

The Hello Girls

by Lynne Belluscio

The other day, someone asked me if I knew when telephone service came to Le Roy and I had to do a little research. I still haven't found out when the first telephones were in service, but I do know that there were telephones in Le Roy by 1888.

The *Le Roy Gazette* reported that the Le Roy telephone exchange had received instructions to charge non subscribers 5 cents a call. The article doesn't say who gave the instructions and it's not clear how non subscribers would have had access to a phone.

The first phone line in the United States ran between Boston and Summerville, Massachusetts in 1877. Three years later there were 47,900 phones in the United States. By 1882, the telephone switchboard had been invented, so Le Roy wasn't too far behind the times to have a phone system by 1888.

Improvements to the Bell Telephone office in Le Roy were made in August 1900 and a new switchboard was installed. An undated photograph in the files shows three ladies at the switchboard in the Bell Telephone office. Ralph Baker was the local manager. "Whenever the silvery tinkle of a bell is heard in a majority of the business houses and homes of Le Roy and vicinity, it's the 'Bell.'" Equipped with the storage battery or central energy system, with underground



cable conduits on Main Street, having a capacity of 800 lines . . . directly connecting with more than 22,000 exchanges throughout the country, it gives the community the opportunity of conversing with practically any point desired in the United States."

In 1901, two telephone companies wanted the Village Board to approve franchises in Le Roy. In addition to the Bell Telephone Company, Milton Wade of Franklinville wanted to provide local service. He said that a subscription would cost 75 cents per home and \$1 for each business. Local services were provided in Batavia, Lockport, Salamanca, Cuba, Akron and

Jamestown. He proposed that they would erect telephone poles in the back yards when possible. Bell Telephone proposed using existing poles.

Finally in October, the Village Board reviewed the options. Bell Telephone wanted to go down East Main Street with their toll lines and to erect poles on all the streets to supply customers with service. The Village Board asked if the Gas and Electric poles could be used, but Bell said the poles were in no shape to use. The Board objected to another set of poles to be erected for phone service. Then discussion followed that would have Bell Telephone reset the poles on East Main or to run over the lines of Le Roy Hydraulic Company. Bell objected to that proposal saying that the power lines were high tension wires and would interfere

with the telephone system. Then one of the Board members asked if the Company was willing to compensate with free telephones. The Trustees thought that five or six phones placed in each of the fire company rooms, one at the Water Commissioner's office, two at the pumping stations would be appropriate since the Company offered ten free phones in Batavia.

Trustee Heaman thought that the Company should pay \$1 per pole annual rental. Not all the Trustees were in agreement with the proposal by Bell Telephone. No decision had been made at the end of the meeting. The Consolidated Telephone Company of Buffalo maintained the Le Roy Company under the direction of L.B. Eaton. It began in 1903 and a couple of years later there were 600 subscribers. The equipment was manufactured by the Century Telephone Construction Company in Buffalo. Rural lines extended east to Lime Rock and west to the Stone School House in Stafford, north to Stone Church and Bergen and south to Pavilion Center and Roanoke, Boston Corners, Pavilion Center and Linwood.

"The courtesy and attentiveness of the genial 'hello girls' of the Le Roy Telephone Company make the use of its lines a pleasure at all times. The present fire alarm system of Le Roy, which has given the very highest degree of satisfaction, was installed by this company."

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