

Early Medford Telephone Operator Recalls Some Experiences

By EVA HAMILTON
Mail Tribune Staff Writer

Many are the tales a telephone operator of the early days could tell—if she would talk.

She worked before the word "automation" was coined. She worked in an era when the "wonderful invention" needed a warm heart and sympathetic ear as well as human hands to keep it operating in the manner to which patrons so quickly became accustomed.

With these statements, Mrs. H. R. Burk of 111 King st., Medford, agrees. She is the former Edna Eifert, one of Medford's earliest telephone operators—one of the first voices to respond to "Hello Central."

When the exchange was new and communications poor, she often had to repeat the conversation for both participants.

Had To Be Trusted

"Central" as she was called and she was frequently called, just had to be trusted and she could be. The "hello" girl's lips were sealed then—and Edna's are today. "VIP" and "top secret" were not in her vocabulary but observance of the Golden Rule was in her character.

Considering the exodus of families into this valley from the east when Mrs. Burk was with the telephone company, it is no wild supposition to believe that there were many long distance calls put through the Medford exchange.

There were many romances in the making and in the breaking. Many big financial deals were being "firmed up" in Medford's "Boom Days." Mrs. Burk could probably write a book with a different angle on southern Oregon history, just by quoting those conversations, but anyone who thinks she is about to betray that trust is just a dreamer.

Will Not Be Told

The persons involved may be "no longer of this world" but their conversations on the Bell telephone will not be told.

There were several telephone companies in early Medford, present files of Pacific Northwest Bell reveal.

There was the old Sunset company, probably the first; the Pacific States company and the Home Telephone and Telegraph company. It was for Pacific that Edna worked.

There were two telephone directories during one period of the early 1900s with telephone



ENJOYS REMINISCENCE—Recalling events early in this century in Ada, Ohio, and Medford, Ore., to which she came in 1904, Mrs. H. R. Burk, best known as "Edna," described an era only a few people remember. She was interviewed at her home regarding her experiences as a telephone operator and a soloist.

exchanges in Medford and Ashland. The fire department and the police department had numbers with each. If the person reporting a fire or trying to call police failed to get a response from the number in Directory No. 1, the patron was advised to "call central" and ask for the Directory, No. 2, number.

In Drug Store

When Edna became operator, the switchboard was in the back of Strang's Drug store on Main street. It was Charles Strang, father of Fred Strang of Medford, who got the exchange established here. It failed to serve more than 15 or 16 patrons until he granted free tolls to Jacksonville, then the county seat.

The exchange remained in the drug store until 1908, when it was moved to North Central ave., the present location of the Western Thrift store.

"Hello, Edna" was the common greeting in those days. The joys, the sorrows of many families were reported to cen-

tral. Narrow escapes from disaster and death were sometimes made possible by the telephone girl.

Recalls Hearing Voice

Edna recalls a voice whispering "I'm so sick." She immediately knew from whom the call had come and summoned the woman's husband. He arrived at his home in time to bring her out of a heart attack. He later told the operator he called his wife why she hadn't called him and she replied "I knew Edna would find you."

In town, all calls came through "central." Knowing this, the reporter asked Edna a number of questions regarding Medford events and people. Her repeated answer was "I can't tell you about that."

Her husband, a former Salem resident who came to Medford as building superintendent for construction of the Jackson county courthouse annex, thinks it is quite a coincidence that his first wife was also a tele-

phone operator in the early life of a communication system. She was Nancy Crabtree, first switch board operator in Cambridge, Iowa.

Some families go through life floating along on the edge of the stream or just treading water in the quiet pools. Others seem destined to swim in the main current all the way. As a result their names become linked with history—of a business, of a town or a nation—dependent upon the area of their endeavors. They are participants in events that will be remembered; associates of persons, successful and unsuccessful, but known. The Eifert family was one of these.

When Edna was a young girl in Ohio her father was a Democrat. There are still Democrats in Ohio and there's nothing so memorable about that. But since he was a Democrat when the famous Commoner, William Jennings Bryan, was running for president and his daughter Edna was invited to sing on the same platform with the "silver tongued orator," it is remembered.

