

First demonstrations of the telephone

In July of 1877, 8 years after the terrible fire that destroyed the city of Hancock, Michigan, USA, Alexander Bell and his associated Frederick Gower present and demonstrate the new communication device – the telephone, in the reconstructed city.



On Sunday, April 11, 1869, three days before the above photograph was taken, Hancock was almost totally destroyed by fire. This image, taken from a glass-plate negative, shows the terrible results.

The Telephone in Hancock County

The Speaking Telephone invented by Prof. Alex. Graham Bell of Boston made its appearance in Hancock County last week, greatly to the interest of those who were enabled to see its operation. Mr. Frederic A. Gower, the associate of Prof. Bell and General Agent of the Telephone for New England came to visit his mother, Mrs. Wyer G. Sargent of Sargentville and at the request of his step-father, Hon. Wyer G. Sargent brought several of the telephones with him.

The instrument proved to be not nearly so large as was expected, being about the size of a butter stamp and shaped something like it. As explained by Mr. Gower, it consisted of a straight steel magnet four inches long, with a coil of fine insulated wire around one end. This magnet is set in the handle of the machine. Above it or what corresponds to the face of the butter stamp, is a plate or membrane, as it is called, of soft Russia iron 2 1/2 inches in diameter 1/100 of an inch thick and enameled on both sides to keep from rusting. Above this membrane is a wooden mouthpiece clamped solidly to the body of the instrument by four screws, and holding the membrane so tightly around its edge that it does not seem possible for it to vibrate in the least degree. But it does vibrate somehow, for when the voice is directed against it through the hole in the mouthpiece it communicates a motion of some kind to the particles of the magnet and they in turn send the vibration out along the wire with which the telephone is connected. The vibration so produced is what is known as a magneto-electric current and it travels as fast as the common telegraph current does, until it reaches the corresponding magnet and membrane at the other end of the line. There it is again given off into the air in the shape of sound, just as it started. The arrangement seems to have no connection with the little telephones made with two tin tubes and a tightly stretched string but is rather a great original discovery, which is not fully understood, as yet, even by the best electricians.

On Thursday, the 26th, Mr. Gower put up a line of common iron wire known as "stone wire", from the cupola of Mr. Sargent's house (whose fine location many of our readers will remember) to the house of his son, Mr. Henry W. Sargent, a distance of some 700 feet, on one side and into the office of the Edgemoggin Silver Mining Company, some 200 feet distant on the other. Through this line conversation was distinctly carried on for more than an hour, without interruption, and thus it goes upon the record that Hancock County and the Messrs. Sargent in particular enjoyed the honor and pleasure of the first application of the telephone for social purposes, in the State. On Friday, although the weather was cloudy, the telephones were connected with the telegraph wire between Sargentville and Sedgwick Village, a distance of 3 miles. Conversation was carried on between the store of Messrs. Herrick and Byard and the Messrs. Sargent's Store at the other end of the wire, without difficulty although those at Sedgwick had had no previous practice with the instrument. Among those participating at Sedgwick were the Rev. Mr. Bartlett, Dr. Hale, Deputy Collector Thomas, Capt. and Mrs. Samuel Herrick, Mr and Mrs. James Byard, Dudley Carlton, Charles Clogson and others. Later on in the day the telephones were put on at Blue Hill and conversation carried on between Blue Hill and Sargentville, with Sedgwick as a way station.

The effect at Blue Hill was somewhat injured by the unaccountable pressure of strong electric currents along the line which made such a clatter in the telephone as to make it difficult to hear what was said along the wire. During the afternoon temporary wires were put up between the stores of Hon. J. T. Hinckley, John A. Stevens, and that of A. H. Dresser where the telegraph office is located. Words spoken between these three places were heard without difficulty. A telephone was left in charge of Mr. Dresser and on Saturday morning communication was again opened between Blue Hill and Sargentville, and this time with entire success.

Mr. Hinckley and Dr. Grindle at Blue Hill talked with Mr. and Mrs. Sargent 11 miles distant almost as easily as though all the parties had been in the same room, while those at Sedgwick were able to overhear the conversation and share in it at times. On Saturday afternoon, the telephones were attached to the wire at the store of Hon. S. G. Haskell at Northwest Harbor, Deer Isle and conversation carried on between that point, Sargentville and Sedgwick with good success. Advantage was taken of the new means of communication to transact several items of business, and all who took part were much impressed with the quickness and simplicity of the operation. Mr. W. S. Sargent of Castine, who chanced to be visiting at Sargentville, conversed with Mr. A. T. Gross at Northwest Harbor and recognized him by his voice without being told his name. After these experiments, two of the telephones were left in working order between the office of the Silver Mining Company over the Messrs. Sargent's store and the house of W. G. Sargent, where they still remain, exciting much interest and being put into frequent use.

Mr. J. S. Bedlow, the well know telegraph manager at Portland has taken the agency of the Telephone for Maine and is now putting them in in various directions. They are used without battery of any kind and seem to need little or no previous practice to operate them and hence must be very convenient for places where there is need of some communication without offering business enough for regular telegraph offices. As the result of the experiments last week, Messrs. W. G. Sargent and Son will probably run a wire in connection with Messrs. Herrick and Byard of Sedgwick, thus securing instant communication whenever it is desired. As the expense is said to be comparatively slight others of our energetic business men will doubtless soon do likewise.



1890 - Hancock, Quincy Street with several telephone lines.

1877, november, 22th, Frederick Gower gives a lecture in Place of Prof Alexander Bell.

**Chelsea Academy
LYCEUM.**

Eighth Entertainment of the Course.

Thursday Evening, Nov. 22, '77,
THE
Bell Telephone
LECTURE.

Special Announcement!

Owing to the pressure of public interest in England, in the Telephone, the return of PROF. ALEX. GRAHAM BELL has been necessarily deferred, and the Lectures contemplated by him cannot be given in the United States this season. The management would respectfully announce to their patrons that they have secured the services of

MR. FREDERIC A. GOWER,

Prof. Bell's Associate and General Manager of his Lectures, who will give the Lecture in place of Prof. Bell. Mr. Gower is a fine speaker and has had entire charge of the Telephone experiments since the first lecture by Prof. Bell, so that our patrons will lose nothing in the way of experiment through this marvelous instrument, by the non-appearance of Prof. Bell.

While there are a number of Lecturers in the field who are trying to steal the brains of Prof. Bell and Mr. Gower, by attempting Telephone Exhibitions, it should be noted that this is the *only* complete and genuine exhibition of the Speaking Telephone that will be made in Chelsea this season.

The attractions of the Lecture as arranged by Mr. Gower include all the most popular features of last season's entertainments, such as the Telephone Organ, Cornet solos, Vocal music, &c., which will be Telephoned from Boston,—the parts being clearly distinguishable—and also the weird and thrilling

TELEPHONE HARP,

just completed for Prof. Bell, from Mr. Gower's designs, by the Mason and Hamlin Organ Co., of Boston, which is pronounced by Telephone experts to be among the most novel and beautiful applications of Telephonic science ever made (the first use of the Telephone Harp will be made at this lecture), and which is intended for exhibition by Prof. Bell before the leading scientists of Europe.

A large number of the leading scientific men of the State will attend this lecture, and the management hope to make it one of the most interesting entertainments of the course.

Respectfully yours,
GEO. A. JONES,
Proprietor Chelsea Lyceum.

JAS. B. FIELD,
LOCAL MANAGER.

J. A. Cummings & Co., Printers, 268 Washington St., Boston.