

We who are to-day accustomed to the daily use of the telephone as a necessity of commerce, rarely stop to consider what a perfect marvel that invention is, which reproduces, fifty miles away, the notes of a piano, the music of a band, nay, even the cadences of the human voice which make it recognizable. The telegraph wire and its function has ceased to be a novelty or a wonder, but thirty years ago it had not. The stoical Indian who heard the humming of the wires in the breeze near the reservation, told his squaw that the Great Spirit was muttering over this curious metal thread. The French-Canadian women warned their children away from the posts, declaring that the swaying wire was uncanny and indeed was fatal to birds as well as boys. It was not clear to Farmer Hayseed, either, how the messages passed over the wire from town to town. He "never see'd no papers a-flyin' past, for all me an' Lucindy watched right clost, many a night, arter chores was done."

But perhaps the most incomprehensible wonder to the popular mind was the discovery of the possibility that an operator could "take by sound." That is, instead of relying upon legible signals made upon a moving strip of paper by the point of the armature, it was possible to make out a telegraph message from the sounds made by the brass instrument while it inscribed these characters. Mr. Ben. B. Toye, now the electrician of the Great North-Western Company at Toronto, who began his career as messenger for the Montreal Company about 1849, was probably the first person in Canada to demonstrate the practicability of receiving by sound. It was a startling novelty, even to his superior officer, who for many a day hesitated to admit the entire trustworthiness of the system, and was wont to insist upon the tape being kept running at the same time that the ear was translating the signals, in order that a check might be had, in visible characters, upon the too precocious cleverness of this unique operator. It is something which Mr. Toye possibly remembers with gratification, that while he was receiving messages by sound, the telegraph people in that now wonderful city, Chicago, were still relying upon the clumsy mode, since become so nearly obsolete, of reading by paper. Old telegraphers still recount with what curious admiring interest they watched him receiving messages by sound. And merchants would linger, puzzled, in the telegraph office, wondering what manner of lad he was whose ear could catch the significance of the mysterious dots and dashes as they rattled over the instrument, and unaided by the eye, translate them into words and sentences. During the time when Mr. Dwight, busy extending lines westward, made Hamilton his temporary headquarters, the Toronto telegraph office was under the charge of Mr. Toye, whose name was as familiar in the mouths of the craft as household words, not only in Canada, but in the Eastern and Western States. Mr. Toye is best known as an electrician. He is, indeed, an inventor of no mean order, as various improved switches, relays, and automatic repeaters, creatures of his brain, testify.

"It is needless to deny that, to most people who have engaged in it, there is a fascination about telegraphy which, if not always strong enough to compel one to remain engaged in it, is yet usually strong enough to keep awake one's interest in the subject." So wrote, not long before his lamented death, a worthy member of the Guild, Mr. William Cassils. That gentleman was with the Montreal Telegraph Company for a long series of years as operator, then manager, afterwards divisional superintendent at Quebec; and he became, some

years before he died, a director of the company resident in Montreal. Some reminiscences of telegraphy in Canada in its earlier days were furnished by him to the writer of these papers. Readers of THE MONETARY TIMES will find them interesting.

"I was a more or less raw Scotch lad," said Mr. Cassils, "when I entered the telegraph service, and when I had learned to master the instrument, I was set to work the Troy line in the Montreal office. The Troy line was at first operated in a room at the rear of the Odd-fellows' building, in that city, but by 1851 it had been moved into the front office, and was operated by the Montreal Company. The operator at Troy was then Mr. Norman W. Bethune, now District Superintendent of the Great North-Western Telegraph Company at Ottawa. He had graduated as a telegrapher in Canada, and has the honor of being one of the earliest, as well as one of the ablest, Canadian telegraphers.

"At the date of which I write, there was no bridge over the St. Lawrence, nor were there any submarine telegraph cables. The St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers were crossed at the following points: At Bout de l'Isle the wire was strung on masts 129 feet high, in two stretches of No. 16 iron wire; one of about 800 feet and the other of 600 feet. At Lachine Rapids, as early as the year 1848, on masts 150 feet high, in two stretches of about three-quarters of a mile each. To maintain these crossings, and especially that at the Rapids, was an expensive and hazardous operation. Every gale of wind, or sleet storm, brought down the wire. To repair the Lachine crossing it was necessary to employ a batteau with a dozen or more men; also a canoe with two men. Interruptions at this crossing were frequent, and sometimes of long duration. On these occasions the operator at St. John, C.E., would shut up shop and re-open at Laprairie, whence messages from Montreal to the South were sent in the summer season per steamer "Iron Duke," then plying between the island wharf and Laprairie several times per day.

