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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Harvey F. March

Division Plant Engineer

Kansas City, Missouri

July 1, 1928 to January 31, 1953

One of the requests made in the 1930's by A. B. Elias, President of the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, in assigning to the Telephone Pioneers the job of writing the history of the telephone in each exchange, was also securing the autobiographies of the pioneers who were retiring or had retired in order that their part in the development of the telephone business might not be lost.

It was from the biographies of such pioneers as McDaniels, Barrett, Penfield, Lichtry, Haldeman and others that the greater part of the data and photographs used in the first volume were obtained. The telephone was thirty years old in 1910 when the author started in the business and his contribution to the same can not be considered in the same category as those who had to invent ways of accomplishing the results as conditions arose.

A brief statement of the author's part in the telephone business of the last 42 years might well close this story as, being small the account might be lost if recorded by itself.

The author was born January 23, 1888 in Kansas City, Kansas. My Father was a physician. Prior to entering medical college, he and my Mother taught school in Paola, Kansas.

While a small child my folks moved to Argentine, now a part of Kansas City, Kansas and I entered grade school there. When I was in the 7th grade they moved back to Kansas City, Kansas where I graduated from grade school and then from high school in 1905.

I worked until 1907 in a wholesale house to obtain money for college.

I entered Kansas University in 1907 but did not finish the year. It appeared to me so many were studying courses and did not follow them when they graduated.

I decided to drop out and take a course in mechanical drafting from the International Correspondence School to fit myself for a machine designer. This was during the depression of 1907 when jobs were hard to get so I spent the time in completing the drafting course.

In the spring of 1908 I obtained a job with the Burlington Railroad. Finally I was promoted to the second shift at the switch-tower (3:00 P.M. to 11:00 P.M.) which left me free to do drafting work in the mornings on the side. I found a young firm of consulting engineers who did not have a large number of jobs and I was able to do all their drafting, working about three hours a day. I received the magnificent wage of 10 cents an hour at the start finally reaching 30 cents an hour.

This continued until the late summer of 1910 when I decided to break away from railroad work and devote all my time to drafting. I made a circuit of all the engineering offices in Kansas City and placed applications with them.

A few days later I received a letter from the District Plant Superintendent requesting I call. I was turned over to the District Plant Engineer, M. T. Sherman who looked over my sample drawings and, finding his folks knew my folks I was given the job.

I found out later that the District Plant Engineering was a new branch in the Plant Department. Previously all engineering had been handled by the Chief Engineer and it was to his Chief Draftsman I had made application.

I was the first draftsman in the Plant Department and very soon other draftsmen were added and I received the title of Chief Draftsman. In addition to drafting work for Kansas City I also did some work for Joplin and St. Joseph.

About a year after starting to work, they decided to place me on engineering, but about that time G. A. Kositsky was brought in from St. Louis from the Bell of Missouri to handle all Plant Engineering for the Missouri and

Kansas Telephone Company. He brought in new methods and new records and requested that I stay on for a while to assist in starting the new engineering records.

I continued in charge of drafting and records until August, 1912 when the Division Engineer at Topeka became ill and his assistant John P. Kobrock took over the job. I was sent to assist him.

At that particular time the Bell was taking over a number of competing exchanges and I assisted in preparation of the cutover and consolidation plans. The division office was moved to St. Joseph and the Northern Division was responsible for the Northern part of Kansas and the Northern part of Missouri to Brookfield.

These purchases, cutovers and consolidations included Atchison, Leavenworth, Topeka, and St. Joseph. I continued in the St. Joseph Division office until January 1, 1917, when I was sent to Akron, Ohio to help in preparing engineering plans for that fast growing rubber city.

In July, 1918 I requested transfer to Kansas City to be with my Father, my Mother having died in the Fall of 1917. I was given the Eastern District of Kansas City and continued to handle this section with interoffice trunks after the Bell and the Home companies were consolidated into the Kansas City Telephone Company.

In July, 1926 I was transferred to Topeka, Kansas and placed in charge of Plant Engineering for the State as Plant Engineer. When the Western Missouri and Kansas area was established with headquarters at Kansas City, my title was changed to Division Plant Engineer of the Kansas Division.

In July, 1928 due to the promotion of Stanley Skinner to Outside Plant Engineer for the area, I returned to Kansas City as Division Plant Engineer for the Kansas City Division. I have continued in charge of the division until my retirement January 31, 1953. This is known as the Western Missouri Division.

Since Kansas and Missouri have been separated into state units with headquarters at St. Louis and Topeka I gave up the Kansas plant but took over the northwest part of Missouri formerly part of the Kansas division.

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During the period of nearly a quarter of a century all duplicate offices have been retired, all manual offices have been replaced with dial (Raytown on June 1, 1953) except the original installation of dial in the Administration Building at 11th and Oak Streets replacing the old Main office at 6th and Wyandotte Streets and the old Harrison office on Baltimore between 10th and 11th Streets.

This engineering work has been extremely interesting and I am glad that all of my service over 42 years has been in Plant Engineering.

Harry Foster March
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