A tour to Niagara Falls in 1901 with the chorus from her college was not a momentous occasion, in itself. But when the chorus arrived to hear that the president of the United States had been shot by an anarchist just 1 1/2 hours earlier in nearby Buffalo, that, too, was not to be forgotten.

President McKinley, a native of Ohio, died a week after the shooting to go down in history as another "assassinated president."

Mrs. Burk was a student at Ohio Northern University at Ada on that September day in 1901.



DRESSED FOR THE STAGE—This picture was taken of Mrs. Burk when she was a young girl prepared to step upon the platform for one of her many appearances as a soloist. Through song she felt she served her maker best.

The university must have been even at the turn of the century, a school which offered a wide program. For, although Mrs. Burk was a music major, she was prepared in the commercial field, too.

Coming to Medford, she operated the telephone company's

switchboard. She later supervised the telephone operators, was bookkeeper for Warner, Wortman and Gore, one of the city's largest groceries; cashier and bookkeeper for Hutchison and Lumsden General Mercantile store, operator of the U. S. post office substation on Bartlett street and secretary to the arpent's Local Union.

Ready To Repeat

Knowing people in all sections of Jackson county, she was rated as the cub reporter's best friend. She was always ready to report visitors from the Applegate, Brownboro, Ashland, Gold Hill and Prospect when "towing" was regarded as news in the Local and Personal column.

The Eifert family, W. W. Eifert, who became mayor of Medford, Mrs. Eifert, their five daughters and one son, came to Medford at the insistence of Charley and Callie Palm, who had arrived earlier. Mrs. Palm was Mr. Eifert's sister. Their stories of the southern Oregon country led the Eiferts to hire a coach on the Southern Pacific and start west.

Medford was about the size of Ada, but Ada was old and Medford was new and Ada was a college town. The Eiferts soon found, however, that there was a migration into Jackson county of "people interested in the better things of life." Their daughters had been given the "advantages," training in elocution and music. Edna soon moved into the productions of the Andrews Opera company, church choirs and lodge functions. She, also, sang at funerals.

MORMON CONFERENCE, 10 a.m. Sunday KBES-TV. The 133rd semi-annual conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is broadcast from the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. The famed Tabernacle Chorale will sing.

MORMON CONFERENCE, 2 p.m. Sunday KBOY-FM. Radio broadcast of the same conference. President David O. McKay presiding.

JUDY GARLAND, 9 p.m. Sunday KBES-TV. George Maharis, TV adventurer turned singer, and comedian Jack Carter join Judy.

A MAN NAMED MAYS, 10 p.m. Sunday KMBE-TV. Willie Mays is up against some stiff competition tonight—Liz Taylor. This program reviews the career of one of baseball's superstars who many baseball men have termed the greatest all-around player in the history of the game.

LIZ IN LONDON, 10 p.m. Sunday KBES-TV. Elizabeth Taylor was born in London and recently has spent some well-publicized months there. But tonight's show foregoes romance and focuses on historic London as seen through the eyes of a beautiful guide and on scenes of her childhood.

The late John Perl, whose funeral home was then on Bartlett st., came to Edna. "Of course, I'll sing," she remembers telling Perl. Later the grateful Negro came to pay her. She refused to take the money but at Christmas was recipient of a "beautiful gift" from him.

The first movie theater Edna

On the Air

By ELEANOR WIESE

Detractors of television programming seem to maintain a favorite theme: that program schedules are shaped far too much to the tastes of the mass audience and do not adequately meet the demands of the cultivated, who hunger for more specialized fare and are being alienated because television does not satisfy this hunger.

This is the reason, the critics of television argue, that people in the higher-educated, higher economic groups are "light viewers." And on this assumption, they build another—that the light viewer confines his selection to TV's heavier material of culture and information, twisting his dial in frustration, while the heavy viewer satiates himself with light entertainment, lolling before his set, subsisting on an uninterrupted diet of situation comedies, westerns and game shows.

