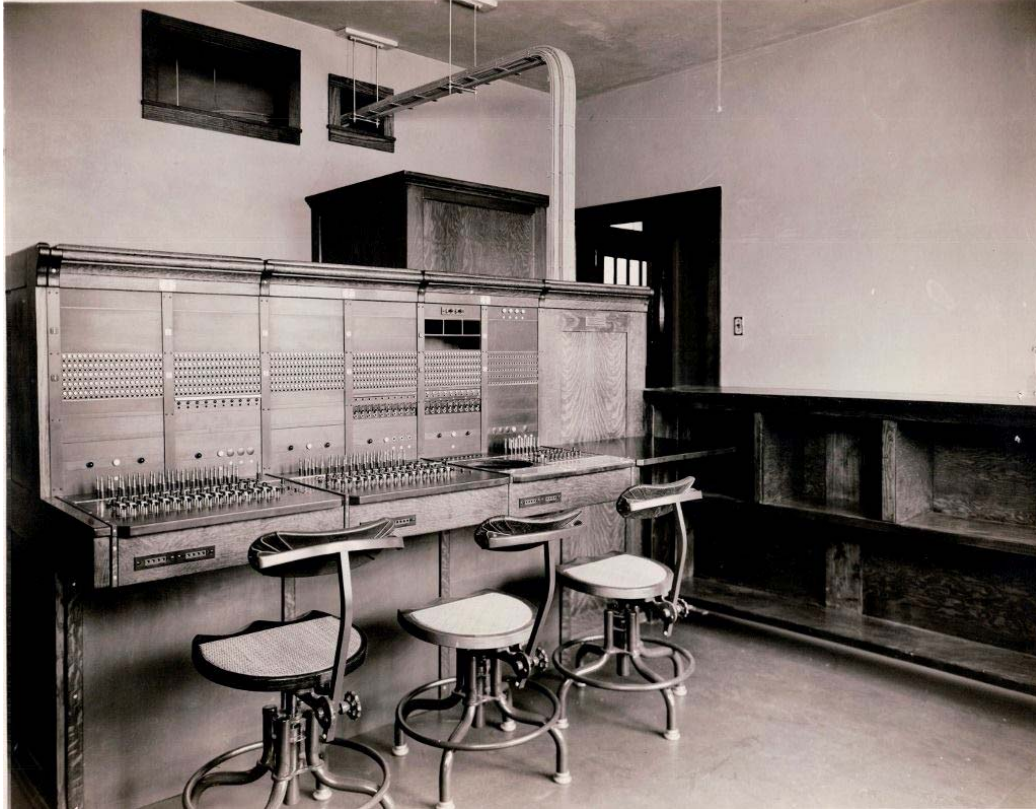
She was 17 years old when she started with the company. Her father, Louis Rohlfing, was a personal friend of the owner, E. S. Coxwell. The latter asked Mr. Rohlfing one day if Gertrude would like to have a job as a telephone operator, and subsequently she was employed, working for \$25 a month. She worked ten hours a day for six days and five and a half hours on Sunday. The exchange at that time was at Second and Clement streets. There was a night operator who lived upstairs over the telephone office.

When she started there were 300



MISS GERTRUDE ROHLFING, a telephone operator on the De Soto exchange for more than 47 years, recalls the growth of the exchange from 300 telephones to the present 2700. Her most vivid memory is of the flu epidemic here in 1918. (Whaley photo)

