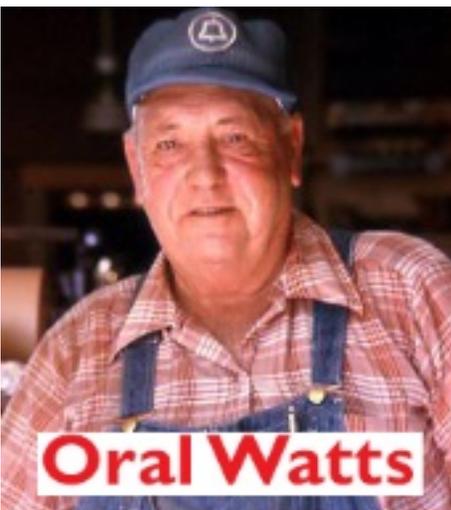


A HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF ATCA

by Chuck Eby

Prior to any telephone related association, collectors and fanciers of telephones, such as, Oral Watts, A.G. Van Nortwick, Al Farmer, Tom Herwer, Ron Knappen, etc., independently collected, restored or sold instruments and parts. Around 1970 Tom Herwer, #18, placed an ad in the **Antique Trader**, to locate others with an interest in telephones and along with Al Farmer, #15, collected the names of a dozen collectors. They had preliminary plans for forming THE ANTIQUE TELEPHONE CLUB so that information on their hobby could be shared with others. During the process, they heard of the early planning stages of the ATCA, gave up the idea of forming another club and passed on the names they had collected to the newly formed ATCA.

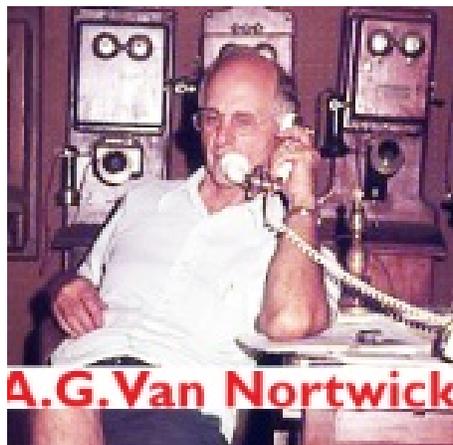
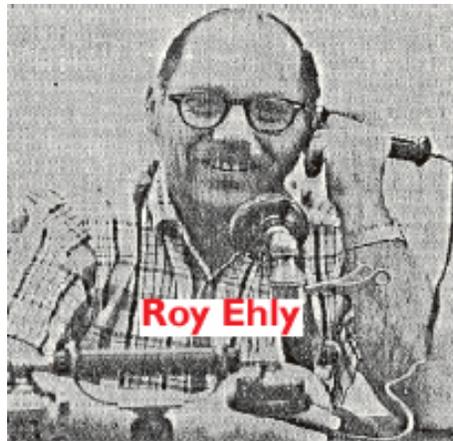
The very beginning of the ATCA can be traced to a sidewalk sale held in the small town of LaCrosse, Kansas. Oral Watts, #1, had been invited to attend the sale with his telephones. The twelve



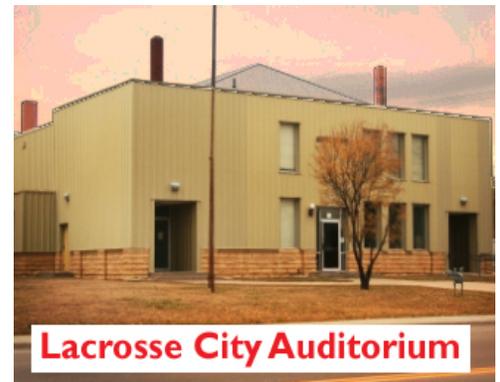
foot U-Haul trailer full of phones that Oral took inspired a lot of town interest in antique phones.

At about the same time, A.G. Van Nortwick, or "Van" #5, met Roy Ehly, #70, of LaCrosse, at a Telephone Pioneers meeting in Wichita, KS. After a great deal of talk between the two, Van suggested a possible sponsorship of a telephone collector's group by the Chamber of Commerce of La Crosse. The Chamber was interested in attracting more visitors and business to town and subsequently voted to sponsor a telephone collectors meeting and show.

