

Dallas Telephone numbers 1915-1961

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Abstract

The period from perhaps 1910 through 1927 was a pivotal and dynamic one for the local telephone industry in the United States. Quite commonly during that era, in a city there would be two or more competing local telephone companies, each with their own network, there often being no way a subscriber of one service could call a subscriber of the other(s). Almost always, those two operations merged, ultimately resulting in subscribers of either of the original services being able to call any subscriber in the city, regardless of their original service.

Usually, by the end of that era, economic realities resulted in the two or more companies merging in some way and then moving toward operational consolidation of their respective networks. Often at about the same time, telephone service was being converted from a “manual” basis to a “dial” basis, which of course introduced its own complications. One manifestation of this was often very “interesting” schemes of telephone numbers, both as they were dialed and as they were presented in print.

One particularly interesting case is that of Dallas, Texas, a case the author recently studied extensively. This article summarizes the findings of this study, actually extending the view through 1961, by which time the telephone numbers in Dallas had (almost) reached their “ultimate” configuration.

1 INTRODUCTION

The period from perhaps 1910 through 1927 was a pivotal and dynamic one for the local telephone industry in the United States. Quite commonly during that era, in a city there would be two or more competing local telephone companies, each with their own network, there often being no way a subscriber of one service could call a subscriber of the other(s).

Usually, by the end of that era, economic realities resulted in the two or more companies merging in some way and then moving toward operational consolidation of their respective networks. During that same era, as to local telephone service, the Bell Telephone System was actually forming up, typically by AT&T, the parent company, acquiring the/a telephone company in each city Bell found to be of value, and then, when there was more than one company, perhaps hastening the consolidation I spoke of earlier, and perhaps later acquiring the other companies.

At the same time, “machine switching” (that is, “dial” service, as distinguished from the earlier “manual” mode) was becoming very important. Often, in a city with, say two telephone companies, one championed machine switching, and installed “dial” switching systems on their network, while the other, for various

reasons, did not eagerly move in that same direction and maintained its network of manual switchboards. When the two companies eventually had a "shotgun wedding" (as was essentially inevitable), the consolidation of their networks, based on wholly different premises, was technically (and otherwise) very challenging.

One manifestation of this was often very "interesting" schemes of telephone numbers, both as they were dialed and as they were presented in print.

Then, as the systems grew, the numbering schemes had to expand to accommodate the larger number of telephone stations to be served, often in ways affected by the shadows of the prior organizational situation, and/or by the economics and technical realities of implementation.

One particularly interesting case is that of Dallas, Texas, a case I recently studied extensively. This article summarizes the result of this study, actually extending the view through 1961, by which time the telephone numbers in Dallas had reached their "ultimate" configuration.

2 CAVEAT

Authentic material on the matters of interest in this study is hard to come by. There are not available online, in general, Dallas telephone directories from the period of interest. Fortunately, there are available online, for many years in the overall period of interest, copies of Worley's Dallas City Directory.

There is also a paucity of authentic information about the evolution of telephone service overall in Dallas, and on the various complex maneuvers of merger and change in control of the various entities involved.

So the stories told here are not necessarily absolutely accurate. But they represent my best interpretations of the available data at this point in time.

3 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to have been able to work on this study with the assistance and collaboration of John Haralson of Denver, Colorado, an astute and knowledgeable student of telephone numbers and the effect on them of the evolution of telephone service, in many cities and regions.

His comments on many of my observations, his providing valuable reference material both on this case and on many other parallel cases, and his calling attention to many relationships I had not noticed, were invaluable.

Many thanks also to Gary Goff of Telephone Collectors International for providing much valuable input on this matter.

4 FORMAT

The format of this article differs from that of most of my other articles in that the majority of the content is all contained in Appendixes. These may refer to each other to complete the "story".

5 APPENDIXES

Appendix A revolves around a table showing the format of Dallas telephone numbers during several "eras" of evolution.

Appendix B illustrates the unique dial used in Dallas over several of the early eras.

