

When the telephone came to Watsonville

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"A telephone line was put up between Ford's store and Pajaro depot by the Watsonville Mill and Lumber Company on Sunday last. The line is nearly a mile and a half in length, and the cost of construction was light. The advantages to be derived from this line are many. The lumber company has made Pajaro their headquarters, and in the future Pajaro will be their lumber-yard base. The main office will remain in Ford's store and as the business of the company is heavy, the telephone will save much travel back and forth, and also be a saving in wear and tear of buggies and horseflesh. The line works perfectly and could not give better satisfaction. The telephone has created much curiosity in town, and is truly a wonderful invention. The one in use here is an Edison carbon telephone..." The Pajaronian, December 1879

That was Watsonville

Alexander Graham Bell had been issued the first patent for a telephone in the United States in 1876. In 1877, local man W.A. Beck invented a telephone that was energized by a horseshoe magnet and was practical for short distances and was used between the Beck home and the Blackburn home — then a distance of one block. This phone was said to be the first invented in California, and if capital could have been raised at the time, there's no telling what might have happened.

The earliest telephone line from back East to the West Coast was in 1882. This same year another local man, Fred Hiscox invented a telephone, the sounder and speaker differing considerably from others. The line ran from his residence to his workshop, and it was said that it carried sound more clearly than the Bell Telephone.

"The Sunset Telephone Company is putting up telephone lines from San Francisco to Sacramento, Stockton, Oakland, San Jose, Gilroy, Hollister, Salinas and Monterey. Work on the new line is under way and it will soon be completed. Messages by telephone will cost over half less than the telegraph, the charge being for length in time of conversation, not for number of words." The Pajaronian, January 1884

In 1894, the telephone office was still located in the post office building on Main Street, but soon moved to the express office, and later that same year the first switchboard was set up in the Lewis House at 241 Main St. The operator sat in the back corner of the lobby, and when a call came in, she would send a messenger out to round up the wanted person. There was also a People's Telephone Company, but, in 1897, articles of incorporation of the Pacific Telephone Company were filed by the county clerk.

In 1898, one small telephone book contained a complete listing of California, Washington and Oregon with a special section for San Francisco's famed Chinatown. The average charge for one telephone was five cents a day, and most of the phones were located in businesses or the homes of doctors, undertakers, etc. In 1900, there were over 240 telephones in Watsonville, and in 1902, the phone company announced that persons making calls had to give the number, not the name, or they would not be connected. The dial system was inaugurated in 1950, and in 1976, the local switchboard was closed with all calls going through Santa Cruz.

Now we see people (mostly men) using cellular phones in their cars, on street corners and in restaurants. I came within inches of having my car hit the other day as some man was driving with his phone in one hand as he jabbered away to someone on the other line — no doubt a very important call that couldn't wait a few min-

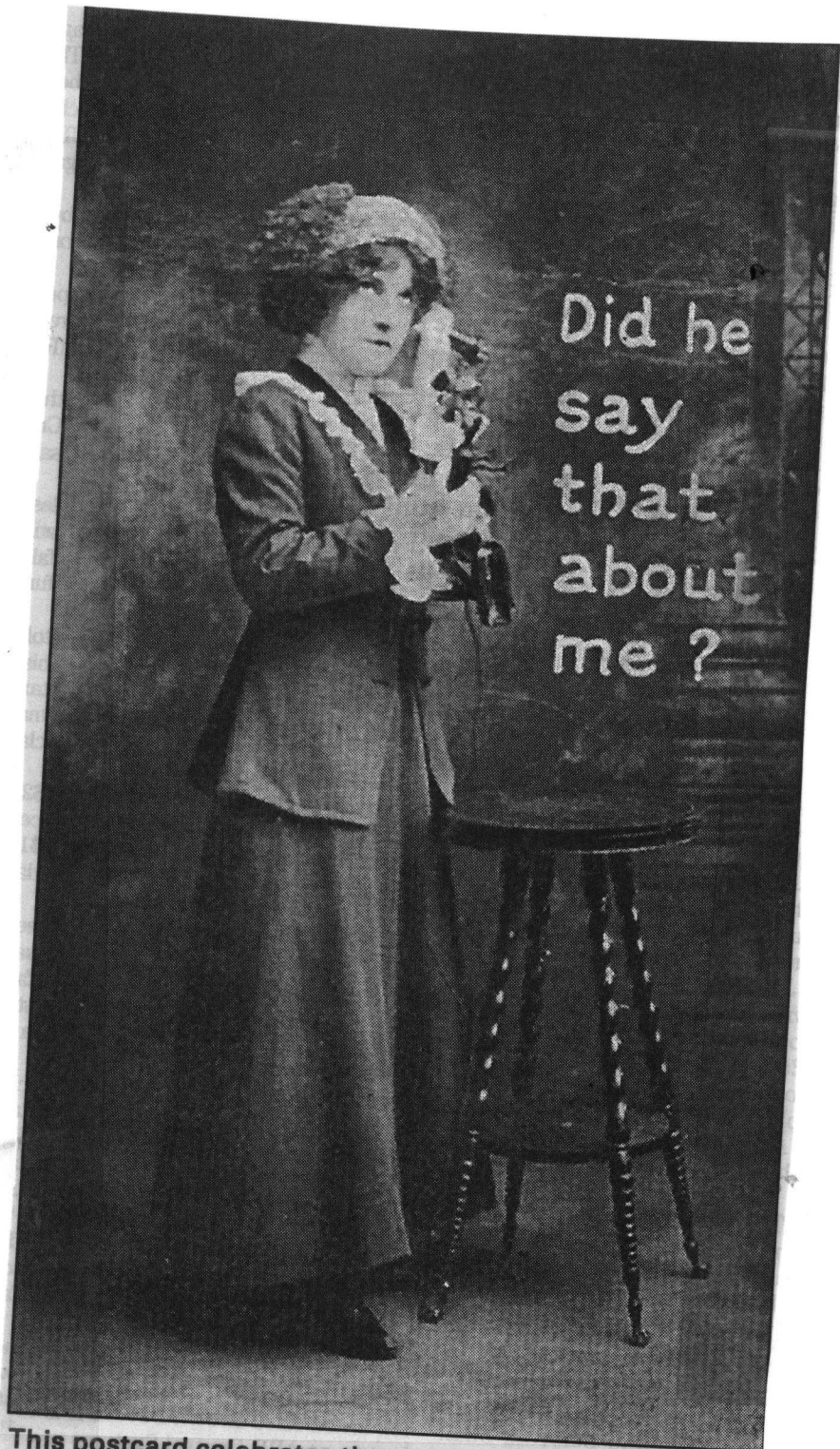
utes!

But having and using a telephone can be a real blessing — calling a loved one, dialing an emergency number, ordering merchandise — the phone is an invention we wouldn't want to give up in this modern age of direct and easy communication. Next time you pick up your phone and dial a number, give a little thanks to Mr. Bell.

"Few patrons realize the trying duties incumbent upon the young ladies at the switchboard in a telephone office. Their task is by no means an easy one. Any persons using phones should not become too impatient about getting the number they call for. Remember that three or four people on the same line may be calling the operator at one time, and she cannot attend to them all at once. If the number you want is in your telephone book be sure to give central the number. Do not simply call for the name you want and compel her to look up the number. All things considered the telephone service in Watsonville is just as good as elsewhere. It is the desire of the company to hope for pleasant relations at all times." Evening Pajaronian, November 5, 1903

REFERENCE





Did he
say
that
about
me?

This postcard celebrates the newest invention of the day,
the telephone.