

# The Economical Aspect of the Rural Telephone

In March 1876 Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone. The patenting, however, amounted to very little for it took two years of hard work to convince the people that his invention was anything better than a toy. The first switch board in the world was installed at New Haven, Conn., January 25, 1878. It was made out of a packing box and brass strips. This gives some idea of how very rapidly this great invention has been developed. When North America awoke to the importance of the telephone every city from coast to coast wanted a telephone exchange. Considering the crudity of the telephone art at that time the problem of filling this demand must have been appalling. Here was an engineering problem, which is to-day conceded as the most difficult and complex in elec-



Winter has no terrors for the farmer whose home is equipped with a telephone.

trical science, confronting a company which could not find men to solve it. There were no telephone engineers because there had been no such thing as a telephone.

But the work had to be done. The only way to learn how to do it was to learn by doing. So one year they began with an apparatus as crude as you and I would make if someone told us to go out and build a telephone exchange to-day. Next year something better was discovered, and all the work of the previous year had to be torn out and thrown on the dump.

Thus the great art of modern telephony was acquired—experiments were tried and the telephone by a process of experiments tried, and they in turn discarded and superseded by something still newer and better. To augment the difficulty hundreds of cities, towns and villages were earnestly demanding service. While the evolution of the telephone by process of experimentation was going on, necessarily at the expense and inconvenience of the users, the character

of the service and the cost to the subscriber, can easily be appreciated.

In less than twenty years the sum of the experiments had resulted in the standardized and perfected equipment; at the same time exchanges had been established at practically every important point, connecting hundreds of thousands of subscribers. Long distance telephones across the continent had become an achieved fact. When the apparatus was perfected of course the service was vastly improved. When it became standardized and could be used for the full term of its durability, the price naturally was greatly reduced. Thus with the inducement of improved service and lower prices and with completely equipped plants to manufacture the apparatus in unlimited quantities, the possibility for the growth of the business became at once apparent. Hundreds of thousands of telephones were installed in the course of the next decade.

The Bell Telephone Company which was the parent company and which is the largest one in existence to-day, grew from 600,000 stations in 1909 to 5,000,000 stations in 1910. Until about 1905 the entire growth was confined to cities and towns; but after completing the service at urban points attention was directed to the rural sections, and here began one of the most remarkable epochs in the history of telephone development.

In less than five years over a million telephones were installed in the homes of farmers. About this time the farmer began to take hold of the telephone proposition himself and thousands of independent rural lines were established. In the districts where timber was plentiful it was an easy matter for him to get the telephone poles on his own farm and to build a rural line at a very small cost to himself and to his neighbors. It is a fact that the farmer has spent more money for the rural telephone than he has for any other one invention in the same length of time. A great many of these rural telephone lines were bought up by the larger companies, as it became difficult for the farmer to secure long distance connection. But if we travel over the country to-day, especially on the other side of the line, we will still see thousands of these little rural telephone lines in use. They have saved the far-

mers millions of dollars in ways too numerous to mention. They have created a spirit of satisfaction on the farm that has turned thousands of young men countryward rather than towards the large industrial points. Go into hundreds of thousands of our farm homes to-day and the ring of the telephone is a familiar sound.

The value of telephone service to the farmer needs no further comment. Instances without number might be given from actual circumstances where the



The family are safe with a telephone.

telephone by a single call has paid for itself many times over. There is, however, a certain aspect to the importance of the rural telephone, so the cause of the farmer which has not been duly emphasized. It is its influence upon the economical conditions of rural life.

It has often been said in reference to agricultural organization that you cannot get the farmers to pull together. The "Farmers' Alliance" is said to have failed for that reason. Attempts have been made to organize the farmers in certain localities to hold out against low prices for produce and not sell their crops until they could get a certain price. The failure of this plan in practice might be partly due to the fact that a farmer is compelled in some instances to sell his crops almost at any price to get money for urgent necessities, yet it is absurd to say that a majority of the farmers are in this condition. The chief reason that it has always been impossible to organize the farmers effectually is simply because of the isolation of the individual members. In order to get men to act together it requires not only a leader, but the leader must be in almost constant touch with his constituents in order to hold them together by the strength of

his purpose, the clarity of his reasoning and the magnetism of his enthusiasm. It is easy enough to keep men in line when you are present with them, the time they get away from you is when they are alone with their thoughts and nobody present to answer the little whys and wherefores of the doubting mind. A good complete rural telephone exchange binds the people of a community together as effectually as if they were in the same village. No matter where the isolated farmer lives, nor how impassable the winter storm may render the lonely lane leading to his home, the telephone keeps him in touch with a hundred friends. There are few people who realize it, but the rural telephone is uniting the farmers in an organization as compact as that of any social or commercial organization in our cities.

Another thing the rural telephone is doing is keeping the farmer's son and farmer's daughter on the farm. By destroying the isolation of farm life it is making the home attractive to the younger people. Young men are fitting themselves at the agricultural college for a life on the farm, for life on the farm has become as congenial as life in the city. Bright young women are marrying these men, and their children will represent a still higher strata of intelligence for the future progress of the farmer.

And again, the rural telephone has made a distinct change in the



What is the price of wheat? The telephone knows. farmer's business methods. By keeping the farmer in constant touch with his markets the rural telephone is said to have increased the farmer's annual income five per cent. To-day, instead of asking the merchant to buy, the farmer can wait until the merchant asks him to sell. In other words he does not load his produce on the market wagon by guess and when he gets to town with his load place himself at the mercy of the buyer. Nor does he have to take the word of the itinerate buyer as to price and demand. His long distance rural phone renders the markets of the state available at a few moments' notice. The in-

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