Connecting Family, Friends & Neighbors

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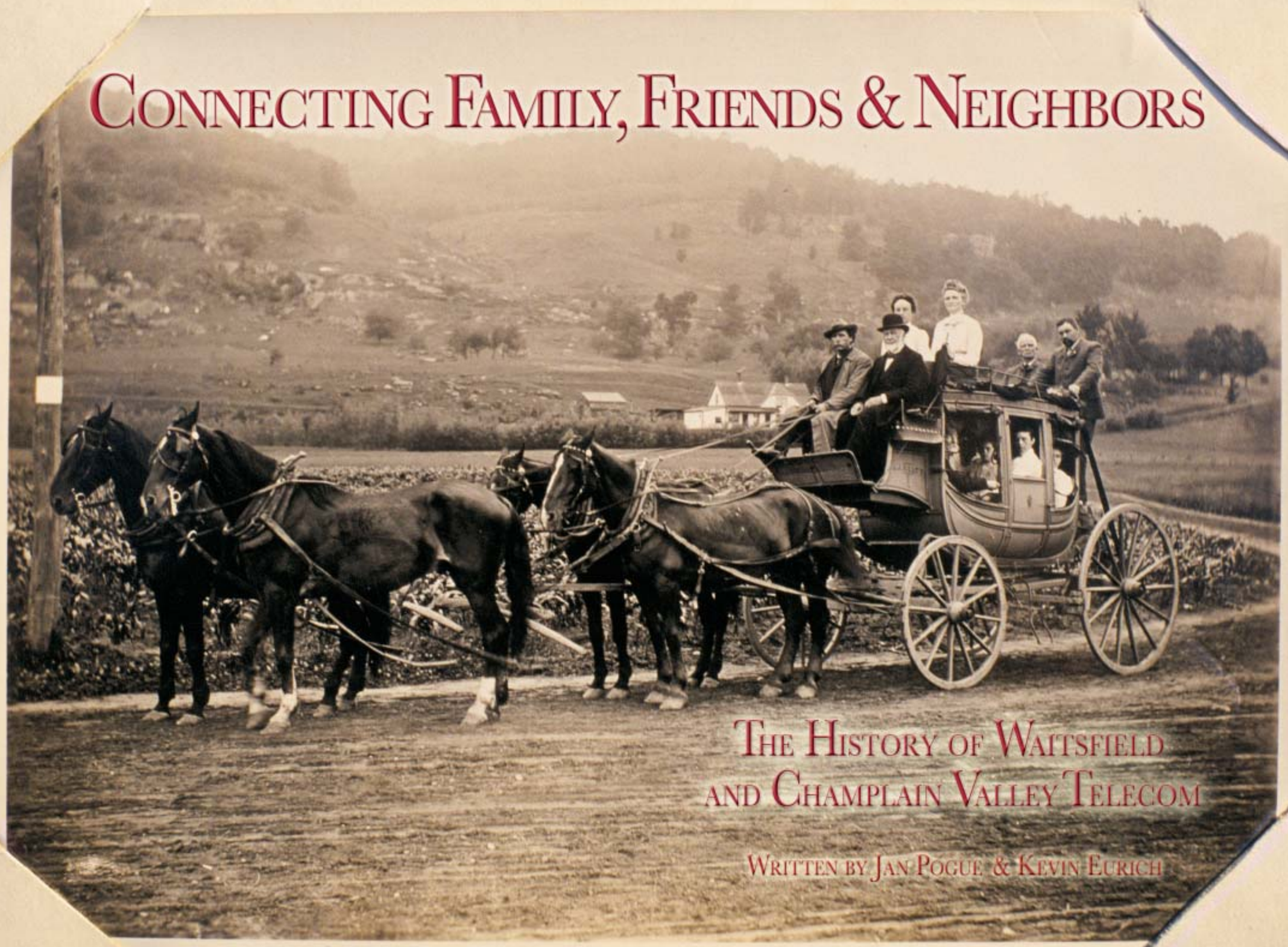

The History of Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom

Written by Jan Pogue & Kevin Eurich

Connecting Family, Friends & Neighbors

The History of Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom

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Connecting Family, Friends and Neighbors—The History of Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom was developed by:

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818 Marietta Street NW
Atlanta, Georgia 30318
404-885-9515

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Book and Jacket Design: Compoz Design
Prepress: Light-Works, Inc.

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Dedication

Susan Haskin Simms
August 4, 1954—July 14, 2003.

There was a single rose left in Susan's garden the day her family left the house forever. Everything in the house was gone, weeks of packing and storing so the new owners could take over the home that had sheltered her, housed her children, given her rest and peace.

Her mother, Eleanor, picked the rose that last day as she walked through the garden—picturing Susan kneeling on an old rug or cardboard box, tending to her plants. There was frost on the ground, and by rights the rose should have been long gone. Yet there it was, a last gift from a daughter, a friend, a co-worker, a mother who had given so much, a final memory.

This book is dedicated to Susan Haskin Simms, whose final gift will always be the memories she left behind.

Senator Patrick Leahy with his wife Marcelle.

Foreword

by Senator Patrick Leahy
United States Senator from Vermont

With the publishing of this book, Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom formally celebrates one hundred years of business. It's a milestone that would distinguish any company, but for Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom, it's a milestone that also comes with the respect, appreciation, and goodwill of the people of the Mad River Valley, the Champlain Valley, and everyone who has ever placed a call from or to one of Vermont's most scenic regions.

More than a century ago, telephone lines began connecting Vermonters. Across the country, communities relied on their infant local phone companies, brand new to the telephone business, to maintain these connections and to expand the telephone's reach. In the Mad River Valley, Vermonters relied on the fledgling Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company to connect farm houses, general stores, and families, one telephone at a time. In Vermont, this was no easy task. One man, Alton Farr, and his wife made the company a success by using their Vermont sensibilities and stubbornness to link as many people as possible to the growing network, through snow, cold, mud, and flood.

The Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company has remained a Vermont family business, operated by Alton's wife, and today by Alton's daughter and her husband. Dana and Eleanor Haskin have expanded the company, purchasing more lines, expanding to more customers throughout Vermont and adapting to changes in technology that have enabled rural and urban areas of once-isolated Vermont to be technologically on par with larger urban areas throughout the country. Like Eleanor's father did decades ago, they are again wiring new homes—this time, not for phones, but for high-speed Internet access. And, like their mother, they are teaching the telephone business to their children, so that Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom can continue to be a family run Vermont business for years to come.

Like so many in the Mad River Valley, Marcelle and I are fortunate enough to be close friends of Dana and Eleanor. We are a small state and our parents were also close friends. In fact, these friendships brought about our meeting and a long and happy marriage.

Vermont has changed a lot since the days that Eleanor's dad and mom ran their telephone company out of their home, but the small-town sensibilities of Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom haven't changed, and neither have the people who run it. The CEO is just a phone call away, and thanks to their family's hard work and perseverance, so is the entire world. This Vermonter could not be more proud of the Haskins.

Alton E. Farr as a young man.

Introduction

Just Ordinary People

Alton E. Farr was an ambitious man, ambitious in the way of a man who lost much early on and would spend the rest of his life trying to make up for it.

When he was six, his parents divorced-virtually unheard of in rural Vermont in 1887. His father went in one direction, his mother in another, to Massachusetts to find work. Alton, wavy haired, serious, a seventh-generation Vermonter, went to live with his Aunt Abbie in Waitsfield, a few miles and a lifetime away from his birthplace in Moretown. There, he grew up in a world of other ambitious people trying to scrape together a living in a town whose population had peaked sixty years earlier.

In Waitsfield, Alton's choices seemed simple. He could be a farmer, like the bulk of his Aunt Abby's neighbors. He could be a logger, one of the tough men who had already cleared almost 70 percent of Vermont's timber. Or he could run a store, trying to predict the things people might need.

But Alton saw a fourth career path, one that was nonexistent less than a generation earlier. It was the strange new world of telephony, a made-up word that had only entered the world's lexicon barely twenty years earlier when two men standing in opposite rooms found they could suddenly speak to each other over wires. Alton's decision to learn electrical engineering and to take a job with the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company set in motion a hundred years of a family business that continues to grow stronger as it enters its second century.

The story of Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom (WCVT) is one of hard work, dedication, and entrepreneurship—of a man chilled to the bone, carrying wires and tools on his back during a devastating flood, of a woman in her housedress and apron untangling telephone wires and installing phones, of progress counted telephone pole by telephone pole. It is the story of two more generations of a family that has taken a tiny, locally owned independent telephone company into the modern world of the Internet and cable television, becoming the little fish that swallowed a whale when it acquired the Vermont portion of GTE in 1994. That act put the small firm into the company of telecommunication giants.

As Alton himself said about a totally different subject that seems remarkably appropriate today as WCVT celebrates its one hundredth anniversary in 2004, "For just ordinary people to take up a scientific subject against the scientists would seem to be utter foolhardiness. Yet I am going to do it and take my own chances."

Chapter One

Making the Connection

No one ever claimed living in Vermont's Mad River Valley was easy in the late 1800s. The Green Mountains form a backbone of double mountain ranges that include two of Vermont's highest peaks, bringing snow and transportation woes alike. Compounding the troubles was that the Valley was flood prone, thanks to six brook-sized streams that fed the Mad River from the slopes of the surrounding mountains. Just getting to and from the little village of Waitsfield, the Valley's biggest community, was a feat. No rail lines came that way because of the expense of running a line. Granville Gulf effectively sealed off any major southern exit, and it would be years before a good highway ventured north. Farmers trying to get their extra sheep and cattle stock to market had to drive them on foot or wagon two hundred miles.

Sometimes, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, people just got tired of fighting the water and the snow and the hardscrabble life and left for the new lands in the West or the industrial centers elsewhere in New England. Those who stayed were hungry for connection to their neighbors and to the rest of the world.

The Valley seemed perfect for what Colonel Andrew C. Brown had in mind. Colonel Brown—he had raised a company of volunteers when President Lincoln issued his call in the fall of 1862 and served at the front during the Civil War—was a man familiar with modern things. The son of a Methodist minister, he'd learned the trade of printer and became the editor and publisher of a weekly in Bradford, then editor and business

John Kelty, of J. J. Kelty Stage Coach, lived and operated his teamster business between Waitsfield and the Middlesex train station two times daily for 75 cents each way.

A snow covered Main Street in downtown Waitsfield, prior to 1913.

Alexander Graham Bell making the first transcontinental telephone call from New York to Chicago in 1892.

manager of the Watchman and State Journal in Montpelier before going to war. When he returned, he became successful and prominent selling fire, life, and accident insurance in his adopted city.

In 1880 he imagined a new adventure in an industry that was destined to change the fabric of American life: telephones. He spent early winter inviting the businessmen of Montpelier, the nation's smallest state capital, to think about the advantages to their business of having a telephone. Telephone service was still in its infancy, and service borders were defined by economies of scale and, perhaps, who got there first. The one rule that had to be followed was the matter of an operational license: companies who wanted to provide service had to be sublicensed by the American Bell System, and in Vermont's case, the New England Telephone and Telegraph Co. (NET&T). If NET&T had no business reason to operate in a particular area, granting the sublicense was a simple formality.

In December, with thirty-three subscribers willing to pay a combined five hundred dollars, Brown received the direct license from NET&T to form an independent telephone operation to serve Washington and Lamoille counties. He installed telephone poles, strung line, and on April 1, opened the Montpelier Telephone Exchange.

The world was coming to an isolated corner of Vermont.

Living with a Monopoly

Alexander Graham Bell first conceived of the telephone in 1874; on March 18, 1876, he and his assistant, Thomas A. Watson, transmitted speech over wire beginning with Bell's famous phrase, "Mr. Watson, come here, I want you." During the next few years, patents were secured and the business organizations that eventually became the base for AT&T and the Bell system were formed. The company held a monopoly until Bell's key patents expired in 1893-1894.

The monopoly period was characterized by steady but slow growth in the number of telephone subscribers. When the Bell Telephone Company was formed, only 778 telephones were in use, and the firm desperately needed money. Bell invested its scarce capital in its most profitable markets, the cities: typically, only two subscribers per mile of pole line could be counted on in rural areas, but forty or more subscribers could be served per mile in urban areas. The math made the decision easy.

This left rural areas like Vermont with little hope of getting telephones without the residents taking matters into their own hands. At the time anyone wanting a telephone line could take up a "subscription" to buy the equipment and string lines. Farmers would run the lines between their own farm and that of their children. 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. Each family maintained the line from their home to the next. None of the lines serving different areas connected with each other, since the lines didn't go "that way."

Eventually, members of these small areas would feel the need for connection with the "outside world" and arrangements would be made for the cooperative to be taken over either by Bell or by an independent company owned by men like Brown, willing to pay a fee to Bell to get equipment and licenses for the few residents who had subscription money.

An 1883 Western Electric 3 box wall phone with a Blake transmitter.

But change was coming. After the Bell patents expired, both non-Bell manufacturers and service providers entered the market throughout rural America. These providers were known as the independent telephone industry, rural companies that launched in the early 1890s and heralded a dramatic period of growth. In 1893 Bell provided roughly 266,000 telephones in the United States. Just ten years later thousands of independent telephone companies were serving more than a million subscribers, nearly equaling the Bell system's network. By 1912, the number of independent telephone companies had climbed to more than 3,200—due in great part to a manual produced by Montgomery Ward & Co., which showed farmers how to hook telephone lines to fence posts—and not incidentally, selling the equipment needed to do so.

Many of the independent providers were marginal operations that employed cheaply built and poorly maintained facilities and suffered from a shortage of capital and managerial skills. Colonel Brown was better than most, and word of both his service and the marvels of the telephone kept bringing him more business. Prominent citizens of Waitsfield and Fayston drafted and signed a subscription service request and submitted it to Brown about 1882. The subscription asked for a single line to be built and maintained by Brown from the Montpelier exchange to a centrally located site in the village of Waitsfield. It served forty-seven citizens. A single "toll station"—the one and only phone—

Montgomery Ward & Co. published a booklet entitled Rural Telephone Lines, How to Build Them. The book contained instructions on line construction and the installation of telephones, as well as a list of materials and accessories required.

STRINGING AROUND

Clarence M. and Meridan L. Richardson ran businesses in the most modern of ways—using a "telephone" even before Waitsfield had service. They were partners in a clapboard mill, tended to a farm, a tannery, a general store, and a custom saw mill plant their father had started. To keep up with each other, the Richardson family used a sophisticated version of a child's toy called a string telephone that worked very much on the principle of two tin cans tied together with a string. The Richardsons strung a line between Meridan's home (now the Waitsfield Inn) and the Richardson store across the road. There was no signaling built into the string telephones, so it is not known exactly how a conversation was initiated. The phones eventually found their way to William C. Carleton, a long-time resident of Warren, who used them between his house and the blacksmith shop across the road.

