

The Milford Home Telephone Co.

By Margaret Rowe Mastick

The Milford Home Telephone Company was formally launched at a meeting of Milford business men held in the office of the bank previous to April 18, 1908 and reported in that issue of The Milford Times. A board of directors was chosen which consisted of M.B. Liddell, C.E. Lovejoy, J.C. Black, M.C. Williams and J.N. Weaver. Of this group the following officers were elected: C.E. Lovejoy, president; J.C. Black, vice president; M.C. Williams, secretary; M.B. Liddell, treasurer.

The company was capitalized at \$15,000 divided into 1,500 shares of \$10 each. Several members took 50 shares of stock each. The balance of \$8,000 needed to build the exchange would probably be readily subscribed as it was considered a gilt edged investment.

The new system was to be an all cable system with cables furnished by the Stromberg – Carlson Company of Chicago, Illinois, with switchboard and phones furnished the Dean Electric Company of Elyria, Ohio. A Detroit engineer would lay out plans for the construction work which would be done locally.

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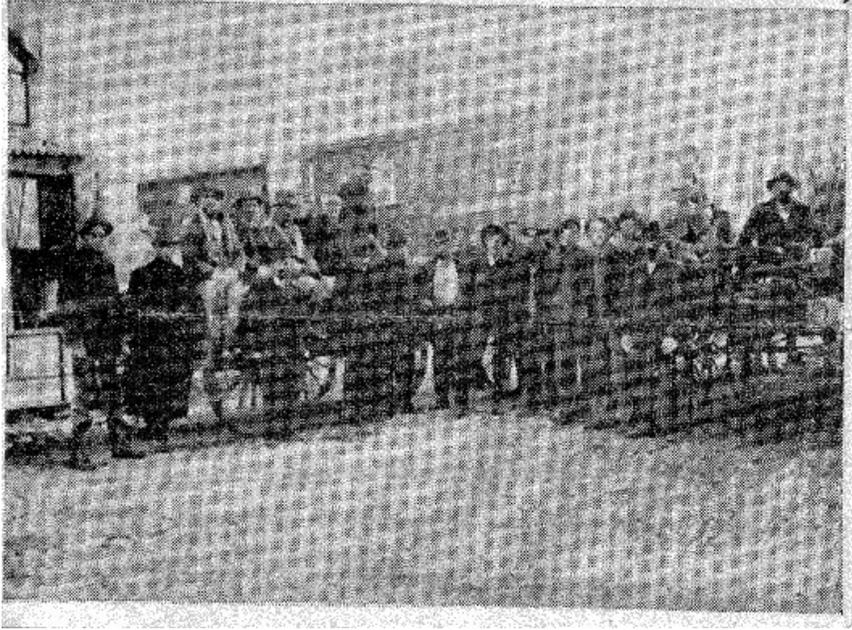
It is safe to say that the picture of the working crew was taken by Elmer Avery at the northeast corner of Main and Commerce Streets. It is also safe to say that the picture was taken later in April or even in early May as patches of snow are to be seen on the road in the background and the sun is just showing above the trees in the east. The men seem to be well bundled up.

The men and equipment are seen with the lumber wagons and teams which was the means of transportation at that time. The Vowles Cultivator works can be seen in the background where Cape's Ice Cream Parlor now stands. An article in the Times states that the switchboard was to be located in the Thornhill store but my memories of it are that it was located in the former jewelry store of Gilbert Wells seen in the photo directly in back of the first man in the photo.

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This picture was preserved by Leo J. Shelters and given to me by Mrs. Shelters after his death. I could make out some of the work crew. Additional names were added by Lou Dever and Mrs. Chester Arms.

The first man to the left of the picture is Guy Fawcett who was a brother of Mrs. Ezra (Hazel) Nicholson. The third man standing on the ground is Mr. Gilbert Wells who was manager of The Milford Home Telephone Company and next to him is his son, Fred Wells. The man in the derby next to him is thought to be the gang boss while the son-in-law of Mr. Wells in the white shirt is Fred St. John. Ezra Nicholson is plainly visible as the man with the row of white buttons on his sweater. There should be Frank Ellis in that group of younger men. Ray Lockwood is seen high up on the wagon at the right and Emory Vincent thought to be the driver of the wagon on the right.



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There is a coil of cable at the rear of that wagon and possibly the men seated on the wagon on the left are sitting on the telephone poles that wagon is carrying. The man in the light colored trousers and white gloves is Al Shelter while the only other man I can readily identify is the one in the light colored cap who is plainly John Dawson.

The building at the rear of the picture contained a telephone booth where all the local swains would call their girl friends without every member of the family listening in on the conversation and also they could keep an eye on the girls at the switchboard to see that they weren't listening in. The reason they didn't have much privacy at home was because telephones were attached to the wall in the most central room in the house.

By the latter part of August 1908 The Milford Home Telephone company was starting to install phones in the business places along Main Street and went on from there to residences in the village. They extended lines out into the country especially south of town.

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Previous to this there had been telephone lines into Milford. On March 20, 1902 it was announced that the Bell Telephone Company of Detroit had put a solicitor to work here to secure subscribers for a local telephone exchange. He received contracts for 45 phones, which included 14 residences. It was hoped the necessary work could be accomplished in 60 days but an item on December 6, 1902 says the Milford Telephone Exchange went into business on December 8 in Herbert Tenny's furniture store, which was just south of what was Puckett's shoe repair shop at the corner of Main and West Commerce Streets. The item continued with the additional information that dealers were requested to deliver anything from one cigar to a paper of pins. Charles Houchen's meat market which had no delivery service was called an given an order of meat that was to be taken across the street to the Lovejoy grocery store and delivered with an order placed with them. Even the postmaster was called and requested to bring out the mail. It was said that Houchen's had called Lovejoy's so many times that the girls at the switchboard just left their lines connected to save work.

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It was after the first invasion of the Bell Telephone Co, to Milford that the other small communities surrounding this area began to get independent lines of their own. There was one called the Huron Valley Telephone Co. in the area south of Milford that at their annual meeting assessed each member one dollar to cover repairs and expenses of the past year. This company had 21 members on two lines.

The "Hello" exchange of Highland had 235 subscribers serving Highland, Hartland and White Lake with more patrons on several lines.

By December 19, 1908 G.H. Wells announced there were 250 patrons here and that he would extend lines to the Walled Lake exchange and was thinking of extending to hook up with Highland and Hartland and would consider extending to New Hudson which had never had a free service with Milford.

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An item about the location of the exchange for the Milford Home Telephone Co. indicated that it was to be in Tenny's furniture store but Mr. Tenny declined that honor saying he had the previous switchboard and would not desire to have another installed so it was decided to locate it in the former jewelry store of Mr. Wells.

The names of the first operators of the Milford Home Telephone Company exchange were given as Miss Hund and Miss Maude Avery.