

The Old MST&T

The Independent Telephone Co. of Butte and the Home Telephone Co. of Bozeman both looked at extending lines to Three Forks in 1909. The Home Telephone actually had 52 subscriptions for phones, but failed to deliver service in a reasonable time. On February 1, 1909, the Three Forks Telephone Co. was organized. Dr. Stoyer was president (he was still building the first drug store in town), Dr. Willard was vice-president (local surgeon), J.L. Broderick was Secretary and Treasurer, Ben Reynolds was Managing Director. On the Board of Directors were J.J. Russell, Wm. Parnacott, and H. Gillingham.

They had raised capital stock of \$2,500, with shares valued at \$1.00. They expected to have service within 90 days. By early March, materials were purchased and arrived in mid-April. A line was constructed by the Montana Independent Telephone Company from Butte to Logan and the Three Forks Telephone Company would tie into that line for a toll. A electrician named C.J.R. deClemenceau was in charge of construction and stringing the wires. The exchange was located in the building where "Outa Ware" is today. The system was not automated, so when a call was made, the caller would tell the operator or "Central" who they were calling and the operator would plug a wire into a bank of receptacles to make the connection.

Dr. Stoyer died just a few days before the long distance connections were up and running on June 29, 1909. His wife Martha was the exchange's first chief operator. By 1912, the exchange was moved to 12 E. Cedar (Headwaters Food Bank building) to accommodate the 260 subscribers with a potential of handling 2000 subscribers.

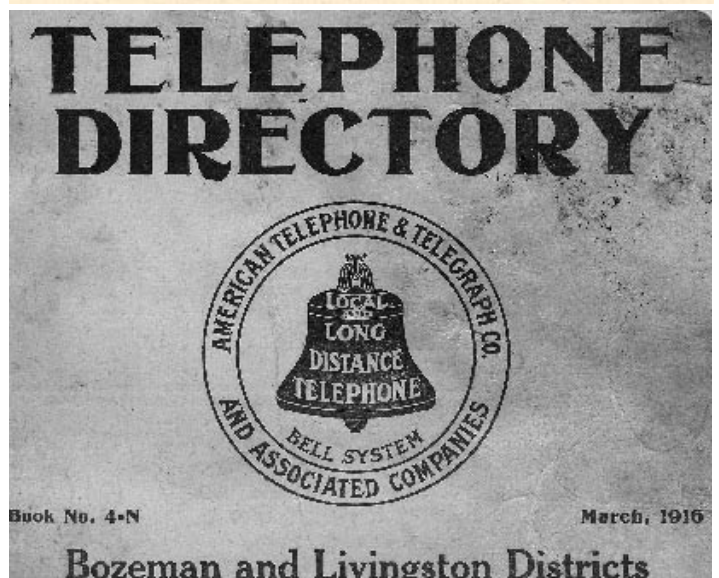
Across Montana small independent local exchanges were soon gobbled up by larger firms. Ohio-born Thaddeus S. Lane came to Montana in 1906. By 1912 he was the President of ten telephone companies in the Washington, Idaho and Montana region, including those in Butte and Bozeman. He soon consolidated his holdings into Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Co which eventually became Mountain Bell or Ma Bell. By 1916, the local exchange was part of the Bell system.

While renovating the building at 12 E. Cedar, a small piece of history was found inside the walls. A rather worn, somewhat moldy 1916 telephone directory was discovered and preserved. It contains the exchange numbers for Belgrade, Bozeman, Clyde Park, Livingston, Manhattan, Salesville, and Three Forks, all in less than 30 pages! This telephone directory is a unique and interesting bit of local lore.

Dr. L.P Gaertner, Physician and Surgeon, had his office upstairs from the Three Valleys Bank (now the Heritage Museum) and his exchange number was 28-J. 100-w was the exchange number for the school, located at 4th Ave and Cedar (now Bertagnolli Park). E.C. Waddell, the man who was having the Ruby Theatre built that year, resided at Main and Grove and his exchange number was 154-J. The Mike Lane ranch was



Thaddeus S. Lane



connected to the world via exchange number 85-J-1.

Recent television ads proclaim Cingular as the "New AT&T." It seems just another turning of the wheel...