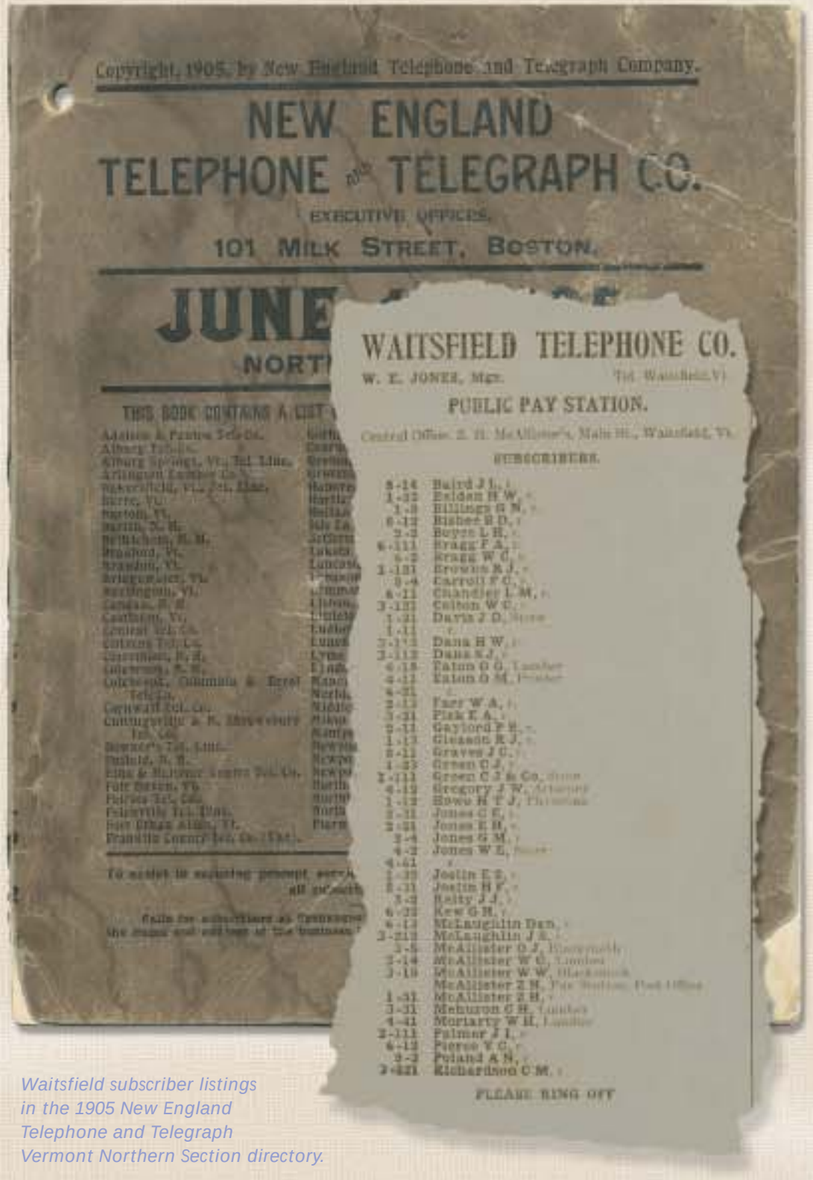
These were the string telephones (similar to two tin cans and a string) used to communicate in Waitsfield between Richardson's Store and their home (now the Waitsfield Inn) in the 1880's.

Cover of New England Telephone & Telegraph's 1905 Vermont directory. It also contained separate listings for each of the Independent Telephone Companies. Fifty-four subscribers were listed for the Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company.

RECOGNIZING THE NEED

The first subscribers to the Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company were a "who's who" of Waitsfield — a judge, the town clerk, even Alton Farr's uncle. Here are some of them:

- Judge Jonathan Hammond Hastings, a self-taught man who became director and vice-president of the National Bank of Waterbury. He filled various town offices, was a deputy and later sheriff of Washington County, and served in the legislature.
- Richardson J. Gleason, who spent most of his adult life in the retail business, but still made time to serve in most town offices. He was town clerk for forty-two years and town treasurer for most of that time, and also served in the state legislature.
- Oscar G. and Orville M. Eaton, known as the Eaton brothers, ran a tinsmith business. Oscar eventually began selling agricultural implements, and his practical knowledge and experience with farm machinery made him a favorite with the local farmers. After the death of his first wife, Oscar married Addie (Miner) Bushnell, Alton Farr's aunt, who provided him a home after his parent's divorce.
- Hugh Baird, who owned what is now known as the Mad River Barn before selling it and moving to the village of Waitsfield. Baird ran a mill just across the road from the Mad River Barn on Mill Brook.



Waitsfield subscriber listings in the 1905 New England Telephone and Telegraph Vermont Northern Section directory.

was installed in the general store then owned by Jacob Boyce, now housing the Masonic Temple. Anyone wanting to receive or send communications by phone did so at the store, within earshot of merchants and shoppers alike.

With the addition of the Valley towns of Warren, Waitsfield, Fayston, and Moretown, Brown had two hundred and fifty patrons and four hundred miles serving twenty-seven towns and five counties.

As the telephone system grew, NET&T became more interested in rural areas and in 1897 purchased Brown's entire operation, which by then was operated under the name of Vermont Telephone and Telegraph Company (VT&T). Included in the deal were toll stations in general stores in Moretown and Waitsfield, along with a handful of private subscribers. In 1902, NET&T gave Walter Jones, now the president, "permission . . . to connect his lines with the lines of NET&T at Waitsfield."

During this time privately installed lines stretched all over the Valley: from Northfield to Warren; Roxbury to East Warren, to Granville; through Waitsfield, and so on. The lines were all owned by different people, and none of them connected. Until the lines were held under one entity, subscribers could only talk to others along their particular line.

Waitsfield Grows Restless

In October 1904, two of Waitsfield's most prominent citizens decided the town should have its own independent telephone company, to allow more phone lines to be established and to have interconnecting lines. Jones and Ziba McAllister had been among the first subscribers to sign up with Brown when he sought to extend his service into the Valley. Jones, born in Waitsfield, had attended St. Johnsbury Academy but came back to Waitsfield to run an extensive mercantile business. McAllister, another Waitsfield native son, spent many years as the Waitsfield town clerk and postmaster.

Jones and McAllister, together with twenty other Waitsfield businessmen, petitioned the state legislature to incorporate the Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company "for the purpose and with the right of acquiring, building, maintaining and operating telephone lines." The incorporation became effective on November 30, 1904.

The new company had seventy-five subscribers and a central office in McAllister's home. They had telephone poles, telephone lines, and the will to keep connected. Now, all they needed was someone willing to spend their life keeping the phones working.

This 1890 Western Electric Vanity Phone had the entire telephone circuitry sitting on the flat surface of the desk. These phones were generally found in semi-public locations such as hotel lobbies and office settings.

A TWO-PHONE HOME

Because the early telephone network was far from the ubiquitous entity we know today, customer access was limited to the area of a particular phone company's service - which made for some interesting situations. Josiah A. Smith owned a teamster business. His house was in Waitsfield, but his customers might be in Warren. Neither of the two independent telephone systems that served the area served all the same customers, and the telephone network required him to have two phones to do so.
One phone went on one wall, the other on another wall. Waitsfield resident Mary Moriarty, who as a young girl lived a few houses from Smith, remembers watching him work both phones at once, marveling at this seemingly magical feat.

EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

One of the oldest area telephone directories was published by the Montpelier Telephone Exchange Company in 1891. It listed the public "toll stations"- otherwise known as public phones:

Moretown:
The George Fletcher Store, across the street from the Methodist church.

Waitsfield:
F. A. Boyce Store, in the building now housing the Mad River Masonic Lodge. It was the oldest retail business in Waitsfield.

Warren:
E. W. Slayton Store, which sat where the Pitcher Inn parking lot is today.

Chapter Four

New Leadership, New Ways

In the end, it all came down to family. Dana and Eleanor realized that things had to change if the company was to survive. Eunice was ill with Parkinson's disease, the company was barely scraping by each year, and customers were demanding the same sort of telephone service they experienced in other parts of the country.

In 1959, when Eunice asked for help from her only child and the son-in-law who called her "Mom," Eleanor and Dana never really hesitated. "We didn't even think of questioning my mother," remembers Eleanor. It was simply the pact that Eunice and Alton had first made to each other and the company, and which they passed on to their family—part of that old-fashioned word, heritage.

The family left Texas to return to the Mad River Valley.

The reality of the job ahead came painfully quick. Within days after taking over WFT, with Dana as manager and Eleanor as treasurer, they were met with a demand from Charles Ross, chairman of the Public Service Board (PSB), that they upgrade their network within one year or face losing WFT's franchise.

The PSB had had enough complaints from customers about the charming but outdated magneto crank telephone system. New arrivals in town said it was hard to start or run a proper business on a

Ramona Shaw, a long time switchboard operator, is pictured symbolically cutting the cable on November 28, 1961 for the conversion to dial. The operators would no longer be needed to set up local and long distance calls.

Dana, Eunice, Susan, and Eleanor during the conversion from a magneto to dial system on November 28, 1961. Seven-year-old Susan Haskin pulled the switch officially converting the system to dial. Eunice made the first toll call to her sister in Brattleboro.

Chapter Two

The Telephone Company Lands a Leader

People in villages similar to Waitsfield in the early 1900s appreciated the struggles of their friends and kin, the work that went into everyday life. They appreciated knowing that most of their neighbors in the tiny adjoining community of Fayston were Irish, from families that had fled the potato famine and could be counted on to grow thousands of bushels of Irish potatoes each year. The villagers appreciated knowing that the Wards over in Moretown had roots in America going back to the early 1700s, and that Hiram Q. Ward—though a newcomer, not one of their own—milled the best lumber for clapboards of anyone in the area.

They liked knowing who they could count on when things needed fixing or something needed to be done. Alton Farr was that kind of man.

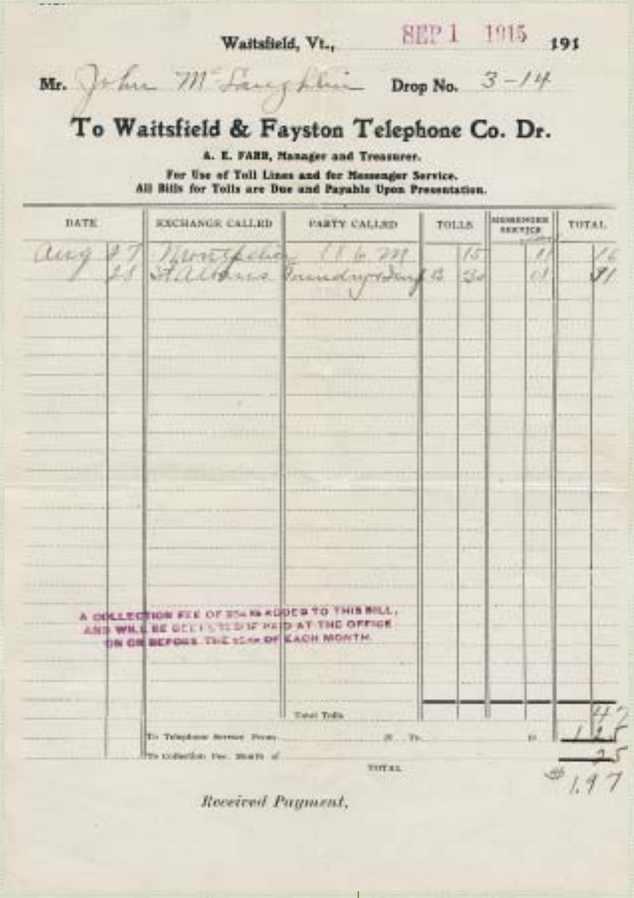
Alton E. Farr was born in Moretown on November 8, 1881, to Lewis and Carrie E. (Miner) Farr, a local boy who came to live with his Aunt Abbie Miner in Waitsfield after his parents divorced in 1887.

He was educated in Waitsfield in the three-story school next to the village cemetery north of town that had been new in 1847 but was showing its age by the 1890s. In 1898, at age seventeen, Alton attended a three-month business course at Gloucester Business College. Eager for more education, he enrolled in Mt. Herman School for Boys in Northfield, Massachusetts, an academically rigorous school for students in grades seven through twelve who were offered the equivalent of a freshman year at college.

The school was known throughout the region and attracted students from all over the country, but its one-

Alton Farr

The old Waitsfield elementary and high school before the addition. Alton and Eunice both attended school here. Eunice came daily from Warren by horse and buggy. While at school, she stabled the horse on Bridge Street where she lived after her marriage to Alton.



Waitsfield, Vt., SEP 1 1915 191

Mr. John McLaughlin Drop No. 3-14

To Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Co. Dr.

A. E. FARR, Manager and Treasurer.

For Use of Toll Lines and for Messenger Service.
All Bills for Tolls are Due and Payable Upon Presentation.

DATE	EXCHANGE CALLED	PARTY CALLED	TOLLS	MESSENGER SERVICE	TOTAL
Aug 27	Montpelier	11 to 1	15	10	25
28	Waitsfield	Laundry Dept	30	10	40

A COLLECTION FEE OF 25¢ WILL BE ADDED TO THIS BILL, AND WILL BE COLLECTED WHEN PAID AT THE OFFICE ON OR BEFORE THE 15TH OF EACH MONTH.

Total Tolls

To Telephone Service From ... To ... 10

To Collection Fee, Month of

TOTAL $1.97

Received Payment,

A Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company subscriber bill from 1915.

hundred-dollar tuition was beyond the ability of many families, including Alton's, and he soon had to drop out. He worked that summer as a bellhop at a hotel on Campobello Island on the border of Maine and New Brunswick, spending his free time taking a course with the American Correspondence School of Electrical Engineering. In the fall he lucked into a job in the construction department of NET&T.

Alton remained with NET&T's construction department until 1906, becoming a husband and family man living in Melrose, Massachusetts, after he married Mary Belle Rose, a young woman he met in front of the Lanesville post office while he was inspecting lines.

In 1906 he transferred to the company's engineering department, settling in for two more years at NET&T. Because he still had family and friends in Waitsfield, Alton's success, work ethic, and personal life were commonly known among the owners of the now four-year-old Waitsfield and Fayston Telephone Company. Although E. S. Joslin had been named president when the business was incorporated, he had a grist mill to tend to; Joslin found he couldn't do all the maintenance work himself. Matt B. Jones, who lived in Boston but was a Waitsfield native and brother of WFT's Walter E. Jones, was vice president of NET&T and knew the difficulties that WFT was having. He and his brother hit upon the idea of asking Alton to come back to the Valley and take over operations at WFT.

Alton quickly saw the advantages of the switch to the little company and pledged, "For $15 a 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 . . . will be of a first class character." The move was a risky one, and when he tendered his resignation at NET&T, his boss told him he'd "never make a go of an independent company."

Alton had more in mind than just tending shop as a paid man, though; his first order of business was to take ownership control of WFT. Alton petitioned the shareholders of WFT to purchase their shares in the company, with the proviso that if he didn't perform, their shares would be returned to them at an "amount not to exceed $1 per share." He took a unique approach in the buyout offer, proposing that, in lieu of a direct cash purchase, he would provide free local telephone service for one year, not to exceed fifteen dollars in value.

Alton and his wife Mary Belle moved to Waitsfield with their two very young children, Ruth and Everett. They lived for a short time at the Cady house on Main Street, then moved across the road to an apartment in the Brown house. A room was set aside on the first floor for the telephone business office.

Establishing a Territory of Operations

Alton's next order of business was to fully establish WFT's territory of operations. Though the company had installed its own switchboard and connected up lines in 1904, its subscriber base was limited to Waitsfield and South Fayston. NET&T was the licensee for the territory covering Moretown, Waitsfield, Fayston, and Warren. To continue expanding its network, WFT needed control of the larger service area.

On July 24, 1908, WFT and NET&T reached an operational agreement giving WFT what it needed to expand its operations. The agreement allowed WFT to connect the towns of Waitsfield, Moretown, Fayston, and Warren. Residents could, for the first time, talk to each other, and by 1914 Alton had 175 customers, compared to 55 in 1905. Alton made sure the customers had twenty-four-hour service by providing operators a place to sleep during the evening when the call volume was at its lowest. In 1910 he moved the switchboard to the Ernest Chase building in a three-year lease. WFT would remain at this location until a fire destroyed the building in 1944.

By this time the telephone was settling into the national consciousness as a fixed and permanent part of American life. In the process, the technology was bringing about great

This is an eight line switchboard. The housewife who probably had it in her kitchen, could tell which line was ringing by the sound of the bell because each one was different.

TROUBLESHOOTING - WITH HUMOR

Alton, stretched to his limits on many days, had to keep his sense of humor. One customer who lived near the high bridge that spanned the brook before the junction of Joslin Hill and Brook Roads complained she had problems with her phone each time she used it. Alton would dutifully come out, but could never find anything wrong.

