

The first residential telephone service on Ocracoke Island was established by Carolina Telephone & Telegraph Company in 1956. The charge was \$5.00/month. Nearly everyone in the village subscribed...and the few holdouts soon signed on as well. Originally the telephones operated via ship-to-shore shortwave radio frequency. The tower was erected at the old Wahab Village Hotel (now Blackbeard's Lodge). A room was added to the hotel to house the equipment.

In the early days private telephone transmissions could sometimes be heard by neighbors over their radios or televisions!

Today, Ocracoke's land line telephone service operates via microwave transmission. The tower and equipment building are on Cedar Road (also known as the Bank Road).

When I was a youngster there was only one telephone on the island — at the Coast Guard station. According to cousin Blanche the US Coast Guard had a ship-to-shore radio telephone as long as she can remember, probably from the time of the construction of the village station in 1905.

The following article by Woodrow Price appeared in the *Raleigh News & Observer* in 1956.

“Ocracoke, June 15 - The last link in Ocracoke's telephone system was completed today when the local exchange was tied in to the long distance lines in the Carolina Telephone and Telegraph system.

“Utilities Commissioner Sam Worthington of Greenville closed the switch which completed the tie-in. The ceremony took place at Wahab Village Hotel [Blackbeard's Lodge] before approximately 35 or 40 islanders, company officials, and tourists.

“The island has been enjoying long distance service since January 14, when three telephones were connected to the mainland by way of short wave radio from a tower on the island to another at Engelhard They have been basking in the luxury of local telephone service for two weeks.

“In that two weeks, they have made a total of 9,390 calls local. The first day more than 1,700 calls were put in as neighbors rushed to chat with each other over the new gadget and ordered their groceries from the store.

So many of them decided to buy by telephone that Jesse Garrish [owner of the Community Store], who had put his telephone in the office, quickly decided to transfer it to a counter up front, where it would be more quickly accessible.

Already, 88 local telephones have been connected to the automatic exchange, which operates at the rear of the Wahab Village Hotel. This means that more than half the island phones [homes] already have telephone service.

“L.W. Hill of Tarboro, president of the CT&T, said in a brief talk before the switch was closed today that his company has about \$100,000 invested in the Ocracoke exchange. The venture is not profitable now and may never be, he said, because of the island terrain and the high cost of maintaining service. For instance, it is planned to fly service men in whenever any trouble develops.

“Hill said the company’s investment here is approximately \$1,100 per telephone compared to an average in the company system of a little more than \$400.

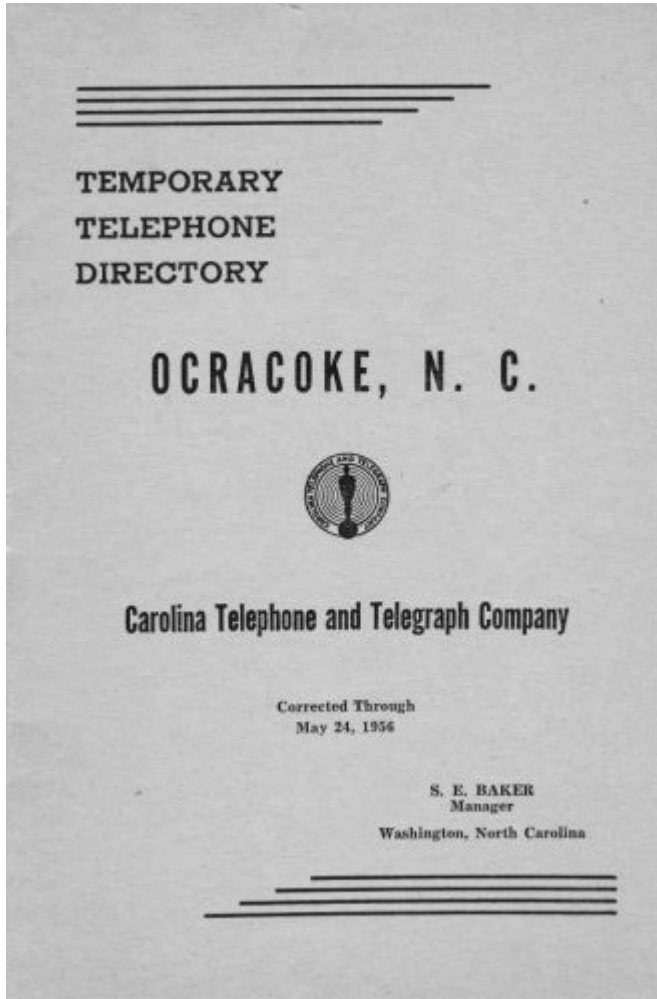
“This was the 111th exchange to be activated by CT&T.