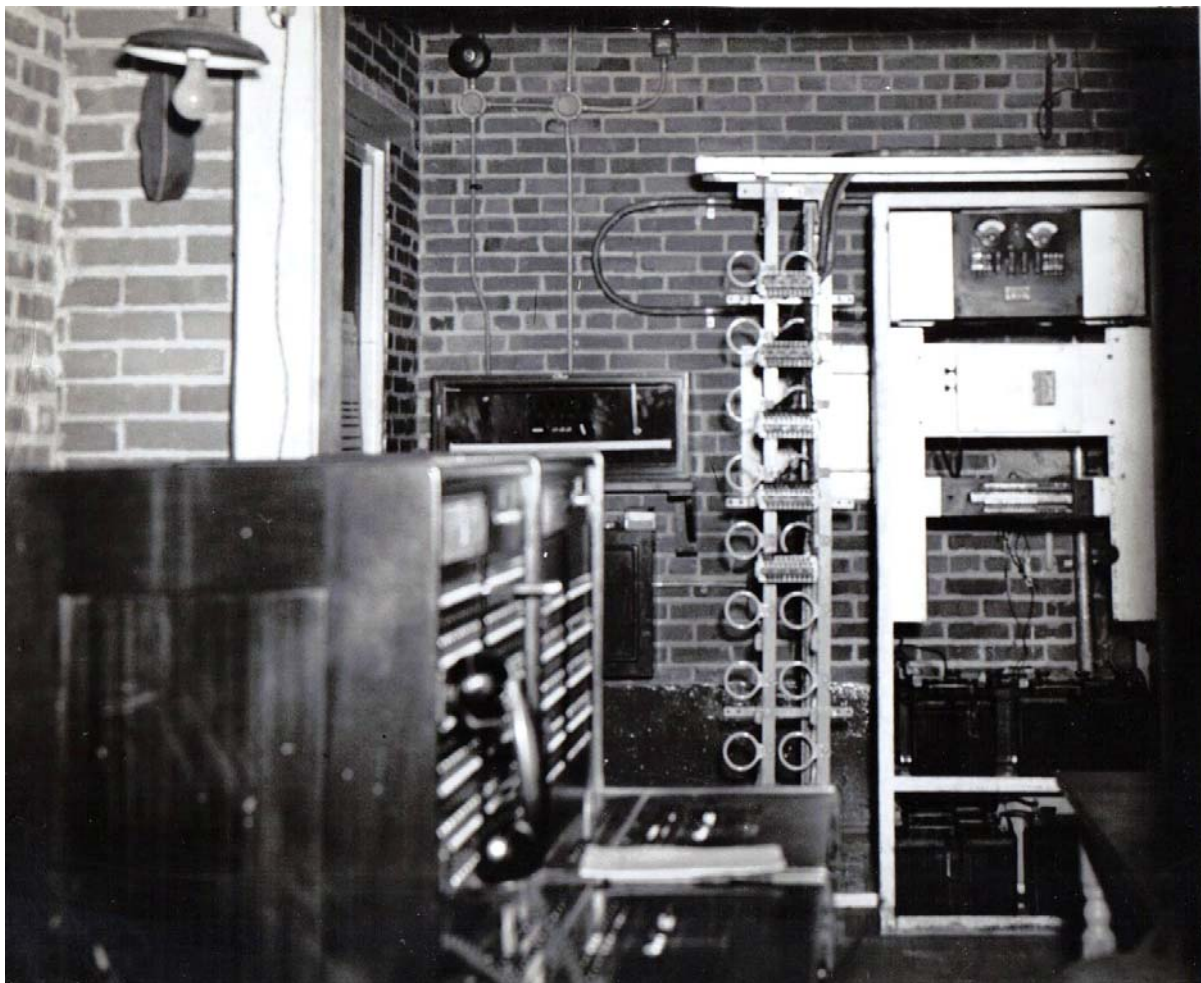
119 West Clement - Old Telephone Exchange owned by the Coxwell family



Old Telephone Exchange owned by the Coxwell family.

