



## *May 2024*

*~Carol Schweizer*

Happy Spring (well almost)! It is still pretty chilly as I write this.

The Program Committee, once again, brought us a very interesting program for the April 1st meeting. Sean Kelleher, historian of the Town of Saratoga, was our speaker. He gave us an amazing history of 17<sup>th</sup> century martyr, Saint Isaac Jogues.

Please note the following message. In recent years, Galway Preservation Society has not held a business meeting for most of our meetings. The two months when we do have a brief meeting, are May and September. The May 6<sup>th</sup> meeting is important because we are required to vote for the officers for the year ahead. Please plan to be with us at 7:00pm so we have the required quorum.

The nominating committee is presenting the following slate for 2024-2025: President-Carol Schweizer, Vice President-Coleen Germond, Secretary-Teri Pudney, Treasurer-Darby Neahr, and Trustee-Julie Hoxsie.

Following the brief meeting, the program will be presented by Schenectady County Historical Society Director of Education and Historian, Michael Diana on the history of Wolf Hollow, a unique geological formation in West Glensville. This is sure to be another interesting program. Please join us at 7:00pm on May 6 for the meeting followed by the program.

Galway Preservation Society will have a booth in the Village Park at the annual Memorial Day. Our periodicals will be available to purchase. It would be wonderful for any of our members to join in the parade that day, May 27<sup>th</sup> as we show our beautiful GPS Banner. If you are interested in marching, let me know at 518 882-1023. The parade marches from the Dockstader Park to Galway Central School.

A note about an event this Saturday, May 4<sup>th</sup>, a presentation and opening reception for a traveling exhibit "Messages From Survivors: One Family's Holocaust Legacy" will be held at the Galway Public Library from 11-2. Related events and programs will be held through the month. For information, and to register to attend the opening reception, please call the Library at 518-882-6385

## *Operator, The baby is on the way!* *The Galway Telephone Company 1903-1932*

~Dave Waite

On December 13, 1882, Nicholas Shaul's store in Barkersville, Town of Providence, Saratoga County was destroyed by fire. While the contents were a total loss, it was noted in the *Daily Saratogian* that 20-year-old Charlie Steele took time away from fighting the fire to save the store's telephone. Today we would scratch our heads if this made the news, but 140 years ago it was vital information as this was the only telephone for miles around this isolated hamlet.

It was only two years after Alexander Graham Bell patented his telephone technology in 1876 that the first telephone exchange was established in New Haven, Connecticut. For the next 18 years, all telephones were leased from the corporation established by Bell. With growth and mergers, what was started by Alexander Bell soon became the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, commonly known today as A. T. & T.

### **GALWAY NOW HAS A TELEPHONE COMPANY**

**Use of Telephone Rapidly Increasing  
in Saratoga County—Two New  
Lines.**

The building of independent telephone lines throughout Saratoga county is going on apace. Two lines have been completed in the southern part of the county comprising fifty instruments in the homes of farmers and vicinity stores and business places and connection has also been secured with the Hudson River Telephone company and the long distance company, so that from many a farm house communication can be had with the great world outside.

One of the latest companies to organize is the Galway Telephone company, which has for its field the town of Galway and portions of Milton and Charlton. The headquarters are at Galway and connection is made with a long dis-

*Amsterdam Evening Recorder Sept. 24, 1903*

By 1881 these leased telephones were ringing in Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, as well as many other of the larger communities surrounding Saratoga County. Because of the high cost and low-profit potential, the Bell Telephone monopoly ignored the rural areas except for leased phones on lines to individuals or businesses like the Shaul Store mentioned earlier. It would be 20 years before telephone service would reach homes in rural Saratoga County, with people from the Village of Galway leading the way in this effort. The movement to bring telephones into rural America began in 1893 when patents on the Bell telephone handset expired and low-cost options became available. One of these new providers was Montgomery Ward, who by 1900 was selling hand crank telephones and everything short of telephone poles needed to install and maintain a telephone system. To facilitate the development of telephone communication, they also began publishing *Rural Telephone Lines and How to Build Them*. This thirty-page booklet was produced to instruct those with no experience working with electricity or

telephone wiring in all aspects of building rural telephone circuits. All of this was accomplished in the first 15 pages, with the remainder of the pamphlet providing detailed descriptions of the telephone equipment and materials that Montgomery Ward offered for sale.

