

**Title:** A Brief History of the Telephone in Beeton. Page 1/7

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**Description:** This document covers the history of the telephone in Beeton, telephone operators that have served in Beeton, locations of the switchboard, privately owned telephone companies, and a brief history of the telephone itself. The document also discusses the number of subscribers and the current state of the telephone (at time of publication).

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"Eight of 10 telephone men who were working in town (Barrie) last week passed west, seated on a farm horse chariot, composed of a huge lumber wagon, heaped full of poles, etc. necessary for their work at Bond Head, Beeton and other places."

This construction crew worked hard all through the hot humid summer of 1885 to raise poles and string wires along the road to Beeton. By fall, all was ready and villagers were welcoming the first telephones with a look of pride.

The 11-year-old invention was still a novelty in most Ontario communities. In fact, the Bell Telephone Company itself was only five years old, but had already connected thousands of miles of long distance lines throughout the Ontario and Quebec countryside, including a line from Toronto to Newmarket as early as 1884 and on to Barrie in 1885. This enabled the Beeton extension to be quickly made from Bradford and up to Alliston.

At this time, J.F. Darby had a jewellery store in the Watson block on Main street. Among his gems one day was placed an unusual looking object, which was "precious" in a different way. It was a primitive switchboard bringing the magic of speech over wires to Beetonites.

News spread rapidly; soon the inquisitive were crowding into Mr. Darby's store to see for themselves whether the rumours were true. The more daring gathered up their courage to step up to the talking box on the wall and listen to the sound of the distant voice - and be convinced.

Acceptance was quick; by December, the pages of the diminutive telephone directory for the Bell's Ontario Department boasted three customers for the Beeton agency:

Beeton Printing & Publishing Co., Centre St.  
Darby, J.F., Jeweller, Main St.  
Macpherson, F.H., Printer & Publisher, Centre St.

For two years, Mr. Darby divided his attention between his prosperous jewellery business and the demands of the busy little switchboard, serving villagers from the hours of 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays, 2 to 4 p.m. on Sundays, and 10 to 12 a.m. and 2 to 4 on holidays.

Then, F.H. Macpherson of the World Publishing House took over for a four-year span, and the switchboard moved to the World building.

It was the first of several moves before the turn of the century for Beeton's central office. The year, 1889, saw it transferred to the post office building, where it stayed until 1893, then went to the corner of Queen and Centre streets. Three years later it hopped over to Main street.

Old-timers cheerfully remember David Allanson Jones, whose endeavours influenced the changing of their town's name from Clarkesville to Beeton. Youthful residents often come across a plaque recently erected in his memory when enjoying their community park.

Internationally known as the "Bee King of the nineteenth century," he also turned his energies to beautifying and bettering his village. In 1891, he became the third local manager for the Bell Telephone company.

Successive managers were G.F. Somers, Frank Somers, and, in 1906, W.J. Anderson. Also, a notary public and ticket agent for the C.P.R., Mr. Anderson formed his own private line, Anderson's Telephone System, early in 1909 with the agreement not to canvass for customers in Beeton.

That same year, another enterprising young physician, Dr. R.S. Brewster, decided to build his own telephone lines in order to serve his patients in the outlying rural areas.

Realizing the advantages of amalgamating with several other private systems in this district, he soon influenced the forming of the Beeton Telephone Company Ltd. to serve these rural customers by connecting with the Bell's exchanges at Beeton as well as the nearby communities of Alliston, Bradford, Cookstown and Tottenham.

Provisional directors - W.O.C. Ahern, banker; Andrew G. Gaul, jeweller; D.S. Morrow, druggist; L.D. Cherry, hardware; and J.N. Lannin, magistrate - called a meeting in Morrow's drug store on July 7, 1911, to adopt the Company's charter.

Shortly afterwards, at a general meeting of shareholders, W.J. Abernethy, farmer, was elected president with fellow officers Frank Wilcox, vice-president, W.O.C. Ahern, secretary and Dr. R.S. Brewster, treasurer.

In two years' time, Frank Wilcox, a local farmer, took over the presidency, and capably served his company for the next 27 years.

Thomas Hammell retired as the Bell's agent in 1919. The year before, the Beeton Telephone Company, looking for an office for their secretary, decided to purchase from the Village of Beeton a building which had previously been used as a local power house supplying lighting service to the community. The Hydro had come to Beeton that year.

A proposal was made at this time, as recalled by N.P. McDonald, "In August 1919, I was called to a meeting of directors of the Beeton Company and representatives of the Bell Telephone Company, and asked to accept the secretaryship and office manager, if the Bell Company would move the switch-board into the Beeton Company's office."

The suggestion was accepted, and the Beeton Telephone Company became local agent for the Bell. Mr. McDonald also became secretary-treasurer of the Beeton Hydro System, and successively managed the affairs of these three organizations from the same office until May 1, 1957, when the Bell Telephone Company purchased the entire system of the Beeton Telephone Company.

From only three subscribers in the first days of the telephone, Beeton now boasts a total of nearly 500 customers, who will soon be giving a last turn to their long-familiar cranks.

Disappearing also will be the welcome voice of the local telephone operator. The personal touch will be gone from the telephone office.

"Each man in his time plays many parts. So did the chief operator. She did the banking for the commercial department; sat in on the switchboard for meal-time relief or sick relief; cut the grass around the building and tended the flowers; kept careful account of the long distance charges; attended the furnace, and did her best to settle disputes re overcharges on party line complaints; and put new fuses on the board as required."

Villagers will indeed be stepping into a new era of telephone calling. During the telephone's infancy, distances of one to two hundred miles were the absolute limit for successful reception, and at times, especially during storms or adverse weather conditions, conversations were unsatisfactory.

By the turn of the century the range had been increased to 1,000 miles. This limit was gradually extended until 1915, when the introduction of repeater stations at intervals along the long distance lines to renew the voice currents, brought about a great improvement in quality and scope.

By 1920, calls could be made to any point in Canada and the United States, though service to places outside Quebec and Ontario was still only available over United States lines. The first all Canadian transcontinental route was inaugurated in 1932 with the opening of the Trans-Canada Telephone System.

In the meantime, overseas radiotelephone service between New York and London, opened in 1927, was gradually extended to other centres on both sides of the Atlantic.

The opening of the first transatlantic telephone cable in 1956 greatly improved overseas telephone service. Today Beeton customers can reach almost every country in the world by telephone.