

The First Telephone on the Farm

I was at a farm meeting a few days ago. Six of us were having lunch. There was one other old guy besides me. The rest of the fellows were from 20 to 40 years old. Someone brought up the subject of phones. That got the other old guy talking. I personally think that old guys talk about the "old days" too much. I try to minimize that when I am with a group of younger folks that I do not know. This other old guy had no such inhibition. He got to telling us about how he helped his dad maintain the first telephone line in their farm neighborhood. The younger guys really could not relate and their eyes pretty much glazed over. Mom said that we got electricity on the farm the year I was born, 1946, but the telephone was in when they bought the farm in 1941. The thing I remember best about electricity is that Mom would light a kerosene lamp on the kitchen table when a thunderstorm approached after dark. Obviously, the power went out a lot. Electric service and phone service were both cooperative efforts in farm areas.



We were connected to an Elk River exchange, but the party line was local. The telephones were large wooden boxes that hung on the wall. The maintenance of the telephone system was a shared effort. Each of the several party members was responsible for maintaining the line for a period.

Pa was our local lineman for a year. He had a set of pole climbing gear. That included the barbed footgear and a waist strap for shinning up the poles. Pa used pole climbing tools if the wires got tangled or an insulator needed to be replaced. I remember watching him do that. At the end of the year, there were five defective telephones above the garage.



Ten years later I took the magnets of the telephone boxes. I used those magnets to study magnetism in my lab in the basement of the house. Each phone had six horseshoe shaped magnets as part of the ringer mechanism.



Pole climbing spikes



Pole climbing waist belt