



# February Events



- February 2 - Hour of Prayer @ Noon
- February 2 - Groundhog Day
- February 7 - Council Meeting @ 7
- February 14 - Happy Valentine's Day!
- February 16 - Road District Meeting
- February 22 - Flower & Garden Club Meeting



## NOTICE...

The City of Alma is looking to appoint someone to fill the Emergency Management Director position that is open for our community. This person would be the main contact for the Lafayette County Emergency Coordinator or the Lafayette County Health Department Emergency Response Planner in the event of an Emergency in Alma. This person also will need to attend emergency program meetings, training exercises and work together with the Fire, Police, and City Council as needs arise.

Contact City Hall if you are interested.

# ★ No More Messages Fro

Continued From Page 1A aren't used because they aren't very reliable.

Old, failing equipment is one of the main reasons the phone company here is going to switch to an automated pushbutton system. Besides that, says Schleeter, there was some pressure among the stockholders of the locally owned company to sell if no switch was made.

But the company managed to get a \$365,000 loan at 2 per cent interest from the Rural Electrification Administration for the switchover, and the transition work began in July. Crews are still installing phones, and work is still being done on the labyrinth of wires in the new building that will make it all function.

It's going to change a lot, this system of buttons and buzzes.

For one thing, the number of employees at the Alma Telephone Company will drop from eight to two—Schleeter and his wife, Mary, who will be bookkeeper and retain her self-appointed title of "general flunky."

And there won't be any need for a night alarm and bed in the phone company office. Now, the night operator has a big metal bed to try to sleep in during the morning's quiet hours. Well, they're quiet until someone wants something on the switchboard and then a screeching bell goes off and wakes up the maybe-sleeping operator who answers the call. They say things are pretty quiet on the board from 11:30 p.m. or so until 5 or 5:30 the next morning.



## Cranking Down

The old wooden crank box on the wall in Mrs. Paul Bredehoff's home in Alma, Mo., will be useless when a push button phone system begins working Dec. 17. "This is the only way we've ever had it," she says of her old phone, and she's not altogether certain she'll like the new machine.

means they come to their phones. bors' batteries and it got hard to hear.

They've been coming to their phones since the company started in this clean little Lutheran community back about 1913. The company's customers then used to own their own phones and their own batteries and their own lines.

But people get careless about that kind of thing, and after a while people with dead batteries were plugging in to their neigh-

Finally, in 1945, the company incorporated and the company now owns and maintains all the equipment. The equipment now includes two 12-volt batteries in the back room that are used to run the system when electrical power fails. And a coal oil lamp so the operator can see her board.

Alma has a 24-page phone book that shows people with total, complete phone numbers

Then Alma's almost 400 citizens come to life, and that



# m Alma Operator

like 18 and 176. And 13. That's Poodle's Cafe, where after your meal they ask you to keep your fork for a piece of fantastic homemade pie.

The phone book's rule No. 1 is "always call by number," but phone company people say that maybe 80 per cent of the callers just ask for a name, and the operator has to have the phone numbers in her head.

The operator also has to know how to handle the 3,700 toll calls made in and out of Alma every month. There now are nine lines out to Higginsville, and Alma callers have to get to Higginsville before they can get to Kansas City or Phoenix or Buffalo. And callers to Alma from Kansas City go through Bell operators here who get the operators in Higginsville who get the

Alma operator who gets the person being called.

The switchover apparently will leave Halltown, Mo., west of Springfield, as the only crank system in the state. The Halltown Switchboard Service has about 300 customers and is 100 per cent crank. However, there's a pending proposal to buy the firm and change it over, too.

So when the Alma switchover comes, you won't be able to stand at the counter and hear the operator say:

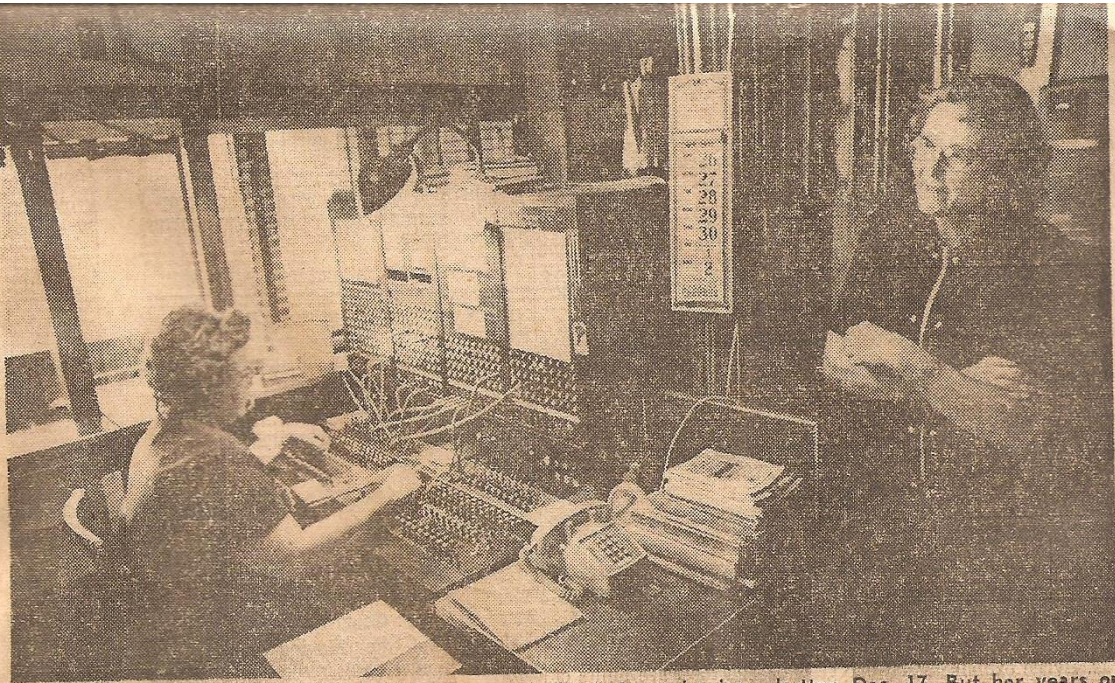
"Oh, thank you, Leona."

