The Story of Communications in Oro

Excerpted from "The Story of Oro – Second Edition 1987"

Circa 1872 the Montreal Telegraph Company established one of the first lines of communication. This line ran from Barrie to Penetanguishene with a branch line from Dalston to Orillia. There were offices in the stores at Rugby, Edgar, Dalston and Craighurst, at which messages were received and sent.

The Oro Telephone Co. purchased the line up the Penetanguishene Road in 1911 with the intention of using it for a telephone line, but sold it later for posts.

In 1872 a telegraph line was built along the railway line. This was the Great North Western Telegraph. Only one office was opened between Barrie and Orillia, and this was in Oro at the Hawkestone station. The line was taken over by the Canadian national in 1922 and continued until 1933.

The Oro Telephone Company

On March 18, 1907, a group of interested citizens from Oro Station and Hawkestone, met in the school at Oro Station to discuss the possibility of local telephone service to improve communications.

The objective was to form a telephone company to be named the Oro Telephone Company and invitations were issued for subscriptions for membership at $10.00 a share. There were four subscribers signed at this meeting.

By May 17, 1907 some telephone poles had been purchased from local residents who had cut them from their swamps, and six telephones were ordered. When the line was completed between Oro Station and Hawkestone a charge for messages of five minutes duration was ten cents for non-subscribers. There were six subscribers on this first line.

The line was extended westward and was completed to Barrie by November 5, 1908, and a line charge of fifteen cents was made for any message going through the Bell operator.

Early in 1909, the Oro Telephone Company Limited was formed. Shares were $5.00 each but to become a member, five shares must be purchased – $61.75 was revenue from the phones, $27.00 of which was sent to the Bell Co. for

long distance messages and switching charges to Barrie. Requests for telephone service was made by Coulson, Jarratt, Marchmont, and Mitchell Square.

As the lines grew, a switchboard was established at the general store at Shanty Bay in late 1909, with R. Robertson as manager and the store clerk waited on customers and operated the switchboard as well. The switchboard looked like an ordinary telephone with a few plugs hanging from it. There were forty one telephones on the system at this date.