



*Skokie's first telephone exchange was established in 1910. Pictured here is Mrs. Martha Kindt at the switchboard in her home that year on Galitz Avenue near Main Street.*

## SKOKIE AND THE TELEPHONE

Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876. Just a few years earlier, Indians hunted here, log cabins were built in three days and wolves brought a \$20 bounty.

The telephone has been one of the real "pioneers" in the industrial and social life of Skokie.

In fact, there is evidence that the man generally credited with being the founder of the village, Henry Harms, was also the first person here to have a telephone in his home.

"Farmer Harms" settled here in December, 1854. In 1886, a toll station listing in the Chicago Telephone Directory carried the following listing: "Niles Center, Ill. . . . Henry Harms, res. . . . 25¢."

That was two years before what is now the Village of Skokie was incorporated as Niles Center. On March 6, 1888, 41 votes were cast in favor of village organization, 16 against incorporating as a village and one solitary vote was cast against incorporating in any form.

The phone in the Harms home was a public telephone hooked up with the Chicago-Milwaukee toll line which was placed in service in 1882.

Another prominent early resident, George C. Klehm, who moved here from Northfield in 1864, also had the local telephone toll station in his home during the early 1890's.

In 1910, Niles Center received its first telephone exchange. A switchboard was installed in the home of Mrs. Martha Kindt on the south side of Galitz Avenue near Main Street. Mrs. Kindt was the manager of this first exchange.

Mrs. Kindt provided service for 70 customers that year. Only 3 customers had private lines. The majority were on 4 and 10-party lines.

To make a call in 1910, telephone users turned a crank, pressed a knob and waited for their own bell to ring. Then they turned a switch, waited for Mrs. Kindt to come on the line and then told her whom they wanted. Then they hung up and waited for their bell to ring again. This meant the party they were calling was on the line. After hanging up, they signaled Mrs. Kindt so she could disconnect the line.

Niles Center residents used this magneto type telephone service until 1929.

During these years, the town was a small rural community with truck gardening as the principal industry.

Then in 1924, lightning struck. The commuter railroad came to town. After the completion of the Skokie branch of the Chicago, North Shore and Milwaukee Railroad that year, Niles Center soon developed into a suburban business and residential area.

This growth brought increased need for more and better telephone communication facilities. In 1929, Illinois Bell completed construction of a new two-story Niles Center central office.

At 9:35 p.m., Saturday, September 7, of that year Niles Center Mayor John E. Brown placed the first telephone call through the battery switchboard installed in the new building. All he had to do was pick up the phone. This activated a signal at the switchboard, and an operator answered and completed the call. The magneto phone was history.



*Magneto telephone service in Skokie ended with the construction of this central office at 8231 Niles Center Road in 1929.*

There were 1,252 telephone customers in Niles Center in 1929. But that number was not destined to grow significantly for some time. It was the year of the bust.

During the boom of the 1920's, home-hungry Chicagoans moved in droves to the suburbs. Evanston's choice residential locations were quickly purchased and the overflow invaded Niles Center.

The 1929 depression left Niles Center with 30,000 vacant lots, 95% equipped with paved streets, sidewalks, lighting, sewers and water. No other northern suburb had so much improved but unused property. For years, no taxes or assessments were paid on this land.

The building revival began in 1940, and on October 1 of that year an issue which had been fraying tempers since 1935 was resolved. Niles Center changed its name to Skokie.

Early the same year residents voted to name the village "Ridgeview," but the town trustees vetoed the selection and appointed a committee to settle the matter. Their choice was "Skokie", an approximation of the Pottowatamie Indian word for "swamp." It was what the Indians called this area prior to its purchase by the United States in 1833.

Along with the big boom of the 1950's came the dial telephone. And since that time, telephone service improvements and rate reductions have been offered at an unprecedented rate.

In 1960, Skokie telephone customers began dialing station-to-station long distance calls direct. Touch-Tone telephones were introduced here in 1965, and this year the modern Trimline telephone became available.

According to recently compiled statistics, Skokie is now the world's third city in terms of the number of telephones per 100 residents. There are 80 telephones for every 100 persons living here. Washington, D.C. is first with 92.6 and White Plains, New York, is second with 84.5.

As Skokie, our nation's largest village, continues to change and prosper, Illinois Bell will continue to build and grow to meet the needs of citizens here.



*Dial telephone switching equipment was placed in service here October 25, 1952. Standing behind telephone company technicians, ready to pull the ribbons which will place the new equipment in service, are (l to r) Mayors George Wilson of Skokie, Henry Proesel of Lincolnwood and Max Finke of Morton Grove.*