

March 1981 Athabasca Telephone Artifacts Presented



Mrs. Gladys Wright, Edmonton and Mrs. Shirley Dubie of Athabasca beside the display of telephone artifacts presented to the Athabasca Municipal Library early in February. Mrs. Wright is one of AGT's first Agent/Operators, having served Athabasca customers from 1912 to 1924. Shirley is currently the Clerk/Typist - Central Office Foreman

— Operations North at Athabasca.

The display, the fourth in an ongoing program of presentations to Alberta libraries and museums, illustrates the beginning of communications between Athabasca and the outside world. A figure of Pierre Eutit, a Metis, who ran from Athabasca to Edmonton in one day to tell of the damages caused by the flooding river, was sculpted by Mrs. Irene Geary, of Edmonton. Other artifacts include a length of iron wire and ceramic insulators from the old Dominion Telegraph line serving the community and two telephones of the early years. The telephones were among the more than 60 re-finished for AGT by the late Jack Reid.

AGT Presents Showcase To Athabasca Library

On Saturday, Feb. 7th Athabasca came into contact with some of its own history. Mr. Tony Cashman, Edmonton author and system-historian for A.G.T. made the presentation of a historical display case to the Athabasca library showing the beginnings of telecommunication in Athabasca Landing.

Mr. Frank Falconer accepted the key to the display case on behalf of the library board. This is the fourth in a series of four such showcases being presented to museums and libraries throughout Alberta. It was developed from the A.G.T. Historical collection of antique telephones, artifacts, photographs and documents. Each display case has been designed around the history of a local area.

The Athabasca display shows three phases in the beginning of the Athabasca to Edmonton telecommunications route, with events in 1898, 1904 and 1912. The case contains two vintage phones, insulators, telegraph cable, sender and key, and a sculpture of the Metis runner Pierre Luit. Also included in the presentation is a printed commentary containing original photographs from this area. Mr. Cashman designed the display and explained its development.

He stated that the two phones in the case originally came from the Athabasca area as did the insulators and telegraph cable. The telephones were restored by former A.G.T. employee Jack Reed who wouldn't accept money for the work but took payment

in the form of two bottles of Chivas Regal whiskey.

The figure of Pierre Luit was sculpted by Mrs. Irene Geary, wife of Harvey Geary, former A.G.T. employee who aided in the construction of the display. The sculpture was prepared from photographs of Mr. Luit taken at the time and now in provincial archives.

In 1898 the Athabasca River flooded the Hudson's Bay Stores and Pierre Luit was the runner who took the news to Edmonton.

Mr. Cashman commented that when invitations were sent out for the presentation these took 8 days to go by mail from Edmonton to Athabasca. He suggested that, had Pierre Luit still been around, the invitations would have come much quicker.

The telegraph to Athabasca came in 1904 and this equipment proved to be harder to find for the showcase. Mr. Harvey Geary, an avid ham operator, managed to locate a key and sender through his hobby and these were donated by Mr. Cy Gillis of St.



Supervisor Jim Yownie stated "It is a glad opportunity for A.G.T. to return these artifacts to the Athabasca area."

Mrs. Gladys Wright of Edmonton was a special guest for the presentation. She was agent and chief operator for the Athabasca area from 1918 to 1924.

Others in attendance were