



THE HUNGRY HOLLOW TELEPHONE COMPANY

Many people know about *Capay Valley Telephone System, Inc.*, and the success Andy Smith had providing communications to people in the valley from 1948-88--it was featured in volume 7 of this journal, after all! However, there was another obscure, yet nonetheless important telephone company that provided telephone service to farmers and country folk along County Road 19 up into what is called Hungry Hollow from the 1940's to 1970. It was called the *Hungry Hollow Telephone Company* and Bill Rominger remembers it for us:

The company's "service area" began about a half mile north of the Stevens Bridge over Cache Creek on Road 94B, about a mile north of what is now the Fliers Club. Utilizing 4 x 4 poles for the telephone poles about 100 feet apart along the county roads, a cross arm on each pole with two glass insulators, and two steel wires attached to the insulators and running parallel to each other about 16 feet off the ground, the telephone line snaked its way out to the Hungry Hollow area. It was a thirteen-party "party line."

The route was about 24 miles long, stretching north on Road 94B to County Road 19, then west across [now] State Highway 505 to County Road 88B, north to County Road 17, west to County Road 87, then north to County Road 12, but also branching off onto County Road 14, west to County Road 85, then both north and south on Road 85 to County Road Road 11 on the north and County Road 84B on the south.

There were three officers that ran the company, although ran the company was a pretty loose term because I don't ever remember a meeting being held, expenses being reimbursed or fees being levied on its subscribers. The officers were Oscar Durst, Jr. president, Lloyd Rominger, vice president and troubleshooter, and Floris Mast, secretary treasurer. In the late 1960's Lloyd's son [and author of this article] Bill took over the trouble shooting until 1970.

The company's troubleshooting "equipment" consisted of one set of pole climbing spikes, a safety belt, a telephone test set, and an aluminum extension ladder. If the phone was out of order, which in retrospect was pretty often, Lloyd and Bill would set out in their pick-up, driving portions of the 24 mile line to see if they could find the trouble. At certain points along the 24 miles, there was a spot at a certain pole where Lloyd or Bill could disconnect the wires, attach the telephone test set and see if there was a dial tone back toward Woodland where the main telephone office was located, and if there was a dial tone, call the main office repair service. Often the person at the main office would say "You have a 100,000 ohm short" which meant absolutely



This is the telephone that served our family during the Hungry Hollow Telephone Company existence. The green insulator is one used to hold the wires up on the pole. Circa 1940's.

Bill Rominger

nothing to us except we have a problem on the line. We would re-connect the wires then start working our way back to west to the next wire disconnect test spot.

If finally we found a test spot that did not have a dial tone then we knew the trouble was between that spot and the last test spot that had a dial tone. At that point we would drive back along the line until usually we could spot a problem visually, possibly a twisted or broken wire.

The winter of 1969-70 was the beginning of the end of the Hungry Hollow Telephone Company. One stormy day the phone was out of order and Lloyd and Bill went to troubleshoot the problem. Finding a downed wire between two poles, Lloyd put the wire over his shoulder and began climbing a pole to re-install the wire while Bill worked on the other pole. A combination of the weight and tension of the wire and a gust of wind pulled Lloyd off the pole and he fell to the ground. Though unhurt, he knew his days as a lineman troubleshooter were over.

Soon after, the company entered into negotiations with the main telephone company, at that time being Pacific Bell, and in the spring of 1970 an underground telephone line was installed and the Hungry Hollow Telephone Company was no more.

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Hungry Hollow was served on the east side of CR 85 by the Hungry Hollow Telephone Company while many on the west side were served by Andy Smith of Capay Valley.

“As a point of historical reference the following people and/or ranches were subscribers of the Hungry Hollow Telephone Company:

George and Dorothy Rominger; Charles and Blanche Rominger; Erna Jenness; Floris and Ruth Mast; William and Helene Rominger; Lloyd and Elsie Rominger; Karl and Mildred Giguere; Roth Ranch/County Road 14 & 85; Oscar and Jean Durst; Bandy Ranch/Road 85;

Bill and Hazel Hayes; Leonard and Mabel Jose; The Lawhead House/Road 84B

This being a thirteen-party line, every household had its own distinctive ring sound and everyone else heard the ring too. Thinking about that, either we got used to hearing all the rings or we just heard our own, but I don't remember that many disturbances from ringing phones. On the other hand, anyone could pick up a receiver while others were talking and listen in and that happened pretty often!! You knew other people were listening because each time someone lifted a receiver the volume decreased. Just for spite, if I was talking to someone and I knew others were listening, I would say “Hello everyone on the line. Enjoying the conversation?” Click. Click. Click. Great fun.

