

Arizona "Toll" Centers A Historical Perspective

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Introduction

The years following the close of World War II were a time of rapid growth throughout the United States. These growing pains were especially acute here in Arizona. Our economy was booming with commercial, industrial, tourist and retirement growth. One aspect of the expansion centered around the need for additional telephone operators to handle the mushrooming growth of long distance calling.

Many of these new long distance operators came from ranks of the local operators. The conversion from manual to dial telephone service moved forward rapidly during the late 1940's and early 1950's. This resulted in displacement of many local operators from smaller rural communities to newly established toll centers. At its peak in 1960, Arizona had twelve toll centers, 10 Bell System and 2 independents. Toll centers in the bordering states of California, New Mexico and Utah also handled long distance service to nearby Arizona exchanges. Beginning in late 1977, further centralization took place as automated "TSPS" type operators in Phoenix and Tucson gradually replaced the "cord board" operators. By 1983, all but four toll centers were closed.

This study is an effort to document the transition of telephone operators from manual "number please" service to the toll centers. It also goes on to show the transition from cord type switchboards to TSPS equipment. The information contained in this study is a result of considerable research and interviews with people who worked in the industry through the years. This report would not have been possible without the valuable assistance. Every effort has been made to record this information accurately. I am sure additional information may surface in the future that will further detail the events of this era. Please feel free to share your knowledge with us regarding these events so it can be included in future revisions of this report.

