

Communication Stafford's First Telephone System



In 1887, the Northern Neck Telegraph and Telephone Company was formed, providing Lancaster County and part of King George County wired communication. Not until July 1904 was a telephone company established in Stafford. Called the Toluca and Fredericksburg Telephone Company, it was founded by Robert Ambler Moncure (1864-1923), the father of Miss Anne E. Moncure. The company sold stock to generate \$5000 in start-up funds. They purchased telephones from Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company and connected the Stafford lines with Southern Bell's exchange in Fredericksburg. The first part of the line ran from Toluca near Garrisonville to Stafford Courthouse to Brooke and on to Fredericksburg. The company was allowed to use the old telegraph poles on which to mount their wires. In areas where there were no telegraph poles, linemen either set poles or simply strung the wires on existing fence posts. As there was no electrical service in Stafford at that time, each telephone had its own battery.

The first telephones were installed in country stores, at the courthouse, and in the doctors' homes. By October 1904 telephones had been installed in thirteen homes or businesses.

Robert A. Moncure ran the company until his unexpected death in 1923. His daughter, Anne E. Moncure then assumed many of the management duties for the telephone company along with teaching school.

Unlike today, all calls were routed through a "central" or operator. For many years this was Mrs. Margaret Gallahan who kept the main switchboard in her living room. Calls coming into Stafford rang into the switchboard. She answered the call, asked who the caller was trying to reach, then connected the call with the recipient's telephone. If Mrs. Gallahan knew the recipient was not at home, she would take a message or tell the caller when the recipient would be returning. She acted as an answering service for everyone who had a telephone and sometimes passed on useful information regarding peoples' health and general news. In 1947 the Toluca and Fredericksburg Telephone Company merged with the Central Mutual Telephone Company. Mrs. Gallahan and her daughter-in-law operated the switchboard and managed all calls in Stafford County from at least 1919 to 1953 when a dial system was introduced. When the old switchboard was finally

shut down, Delegate Frank P. Moncure said, We have gained a telephone with a dial, but we have lost a telephone with a heart” (*Free Lance-Star*, Aug. 7, 1953).

Sources:

Daily Star, Oct. 26, 1904, “Stafford Telephone: Stock of the Line Being Placed Here”

_____. Dec. 9, 1904, extension of the Toluca and Fredericksburg telephone lines

_____. Mar. 7, 1905, “Stafford: Telephone Company Organized—Line to Run from Upper Stafford to Falmouth, Etc.”

Free Lance, Oct. 25, 1904, installing wire for the Toluca and Fredericksburg Telephone Company

_____. Nov. 15, 1904, Toluca and Fredericksburg telephone line completed

_____. June 20, 1905, establishment of the Hartwood and Fredericksburg Telephone Company

Free Lance-Star, July 21, 1953, “Dial Telephones Cut over Today at Stafford C. H.”

Stafford Deed Book 60, p. 293—May 2, 1947—deed—Toluca and Fredericksburg Telephone Company to the Central Mutual Telephone Company, Inc.

Telephones in Wide Water (Widewater)

by Mary Cary Kendall



Our home phone at Wide Water (*Richland*) was attached to the wall and a handle would be turned for the “ring” of the “party” you wished to call. Our ring was 2 short and 1 long turn. Most phones were in a “party line” and there were about 4 other phone subscribers sharing each line. If you wished to make a call you would remove “the receiver” to ask if “the line is in use.” If it was, you would put down the receiver and wait to hear a short ring indicating the line was “not busy.” If you wished to call someone not on your line, you would ring 1 long turn for central/operator to connect you to the party. On our line were the homes of two aunts. These rings were 1 short and 1 long turn and 2 longs, a short, and a long turn. Every ring on your line was heard in your home. When you heard the ring of another party you were tempted to pick-up the

receiver and listen to their conversations! If the conversation was really interesting you might even join in the conversation!!! Oh, how different things are now!