

1943 Nov. 12

# AROUND THE TOWN

By Edgar S.  
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THE Albany Rotary club will celebrate a significant anniversary in connection with its weekly luncheon today at the Ten Eyck; the first coast-to-coast telephone conversation between Albany and San Francisco which was the feature of its luncheon just 28 years ago. It is difficult to realize that the telephone, outgrowth of an idea of Joseph Henry, teacher in the Albany academy, was in its swaddling clothes, back in November 12, 1915, with World War I stealing the front pages.



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Albany was the third city in the United States to establish an exchange, following closely New Haven, Conn., and Lowell, Mass. The Albany office was opened May 22, 1878, as the American District company with rooms on the second floor of the Van Heusen Charles company in Broadway. Many consolidations were consummated from time to time, until today, the Bell telephone system encircles the globe.

At 9 o'clock in the evening, just 28 years ago today, the members of the Albany Rotary club met in the Ten Eyck hotel. The new wing was just a set of blue prints and the hotel building was flanked on the east by the old Tweddle building. George D. Elwell was president of Albany Rotary that year, and it was his voice, singing, "I Love You, California" that was picked up on the long distance telephone by the members of the San Francisco Rotary club, some 3,400 miles away. R. R. Rogers, member of the west coast club, acknowledged the song by replying with his rendition of "Albany, Dear Albany."

At each club member's place was an individual telephone. There was another group up at the Education building, presided over by Commissioner John Findley who were plugged in on the line for the first coast-to-coast hookup in the history of telephonic communication. W. F. Schmidt, special agent of the New York Telephone company, spoke from Albany on "The Transcontinental Telephone Line." The men of Albany Rotary listened as the connections were completed from city to city, climaxing when Bert Lytell, former Albany Stock actor, talked to his old friend, George William McEwan and Secretary Jack "Cogs" Tremain engaged in conversation with Jack Shetland in San Francisco.

The members of the San Francisco Rotary club were meeting in the Palace of Liberal Arts during the Panama-Pacific Exposition, and the demonstration was one of the features of that earlier World's fair.

The voices of those which were carried from coast to coast passed through 13 states and over 130,000 poles to the Golden Gate. It is interesting to trace the development of long distance telephone communication previous to the history making event in Albany that night. In 1876, communication was established between Boston and Cambridge, two miles. In 1882, the 45 miles between Boston and Providence was an accomplished fact. New York and Boston were successfully linked in 1884. In 1890, Chicago, 900 miles away, was added to the circuit. During the year 1911, Denver, 2,100 miles away, was added to the list and in 1913 Salt Lake City, 2,600 miles distant, was the pre-runner to the Albany-San Francisco hookup. In commemoration of that event, Albany Rotary will today devote its entire luncheon period to a review of a meeting which made communications history back in 1915.