"In connection with the Lachine crossing, I think of Mike Connors, a tall Irishman, of perhaps forty years of age, who, about 1835, had learned the trade of shipbuilding in the yard at Hochelaga, where Mr. Hugh Allan, then a young man, too busy with the work of the day to be thinking of his eventful future, was busied with the construction of vessels for the house of which he afterwards became such a prominent member. Mike lived close to the Rapids, and, being an adept at handling craft, his services were in frequent demand by the company. He had under him a gang of men, who, for some reason into which we need not enquire, were styled 'the forty thieves.' Mike showed great presence of mind in emergencies, and had apparently been born to command. In his normal state, he commanded with moderation, but when under the influence of certain inspiration which he loved to 'conceal about his person,' he commanded in terms more forcible than elegant. My latest recollection of him is in connection with a visit he paid at the office of the company in St. James' street, Montreal, when, not finding the secretary in a suitable frame of mind, Mike emphasized his demand for money by throwing, in a fit of rage, an ink-bottle, or something of the sort, at the head of that officer. Mr. James Poustie, who is 'with us unto this day,' had, previous to the date of my joining the company, become a regular line repairer, and he has, during the forty intervening years, built more lines throughout Canada than any other man. The company had built a batteau for use in connection

with the crossing of the Rapids. In this craft Mr. Poustie, Mike Connors, and a gang of men actually ran the Lachine Rapids in the winter of 1851—a feat which, about twenty-five years later, was repeated by others, who imagined they were doing something which had never before been accomplished. Mr. Poustie is not given to boasting, or he would have publicly claimed priority when the repetition of the feat was being noticed in the newspapers."

After some years spent persistently fighting the difficulty of crossing at the Rapids, permission was obtained from the Imperial Government to use St. Helen's Island, opposite Montreal, for crossing purposes. So, in 1852, masts of about 215 feet high were erected on the island, and on the mainland near Molson's brewery. From these was suspended a stretch of light wire of about three-quarters of a mile in length. All the shipping entering the harbor necessarily passed under this wire. In the winter, when the river 'took,' the wire was lowered and rested on temporary poles erected on the ice. In the summer of 1852 an attempt was made to lay, under St. Mary's Current, a leaden pipe two-thirds of a mile in length, containing an insulated conductor. It was not a success. The piping stretched in the laying, and the insulation of the conductor was imperfect. It was not until 1854 that well-constructed submarine telegraph cables came into general use, when the use of masts in crossing rivers was abandoned.

#### GODERICH BOARD OF TRADE.

Railway extension, improved lake connections, the lumber trade and insurance, were each referred to at the annual meeting of the Goderich Board of Trade, which was held a short time ago. Communications from other boards of trade on various matters were received during the year and given due attention. The report draws attention to the apathy shown by some members, and says:

"There are many matters which will suggest themselves to your minds which we could take hold of, but unless there be something like organized effort on the part of our merchants and business people in any of these, we can never hope to accomplish even the smallest of them. What is mostly wanted is an increased attendance at meetings. We are all surely imbued with the same desire to see the town prosper, and a live, active board of trade can do a great deal to this end."

The election of officers for the ensuing year resulted as follows: President, R. S. Williams; vice-president, Jos. Kidd; treasurer, R. Radcliffe; secretary, J. Mitchell. Council: J. H. Colborne, M. Hutchison, F. Jordan, Joseph Beck, A. Saunders, C. A. Humber, D. C. Strachan, Capt. McGregor, J. Carey, R. Price, A. S. Christal, W. Lee, C. A. Nairn, F. Pridham, W. Campbell.

#### ST. THOMAS BOARD OF TRADE.

In his annual address, delivered on the 29th of April, the president of the St. Thomas Board of Trade refers to the past year as being an uneventful one in the history of that city. No failures of any importance have occurred among the merchants, while the railways enjoyed a season of "unparalleled prosperity," which has been reflected in mercantile lines to a large extent, giving steadiness and volume to trade at a time when the farming community is buying the least, and consequently when it is most welcome. The