Appendix C gives a "partly conjectural" story of the changes that happened between eras.

Appendix D Follows the changes over the eras of the main telephone numbers of two "landmark" downtown Dallas enterprises.

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**Appendix A
Dallas telephone numbers–1915-1961**

Based on listings in Worley’s Dallas city directories except as noted.

1915-1918		All dial				
Auto (dial) ^a	Bell (manual)	1924 ^a	1927-1939	1941-1945 ^c	1955 ^c	1961 ^c
A 2368 ("Avondale" ^d)	Preston-s ^b Cliff-s	Avondale 2368 (A -2368)	2-2368 3-2368	Central-2368 (C -2368)	LO gan-2368 (LO -2368)	DA vis 1-2368 (DA 1-2368)
C 2368 ("Cliff")	Edgewood-s Haskell-s	Cliff-2368 Edgewood -2366	4-2368 5-2368	Harwood -2368 Justin -8-2368	PR ospect-2368 RA ndolph-2368	EM erson 8-2368 FL eetwood 7-2368
E 2368 ("Edgewood")	Main s	H -2368 (was Haskell)	6-2368 7-2368	Lakeide -2368 Logan 6-2368	RI verside-2368	LA keside 6-2368 WH itehall 2-2368
H 2368 ("Haskell")		J -2368	8-2368	Madison -2368		
M 2368 ("Main")		X -2368	9-2368	Riverside -2368		
		Y -2368		Taylor -2368		
		U -2368)		Tenison 3-2368		
				Tremont 7-2368		
				Winfield -2368		
				Wright 7-2368		

Notes:

1. The letter(s) to be dialed are bolded to make clear the working of the numbering plan. That does not necessarily mean that this is the customary typography for representation of the numbers in print (which varied greatly).
2. The station number "2368" is arbitrarily used in all examples (except as described in note b).
 - a. The dials used in these eras did not have the later-familiar "mapping" of letters to digits. Rather, the digits had letters associated with the digits thus:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
M	X	H	E	A	C	Y	U	J	nil

 We see an example in Appendix B.
 - b. The italic letter "s" represents the station number, which may have 1-4 digits.
 - c. Only representative offices shown.
 - d. Name assumed to be the basis of the central office code

Appendix B
"Short alphabet" dial (Dallas arrangement)

Figure 1 shows an example of a Western Electric "short alphabet" dial with the letter arrangement believed to have been used in Dallas.



Figure 1.

Because of the way this arrangement was, in many Western Electric dials, indicated in the nomenclature of the number plate and the dial itself, I often refer to this arrangement as "arrangement G".

For reference, Figure 2 shows the arrangement of the letters on the "full alphabet" dials "standardized" in the US starting in 1921.



Figure 2.

Because of the way this arrangement was, in many Western Electric dials, indicated in the nomenclature of the number plate and the dial itself, I often refer to this arrangement as "arrangement B".

The basis for the arrangement of letters on the dial shown in Figure above is not known. I suspect it was something like this:

When the Dallas Automatic Telephone Company (DATC) began operations in Dallas (in 1912), to offer dial service in competition with the existing Southwestern Telegraph and Telephone Company (SWT&T, a Bell System affiliate), which offered manual service, they planned to have central offices serving roughly comparable areas of the city.

They apparently believed it would be helpful if their central office names (the first letter of which would be the dialed central office code for that office in their network) were the same as those of the generally-comparable SWT&T central offices, which were Cliff, Edgewood, Haskell, Preston, and (of course) Main.

Thus they adopted the names Cliff, Edgewood, Haskell, and (of course) Main for four of their offices, plus Avondale for the fifth (which did not match up with any SWT&T office name at the time, but whose service area generally corresponded with that of the Bell Preston office). And they assigned the initial letters of those names, A, C, E, H, and M, to prominent digit positions on the dial (digits 5, 6, 4, 3, and 1, respectively).