“Besides President Hill, other company officials on hand for the occasion included Dail Holderness, vice president, secretary and treasurer; Jack Havens, vice president in charge of public relations; W.D. Marshall of New Bern, district commercial manager; A.N. Mason, general plant manager; C.R. Jones, chief engineer; Earl Baker, local manager; and John Reed of the advertising and public relations division. Robert Lyday of Rocky Mount, district representative for the Automatic Electric Co., also attended.

“Utilities Commissioner Worthington was accompanied by Ralph Moody, another member of the Commission. In a short talk before he threw the switch, Worthington said, ‘We realize as the regulating agency of this and other companies that projects of this kind are not profitable, but sometimes are necessary for the welfare and safety of a community.’

“One factor contributing to the relatively high cost of the installation here was the fact the company decided to bury its lines instead of running them overhead. This was done because of the danger of hurricane winds and also because of the effects of erosion [corrosion?] on overhead installations.”

Ocracoke Island’s 1956 Telephone Directory (Cover & Two Pages):



OCRACOKE, N. C.

INSTRUCTIONS

HOW TO DIAL—(General):

Remove receiver from hook, listen for dial tone and dial number desired. If, after dialing, you hear a series of buzzes, this is the busy tone and indicates the number you called is busy. Hang up receiver and call later. After talking, you may wish to put in a second call, in which case, hang up your receiver for about five seconds, remove the receiver and dial again.

The first two letters of each number indicate the exchange name. The first four figures of each number indicate the line number and the last figure indicates the ringing code. For instance, the number WAverly 8-2201 represents line number 8-220 and ringing code number 1; the number WAverly 8-2288 represents line number 8-228 and the ringing code number 8. The ringing codes are as follows:

Tel. No.	Code	Rings
WAverly 8-2211	1	1 long ring
WAverly 8-2212	2	2 short rings
WAverly 8-2213	3	3 short rings
WAverly 8-2214	4	4 short rings
WAverly 8-2215	5	1 long and 1 short ring

WAverly 8-2216	6	1 long ring
WAverly 8-2217	7	2 short rings
WAverly 8-2218	8	3 short rings
WAverly 8-2219	9	4 short rings
WAverly 8-2210	0	1 long and 1 short ring

PARTY LINE SUBSCRIBERS—

To call a subscriber on your own line, first take down your receiver. When dial tone is heard dial No. 116 and the last figure of your own number and the last figure of the subscriber's number desired. Hang up the receiver. Your telephone bell will ring indicating to you that the telephone of the number desired is also ringing. When your bell stops ringing it indicates that the called party has answered his telephone. Lift your receiver and talk.

Ringling on your own telephone may be stopped by momentarily removing your own receiver from the hook.

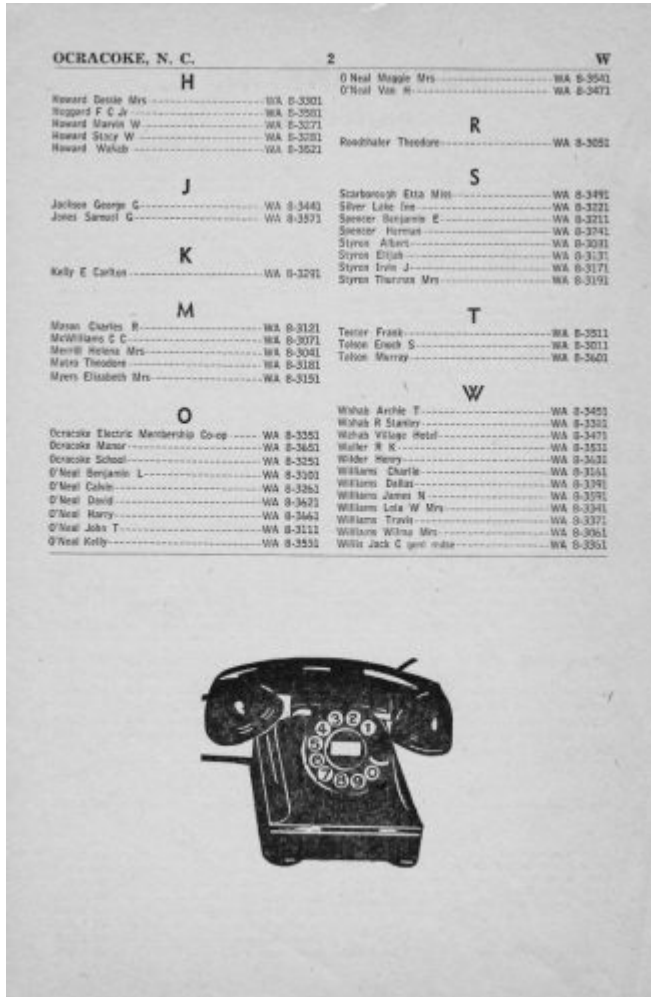
Do not move receiver hook up and down. This will cause wrong numbers, or if you are talking will cause the line to disconnect.

