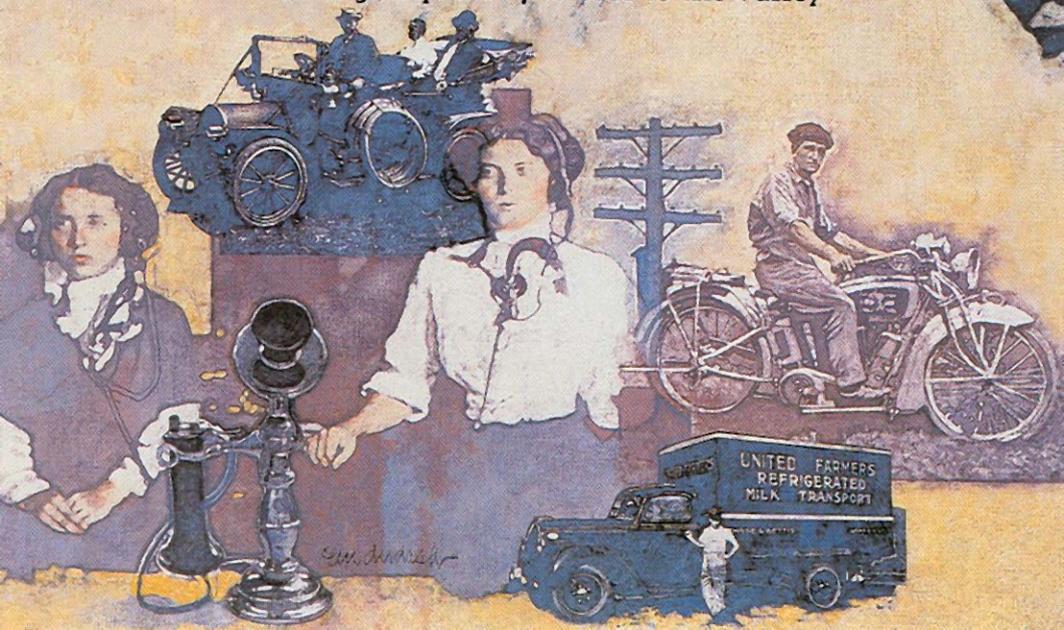


JUNE 1994

# WAITSFIELD TELECOM

Celebrating 90 years of service to the Valley



## A Brief History of the Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company

In the late 1870s, shortly after Alexander Graham Bell and his partner Thomas A. Watson invented, patented, and started exhibiting their wondrous new gadget, the telephone, an eager public jumped on the idea.

Since shopkeepers, farmers, and businessmen saw the value of not having to send messengers for answers, or to request goods and services, the practicality of instant communications wasn't lost on the rural population. But only big cities and towns received attention from the Bell Company and its rivals in the drive to control the future of the telephone. There was little money to be made in rural markets. The small towns and villages were left to fend for themselves and they did. This was the beginning of the independent telephone companies, Waitsfield Telecom among them.

At that time, Montgomery Ward & Co. published a booklet entitled *Rural Telephone Lines, How to Build Them. Instructions on Line Construction and the Installation of Telephones. Also Contains a List of Materials and Accessories Required.* Installation was easy: all you needed were wire, magneto telephones, batteries, a few tools, and some reasonable strength. Of course, patent rights had to be taken into account. The Bell Company wasn't at all pleased with anyone encroaching on their territory. The history of lawsuits filed for and against them attests to their zeal in this regard. But, their patents had run out on the basic "telephone" around 1894, and many communities were getting into the act of starting their own telephone companies and services.

At the time anyone wanting a telephone line could take up a "subscription" to buy the equipment and string some lines. Farmers would run lines between their own farm and that of their children. Far easier than walking when you needed to ask for help. Shopkeepers did the same in towns such as Warren and Waitsfield.

Stringing line meant "hanging" the line from pole to pole, draping along fence rails, running along the ground or wherever else was handy. And each family maintained the line from their home to the next. One line was draped over the mountain from the Eurich homestead (the former Little John's, next to the Southface condos) in Warren to the Fayston home of Rob Livingston, where it picked up the main line. Naturally, the single wire was maintained by the Eurich's between their home and the Livingston's.

Pity the poor chap tying the wires together when a caller suddenly decided to put through a call at the same time. As Ed Eurich described it, "OW! That stung! It made you jump. There was a lot of voltage coming through that wire."

By 1880 a telephone line ran between Montpelier and Warren. The only phone in Waitsfield was in Jacob Boyce's store (now the Masonic Lodge). A fee was charged for the delivery and collection of messages or to send a runner to call you to the phone.

### The Beginnings Of A New Company

By 1900 it made sense to create a town exchange in Waitsfield. A line was subscribed to by at least 47 citizens of Waitsfield and the line was contracted and ran from the Montpelier Telephone Exchange into Waitsfield. All the subscribers promised to pay a share to a combined total of \$500.00 "payable when the line is built and completed." The signers' subscriptions added up to over \$630.00 total. Their subscriptions ranged from \$2.00 to Walter E. Jones' \$250.00 making him, eventually, the president of the Waitsfield line. This contract was signed June 9, 1900, establishing the first Waitsfield exchange.

This contract was quickly superseded by a Toll Line Contract signed February 25, 1902 and effective April 1, 1902 signed between New England Telephone and Telegraph Company and Walter E. Jones. The new contract stated "permission is hereby given to the second party (Jones) to connect his lines with the lines of the first party (NET&T) at Waitsfield Village, Vermont."

NET&T would supply Mr. Jones with all the equipment for a rental fee on each piece per annum, payable monthly. This included the "station equipment" and the telephones themselves.

During this time lines went up all over the Valley: from Northfield to Warren; Roxbury to East Warren, to Granville; through Waitsfield, and so on all owned by different people. The lines from Roxbury came over the mountain to Wyd McClaffin's home in Warren, then ran along the road to Granville. None of the lines connected with one another. It made sense to combine all the lines into one system allowing those on the line to be able to talk to one another in different towns. Until the lines were held under one entity, subscribers could only talk to others along their particular line.

On October 9, 1904 E. W. Slayton sold his Warren lines and

exchange to Walter E. Jones and Ziba McAllister. The next day, October 10, Jones and McAllister purchased the lines from Warren through Waitsfield to the Moretown town line from NET&T and along with 20 other citizens of Waitsfield petitioned the state legislature to incorporate the Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company "for the purpose and with the right of acquiring, building, maintaining and operating telephone lines." On November 30, 1904, the Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company's incorporation became effective, with E. S. Joslin as the company's first president.

Eventually the need for a manager to maintain and install new equipment was evident. Mr. Joslin couldn't do all the work for himself, he had his own lumber business to attend to.

Walter Jones' brother, Matt, a director (and future president) of NET&T and living in Boston, contacted a young man then working for NET&T, Alton Farr, to manage the fledgling telephone company. Mr. Farr had grown up in Moretown, it seemed a natural.

On March 16, 1908, Alton Farr wrote to Frank Eaton of the Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company: "For \$15.00 per year I propose to give you continual service and service to any station of the system in the Mad River Valley, and the quality of the service I assure will be of a first-class character. I would be glad if you would talk the matter over with officials of the company." He was accepted. As part of the contract hiring Mr. Farr, most of the shareholders of the original agreement sold their shares in the company to Mr. Farr, with the proviso that if he didn't perform as stated by May 1, 1913, their shares would be returned to them at an "amount not to exceed \$1.00 per share."

