

It's Time To Bring Back The "Classic" Phone Company

By Dick Pence

Now that the voice of the consumer has been heeded and "old Coke" is back as "Classic Coke", it's time to bring back the Classic Phone Company.

I'm not talking about the "old phone company" - the one which used to send us just one bill instead of three or the one which had only one number to call if anything went wrong. Not even the one that used to let you make a credit card call by correctly pushing 28 digits in a row instead of 35 or 40.

What I long for goes much deeper than that. I'm talking about the time when a long-distance phone call was more than just a triumph over technology. It was an exercise in personalities, patience and perseverance.

Back in 1950 I was a novice seahand aboard a cruiser based in Philadelphia, barely six months out of high school and fresh from the plains of South Dakota. One Friday night in November, we were granted shore leave at the conclusion of a two-week training cruise. Homesick and seasick, I headed immediately for the row of pay phones that lined nearly every Navy dock in those days. I deposited a carefully preserved nickel (remember?) and dialed "0".

"I'd like to place a station-to-station collect call to the Bob Pence residence in Columbia, South Dakota please," I said in my best telephone voice.

The Philadelphia operator was sure she had heard wrong. "You mean Columbia, South CAROLINA, don't you?"

"No, I mean Columbia, South DAKOTA." I had tried to call home once before and I was ready for that one.

"Certainly. What is the number, please?" I could tell she still didn't believe me.

"They don't have a number," I mumbled. Like I said, I'd tried to call home once before and I knew what was coming.

She was incredulous. "They don't have a number?"

"I don't think so."

"I can't complete the call without a number. Do you have it?" she demanded.

I didn't relish enlarging my role as a bumpkin, but I knew authority when I heard it. "Well... the only thing I know is... two longs and a short."

I think that was the first time she snorted. "I'll get the number for you. One moment please."

There followed an audible click and a long period of silence while she apparently first determined if, indeed, there was a Columbia, South DAKOTA, and then if it was possible to call there. When she returned to the line, she was armed with the not-insignificant knowledge necessary to complete her task.

In deliberate succession, she dialed an operator in Chicago, asked her to dial one in Minneapolis, then asked Minneapolis to dial a Sioux City opera-

tor, who was asked to ring Sioux Falls, who rang Aberdeen and then - finally - Aberdeen rang the operator at Columbia.

By this time, Philadelphia's patience was wearing thin, but when Columbia answered, she knew what had to be done.

"The number for the Bob Pence residence, please," she said. She knew she was in control now.

Columbia didn't hesitate an instant. "Two longs and a short," was the matter-of-fact response.

Philadelphia was set back for a second, but was determined to plow on. "I have a collect call from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for anyone at that number. Will you please ring?"

Again Columbia didn't miss a beat. "They're not home."

Philadelphia paused to digest this. She didn't want to set herself up again, so she relayed the message I'd already heard: "There is no one at that number. Would you like to try again later?"

Columbia quickly interrupted: "Is that you, Dick?"

"Yeah. Where are the folks?"

Philadelphia was baffled, but she knew she had to look out for the company. "Sir... Madam... You can't..."

Columbia paid no mind at all. "They're all up to the school house at the basketball game. Want me to ring?"

I knew I was on real thin ice. "It's probably too much trouble to get them to the phone."

Philadelphia was still in there trying to protect the company. By this time, though, she was out of words. "But... but..." she stammered.

Columbia was still oblivious. "No trouble. It's halftime."

I caved in. I didn't want to start over. "All right."

Mustering her most official tone, Philadelphia made one last effort: "But this is a station-to-station call!"

"That's all right, honey," said Columbia. "I'll just put it on Bob's bill."

Philadelphia was still protesting when the phone rang and was answered at the school house.