One day, after again finding no problems, he asked her to try using the phone. Sure enough the transmission kept cutting out. This time, though, Alton saw something suspicious. Mrs. Dana, in the style of the day, usually wore a skirt with a metal hoop at the bottom. The metal touched the telephone wires, creating a momentary short on her line.

changes in the ways of working, living, and thinking. The telephone's effect on rural America was intensive; between 1902 and 1907, a 449 percent increase took place in the number of rural phones, and the rise in the morale of farmers and their families brought about by this quasi-revolution quickly translated into an increase in farm productivity. By the end of 1910, President Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission had designated the telephone as one of the foremost influences making for "the solution of the rural problem."

Everyone began to feel they needed a telephone, and the Bell company–now known as the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T)–wanted to make sure every telephone was serviced by them. The 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, making it impossible for independent companies to act as any more than a closed community of communications. The company's monopolistic attitude was looked on unfavorably by the government, which began under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to pressure AT&T to change its tactics.

In December 1913, to avoid an antitrust investigation, AT&T's vice president, Nathan Kingsbury, told the U. S. Attorney General that AT&T would provide long distance service to independent phone companies and refrain from acquisitions or forcing them out of business. The most immediate change affecting Waitsfield & 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 agreement gave Alton the ability to start looking out for his company's best interests in a new way—and to identify a new target standing directly in his path.

Calling on a Competitor

Gilbert R. Andrews was born in Northfield in 1844 and was by the early 1900s one of its most prominent citizens and businessmen. He had been an agent for Pillsbury flour, proprietor of a gristmill and a sawmill, wheelwright/blacksmith, lumber manufacturer, dealer in watches, beekeeper with twenty colonies, and farmer. By the time he was thirty-three years old, he owned hundreds of acres of timberland in the Mad River Valley area.

Like many people of the time with foresight, Andrews turned his attention to telephones, specifically with the little independent, Orange County Telephone Company; he became the company's owner and manager about 1906. Orange County's operations then included the Northfield area of which Roxbury was a part, but Andrews had also extended telephone service into the town of Warren and parts of Waitsfield by obtaining permission from NET&T to run a telephone line via the East Warren Road to and through Waitsfield and then north to the Moretown town line. He operated here under the name of G. R. Andrews Telephone

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

Following is a rate notice dated October 1, 1919, and sent to WFT's subscribers:

To the subscribers of the Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company, the following will go into effect November 5, 1919 on all lines having continual service.

Wall set	$1.75
Desk set	$2.00
Swinging arm set	$2.25
Hand set	$2.00
Extension bell	$.10
Loud extension bell	$.20
Extension telephone	$.50
Initial installation	$3.50
Moves at cost	
Private line rental per quarter mile, or fraction thereof	$.50

Western Electric candlestick phone.

This building on Main Street, Waitsfield, housed the telephone company's switchboard until a fire in 1944.

VERY PUBLIC LINES

Party lines were the rule rather than the exception in rural telephony, and eavesdropping on the neighbors came to be a standard country entertainment - though sometimes creating no little animosity.

Clesson Eurich recalls one story about a farmer who needed to contact a store in Waitsfield. Each time he lifted the receiver, the same two women would be talking, much of the chatter about baking cookies. Finally, the farmer made two very loud sniffs into the transmitter and followed it up by saying in an equally loud voice, "My gawd, I think I can smell cookies burning." Both women hung up their phones.

Alton Farr, a.k.a. Altee and an employee, on a 1910 Theim motorcycle. Alton regularly used his motorcycle for maintaining the lines. The cart was used to transport tools and equipment. Notice the business office in the background. Residents of Waitsfield still affectionately recall Altee on his motorcycle.

The Farr residence in Waitsfield was the location of the telephone business office from 1921 to 1966. Dana and Eleanor still live here today.

Company. WFT and G. R. Andrews Telephone Company did not have any connections between them. Consequently, some business people in Waitsfield took advantage of G. R. Andrews' line running via the East Warren Road and through the heart of Waitsfield village to add a second phone to increase the service area.

The Kingsbury Commitment of 1913 left the territory that these two companies served wide open to competition, and Alton decided to win out.

In 1918, when Andrews was seventy-five years old, he offered up his Warren exchange to Alton for a price of $1,700—a purchase that the WFT board of directors approved on July 6. The sale was a friendly one, and WFT mortgaged it through G. R. Andrews, putting up its network as collateral.

Eunice and Alton Farr camping in the Mad River Valley during their honeymoon in 1924.

Alton's little kingdom was growing—but so were his workload and his debt.

Like many independent telephone companies, WFT struggled financially. In the mid-1920s NET&T's Vermont manager sent a letter to Alton, expressing the company's concern over WFT's delinquent account. Other similar letters would follow.

WFT's 1926 annual report to the Public Service Commission listed 256 subscribers, 2 operators and 4 pay stations. The network had 79 miles of pole line with 191 miles of iron wire and 7 miles of copper clad wire, all worth $10,356. Alton's liabilities that year were $10,174, and his expenses of $6,347 were equal to his revenues, leaving no profit.

WFT's financial struggles led to a much-needed shot in the arm: a rate increase in 1928. NET&T engineers noted improved transmission, and their accounting manager sent a letter to Alton Farr congratulating him on bringing the account up to date.

Alton had long before realized his old boss at NET&T had been right when he had said making a living with an independent phone company was nearly impossible. In an effort to make ends meet, he became involved with Green Mountain Power, bringing electricity to the Valley. Alton became one of the Valley's first electricians when he began wiring homes.

Another major change occurred in Alton's life in the early 1920s, one that would have far-ranging effects on the company's future. Alton and his wife, Mary Belle, had in 1921 purchased a home from his Uncle Oscar Eaton and Aunt Addie Miner Bushnell Eaton. After closing on this property Alton moved WFT's business office from the first floor of the Brown house to its new location on Bridge Street. The couple only lived there two years when, like his parents, he and Mary Belle divorced, and she moved back to Massachusetts. The children stayed with Alton. A year later, Alton married again, this time to Eunice Florence Buzzell of Warren. Eunice immediately began working as WFT's secretary and bookkeeper.

Through Rain, Sleet, and Snow . . .

"Altee," as he was affectionately called, had taken seriously his promise to his stockholders years earlier to provide first-class service to his customers. He used his Model T Ford or a motorcycle to answer repair calls and make new installations. He was constantly on call, expected to make repairs and put calls through no matter what the conditions.

The lines during this period were still party lines, with potentially dozens of people on each of them, but a vital link nonetheless. When the lines went down, communication stopped: Customers who were accustomed to using telephone operators as everything from emergency dispatch systems to answering services found themselves hopelessly out of touch.

Alton Farr circa 1920.

The flood of 1927 demolished much of Vermont, including most of Waterbury Village and downtown Montpelier. Waitsfield was also badly damaged. Barns, bridges, earth, and all the working mills along the Mad River were washed away. Along with the torrents of water went telephone poles and lines. It took nearly a week to restore phone service in the Valley.

Alton Farr on his 1916 Excelsior motorcycle.

Certainly this feeling of isolation was never truer than during the devastating flood of 1927, which demolished much of Vermont and still stands as the greatest disaster in the state's history.

Rainfall during the month of October before the flood had averaged about 150 percent above normal across the state. Heavy rainfall periods were separated enough so that flooding did not occur. Instead, the rain saturated the soil and wreaked enough havoc for Alton that he'd spent much of the time on his motorcycle, shoring up downed and damaged lines.

No one, though, expected what happened next. The rain that began late in the day on November 2 continued through the night and increased the following morning. Torrential, unrelenting downpours lashed the land just east of the Green Mountains; by the end of the morning of November 4, almost nine inches had fallen. Devastation occurred throughout the state, with 1,285 bridges lost as well as countless numbers of homes and buildings destroyed and hundreds of miles of roads and railroad tracks washed out. Telephone service, now such an essential part of life, became a thing of the past.

Alton waited impatiently for the water to recede so he could tackle the task of restoring his phone service. Finally, on the night of November 9, Alton put a canoe into the water at Waitsfield and paddled along the Mad River for thirteen miles, stopping along the way to repair the lines that linked his customers to the main line at Middlesex that was serviced by NET&T.

Alton was a hero, heralded in the Barre Times as the man who "repaired phone by canoe."

A year later, NET&T's toll station in Warren was disconnected. Because NET&T no longer needed to maintain the Warren line, they sold 275 poles and 2 pairs of wires to WFT for one dollar. Clearly NET&T was becoming less and less a viable entity in the Valley while WFT became more and more vital.

At the same time, another of Alton's partnerships was growing and maturing and taking WFT along with it, although this hook-up was of a more personal nature.

Her name was Eunice.

A windstorm downed lines and poles along Route 100 in the Mad River Valley.

Chapter Three

A Family Business

Eunice Farr at a desk in her home in Waitsfield; the same home that the phone company operated out of until 1966.

There was nothing fancy about Eunice Florence Buzzell Farr. She was born in Warren on December 13, 1897, into a family of five brothers and sisters who lived with their parents on a farm on what is now Sugarbush Access Road. The farm was small and poor, and the family grew up with little more than love and faith. They were known at church in Warren as the "singing Buzzell family." Faithful attendees, Eunice and her older sister walked to church every Sunday because the wagon couldn't hold all of them.

She wasn't a beautiful woman, or highly educated—Waitsfield High was a two-year school, and she graduated when she was fifteen—but she knew her own worth. Eunice knew how to work hard at making something of nothing, just as her father had worked his meager hillside farm. For a brief time after finishing high school she taught the younger children, as many of the young female graduates did. But she clearly had other talents. When Walter E. Jones asked her to help in his general store on Bridge Street in Waitsfield, Eunice took over the selling of dry goods and groceries.

Jones had been instrumental in starting WFT and in bringing Alton Farr in to manage it. Alton was in and out of the store often; Eunice, with her quiet manner and gentle way of speaking, was a soothing presence.

American Electric nickel pot belly candlestick telephone, 1895-1896.

Floy Bettis Joslin and Edna Boyce are shown at the switchboard they attended in the building that burned in 1944.

In 1924, when she was twenty-seven—just about the age most women of that era would be labeled "spinster"—she and Altee married. Eunice moved into the brick house on Bridge Street, becoming WFT's bookkeeper and managing the company's office out of her living room.

All Alone—With My Phone

Eunice had married both a man and a company. What's more, the business involved an invention that was as firmly entrenched in society as any had ever been. A writer named Herbert Casson, who produced a long series of stimulating business books during the first half of the twentieth century, had already recognized the impact in 1910 when he wrote, "Who could have foreseen what the telephone bells have done to ring out the old ways and to ring in the new; to ring out delay and isolation and to ring in the efficiency and friendliness of a truly united people?"

By the 1920s, the telephone was all-pervasive, seeping into every aspect of life, in literature, in popular culture. One of the hit songs the year Altee and Eunice married was Irving Berlin's "All Alone," woefully declaring:

All alone-I'm so all alone,
There is no one else but you.
All alone by the telephone
Waiting for a ring.

And, if there were more people than cows in Vermont in 1930, every one of them felt entitled to that wonder of wonders, the telephone. Eunice and Altee's job was to make sure those telephones worked, Altee out in the field and in his customers' homes, Eunice in her own home, overseeing the house and the business.

One of Eunice's jobs was to keep up with the operators hired to handle the switchboards that connected all of the WFT customers. The operators had been women almost from the beginning of telephony. Male operators proved a disaster; the young men first hired were too impatient and high-spirited for the job. A visitor to one early exchange run by "the lads," as one historian labeled them, called it "a perfect bedlam." Bell leaders desperately turned to women—who they saw as calm, gracious, diffident, and never impolite.

The ladies had always been on the job in the Mad River Valley. At first, service was only given during the working man's day, attended to by the wife of the manager between her housework. Twenty-four-hour service was provided when it became necessary for the company to rent separate quarters. These quarters became the apartment for the two young women employed as "Central Girls," who earned fifteen dollars a week.

Being an operator was much more than setting up calls between two parties. The operator had to create toll tickets and constantly monitor the calls to determine whether they were still in progress. Because there were no visual cues to show if the call had ended, operators entered the connection to ask, "Are you waiting? Are you through?" She would be pulling cords out to terminate one call and simultaneously plugging them back in to set up another.

EUNICE AND THE SCHOOLS

Eunice Farr's connection to Waitsfield High School was strong and deep. She had long had a desire to establish an alumni association there, and in 1950, the year her daughter graduated, she accomplished her goal. That year, WHS held its first annual alumni meeting and banquet. The tradition continues today as former schoolmates and teachers gather each Memorial Day.

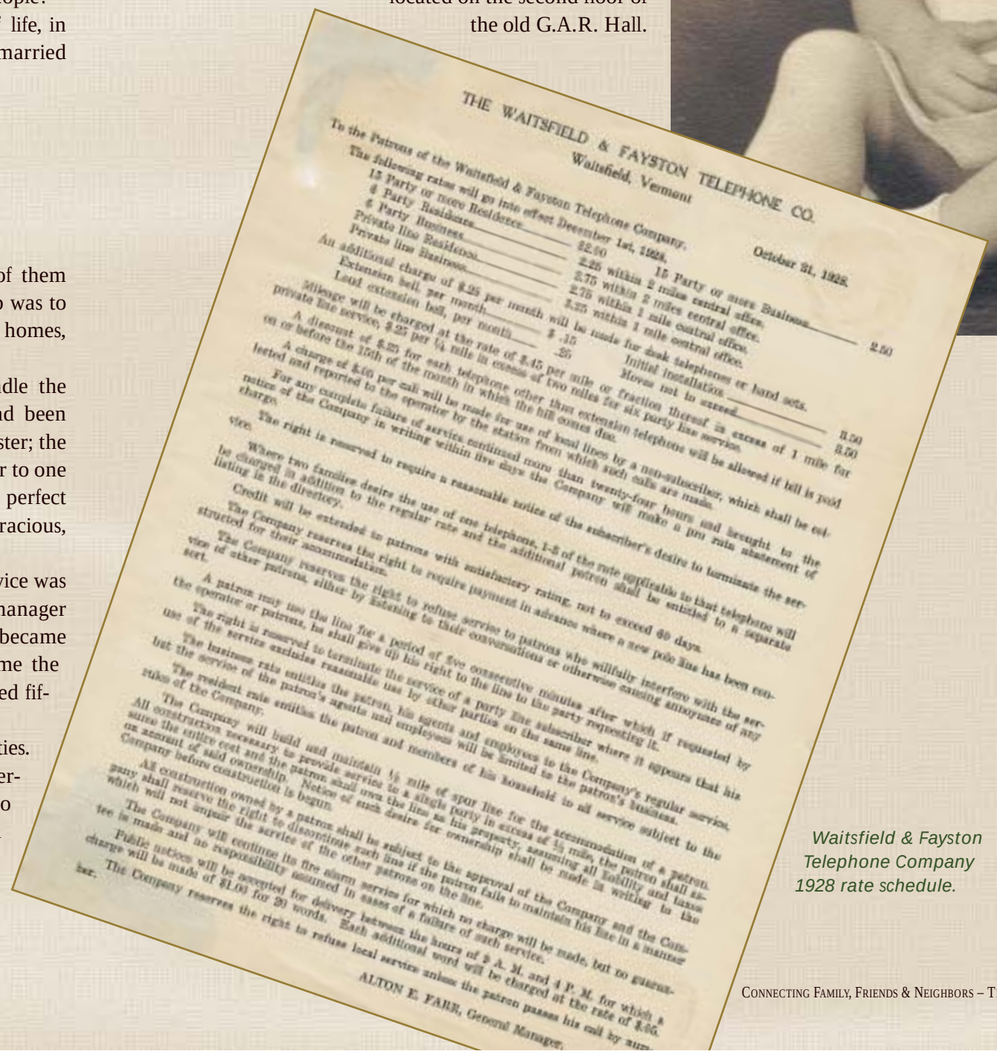
The reunion in 1952 had a special little twist. Eleanor and Dana had just married, and Dana was in Okinawa. He'd promised to call her, but Eleanor didn't want to miss the call or the banquet. Eunice had a telephone line strung from her home across the river to the Waitsfield Federated Church, where the reunion was being held, and installed a telephone there.