This cliché is having a tough time standing up against some recent research statistics. In a report recently presented before the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Dr. Thomas E. Coffin, NBC's Director of Research, came up with some different findings.

Dr. Coffin examined viewers' program selections—not on the basis of viewers' education or income—but by amount of viewing. Using the Nielsen index of measured hours of viewing, he divided the audience into five numerically equal groups. He then compared the viewing habits of the extreme groups—those that watched least with those that watched most.

As you might expect, entertainment drew the heaviest viewers. Specifically, in the heaviest viewing group, the number who watched one or more of a selected group of entertainment programs was 31 per cent greater than the number who watched any of a group of information presentations.

But as you might not expect, among the lightest viewers the gap in preference for entertainment over information was far greater. In this group, 73 per cent more watched entertainment than had watched any of the information programs.

Another variation on this theme emerged from another source, the American Research Bureau dailies for one week. In this analysis 62 per cent of the heavy viewers watched "talk" programs, including news, discussion and education shows, whereas only 21 per cent of the light viewers watched them.

In commenting on these findings, NBC's Robert Sarnoff, chairman of the board, suggests one runs a risk in assuming that light viewing is a cultural status symbol or that a schedule overloaded with specialized programming will of necessity prompt the light viewer to change his ways.

Mr. Sarnoff believes the light viewers are people who have developed a wide range of resources for filling their leisure hours and pursuing their intellectual interests. Television is less important in their general scheme of things. They turn to television, as do most people, chiefly for entertainment, but since they do less viewing they are less aware of the scope and diversity of programming available to them. Consequently,

they are less selective than the habitual viewers in the use of the TV sets.

Of course, there are those who will take issue with him in regard to the scope and diversity of TV programming. But there are many good things on television that the light viewer might easily miss; and that's the purpose of this column—to point out some of the programs that sound unusual or better than average.

Refuses To Sing

"People who think there is race prejudice here now should have been here then," she commented last week. "There was on Negro family in town. The regular soloist for the undertaking parlor refused to sing at a Negro funeral."

The late John Perl, whose funeral home was then on Bartlett st., came to Edna. "Of course, I'll sing," she remembers telling Perl. Later the grateful Negro came to pay her. She refused to take the money but at Christmas was recipient of a "beautiful gift" from him.

The first movie theater Edna

operated the telephone company's

switchboard. She later supervised the telephone operators,

was bookkeeper for Warner, Wortman and Gore, one of the city's largest groceries;

cashier and bookkeeper for Hutchison and Lumsden General Mercantile store, operator of the U. S. post office substation on Bartlett street and secretary to the arpent's Local Union.

Knowing people in all sections of Jackson county, she was rated as the cub reporter's best friend. She was always ready to report visitors from the Applegate, Brownboro, Ashland, Gold Hill and Prospect when "towing" was regarded as news in the Local and Personal column.

The Eifert family, W. W. Eifert, who became mayor of Medford, Mrs. Eifert, their five daughters and one son, came to Medford at the insistence of Charley and Callie Palm, who had arrived earlier. Mrs. Palm was Mr. Eifert's sister. Their stories of the southern Oregon country led the Eiferts to hire a coach on the Southern Pacific and start west.

Medford was about the size of Ada, but Ada was old and Medford was new and Ada was a college town. The Eiferts soon found, however, that there was a migration into Jackson county of "people interested in the better things of life." Their daughters had been given the "advantages," training in elocution and music. Edna soon moved into the productions of the Andrews Opera company, church choirs and lodge functions. She, also, sang at funerals.

MORMON CONFERENCE, 10 a.m. Sunday KBES-TV. The 133rd semi-annual conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is broadcast from the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. The famed Tabernacle Chorale will sing.

MORMON CONFERENCE, 2 p.m. Sunday KBOY-FM. Radio broadcast of the same conference. President David O. McKay presiding.

JUDY GARLAND, 9 p.m. Sunday KBES-TV. George Maharis, TV adventurer turned singer, and comedian Jack Carter join Judy.