On April 16, Alton Farr tendered his resignation to his boss, Mr. Howell in Massachusetts, to take up his new job as manager of Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company. According to Mr. Farr's daughter, Eleanor, he was told by Mr. Howell that "he could never make a go of an independent company."

On July 24, 1908, another agreement with NET&T was signed specifying territories and rights, which poles and lines were whose, and incorporating Moretown's lines that were "under existing contract to Ward & Haylet, of Moretown, Vermont, subject to notice of cancellation of said contract heretofore given to said Ward & Haylet." (Mr. Ward was the founder of the Ward Lumber Company, and Dr. Haylet was Moretown's doctor.)

## Bell's Growing Pains

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Because the Bell System (American Telephone and Telegraph Company) carefully doled out lines to cities and territories where it could make money, and refused access to its lines to any upstart telephone company, each independent company was a closed community of communication. In 1904 legislation was passed in Washington mandating interconnection between telephone companies. AT&T fought the legislation and came under heavy pressure to change their tactics under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. They would lose literally everything if they didn't accede to the new law quickly.

Finally, on December 19, 1913, AT&T vice-president, Nathan Kingsbury, wrote a letter to the United States Attorney General in effect throwing in the towel. The "Kingsbury Commitment" effectively stopped the growing American Telephone and Telegraph Company from swallowing up independent phone companies (or worse, putting them out of business) and agreeing to three major changes in their business practices. The most immediate change affecting Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company was that AT&T "would make arrangements, promptly, under which all other telephone companies may secure for their subscribers toll service over the lines of the companies in the Bell system."

The Valley was now connected to the rest of the world.

And number two: Bell could no longer use nasty tactics to take over independent telephone companies. Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) approval was now required to buy an independent telephone company.

## The Federal Government Steps In

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With the country at war, some thought that the government should control all communications lines. On July 13, 1918, the Federal Government took over all the telephone companies in the country, including the Waitsfield and Fayston. By running the nation's telephone systems, the government learned how to control and set reasonable rates for subscribers. This would serve them well in the future. At the end of World War I, the telephone companies were returned to their owners.

## Growing Again

On August 1, 1918, G. R. Andrews of Northfield sold his assets: poles, lines, cross pieces, wires, braces, insulators and guy wires, switchboard, phones and other equipment still in the Valley, including the phone in (and the line to and from) the Roxbury railroad station, to the Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company for a total of \$1,700. It is interesting to read the old contract in which equipment is described like this:

"#3 - A second wire on pole line No. 1 from East Warren southerly toward Granville line, about three miles, to the residence of Arthur Lamb in the town of Warren."

Now most of the Valley lines were part of the Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company.

The switchboard and central office were located in the manager's home, wherever that was at the time. New manager, new office. The board was operated by the manager's wife during business hours only. Of course, she was expected to run her home, too, in between dashes to the board to answer calls and make connections.

"Altee" Farr used his Model T Ford or a motorcycle to answer repair calls and make new installations. No matter what the conditions, the calls got through. And Altee Farr kept his side of the bargain he made in 1908.

In 1924 Alton Farr married Eunice Buzzell and she became the company's book-keeper and secretary. They lived in the brick house on the left, just over the covered bridge in Waitsfield. It was built in the early 1800's and known as Campbell's Tavern

and used as a stagecoach stop. When Alton purchased the house, it still had the old dance hall at the back.



"Altee" and his Excelsior V-Twin Autocycle. Notice the wooden structure on the left, it's the old dance hall attached to his house. The barn still stands.

### A Slight Snag

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On September 8, 1926, Matt B. Jones, Walter's brother and now President of NET&T, wrote a letter complaining about a bit of a problem he had getting toll service to Waitsfield. He argued that Mr. Farr wasn't keeping up his lines. Upon further inspection and testing, it was found that the line from Montpelier into the Valley, leased to Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company, was in "poor condition and very low insulation." The Waitsfield office equipment with the exception of "one loose spring causing a loose connection" was found to be "in good condition." Eventually the wiring was improved, and as parts became available, the system was upgraded.

### Great Devastation

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The great flood of 1927 demolished much of Vermont including most of Waterbury village and downtown Montpelier. Barns, bridges, earth, and all the working mills along the Mad River in the Valley were washed away. Along with the torrents of water went telephone poles and lines. Towns and villages were cut off from the outside world. But due to the extraordinary efforts by the employees of various telephone companies, service was restored in about one week. For several days, the only way to send important toll calls was by radio between the central office and the edge of the affected areas. Matt Jones and several of his NET&T men were attending a meeting in Montpelier when the flood hit and each left a record of his personal experiences clambering over wreckage, plodding through muck, crossing raging rivers, watching selfless heroism, and leaving behind a superb firsthand account of the carnage. (Ask about this book in the Joslin Memorial Library.)

Another flood in 1939 wreaked slightly less havoc than the 1927 flood, cutting off service temporarily. And in 1954, again the toll lines went out of order. After each of these incidents, radio was the only communications route out of the Valley.

### Alas, A Rate Increase

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In 1928 Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company filed for a rate increase. In a letter sent to all customers, Mr. Farr outlined the new

charges: \$2.00 for a 15 party or more residence line and a new private line business charge of \$3.25 within one mile of the central office.

The letter also imposed certain conditions for the first time:

The Company reserves the right to refuse service to patrons who willfully interfere with the service of other patrons, either by listening to their conversations or otherwise causing annoyance of any sort.

A patron may use the line for a period of five consecutive minutes after which if requested by the operator or patrons, he shall give up his right to the line to the party requesting it.

Obviously, the “listeners” were getting out of control.

### Public Notice and Other Services

One service started at this time was the “public notice.” Anyone wishing to make an announcement or public notice through the phone system, would pay \$1.00 for 20 words and \$.05 for each word thereafter. Delivery would be between 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM. Two long rings would signal the announcement. This service lasted until 1959 when telephone traffic made public notices too much to handle.

Another boon to the community was the fire alarm called out from the telephone switchboard. Three long rings, three times in succession alerted everyone along the line of a fire, calling all who could to come to fight the flames.

One story recalls a fire call coming into the switchboard while Willie Bragg and another volunteer were walking across the road. The operator yelled out the window to them that a raging fire was just called in and its location. Willie is reported to have yelled back, “Keep it burning, we’re coming!”



*Central Office Girls at work. Actually this picture was taken at the Richardson House after the fire in 1942. The operators are Gertie Baird (l) and Katie Jones (r).*

When the time came to rent a proper office, two operators, called the "Central Girls," were hired to cover the switchboard 24 hours a day. They lived in the office and earned \$15.00 a week. Since the girls had to cover the office at night they slept on a cot in the corner with easy access to the switchboard.

Operators could follow the progress of the local doctor as he made house calls. The doctor would check in as he left one place for another and pick up his messages.

When someone called in for "Mrs. Jones" the operator could often tell them to wait a bit as "Mrs. Jones was seen leaving the store."

Kevin Eurich tells one famous story about endless conversations on party lines: Two farm wives were holding a marathon discussion including references to the baking of cookies. A farmer tried, repeatedly, to get the line to make a call himself. Finally, he broke in telling the women "My Gosh, I think I smell cookies burning." Two clicks and the phone line was his.

Another farmer was entertaining a friend when the phone rang. And rang. Finally the friend asked him why he wasn't answering his phone. He replied, "Because the phone was put in here for my convenience and right now it isn't convenient for me to answer it."