The operators were also the earliest form of emergency dispatch systems. 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. The Central Girls could follow the progress of the local doctor as he made house calls, the doctor checking in as he left one place for another and to pick up his messages.

The Farrs began a service of paid advertisements and public notices to help meet the costs of the company. For one dollar, businesses could place ads that would be delivered over the entire telephone network. The operator would plug into the telephone company lines and provide two rings repeated two times (known as a general alarm) and then read the advertisement. Public notices would be delivered in the same manner.

All this activity was quite a lot to heap on the backs of people like Mary Moriarty, who began working at WFT in 1931 and spent the next eleven years operating the switchboard located on the second floor of the old G.A.R. Hall.

A young Eleanor Farr.



THE WAITSFIELD & FAYSTON TELEPHONE CO.
Waitsfield, Vermont

To the Patrons of the Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company. October 31, 1928.

The following rates will go into effect December 1st, 1928.

1 Party or more Residence	$2.50
1 Party Residence	2.25 within 2 miles central office.
4 Party Residence	2.75 within 2 miles central office.
1 Party Business	2.75 within 1 mile central office.
Private line Residence	2.25 within 1 mile central office.
Private line Business	
An additional charge of $.25 per month will be made for desk telephones or hand sets.	
Extension bell, per month	$ .15
Least extension bell, per month	.25

Initial Installation
Moves not to exceed

Mileage will be charged at the rate of $.45 per mile or fraction thereof in excess of 1 mile for private line service, $.25 per ¼ mile in excess of two miles for six party line service.

A discount of $.25 per 'phone will be allowed if bill is paid on or before the 15th of the month in which the bill comes due.

A charge of $.50 per call will be made for use of toll lines by a non-subscriber, which shall be collected and reported to the operator by the station from which such calls are made.

For any complete failure of service, continued more than twenty-four hours, and brought to the notice of the Company in writing within five days the Company will make a pro rata abatement of charge.

The right is reserved to require a reasonable notice of the subscriber's desire to terminate the service.

Where two families desire the use of one telephone, 1-5 of the rate applicable to that telephone will be charged in addition to the regular rate and the additional patron shall be entitled to a separate listing in the directory.

The Company reserves the right to require payment in advance where a new pole line has been constructed for their accommodation.

Credit will be extended to patrons with satisfactory rating, not to exceed 30 days.

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.

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 patron, he shall give up his right to the line to the party requesting it.

The right is reserved to terminate the service of a party line subscriber where it appears that his use of the service excludes reasonable use by other parties on the same line.

The business rate entitles the patron, his agents and employees to the Company's regular service, but the service of the patron's agents and employees will be limited to the patron's business.

The residence rate entitles the patron and members of his household to all service subject to the rules of the Company.

The Company will build and maintain ½ mile of spur line for the accommodation of a patron. All construction necessary to provide service to a single party in excess of ½ mile, the patron shall assume the entire cost and the patron shall own the line as his property, assuming all liability and taxes on account of said ownership. Notice of such desire for ownership shall be made in writing to the Company before construction is begun.

All construction owned by a patron shall be subject to the approval of the Company and the Company shall reserve the right to disconnect such line if the patron fails to maintain his line in a manner which will not impair the service of the other patrons on the line.

The Company will continue its fire alarm service for which no charge will be made, but no guarantee is made and no responsibility assumed in cases of a failure of such service.

Public notice will be accepted for delivery between the hours of 9 A. M. and 4 P. M. for which a charge will be made of $1.00 for 20 words. Each additional word will be charged at the rate of $.05.

The Company reserves the right to refuse local service unless the patron passes his call by another.

ALTON E. FARR, General Manager.

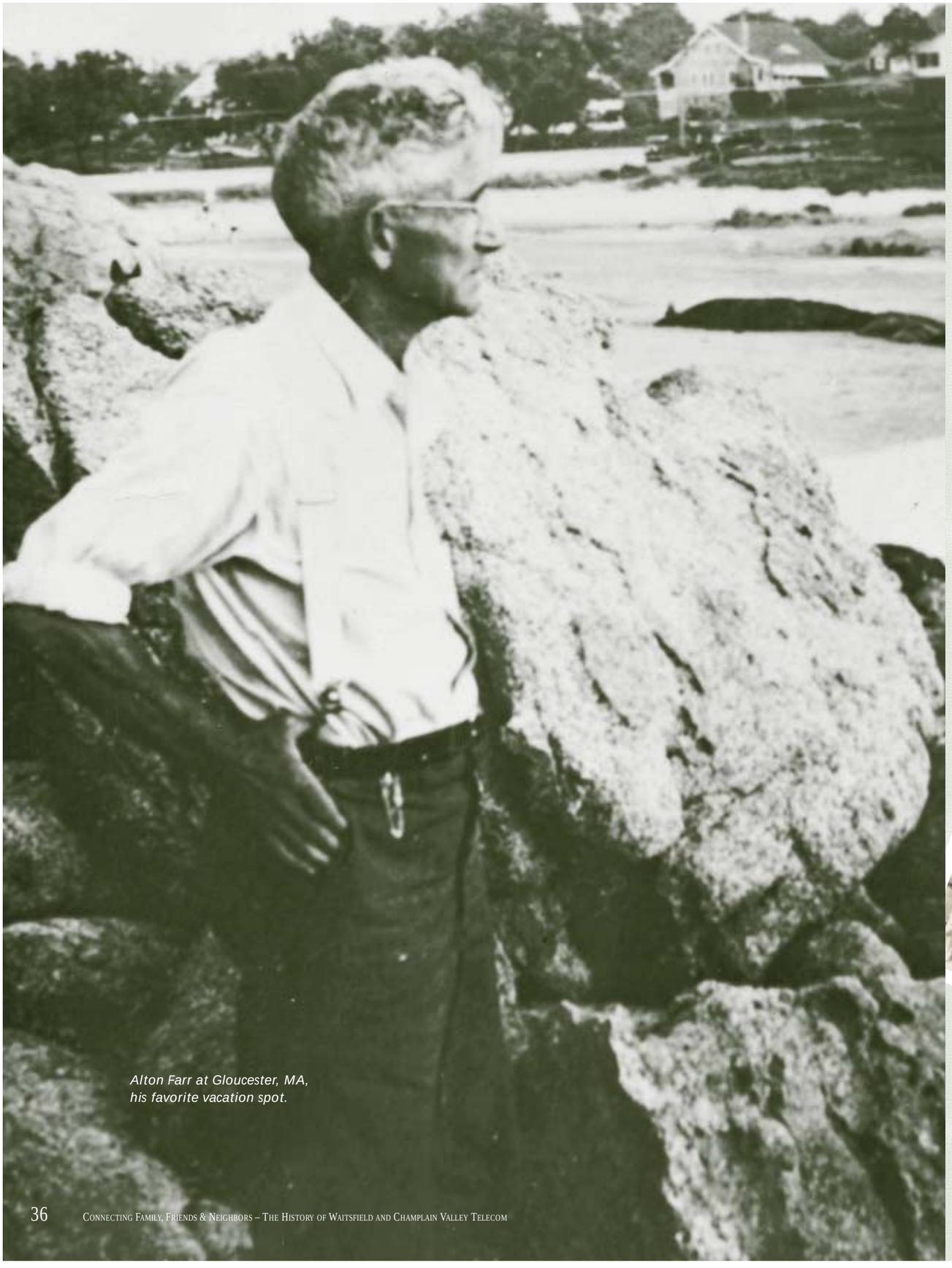
Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company 1928 rate schedule.

BEYOND BUSINESS

It was World War II, and the news was not good.

Josiah Smith, who lived across the street from his son and daughter-in-law, Herb and Irene Smith, was the one with the phone, so he got the message: Josiah's grandson Norman, Herb and Irene's son, a recent graduate of the Naval Academy, was killed in action.

Word spread quickly through the small community, soon reaching Eunice Farr. Before the day had ended, Eunice had a telephone installed in the Herb Smith residence so the family would be equipped to more easily communicate during this difficult time.



Alton Farr at Gloucester, MA, his favorite vacation spot.

Although the operators had a strict code of confidentiality, they sometimes found themselves acting as telephone police. When Eunice and Alton asked for a rate hike in 1928, setting new charges of $2 for a fifteen-party line and $3.25 for a private line, they included a threat meant to aid their operators: WFT could refuse service to anyone who "willfully interfere(s) with the service of other patrons, either by listening to their conversations or otherwise causing annoyance of any sort." The condition went even further by telling patrons they had use of the phone only five minutes before an operator or another patron could ask them to yield the line.

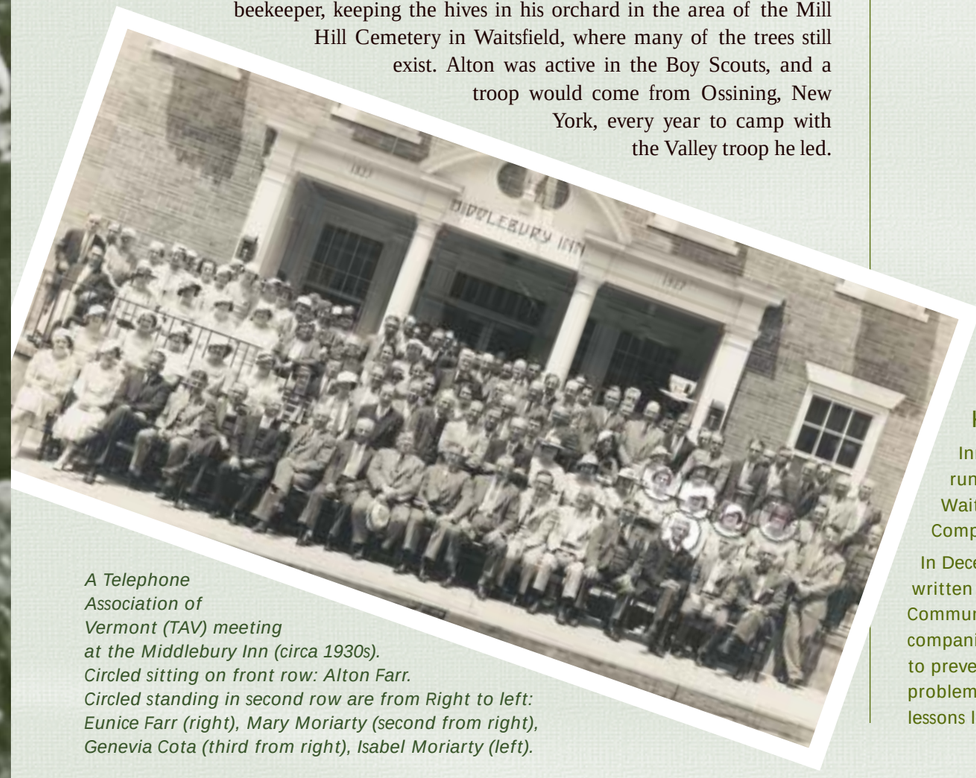
Juggling Family Life with Work

In addition to running the company, Eunice and Alton were busy with their family and their social obligations. Their daughter, Eleanor Geraldine Farr, was born October 14, 1931, completing the little family. The couple had lost a son, Alton Jr., shortly after his birth in 1929, and they worked hard to both protect and enjoy their daughter.

Alton was very special to the children of the community, teaching a whole generation how to swim, with lessons usually taking place in the Mad River under Waitsfield's covered bridge. Alton built a raft and secured it near the Great Eddy so the children could use it for jumping and diving in the water. He and Eunice welcomed the young people in the Valley, planning skating parties on the river for them, Eunice making pans of homemade potato chips along with gallons of hot chocolate. Alton cleaned the snow off the ice and kindled fires for warmth. Using his knowledge of electrical wiring, he strung electric lights under the covered bridge for night skating.

He was a lover of the outdoors, a master at grafting apple trees and an avid beekeeper, keeping the hives in his orchard in the area of the Mill Hill Cemetery in Waitsfield, where many of the trees still exist. Alton was active in the Boy Scouts, and a troop would come from Ossining, New York, every year to camp with the Valley troop he led.

Eunice Farr and daughter Eleanor, circa 1940.



A Telephone Association of Vermont (TAV) meeting at the Middlebury Inn (circa 1930s). Circled sitting on front row: Alton Farr. Circled standing in second row are from Right to left: Eunice Farr (right), Mary Moriarty (second from right), Genevia Cota (third from right), Isabel Moriarty (left).

SPREADING THEIR KNOWLEDGE

Innovation is a common thread running through the history of Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company.

In December 1935 a diagram and letter written by Alton appeared in Rural Community Telephoning showing other companies how to rewire their systems to prevent cross-ringing and other problems on the lines-on-the-job lessons learned the hard way.

Eunice Farr and the telephone truck, a 1941 Dodge pickup, used to maintain the lines.

Eunice, seemingly the most patient person in the world, never was known to get angry or raise her voice. She was soft-spoken and a good listener. She made wonderful wedding cakes, laboriously mixing them by hand with a wire whisk before the development of electric mixers, and people from all over the Valley came to ask her to bake for them. She loved plays and took part in some of the ones performed in the Valley by friends and neighbors.

Their business was growing. The number of subscribers peaked in 1930 with 246 accounts and 35 lines, in part because of large logging operations in Fayston. When the logging operations pulled out, the number of accounts dropped to 196—but Alton and Eunice worked just as hard.

While theirs was hardly a perfect life, the Farrs were happy and productive. Alton was clever, offering up innovative plans and thinking, taking delight in writing a story for The Vermonter (a forerunner of Vermont Life) magazine about his observations of nature.

A freak accident brought an end to the family circle and started Eunice on a different path, as a parent and as a business owner. In 1938, while Farr was helping his lineman, a telephone pole began to fall. Alton stepped under it to break the fall and protect his employee. The accident crushed his lungs. He became mostly bed-ridden after the accident, contracting tuberculosis and finally dying just shy of his fifty-ninth birthday.

The obituary in the Barre Times mourned the loss of "one of the best known men in town," a man whose "loyalty and efficiency in his work marked him among men. He was a true friend to those in trouble."

Eunice and nine-year-old Eleanor were on their own.

A Housedress and an Apron

Eunice spent the next twenty-one years doing what Alton had done: running the company. It was a notable feat in an industry and era clearly dominated by men. Eunice was one of the first women to run a utility company in the United States. She kept the books, managed the office, and installed the phones, sometimes going out during a windstorm to poke apart lines that had crossed and short-circuited. Over the years, she developed an advanced level of understanding in every aspect of the telephone business, her tenure a seemingly endless string of challenges.

Labor was short, money was tight, and leisure was almost nonexistent.

World War II was a difficult time for most Americans, and Eunice Farr's problems were compounded by being a woman and a single parent running a telephone company. The war also brought on another responsibility that was perhaps the most difficult. Families learned about the disposition of their loved ones in the armed services via telegram. Delivery of these messages often fell to the local telephone company.


OFFICE OF DEFENSE TRANSPORTATION
CERTIFICATE OF WAR NECESSITY

The Office of Defense Transportation issued this World War II commercial vehicle Certificate of War Necessity for gas rationing.

Eunice delivered many of these dreaded messages, sometimes taking her daughter with her for emotional support. Waitsfield resident Jessamine Larrow recalls those times–and remembers telling others that if she ever saw Eunice Farr heading her way, she would run in the other direction. Indeed,

NO TIME TO QUIT

Marguerite Moriarty was on duty the 1944 morning when fire began racing through the building that housed WFT's telephone switchboard.

