

# Peek into telephone history rings a bell

By **BOB WITHERS**

The Herald-Dispatch

[bwithers@herald-dispatch.com](mailto:bwithers@herald-dispatch.com)

**HUNTINGTON** — Three weeks ago, we ran a photograph loaned by Larry Legge showing a Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. crew in Guyandotte. Legg, a district vice president with the West Virginia Historical Society, has come up with another view — a group of workers taking a break in Huntington in 1920.

The crew includes, from left, Frank Reed, A. McDaniels, C.W. Traylor, Jim C. Vickers and, sitting in the cab of the truck, C.L. Rutherford.

This second photo gives us an opportunity to dig a little deeper in local telephone history, much of which comes from George S. Wallace's "Cabell County Annals and Families" (Richmond, Va.: Garrett and Massie; 1935).

The first phone line, you'll recall, was built between Guyandotte and downtown Huntington in 1883, and that was about the same time that the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Co., headquartered in Richmond, Va., secured a franchise to provide



Photo courtesy Larry Legge, West Virginia Historical Society  
Telephone workers pose with their truck in 1920.

general service in Huntington. A small office was established with between 25 and 30 subscribers.

Lon Hutchison, manager of the Western Union Telegraph Co. office here, also managed the phone company. The first operators were Dave Parrish and Guy Perkins by day and

Robert Gladstone and John W. Lee by night.

During the closing years of the 19th century, the company moved from the Harvey Building to the Huntington National Bank Building. In those days, the magneto type of machinery required the turning of a generator on the

telephone to signal the operator.

In 1902, when the company moved into the Advertiser Building on 4th Avenue, common battery service was installed. To make a call from this system, the caller simply lifted the receiver from the hook and a signal appeared on the operator's board and he answered the call — sort of like how Andy and Barney ask Sarah to connect a call in *Mayberry*.

A far cry, isn't it, from today's cell phones that can do everything except fix your lunch. And who knows? Maybe that's next.

This photograph, too, is from the collection of the recently deceased Harry E. Jackson, who worked as a foreman supervisor construction for C&P, which later became Bell Atlantic and still later, Verizon.

**If you have an old photograph — not a clipping or a photocopy — you would like for us to consider for this weekly look back, send it and your story to reporter Bob Withers, The Herald-Dispatch, P.O. Box 2017, Huntington WV 25720. Be sure to include your name, address and telephone number.**