



## The Face of Fillmore

*By Sherry Shepard*

August 3, 2011

The Face of Fillmore this week looks at the changes in communications here in Fillmore over the last century and a half.

As soon as communities were established along the western slope of the mountains from Richmond on the north to St. George on the south, a careful look was taken at the need for communication between settlements.

On April 10, 1865, a special meeting was held in Salt Lake City and a unanimous vote was taken to construct a telegraph line through the southern settlements. As was true with any undertaking, these Mormon settlers divided into numerous construction crews through the areas where they lived and went to work. Soon the Deseret Telephone Company was organized. Under the leadership of Brigham Young, the workers were from all walks of life. Thomas Callister, as District Bishop of Millard County, was in charge of work throughout his county. The crews under his supervision worked quickly, sometimes constructing as many as 20 miles of pole line in one week. By January 15, 1867, the line was completed and in operation to St. George.

At one point, ownership of Deseret Telephone was designated to the bishop in each area. Not many years passed until it was discovered that the cost of maintaining and operating the telegraph line was a major financial problem. Each year it was operated with an increasing loss. The company was sold to Western Union Telegraph Company who operated it until 1902, then decided to dismantle the line and move it to a more profitable area.

This decision was upsetting to the communities and to Bishop Thomas C. Callister, because it was his father who had supervised the construction of the line and he, himself, had worked on it. He undertook to organize a local company to buy the line and keep it in operation. His main obstacle was a financial one. He looked in all of the local communities and found only one man who would help back him financially. James A. Kelly, a young businessman, had just opened a butcher business in Fillmore and was not as much financial help as was needed, but offered his wholehearted support in any way he could. The two of them, along with Bishop Callister's son, T. Clark, who was a senior in engineering school, were about to embark on a great new idea. T. Clark was a pioneer in his field and suggested that they convert the telegraph line to a telephone line. They could operate it themselves and avoid employing trained telegraph operators.



The group purchased the Western Union Telegraph Company and proceeded to change it into the first telephone company in the county. Equipment was first rented from Bell Telephone Company and during the Christmas holiday from college in 1902, the equipment was installed.

The first telephone was installed in Mr. Kelly's meat market with a circuit strung to the post office about a half block away. People came from far away to witness talking on the telephone.

With the first experiment a success, they installed telephone toll stations (pay telephones) in Thompson and Peterson's store in Scipio, George's Store in Kanosh, Mr. Kelly's residence, in the old Olsen home and in Bishop Callister's residence in Fillmore. From there operations expanded to Oasis where it was again connected to a telegraph line, then to Holden, Meadow, Deseret and Hinckley and finally Oak City.

In 1904 the company was incorporated under the name of Millard County Telegraph and Telephone Company. In 1907 a telephone line was constructed to the new town of Burtner, now Delta.

With the expansion of the company, the following advertisement appeared in the March 15, 1913 *Progress* newspaper: "Let us install a telephone in your residence or place of business."

Bishop Callister's home became the local telephone office with the switchboard in the dining room and telephone equipment assembled by workers in the basement. Duane Bartholomew's mother, Zola, was the first telephone operator for the company. (Later the telephone office was located just across the street from the National Guard Armory before moving to its present location.)

The Callister home was built in about 1896 and was originally of red brick. Their family had a history of public and church service with some of them serving as bishop, mayor, superintendent of schools, probate judge, and other prominent positions in the community.

During the depression, T. Clark Callister owned the family home. He wanted to keep his employees working, so he had them paint the individual bricks and mortar on the home.

In 1985, the home was purchased by Mike O'Camb. There he raised his family and made several improvements to the home, including the installation of a spacious bathroom upstairs, as well as a tile roof. He sold the home to Tilden Swallow a year ago.

With all of the new technology in communications, it is hard to imagine that 110 years ago there were no telephones ringing anywhere in the Face of Fillmore.

