

GENERAL NEWS

Carlisle Bell Office part of historic project

By Josh Shepley
The Carlisle Mercury Staff
 The original Carlisle Bell Telephone office will soon be preserved for all time as a functional artifact and one of the prime exhibits in the largest telephone museum in the world.

Thomas Jones Jr., former owner of the Blue Ridge Telephone Company, is an investor in the Merchant's Hope Historic Foundation.

Carlisle is the last town in Kentucky to have switched from manual to a dial telephone system. The conversion to dial in 1967 marked the end of manual systems and finished ushering in the electronic age in telephone systems.

Jones' father owned one of the few independent telephone systems existing during Ma Bell's early days in the business. But as Bell grew beyond its competition, the Blue Ridge Company was passed on to his son. Though he sold the business, Jones became interested in preservation, specifically old manual telephone systems.

"Possibly the town did not grow enough for Bell to make any kind of switch."

By the time Jones began his search for the old switchboards, most had either been trashed or sold to museums for display.

When he came on the Carlisle switchboards, two positions, stations where the telephone operator worked the system, were stored in holding at a Louisville museum.

The Carlisle positions are unique, Jones said, because they use an uncommon method to signal operators of an incoming call, the Bulls-eye system. In most early telephone operations, a light or bell would sound if a caller wanted to come through on the line. The Bulls-eye system, however, used a simple aluminum ball that flipped when a call wanted to come through, Jones said.

"The Bulls-eye was not used in a lot of phone systems even in the early days. It is quite a rarity from the 1920s," Jones said.

Another unique feature is the fact Carlisle's telephone office remained on Main Street. Old telephone offices were located along a town's Main Street, bringing the operator into prominence as the primary instrument of communication, Jones said. But as telephone systems became more complex and depression-aided, they were moved away from the hub of many cities. Carlisle's, however, did not for many years after other systems had.

Jones was gratified the old office building, complete with a doorway sporting the old Bell Telephone company symbol, chairs and even headsets remained behind after the main office had closed, though he wondered why nothing else ever settled there.

Owning three of the six positions in the office, other two are in Louisville and Winchester museums, Jones did not originally plan to reconstruct the old Carlisle office until he discovered most of the office, even the tile floors, still existed virtually intact.

He bought everything, even the old lamps that adorned the

ceiling. Pictures he acquired showed how the office looked when it was in full operation and with them he has arranged the office to be a major exhibit in the Blue Ridge Telephone Museum.

The museum, located in the basement of a restored historic Williamstown, Virginia building. The building is part of a larger attraction called Merchant's Hope, a village of 17th century style buildings set in Blue Ridge, Georgia.

The Carlisle exhibit will be made fully operational as an attraction for tourists to actually call on and use the system, Jones said.

"The exhibit will be a hands on affair where groups can sit and operate the controls and see what the old telephone systems used to be

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Bicentennial Census being taken

In 1790, our nation's very first census was taken by U.S. Marshalls traveling the countryside on horseback. Today, exactly 200 years later the census is taken by private citizens from within their own communities, and their form of transportation requires gasoline rather than hay or fuel.

About 240,000 people across the nation have just taken the federal Dept of Office as temporary employees of the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Over the next six to eight weeks, these civic-minded individuals will visit with every household that has not returned a census form by mail.

Census takers have the official title of Census Enumerator, which is indicated on the identification they carry.

Perhaps our most distinguished enumerator was Thomas Jefferson who directed the 1790 census. He along with the other founders of our nation, recognized that a proper accounting of our new nation's inhabitants lay at the cornerstone of democracy.

Band concert, May 9 in NCHS gymnasium
 Nicholas County High School Band will present its annual spring concert, Wednesday, May 9.

The concert will begin in the Nicholas County High School gymnasium at 8 p.m. The concert is free and open to the public.

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