

History of the Telephone in Metuchen NJ

The first telephones in Metuchen were installed in 1897 in N.V. Dunham's restaurant on Main Street, near the railroad station and in the grocery of F. Edgar Estate at the corner of Main Street and LeGrand Avenue. (Now Amboy Ave)

These telephones shared a party-line connected to the Perth Amboy switchboard.

The December 1, 1893, directory of the New York and New Jersey Telephone Company listed the following Metuchen subscribers (served from Perth Amboy, there being no switchboard in Metuchen):

Becker, R. H. Jr. Hotel Brunswick

Coudert, F. R. Residence

Dempsey, John, Livery

Edgar, Chas. S., Residence

Estate, F. Edgar, Groceries

Hoffman, F. G., Residence

Hunt, A. Clark, M. D.

McAdams, Wm. F. , Groceries

McKenzie, W. V. , M. D. , Physician

Metuchen Club, The

Pattison, Frank A. , Residence

Tapping, J. H. , Druggist

Whitman, John M. , Residence

Metuchen's first telephone switchboard was installed on February 6, 1900, in the rear of Mr. C. A. Prickitt's drug store in the old Wittnebert Building on Main Street. It was a small one-position board of the magneto type-small cranks at each instrument were used to generate the ringing current and batteries at each telephone supplied the calling current. This switchboard at first served about fifty subscribers. Harold Tappen was the first telephone operator here. In his absence calls were handled by S. H. Crampton, the drug clerk, or by St. George Kempson, who was glad to substitute for his friend after school hours without pay-just for the fun of it. Mr. Kempson, still a resident of Metuchen, was subsequently employed by New Jersey Bell Telephone Company at its headquarters in Newark. He retired in 1947. The first girl operator was Miss Daily Martin.

When Mr. Prickitt moved his store to the Burroughs Building at the corner of Main St. and Station Place, the switchboard was moved too, and placed in the bay window behind the prescription counter. Metuchen was one of the first towns in New Jersey to have selective ringing whereby only one bell on a party-line rang, instead of all the bells ringing simultaneously, necessitating the use of code ring for each party. In a couple of years the increase in the numbers of subscribers made it necessary to install a two-position switchboard upstairs.

During the first decade of Metuchen's telephone service most of the calls were placed by name instead of by telephone number. When the number of subscribers was approaching three hundred, memorizing the numbers of all subscribers was a real job for each new telephone operator.

As the number of subscribers increased additions were made to the switchboard. By 1926, there were over 1,000 telephones and a new switchboard and larger quarters were required. On October 30, the office was moved to Hillside Avenue, where a new "common battery" switchboard had been installed.

That was the end of the hand-cranking days for with this new type of switchboard lifting the receiver signaled the operator and talking current was supplied by large batteries at the central office.

In the last decade, Metuchen's telephone service has grown impressively- both in number of phones and quality of service. In 1947, for example, there were only 3,900 phones, while today the number of telephones in the Metuchen exchange area totals 17,000.

In July, 1955 – with the opening of the new central office at Main Street and Durham Avenue – dial service was introduced in Metuchen. This improvement enabled 4 –party customers to dial locally and, in addition, gave individual and 2-party users dial service to most of New Jersey and to New York City.

On August 18 of this year, Metuchen's dial territory will be expanded for one, two and four-party subscribers and include many places across the country, as far west as San Francisco.

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From the notes of Lloyd Grimstead. Possibly written by Lloyd in the 1950's