Aside from the lack of privacy, the chronic problem of "listening in" was a drain on the batteries running the phone connections. For every phone lifted, there was a consequential lessening of the voice level of the speakers. If only two people were talking to each other, all was clear and understandable. However, as the eavesdroppers picked up their phones, the sound dropped to barely audible. Werner and Erika von Trapp solved the problem by speaking German to each other. It wasn't long before they, too, had the line to themselves.

In 1934 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was established creating local utility commissions to set rates and policies "in all matters affecting intrastate service." In effect, legalizing the monopoly and regulating rates.

### Spreading Their Knowledge

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Innovation is a common thread running through the history of Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company. In December 1935 a diagram and letter written by Mr. Farr appeared in *Rural Community Telephoning* showing other companies how to rewire their systems to

prevent cross-ringing and other problems on the lines. Years later, his daughter, Eleanor, would write articles teaching other telephone companies how to computerize their businesses.

By 1940 there were 196 accounts distributed over 35 lines around the Valley.

### A Change of Leadership

In 1938, while helping his lineman working on a telephone pole, the pole started falling. Mr. Farr stepped under the pole breaking the fall and protecting his employee. The accident crushed his lungs. He contracted tuberculosis leaving him bedridden until his death in October 1940.

Although devastated by the death of her husband, Eunice Farr continued to run the telephone company on her own, becoming one of the first women to run a utility company in the United States. Mr. Farr had also been the local Green Mountain Power representative and repairman, but Mrs. Farr realized that doing both jobs, as her husband had done, was too much for her alone. She decided not to serve Green Mountain Power in the same capacity.

### Making Do

During the late 1930s, Raymond Hosking worked as the lineman until he was drafted after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Then, Mrs. Farr had to get whomever she could to work for the company. Joe Moriarty, an electrician filled in, Gene Baird helped out, as did George Armstrong and Vic Dumas. Eunice Farr was known by her employees as a determined, yet kind and patient



*Susan Haskin Simms remembers, as a youngster, sitting on the safe with her legs crossed watching her beloved grandmother, Eunice Farr, run her business from the crank phone.*

boss. When asked what it was like working for the phone company then, Vic said with a smile, "It was a lot of fun, a real good job. I enjoyed it."

The central office was located to the left of the building housing Sweet Pea Natural Foods and David Garten's Custom Color (the Moriarty building). In 1942 a tenant in the apartment left a cardboard box full of live ashes on the porch. The resulting fire completely razed the building. Just before she fled down the stairs to safety as the office was engulfed in flames, the operator called the NET&T offices. Within 24 hours, service was restored with an antique bell-ended switchboard. Because of the war, new equipment was im-

possible to find and everyone had to make do. The office moved into the old meat market across the street, a rather rudimentary structure, until the front room of the Richardson House, what is now Universal Micro Systems, became available. Unfortunately, the replacement switchboard didn't have enough capacity to handle all the incoming

lines, so several lines were attached to any one bell. Simply put, there may have been three people's telephone lines joined and attached to one bell. This created much confusion as to who was calling and to whom, but even with all its problems, the operators were quite fond of this switchboard.

During Mrs. Farr's stewardship the responsibility to repair, maintain, install, and troubleshoot the system fell on her. Often she would don her coat to untangle lines with a "put-up pole," replace batteries, or install a new phone



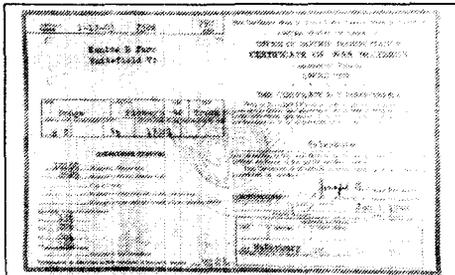
*Elizabeth Long and Marguerite Moriarty answering calls on the bell-ended switchboard at the old meat market. Notice the wires coming through the window.*



*Eunie Farr and her repair truck ready to make another service call. 1940s*

for someone. One patron claimed that “she even climbed poles,” but she denied this and no one else can prove it.

As young Eleanor Farr was about to go to the prom in June 1946, a fire broke out in the Farr home destroying the wooden addition (the former dance hall) to the home: a bedroom, dark-room, and the telephone company business office. The office moved into the Farr livingroom and customers would push open the front door and saunter into the livingroom to pay their bills and get their questions answered, more often than not they stayed to chat. Bills were often paid with maple syrup, eggs, or whatever one could barter.



*The gas ration card, issued during WWII allowing service calls to continue.*

### Rapidly Increasing Growth Forces Changes

With the opening of Mad River Glen in 1948, and Sugarbush in 1958, the phone system grew almost beyond its capacity.

As to long-distance billing, the operators had to time the calls and write up the charges. Norm remembers watching Ramona (Moni) Shaw handling calls and keeping the time cards. He says, although Moni shyly hedges on this one, that she was so good an operator, that she could remember each call, the length, and the billing charge and even write them up, correctly, at the end of her shift. Quite a feat, by any stretch of the imagination, considering all the calls she handled each day.

Moni was hired right out of school in August 1949 and trained by Gladys Brothers. She described the working shifts as: 8:00 AM-12:00 noon, 12:00 noon-4:00 PM, 4:00 PM-8:00 PM, and the night shift 8:00 PM to 8:00 AM. Not much happened at night, nor on weekends. By then, public notices cost \$2.00 each.

Moni was also admired for the way she handled callers. Operators must be polite even in the face of irate and/or otherwise difficult callers. And Moni handled her callers very well. There were never any complaints registered against her.

When Norm Neill went to work for Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company in 1958, his first assignment was to install a new phone in Charlie Jones' home. Mrs. Farr handed him the phone, wire, batteries, and other accoutrements and told him to install it. Three days later and after several visits from Mrs. Farr, he had the phone installed. After that effort, Norm says he got the job down to a couple of hours worth of work, instead of days.

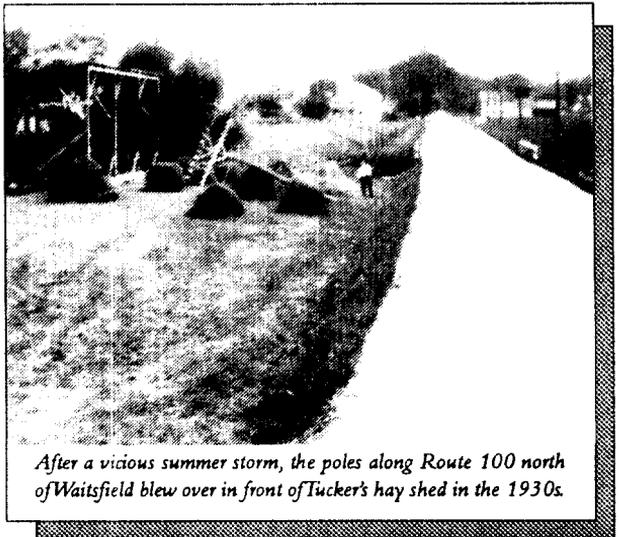
### A Little Yankee Ingenuity

In 1952 Dana Haskin married the Eleanor Farr while she was earning a degree in music from Eastman School of Music and he was in the Air Force. They met when Eleanor hired Dana to teach swimming to Valley youngsters at the Lareau swimming hole. They remained in the Valley for a few years after their marriage until Dana rejoined the Air Force. During this time, Dana worked for the phone company, Eleanor taught music in the Valley schools.

