

# Sierra

TELEPHONE

## PROVIDING SERVICE FOR 125 YEARS

Sierra Tel takes pride in our rural roots, and this past year we celebrated the 125th Anniversary of Sierra Telephone Company, Inc. This main building block of the Sierra Tel Family began in Mariposa on November 2, 1895, when the Sunset Telephone Company, with the help of subscriptions totaling \$2,000 from Mariposa residents, completed a line from Merced to Mariposa. The line ran from Merced via Mount Bullion, Bear Valley and Hornitos. Constructed of sawed heart redwood poles and copper wire, the telephone line connected Mariposa with the outside world.

In December of 1895, a central office was located in the Burnett and Jones drugstore on Charles Street between 6th and 7th. The company consisted of a switchboard to which privately owned lines ("Farmer Lines") were connected. Burnett, being the town doctor, had one of the first phones. The Mariposa Gazette received its telephone February 19, 1898.

The telephone company was later purchased first by the Thistle family, then by the Magowans. At some point the central office was moved to the Grosjean building on the southwest corner of 6th and Charles. A soda fountain and candy shop was the principal business at that location. Sarah and Jack Gann purchased the business in 1913.

Users of the telephone exchange built their own lines to the office in order to receive service. These "Farmer Lines" were built in rural areas with as many as thirty subscribers all using the same line. Early-day ledgers showed user accounts indicating who owned the line—the farmer or the company. The switchboard would be open limited hours. After 10:00 PM, only emergency calls would be answered. Young Violet Cann Matlock often served as an operator and remembers answering calls for help during the night-time hours.

Jim Dulcich bought the Mariposa system in 1927. By 1933, he and his wife Marjorie moved the enterprise, now named The Butterfly, to the east side of Charles Street. The Butterfly included a meat market, coffee shop, the Mariposa Telephone Exchange and later a general grocery. They built the first rental lines and established the first service outside the immediate town of Mariposa. During World War II, June Meagher and Mickey Fournier, and perhaps others, stood by at the switchboard at night to receive war-related emergency calls.

After the war, Jim and Marjorie sold the company to Wesley Roome, who in turn quickly sold it to Oscar Ivey. Ivey modernized the company,

disposing of the old crank phones in favor of a dial system. He built a new building located at 8th Street and Highway 140 to house the company.

In 1944, the Bakers purchased the Raymond Telephone Company from the founder, Archibald C. Shaw, Sr. The Mariposa Telephone Exchange was purchased in 1953, and in 1954 it was incorporated as the Mariposa County Telephone Company, Inc. Also in 1953, the Raymond Telephone Company was changed to Sierra Telephone Company, and in 1954 it was incorporated as the Sierra Telephone Company, Inc. It is still a family-owned business today.

By 1984, the reasons for keeping the companies separate had ceased to exist, and they were merged to bring about some economies of scale. Sierra Telephone Company, Inc. was the surviving corporation.

The Mariposa Telephone Exchange consisted of a central system in Mariposa town, with lines extending to the Fairgrounds on the south, the Mel-O-Dee Motel on Highway 140, and the Division of Forestry Station on Highway 49. All other out-of-town connections were customer-owned "Farmer Lines" consisting of one wire with the earth (ground) serving as the return conductor.

The extension of electrical power into Mariposa's rural areas created complications for the single wire telephone lines widely used in former years. Electrical interference from the new power lines caused the rural telephones to be extremely noisy.

Almost upon acquisition, the planning and construction of modern lines for the rural areas began with the completion of extended service occurring in September of 1959. A new office and switching facility on Bullion Street in Mariposa heralded the completion of this major project.

The past 125 years have seen many investments in what has become Sierra Telephone today to meet the challenge of rapidly-developing areas of Mariposa County and Eastern Madera County. The company has now completed 99% placement of fiber to the node, further facilitating the deployment of high-speed digital services. We are committed to providing continuing advancements in telecommunications technology and broadband services to the mountain area customers and communities we serve.