Interestingly enough, although the DATC central office codes were the initial letters of the central office "names", those names themselves were rarely if ever mentioned. The numbers were seemingly always (officially) stated as, for example, "A 2368"

I do not know why they gave "X" such a nice "short pull" position (with "2"), but it came in handy a bit later (maybe the DATC folks had a premonition).

Nor do I know why they assigned Y, U, and J to the last three digit positions, although good use was made of them (rather arbitrarily) a bit later.

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Appendix C **The back story—maybe**

This is a conjectural explanation of the evolution of Dallas telephone numbers from 1915 through 1961, as shown on the table of Appendix A. I derived it by, working with a knowledgeable fellow researcher (see Acknowledgments section above), by triangulating and interpolating among a very thin body of authentic information. I am fully responsible for any guesses that turn out to be wrong.

Note that the various complex maneuvers of acquisition and merger and renaming of the various entities, the details of which are not at all clear to me, have in any case here been simplified.

The dates (except those shown in bold italics) are those of the Dallas City Directories from which much of the pertinent data was derived.

I pick up this story as reflected in 1910.

1910 (not a year recognized on the table). In 1910 there was seemingly a single telephone company in Dallas, likely Southwestern Telegraph and Telephone Company (SWT&T) (perhaps under an earlier name), which was part of the Bell Telephone System (and thus owned in one way or another by AT&T). It provided service through a number of manual central offices, which were identified by names. It is likely that they had no visible intent to “upgrade” to a “machine switching” (dial) system in the foreseeable future.

1915 Some time prior to 1915, a competing telephone company, The Dallas Automatic Telephone Company (DATC), definitely not part of the Bell Telephone System, was formed to offer telephone service in Dallas in competition with SWT&T, on a dial basis, probably using Strowger switching equipment from Automatic Electric, eventually with a number of central offices.

Each competing company then had its own network, wholly separate. There was essentially no way that a subscriber of one of the services could call a subscriber of the other. As a result, most businesses had telephones on both services, usually identifying their two numbers in their advertising as “Auto” and “Bell” (or “SW”). Examples of the telephone numbers used for the two services are shown on the table in two columns for the 1915 era.

The different DATC central offices all had letters (presumably the first letters of the rarely-if-ever-mentioned names), and the central office code was a single digit, dialed based on that letter, as associated with a digit on the dials in use on their system.

The association of letters with digits on those dials is shown in a note to the table and (M=1, X=2, etc.) and seen in Appendix B. Note that this is wholly different from the assignment of letters to the various digits (ABC=2, DEF=3, etc.), that, starting in about 1921, appeared on the dials many places, especially in the larger cities, and which eventually became very familiar nationwide. It is also shown for comparison in Appendix B.

It is believed that the specific letter-to-digit assignment on the DATC dials was essentially unique to Dallas.

It is believed that DATC had at the very first used dials with a different arrangement of letters, but quickly switched to the dial I describe above.

These dials were presumably made by Automatic Electric Company, who made the (presumed) Strowger switching equipment, and probably supplied the telephone sets used.

Note that in this era a Bell number such as "Main 2368" (manual) might be printed in a newspaper ad as "M 2368". An alert caller for that establishment might realize that "M" was an abbreviation for "Main", and (quite properly) ask the operator for "Main 2368". But if he asks for "M 2368" (just as he sees it), the operator would recognize that this call is to a number in the Main central office and route the call accordingly.

It is believed that where central offices in both systems had the same name (*e.g.*, "Main", "Cliff", "Haskell") that they were in some way "counterparts", likely serving about the same areas of the city.

One result of this is that a business subscriber might arrange with the two companies to have the same number in both systems, and could therefore advertise "Both phones Main 2368" (or "M 2368").

1917 (not a year recognized on the table): Southwestern Telegraph and Telephone Company became an integral part of the recently consolidated and renamed "Southwestern Bell Telephone Company" (SWBT), owned by AT&T. It is suspected that the Dallas operation however still operated under the familiar name "Southwestern Telegraph and Telephone Company".