Dana remembers one particularly vicious summer storm knocking over all the poles along "the Flats" (from the Baird home to the Irasville cemetery on Route 100 past the two shopping centers built much later). This was

during the construction of the lines converting the system to dial. The company foreman had sent all his crew home because of the impending storm. When the poles blew over, he contacted Dana and said he would bring his men and equipment back to put up the lines and poles. As Dana tells it, "I told him that Norm

(Neill) and I could do it alone. He didn't believe it, but I backed up my truck to the first pole, attached a come-along to it and cranked it up until we could get a smaller pike-pole underneath to prop the big



*After a vicious summer storm, the poles along Route 100 north of Waitsfield blew over in front of Tucker's hay shed in the 1930s.*

pole up. Then we went to the next pole, cranked and propped that one up, and continued down the line cranking and propping up telephone poles. When we finished the last pole, we returned to the first pole and cranked it until it was straight up. When we finished straightening all the poles, we put posts next to them and wired the post and poles together. The foreman was amazed that we had done it in less time than it would have taken him to get his men and equipment back to the job!"

### Charted Growth

During this period, a report was sent yearly to J. A. Morse, Connecting Company Agent with NET&T. The information returned was a list of all the connections and phones installed. These are the reports for:

	1952	1953	1954	1958
1. Main Residence Telephones (maintained and operated by the company)	216	214	201	258
2. Extension Residence Telephones	2	4	0	18
3. Main Business Telephones (main & extension)	53	58	56	66
4. Service Telephones (owned by customers & operated by company)	1	0	4	0
5. Public Telephones (Pay Stations)	10	10	9	16
6. Private Branch Exchange Telephones	0	0	0	0
7. Total Telephones in Service (Sum of 1 through 6)	282	286	270	358
Number of Telephones Outside Village Area	231	180	37	-
Number of Exchange Lines	43	49	44	53
Number of Rural Telephones Installed Since June	23	0	35	-

Looking at the chart, you can see the fluctuations in the number of phones installed. Some of this was due to the closing of businesses. The lumber companies were pulling out. Between 1954 and 1958 the jump in installed lines, from 270 to 358 reflects the growing population of the ski areas, increasing the number of telephones by 33 percent.

### The End of An Era

During 1957-58, there was some talk of Mrs. Farr selling the company. Her health was failing and managing the company was a huge job. She, Dana and Eleanor discussed having the younger couple take over the company.

Many new arrivals in town complained to the Public Service Board (PSB) that the Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company was still on magneto systems and not dial; it was hard to start or run a proper business on a magneto system. Skiers coming up to visit didn't particularly like this "party-line" business. Some thought it was "quaint," others simply hated it. They were insistent enough that the PSB complained, in turn, to Mrs. Farr. While Dana and Eleanor were stationed in Texas with the Air Force, they and Mrs. Farr started exploring ways to convert to dial. Through their many contacts, they learned where they had to begin and how to do it correctly.

### A Thank You Earned

In the meantime—

A Resolution was passed at town meeting, March 3, 1958 acknowledging "the obligation of gratitude which we owe to the public-spirited citizens who pioneered a local telephone service for this Town and Valley and that we express our appreciation for the services rendered over the past fifty years by the late Mr. Farr and Mrs. Farr in the operation of this telephone service, and, that we take this means of expressing our best wishes to Mrs. Farr in the years to come..."

Michael J. Mack, the manager of Richmond, Vermont's Western Telephone and Telegraph Company, wished to buy out Mrs. Farr's majority shares in the company, effectively taking control of the company. He had been telling Dana Haskin for years that he would be buying Mrs. Farr's company, so Dana didn't have to worry about the company. Mack went so far as to arrange a loan through National Life Insurance Company of Vermont to rebuild the telephone company plant. He had already bought up several smaller companies and converted them to dial. He wanted to do the same with the Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company.

In his letter of March 11, 1958, discussing a possible annuity for Mrs. Farr as part of the purchase agreement, Mr. Mack wrote,

"A storm, not of the severest type, would cut off entirely your source of income and render your telephone plant valueless. I do think that your serious consideration of these matters would greatly benefit you."

There is no record of her reply.

April 16, 1958, a letter from Oscar L. Shepard, Chairman of the

Vermont Public Service Commission states:

"The Commission has received a petition requesting that it make an order approving the sale of the Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company to the New England Telephone & Telegraph Company.

"As we have received no request for such an order from either you or the New England Company and so far as the commission knows, there is no arrangement whereby you have agreed to sell to any particular company, we - therefore - can entertain no request for such an order or even a hearing in the matter."

Again, on November 30, 1958, another offer was received, this one from A. J. Prahl of Stowe:

"I am not sure you remember me. I was the auditor for the Public Service Commission in Montpelier for several years up to 1957. Perhaps you will recall my visiting you in Waitsfield several years ago to go over telephone figures with you. Mr. Carpenter, whom I believe you know well, and I worked together, and we are good friends.

"I am writing to inquire if you are thinking of selling the telephone company. I would be very much interested in discussing it with you. I seem to recall that Mr. Mack, and perhaps Mr. Hopwood, had made you an offer several years ago. I am sure that I, and my associate, would be able to offer more than either of the others, and I would like to talk with you about it at your convenience.

May I hear from you, please?"

### **New Leadership, New System**

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**B**y the end of 1959, Dana and Eleanor had returned to Waitsfield, Dana's service over, to take over the company and to continue the process of converting to dial. Dana was named the Manager, Eleanor the Treasurer.

For Valley-born Vermonter Eunice Farr, taking out a loan to install a dial system was a difficult decision. It was a scary time for the family, but they knew it was the only way to grow and improve their company. The change to dial was under way and Mrs. Farr stepped back from day-to-day operation of the company and let her daughter and son-in-law take over.

Ironically, the *Monsanto Magazine* ran an article by Fred Gehrung in March 1959 about rural telephone companies called "Home Style Communications." Among the three companies featured is the Waitsfield-Fayston Telephone Company. Norm Neill is pictured inspecting lines as the "only lineman for Waitsfield's tiny phone company (375 subscribers), ignores -17° cold to hunt short circuits." The article ends with this: "The dial system hasn't arrived in Waitsfield either, and if it is up to some folks in town, it never will. Mrs. Farr's company, 375 subscribers strong, is such a flavorsome ingredient in their ski resort area's cup of charm that a noted author recently pleaded with her not to go dial and surrender the 'human touch'."



### Construction Begins

Permission from the Vermont Public Service Commission was given to apply for a loan from the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) to convert to a dial system. A loan for \$362,000 was approved and telegraphed to Mrs. Farr on November 5, 1960. This loan was one of nine approved in eight states in five days, "proceeds will assist in improving service for 358 subscribers and in furnishing initial service to 195 subscribers." A wire was sent to Mrs. Farr on February 1, 1961 releasing the loan funds so the construction could begin. With the new system a new building to house the dial equipment was required. The REA approved this loan on May 6, 1961. On May 10, 1961, the REA approved Cass-Warner Building's bid for \$9,975.00 for construction with the terse message:

"CASS-WARNER BUILDING BID \$9975.00 VERMONT  
503-A WAITSFIELD APPROVED. SUBMIT THREE COP-  
IES EXECUTED CONTRACT WITH BOND=D D  
MOHLER RURAL ELEC ADMIN.0"

With only 120 days on his contract, during the summer and fall of 1961, George Twombly's Telephone Service Company of Standish, Maine, placed 35 miles of new cable and rural distribution wire. They rented the apartment above Joe Moriarty's showroom and hired two more crews to help. The *Times-Argus* of Barre ran articles in May and June of 1961 describing the work: "Construction and Supply Company, Inc. of Essex Junction have charge of right of way, clearance, brush control and installation and Seward Company of Kittery, Maine, have charge of poles, guys and anchors."

