

History of the Growth of the Telephone Company in Central Marinette County

The Wausaukee Telephone Division is comprised of the former Amberg Telephone and Telegraph Company and the Farmers and Merchants Telephone Company.

Amberg Telephone and Telegraph Company was incorporated July 29, 1904. By 1912, the company had grown to three exchanges - - - Pembine, Goodman and Dunbar. The exchanges increased to five between 1915 and 1918 with the purchases of Wausaukee Telephone Company and Crivitz Rural Telephone Company. In 1926, headquarters were moved to Wausaukee. On June 5, 1946, the majority of Amberg Telephone's was acquired by Robert H. Keating.

The Company expanded from about 251 customers in 1945 to 560 in 1951. Crivitz and Wausaukee were converted to dial and EAS was established between Crivitz and Wausaukee in 1951. In 1952, Goodman and Pembine were converted to dial. After REA financing was obtained in 1956, the Company established the Amberg exchange with dial equipment and EAS from Amberg to Pembine and to Wausaukee. Total customers had climbed to 1,442.

In 1965, new central dial office buildings and equipment were provided at Crivitz, Pembine and Goodman. At the same time, a new exchange was established at Twin Bridge with EAS to Crivitz and Wausaukee. The Harmony Telephone Company was acquired in 1958 and construction begun to provide dial service. By the end of 1967, the Company had 2,950 customers and a plant valuation exceeding \$2 million.

On June 16, 1969, Amberg Telephone was acquired by Cencom, Inc. That year, a project providing new buried cable and carrier facilities for modern toll service for Amberg, Crivitz, Harmony, Twin Bridge and Wausaukee exchanges was completed. By the end of 1970, plant valuation increased to \$3 million with 3,500 customers, and by June, 1974 there were 4,991 stations in the seven exchanges. Between 1970 and the end of 1976, the conversion to all one-party service was completed through the installation of new central office equipment, central office additions and buried plant additions. In 1983, a new division and business office building was completed. New digital central office equipment was installed at Pembine and Twin Bridge during 1983.

Farmers and Merchants Telephone Company was incorporated May 26, 1904 at Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin. In 1908, the Company was purchased by William Harley, who was president until his death in 1937. His wife, Mrs. Delia Harley, was President from 1937 - 47. In 1947 their son Ervin Harley became President and General Manager, serving in this capacity until his death in 1950 at which time his two sons assumed operation of the company. Ernest Harley became President and General Manager and Francis Harley became Vice President and Plant Superintendent. They served in these capacities until their retirement after the company was acquired by Cencom, Inc., June 1, 1973.

In 1931, Farmers and Merchants Telephone had two exchanges, Coleman and Lena, both equipped with magneto switchboards. The main office was at Lena and that year the office was destroyed by fire, along with the Company's early records.

A new building was constructed at Lena in 1933 and dial equipment was installed. At the end of

1933 the Company served 246 stations. In 1947, the main office was moved to Coleman. In 1950, the Coleman exchange was converted to dial service and the Company's total stations were 459.

In 1959, a combined headquarters and dial office was erected in Coleman and the Company's total stations had grown to 1,169. By 1967, with other building additions and installation of a new dial switchboard at Lena, total stations were now 2,063.

In June, 1979, the Amberg Telephone & Telegraph Company and Farmers & Merchants Telephone Company became the Wausaukee Telephone Division of Cencom of Wisconsin, Inc. At the end of 1984, the Wausaukee Telephone Division served 9,728 access lines. Norbert G. Quella, Jr. is the Division Manager.

The present building on Cedar Street and Hwy 180 was constructed in 1984 and operations moved in to the building that year. PTI (Pacific Telecom Inc.) purchased the Cencom Company in 1983, in 1997 Century Telephone Enterprises Purchased PTI and renamed the new company CenturyTel, In 2009 CenturyTel purchased a company call Embarq and renamed combined company, CenturyTel/Embarq, to CenturyLink.

Information was supplied by Mark Swaller from the the Wisconsin State Telephone Association Archives.