

## **Michigan Every Day** **By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly**

*Oct. 27, 1879*  
*First telephone*

The first phone installed in a Michigan town was not in Detroit or Grand Rapids or Ann Arbor but in Rockland, a town of a few hundred residents in the Upper Peninsula's Ontonagon County.

The people of Rockland laughed when Linus Stannard installed a "box" in his home so he could talk over a wire with neighbors; neighbors who had no telephones of their own. Stannard had visited the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876 and listened to a lecture by Alexander Graham Bell. Stannard often walked miles to a neighbor's house to deliver a message or discuss business, so Bell's invention that enabled its user to speak over long distances interested Stannard. When Stannard arrived home, he discovered his fellow townsfolk unimpressed. But Stannard convinced five nearby friends to start a company and construct a private line.

Eighteen miles of wires strung on cedar poles were stretched from Greenland to Ontonagon through Rockland, a job that took two weeks and was completed in March of 1877. Once up and going, the five men had a party line and almost every night they demonstrated the strange device. At first skeptics believed they were being hoaxed and that the singing or talking they heard was not coming from miles away but from an adjacent room. Eventually these people became convinced the telephone was real and on Oct. 27, 1879 the partners formed the Ontonagon county Telephone Company.