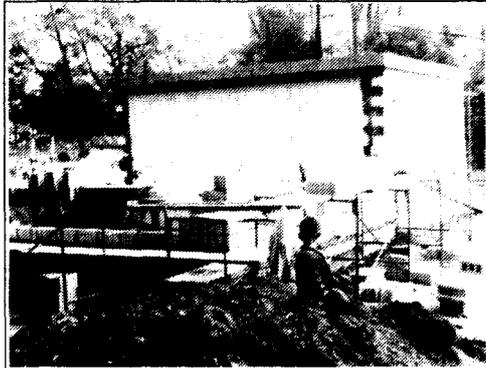
To handle the new ITT dialing equipment, Cass-Warner built the cement block building (all of 20 feet by 20 feet, where the satellite dishes are now located near the public phone on the curve just beyond Bridge Street in Waitsfield).

Until this time, there could be as many as 27 subscribers to a line. With the new dial system, the maximum was eight. And the eavesdroppers problem was lessened considerably! Now only one phone rang at a time and unless someone accidentally picked up the phone and heard someone speaking, no one could know the phone was busy. Subscribers dialed four numbers to reach another phone in the Valley.

For the first time, phones were offered in "decorator" colors (other than wood or black), with a variety of new sizes and shapes to choose from. A letter went out to the subscribers describing their new choices of phone and service:

"Phones come in four styles - the standard desk model, wall phone, and new 'spacemaker' wall model, all in ten attractive colors. The year 1961 will bring the fourth member to the family - the small and attractive Starlite with lighted dial. This will be available either for your main station or an extension, in six pastel shades.

"Services available are custom PBX unit, secretarial answering unit, push-button key telephone for multi-line use, transistorized speaker phone, which will leave both hands free



*The original 20' x 20' building is in the background, while the first addition to it is under construction. A young Eric Haskin watches the construction. 1964*

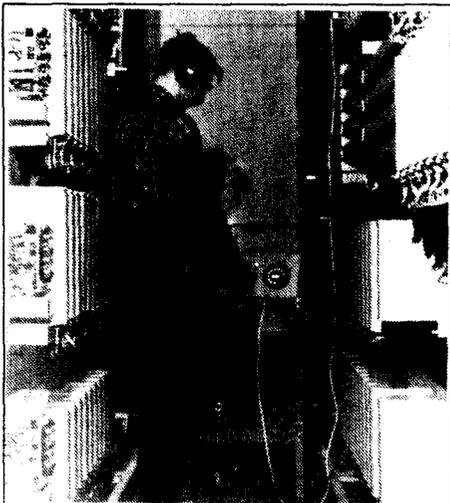
while you talk, and hard-of-hearing sets. Radio telephone will be offered, if ten or more subscribers are desirous of this service."

Imagine the huge advance represented by this conversion: a choice of phones and colors and your choice of location for this new contraption!

For awhile, all subscribers had two phones in their homes: one dial, one crank. Of course, many older residents preferred the crank system they had always used.

Finally, the big day came. On November 28, 1961, seven-year-old Susan Haskin, under the supervision of her parents and grandmother, pushed the switch, officially converting the system to dial. Eunice Farr, making the first toll call on the system, promptly called her sister in Brattleboro.

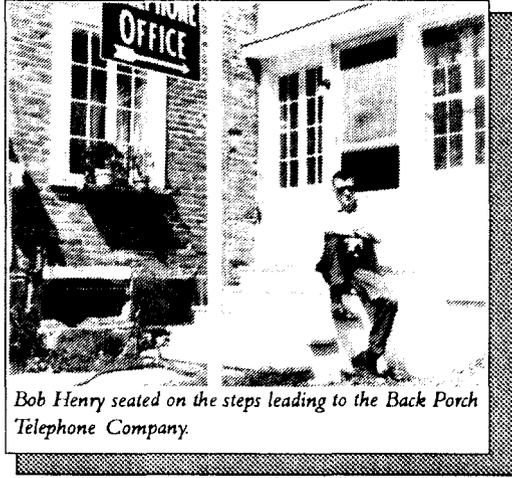
At the Magneto Office, Ramona Shaw supposedly cut the wire leading to the switchboard. Contrary to the photographs taken at this time, it didn't really happen right away, because the operators were leery of this new system (and of losing their jobs). They kept the switchboard working a few more days until finally Norm Neill did the deed, cutting Moni and her fellow operators off from their links to the outside world.



*Norm Neill tracking down a problem at the Central Office on the step-by-step dialing equipment.*

From 1961 through 1968, to keep party line subscribers from tying up the line on local calls, there was an automatic timing mechanism which sounded for a few seconds before disconnecting the call after five minutes. Denise McCluggage, of the *Valley Reporter*, nicknamed the "sound" the galloping ghost and editorialized frequently on its nuisance factor. Everyone in the Valley was pleased when the system was converted to all one-party service and the ghost was retired.

As the business grew larger, it outgrew the livingroom desk. The back porch was closed in, the windows covered with plastic in the winter, and the offices moved onto the porch. Most skiers thought it funny, if not unusual, for a telephone company to be doing business from the back porch of the owner's home. Dody Moriarty, a thirty-year veteran of Waitsfield-Fayston Telephone



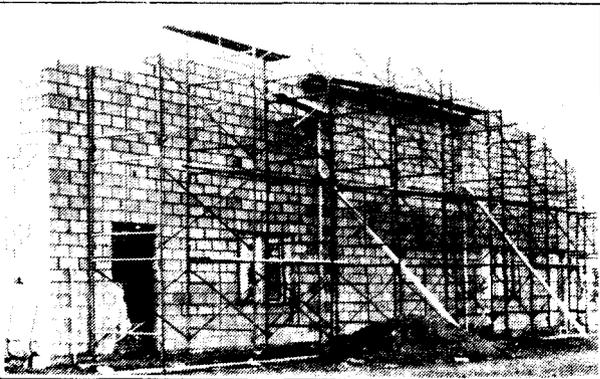
*Bob Henry seated on the steps leading to the Back Porch Telephone Company.*

Company recalls the new office being dubbed the "Back Porch Telephone Company." This name, coined by Paul Bristol of the old Alpen Inn, caught on and reflected the low-key nature of doing business in the Valley in those days.

### Growing Pains

In 1964, after Glen Ellen opened, the capacity of the company was literally at the end of their lines. A new office and new plant facilities were desperately needed. Keeping the office in the home of the manager was no longer practical. There simply wasn't enough room for the new employees to work off the Farr/Haskin's back porch. Along with 72 miles of new cable and rural distribution wire added, the company found it feasible to go from eight-party lines to one,

*The business office under construction in 1966. The building is dedicated to Alton and Eunice Farr.*



two, and four-party lines. In 1966, the new business office was built on the north side of Waitsfield with commanding views of the ski areas that had been responsible for all the expansion. The buildings were dedicated to Alton and Eunice Farr.

Eunice Farr died in 1965.

### Direct Dialing Comes to the Valley

Effective June 4, 1967, Direct Distance Dialing became reality. Subscribers simply dialed "1" to get out of the state, then dialed the area code. Computers now handled the timing and billing of calls.