Marguerite immediately began placing calls to the Waterbury and Montpelier Fire Departments. None of the adjoining Valley towns, including Waitsfield, had any fire engines adequate to fight a fire of this magnitude. Volunteers began to show up, trying to help as much as they could.

Marguerite, aware that the Valley would be without service the minute the switchboard went, stayed at her job until the heat became too much. Although volunteers tried to move the switchboard out, the heat and smoke soon forced rescuers to abandon the idea. Marguerite and the other townspeople stood outside as the flames destroyed their link to the outside world.

The remnants of the 1942 fire in the Main Street building.

Ramona Shaw was the last switchboard operator for the company. This picture was taken in what is now the Universal Micro building in Waitsfield. Shaw became an operator for WFT in 1949 and stayed with the company until the dial conversion in November of 1961.

Jessamine one day did receive one of those dreaded messages from Eunice, saying her husband was missing in action.

Financial struggles were the norm for most businesses in the Valley during these times, and WFT was no exception. Logging and farming were the chief ways of making a living, neither one highly lucrative. Eunice was always in the position of deciding which bill had the larger impact on the business when determining the one to pay first.

People knew Eunice was struggling herself, and they paid in any way they could. It was not uncommon for bills to be paid in sides of beef, pigs, eggs, vegetables, firewood, maple syrup, and even wood ashes as barter to settle accounts.

Eunice abhorred the idea of borrowing money. She had been brought up to make do with what she had, yet the stark reality was that she was forced to borrow from time to time to keep things going at the phone company. Eunice used her own home as collateral for these loans.

In order to keep WFT solvent, Eunice petitioned the PSC for a rate increase in 1947. The new rates took effect on August 1, 1947. Although the increase helped, the financial struggle continued. By 1950 the annual PSC report contained the following statistics for WFT: 278 subscribers, 3 operators, 8 pay stations, 265 party lines, 13 private lines and 87 miles of pole line with 12 miles of #10 Iron wire, 8 miles of #12 copper-weld, 2 miles of #17 2 parallel, 274 miles of #12 Iron wire. Revenue totaled $15,628 against $14,849 of expense. Gross income was $779 with deductions of $784, leaving a loss of $5.

Disaster—And Change

Early in the morning on February 2, 1944, a major fire erupted in the Carl Long building that housed WFT's telephone switchboard. A fire had apparently occurred there the evening before, caused most likely by a box of ashes that had been carelessly set outside. The ashes were thought to have been extinguished, but they were somehow rekindled.

WFT lost its switchboard in the fire and needed to reestablish a connection to NET&T as soon as possible. NET&T loaned a switchboard to WFT that same day, which was placed in the Harry Belden building south of the Waitsfield Hotel on the same side of the road. This switchboard was an older model used by the army in the field, a small portable unit with access for about twenty lines. Units could be stacked one on top of the other for whatever growth was required. Wires were reconnected to the newly installed switchboard, and the Valley was once again in touch with the outside world.

Two operators are shown working the temporary switchboard after the fire. Because the board was so small, several lines had to be assigned to the same position on the switchboard. The bell would ring when a customer was calling. It required two operators to watch and identify which bell was ringing.

This is the switchboard that replaced the temporary switchboard after the fire. This board was used until the conversion to dial in 1961.

Dana Haskin with his B-29 bomber crew during the Korean War.

The switchboard did not stay in this building long. By early 1945 a larger switchboard had been installed across the street in the front room in Enos Brothers' house, present site of Universal Micro Systems (4457 Main Street). This home would be the last for the switchboard that controlled the old magneto (crank) telephone system, remaining until 1961 when WFT made the conversion to dial.

A Mom at Work

Eunice spent most of her waking hours running her business, often taking Eleanor along with her. One of the most common maintenance chores was to uncross lines that had been shorted together by winds, falling branches, and the like. To uncross lines, Eunice would park the truck under the wires at the base of the pole where a cross began, take a rope anchored by a battery, and throw it between the wires, towing the rope all the way to the next pole. Once Eunice felt Eleanor was old enough, she was taught how to perform this work as well as other field maintenance. When Eleanor got her driver's license she drove her mother around the network and performed whatever work was required.

Though Eleanor was expected to help, Eunice made sure there was time for fun—and that as mom she helped provide that fun. Eunice would load eight kids in her 1947 Ford sedan to drive to school sporting events, the girls sitting on the guys' laps. Eunice was very involved in the school. When the Farr house burned in 1948, the entire high school emptied within seconds, the students racing toward the building and grabbing everything out of the house, placing the household goods with neighbors until the home could be repaired.

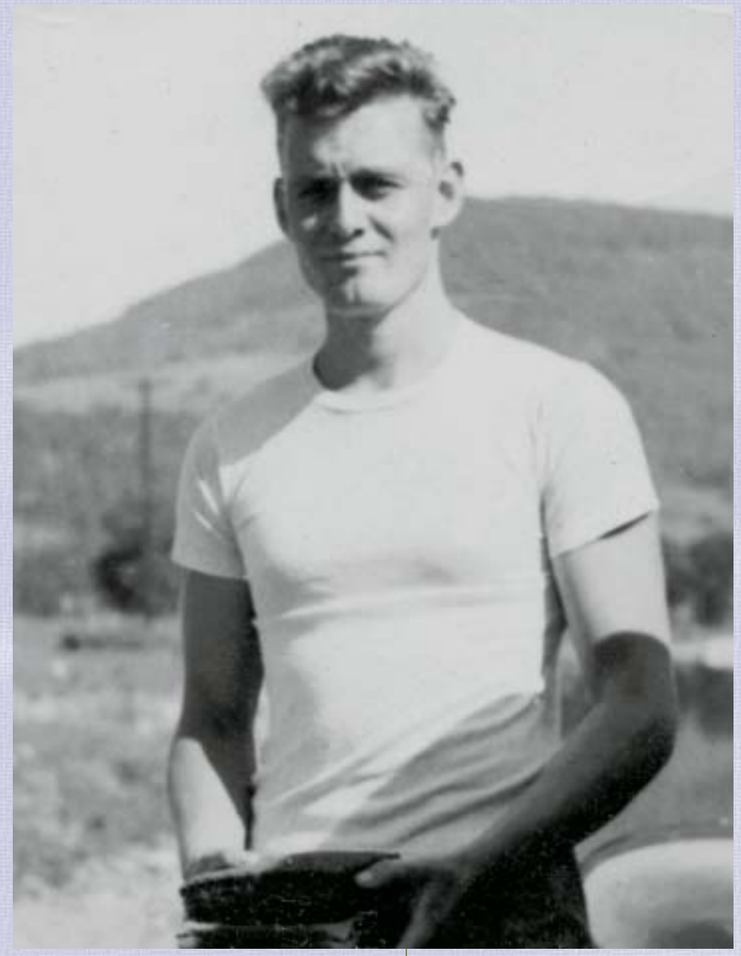
Children stopped by the office on their birthdays, shyly telling Eunice, "Farr, it's my birthday!" Eunice would give them a quarter. Sometimes, on a good day, Eunice would close the office to take the kids swimming, letting the telephone operator know where she was in case of an emergency.

A Changing World

Eunice had lost her number-one helper when her daughter graduated from Waitsfield High School in 1950 and went to the University of Rochester in upstate New York to study music. From her years of working alongside her mother, Eleanor was as familiar as Eunice with the telephone industry. She had helped with maintenance, but also spent time in the business office, sorting and billing. While in high school, she split the Sunday operator shift with Eunice so the other operators could have the day off. Years later, Eleanor would say that getting into the phone business was easy. She was born into it.

Although she returned home each summer to help her mother run the company, Eleanor's life seemed to be moving away from WFT. She had met the man she would eventually marry, Dana Haskin, when she took swimming lessons at the Montpelier Recreation Department while she was in high school.

Just months after marrying Eleanor in 1952, Dana would leave for Okinawa to join the 307th Bomb Wing as a left gunner in a B-29.



A young Dana Haskin at the Lareau swimming hole and teaching swimming in Waitsfield.

Dana was born August 31, 1930, in Providence, Rhode Island. His family moved several times before settling in Montpelier in 1943 when Dana was thirteen years old. He started teaching swimming and water safety in Montpelier when he was sixteen, and continued in his summer job until 1949 when he graduated from Montpelier High School. Dana attended the University of Vermont from 1949 to 1950, then moved to Vermont Junior College until February 1951 when, during the Korean War, he enlisted in the U. S. Air Force.

On March 23, 1952, Dana L. Haskin and Eleanor Geraldine Farr were married in the Waitsfield Federated Church. Dana left three months later for Okinawa, joining the 307th Bomb Wing as a left gunner in a B-29, flying missions over the Korean peninsula and earning an air medal. After his discharge in 1953, he returned to Waitsfield. His job? With the phone company, naturally.

He started attending the University of Vermont on the GI Bill, working part-time at WFT between 1954 and 1956. During that same period Eleanor brought in some extra income by teaching music in the rural schools of Moretown, Duxbury, Fayston, and Waitsfield.

Eleanor, who had dropped out of college when she married, returned to the University of Rochester in 1956 to complete her degree in music. Dana went with her and took employment with Taylor Instruments. Their daughter, Susan, born two years earlier in August 1954, stayed behind with her grandmother, this beginning a bond that would last until Eunice's death.

Eleanor graduated from the Eastman School of Music in May 1957 with a Bachelor of Music Degree. After Eleanor's graduation, Dana returned to the USAF, where he became one of the few enlisted men to receive a direct officer's commission. Eleanor felt it important to accompany her husband, so she packed up, bringing Susan with her, and followed Dana as he moved around the country.

Alone, Again

Because of Eleanor's moves, Eunice was back handling the telephone company by herself. An article written on rural telephone companies in the Monsanto Magazine in March 1959 described Eunice as "energetic and likeable," and noted that she had been providing the Waitsfield telephone service virtually single-handedly since Alton's death.

The article explained that the dial system hadn't arrived in Waitsfield—and that if it was up to the folks in town, it never would. "Mrs. Farr's company, 375 subscribers strong, is such a flavorsome ingredient in this ski resort area's cup of charm that a noted author recently pleaded with her not to go dial and surrender the 'human touch."

Norman Neill, Installer, climbing a pole in snowy Waitsfield Vermont circa, 1957.

A young Susan Haskin.

Eunice's "human touch" was taking its toll, though.

Changes were occurring in the Valley that affected Eunice and WFT dramatically—as dramatically as had the arrival of the very first telephone more than a half century earlier. The Mad River Glen ski resort arrived in 1948, bringing a new industry. By the late 1950s, Sugarbush and Glen Ellen ski areas reshaped the Valley, both economically and physically.

The WFT plant was in terrible shape by this time, with field wire being laid on the ground just to keep customers in service. Upwards of twenty-nine people were on a single party line. The ski business was growing, and the Valley businesses needed a more rapid and sophisticated means of communicating.

While charming, the old-fashioned telephone system was increasingly ill-suited to keep up with the Valley's growth. Resort visitors accustomed to city ways sometimes found the delays irritating, and they took their irritation out on the operators. There was little time for on-the-job training, which caused more irritation. Norm Neill remembers that his first assignment upon joining the company in 1958 was to install a new phone in Charlie Jones's home. Eunice handed him the phone, wire, batteries, and other pieces of equipment and told him to install it. Three days later, and after several visits from Eunice, he had the phone in; after that baptism by fire, Neill said he got the job down to a couple of hours of work.

By 1959, Eunice was considering selling the company. Her health wasn't good, and she was under endless pressure to sell, particularly from NET&T.

Eleanor and Dana, stationed at James Connelly Air Force Base, Waco, Texas, realized the company was at a critical juncture. In order to remain a viable business and stay within the family, they were going to have to take over WFT, which was a momentous decision for them. Dana returned to the Vermont Air National Guard (VTANG) as a navigator and radar intercept officer flying F-89s. He remained with VTANG until 1984, retiring at the rank of lieutenant colonel.

The move ushered in a new era of progress and leadership at WFT.

R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS, it has become known that Mrs. A. E. Farr, manager of the Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company, may be making sale of the business of this company in the near future, and,

WHEREAS, the Waitsfield & Fayston Telephone Company received authority to incorporate by Act of the Vermont Legislature approved November 30, 1904, and,

WHEREAS, the late Alton E. Farr became associated with the company on its incorporation in 1905, and,

WHEREAS, the late Mr. Farr was thereafter continually connected with the company until his death in 1940, either as manager, stockholder and/or principal owner, and,

WHEREAS, Mrs. Farr has continued to carry on the telephone service during the past eighteen years, and,

WHEREAS, it is fitting and appropriate that recognition be accorded to Mrs. Farr and her late husband for this local telephone service rendered to the citizens of Waitsfield and surrounding communities for these more than fifty years;

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved by the voters of the Town of Waitsfield, in Town Meeting assembled, this 4th day of March, 1958, that we acknowledge 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; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be sent by the Town Clerk to Mrs. Farr.

Read and unanimously adopted, March 4, 1958.

Emily J. Eaton
Emily J. Eaton, Town Clerk

Attest; a true copy

Emily J. Eaton
Emily J. Eaton, Town Clerk

Resolution issued by the town of Waitsfield thanking Mrs. Farr and the late Mr. Farr for providing telephone service to Waitsfield and the rest of Mad River Valley.

Norma Eurich working at the business office on the back porch of the Farr home.

magneto system. Skiers coming up to visit Sugarbush, didn't like this "party-line" business. Sugarbush, responding to complaints from its own customers, put pressure on WFT to go dial.

Dana and Eleanor recognized the PSB was right and promised to replace the system within two years, if the agency would back off its one-year deadline. Making the promise and securing the financing to make it happen were gut-wrenching moves for Eunice and the young couple.

Eunice, who had managed the company on a shoestring for years, was so intent on turning over the business debt-free to her daughter and son-in-law that she had eaten peanut butter for months to pay off a $15,000 loan. Neither Eleanor nor Dana knew how to go about obtaining the kind of cash needed for the upgrade. Dana's experience in telephony was on-the-job training. Eleanor, though born into the industry, wasn't versed in either technical or financial matters; she was a music major, a pianist who taught children, not a financial wizard who read accounting books or juggled millions. Neither she nor Dana had ever managed more than Dana's salary and the money Eleanor made teaching music students.

Looking around hopefully to possible sources of cash, they first approached the National Life Insurance Company with a request to borrow $125,000, far more than the price of most homes in the Valley. "I don't know whether you could hear the laughter all the way down to the basement," recalls Dana. "I left sort of deflated."

Friends in the business suggested they go to a telephone convention in Maine to explore the chances of borrowing money from the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). The REA came into existence in 1936 as a government agency to provide funds for utility companies to bring electricity into the rural communities. Telephony was added to its coverage list in 1949. While the agency had loaned a lot of money over the years to independent telephone companies, the REA had earned only a checkered reputation. After long discussions, Dana and Eleanor made the tough decision to let an outsider into the back door of their family-owned company. They decided REA could supply both the money and the expertise that WFT didn't have and sorely needed. "We figured if we were going to continue the company, there was nothing else we could do," Dana says.

An Expensive Leap of Faith

WFT met with the PSB in December 1960 to secure approval to borrow up to $400,000 from the REA to install a new dial telephone system. Then, in a breathtaking moment filled with trepidation and wonder, Dana and Eleanor signed a twenty-five-year loan with the REA for the entire amount.

With the PSB's approval and REA supplying the specifications and supervision, WFT obtained bids from prospective construction companies to install the newly proposed network. On April 25, 1961, about twenty suppliers and contractors attended WFT's bid opening at the Library Hall in Waitsfield (now the town clerk's office). The entire cost of the project was $321,000, and the work was to start immediately.

JOINING TANE

WFT became a member of the Telephone Association of New England (TANE) when it was founded in 1958. TANE was organized as an educational arm for all New England telephone companies.

Over the years, WFT employees have served on committees and as part of TANE's executive body. Both Eleanor and Dana Haskin have held various positions, including the presidency.

