

Title: The Telephone in Our Past. Page 1/3

Creator:

Subject: Beeton, Telephone, June Chamers, Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Historical Society, Bert Platt, Beeton Telephone Company, Douglas Bone.

Description: This article provides an in-depth look at the history of the telephone and a look at the telephone's role in Beeton.

Publisher: Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Historical Society

Contributor:

Date:

Type: Article

Format: JPEG / PDF

Identifier: 0021

Source: Beeton History Vertical File - New Tecumseth Public Library: Beeton Branch

Language: En

Relation:

Coverage:

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THE TELEPHONE IN OUR PAST

A Report by June Chambers of the Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Historical Society March 18 meeting.

"The Telephone in Our Past" attracted an audience of forty to the March 18, 1991, meeting of Tecumseth & West Gwillimbury Historical Society, held in the Newton Robinson United Church hall.

Bert Platt, life-long resident of Beeton and author of a book on the Town's history, has researched the telephone. His enthusiastic presentation was followed by a display of vintage phones owned by Doug Bone, a retired Bell employee, who lives in Gilford.

Although it was originally thought to be the work of the devil, the telephone, today, is used more by Canadians than any other people, in homes, offices, cars, direct, portable, or by fax. This wonderful instrument that has changed their lives made its first appearance at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. Twenty-nine year old Alexander Graham Bell, from Brantford, a teacher of the deaf, won the coveted medal for his invention, using it to quote Shakespeare's famous words, "To be or not to be", into the ear of a startled judge.

Although there were other creative minds at work, even twenty years before this, it was Mr. Bell who won the race to the U.S. patent office, beating one of his competitors, a Mr. Gray, by a mere half hour.

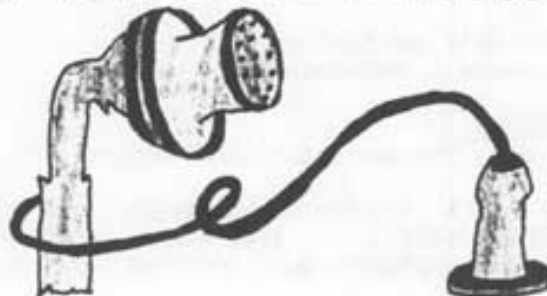
By 1889 the telephone system began to establish itself in rural areas as small independent companies, often initiated by doctors from their homes. In 1889, a local jeweller started a line in Beeton. Twenty-seven subscribers in 1888 grew to five hundred in 1963.

The Beeton Telephone Company was born in 1911, with capital of seven thousand and shareholders. When you visit the Beeton Library today, you are setting foot in the Telephone Company's home of 1918. Originally, the building served as the town's power house. In 1959, Bell Canada took over for fifty thousand dollars.

Telephone etiquette was practical and considerate. "Do not use profane language." "Do not tie up the phone." "Do not use during a storm." It was the community and rural life line, with the operator in tune to the news - good and bad.

Mr. Bone shared his priceless collection: a diagram of Bell's invention along with a reproduction of the original model, a cherry wood receiver of 1877 which also served as the ear piece. Phones were so varied in shape and design, including one that looked like a candlestick and another, resembling a tulip, made of clear glass.

Although Douglas Bone and his wife, Joan, live in a cottage they have managed to find room for an extensive library of telephone memorabilia and one bed room houses a switch board.



SOME RECENT EVENTS OF INTEREST

MARION KEITH PLAQUE UNVEILED:

At Rugby Community Hall, Oro Township, a plaque honouring the memory of Oro native Marion Keith was unveiled on Saturday, June 8. Marion Keith is the pseudonym of Mary Esther Miller, who was born in 1874 at Rugby, and died in Toronto in 1961 at the age of 86. She was the daughter of John Miller, a country school teacher, and Mary Johnson Miller. In 1909 she married Rev. Donald C. MacGregor, a Presbyterian minister. Marion Keith was a well acclaimed and popular novelist, whose many books reflected her strong social consciousness as well as a romantic idealism. A collection of her works was on display in the hall, where refreshments were served, under the charge of the participating Women's Institutes. The plaque was erected under the auspices of the Township of Oro History Committee, the Township of Oro, and the Women's Institutes of Clowes, Harvie Settlement, and Rugby.

INNISFIL HISTORICAL SOCIETY APRIL 20 MEETING:

An original idea was carried out with style at the annual Open House of this society. It took the form of an 1889 wedding reception, based on the record of the William Kell-Lavinia Sawyer wedding. The members of the receiving line were in period costume; while period pieces of furniture added to the illusion. A table of memorabilia of wedding photos, gifts, wedding accessories, and accounts of weddings as they used to be, along with a display of wedding gowns, added greatly to the interest of the afternoon. Innisfil Historical Society is to be greatly commended for its excellent contributions to our awareness of our social history with such events as this.

POW-WOW, June 15 and 16 at the Dunlop Street Arena, Barrie. Sponsored by the Barrie Native Friendship Centre, it drew native peoples from many places in Canada and the U.S. to take part in the inter-tribal competitions. The craft displays were truly enticing. But it was the drums, the dancing, the dress and the spirit that gave one a sense of awe and wonder. This is likely to be an annual event. Don't miss it next year.

SOME SUMMER EVENTS OF INTEREST

CANADA DAY AT THE CENTENNIAL MUSEUM, Penetanguishene. Second Annual Arts and Crafts Marketplace. Featuring Huronia Old Tyme Country Band and The Simcoe County Cloggers. Traditional craft demonstrations. Children's entertainment. And much, much more. 10.00 - 6.00.

HURONIA MUSEUM, to June 24, exhibit of "Charles Meanwell: Recent Paintings".

June 22: Yard Sale and Heritage Day
June 26: Dunsmore Archaeological Collection

MIDLAND COMMUNITY:

July 12, 13, 14: Shondecti Heritage Festival

DON'T FORGET TO VISIT YOUR HERITAGE PARKS THIS SUMMER. PHONE THEM FOR INFORMATION ON SPECIAL PROGRAMMES.