



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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As I look around the Face of Fillmore, I often wonder what our pioneer forefathers would have thought of some of the modern conveniences we use on a daily basis. One that I am sure they would be amazed at is the cell phone. This invention and the ones that led up to it would be mind-boggling to the people who settled here nearly 170 years ago.

I am often reminded of just some of those changes in my lifetime. Who would have thought that we would ask the person we were talking to where they are? Not many years ago, we knew where they were – connected to the land line we had called. Now their location can be just about anywhere.

The original invention of the telephone happened just two years before the settlers arrived in Fillmore. In 1849, Italian Antonio Meucci was credited with its invention although most Americans connect the telephone with Alexander Graham Bell who first patented it in 1876, when Fillmore was celebrating its 25th anniversary.

As soon as communities were established along the western slope of the mountains from Richmond on the north to St. George on the south, early leaders took a careful look at the need for communication between settlements. On April 10, 1865, a special meeting was held in Salt Lake City and a unanimous vote was taken to construct a telegraph line through the southern settlements. These Mormon settlers divided into numerous construction crews through the areas where they lived and went to work. Soon the Deseret Telephone Company was organized. Under the leadership of Brigham Young, the workers were from all walks of life. Thomas Callister, as District Bishop of Millard County, was in charge of work throughout his county. The crews under his supervision worked quickly, sometimes constructing as many as 20 miles of pole line in one week. By January 15, 1867, the line was completed and in operation to St. George.



Looking east on Center Street with the two-story telephone office on the left by the people walking up the street.

At one point, ownership of Deseret Telephone was designated to the bishop in each area. Not many years passed until it was discovered that the cost of maintaining and operating the telegraph line was a major financial problem. Each year it was operated with an increasing loss. The company was sold to Western Union Telegraph Company who operated it until 1902, then decided to dismantle the line and move it to a more profitable area. This decision was upsetting to the communities and to Bishop Thomas C. Callister, because it was his father who had supervised the construction of the line and he, himself, had worked on it. He organized a local company to buy the line and keep it in operation. His main obstacle was a financial one. He looked



The Callister home which was the first telephone office

in all of the local communities and found only one man who would help back him financially. James A. Kelly, a young businessman, had just opened a butcher business in Fillmore and was not as much financial help as was needed, but offered his wholehearted support in any way he could. The two of them, along with Bishop Callister's son, T. Clark, who was a senior in engineering school, were about to embark on a great new idea. T. Clark was a pioneer in his field and suggested that they convert the telegraph line to a telephone line. They could operate it themselves and avoid employing trained telegraph operators.

The group purchased the Western Union Telegraph Company and proceeded to change it into the first telephone company in the county. Equipment was first rented from Bell Telephone Company and during the Christmas holiday from college in 1902, the equipment was installed. The first telephone was installed in Mr. Kelly's meat market with a circuit strung to the post office about a half block away. People came from far away to witness talking on the telephone. With the first experiment a success, they installed telephone toll stations (pay telephones) in Thompson and Peterson's store in Scipio, George's Store in Kanosh, Mr. Kelly's residence, in the old Olsen home and in Bishop Callister's residence in



The next telephone office on Center Street

Fillmore. From there operations expanded to Oasis where it was again connected to a telegraph line, then to Holden, Meadow, Deseret and Hinckley and Oak City. In 1904 the company was incorporated under the name of Millard County Telegraph and Telephone Company. In 1907 a telephone line was constructed to the new town of Burtner, now Delta. With the expansion of the company, the following advertisement appeared in the March 15, 1913 Progress newspaper: "Let us install a telephone in your residence or place of business."

Bishop Callister's home located on First East was built in 1896 and became the local telephone office with the switchboard in the dining room and telephone equipment assembled by workers in the basement. Zola Bartholomew was the first telephone operator for the company.

During the depression, T. Clark Callister owned the family home. He wanted to keep his telephone employees working, so he hired them to paint the individual bricks and mortar on the home.

Later the telephone office was located just across the street from the National Guard Armory before moving to its present location. The Callister home has changed owners in recent years, but is still the well-kept, historical addition to the neighborhood that it has always been.