The Galway Telephone Company was incorporated in October of 1903 with a capital of five thousand dollars funded with 500 shares of stock at ten dollars each, all of which were purchased by the six directors and their families:

Charles Frederick Mairs, 245 shares

The son of Thomas & Emma Mairs, Charles grew up in Galway and was well-known in the village. Though his work for the Richfield Springs Railway Company took him away from the village, he had inherited a house on South Street in Galway that he used as his summer home. His wife Elizabeth also purchased 50 shares. Charles Frederick Mairs passed away in New York City in 1904, only a year after the Galway Telephone Company was established.

Harvey R. Crouch, 200 shares

53-year-old Harvey Crouch owned a dry goods store in the village of Galway that he later sold to his nephews and was renamed Robinson Brothers' Store.

Herbert Carlton Crouch, 1 share

The 25-year-old son of Harvey & Charlotte Crouch, Herbert trained as an electrician and worked as a lineman in the early years of the telephone company.

Walter Anderson Balch, 1 share.

A paper hanger/house painter, 28-year-old Walter lived in the family home on West Street in the village.

Fred J. Saxton, 1 share

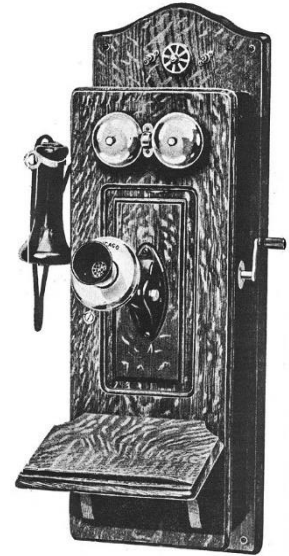
Frederic Saxton and his wife Margaret lived on East Street in a home that sat behind the First Associate Presbyterian Church parsonage. Fred, age 52, worked as a day laborer in Galway.

John Elsworth Cavert, 1 share

58 years old when he became a director for the telephone company, John was a Civil War veteran who served as a private in Company F of the 110<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteers. On returning from the war he took up farming in Galway.

The first switchboard was in the home of Harvey Crouch with his 22-year-old daughter Edith as the operator. As the switchboard operator, Edith earned one hundred dollars a year. By December 1903 poles were being set, and soon after the New Year telephones had been installed as far out as West Charlton.

The Galway Telephone Company system was a single grounded wire network connected to what was the standard for that time, a hand-crank telephone. While the speech transmission on these early telephones was powered by dry-cell batteries either within the telephone or mounted beside it on the wall, the ringer was run by a hand-cranked generator. By varying the amount that the crank was turned the caller would make long and short rings that would ring on every phone connected to the multi-phone, or “party” line they were on. To call a telephone on another line, one ring would be made while holding a button on the side of the telephone that directed the ring only to the switchboard.



Each telephone on the party line was given a unique series of long and short rings announcing that the call was directed to their telephone. Here are some of the earliest people to be connected to the Galway Telephone Company circuits and their rings:

**West Galway Circuit:**

John Davidson - 5 short  
 Hecker Store - 2 short  
 Hecker House - 1 long, 1 short  
 A & T. M. Gilchrist – 3 short  
 Rev. A. Wareham – 4 short  
 H. Mead – 6 short  
 Jason Bell – 1 long, 2 short  
 William Welch – 1 long and 3 short  
 M. McWilliams – 1 long, 4 short  
 John Schulze – 1 long, 6 short  
 H. Bunyan – 1 long, 5 short