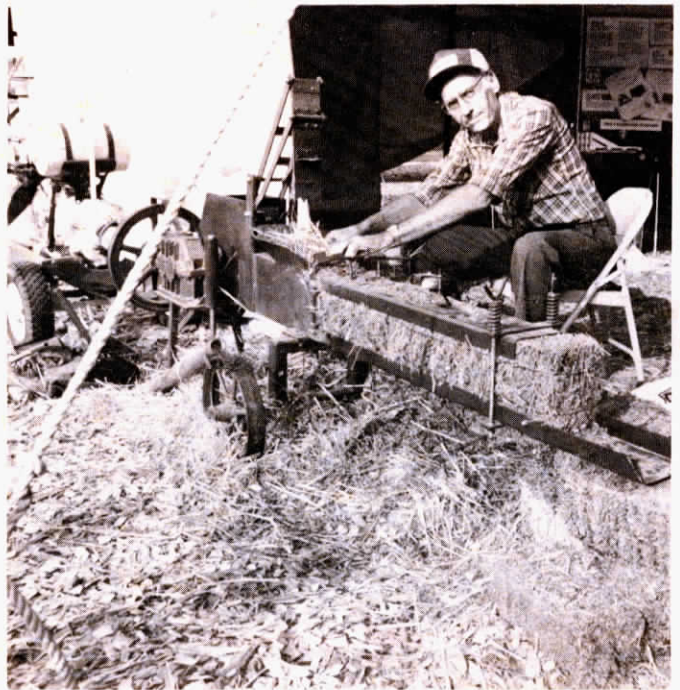
"I have a station-to-station call for Bob Pence," she said. At that instant she knew Ma Bell had somehow been had.

"It's for you Bob," said the answering voice.

Philadelphia was still trying to make sure SOMEBODY was going to pay for at least a station-to-station call when Dad got on the line a moment later.

I wish I could have seen her face when I began my end of the conversation the same way everybody from out that way does whenever they call home. "Hi Dad. How's the weather?"

I don't like to think about it, but I guess AT&T began automating its long distance service the next Monday morning. Now look where we are.



The 1/5 scale baler produces 2-lb. bales measuring 14 in. long, 5 in. wide, and 7 in. high.

IOWA PAIR DEMONSTRATES HOW BALES WERE MADE IN THE OLD DAYS

Hand-Feed "Mini" Baler Makes 2-Lb. Hay Bales

A pair of Iowa farmers are turning back the clock and making hay the way it was made in the 1930's, using a "hand-feed", home-built replica baler that produces miniature bales.

Albert Uitermarkt and Walter Slycord, Oskaloosa, Iowa, demonstrated the hand-built baler at farm shows and thresher's reunions this fall. A 1/5 scale model produces 2 lb. bales of hay or straw measuring 14 in. long, 5 in. wide, and 7 in. high. They sell the bales for \$2 apiece and Asgrow Seed Co. sponsored the farm show demonstrations.

"People buy the bales as decorations for Halloween or Christmas nativity scenes," says Uitermarkt. "They put little animals or pumpkins or stalks of corn on the bales. Hay and straw bales seem to sell equally well."

Uitermarkt, a retired mechanic, built the baler two years ago using an "Ann Arbor" stationary hay baler, built in the 1930's, as a model. The baler was fashioned from flat 3/16 in. metal. The only tools used were a welder, hacksaw and surface grinder.

"Many farmers over 50 years old tell me they used to make bales like this. It takes two men to operate this miniature baler, but years ago it took a crew of at least six - two men to tie and block the bale, two men to stand on the ground and pitch hay onto the platform, one man to stand on the platform and pitch hay into the chamber, and one man to carry bales away. They quit making these balers in the late 1930's."

The baler is powered by a 15 hp 4 cylinder upright in-line air-cooled Wisconsin engine mounted on a cart.

During demonstrations, Uitermarkt hand feeds hay or straw into the baler chamber. The vertical plunger, an oak board with a metal 18-in. long claw, pushes the material

down. Another horizontal plunger pushes hay through the chute.

Wood blocks separate the bales as they go through the bale chute. The baler is equipped with tabs that are attached to the bale. When the tabs strike clangers inside a bell mounted on the bale chute, Uitermarkt knows he must put another block in the bale chute. "The distance between the bell and the wood block in the chamber determines bale length," notes Uitermarkt.

Two grooves run the length of each block. When the bell sounds, Slycord inserts a wire through each groove, back through the groove in the block on the other end of the bale and through a loop on one end of the wire. He uses pliers to twist and tie each wire together, then snips off the ends of the wires.

A lever sets bale tension. "We can make 40 bales per hour," notes Uitermarkt, who also built a "wire maker" table to fashion the loops on the wires.

Uitermarkt, who spent about 500 hours to build the big baler, says he has no plans to build the balers commercially but is willing to let people look at it and take measurements.

Last summer Uitermarkt and Slycord built a second, smaller hand-feed baler that's also modeled after the 1930's "Ann Arbor" baler. It makes bales just 4 in. long, 1 1/2 in. wide and 2 in. high and is powered by an electric windshield wiper motor from a junked car. The men use grass from their yards and straw chopped up by a lawn mower in the "super mini" baler.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Albert Uitermarkt, 1510 S. Second, Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577 (ph 515 673-4547).