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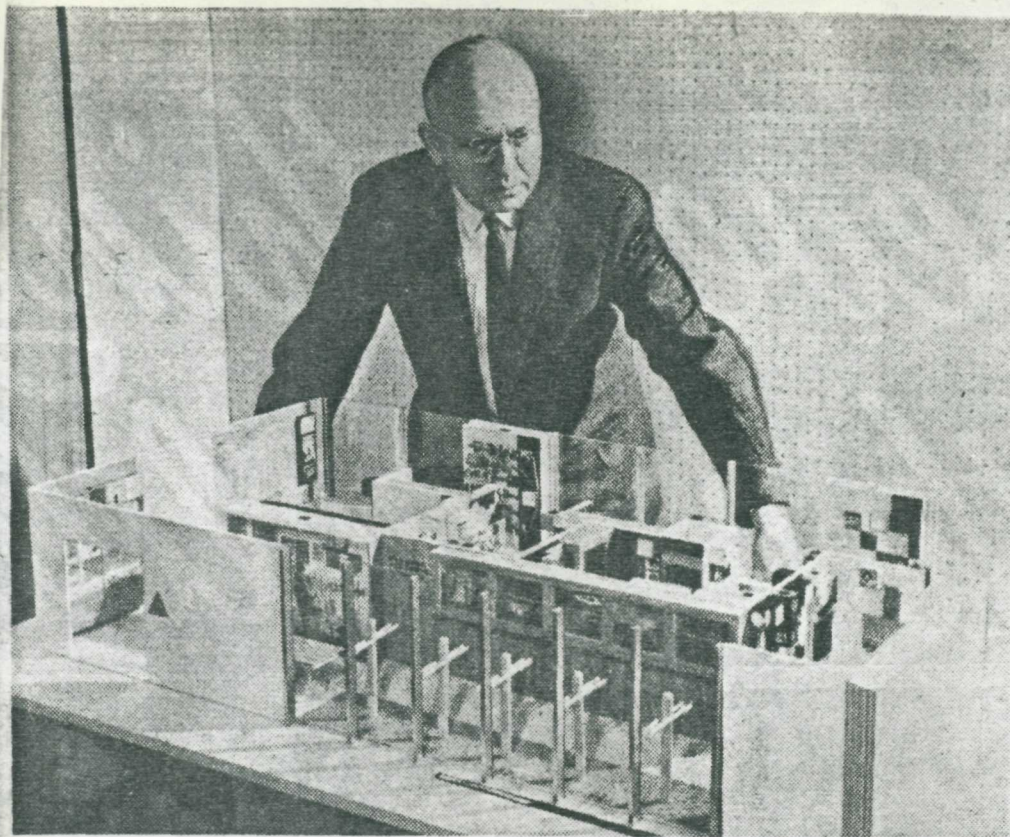
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Ralph Mahon
CHICAGO TRIBUNE, SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 1966



Ralph L. Mahon, 260 Forest av., Elmhurst, examines model of telephone museum he planned for the Illinois Bell Telephone company's offices under construction at 225 W. Randolph st. Mahon retired last week as the firm's historian after 41 years service.

'Walking History Book' Charted Phone's Past

In June of 1924 a young University of Chicago graduate joined the Illinois Bell telephone company as an engineering trainee. Ralph L. Mahon, 260 Forest av., Elmhurst, retired from his 41-year career Tuesday, just one day after his 65th birthday.

The native of St. Elmo, Ill., worked in a variety of operational jobs during this period. But none he enjoyed more than that of being historian for the company, he said.

Historian Since 1947

"Because of the many positions I was placed in, I learned much about operational aspects of the company," he said.

In 1947 Mahon was asked by Bell executives to help prepare a history of the company for the firm's 75th anniversary in 1953. From that time on he was engaged in historical research.

"I gathered the information from many sources," Mahon said. "Each item was placed on a card and cataloged. Information was taken from the Chicago Historical society, company records, periodicals, personal interviews, and from my own experiences."

Mahon said the installation of the first phones in Chicago came in 1877. The N. V. Fairbanks company had a line strung from its office at 113 N. Dearborn st. to a warehouse at 19th and Blackwell streets.

Slow in Catching On

Mahon said most of the phones in use before 1900 were primarily for commercial use. "It was considered unnecessary to have a private phone in your home," he said.

When John I. Sabin came to the Chicago offices as a top executive shortly after the turn of the century, he started a program to attract new private home users.

Among the many innovations put into use at that time were 10 and 20 party lines and coin boxes.

"Most persons think the dime phone call came after World War II," Mahon said. "One of the things Sabin did in 1900 was to cut the cost of a phone call to a nickel. It was raised back to a dime in 1951."

Grin and Hang On

Mahon, accurately described by his associates as a walking history book, said sales ideas changed radically thru the years. During the depression in the 1930s, the company didn't attempt to sell new phone service, he said. "Instead, we tried to convince folks they should hang onto phones they already had," he said.

A fire in December of 1946 will never be forgotten by many River Grove residents, according to Mahon. The flames destroyed the local telephone ex-

change building. "However, by using portable equipment, one of the most

spectacular recoveries of phone service in history was accomplished," he declared.

Will Visit South America

Mahon and his wife, Mayme, plan to visit South America later this year, after Mrs. Mahon finishes her 4th term as president of the Elmhurst Woman's club.

The couple has traveled to Europe and Asia and been in all of the 50 states. Mahon has thousands of color slides photographed during the travels.

In recent months, the veteran telephone man spent many hours planning and designing an historical museum on telephones. The museum will be in Bell's new general office building to be constructed at 225 W. Randolph st.