A MAN NAMED MAYS, 10 p.m. Sunday KMBE-TV. Willie Mays is up against some stiff competition tonight—Liz Taylor. This program reviews the career of one of baseball's superstars who many baseball men have termed the greatest all-around player in the history of the game.

LIZ IN LONDON, 10 p.m. Sunday KBES-TV. Elizabeth Taylor was born in London and recently has spent some well-publicized months there. But tonight's show foregoes romance and focuses on historic London as seen through the eyes of a beautiful guide and on scenes of her childhood.

The late John Perl, whose funeral home was then on Bartlett st., came to Edna. "Of course, I'll sing," she remembers telling Perl. Later the grateful Negro came to pay her. She refused to take the money but at Christmas was recipient of a "beautiful gift" from him.

The first movie theater Edna

operated the telephone company's

switchboard. She later supervised the telephone operators,

was bookkeeper for Warner, Wortman and Gore, one of the city's largest groceries;

cashier and bookkeeper for Hutchison and Lumsden General Mercantile store, operator of the U. S. post office substation on Bartlett street and secretary to the arpent's Local Union.

remembers in Medford was the Old Savoy, at which she sang. It was located on North Front st. The words of songs were flashed on the screen. She also sang at the Page theater on East Main at Bear creek. It was gutted by fire in the 1920s.

Glamorous Moment

One of her most "glamorous moments", however, was singing the role of the Queen in "Iolanthe," which was presented at the fairgrounds by the Andrews Opera Company under auspices of the Greater Medford Club.

Her costume was shipped from San Francisco for the production. The opposite in costuming was experienced when she consented to fill in as Katisha in "The Mikado". The singer to be imported for the role failed to appear. Edna had been playing one of the Three Little Maids in an attractive makeup. She still remembers the comments of the late James Stevens, who got her ready for the part.

Another treasured recollection of her singing career takes her back to World War I. She was a member of a chorus invited to sing with Madame Schumann-Heink when the famous opera star came to Ashland to raise funds for the American Red Cross. Madame Schumann-Heink, who had sons in the American army, the German army and the German navy sang in camps and for Red Cross chapters throughout the United States.

Entertainment was through participation in the early 1900s.

Recalls Serenades

Edna recalls the many occasions upon which her sister, Jessie, now Mrs. E. N. Eldridge of Medford; Jessie's former husband, Bill Barnum, and Leon Hanna, brother of former Circuit Judge H. K. Hanna of Jacksonville, used to serenade her and her friends. The Barnums, who owned and operated the Rogue River Valley railroad, had a "Brisco" car, which was the pride of Father W. S. Barnum. His son and daughter-in-law used it as conveyance for their serenading tours with accordion and saxophone.

For (she can't remember how many) years Edna sang in the Presbyterian church choir, which she also directed. Her mezzo soprano voice is remembered by many persons who were in the congregation when she, standing on the balcony, led the singing of "God Bless America" during World War II.

As grand warder of the Order of Eastern Star, she attended the Grand Chapter meeting in Portland in 1926 and sang "Open the Gates of the Temple." She is past worthy matron of Reames chapter in Medford.

A reference to the Eifert family recently appeared in the Mail Tribune "Flight of Time" column. Dated Sept. 5, 1913, it read: "Funeral services for Mayor W. W. Eifert, largest in city's history."

Local Post Office Commended for Job

The Medford post office has been commended for its efforts in promoting the sale of U.S. Savings stamps, according to a letter to Acting Postmaster Al Bradford from William H. Neal, national director of the U.S. Savings bonds division.

Neal also announced that children buying their first savings stamps of the school year will be given a free certificate signed by the seven mercury astronauts which will designate the recipients as "junior astronauts."

These certificates are now available at the Medford post office and at the public schools.

Sheriff's Deputies Return Man on Charge

Savings stamps in 10 cent, 25 cent, 50 cent, \$1 and \$5 sizes are on sale at the post office at all times and at the schools during stamp day.

Sheriff's deputies returned Walton Charles Tillman, 46, from Winnemucca, Nev., Thursday on charges of uttering and publishing a forged check.

