

*These minutes were taken by Catherine P. Lund and handed to me later. Note.*

*Copy*      (11)

*Minutes of Stockholders meeting of the People's Progressive Tel. Co. held Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> 1913 at 2 P.M. Pres. Holt read the call of the meeting. Mrs. P. Lund was made secretary of meeting in the absence of the secretary of the company. Pres. Holt stated the principal of stock represented at this meeting.*

<i>James P. Brackin</i>	<i>850.</i>	<i>Henry Hunt</i>	<i>831.</i>
<i>Wallace</i>	<i>97.</i>	<i>David Confield</i>	<i>23.</i>
<i>Eds</i>	<i>25.</i>	<i>James Tullis</i>	<i>229.</i>
<i>Lawrence</i>	<i>143.</i>	<i>Jos. P. Hunt</i>	<i>154.</i>
<i>Ch. E.</i>	<i>101.</i>	<i>Quinn and Ramsey &amp; J. H. Bowler</i>	<i>1700.</i>
<i>Wm. Gardner</i>	<i>24.</i>	<i>P. B. Anderson</i>	<i>40.</i>



*Area south of Gunlock, Utah, photographed by Charles Kelly ca. 1940, was typical of the terrain where the PPTC built its lines. USHS collections. Above: PPTC minute book. Courtesy of authors.*

# The People's Progressive Telephone Company, 1912-17: The Dream and the Reality

BY HELEN B. GARDNER AND QUENTON T. BOWLER

Mrs. Gardner, a freelance writer, lives in Gunlock, Utah. Dr. Bowler, her brother, is head of the Teacher Education Department at Southern Utah University, Cedar City. Henry D. Holt was their maternal grandfather and John H. Bowler and J. S. P. Bowler their paternal grandfather and great grandfather respectively.

**T**HE YEAR WAS 1912. At his ranch home in Central, Utah, Henry Davis Holt sat listening to an itinerant dry goods drummer tell the story of how many telephone companies were being formed in northern Utah.<sup>1</sup> Lines like silver ribbons, the man told Holt, were being strung across the state to connect homes and businesses. The telephone was a most wondrous invention.

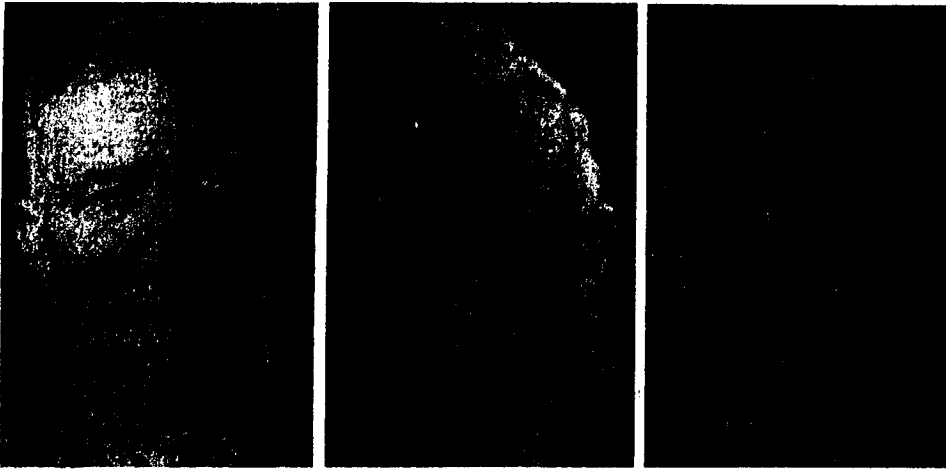
Telephones were not unheard of in this remote and isolated high desert area of southwestern Utah, but Holt and his rancher friends were a day's ride on horseback or wagon to reach one. St. George, Utah, thirty miles to the south was the home of the Southern Utah Telephone Company. It boasted of a one-line connection to Salt Lake City, four hundred miles to the north. The road linking Central to St. George was at that time nothing more than two ruts worn into sagebrush-covered flats and winding around barren hillsides covered with large lava rocks.

A vision began forming in Holt's mind of placing telephones in every home in this isolated part of southwestern Utah. A dynamic and energetic man, he was the ideal person for the drummer to converse with about the telephone. Holt was known for his progressive ways and his willingness to try something new; moreover, he was a man of action. He decided the country needed telephone service. Here was the means to bind together the hard-to-reach ranches and small hamlets existing on the lip of the harsh Great Basin.

The first man Holt contacted was James Samuel Page Bowler, who lived in Gunlock. This village, twelve miles southwest of Central, sat in a canyon on the banks of the small, winding, lazy Santa Clara River. Bowler was postmaster of the town, justice of the peace, and choir director and superintendent of the Sunday School for his beloved Mormon church. A well-respected man, educated and erudite, he had left a life in England vastly different from the one he found in southwestern Utah where his church bade him settle. Invariably the teacher, Bowler felt his musical ability and love of books warring constantly with the coarse work of grubbing and clearing sagebrush flats for farm land to raise food to feed both his family and his animals. Isolation weighed heavily upon this man of letters.

