

THE ERLANGER HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PRESENTS  
“A HISTORY OF THE  
TELEPHONE SERVICE IN  
ERLANGER, KY.”



**Mankind has always searched for ways of communicating with his fellowmen. In the early days drums, smoke signals and flags offered limited connections. In early Erlanger, a Fox Horn was used to communicate an emergency situation. Later, the telephone and a siren replaced this horn. Technological advances in the communication field are almost unbelievable, and change almost daily. Now days, telephones operate wirelessly via towers and satellites; not only can we verbally communicate, but also send/receive text messages, connect to the Web, GPS, and take pictures as well. Following is a brief history of the comin' of the telephone to Erlanger, KY.**

**Bits & Pieces of Telephone History-**

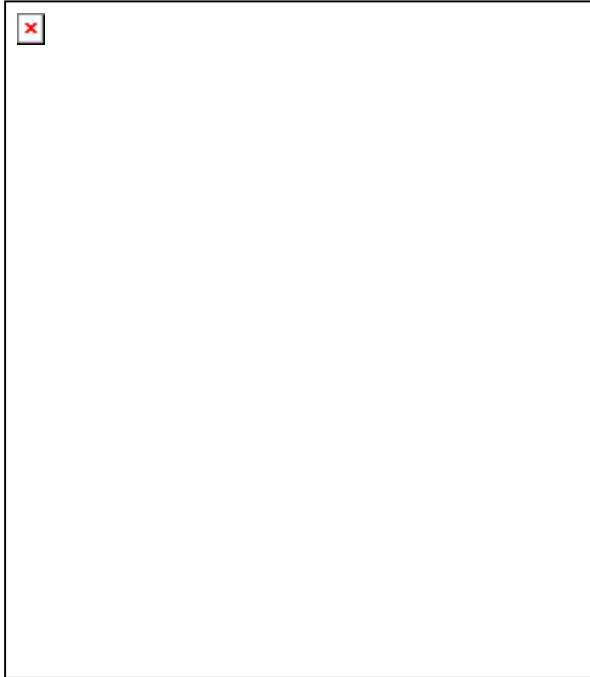
An electrical telegraph was developed and patented in the United States in 1837 by Samuel F.B.Morse which revolutionized long distance communication. The telegraph required the use of a code book and was generally used for business applications. The code book caused numerous problems in residential settings, thus usage was limited.