More growth in the ski areas brought about the need for even more facilities to handle new residents and businesses. By now, there were over 1,000 customers. A feasibility study showed that conversion to all one-party lines was a possibility. The Vermont Public Service Board agreed, the REA agreed and the Board of Directors went ahead with the project. It was the first all one-party system in the state of Vermont. No longer were customers charged by where they lived in relation to the central office (base rate area and zones), but by a flat \$7.00 fee for residential and \$14.00 for business customers.

Until December 1968, all billing was done by hand and an Addressograph machine stamped the mailing address on the envelope. A new IBM billing system was installed and performed the tasks of billing. Paper tape reels of unrated toll calls were sent to a main computer facility in Maine to be processed and returned to the Waitsfield office for the final tasks of billing: collating, stuffing, and mailing. Dody Moriarty remembers one month when the toll statements inadvertently ended up in the trash, launching a massive search for the missing data.



*The company's first 4x4 pickup truck—  
—a 1961 Chevy.*

### Continuing A Tradition

Continuing in her father's footsteps, Eleanor Haskin's article "You Say You Need A Computer" appeared in the July 15, 1980 issue of *Telephone Engineer and Management* magazine. The article shows

other telephone companies how to computerize their business, from planning through implementation. At the time the article appeared her credits already included the authorship of two books, *Computer System Development for Small Telephone Companies* and *Independent Telephony in New England*, and the presidency of the Organization for the Protection and Advancement of Small Telephone Companies. In her spare time, she gave computer demonstrations and participated in computer seminars for other telephone companies. All this before the personal computer, as we know it today, hit the desks of mainstream America.

### Step-By-Step Dialing Advancement

The next major advance came in 1981 when step-by-step dialing was made obsolete by digital electronics; from analog to digital. All the employees in the company worked for several days straight calling each customer and checking the connection before the change was permanently made. As Dianne Thompson and Dody Moriarty described the mind-numbing hours, "We were calling people until all hours of the night, well, really only until about 11 PM. We had to check each connection on the system." The rewards were there too, "We all went to Gallaghers to unwind afterwards."

Now software runs the system. In the "old" days the men working in the plant facilities building, by now a 100' x 40' building, would hunt down a problem with their eyes, ears, and hands. They fixed the switches by hand, they replaced equipment by hand. Now, it's all done on a computer. As Dana put it, "Today we could fit everything into the original 20' x 20' building!"



*The Digital Cut-Over Crew - 1981*

Back Row, left to right: Adrian Ferris, Norm Andrews, Merritt Janes, Frank Lyford, Brian Moulton, Gary Damon, Jack Jones, Owen Wimble, Dana Haskin. Middle Row: Dody Moriarty, Dianne Thompson, Mike Feilon, Fred Blanchard, Ken Griffith, Dave Smith, Bob Henry. Front Row: Dave Patterson, Norris (Fat) Weston, Lester Miller, Sr., Kevin Eurich, Eleanor Haskin, Debbie Jones

## The Good New Days

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With the change to electronic handling of the system came the technological advances of push-button phones, call-waiting, call-forwarding, conference calls, speed-dialing, and other marvels taken for granted today.

In 1993, a three-year project to replace and upgrade the entire plant was finished, bringing the system into line to handle the traffic of the twenty-first century: computers, faxes, electronic mail, as well as standard voice communications.

Today, computers do most of the work of the telephone company, leaving employees time to keep the human touch in the business. As Susan Haskin Simms, grand-daughter of Eunice Farr and one of the three Farr grandchildren working for the company says: Plain Old Telephone Service, or POTS, is no longer the norm for many customers.

Yes, gone are the days when the operators could track down the doctor, or your next door neighbor, by looking out the window. But gone, too, are the days when doctors made house calls.

While the company's plant is so sophisticated that a "Madison Avenue" ad agency can operate here communicating with its clients all over the country, and a Valley engineering business has its engineers calling Waitsfield from all over the world, it still maintains the "old time" customer service of the past. Although exchanging maple syrup for service would be frowned on by agencies of the government regulating such practices.

## Very Special Customer Service

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Customer service is an ongoing commitment. Their employees are considered their most valuable asset. All employees are trained thoroughly in their jobs through on-the-job training and/or through special technological training sessions. An interesting note: most of the employees live in the Valley and are dedicated to the future of this area. Most share a long employment history with the company, as dedicated members of the overall team. Through on-going surveys, the company has received, and implemented, many ideas directly from their customers. According to survey responses, the customer satisfaction level is extremely high. The company is committed to ensur-

ing that customers understand what they are being billed for, breaking out the details of all charges monthly. "We are amazed at the customers who have second home here who have never seen the FCC Access Charge, mandated by the government, on their home telephone bills. Even though everyone in the country pays this charge, it is apparently not shown clearly, as it is on the Waitsfield bill," says Susan Simms. Continuing efforts to respond to customers has spawned the Call-Back Program, where customer service representatives contact customers after new service has been set up or augmented, to make sure that the customer is completely satisfied. A satisfied customer is a happy customer.

### Long Distance Choices

In the late 1980s, after the government forced the breakup of AT&T, other companies proliferated: Sprint, MCI, Long Distance North among them, started selling their own long-distance services to telephone customers. By 1991, customers were able to make their own choice of long-distance carrier, opening a spectrum of services and billing options.

On September 3, 1992 the company held an open house, in the pouring rain under a tent, to introduce their new operating name: Waitsfield Telecom. They gathered most of the interstate phone companies to explain their system's virtues over their competitor's (in the next booth). Amid ice cream, hot dogs, pelting rain, puppet shows, and wiring demonstrations, customers were treated to explanations of the interstate services.



### A Part of the Community

Community service is a large part of the company's inherent strength. When members of the community recognized the need for a skating rink and offered to volunteer time and material to make it happen, Waitsfield Telecom was there putting in the light poles to illuminate the rink. Among the projects to which they lend their support are the Mad River Winter Carnival and the Mad River Push

for Life, an emergency telephone system for senior citizens in the Valley, the Mad River Ambulance Service, and various cultural events.

For years, the Valley residents have been fortunate enough to have free "pay" telephones located throughout the area.

Most recently Waitsfield Telecom introduced a voice mailbox (Bulletin Board) information network, on trial, at the Waitsfield Elementary School. "We saw this as a perfect blend of technology and improved communications between the schools and parents," said Susan Simms. It may not be quite as personal as in the days of "Central" but the ability to relay important information is based on the foundation of early telecommunications.

One thing that hasn't changed: while they may be ultra modern with facilities, Waitsfield Telecom continues to be your local, next-door, community-oriented, friendly neighbor.

As Kevin Eurich summed up the last ninety years, "in the past the problems we encountered were mostly noise on the line or shorts. Now it's incompatible answering machines or faxes that won't work at 9600 baud." Who knows the future of telecommunications?

Watch for the birthday celebration events planned starting in August. Notices will be sent out with customer bills and appear in local papers.

Amazing, isn't it, where ninety years of technology has brought us?