For a time, while the conversion was taking place, subscribers had two phones in their homes—one dial, one crank. The dial phones were in ten "decorator" colors, with a variety of new sizes and shapes from which to choose, such as the standard desk model, wall phone, and new "spacemaker" wall model. Another new phone would be offered the next year, according to marketing information put out by WFT, the "small and attractive Starlite with lighted dial." The customers were so eager to try out the new phones prior to the official conversion day that they began calling each other, creating a problem for the construction crews trying to finish their work in the dial office. The system had to be turned off to prevent early use.

Before the conversion, there had been as many as twenty-seven subscribers on a line. With the new dial system, the maximum was eight. 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.

On November 28, 1961, seven-year-old Susan Haskin, the oldest of the Haskin children, pulled the switch under the supervision of her parents and grandmother, officially converting the system to dial. WFT held an open house at the dial office in Waitsfield village after the conversion was complete. More than 150 people came to view the new dial telephone switching system and to ask questions.

WFT was now the most modern independent telephone system in Vermont. While operators were still required for long distance calling, a task handled by NET&T personnel, operators were no longer needed to set up local phone calls, and WFT went forward after that November with five employees—three of them family members.

Subscriber information pamphlet sent out to customers prior to the conversion to dial in 1961.

Dana and Eleanor Haskin working in the business office on the back porch of their home.

Family Business, Family Needs

At ages thirty-one and thirty respectively, Dana and Eleanor now found themselves business owners, debtors, and parents to two (soon to be three) children, living with a frail Eunice in a too-small house that still had the phone company's office in the living room.

If they hadn't hesitated for a moment in their decision to move back from Texas and take over the company, Eleanor and Dana now had to carefully plan how the family, the marriage, and the company would be able to survive under their stewardship.

Dana was a military man, gruff and used to getting things done. Years later, he would ruefully acknowledge that his "DSS" mode of operating ("Dana Says So") would sometimes get in the way of staff autonomy. Eleanor was quieter, a lover of music and peace, yet equally determined to succeed: she was the one who had made the decision years earlier to leave two-year-old Susan with her mother in Waitsfield while she returned to college to earn her music degree, a decision she says was one of the toughest she'd ever made. Since then, she'd been a dutiful wife,

Sally Tremblay learned by watching the switchboard operators just across the road from her house as a young girl. She worked as an operator during the summers while she was in high school and worked full-time after graduation before moving to a company in New York. She returned to work during the conversion to dial in 1961.

Contract construction crews unloading cable reels for the 1961 conversion to dial.

Robert Henry, Installer, on the steps of the "back porch" telephone company business office at the Farr home.

following her husband all over the country as the military moved him around, setting up house, and making a life in disparate places where she often found little resonance in her own life.

Yet they were united in their efforts to keep the company afloat, united in their belief that heritage, and the obligations that it brought, should be foremost in running WFT and their personal lives.

After Eunice's death in 1965, Dana became president and Eleanor vice president, filling multiple positions in the daily operation of the business. In addition to serving as president, Dana was also the company's general manager, but performed telephone installations and plant maintenance on a daily basis. Eleanor's role since her return to WFT in 1959 was bookkeeper, billing clerk, secretary, customer representative, and taking on whatever other duties might be tossed in her direction. She also worked full-time as a mother. Gregg Haskin, Eleanor and Dana's third child, was born on May 15, 1964, joining nine-year-old Susan and four-year-old Eric.

Each of them saw that they had their jobs to do; each of them believed that job was important. "My wife and I have been partners in life," says Dana. "I think maybe more than partners . . . the company was our life, is our life." Eleanor's model for this partnership had been developed literally on her parents' knees. She grew up knowing the company was more than a business. It was an obligation and a privilege. She remembers begging to go to a movie in Montpelier when she was a child, and her mother and father telling her to take a nap, that then they'd take her. On the way to the movie, her father was flagged down, told there was trouble on the line. Eleanor never saw the movie, but she saw a little more of the relationship between a family and its company.

Now, all these years later, she and Dana began to rebuild the company and to grow personally in ways that would surprise each other and themselves.

Getting Down to Business

In 1961, as the company grew, the business office moved from the living room to the newly remodeled back porch. Some years later Gene Rayburn, most notable for hosting game shows on television, came to the Mad River Valley. Seeing the location and operation of WFT's business office, he warmly dubbed it "the back-porch telephone company."

If Eleanor thought about it, she realized her own children were growing up in telephony, just as she had—coming home from school to find parents at home and at work, at the same place. Susan, who until her death from breast cancer in 2003 was intimately involved with the company, remembered coming home from school to the brick house on Bridge Street and immediately rushing back to visit her father on the back porch. Dana's desk, the only piece of expensive office furniture, sat amid homemade bookcases and file cabinets; Dana still uses the desk today.

THE GALLOPING GHOST

The new dial system instituted in 1961 included a feature to keep party line subscribers from tying up a line on local calls. After five minutes, an automatic timing mechanism could be heard for a few seconds before the call disconnected; the warning sounded exactly like a horse galloping across a pasture. A Valley journalist nicknamed the sound the "galloping ghost" and editorialized frequently on its nuisance factor.

The journalist, Denise McCluggage, once donned a white tablecloth and crashed a telephone company party as The Galloping Ghost.

While Dana and Eleanor loved the convenience and the quaintness of the back-porch operation, by 1965 the company obviously needed a larger and more modern facility to conduct business effectively. A year earlier, WFT upgraded its plant and central office from an eight- to a four-party service to accommodate the Valley's growth. Customers on eight-party lines would now have less delay from busy conditions. The rates for the four-party services were set at $5.50 for residence and $7.25 for business. WFT now had six full-time employees.

Dana and Eleanor agreed on a site for the new office that was north of County Road on Route 100 in Waitsfield. They purchased this property on February 23, 1965, and broke ground in 1966.

That same year, Dana closed out all outstanding stock in the company, making the Haskin family owners of 100 percent of the company. That full ownership continues today.

A Whirlwind of Change

The years from 1966 to 1968 would see a whirlwind of change at WFT, brought on in large part by the tremendous growth associated with the Valley ski business. The implementation of Direct Distance Dialing (DDD) was a part of that growth. WFT was still operating with four-party service. As a result, WFT customers had to dial two digits to access the toll network. The first digit was always 1, and the second digit identified which phone on a party line was making the call.

Waitsfield's DDD network included an automated toll ticketing system. This electro-mechanical marvel sent all toll call data to paper tape punch machines. Until the latter part of 1968, the process for producing a toll statement from the paper tapes was completely outsourced. Then WFT leased its first IBM computer to handle most of this process. The computer's primary function was the printing of toll statements for customer billing. All other business applications remained manual with paper records.

In spite of party-line customers having to dial an extra digit to access the toll network, DDD gave subscribers the ability to place toll calls without operator assistance, saving the customer time as well as money.

Early in 1967, a $640,000 REA loan for single-party conversion was approved, and construction finished in November. By the end of March 1968 the single-party service conversion was complete, and WFT became the first telephone company in Vermont with all private lines. The company could now eliminate its two-digit DDD access and go to the simple and commonly understood digit 1. The new private line rates were set at $7 for residences and $14 for businesses.

Because the ski areas were constantly growing, particularly Sugarbush (Glen Ellen in Fayston was still a separately owned business), WFT had to decide to expand its 496 exchange to Sugarbush or build a new dial office near the base of the ski area. Economies of scale dictated the latter. In 1973, the 583 exchange was built on the Sugarbush Access Road as a separate exchange with its own toll ticketing and connections to NET&T. Traffic

FROM THE GROUND UP

Dana and Eleanor Haskin did it all in their early days with the company.

During major roadwork on Route 100 in 1954, WFT had to move telephone poles lining the road between Waitsfield and Warren.

The couple had a black Labrador retriever named Cindy who accompanied them everywhere. Dana had to run temporary wires through a culvert during the roadwork and came up with the idea of using Cindy. He attached one end of a rope to the wires and gave the other end to Cindy. The dog was coaxed through the culvert, and the job was done.

While this was going on, Eleanor, pregnant with Susan, was performing flagging duties. A peeved driver with New York plates became impatient and began to determinedly drive through the construction zone, despite Eleanor's insistence he stop. Her animated efforts brought on premature labor pains, and nature gave a boost to Dana and Eleanor's first child–a child born into telephony.

Dana Haskin at a Telephone Association of New England (TANE) meeting when he became the Association's president.

Eleanor was elected to OPASTCO's Board of Directors in 1974 and served in other various offices culminating in her election to the presidency in 1980. She was the first woman President of OPASTCO and, for that matter, any other national association relating to telephony. This was a significant achievement, but not that surprising given her dedication and extensive participation in the industry. Eleanor was later honored with the OPASTCO President's Award for her many years of service to the telephone industry.

between 496 and 583 was routed via interoffice trunks. WFT published a new telephone directory that year to reflect the telephone numbers changed as a result of the upgrade. WFT now had a facility that met the needs of Sugarbush and could easily match any further expansion in the area.

The Valley continued growing throughout the 1970s, and by the end of the decade WFT knew it had to either expand its facilities or install an electronic switching system, far superior in size, expandability, versatility, and programmability.

The introduction of more sophisticated subscriber carrier devices gave telephone companies a new engineering option, the "carrier serving area." WFT planned to create its own carrier serving areas to shorten the distance between central office and subscriber. Transmission quality would improve, and special features could be brought to customers; WFT would become the first company to use this technology in Vermont.

Everything about the company was on the upswing, including its business office, which had been expanded to accommodate growth in a variety of areas. A four-bay garage and mezzanine were constructed on the west wall of the business office, and the old garage area was remodeled.

A Visionary Emerges

Eleanor had changed a great deal in the years since she and her husband had come back to the Valley. She began to realize she had interests beyond her hometown and an ability to embrace change and sense when technology was both necessary and a solid investment in the future.

Eleanor calls it vision—an exalted, big-sounding word to come from such a modest woman. "I don't know where it comes from or why I was blessed with it," she admits, but she has come to believe it has been her guiding light for years. That she can use it at all is a testament to what that vision has produced: She has consistently been one of the leaders in technology in the field of telecommunications, the first woman in any leadership role among independent telecommunication companies, ahead of her time in the use of computers and in embracing state-of-the-art services for her company.

Her transformation from small-town business owner to national industry leader solidified in the mid-1970s, when she began to feel the pull of a larger audience. She became active in state, regional, and national organizations in the independent telephone industry, becoming the first woman president of the Telephone Association of New England (TANE), and the first woman inducted into the TANE Hall of Fame.

At the same time, her voice was being heard on the national level through the Organization for the Preservation and Advancement of Small Telephone Companies (OPASTCO), which today represents five hundred of the twelve hundred independent telecommunications companies in the United States. In 1980 she was elected its president, the first woman chosen to lead a national telephone industry association. Years later, she was again the first woman to receive the OPASTCO President's Award, a prestigious honor given to individuals who have made a significant contribution to the independent telephone industry.

Those years were filled with momentous moments and many hours of hard work. During her OPASTCO presidency, she earned the reputation for "having a meeting every time we sat down to eat." The access to people and information was heady. "It was a privilege to be with those people; I was like a sponge," she remembers.

The contacts and knowledge gained from her affiliations were helping to propel WFT into new areas. "We were involved in computers in a way that other companies weren't," she says, and she lectured all over the country to other independents who wanted to computerize. Eleanor was able to help WFT investigate each new and interesting technological offering—at a time when each piece of that information was like a nugget of gold—and she and Dana seemed to have an instinct for what would work for their company.

POTS Wasn't Enough

All this activity was teaching the duo one thing: While plain old telephone service (known in the industry as POTS) was important, the future of their company relied on more than the next dial tone.

At the same time that WFT was gaining in the telecommunications area, another opportunity appeared: cable television service (CATV) in the Valley. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) prohibited most telephone companies from owning and/or operating a CATV business, but WFT received an FCC waiver because of the company's rural exemption status. The PSB granted Waitsfield its CATV franchise.

In 1982 Waitsfield Cable (WC) was established and began its CATV system installation. WC planned for a five-year phase-in for service areas, but the five-year plan was accelerated and 1986 saw completion of construction.

WC started out with thirty-six channels and has grown over the years to improve its product and increase programming. The service improvements culminated in the launch of digital cable in 2000. When the Internet started taking off, WC provided cable modem access, which also proved to be an interim defense mechanism against competitors until WFT launched its own high-speed Internet access.

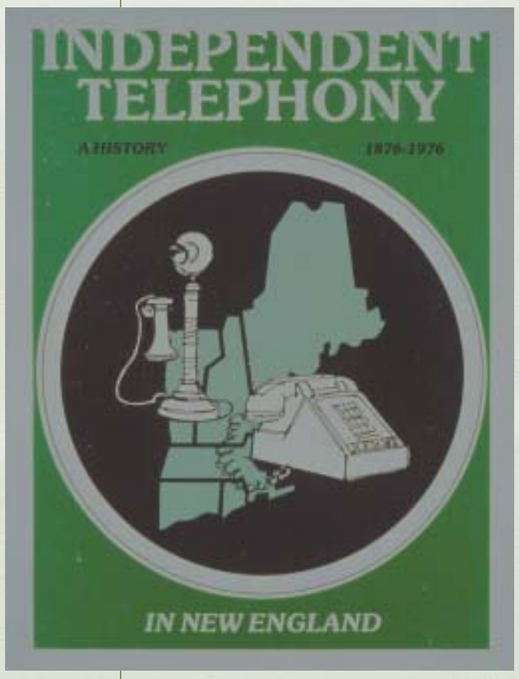
The Breakup of the Bell System

In 1984 the telecommunications industry endured the largest change in its 108-year history. Though the U. S. Justice Department had been trying to break up AT&T's Bell System for decades by applying the Sherman Antitrust Act (which covers antitrust matters), the effort hadn't been successful. In November 1974 the Justice Department once again filed suit against the Bell System, alleging that AT&T was using its government-protected local phone monopolies to frustrate competitors' entry into the long-distance and equipment-manufacturing businesses.

On January 8, 1982, AT&T agreed to break up its $136 billion empire. AT&T would divest the local parts of the Bell Operating Companies (BOCs), but keep its manufacturing facilities and long-distance network. Two years later, the Bell System, as it was once known, ceased to exist. The twenty-two BOCs were merged into seven Regional Bell Operating Companies (RBOCs). By 2003 these seven RBOCs were reduced to four through mergers and sellouts, leaving BellSouth, Qwest, SBC Corp., and Verizon.

MORE EXPANSION

In 1988 WFT, with an employee base now near thirty, was faced with the need to once again expand its business office complex. A new separate structure was built behind the business office to house the growing fleet of vehicles as well as inventory, dispatch, vehicle maintenance, and work space for the outside plant crew. The space previously used as a garage and inventory storage was converted to office space and conference rooms.



PRESERVING THE HISTORY

The year 1976 was the one hundredth anniversary of the telephone. This occasion gave Eleanor motivation to write the history of independent telephony in New England. Her goal was to have the book completed in time for distribution at the annual meeting of the Telephone Association of New England (TANE), held in September at the Balsams in Dixfield Notch, New Hampshire.

The book is a historical compilation of every telephone company that ever existed in New England. This publication has become an important historical record in many libraries, and a copy resides in the Vermont Historical Society's library in Barre.

A young Gregg Haskin standing with the first satellite receiver for Waitsfield Cable.

Waitsfield Cable began providing cable television service to the Mad River Valley in 1982.

OUT OF FIRE COMES CHANGE

WCVT's involvement with emergency services is legendary. In the early days, when a fire report was made to the operator, she called each of the firemen listed for a particular town and rang the fire alarm code to advise them of the report.

The fire that destroyed the company's headquarters in 1944 spurred Waitsfield, which only had an old chemical engine, to finally purchase a new fire engine that Alton had lobbied for, and officially launch the Waitsfield Fire Department.