1918 (not a year recognized on the chart): A new firm, Dallas Telephone Company (DTC), apparently owned (one way or another) by SWBT, was created and acquired all the telephone plant and telephone operations of DATC and SWT&T. It was of course part of the Bell Telephone System.

1924 By this time, two projects had been completed; the details of exactly how they proceeded, and how they interacted, are unclear.

- Starting after the merger of 1918, DTC began to put in place provisions so that subscribers of one of the original new networks could call subscribers of the other.
- Starting in 1921, DTC began to progressively completely convert its Dallas telephone network (manual) to machine switching (dial) operation (with Strowger equipment made by Automatic Electric).

To make this most workable, DTC, for subscribers of the manual offices, before they were converted to dial, had on the subscribers' new telephone sets dials with letters associated with the digits in exactly the same unique way as the dials originally used by DATC. Their new and replacement telephone sets were likely made by Western Electric, which for that purpose introduced dials with the "Dallas" letter arrangement.

Some of the former "Auto" dial offices got new central office codes, actually just a letter not based on a name. It seems that other of those offices were retired, their subscribers reassigned to other offices. The details of this are unclear.

In addition, the former Bell office "Main" got such a new "nameless" central office code ("X"), and the former Ball "Haskell" office got a "nameless" central office code, "H", the same one it had when it had a real name. (No, I don't understand what that was all about).

In any event, after all the dust had settled, there were 8 distinct central offices. And, handily enough, there were of course 8 distinct "pulls" of the dial for their central office codes.

"0" was unavailable as it was presumably the preferred pull to reach the local operator. "1" was undesirable owing to the prospect that, especially on the deskstand telephone sets then commonly in use, "fumbling" with the switchhook when talking the receiver off-hook could generate a "preliminary pulse" that would look to the central office equipment like a dialed digit "1", so it was attractive to arrange the equipment to ignore an apparent initial digit of "1" (except for service codes such as "113"). Thus "1" could not be used as a central office code.

1925 (not a year recognized on the table): Dallas Telephone Company became recognized as a component of the newly-reorganized Southwestern Bell Telephone Company (SWBT—owned by AT&T), and began to operate in Dallas as Southwestern Bell Telephone Company.

1927-1939 Apparently some time before 1927, SWBT decided to move away from the scheme of letters to represent digits it had inherited from DATC, and changed the representation of the telephone number to the form "2-2368". Seemingly most of the actual numbers, as dialed, did not change. Thus the Cliff central office number formerly shown in print as "C-3895" (dialed as 63895) was now represented in print as "6-3895" (still dialed as 63895).

I believe that this conversion to identifying the central offices by a digit rather than a letter was an intermediate step to move away from the very parochial "short alphabet" letter scheme, to allow the eventual adoption of identifying central offices by letter but based on the "full alphabet" dial arrangement by then in wide use elsewhere.

1941-1945 Apparently some time before 1941, SWBT moved back to a representation of telephone numbers based on a name for each office. The central office code was now the single digit that, on the "full alphabet" dials then in wide use in the US telephone network, was associated with the first letter of the central office name.

It appears that in general this was done so as not to change the numbers as dialed; only the printed representation changed (as for example from "2-2368" to "Central 2368").

It is assumed that, in advance of this change, all dials in the Dallas system were progressively changed from those with the original DATC arrangement to the type

having a "full alphabet". (Recall that since perhaps 1927, letters on the dials were no longer used at all, so the dial swap-out would have caused no difficulty to the users.)

Note in this era the existence of both single-digit and two-digit "central office codes (for the latter, such as "Justin 8" and "Logan 6").

As to Justin 8 (58), that was probably done to preserve the name that was somehow always in the background for the "J" office while avoiding conflict with the code for the Harwood office (5).

As to Logan 6, Tenison 3, and Tremont 7, this is a situation often seen at the corresponding stage of evolution of cities using step-by-step switching equipment. It comes from a need to establish new "central office codes" when all the usable single-digit codes are already used, but it is not yet time to convert the entire city to two-digit central office codes (which would have involved costly equipment changes throughout the city).

