

HELLO! CENTRAL! (Cont.)

In the 30 years, since direct distance dialing (DDD) was established, communication needs forced a change in area codes, locally, from 313 to 810 December 1, 1993. So we've come from a single phone in the Judson Brothers grocery store, to the exchange in the Argus printing office, to the switchboard on the second floor of the Brighton State Bank, to large windowless structures with apparently magical functions going on with little fanfare or our notice. The telephone has developed from turning a crank to having multiple means of communication in one's home, office or vehicle. The directory has grown from a list in the local newspaper to one that weighs over 2½ pounds. (A valid criterion indicating change?) The business directory pages were instituted with the first printed directory. The 1921 issue was half full of the 'yellow' pages, altho' they weren't yellow. These have become a means by which one may locate a needed product or service.

Before WW II Dick Tracy wore a wrist radio. (Surely the writer is not alone in remembering that cartoon.) Many felt the cartoonist's imagination was quite erratic. Today personal 'beepers' have replaced Dick's wrist radio. This writer's grandchildren make light of the study necessary for her to fully utilize the many possibilities of her telephone. Touch one button to converse, another to relay recorded messages, another instantly connects with an often called number without dialing, etc., etc. A recently purchased piece of telephone equipment is near obsolescence by the time it's installed.

Late local historian Bill Pless writes of several anecdotes concerning early telephone use such as the farmer living on his father's farm. The father didn't want the telephone installed and complained mightily when the son and wife had one put in. Thinking to quiet his complaint they finally got him to call his friend, Seth, who lived about a mile away. After shouting, "Hello, Seth!" the old man stepped back. The son encouraged him to continue. "I'm just waiting for that hello to get down to Seth's."

Another story concerns a self-made successful farmer and his sister who were enjoying the fruits of their labor and wanted everyone to know. A telephone and a furnace were installed and a car purchased; at a time when few had such luxuries. He came to town and called his sister from several stores where other customers could overhear his part of the conversation. "Did the telephone ring loud enough?" he asked. "Is the furnace operating all right? Did you adjust the chains to the draft and damper? Is the house warm enough?" Then he'd tell her the car was running splendidly and made every hill in high gear. Frequently seen wiping dust off the windshield and fenders and openly admiring the vehicle, neighbors would often cause him some concern by deliberately parking close to his car. (By Marieanna Bair with thanks to Bill Pless' writings, clippings from the Brighton Argus and Livingston County Press, Olive Smith Griffin, Alice Newcomb, Jane Tomlinson, Janice Field and Theresa Swiecicki.)

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