**1844-** Innocenzo Manzetti mooted the idea of a speaking telegraph (telephone).

**1873-**The City and Suburban Telegraph Company, later Cincinnati Bell Telephone, incorporated on July 5, 1873.

- On March 10, 1876**, at the age of 29, Alexander Graham Bell developed the telephone's fundamental operating system when he and his associate, Thomas Watson, were working in their lab experimenting with a new type of 'liquid transmitter'. Through the instrument Mr. Bell spoke to his assistant and said, "Mr. Watson, come here, I want you." In less than eighteen months the "Bell Telephone Company" was founded in Boston, Massachusetts.
- 1876-** Alexander Graham Bell, US Patent 174,465, applies for improvement in Telegraphy-transmitting vocal or other sounds telegraphically.
- 1877-** A.G.Bell's US Patent 186,787 granted for an electromagnetic telephone using permanent magnets, iron diaphragms, and a call bell. The earliest telephones were each connected to each other. Everyone who shared the same line could listen or talk to each other. Identifying the intended recipient of a phone call was done by a 'ring pattern'.
- 1878-** The City and Suburban Association signed a contract with Bell Telephone of Boston for a license to furnish Bell Telephone Service to the Queen City area. Thus, The Association became the exclusive agent for Bell Telephones within a 25-mile radius of Cincinnati.
- 1878-** Manual switching board developed. Now many phones could be connected through a single exchange.
- 1879-** Bell Telephone extends a line across the Suspension Bridge to Covington KY. Women, or "hello girls", took the place of men as operators; 25 employees served more than 1,000 customers, and a total of 145,392 calls were recorded for that year.
- 1883-** City and Suburban contracted with American Bell (AT&T) for long distance service, about 100-mile radius.
- In 1891** the dial telephone was invented by a man named Almon Strowger of St. Louis, Missouri. Mr. Strowger, a mortician, developed the method of direct dialing because he felt exchange operators were diverting his business calls to his competitors. However, the dial phone was not put in service until 1905 when Dial Switching Equipment went into development.
- Meanwhile in Erlanger, the telegraph came with the Railroad Depot in **1877**. However, the CNO&TP Railway Co. did not share this system with any locals.
- 1889-** Citizens of Florence paid the Bell Telephone Co. \$300.00 to run telephone wires to a single box connector. This sum of money only gave them a phone; they now had to pay 20 cents for every call to Cincinnati.
- 1890-** Telephone installers and repairmen transported themselves by bicycle.
- 1890's-** Since Florence had telephone service with lines that ran through Erlanger, Dr. Charles R. Slater, who had just began his medical career in Erlanger, convinced other local citizens to collect \$100.00 to have the telephone installers install a connection for Erlanger. Here the toll rate for a message to Cincinnati was 15 cents. Thus, the first phone was located in Dr. Slater's office which was located on the Lexington Pike (~#22) near Commonwealth Avenue. In 1899 Dr. Slater married Carrie Baker and built a house at #25 Erlanger Road. Now the large front room of this house served as his office and examining room. The second phone was placed in Mitchell's Market which was located on Crescent Avenue. Soon, citizens would call-in their grocery list early in the morning for home delivery that afternoon. A telephone pay station was established at #11 Commonwealth Avenue. Miss Susan Grant operated the station out of her parents home. When a call came for someone living in Erlanger or Elsmere, Miss Grant would pay a boy 5 cents to fetch the person to the phone.
- 1895-** Newport is the headquarters for Citizens Telephone Co. which connects all cities in Kenton Co.
- 1900-** The 1900 Erlanger U.S. Census indicated 453 people living in 89 residencies with three grocery stores and two livery stables.
- 1904-** Citizens Telephone Co. in Covington P.D.
- 1905-** In Erlanger demand for telephone service increased, so the telephone company established an exchange on the second floor of the old Gabbard (Gebhard?) building. With about 50 customers there were two, three and four party lines. Each party on the line had a distinct number of rings which would signal that the call was for that party. However, nothing prevented other parties on the line from listening to another's conversations. Some of the early operators included Sophia, Reisch, Grabbard (Gebhard?), Ella Taliaferro and Joseph Meyers.
- KY Post March 1, 1907-** Erlanger exchange now separate exchange.
- 1910-** Erlanger's population now stands at 700 citizens.
- 1912-** The newly constructed three story building on the Lexington Pike opened with the Citizens Bank of Erlanger on the first floor front and the U.S. Post Office in the back. Initially the telephone exchange moved a few doors North from the Gabbard (Gebhard?) building to the second floor of this building, while the Masonic Lodge occupied the third floor. Frank Metcalf, a barber, set-up his shop in the basement area.

If you wanted a Drugs Store, e.g. Bentler's-call #91; Dahlenburgs-#235; Undertaker, P.Taliaferro #87; Hardware-Scheben Hardware-#141.



Erlanger Exchange  
"Hello Girls"  
ca1930



L-R Sadie Riggs, Lillian Yelton,  
Dorothy Maloney, Adeline Huser



Erlanger Citizens Bank—ca 1912

L-R—Mabel Tavlin, Martha Moss,  
Lela Cook, Ruby Richards

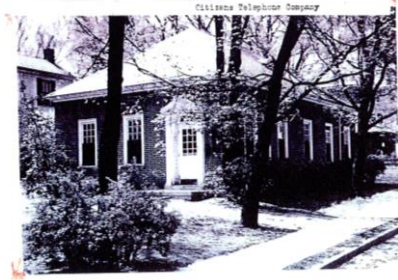
- ca1915-** Cincinnati Bell acquires Citizens Telephone Co. located in Covington.
- 1915-** Transcontinental calls become possible; Cincinnati's Bell's President calls London, England.
- 1921-** Citizens Telephone Co. builds a \$600,000.00 exchange at 11<sup>th</sup> and Scott in Covington.
- 1924-** With over 400 subscribers, the Erlanger exchange takes over the entire second floor of the Citizens Bank Building. Sleeping quarters were now provided for the operators. Mabel Tavlin was the supervisor and the only night time operator. She occupied the apartment across from the exchange and answered all night time calls after being alerted by a loud ringing bell.
- 1927-** Cincinnati Bell introduces the handset telephone to replace the 'candlestick' version which had a separate piece to be held to one's ear.
- 1928-** A telephone cable to Covington from Cincinnati was laid on the bottom of the Ohio River.
- 1930-** Conversion to dial service for the entire area was started, but was not completed until after WW II.
- ca1931- Fire Telephones:** On October 29, 1931 Erlanger's Fire Trucks were moved to the rear of the Scheben Hardware Building located at the corner of the Dixie Highway and Erlanger Road. Since the telephone exchange had over 500 subscribers, the fire department now installed five 'fire phones' for receiving emergency calls. Three of these phones were in local residences, while the fourth was in Dempsy's Garage, #6 Dixie Hwy., and the fifth in the fire station. During the daytime all calls would be answered by one of the Garage's workers. Also, whenever the phone rang, a very loud bell sounded which alerted people in a two block area. Usually, the message would be yelled across the Dixie Hwy. to Chief Andy Scheben, Jr., who worked at the 'Scheben Coal & Feed Store'. If the fire department was to respond, the worker would press the siren button located next to the telephone. At night or on Sundays, my Dad, Fred, who lived on Erlanger Road would usually answer the phone, which was located in our 1<sup>st</sup> floor bedroom closet. We also had a siren button and as expected that closet was off limits for us kids. My brother Fred and I shared a bed directly above this telephone and when it rang, the sound vibrated through the walls and usually awakened us. I remember my Dad telling my Mother to press the siren button an extra time or two whenever the fire was serious. In 1935 the City of Erlanger budgeted \$207.96 for this telephone service plus \$36.00 for the siren connection.
- 1934-** Telephone lines were completed under the Licking River between Newport and Covington.
- 1936-** #39 Erlanger Road—The Citizens Telephone Co. purchased this property from the Buckner