"Alma."

"No, I have not. I'll tell you some other time why."

And maybe that's progress.

A citizen came across these old articles and allowed me to scan them in. Little Ole' Alma made the Kansas City Star when we switched from the crank phone to the push button system!!



'Good-By,  
Central'

For 23 years, Miss Anna Louise Limback has been an operator for the Alma Telephone Company, a part crank, part pick-up-and-wait system that will switch to push

button Dec. 17. But her years on the board are 20 fewer than Mrs. Velma Frerking (right), has put in for the little company.  
(Star photo by Ray Corey)

## Bell Tolls for Operator

By William D. Tammeus

A Member of The Star's Staff

Alma, Mo.—You can see her from the street through the window, sitting there in front of her phone board, plugging in, unplugging, modestly acting as the heart of this town.

If you step inside the Alma Telephone Company's headquarters and lean on the wooden counter by the old switchboard, you can watch the incredible rhythm of a dying breed—the central operator for a telephone system that still partly cranks its way to life.

**BZZZZZZZ.** A small piece of metal on the board has dropped from straight up to straight out. Miss Anna Louise Limback, who's been an operator here for 23 years, plugs in to the buzzing spot.

"Alma," she says. It's one of the system's 126 rural hand-crank customers. She connects the caller.

A small light comes on by another tiny numbered hole in the board. Miss Limback plugs in to it.

"Number, please." Swiftly she connects that caller.

The operator here does more than just connect callers. She sets off the whistle that tells Alma its noon. She rings the fire alarm. She rings the torna-

do alert. She broadcasts general messages over party lines to eight or more listeners at a time. She tells people how to spell words.

And more. She gives them that recipe they missed the other night. She answers questions about who died when callers hear the church bell ringing. She tells farmers' wives whether she's seen their husbands on the streets.

Well, all that will be true until Dec. 17, anyway. After that, the 320 subscribers to the Alma phone company will pick up their phones, hear that dial tone so familiar to the rest of us and punch out numbers on their brand new push button phones.

When they punch the button for the operator, they won't get Anna Louise Limback or Bertha Rolf anymore. They'll get an operator in Higginsville, a dozen miles away, whom they probably don't know.

Alma is changing from a system that is part crank, part pick-up-and-wait to complete pushbutton. It will lose its local operators, lose the party lines. And the monthly residence rate, assuming the Missouri Public Service Commission approves, will go from \$3.50 to \$8 to pay for higher equipment and operating costs.

"When they decided they were going to switch," says Carroll Schleeter, phone company manager, "they went all the way."

When Dec. 16 slips into Dec. 17, the phone company will shove some black box-looking things in its new 6,000-square-foot building and pull out some old white fuses, and that will end almost 60 years of "Hello, Central."

The present company headquarters, next to the old green

wooden-front postoffice with a fern in the window, will be used as the business office.

The old board, built in the 1930s and installed here about eight years ago, will be retired.

"It's just hanging together for us right now," Schleeter says of the board, "and we hope it'll hang together until we change."

In fact, quite a few of the plugs on this old board have rubber bands around them and  
See ALMA on Page 12A

### On Inside Pages



CERNAN

The final Apollo is scheduled to leave earth at 8:53 p.m. (Kansas City time) Wednesday on the most ambitious manned moon mission to date. Blasting off in the first night launch of an Apollo will be astronauts Eugene Cernan, Harrison Schmitt and Ronald Evans. Phillip S. Brimble, The Star's science-medical editor, and Rosalind K. Ellingsworth, science-medical writer, report on past Apollo missions and goals for Apollo 17. Page 1G

The technique of heart transplanting goes into its sixth year with mixed opinions on its value. 14A.

Governor Hearnes says Democratic governors must en-

... of citizens come to life, a



### Telephone Operators'

When the Alma Telephone Company finishes changing to a push button system, its only two employees will be Carroll and Mary Schleefer, who will run the operation. The husband-and-wife team walk down Alma's main business street, just in front of the post-office.



Mr. and Mrs. David Knipmeyer won first in the comical floats division. (The Concordian photo)



A view of Alma, facing the northeast, taken about 1920.

## Alma Celebrates Centennial

(Continued from page one)  
with the drunks by tripping them with a rope stretched across the doorway of the saloon. When the drunks became too noisy and dis-

turbed the peace, they were locked up. The fines were usually five dollars and costs. The total fines for one year were more than 350 dollars.

In contrast to the conditions of pre-prohibition days, Alma became a peaceful town after the introduction of national prohibition. More details of Alma's

history are included in the centennial history book being published by the Alma Four Square Extension Club.