TELEPHONE SERVICE AND EMERGENCY CALLS

Long Distance.....	Dial "0"
Information—Numbers Not Listed in Directory.....	Dial "0" and ask for "Information"
TO REPORT DIFFICULTY.....	Dial "0"
With a Local or Long Distance Call.....	Dial "0"
To Report a Telephone Out of Order.....	Dial "0" and ask for "Repair Service"
Business Transactions With the Company.....	Dial "0" and ask for "0600"
For the Telephone Number or Address of the Nearest Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) Office.....	Dial "0" and ask for "Information"

WARNING: The law of North Carolina provides that any person who shall wilfully refuse to immediately relinquish a party telephone line when informed that such line is needed for an emergency call to a fire department or police department, or for medical aid or ambulance service, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor. Such law also provides that any person who shall secure the use of a party telephone line by falsely stating that such line is needed for an emergency call, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

A	E
Allgood Jake.....WA 8-3431	Eaton Eliah K.....WA 8-3501
B	G
Balanza Lawrence.....WA 8-3511	Garrish Jesse W.....WA 8-3481
Berly Machine Works & Foundry Co.....WA 8-3641	Garrish Jule.....WA 8-3611
Berly Mace.....WA 8-3641	Garrish Mace.....WA 8-3421
Bray Kathleen Miss RN.....WA 8-3031	Garrish Moorford R.....WA 8-3461
Burke Azzaz D Jr.....WA 8-3501	Garrish R P.....WA 8-3561
C	Garrish Roby Miss.....WA 8-3221
Connolly Steve genl cde.....WA 8-3321	Gastlin Horaz.....WA 8-3141
	Gastlin James L Jr.....WA 8-3091



The following story was told to me by Ocracoker, Al Scarborough.

Helen Dixon Fulcher was 84 years old when telephones were introduced to the island. The CT&T salesman tried to convince Helen to purchase a telephone. “No,” she said, “I don’t see any use for one of those newfangled gadgets.” The salesman, realizing that Helen was advanced in years, tried to entice her by pointing out that she could use the telephone to contact a neighbor if she became ill or had an accident and needed assistance.

Helen pointed out that all of her neighbors were old and frail. Miss Maude Fulcher, Helen explained, was in her seventies and “not doin’ too good.” Big Ike was nearing ninety. He had one foot in the grave. He wouldn’t be much help if she called on him. Charlie Scarborough was almost eighty, and his wife Sue was not far behind. Helen certainly couldn’t count on them for help.

The salesman persisted, saying he could “connect” her and she’d be grateful for it.

Finally, in desperation, she averred that she’d agree if he could just connect her directly to “Glory.”

Eventually Helen gave in and subscribed to telephone service. She would dial a number, but her eyesight was failing, and she’d often misdial. Of course, everyone she connected to on the island was someone she knew. The other party would try to explain that she’d dialed the wrong number, but Helen insisted she’d dialed correctly. Not fully understanding how the telephone system worked, Helen would explain in an exasperated voice that she was calling so-and-so, and would the person she was now talking too “please not pick up the phone the next time I call.”

*According to his obituary, Woodrow Price (1914-2000) was a “reporter,” a “superb newspaperman,” “former managing editor of the *News & Observer* and an avid outdoorsman who helped establish the Cape Hatteras and Cape Lookout national seashores....”