Family (Deed Book #250/294) and the Carl Brothers Construction Co. built the structure. This Office was originally equipped with six No. 12 common battery switchboards, which replaced the older magneto-type equipment. The Dixie Exchange cost between \$65,000 and \$70,000. During its 15 years of operation there were many equipment expansions. At the end of its era, switchboards were lined up back to back the length of the work area. Initially, Ellen Riggs was the chief operator, then Nellie McCarthy replaced her until the Dixie-Erlanger Exchange was moved to Lakeside Park, KY. in 1951.

#39 ERLANGER ROAD

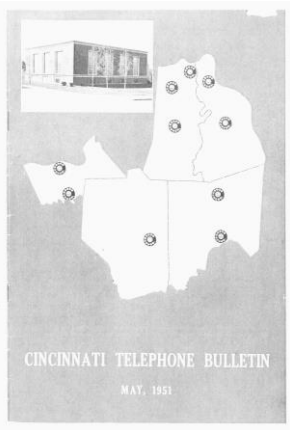


Citizens Telephone Exchange 1936

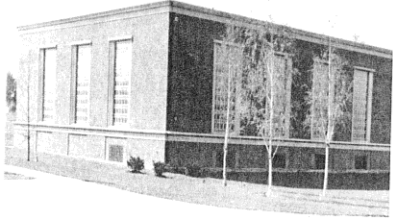


Citizens Telephone Exchange 1951

1951-New Dixie-Erlanger Exchange, Lakeside Park



May 20, 1951-Citizens Telephone Co. Direct Dialing Announced



The new Dixie-Erlanger dial central office located at 2611 Dixie Highway, Lakeside Park, was placed in service Sunday, May 20, at 7:00 A.M. This new office serves 2900 customers in the area including Crescent Springs, Elsmere, Erlanger and Lakeside Park.

- 1941-** Cincinnati Bell celebrated the installation of its 100,000th phone.
- 1946-** First commercial mobile telephone service linking moving vehicles to the telephone network by radio.
- May 20, 1951-7:00 A.M.** the entire area of the Citizens Telephone Co., Inc. totaling 56,322 telephones became Dial operated! The conversion which started in **1938** now brought the total Co. investment to \$12,800,000.
- The new Dixie-Erlanger central office is located at 2611 Dixie Hwy. Lakeside Park, KY. Now customers can dial direct to all Cincinnati metropolitan telephone numbers. Many of the Erlanger operators went to work for the telephone Co. in Covington or Cincinnati. The building at #39 Erlanger Road still exists and has been used as an office for the past 57 years by many different agencies.
- 1955-** laying of the transatlantic cable started.
- 1957-** Citizens Telephone Co. headquarters now located in the Green Line Building at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Court Street in Covington.
- 1960's** on—We have seen many technological advances in communications and probably have not

seen or heard the last!  
 Below are some of the people and equipment that have contributed to the development of the telephone in Erlanger, KY.



L-R Willie Jo Herrmann, Mary Webster, Helen Schmidt



Hello Girls with Christmas Collectibles



Erlanger Traffic force and invited guests held their farewell party at the Cabana Restaurant on May 14, 1951. Chief operators Nellie McCarthy and Edna Patterson were presented corsages.

Resources:

- Archives of Cincinnati Bell via Gerri King, Custodian
- Erlanger Historical Society Records
- Articles by E.O.Victor and H. Childress
- From Buffalo Trails to the Twenty-first Century by W. Onkst
- Pictures from Schmidt and Herrman Families
- BY-Erlanger Historical Society, Jack Scheben
- JASErlanger telephone