DID YOU KNOW.....

A look back at early area history as found in the archives of the Enderlin Historical Society and Museum by Susan Schlecht

The following article appeared in the **November 19, 1914** *Enderlin Independent*. It gives us a glimpse of how a phone system worked in the early days. For the younger generation, the closest to this type of system you might see is on reruns of "The Andy Griffith Show" where they pick up the phone and ask Sarah, the operator, to put them through to whoever they are calling! The article below is written exactly as it appeared in 1914.

PHONE CENTRAL VERY BUSY PLACE

Central Girls' Pleasant Voices Answer "Number Please" Fifteen Hundred Times Daily. (11/19/1914) We have often wondered how many calls are answered in a day at a central telephone office in a town the size of Enderlin. In answer to a query of this nature propounded to Manager Stenseth a few days ago, the gentleman very obligingly agreed to keep a record for a day and give us the results.

And in furtherance of this promise, with the help of the lady operators, a complete record of all calls was made covering a period of twenty-four hours. The count began last Monday morning at 12:01 a.m. and ended at 12 o'clock Monday night. From 12 to 5 a.m., there were 21 calls; from 5 to 7 a.m., 11 calls; from 7 to 8 a.m. 22; 8 to 9 a.m. 83; 9 to 10 a.m. 160; 10 to 11, 145; 11 to 12, 95; 12 to 1 p.m., 81; 1 to 2, 65; 2 to 3, 92; 3 to 4, 81; 4 to 5, 99; 5 to 6, 67; 6 to 7, 108; 7 to 8, 47; 8 to 9, 28; 9 to 10, 21; 10 to 12, 14. Making in all, 1196 calls – nearly one each minute for the entire twenty-four hours of the day. But this is not all the calls these popular young ladies answer in a day. In addition to the local calls there are on an average of seven long distance calls. And that is not all. The obliging young ladies are also called upon probably a hundred times a day to tell their patrons the correct time of day. Yes, and more yet – "Is 108 in?" "How is 106?" "How late is 107?" These questions have to be answered innumerable times in the course of the day's routine. Can you blame them for sometimes answering rather shortly?

And another thing – and Manager Stenseth wished to lay particular stress upon this matter – think how much more time it takes the operator to answer your call when, instead of giving the number of the phone with which you wish to communicate, you say "give me Mr. Smith." Now, the telephone company soon will issue another new telephone directory containing the name and number of every subscriber and the patrons can facilitate their own business, as well as make the work of the girls easier, if they will consult the directory before calling Central and give their calls by number.

<u>Sue's comments</u>: How many of you remember calling the phone company to ask the correct time or to ask if the train was in yet or running on time? As a railroad town, all things centered around the trains. The article does not tell us how many young ladies worked at the phone central during a typical day.

Watch for more history next week!