This situation is made workable in this case by the fact that, for example, no Lakeside station numbers began with "6", Thus the digits "46" would be uniquely recognized as a two-digit central office code (for "Logan 6"). A similar situation existed for Tenison 3 and Tremont 7: there were no Taylor station numbers beginning with "3" or "7". Thus the digits "83" or "87" would be uniquely recognized as two-digit central office codes (for Tenison 3 and Tremont 7, respectively).

Note that in each of these "two-digit" central office codes, the numbers could just as well have been presented in the "2L-4N style" that was already in vogue in larger cities. That is, "Justin 8-2368" could just as well have been presented as "JUstin-2368", Logan 6-2368 as LOgan-2368, and so forth; the implied dialed codes would have been identical for either representation. One of those in fact turned out to be useful in the next phase of evolution.

1955 Apparently some time before 1955, SWBT adopted a "2L-4N" numbering plan (as had for some while been used in larger cities mostly in the North), and seemingly "renamed" many of the existing central offices. Central office codes were now all 2 digits, derived from the first two letters of the central office name. The typical number was presented (in the full formal form) as "PRospect 2368", or "PR-2368" for short. Seemingly many telephone numbers were changed in this transition (both the central office code and station number components).

Interestingly enough, of the several 2-digit central office names established in the 1941-1945 era, all of which could have morphed unscathed into "2L-4N" form, seemingly only Logan 6 actually survived by 1955 (as LOgan, the same dialed code).

1961 Apparently some time before 1961, SWBT adopted in Dallas the "2L-5N" numbering plan that was then essentially mandated throughout the Bell Telephone System in preparation for the onset of Direct Distance Dialing. The typical number was presented (in the full formal form) as "DAvis 1-2368", or "DA1-2368" for short.

Overall, there were many changes in central office names, this often seemingly to allow use of the "digit absorption" scheme in the step-by-step switching systems to avoid an costly expansion of the switch train merely to accommodate the additional digits in the new numbering plan. Typically the last four digits of the number were unchanged.

Beyond Of course, in later years 10-dgit dialing became mandatory for all calls in the Dallas area, and so a typical telephone number really became 214-421-2368.

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Appendix D A tale of two firms

The table below tracks the telephone numbers of two prominent Dallas businesses through the telephone number eras studied in this report.

“Adolphus”: This is the Hotel Adolphus, an elegant hotel located on the eastern edge of downtown Dallas, built in 1912 by Adolphus Busch, perhaps best known as one of the founders of the Annheuser-Bush beer empire. Its location was constant.

“Titche’s”: This is the Titche-Goetttinger Co. department store, a long time Dallas shopping landmark (often called just “Titche’s”). Its main store was located in downtown Dallas, at a constant location.

Business	1915		1924	1927-1939	1941-1945	1955	1961
	Auto (dial)	Bell (manual)					
Adolphus	M 2141	Main 6500	X-3281	2-3281	Central 3281	PRospect 6411	RIverside 7-6411
Titche’s	E 1387	Edgewood 975	X-3481	2-3481	Central 3481	STERling 4811	RIverside 8-4811

From this we might conclude as follows:

- When SWT&T mechanized its Dallas network, at least some subscribers previously served by Edgewood (manual) central offices were served by the “X” (dial) office (corresponding to the prior “Main” manual office).
- Between 1945 and 1955, probably in connection with the instillation of more modern switching equipment, the “Central” central office name was retired and superseded by two new central office names, **PR**ospect and **ST**erling (two being required owing to an increase in the number of subscribers to be served) and the subscribers formerly having Central numbers were reassigned **PR**ospect or **ST**erling numbers.
- By 1961, when the telephone numbers in Dallas had been changed to the “2L-5N” form (to prepare for Direct Distance Dialing), the **PR**ospect and **ST**erling central office codes were superseded by **RI**verside 7 and **RI**verside 8, respectively.

But this is just conjecture on my part.