

## The First Independent Telephone in Abilene in 1893

By B. Frank Myers

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“A Reminiscence”

The first Independent Telephone System was started in 1893 by Frank Smith and B. Frank Myers. Frank Smith was twelve years old and B. Frank Myers was 9 years old. Smith was the night operator for the Bell system in Abilene, a toll line went through here and there were some local subscribers.

One night I went with Smith to the telephone office which was the top floor of his father's drug store located at First and Cedar Streets.

After being there awhile, the telephone rang. Smith motioned me to take down the receiver but I should not make a sound. This was my first experience with the telephone.

Later that year, Frank Smith went with his parents to a fair in Omaha, Nebraska. Smith said that if I could get some money, he would buy some parts and we could have our own telephone system. I got part of the money by selling a couple of old fat hens that I stole from my mother.

Frank Smith came back from Omaha with four of the old fashioned ear pieces. He lived across the street, we found some old lumber to hold the line up over the street. We ran two wires with ear-pieces on the ends of each wire. I would talk in one piece and he would listen in on the piece at the other end of the one I was talking in and then, he would talk in his end of the line and I would listen to him on my end of the line. We used blue vitrol [sic] batteries. Later we bought two buzzers, so we could call each other.

C.L. Brown started in the telephone business in late 1890's or early 1900's. I knew him when he was a clerk in the basement of Case's Department Store. C.L. Brown had only one arm. I watched the men with the long spoon shovels dig holes for the telephone poles. C.L. Brown would go with them and with his one arm would hold a board at the edge of the hole, the men would tilt the poles against his board and slide the pole into the hole.

Katie Berry was one of the first “Hello Girls” and Mary Kane was the bookkeeper. She would walk all over town and collect the monthly

telephone rentals. The Brown System was getting quite large. I was working as a printer. At this time Brown had a small printing department. I called him and asked if I could see him some evening. He knew who I was. He said that I should come to his office that evening. We visited awhile then I said that I would like the job of running his printing department. In about two weeks, I got a call to start work the next week. One of my most embarrassing moments was when we were talking when I noticed his shoe was untied. I wanted to tie the shoe for him as he had only one hand but thought it best not to offer.

The printing department turned out that I had the printing, the stationery department and the meter mailing.

During the height of the company, Brown started to sell stock by mail. I had five girls addressing the envelopes and stuffing the literature. For awhile during the campaign of selling stock, 15% of all the letters in the Abilene post office were the letters from C.L. Brown's office.

The printing was discontinued about 1940. In the 1940's the Brown Telephone Company merged with the United Telephone Company.

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