In later years, Dana lent his support by starting the Mad River Valley Ambulance Service (MRVAS) in 1970. Dana was one of its original founding members and served as a driver, attendant, and trainer.

MRVAS could only afford a used hearse when it first began providing emergency services for the Valley, and there were no facilities to house it. Dana gave MRVAS permission to park it in the business office parking lot until they found another spot. Dana remained with MRVAS well into the 1980s, long after the service had begun to share space in a new firehouse built in 1973.

The breakup gave other long distance carriers the right to compete with AT&T. As a result, hundreds of companies emerged to compete for the new long distance market. MCI and Sprint are among the best known, but many others attained various levels of success.

Although opened to competition, the 1980s' long distance market remained heavily tilted in favor of AT&T. AT&T had a high-quality network in place to carry long distance calls, while most other firms relied on patched-together networks that provided lower-quality voice transmission sound and much-decreased reliability.

By late in the decade, however, the situation began to change. Sprint, MCI, and a few other firms installed fiber optic networks that equaled AT&T's in terms of quality and reliability. In addition, legislative changes made it possible for anyone to use alternative carriers without requiring users to first dial a long string of access numbers. In other words, the digit "1" became the access digit for any long distance carrier. This ease of use leveled the playing field and brought true equal access competition to the long distance market.

Convincing the Local Exchange Companies (LECs) to convert their switches so they could technically offer equal access was a challenge. WFT took until 1990 to upgrade to the software revision that included equal access.

WFT was as sophisticated as any of the bigger companies in dealing with these challenges. Although the company was at the top of its game as the 1990s started—charismatic leadership, an excellent support team, the best of technology—Eleanor and Dana were also aware of the fleeting nature of success, and were determined to make it last, even if it meant taking a chance with a move that some told them would bankrupt their company.

Dana Haskin greets customers at a company open house.

Aerial view of downtown Waitsfield.

Chapter Five

The Little Company Grows Up

For a fleeting moment, they owned it all, the whole multimillion-dollar network with its thirty-five thousand Vermont customers. In that tiny span of time, both Dana and Eleanor had just enough presence of mind to realize what they had accomplished: from a tiny corner of New England, the WFT family had just made telecommunications history.

The Bell System had years before recognized the danger of independent companies when Bell tried to retain control over all telephone access. A hundred years later, Eleanor and the owners of two other companies in two states, had just proven how right Bell had been.

Continental Telephone Company (Contel), a multibillion-dollar telecommunications giant, operated in New England for twenty years before it merged with GTE in 1990. At the time, Contel was the nation's second-largest cellular phone provider, and GTE had been most interested in acquiring that piece of the company. The rumors started early that GTE wanted to sell off other pieces of the company, including the parts that provided phone service in New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont.

The rumors, which Eleanor heard on a boat during a telephone convention, set her imagination running wild. She had occasionally run into GTE people during her lobbying work for the independent phone companies, and she would always remind them that she was interested in purchasing anything they might ever sell off in Vermont. She and Dana had the feeling that the enormous company didn't take WFT, with its five thousand subscribers, very seriously.

Eleanor Haskin (seated center), Shirley Manning of Lincolnville Telephone Company (seated left), Paul Violette of Merrimack County Telephone Company (seated right) and legal counsel signing paperwork for the acquisition of the GTE Vermont properties. Ownership was transferred to the purchasing companies on August 1, 1994.

A QUESTION OF UNITY

The GTE employees were unionized members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). Other employees joined, but became salaried employees under the corporate structure of the company. This labor environment was new for WT, which was union free. Fortunately, other former GTE employees came on board who had management experience operating with a union, which proved helpful in establishing a positive management-employee relationship. Until the labor issues could be resolved, Champlain Valley Telecom remained a separate entity.

In 1998, employees met with the union representative and the company, voting to decertify this particular union local. With the labor issue resolved, WT and CVT legally merged in 1998 to become Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom (WCVT).

HER GRANDMOTHER'S GRANDDAUGHTER

Like her grandmother, Susan Haskin Simms admired education.

When she died in 2003, her family established the Susan Haskin Simms Scholarship to be given to an employee family member that is going on to college. The scholarship is a companion to one created after Eunice Farr's death.

As it became more obvious that the properties would go up for sale, Eleanor became determined that her company would shake off the condescending attitude and shake up the industry.

She knew she couldn't afford the price or handle the total subscriber base that would accompany the sale, but in 1990, she began to contact others to see if they would join her in the deal. Because GTE wanted to deal with only one entity in each state when it sold, Eleanor and WFT, now known as Waitsfield Telecom (WT), Paul Violette of Merrimack County Telephone Company in New Hampshire, and Shirley Manning of Lincolnville Telephone Company in Maine, decided to join together and seek out other potential buyers to form the New England Independent Group (NEIG).

In a humorous understatement, Eleanor told Dana she was buying him another company.

"The Dark Suits Didn't Scare Us"

Eleanor and Dana saw the purchase as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to expand the company's economic base. Changes in the Valley were forcing some deep thinking for the company. After years of tremendous growth, Mad River Valley leaders looked around and began to notice things they didn't like; for example, explosive development was threatening to destroy the fragile beauty of the mountain retreat. Recognizing that the impact of unchecked growth might be devastating, they put in place protections that would inhibit potentially harmful growth.

The sudden braking—which had ramifications for industries and businesses throughout the area—forced Eleanor and Dana to think, again, about how to keep growing. Acquiring the GTE properties seemed made to order.

The fact that they had no experience with the economies of scale the deal entailed—much as they had known nothing in 1960 when they tried to borrow the $125,000 they thought they needed to upgrade the company from crank to dial—was little more than a blip on their screens. That other, much bigger companies were finding it a little hard to believe the properties were being swiped out from under them by these tiny independents was even less of interest to Eleanor. "We started out like we knew what we were doing," Eleanor remembers with amusement. "The dark suits didn't scare us."

Because GTE wanted only one bidder per state to purchase the stock, each of the three companies that made up NEIG formed an acquisition company. Vermont was directed by the team at WT, which invested hundreds of hours in the deal. Eleanor, who was the point person for the team, fell asleep during one long conference call, head down on the table amid the papers detailing another complicated phase of the negotiations. "I never knew if they heard me snoring."

NEIG and GTE reached a definitive agreement on November 12, 1993, in Boston. "We never wavered. We captured [GTE's] imagination, and we kept it," she says.

For seconds, until all the Vermont properties were legally divvied up, everything belonged to the Haskins, a moment almost too short for Dana and Eleanor to savor. When those seconds ended and all the papers were signed, the company had a 20 percent equity in the thirty-five thousand lines GTE had owned in Vermont.

Yet now they had all the time in the world to savor what they'd done: Their acquisition quadrupled the customer base, spreading out 551 square miles over the Appalachian Gap into the Champlain Valley and extending to the New York state line. The transaction doubled their work force by adding thirty-seven new employees.

The switchover was instantaneous; the plan was a complete cut-over, with GTE providing no transitional services after the closing. A semi-truck load of records had already been delivered to the warehouse behind WT's brick office in Waitsfield—inspiring awe in a most tangible way for what the company's future held.

Eleanor Haskin meets Pope John Paul II in his private office.

Then, Dana says, "We had a ball."

The customers on the Champlain Valley side of Champlain Valley Telecom, which would officially merge with WT in 1998 into Waitsfield & Champlain Valley Telecom (WCVT), hardly knew what to think. Although they were an amalgam of several different independent companies that reach all the way back to 1896, they had had three telephone companies in six years, and service was erratic at best. Contel had never provided good customer service. GTE had been almost totally uninterested in the Champlain Valley; the whole point of the Contel purchase had been for wireless rights, not ground lines, so GTE hadn't spent any money on local offices.

Now, customers in Bristol, Lincoln, Richmond, Hinesburg, Charlotte, Weybridge, Bridport, Addison, and Panton were skeptical of a tiny company from the other side of the mountain. When Kurt Gruendling, vice president of marketing and business development for WCVT, arrived in 1996, two years after the merger, his first job was to hear what the customers on the Champlain side were thinking.

"The Waitsfield customers knew what a good company this was, how forward-thinking and ethical. But the Champlain Valley properties were separated by a mountain range. They didn't have a local business office. They knew almost nothing about us."

The company began a massive outreach program to teach the fourteen thousand new customers about their new telephone provider, to welcome them into the family.

Gregg, Eleanor, Dana, Susan, and Eric Haskin.

Not Just a Business

Four big Vermont dogs roam the offices of WCVT, watching over employees, inspecting new visitors. The staff calls one, Sheena, the CED (Chief Executive Dog). She jumps into a chair at the conference table and sits perfectly still, waiting to weigh in on the day's issues.

If anything ever tells you this is a different place to work, and a different company with which to do business, those dogs do the job. "We feel the company is a family," Eleanor says, using a phrase that, in many other places, would be little more than an overused slogan.

That family observation is both literally and figuratively true.

Although the Haskin children were not required to come into the business, all four of them gravitated in that direction, two after first having careers in other fields.

Eric, the middle child, began working part-time for WFT in 1978. He was still attending school and worked during the summer, and had an installer's van in his last two years of high school so he could take troubles after school. Eric graduated from Harwood Union High School in 1979 and worked for the company until November when he entered the United States Navy. In November 1982 Eric began full-time employment with WFT as an installer, moving later to a lineman position. He joined the engineering staff in 1987 and eventually moved into cable splicing. Eric went back to the lineman position in 1991 for one year, and then moved on to his current position as field engineer.

Gregg worked part-time for WFT for six years while he finished high school and attended college. During that time, he held every position except line construction.

As we celebrate National Small Telecommunications week and Vermont Independent Telephone Company week (just named in a Governor's Proclamation), I would also like to commend all of the Independent Telephone Company's that collectively provide service to over 66,500 customers in Vermont and their dedication to bringing the latest technology to the rural communities they serve: Franklin Telephone Company, Ludlow Telephone Company, Northfield Telephone Company, Northland of Vermont, Perkinsville Telephone Company, Shoreham Telephone Company, Topsham Telephone Company, and Vermont Telephone Company.

From WCVT's commitment to customer service and your commitment to your communities, whether it is wiring local schools, providing resources for student scholarships, or your employees' dedication to public service, WCVT is truly an example for other Vermont businesses.

We are proud of you and Vermont's Independents for all that you do. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Howard Dean, M.D.
Governor

HOWARD DEAN, M.D.
Governor

State of Vermont
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Montpelier 05609

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September 17, 2002

Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom
P.O. Box 9
Waitsfield, VT 05673-0009

To the Haskin Family, and the employees at Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom:

Congratulations on your excellent achievement - offering high-speed DSL service to over 90% of your customer base. I realize this is no small task.

But I am not surprised. Since your Company was founded almost 100 years ago as the Waitsfield-Fayston Telephone Company, WCVT has been a leader in providing the latest technologies to our citizens in the most efficient and affordable manner.

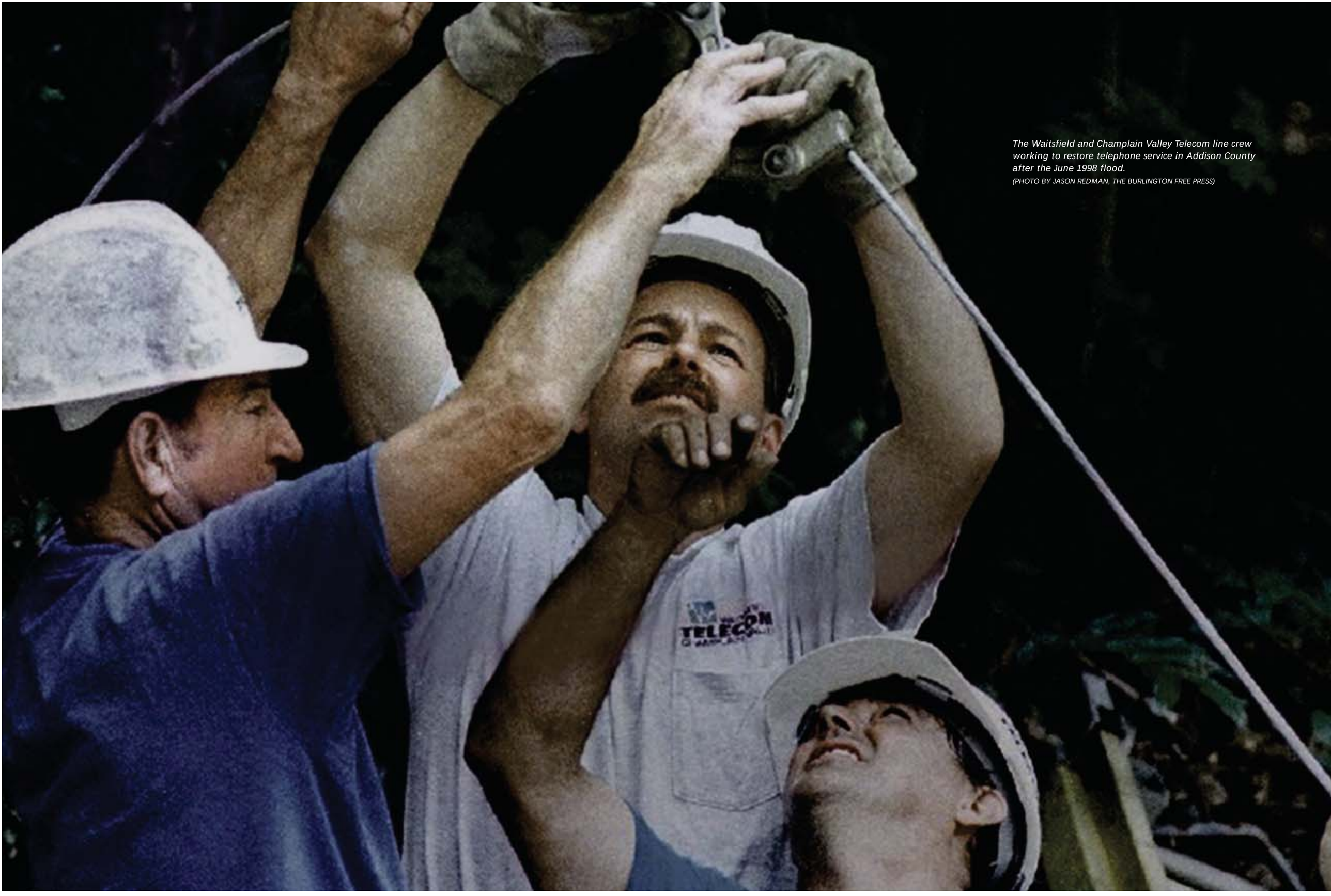
Your award-winning past and your commitment to quality makes this evident:

- The Deane C. Davis Outstanding Vermont Business Award in 2000
- The U.S Senate Productivity Award for Outstanding Achievement of Economic Activity in 1999.
- The Achievement Award from the Vermont Council for Quality in 1998 &1999.
- Winning the Governor's Award for Performance Excellence from the Vermont Council for Quality in 2000.
- And finally, WCVT has won numerous awards through the Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies ("OPASTCO") recognizing the company's achievements.

