

# Burgaw Gets Phone Service



The Depot in Burgaw had a telegraph system installed around 1851. This remained one of the main forms of long distance communication and in operation until the more modern phone system was installed and became popular. In 1902, installation of long distance lines between Wilmington and Raleigh by Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company began. The installation process was quick and progressed at the rate of approximately 2 miles per day. At the end of September 1902, phone lines had been installed from Rocky Point to Raleigh. It was touted that Rocky Point had access to talk to people in New York before people from Wilmington could. All that was lacking in a full connection was a two mile section in Castle Hayne where Southern Bell was having troubles acquiring the right-of-way over land owned by Sam Blossom. Phones had been installed in public locations in Rocky

Point, Burgaw, Wallace, Rose Hill, Magnolia, Warsaw, Faison, Mt. Olive, Goldsboro and various other points headed to Raleigh. The locations where the phones were installed were known as "toll stations" and messenger boys were employed to locate persons who were wanted on the phone.



**LONG DISTANCE SERVICE**

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**PHONES ALREADY IN BETWEEN  
ROCKY POINT AND RALEIGH**

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Rocky Point Will Talk With New York and all Over the Country Before Wilmington — Four Toll Booths to be Located in the City. Poles up for the Line to Southport.

Phone service with toll stations in Wilmington were only meant to be temporary. Wilmington installed five sound proof booths – The Orton, Bonitz House, J. Hicks Buntings Pharmacy on Front Street, J. W. H. Fuch’s Drug Store and the Chamber of Commerce. On November 15, 1902 at 7 o’clock in the morning, Wilmington opened the long distance lines to the public. The line would have been open 2 weeks prior if not for trouble on the circuit. Southern Bell employees searched the entire line, from Goldsboro to Wilmington looking for the issue. They climbed every pole and finally located the issue three miles south of Rocky Point. Someone had “maliciously climbed one of the poles and attached an enunciator wire to the metallic circuit, run it down by the insulator to the arm, thence along the arm, and attached the wire to the ground wire running down the pole”. The circuit was grounded making long distance calls impossible. Another of the same issue was located three miles south of Burgaw. Once fixed, calls could be made to most major points east of the Mississippi River.

Long distance rates based on 3 minutes during daytime hours were:

Burgaw to Raleigh - \$1.00	Burgaw to Asheville - \$2.00
Burgaw to Charlotte - \$1.50	Burgaw to Wilmington - \$0.20
Burgaw to New York - \$3.50	Burgaw to Washington DC - \$2.00



Rates at night were half the day time rate. Rates were collected in the toll stations by dropping coins into the slot. Each coin made a distinctive sound. The operators were trained to listen to the sounds and knew when correct change was placed in the toll station. If coins were dropped into the wrong slot, the operator would detect it and the person making the call would be out the money. Operators were held responsible for every cent deposited into the toll station cabinet and carefully listened to make sure correct change was placed in the correct slot. Each booth was outfitted with an oak cabinet with slots for coins in the denominations of \$1.00, \$.50, \$.25, \$.10 and \$.05. Later, Southern Bell made changes to its Wilmington exchange and discontinued the booths and subscribers were to have their own phones.

It was not until 1906, that Burgaw received the capabilities of local phone service. W. D. Croom lobbied for the service and Southern Bell agreed to install 26 phones. Southern Bell further agreed to provide service to farmers and other out of town citizens within ten or fifteen miles in either direction as long as they agreed to construct and maintain the lines from their residence or place of business to a point one mile from the exchange. This made life easier for the farmers around Burgaw. This allowed for long distance connections from the growers and truckers to be in touch with the markets to which they shipped.

The monthly rates for this personal service was:

Businesses - \$2.00 to \$2.50 per month

Residences - \$1.50 to \$2.00 per month

These monthly fees did not include any long distance charges that were incurred. As the town grew in size, so did the need for a more wide spread phone system.