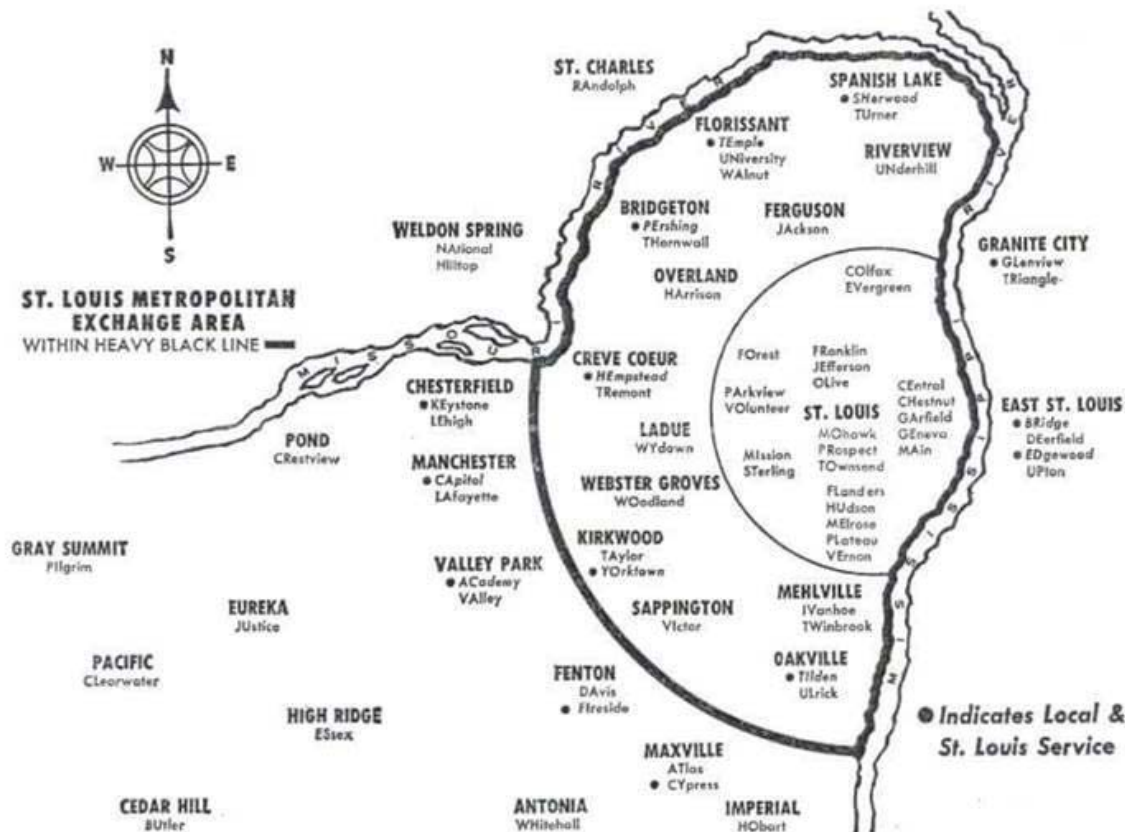






1943 De Soto Switchboard

ST. LOUIS METROPOLITAN EXCHANGE AREA AND SOME SURROUNDING EXCHANGES



CENTRAL OFFICE NAMES – ABBREVIATIONS – LOCATIONS IN AND NEAR ST. LOUIS

PREFIX	CENTRAL OFFICE	LOCATION	PREFIX	CENTRAL OFFICE	LOCATION	PREFIX	CENTRAL OFFICE	LOCATION	PREFIX	CENTRAL OFFICE	LOCATION
AC	Academy	VALLEY PARK	FL	Flanders	ST. LOUIS ZONE	LE9	Lenox	FREEBURG, ILL.	TH	Thornwall	BRIDGETON
AD	Adams	BELLEVILLE	FO	Forest	ST. LOUIS ZONE	MA	Main	ST. LOUIS ZONE	TI	Tilden	OAKVILLE
AT	Atlas	MAXVILLE	FR	Franklin	ST. LOUIS ZONE	ME	Melrose	ST. LOUIS ZONE	TO	Townsend	ST. LOUIS ZONE
BR	Bridge	EAST ST. LOUIS	GA	Garfield	ST. LOUIS ZONE	ME2	Mercury	O'FALLON, ILL.	TR	Tremont	CREVE COEUR
BU	Butler	CEDAR HILL	GE	Geneva	ST. LOUIS ZONE	MI	Mission	ST. LOUIS ZONE	TR6-7	Triangle	GRANITE CITY
CA	Capitol	MANCHESTER	GL	Glenview	GRANITE CITY	MO	MOhawk	ST. LOUIS ZONE	TU	Turner	SPANISH LAKE
CE	Central	ST. LOUIS ZONE	GR	Grove	NEW ATHENS, ILL.	NA	National	WELDON SPRING	TW	Twinbrook	MEHLVILLE
CH	Chestnut	ST. LOUIS ZONE	HA	Harrison	OVERLAND	OL2	Olive	ST. LOUIS ZONE	UL	Ulrick	OAKVILLE
CL7	Clearwater	PACIFIC	HE	Hempstead	CREVE COEUR	OL	Olive	EDWARDSVILLE	UN7-8-9	Underhill	RIVERVIEW
CL	Clinton	WOODRIVER	HI	Hilltop	WELDON SPRING	PA	Parkview	ST. LOUIS ZONE	UN4	University	FLORISSANT
CO	Colfax	ST. LOUIS ZONE	HO7	Hobart	IMPERIAL	PE	Pershing	BRIDGETON	UP	Upton	EAST ST. LOUIS
CR	Crestview	POND	HO	Howard	ALTON, ILL.	PI2	Pilgrim	GRAY SUMMIT	VA	Valley	VALLEY PARK
CY	Cypress	MAXVILLE	HU	Hudson	ST. LOUIS ZONE	PI	Pioneer	BELLEVILLE	VE	Vernon	ST. LOUIS ZONE
DA	Davis	FENTON	IV	IVanhoe	MEHLVILLE	PL	Plateau	ST. LOUIS ZONE	VI	Victor	SAPPINGTON
DE	Deerfield	EAST ST. LOUIS	JA	Jackson	FERGUSON	PR	Prospect	ST. LOUIS ZONE	VO	Volunteer	ST. LOUIS ZONE
DI	Dickens	COLLINSVILLE	JE	Jefferson	ST. LOUIS ZONE	RA	Randolph	ST. CHARLES	WA	Walnut	FLORISSANT
ED	Edgewood	EAST ST. LOUIS	JU	Justice	EUREKA	SH	Sherwood	SPANISH LAKE	WH	Whitehall	ANTONIA
ES	Essex	HIGH RIDGE	KE7	Keystone	LEBANON, ILL.	ST	Sterling	ST. LOUIS ZONE	WO	Woodland	WEBSTER GROVES
EV	EVergreen	ST. LOUIS ZONE	KE	Keystone	CHESTERFIELD	TA	Taylor	KIRKWOOD	WY	Wydown	LADUE
EX	Express	EDGEMONT	LA	Lafayette	MANCHESTER	TE	Temple	FLORISSANT	YO	Yorktown	KIRKWOOD
FI	Fireside	FENTON	LE	Lehigh	CHESTERFIELD						

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR TABLE OF LOW INTERZONE RATES BETWEEN POINTS IN THE ST. LOUIS METROPOLITAN EXCHANGE AREA