**Central Galway Circuit:**

H. R. Crouch – 1 short

**Charlton Circuit:**

Dr. St. John – 2 short  
 W.J. Cavert – 3 short  
 Dr. Sweetman – 4 short  
 Callaghan Store -1 long, 1 short  
 Callaghan House -1 long, 4 short  
 Rev. James – 6 short  
 C. Haynes – 1 long, 5 short  
 John Young – 1 long, 3 short  
 J. Glover Store – 1 long, 2 short  
 Glover house – 7 short  
 John Bann – 8 short  
 John Skinner – 9 short  
 William Murtlow – 5 short



McWilliam's Home on Sacandaga Road

By April 1907, the Galway Telephone Company had grown to 119 phones. With this ever-increasing workload, it became impossible for Edith to continue as the sole operator. The telephone switchboard was moved to the Hawley McWilliam home on Sacandaga Road, 2 and 1/2 miles south of the village. With this change, the switchboard was taken over by Hawley's wife Alberta as the Chief Operator, assisted by their 16-year-old daughter Jean. According to W. Bronson Taylor in his book *Stories and Pictures of Galway*, proof of the vital importance of this local telephone service came quickly:

The first call through the new switchboard was the call for a doctor at the birth of a child. The date is definitely recorded in the Town Clerk's Office. The child was Helen G. Robinson, born on April 18, 1907. Jean McWilliams took the call.

The doctor did arrive and the baby was delivered without incident, with Helen growing up to graduate from Potsdam College and becoming an elementary school teacher, marrying Galway native Charles E. Bogue.

Bronson Taylor went on to describe how members of the community used this newly acquired connection to not only keep in touch with their neighbors but also share with others what they saw happening around them. He gave as an example when he was returning home during a snowstorm and those he passed reported his progress to his family and even made themselves available when his wagon got stuck in the drifts along the way.

During the Galway Village fire of September 17, 1908, from the moment it was reported at 5 a.m. that morning, the McWilliam women stayed at the switchboard around the clock transferring calls and connecting families and officials. Through their diligence, resources needed to lessen the catastrophe were brought in without delay

With this need for switchboard operators to connect calls made beyond the party line that a phone was on, they learned many details about the lives and activities of the people and families they served. Throughout all of the years that the McWilliam women served as operators, they never abused that trust, always keeping the personal details they learned to themselves. Bronson Taylor ended by recalling that “Many a time I heard the saying “God Bless Mrs. Mac.”



*Kay & Viola Saunders at Jones home switchboard*

James A. Jones of Ballston Spa purchased the Galway Telephone Company in 1927, soon moving to the village and bringing the switchboard to his South Street home. By this time they were serving 200 customers and had over 45 miles of wire strung through Galway and adjoining communities. Viola Saunders and her younger sister Kay were switchboard operators when the company operated out of the Jones home. Other operators included James’ wife Elizabeth and later Marion Groff.

After taking over the telephone company, James Jones made extensive repairs to the lines and put much effort into assuring that the circuits were in perfect working order. He also continued to extend the service to new customers, with his daughter Betty recalling that he would visit farmers, pointing out the advantage of having a phone if a cow got sick, never mentioning the same benefit for family members.

New York Telephone purchased the company in 1932 for \$10,000, bringing to a close nearly 30 years of telephone service to the local community by men and women of the Galway Telephone Company.

Illustrations: Galway Now Has a Telephone Company, *Amsterdam Evening Recorder*, September 24, 1903; Illustration of Hand Crank Phone from *Rural Telephone Lines and How to Build Them*, 1900, Montgomery Ward; McWilliam Home from *Stories and Pictures of Galway*; the photograph of Kay & Viola Saunders is from *Galway 1900-1949*.

Sources include material from the Galway Preservation Society Archives; Duke University website: [ntca.org](http://ntca.org); *History of the telephone in the United States* at [wikipedia.com](http://wikipedia.com); *The Delia Denison Diary*, 1992 Town of Galway Bicentennial Publication; W. Bronson Taylor’s *Stories and Pictures of Galway*; *Charlton House Letters*, Charlton Historical Society at [charltonnyhs.org](http://charltonnyhs.org); Galway Preservation Society’s *Galway 1900-1949, A Photographic History*, as well as the online newspaper archives at [fultonhistory.com](http://fultonhistory.com) and [nyshistoricnewspapers.org](http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org)