He has signed a statement admitting to issuing a false check for \$155 to an area market.

Try and Stop Me

By BENNETT CERF

A PROFESSIONAL GUIDE on an African safari exulted to a nervous hunter, "At last! Here are fresh lion tracks!" "That's great," quavered the "hunter." "Now you just see where they're going to and I'll find out where they came from."

"I note," rasped the old judge, "that in addition to stealing this lady's money, you also helped yourself to all of her jewelry."

"It's my mother's fault," sobbed the prisoner. "She always reminded me that money alone does not bring happiness."

Joe E. Lewis, who likes to bet on long-shots at the race tracks, picked a particular lemon one sultry afternoon. "I won't say that nag ran slowly," reported Joe later, "but this is the first time I ever saw a jockey take along copies of The Reader's Digest and Cosmopolitan!"

The French philosopher Voltaire was told that a certain professor had an answer for everything. "Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Is he as ignorant as all that?"

© 1963, by Bennett Cerf. Distributed by King Features Syndicate



SAMBO'S PANCAKES

NEW HOURS
6 A.M. to 12 MIDNIGHT Daily

OPEN 24 HOURS ON
FRIDAY AND SATURDAY

1025 South Riverside

COMING!

OCT. 25
OCT. 26
OCT. 27



3 BIG DAYS OF
FAMILY ENJOYMENT!

- ★ Rummage Sale
- ★ Food Sale
- ★ Bazaar
- ★ Art Show & Fun Fair
- ★ (Root) Beer Garden
- ★ Sidewalk Cafe
- ★ Continuous Music
- ★ Modeling
- ★ Entertainment

FUN

for the Youngsters!
8 Rides & Games of skill with prizes... burro rides... puppet show. The kiddies will love it!

MEDFORD ARMORY

Friday, Saturday & Sunday, Oct. 25, 26 & 27

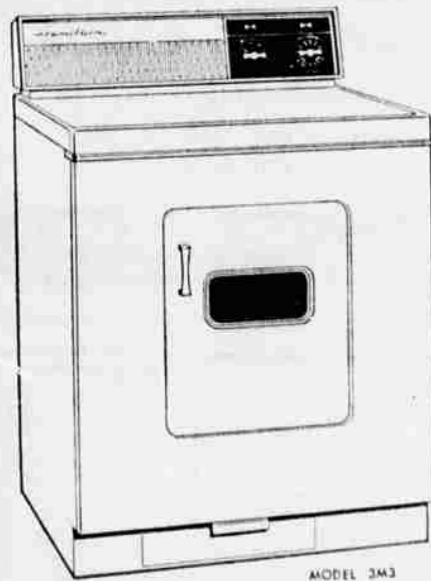
Sponsored by
The Junior Service League. Proceeds to be used for community benefit and for the benefit of the Kindergarten for Hard of Hearing Children.

THE MEDFORD MAIL TRIBUNE

it's coming... NATURAL GAS
will you be ready for it?

LIVE MODERN... FOR LESS... WITH GAS

FREE INSTALLATION!



Hamilton
AUTOMATIC
GAS DRYER

A new Hamilton Gas Clothes Dryer lets you defeat the weather with pleasure!

In fact, soggy wet, housebound days make fine laundry days—when you use an automatic Gas Clothes Dryer.

Just try this dryer for 30 days FREE and see if you don't agree.

LOOK AT THESE FEATURES

EXCLUSIVE TWIN AIR STREAM DRYING—only Hamilton gives you two drying air streams...one for gentleness, one for speed.

HUSHED DRYING—You'll like the smooth, noiseless operation of a Hamilton—so quiet you'll hardly know it's running.

SATIN SMOOTH DRUM—that will not flake, chip, peel or stain. Completely safe for your most delicate things.

Don't Delay—Phone Now

BUDGET TERMS

\$199⁹⁵ DOWN

LESS THAN

\$9.00

PER MONTH



CALIFORNIA-PACIFIC UTILITIES CO.
YOUR PARTNER IN WESTERN PROGRESS

Phone 772-5281, Medford

482-2116, Ashland