
Central and northwest Kansas news

Antique telephone buffs converge on La Crosse

By BILL SIDLINGER

LA CROSSE — It was not possible to make a telephone call from the La Crosse city auditorium Sunday despite the fact there were about 170 telephones in the hall.

But none of the telephones was connected, although most were in working order. And for those that were not in working order, their owners were trying to swap missing or faulty parts with other collectors at the 3rd Antique Telephone Collectors association exhibit.

Most of the exhibitors would not part with any of their collection of antique telephones for money — only by swapping for some telephone equipment they wanted.

Prices listed

But Oral P. Watts, who owns the Old Telephone Exchange and Museum at Coffeyville, has prices on some items and the prices would lead an observer to believe Mr. Watts is well aware of the rise in the cost of living index. Certainly antique telephones are increasing in value at a much faster rate than the Dow Jones Industrials.

Other collectors were willing to sell such collectibles as telephone line insulators, which apparently were made in an amazing variety of colored glass.

And although there were wall phones, old fashioned desk phones, phones in cabinets, and phones hanging from wires, telephones and insulators obviously weren't the only items that interested the collectors.

Telephone Memorabilia

There were all sorts of telephone memorabilia on hand, including large numbers of postal cards which mentioned the telephone in some way.

One exhibitor had a complete set of colored cards with a pretty girl talking on the telephone, apparently uttering such homilies as "Hello — Don't you think stolen kisses are always sweetest?" That only a daring bit of ankle was shown by each of the telephoning ladies indicated these cards must have been from the pre-World War I era.

John L. Murphy, owner of the Gorham Telephone Co., had an exhibit composed mostly of old wall type phones, but including the old switchboard from the Galatia exchange, a switchboard that looked as though it would be too small for almost any office.

The exhibitor who made the longest trip to the exhibit was Dr. Francis X. Fellers, Cambridge, Mass., who managed to get to the association's meeting about 6 pm Saturday after flying from Massachusetts to Kansas City and renting a car there to drive to La Crosse.

Dr. Fellers, however, was in time for a combination social and business meeting Saturday evening.

In an election of officers, C.A. Smith, La Crosse, who has been president of the association, swapped offices with Merrill Humburg, La Crosse, who has been secretary. Dan Foster, La Crosse, remained on as vice president.

John Murphy, Gorham, was named to the board of directors replacing Ed Downing of Atwood. Other directors are Roy Ehly, La Crosse; Wayne Stull, Great Bend; A. G. Van Norwich, Wichita; and Oral P. Watts, Coffeyville.

Clyde Amerine, a member of Barton County Community College's popular singing combo, The Hilltoppers, entertained the visiting collectors with folk songs.