That first known meeting of telephone collectors was organized prior to the formation



of and collector club by C.A. Smith, #20, the Chamber of Commerce Secretary of La Crosse, and Roy Ehly, City Councilman and an employee of Southwestern Bell Telephone Company. La Crosse was already the site of the La Crosse Post Rock Museum and the Kansas Barbed Wire Association Museum. La Crosse, claiming to be the "Barbed Wire Capital of the World", was the headquarters for the Kansas Barbed Wire Association and would soon become the headquarters of the Antique Telephone Collectors Association.



At the suggestion of Van, invitations to the April 3rd and 4th, 1971 show, were sent to a number of known collectors formed from a list of Ron Knappen's, #45, telephone parts buyers and from Tom Herwer's list. Newspaper clippings of the show reported that twenty collectors attended the show with about a thousand people viewing the many telephones on display. On Saturday night, April 3rd, the collectors in attendance, met with C.A. Smith and Roy Ehly in the kitchen of the La Crosse

Municipal Auditorium and decided to form an association with headquarters to be established in La Crosse. ATCA would remain in La Crosse until it moved to Abilene in 1982. It was at that kitchen meeting that the men decided to assign membership numbers, with Oral Watts being the first to join. That group of men could never have realized that so many collectors, over the years, would be identified and join the association.

The first annual fall show as an official association was scheduled for September 25 and 26, 1971, once again at the La Crosse Municipal Auditorium. At that show, the proposed Articles of Incorporation and Association Bi-Laws were adopted. The by-laws re-mained in effect until they were amended at the 1975 annual meeting and in 1987. Five directors, A.G. Van Nortwick, #5, Oral Watts; #1; Wane Stull, #11; Roy Ehly, #70; and Ed Downing (NM), who later resigned and was replaced by John Murphy, #8, were elected. The directors appointed C.A. Smith, President. Dan Foster, #73, Vice President, and Merrill Humburg, #56, Secretary. These eight men were the incorporators. A charter was applied for and granted, giving the Antique Telephone Collectors Association legal authority to operate as an organization on November 11, 1971. At that time there were twenty paid members.

Growth came rapidly for the first membership list on January, 1972, (arranged by membership number) contained forty nine names and by the annual meeting in April, 1972, there were seventy two members. One year later, at the April 1973 meeting, there were one hundred twenty eight members on the membership list (arranged alphabetically).

Rapid growth of the ATCA came through word of mouth by the enthusiastic membership to other collectors. Also, a great deal of credit must be given to Ron Knappen for spreading the word in his catalogs, plus an article suggested by Steve Hilsz and written by Ray Blain in the **Telephony** magazine told of the association.

The association has been most visible through the monthly newsletters, the regional shows and the annual fall shows held in different regions of the country. Obviously over the years this has changed with the advent of the internet and then social media.

In 1996 Chuck Eby #381 developed an internet presence when he formed an association webpage as part of his personal web space. This page was then adopted by the board as the official page and in May of 2000 the current website of atcaonline.com came into being. Chuck also formed an association email group, or listserv, also in late 1996. As more people

became aware of the positive aspects of the internet and social media became commonplace, Allen Rockefeller #3642 and Mike Davis #2202 formed an ATCA group on Facebook which has attracted thousands of subscribers.

The first **ATCA Newsletter** was published on January 20, 1972, and has continued without interruption. Every newsletter has been digitized and is available to view on our website.

The first Fall Show was held in La Crosse, KS hosted by the Chamber of Commerce. Oral Watts decided to continue with a show and hosted the second Fall Show in Coffeyville, Kansas. At that show it was decided to make the Fall Show an annual event held at different locations around the country. The third Fall Show was hosted by Al Farmer in Lincoln, Nebraska. This tradition has given each member the opportunity to attend a show without having to travel great distances. As hotel expenses have increased, it has become more and more difficult to find locations that we can afford. Since 2012 the show has been held at the very reasonably priced Shipshewana, Indiana. The Fall/Summer annual traditional show has continued for fifty years until the world wide Pandemic of 2020 closed our show due to travel restrictions and quarantine. This was the first interruption of our shows since 1971