

**When the Telephone Came to Auburn
(Excerpts from a April 23, 1993 Bill Wilson column)**

A telephone line was installed from Auburn to Sacramento in 1891. Only a few residents believed that a voice could be carried for thirty miles or more. But it started a communications network that expanded to almost every home during the next century. Colonel Walter Scott Davis reportedly built the first private line in Auburn in 1889 connecting several businesses including one to Mammoth Bar Mine on the Middle Fork of the American River to room 43 of the Freeman Hotel. The line later was taken over by Auburn Telephone Company. When the service reportedly became unsatisfactory, it was transferred to the Sunset Capitol Telephone Company, which provided service for several decades until it became Pacific Bell Telephone.

The first exchange was established at a drug store on the corner of Main and commercial streets in what is now Old Town Auburn. One of the mechanical problems of the early exchange was the "enunciator" a metal tab next to the switch board cords that would drop to indicate when the parties had terminated their conversation and the receiver had been placed on its yoke. During cold weather, the "enunciator" would stick and not drop and it was not known by the operator if the parties on the line had ended their conversation.

Scratch paper was used to record toll calls, and a rent receipt was handed out for payment of a bill. When calls were made on the party line, there was little to control the time, how long the line was used or who was listening in on the conversation. The party line was the neighborhood listening post, and entertainment and gossip center.

The telephone system in Auburn was altered to conform with Sacramento's Hampton Express System in 1895. Auburn's first telephone directory of 1895 was printed on a piece of cardboard and listed 62 telephone numbers.

When the area continued to grow following World War II, when there were 1920 telephones on line, a dial service was instituted in Rocklin and Loomis in 1947 and in 1953 dial telephones came to Auburn with the TUrner prefix. The rest is history.

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