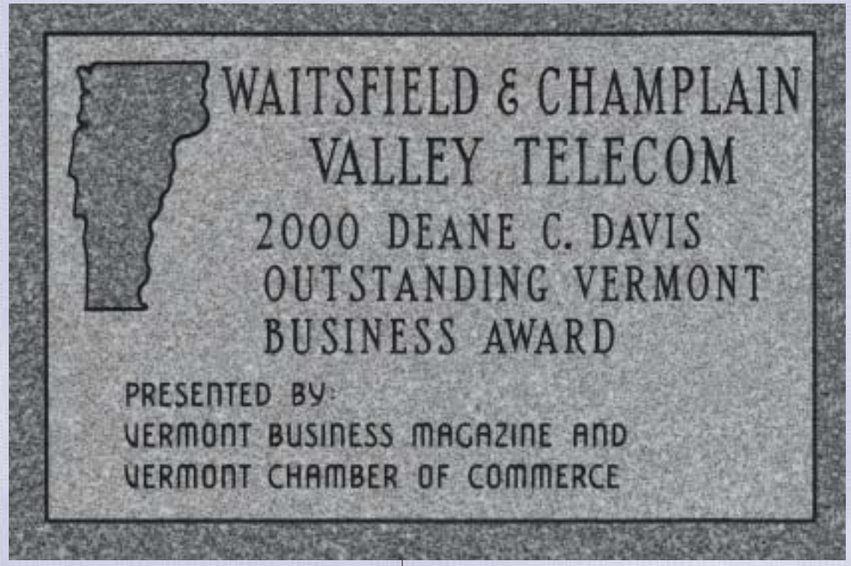
I would like to personally thank Dana and Eleanor for your continued commitment to the communities you serve. And thank you to the 106 employees of WCVT and its subsidiaries for your tremendous effort in bringing the latest telecommunications services to your rural customers in the central Champlain and Mad River Valley regions of Vermont. This is a huge undertaking and we appreciate your unwavering dedication.

Printed on 100% Processed Chlorine Free Paper

A letter from Howard Dean congratulating WCVT on its achievement of offering high-speed DSL service to over 90 percent of its customer base. September 17, 2002.



The Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom line crew working to restore telephone service in Addison County after the June 1998 flood.
(PHOTO BY JASON REDMAN, THE BURLINGTON FREE PRESS)



The Deane C. Davis Outstanding Vermont Business Award was received in 2001, given to a business whose outstanding accomplishments in 2000 complemented its history of success and awareness of what makes Vermont unique.

Like his mother, he describes himself as "born into the industry" and remembers all the "funny sounds" coming out of the central office where the switching stations were located. Gregg began full-time employment with the accounting department in 1986. He has been a manager and vice president of the accounting department and today serves as WCVT's chief financial officer.

Scott joined the Haskin family in 1982 at the age of two. He experienced telephony as he grew up and graduated from Essex Technical School in telecommunications. He completed a trainee program at WCVT and is currently an installer/repairman.

Susan, the oldest, seemed the least likely to join the company. She graduated in 1972 from Harwood Union High School, and enrolled at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. She graduated in 1976 with a degree in geology, then moved west and worked for oil firms in Colorado and Wyoming, where she married and worked for the next ten years as a geophysicist.

Living in Colorado in 1983 but missing home and Vermont, Susan returned that year and began working on a computerized mapping system then in WCVT's customer service department, soon taking over its leadership. She introduced policies and procedures for the customer service representatives that streamlined operations and improved customer service. Shortly after returning to Vermont, Sue adopted the first of her three children. Even after her diagnosis of breast cancer, she worked as an adoption advocate and as an instructor for Social Rehabilitative Services.

Susan died in July 2003, a bright light gone out. For her funeral, employees gathered hundreds of daisies from a meadow below a favorite spot of Susan's. "She loved the colors," Tammy Field, administrative services supervisor, explains.

Only a family member would know that.

Vermont Governor Howard Dean presenting to Dana and Eleanor the Vermont Council for Quality Governors Award for Performance Excellence.

Enter the Internet

The care and devotion employees give each other is reflective of the service they provide and the concern they give to offering customers the best and the newest. "We value the people we serve because they are our friends, neighbors, and fellow business owners," Eleanor points out.

That feeling, and the company's willingness to try to be ahead of technological changes, made them ready for the Internet explosion in the mid-1990s, when everyone wanted access. Internet service providers (ISPs) were springing up everywhere. WCVT quickly realized the Internet could become a viable competitor and revenue producer.

The move to providing Internet service was a drastic switch for WCVT, as it was for other companies. "We were in the telephone business, and then we were in the telecommunications business," Eleanor says. "It was a big shift."

Green Mountain Access (GMA) launched in 1997. Internet access was initially offered via dial-up connection, because high-speed access was expensive and limited to those who could afford wide bandwidth. When digital subscriber line (DSL) technology became available, subscribers eagerly signed up, with the company listing its first five "beta" customers over the December holidays of 2000. DSL not only provided speedier access but also worked within a separate envelope over the subscriber's telephone line. Voice calls (inbound or outbound) were now independent of the Internet connection.

In theory this step forward was an excellent one, but the service was distance-sensitive and wouldn't work well—or at all—beyond eighteen thousand feet from the central office. WCVT, in harmony with GMA, set out to make DSL 100 percent available throughout its service area.

DSL penetration became part of the company's annual goals, and today WCVT's plant has 100 percent DSL availability and more than four thousand DSL customers. The DSL penetration factor is exceptional compared to the national average-service to areas that, if you looked just at dollars and cents, probably shouldn't be served, says Gruendling. Increased DSL sales are integral to the company's long-range strategic plan.

In 1997 WCVT formed its own long distance company, Green Mountain Long Distance (GMLD).

"We may appear to be a small telecommunications company, but we're really not,"

During the ice storm in January of 1998, technicians worked night and day to restore service. In this photo, a central office technician travels down a road covered with fallen branches.
(PHOTO BY JOHN BRASSARD, WCVT CENTRAL OFFICE TECHNICIAN.)

"NOT VERIZON"

A series of six customer discussion groups in March 2003 gave some interesting answers to what WCVT is known for:

- Family-owned business.
- Leading edge of technology
- Reliability
- The little phone book
- Pleasant faces at the Hinesburg office
- Not Verizon
- Not GTE/Contel–not the old way that service was.

NEITHER RAIN NOR SNOW NOR LAKE WATERS

October 2003 found WCVT linemen threading a cable across Lake Champlain to give updated service to Garden Island.

The same cable had linked the island to WCVT and its predecessors since 1969, strung along the floor of the lake. "I guess you could say the cable has served us well," says Tom Blonski.

WCVT employeed 100 at the time this company photo was taken in September 2003.
(PHOTO BY WILLIAM STIREWALT OF VERMONT ZONE FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY.)

says Gregg Haskin. “We’re a big player. We know what we’re doing, and we do it well.”

Its attitude makes the company even more sensitive to the need to provide quality service with all the finest features. And, while WCVT’s leaders were spending a lot of time thinking about all that, they were also facing a few years of intense pressure from other outside forces—like Mother Nature.

A Year of Disasters

When you run a telecommunications company, you expect natural disasters, and you prepare for them. You just don’t expect two in one year.

Eleanor and Dana had already decided that 1998 would be the year of a tremendous alteration in the business’s structure. All the changes they had gone through since the GTE merger had forced them to reexamine their company; they were both nearing seventy and needed to begin thinking about how to prepare WCVT for the future. They planned to overhaul the company’s management practices by teaming up with the Vermont Council for Quality (VCQ) and the well known Baldrige National Quality program. The Baldrige criterion provides a tried and proven roadmap for businesses to continually improve their entire operation and strive for excellence.

Before implementing these planned overhauls, though, January 1998 arrived with a snap, crackle, and pop: three inches of ice coating the Champlain Valley. On January 8, a devastating ice storm swept across New England and southeastern Canada. Six Vermont counties were declared federal disaster areas, and over seven hundred thousand acres of forestland were damaged by the storm. The ice knocked down lines and snapped telephone poles, interrupting electricity and telephone service for thousands. Champlain Valley residents awoke that morning to dark, cold, and an eerie silence broken only by the sound of a distant chainsaw or the ominous snapping of tree limbs breaking from the weight of the ice.

At its peak, there were approximately five hundred WCVT customers cut off from the world, as WCVT employees—many themselves without power or phones—worked their way around fallen trees to repair lines. Personnel came into the office to answer customer service calls, and help in the recovery effort. Falling temperatures kept the icy coating intact and made the line work brutal. Many times, WCVT employees were working right alongside the Vermont National Guardsmen brought in to help assist citizens and support the clean-up effort.

The ice storm was hardly forgotten when summer brought its own pestilence to the WCVT counties. A July flood again forced officials to declare a national disaster area in eight counties. In addition to all the other damage, the New Haven River completely destroyed the town library in Bristol except for a few books, and brought WCVT pouring into the area to restore ruptured phone lines. The Mad River lived up to its name again, as it had in 1927 when Eleanor’s father had serviced his customers from a canoe. Warren village was completely under water, many towns were flooded, and major roads throughout the area were submerged as well.

Looking around that day, one young woman summed it up: “There’s no sense in crying. You just have to keep going.”

WCVT did, sending out its best to bring its subscribers back into the world.

A Year of Honors

Figuring if they could survive that year they could survive anything, WCVT pursued its new management plans. Partly as the result of the Baldrige principles, WCVT in 2000 acquired a branch office in Hinesburg to provide a personal presence in the heart of the CVT serving area. GMA moved its operations to Hinesburg at the same time, a move that gave the new company the room and geographical access it needed to maximize its efforts.

At about the same time, the Waitsfield Cable office at the Mad River Green complex was converted to a multi-service point of business so that customers would have easy access to all services.

The changes paid off. In 1998 and 1999 VCQ recognized WCVT’s hard work and success story with its annual Achievement Award, and in 2000, WCVT won the prestigious Deane C. Davis Outstanding Vermont Business Award. In addition to the Deane C. Davis award, WCVT was also presented with a U.S. Senate award, For Outstanding Achievement of Economic Productivity.

A Future Awaiting Definition

Death and taxes have a way of humbling us all.

For Dana and Eleanor, death, taxes, and a regulatory atmosphere that seems murky at best have left them unsure about where their company will go in its third generation.

Strangely, the uncertainty has an invigorating effect, not a gloomy one. “I like change,” Eleanor, now seventy-two years old in this 128th year of telephony. “I love new things. I love to get into computer software and figure it out without the use of a book.”

For her, figuring out the future is akin to learning software without a book-a challenge, certainly, but not a frightening one. She and Dana have no roadmap for the future, but they do have one from the past, one Eleanor says she learned when she was a piano student at the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, toiling under a professor who demanded more than she at first thought she had. “You keep working for perfection. You stick with it until it’s done. That’s what I brought to this business.”

That determination is what she and Dana will leave behind, too.

Postscript

Helping Hands

The names they remember are Valley names: Eurich. Neill. Moriarty. Shaw. Tremblay. Baird. Wimble. Ferris. Jones.

For the Farrs and Haskins, the two families that have run the Waitsfield telecommunications company since 1906, these names are inherently part of the company's legacy. Their stories are intertwined, inseparable, as much a part of the company as are the stories of Alton and Eunice, of Dana and Eleanor, of Susan, Gregg, and Eric.

These stories are about the people the Valley remembers-a fitting way to end the book of a company celebrating one hundred years.

In the early stages of World War II, when Eunice lost Raymond Hosking to the armed services, she wasn't sure she could keep the company running. Raymond had worked for her husband, Alton, for many years as a lineman and installer/repairman. After Alton's death, Raymond's presence had given Eunice the breathing room she required to keep up with the rest of the business. His absence left a tremendous void.

When he returned from the war, Raymond went to work for NET&T. But Eunice never forgot him, or all he had done for her company.

Mary Moriarty began working for WFT in 1931 and spent the next eleven years operating the switchboard located on the second floor of the old G.A.R. Hall. Her first switchboard was in terrible shape, the plugs falling out of the jacks and most of the cords held together with tape. Alton—the same Alton who had taught her to swim in the Mad River when she was a little girl—quickly bought a new one from NET&T.

Ramona "Mony" Shaw became an operator for WFT in 1949 when she was nineteen and stayed with the company until the dial conversion in 1961. Mony tells of tracking the direction of thunderstorms by the electrical effect it had on the telephone lines. The lightning would cause the calls on the switchboard to drop off, making it seem like a dozen subscribers were signaling the operator all at once. When she was inexperienced, she thought the calls were all

The Haskin family photo taken December 2002.
Back row: Eric, Dana, Scott, Gregg, Michael, Samantha.
Front row: Anna, Lisa, Kianna, Eleanor, Derrick (infant), Roberta, Shannon, and Susan.

legitimate and would try to plug in to answer them, receiving an electrical shock every time. She soon learned to tell the difference.

Bernadette Ferris was an operator in the 1940s when her future husband, Adrian, made nightly trips to the central office in Waitsfield to visit with her while she operated the switchboard. Their son, Adrian Ferris Jr., has been with WFT for many years, as a lineman and a line assigner/switch programmer. Before Mrs. Ferris died, Adrian Jr. used to bring her to sit at the old switchboard that had long since been dismantled and put on display at the company's office. She immediately began to pull and plug in lines; it was like she had never left.

Norm Neill, born on the Neill farm just past the Round Barn on East Warren Road, spent twenty-one years with WFT. He became a lineman in 1958 and learned everything by doing it, since Eunice had little time to teach. Norm remembers trying to locate the cause of the service outage at Pat and Peg McCuin's home in Warren at Cold Springs Farm. He had just reached the top of a pole that went up the road to the McCuin house and snapped his safety belt around it when the pole broke in two. Snow helped cushion his fall, and Norm found himself still straddling the upper half of the pole that he had just climbed.

When doing a story in 1959 on home-style communications, Monsanto featured a picture of Neill walking down Bridge Street in Waitsfield looking for line problems. The temperature that day was minus seventeen degrees Fahrenheit.

Sally Wimble Tremblay was born at home in 1932 to Claude and Rita Wimble, in the same building where Alton Farr lived when he first moved back to Waitsfield to take over WFT in 1906.

Some of Sally's earliest childhood memories were of going from her home across the road to WFT's central office to watch in fascination as the operators worked the big switchboard that connected the village residents with each other and with the world. She wanted to spend more time there than anywhere else and soon became a favorite of the operators.

At first, the Central Girls gave her simple things to do, like running errands. Marguerite "Peg" Moriarty, sister to Joe Moriarty (and neither a relation to Mary Moriarty mentioned above), an operator who had started with WFT in the 1930s, was impressed that this youngster wanted to spend more time in the central office than she did playing with the neighborhood children. Peg began teaching Sally how to perform some simple maneuvers at the switchboard. By the time she was in high school, Sally had a good command of the switchboard and began training in earnest. She started filling in on weekends, then in summers when the year-round operators took their vacations. Her first full week's paycheck of seventeen dollars made her proud-and even more eager to work the board.

She graduated from Waitsfield High School in 1950, the same year Eleanor Farr graduated, and began working full-time. Peg stayed until 1951, then left WFT to go to work as an operator for New York Telephone. Sally followed Peg to Albany and became an operator for the same company, staying there for one year, then returning to Waitsfield. Sally worked as an operator for a short time during 1961 to help out as WFT made its conversion to dial. It was like she had grown up with the company.

The Moriartys were linked in many ways to the company. Joe Moriarty worked long and hard for Alton and Eunice. His daughter Dody spent more than forty years with the company, and retired at the beginning of 2004.

Ted Clifford, who ran wire and cable supplier Clifford of Vermont, never worked for the Haskin family, but he had been a friend to Eunice and Eleanor for more years than either could remember. When Sugarbush resort was under construction, WFT was held together with iron wire, Western Union joints, magneto phones, and the old switchboard now in the hall by customer service. Ted sold Eunice enough army wire to go from the center of Waitsfield Village to the Sugarbush parking lot. He waited over two years to get paid. When Dana and Eleanor returned from Texas to take over the company, Clifford literally took Dana by the hand to the Telephone Association of Maine convention to introduce him to REA borrowers and nonborrowers.

Receiving a tip just before his discharge from the navy in 1969 that an opening existed for a central office technician, Kevin Eurich, who had deep Valley roots, went to the interview in uniform-hoping it would impress the old military man in Dana. Though he has gone through many changes in the company, Kevin found himself a few months ago sitting on the floor of the office, blueprints of one of the old magneto switchboards spread before him, as he tried to get it working for a coming demonstration-nearing his thirty-fifth year with the company, momentarily low-tech in a high-tech world. Kevin, who retired in 2003, was one of eleven people who had spent more than thirty years with the company.

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