Bowler listened with fascination as Holt repeated the drummer's stories. Together they began to plan, both caught up in the dream of

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Henry D. Holt, Fallon, Nevada, 1946, recorded in the journal of his granddaughter Helen B. Gardner.



L-R: Henry D. Holt, James Samuel Page Bowler, and John H. Bowler. Courtesy of authors.

binding this wild land with telephone lines and telephones. Holt proposed that they contact men they trusted and form a telephone company. The time for such a venture was now, Holt told his friend. Bowler offered his life savings of \$600 as part of the start-up capital for the company. He also agreed to become an officer, acting as secretary-treasurer because of his knowledge of finance and his fine penmanship.

Holt and Bowler asked four other men—relatives or neighbors—to join in forming the company. One man, John H. Bowler, was a son of James Samuel Page Bowler and owned a ranch five miles north of Gunlock on Magotsu Creek. He was also an astute businessman, having been taught well by his father.

Holt approached his neighbor and another trusted friend Marcellus E. Bracken. “Cell” was the healer in the area. He set broken bones, poulticed bruises and contusions, and knew just the right amount of laudanum to give. His wife had died giving birth to their youngest son, and Cell was raising nine children alone. Noted for his steadfastness and dependability, he was a homebody.

Another participant, A. H. “Bert” Truman, was a son-in-law of J. S. P. Bowler and a brother-in-law of John H. Bowler. Truman’s holdings were three miles north of John Bowler on Magotsu Creek. A gregarious man who loved nothing better than a good laugh and a social evening, Truman also held the undisputed title of the “best damn cowboy and cattleman in the country.” The prospect of being able to



communicate with his relatives and neighbors by telephone was exciting to him.

Robert Chadburn, a Scotsman, was the next man enlisted by the group. He was a gardener and orchardist and a brother-in-law of Henry Holt, having married Dinah, the sister of Henry's wife, Alice. They lived downriver from Central on a homestead bordering the Santa Clara River. Truman's farm reflected his skill as a farmer, his thrifty nature, and his careful stewardship of his holdings. A quiet man, he felt the isolation but not as much as his wife. Her nature craved the company of others. For her sake he was willing to leave his beloved farm to build the telephone company. He would commit the time needed to complete this brave new venture.

All these men were respected in this vast area of farms, small towns, and ranches that dotted this rough and forbidding part of Utah. They provided a perfect mix of the traits needed to build a communications network through the hills, valleys, desert, and mountains.

On June 25, 1912, the group gathered at the home of Henry Davis Holt in Central. His daughter Blanche Holt Bowler, who was then seven years old, recalled in her eighty-sixth year that ". . . The electricity in the air at the time was contagious. The men all sat around the kitchen table. There was a lot of planning and jubilation in the room. At one point, 'Uncle Bert' [Truman] jumped up and danced a jig around the table. We [children] could hardly wait for everything to get started."<sup>2</sup>

Holt proposed that the company begin its lines at Enterprise, about fifteen miles north of Central. He suggested that the line branch east to Pine Valley and Newcastle residents and then south to Central, connecting all the ranches in between. From there the telephone line would stretch over the hills to Gunlock, Veyo, and ranches in that area. The lines of the fledgling company would skirt St. George since Southern Utah Telephone Company, owned by E. H. Snow, was already operating there. The switchboard connecting the miles of new lines would be placed in Holt's home in Central. It was an ambitious plan.<sup>3</sup>

Work began soon after the initial meeting. On July 12, 1912, Holt contacted Western Electric Company in Salt Lake City and ordered the following material: 22 miles of telephone wire, 1,250 feet of #14 iron wire, 250 feet of inside wire, 6 "A" protectors, 250 #1 Blake insulator staples, 250 feet of #19 TW.Pr. R.C. inside wire, 675 painted oak brackets-12", 675 pony glass insulators #9, 6 #1317-R telephone sets, 6 4/2 x 5' ground rods, and 18 Blue Bell batteries. The cost of this order was \$132.28. On August 22 an additional 24 bundles of telephone wire was ordered from American Steel and Wire Company. The new telephone company was now ready to begin construction.<sup>4</sup>

Although the men involved all had stock and ranches to maintain,

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Blanche Holt Bowler, Gunlock, Utah, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Minutes of People's Progressive Telephone Co., June 15, 1912, to September 6, 1913. Minutes and other records (PPTC Papers) cited hereinafter are in possession of Rita Holt Pulsipher, Mesquite, Nevada. The only account of that first meeting was one line: "Meeting held June 25, 1912, omitted here." It was written at the top of a page containing minutes from the September 6, 1913, meeting. It appears to have been written as an afterthought.