### Happy Birthday, Waitsfield Telecom!



## The Employees of Waitsfield Telecom - 1994

Dana Haskin .....	President
Eleanor Haskin .....	Vice President Operations
Kevin Eurich .....	Central Office Manager
Dan Owen .....	Engineer/Plant Superintendent
John Simms .....	Cable TV Manager
Susan Haskin Simms .....	Customer Service Manager
Tom Yurkosky .....	Vice President Finance
Norman Andrews .....	Senior Outside Plant Technician
Ed Benham .....	Consultant
Eric Benz .....	Mechanic
Angie Bigford .....	Customer Service Rep
Fred Blanchard .....	Outside Plant Supervisor
Amber Diehl .....	Information Systems
Bernie Dunbar .....	Outside Plant Technician
Adrian Ferris, Jr .....	Workload Control
Tammy Field .....	Administrative Assistant
Dan Fuller .....	Outside Plant Technician
Erin Harrington .....	Customer Service Rep
Eric Haskin .....	Outside Plant Technician
Gregg Haskin .....	Accountant
David Jones .....	Outside Plant Supervisor
Jack Jones .....	Outside Plant Technician
Seth Joslin .....	Customer Service Rep (Cable TV)
Lisa Liberty .....	Accountant
Frank Lyford .....	Radio Technician
Dody Moriarty .....	Billing Coordinator/Directory
Brian Moulton .....	Accountant
David Patterson .....	Central Office Technician
Jennine Poulin .....	Accountant
Dianne Thompson .....	Receptionist/Cashier
Jim Vasseur .....	Outside Plant Technician
Karen Vasseur .....	Customer Service Rep (Cable TV)
Paul Webb .....	Programmer Analyst
Don Whitman .....	Cable TV Design Technician
Owen Wimble .....	Outside Plant Technician
Bill York .....	Central Office Technician

## Montpelier, Middlesex, Moretown, Waitsfield Telephone Line

We, the undersigned citizens of the Towns of Waitsfield and Fayston are desirous of having a telephone line to connect the Village of Waitsfield with the telephone exchange in the Village of Montpelier and hereby promise to pay to A C Brown, proprietor of the Montpelier Telephone Exchange, the several sums set to our names respectively for the purpose of securing the erection and maintenance of said telephone line. The towns of the said subscribers are that; re for the payment of the sums stipulated on our part, the said A C. Brown on his part promises to field and maintain a good and substantial lines, with a centrally located office in the village of Waitsfield VT and also promises to deliver to each of us the said subscribers such a number of coupon message tickets as, al-(10) cuts each coupon to Moretown {13-}, fifteen cuts to Middlesex and (20) twenty cuts to Montpelier and Waterbury will amount to the sum hereby subscribed. {The regular tariff rates to non-subscribers will be five cents higher than these.} The said coupons to be good until used, and each coupon entitling the holder to five minutes service an any one time on presentation thereof at the offices at Waitsfield, Moretown or Middlesex and giving the holder direct communication within any station upon said line or connected with the telephone exchanges with the limits of the village of Montpelier, but should not include message service in the delivery or receipt of messages nor shall they connect (?) to lines which are now or may hereafter be built to connect other towns and villages with the Montpelier exchange except upon the payment of regular tariff rates for the lines extending beyond the Montpelier Exchange.

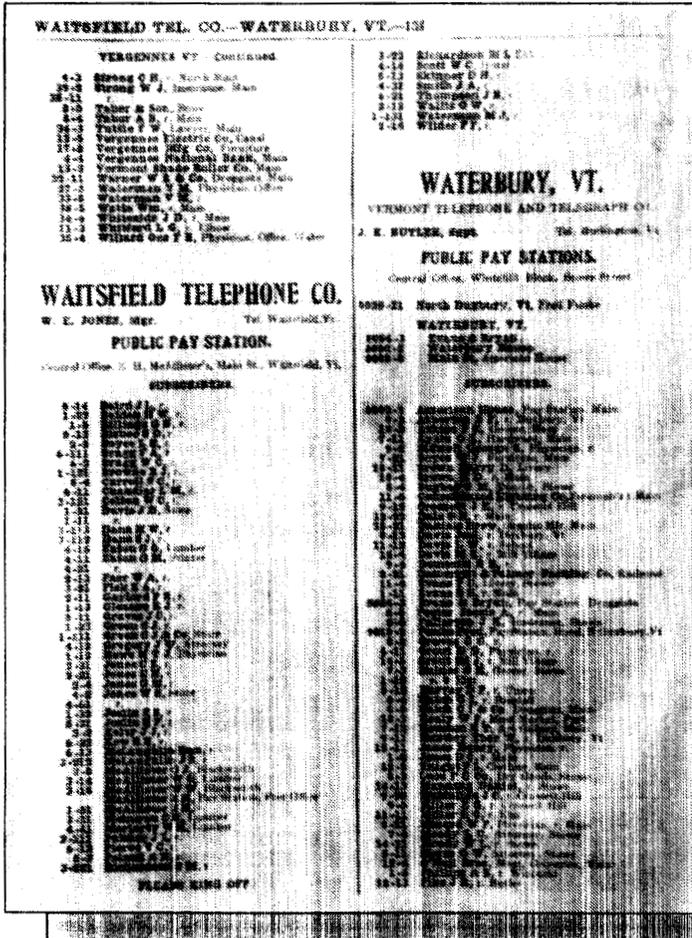
### Amount Required \$500.00

The above sums payable when the line is built and completed:

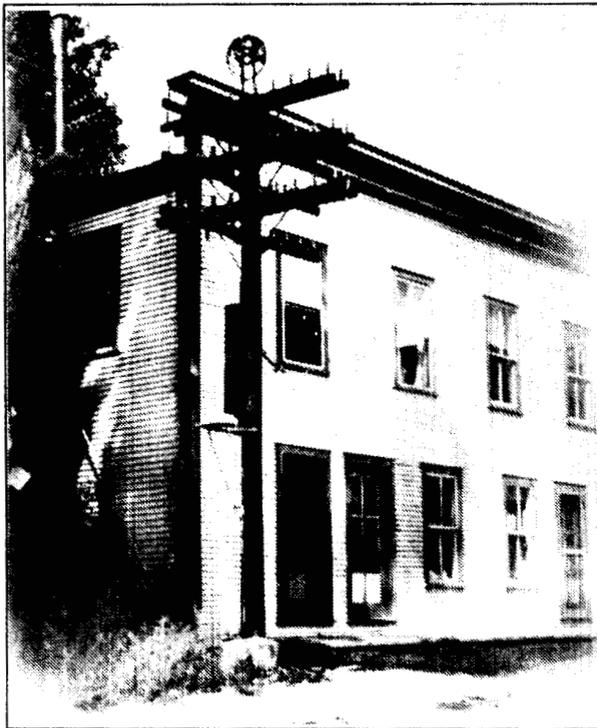
J H Hastings	\$50.00	Z H McAllister	\$10.00
R J Gleason	25.00	Chas. E Jones	10.00
FA Boyce	25.00	AM & ML Richardson	20.00
WA Jones	250.00	L R Joslin	10.00
Eaton Brothers	20.00	A C Jones in labor	20.00
W M Strong	10.00	EA Dumas	10.00
W G McAllister	10.00	WW McAllister	10.00
W F Wilder	3.00	M E Hadley	3.00
X L Billings	25.00	MA & Wm Palmer	5.00
Go O Boyce	5.00	CW Richardson	5.00
C E Joslin	5.00	Jas Baird 4th	5.00
Pardon Bushnell	3.00	Geo A Berry	5.00
Nathan Robinson	5.00	C F Camp	5.00
S J Dana	5.00	A W Bigelow	5.00
O S Joslin	2.00	C H & J S Newcomb	5.00
D W Rodgers	5.00	Geo Eddy	5.00
L D Savage	5.00	F G Evans	5.00
Geo Heath	5.00	BA Holmes	10.00
A F Richardson	3.00	FF Dumas	5.00
Eli Wheeler	5.00	L M Tyler	10.00
Charles Parker	5.00	O J Gale	4.00
?? Reed	5.00	Hugh Baird	5.00
Josiah Haldere	3.00	T C Ryder	5.00

