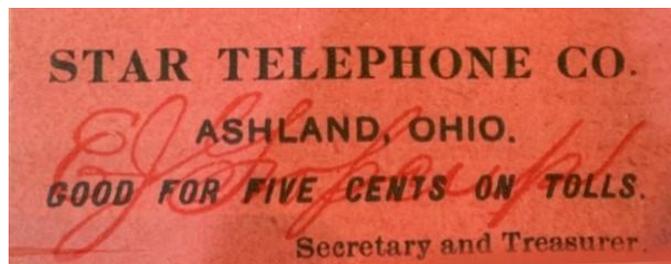


# Star Telephone Company

By Lori Adams

The first telephone company serving Ashland was known as the People's Telephone Company and was established in 1896 in Butler, Ohio. George A. Ullman, Joseph R. Swartz, Samuel H. Grabill, and George R. Freer purchased the People's Telephone Company for \$30,000 in 1899 and incorporated it under the name of the Star Telephone Company. At this time there were about 30 homes in Ashland with telephones, including the Erie Railroad and a local livery stable who felt it was necessary to provide more timely transportation services to the citizens who had telephones in their homes. P.A. Myers reportedly also had a telephone in his home as early as 1880 and referred to it as a "talk box."

The Star Telephone Company was originally located in the Guth Building at the corner of Church and Second Streets. By 1905, the company reported there were 934 telephone numbers in the village of Ashland and 230 telephones in the rural areas of Ashland County. The company owned exchanges in Ashland, Congress, Creston, Homerville, Jeromeville (now Jeromesville), Lakeville, Lodi, Loudonville, Paradise Hill, Redhaw, Seville, Wadsworth, and West Salem. The company also maintained toll stations in Burbank, Hayesville, Olivesburg, and Pavonia.



Telephone companies would often sell booklets of coupons that were used to pay for public telephone service or toll calls

In the early days of telephone service, subscribers were not permitted to allow other families in the neighborhood to use their telephone. Those who did not have a telephone were required to use public stations. Companies would sell booklets of coupons or franks that could be used to pay for public telephone service or toll calls.



This manually operated switchboard from the Star Telephone Company is on display at the Ashland County Historical Society

It is believed that the first long distance call from Ashland was made by Star Telephone employee Charles F. Kettering in 1906. He hooked up a telephone to a piano in a home at 208 W. Walnut Street, and opened the line so operators in Cleveland could hear his girlfriend, Olive Williams (later his wife), play her music.

By 1911, the cost of a three minute call to Cleveland was 35 cents. The former three or four digit telephone numbers were expanded to a "colorful" exchange where someone would lift the receiver and inform the operator to connect with 523 Blue, which was the number and color assigned to the Ashland Public Library.

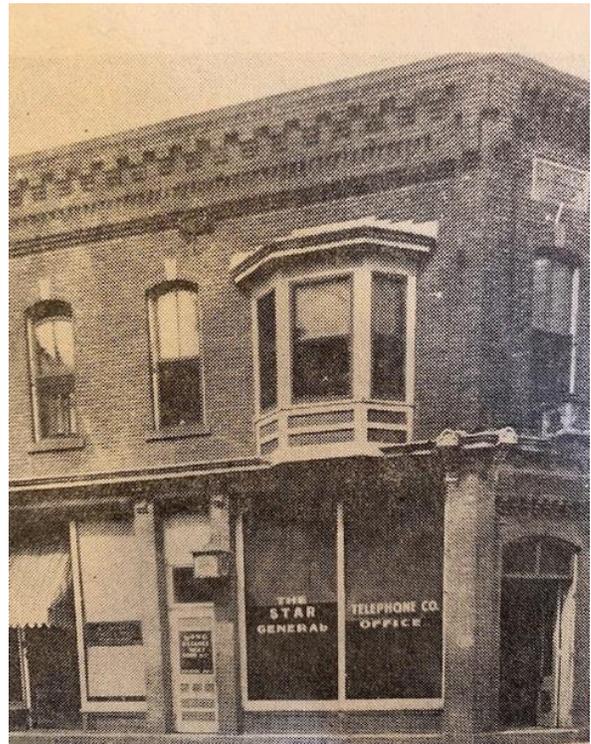
## STAR TELEPHONE COMPANY

In 1915, Star Telephone Company advertised that their goal was to place a telephone in every home in Ashland because it was a necessity, not a luxury. They boasted 2,800 telephones in the area along with Ohio State and Bell Telephone Company long distance connections.

In 1929, 3,894 telephones were connected, and the company employed 47 people who handled a daily average of 26,000 local calls and 500 toll calls. Rates for monthly telephone service were \$4.50 for a private business line, \$3.50 for a business party line, \$3.00 for an individual residential line, and \$2.00 for a residential party line.

The Star Telephone Company continued to grow through the years despite an early article in an issue of the Ashland Press on January 8, 1885 that stated the telephone was an expensive luxury that would never become a part of general society or the business world.

In about 1950, the Star Telephone Company merged with the Northern Telephone Company, which eventually became the General Telephone Company of Ohio in 1975 located at 118 West Main Street.



**The original office of the Star Telephone Company was located at the corner of Church and Second Streets in Ashland in the Guth Building**



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