So from wires strung between poles and multi-subscriber party lines we have come to wireless cell phones smaller than the palm of our hand that we can use to talk to people on the other side of the world. Yes, that is progress for sure, but there is something quite comforting to have experienced a small country telephone company that served a place we call Hungry Hollow. Ah, memories, and history, are made of this.”

Bill Rominger

After I had shared this information I'd just gotten from Bill Rominger with a descendant from the Masts of Hungry Hollow, Faye (Mast) Brannan, she informed me that even before that, her great uncle John, living with his father Gotleib Mast off CR 13-86, had had a phone line strung out from Woodland to his homestead in the 1920s--along the fence lines! She said that he was executive at the *Bank of Italy* (before it became *Bank of America*) in Woodland and needed to stay in touch from the ranch in the Hungry Hollow-Dunnigan Hills in western Yolo County, so they used the existing fence lines, just putting up poles when they needed to go over the dirt roads. When I then shared this with Bill Rominger, he agreed there was a Woodland phone company [perhaps *Woodland Phone Exchange*, which was established in 1884, per historian Shipley Walters?] that might have reaching out here, too. Also adding:

The phone company has changed its name many times over the years. Prior to the Pacific Bell name I mentioned before it was known as American Telephone & Telegraph. That was back in the days when "monopoly" was never heard of and the service was so much better than than it is today, even with antiquated equipment. AT&T of course is a take-off of American Telephone & Telegraph.

So, apparently the Woodland telephone company strung lines out to us, too--and they used the existing fence lines to do it! And the phones were the old crank models--like the one I recall still in the house my family lived in in western Hungry Hollow in the early 1950s!

The Bank of Italy was founded in San Francisco, California, USA, in 1904 by Amadeo Giannini. It grew by a branch banking strategy to become the Bank of America, the world's largest commercial bank with 493 branches in California and assets of \$5 billion in 1945.

The bank was established to serve working class citizens of the area, especially Italian Americans living in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood. The bank survived the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 and was one of the first to offer loans to businesses to help rebuild the city. In 1909, the bank began opening branches in other cities and had 24 branches by 1918...The Bank of Italy merged with the smaller Bank of America, Los Angeles in the 1928. In 1930, Giannini changed the name "Bank of Italy" to "Bank of America." As Chairman of the new, larger Bank of America, Giannini expanded the bank throughout his tenure, which ended with his death in 1949.

www.wikipedia.com

Woodland Businesses, including a telephone company: Freeman, filed a town plat in 1863...Families began moving into the new city, and they built homes, schools, churches and a cemetery. In 1861, a private secondary school, Hesperian College, opened on what is now Bush Street for the teenage children of the town's prosperous farmers and business people. By the mid-1860's, Woodland...its business district boasted two county buildings, the courthouse and county hospital, a steam flour mill, brewery, livery stable, two blacksmith shops, wagon shop, two hotels, drugstore and six other stores. There was also a newspaper, the *Woodland News*, the ancestor of today's *Daily Democrat*.

What literally put Woodland on the map was the arrival of the railroad in 1869. Connected to the outside world by regular train and telegraph service, Woodland residents soon enjoyed a full range of city services--gas, water electricity and **telephones**, streetlights and graveled streets. **by Shipley Walters**
www.strollthroughhistory.com/history.html



On CR14 at CR87--Photo below, circa 1940s, courtesy of Bill Rominger, whose father Lloyd grew up here, then built across CR 87, and with the help of his son Bill ran the Hungry Hollow Phone company, 1940-70.



The Rominger homestead in Hungry Hollow above was built by William Rominger (3rd from right in family photo below, wife Helene standing behind him to left). Their children would include Helen (Mrs. Herb Campbell) and Lloyd Rominger.



Charles and Elizabeth Rominger had eleven children together: Lena (who died at age 12 of meningitis), William, Charles, Carrie, Herman, Edwin "Todd," Albert, Lena "Suse," Lydia, Elmer (who died at age 24 from pneumonia), and George "Mick." In this picture taken in front of the Rominger home, Suse, Mick, Lydia and Todd are in front, left to right. Standing are Elmer, Al, Herm, Charles, Blanche (Charles' wife), Helene (Bill's wife), Elizabeth, and Charles. This picture was taken before Elizabeth's death in 1920. Charles and all of his sons were farmers. Both Todd and Herm served in WWI.