*The wording of the original contract starting the  
Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company in 1904.*

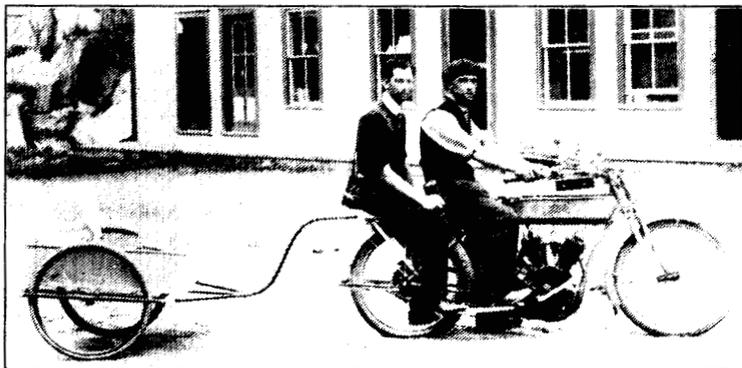
# A Pictorial History



A copy of the telephone directory printed somewhere between 1904 and 1907, before Alton Farr joined the company. In addition to the 47 original signers (that we have on record) there are just a few more names on the list of 57 names. Several numbers are residence numbers of businesses, which accounts for the discrepancy.



*The phone company's office along Route 100 next door to the Moriarty Building (housing Sweet Pea) before the 1942 fire. Notice the huge telephone pole with the wires going into the window. The Bell system sign is in the window where the switchboard was located.*



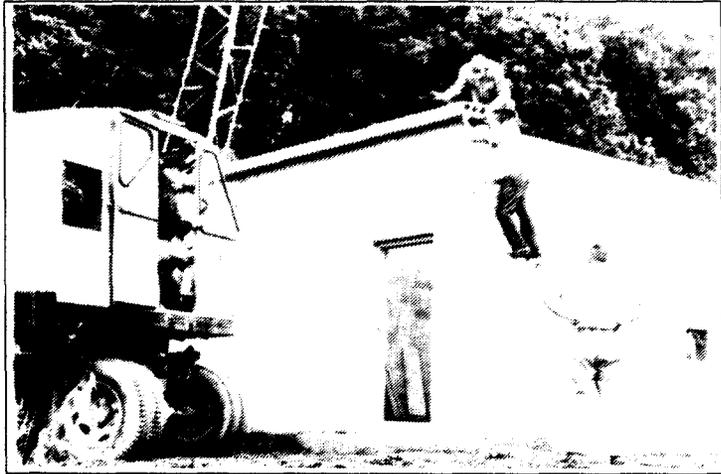
*Altee Farr on his Thiem motorcycle with the business office behind him. Notice the Bell signs on the repair wagon and in the window.*

*A list of subscribers from the pre-dial years*

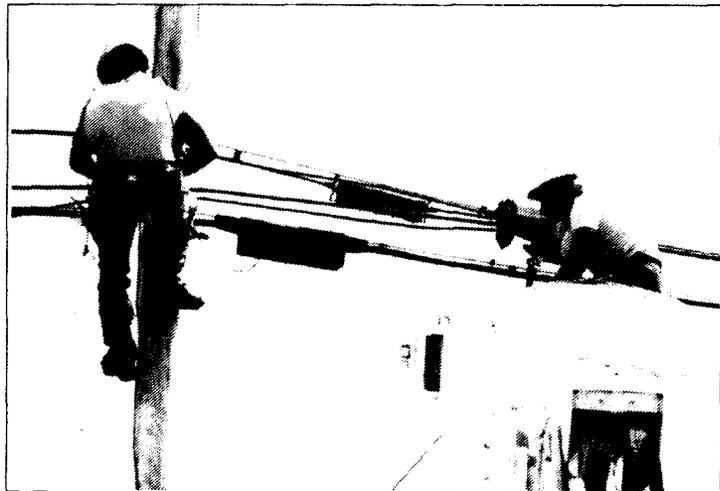
NAME	NUMBER
W. H. ...	1
...	2
...	3
...	4
...	5
...	6
...	7
...	8
...	9
...	10
...	11
...	12
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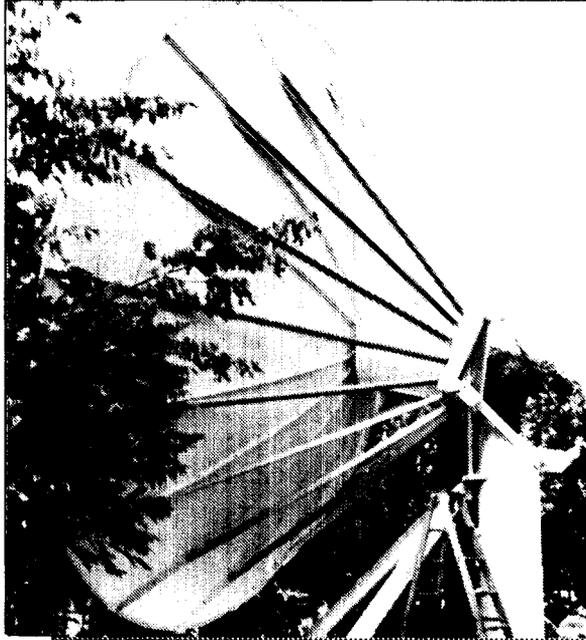
*1964 - Adding the second cable to the system*



*1966 - Putting the blocks together along the roof line during the construction of an addition on the Central Office.*



*1980s - Adding the lines for the cable system*



*The cable satellite dishes near the Central Office*



*1982 – Debbie Jones at the open house celebrating the opening of Waitsfield Cable.*

## Thank You

The author would like to thank the many people who helped make the writing of this history possible. From former employees and friends outside the phone company who told me their tales making the history that much richer for their insight and details: Norm Neill, Ramona Shaw, Ed Eurich, Elizabeth von Trapp, Bob Gove, Vic Dumas, Kevin Eurich, Dody Moriarty, Susan Simms, Dana Haskin, and Eleanor Haskin. Thank you for allowing me to take up your valuable time, and for your infinite patience. A thank you, too, to my family for its patience while Mom was working in the office.

A special thank you to Phil and Onri King, and Muriel de Marne for their superb editing and recommendations.

## Author's Biography

Katherine de Marne Werner, while born and raised in Washington D.C., arrived in the Valley before the dial installation began when four digits were all that were required to call someone locally. Now, she too, has a fax and a 14,400 baud modem, just to keep up with the current trends in telecommunications. Her husband, Peter, is a masonry contractor. They have two children, Pete and Heidi, two cats and too many dogs.

A freelance writer writing for *Country Courier* and *Prime-Time Journal*, she also edits Random House's *The Official Directory to U.S. Flea Markets*, a yearly edition published each spring. She is a co-editor of *Vermont Voices I & II*, publications of the League of Vermont Writers. Former president of the League of Vermont Writers, she is the director of the annual Dorothy Canfield Fisher Writers Conference held in Burlington each June.