

## EARLY TELEPHONES

My grandson, Austin, is a collector of various things. Most recently he acquired an old telephone. I haven't seen it yet but according to his description it is typical of the phones I knew as a kid.

These phones were designed to hang on the wall. On the front of them were two bells mounted at the top which were activated by a rod that projected from the ringer inside the phone. Just



below that was the voice receptacle, which we would call the microphone today, that extended to where it could be spoken into by the user. Under that was a shelf which would be used to write notes on. The receiver or earpiece, which was used by only one ear, was hung on a cradle on the left side of the phone. This was lifted to activate the phone. The ringer was activated by a small crank on the right side of the phone.

The telephone office was in the town of Elbert as it was in most of the towns in the area. Lines were constructed in each direction from the office and were controlled by the operator. Several homes were located on each line. If the person you wanted to call was on the same line you could just ring their ring, but if on a different line you had to go through the operator. These lines were made of smooth wire, which of

course was called telephone wire and supported by posts or poles with insulators. I've heard stories of the line running on the top wire of the fence, but I never saw that.

I know the operator had regular hours, but I can't remember what they were, I just know you didn't try to make a call at night unless it was an emergency. There was a monthly phone bill, that I have no idea what it was, but that covered the operator's salary. There was no charge to call any line from the same office, but a long-distance charge for each call to other towns. Extended visiting was a problem sometimes and could require asking for the line if the need was great enough.

I remember some of the rings on our line: Ours was 5 rings, Dittmore's was 4, Kelly's was a short and a long, Hoover's was 2. The operator was 1 ring. My Grandad Gresham was on a different line and my Grandad Squires was on a different one yet.

While no one wanted to admit it, there was a great deal of "listening" going on, so most conversations could not be considered private. If the neighbors phone rang all you had to do was pick up the receiver to listen in, and supposedly they wouldn't know it. Of course, you wanted to make sure they had time to answer it before you picked up.

I remember quite vividly one such incident although it happened 82 years ago. My mother picked up the phone early in the morning on Kelly's ring. The call was from someone on the Squires line. He asked the Kellys if they had heard the news from the Springs. Then he told them that he overheard that Mrs. Squires had died that night. That was how my mother learned of the death of her mother, my Grandmother Squires.

Thoughts generated by an old telephone.