<sup>4</sup> Invoices from Western Electric Co. and American Steel and Wire, PPTC Papers.

they nevertheless dropped everything and began digging post holes and stringing telephone lines to tie together the remote hamlets and ranches of southwestern Utah. Progress would come to this part of the country, they told one another, and they would be the catalyst for this wonderful new way of communication.<sup>5</sup>

Each man had invested all the cash he had. As news of the project spread, people began coming to the homes of Holt and J. S. P. Bowler, bringing any money they could spare to invest in the new company. The initial capital investment totaled \$1,330. Stock was offered at \$1 per share. There were seventy-five stockholders at the end of the first year. The amounts invested ranged from \$7 to \$600. More often than not, these amounts represented the entire life savings of these struggling settlers.

On April 13, 1913, one day before the last mile of the first fifty-two miles of telephone lines was finished, corporation papers were filed with the state of Utah. Henry D. Holt was listed as president, Marcellus E. Bracken as vice-president, J. S. P. Bowler as secretary-treasurer, and Robert Chadburn and Bert Truman as directors. In the stockholders' meeting Lawrence Bracken was appointed as business manager of the company.<sup>6</sup>

The switchboard connecting towns was installed in Henry Holt's parlor. This meant jobs for his daughters Blanche, LaVerne, Vilate, and Ruby. Blanche Holt Bowler remembered her father talking very seriously to them about their responsibilities as telephone operators. He formally hired them at one dollar per month, divided among the four sisters, and charged them to take constant care of the calls coming in and cautioning them to always make the proper connections. At age seven Blanche was too short to reach the connecting jacks. She stood on a chair to plug in the connections that joined two towns together.<sup>7</sup>

The first annual stockholders' meeting on May 24, 1913, opened to a full house at Henry Holt's home in Central.<sup>8</sup> Financial and statistical reports were read and approved. Several subscribers present voiced opinions on the management of the telephone company. "It was considered advisable [*sic*] to make some changes," the minutes noted. A motion by A. L. Huntsman suggested that all telephone ser-

<sup>5</sup> Holt interview.

<sup>6</sup> PPTC Minutes, April 1913.

<sup>7</sup> B. H. Bowler interview.

<sup>8</sup> PPTC Minutes, May 24, 1913.

vice to Grass Valley (an area with a few ranches north and east of Pine Valley) be discontinued. The motion was seconded and carried. Vice-president Bracken made a motion that "a fee of \$25.00 be paid before any installation of a telephone and then a charge of \$1.00 per month phone rental and line fee." Furthermore, he added, "any person not a family member should pay \$12.00 in advance for use of same." It is unclear to whom the \$12.00 would be paid, and the minutes record no reasons given for the fee. Nevertheless, the motion was seconded and carried.

A letter from attorney Samuel Judd was read to the stockholders and discussed. It proposed obtaining a few telephones in use in Newcastle and the Mesquite/Bunkerville Telephone Company and consolidating them with the People's Progressive Telephone Company. On a motion from Bert Truman, secretary J. S. P. Bower was instructed "to contact Attorney Knox, company solicitor [*sic*] and arrange this matter." The Newcastle telephones and the Nevada company soon became a part of PPTC.

Officers for the coming year were elected by a show of hands. Henry Holt was reelected president with John H. Bowler replacing Marcellus Bracken as vice-president. J. S. P. Bowler again assumed the mantle of secretary-treasurer. Bert Truman remained as a board member, and A. L. Huntsman replaced Robert Chadburn. Lawrence Bracken remained as manager of the company, but Earl J. Tullis was added to PPTC personnel to assist Bracken on the southern end of the lines. Tullis lived in Gunlock.

Ranchers and townspeople alike felt grateful for this new communications link. Prior to the formation of PPTC the nearest telephone to the outside world was in St. George. The day that PPTC's telephone service officially began it was rumored that Dinah Chadburn, wife of Robert Chadburn, spent the entire day making calls. Blanche Holt Bowler remembered that "Aunt Dine would ring central and asked [*sic*] to be connected first to one person and then another. She would say, 'just connect me with anyone. I just want to talk.'"<sup>9</sup>

The logistics of keeping the new telephone lines operational were awesome. Ultimately 260 miles of lines had to be maintained, and much of it could only be reached on horseback.<sup>10</sup> The country bordering the Utah/Nevada line was remote and very rough. The

<sup>9</sup> B. H. Bowler interview.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Milton A. Bowler, Gunlock, Nevada, 1979.



*Moapa, Nevada, April 1907. Buildings include hotel and store. Shipler photograph, USHS collections.*

PPTC line traversed the mountains and desert west of Gunlock and crossed into Nevada near the plateau/desert created by the Beaver Dam Wash drainage area. After leaving Mesquite and Bunkerville the line closely followed the banks of the Virgin River, going southwest toward Moapa, Nevada, where the company ended its line. The men responsible for maintaining this line lived with the certainty of having some part of the line grounded and shorted out nearly every day. They were seldom disappointed.

In some places lines were simply fastened to branches of the indigenous juniper trees whose stubby, sturdy branches were sometimes barely long enough to provide the length needed to keep the lines clear of static-causing interference. On some stretches cairns of rocks were erected. A juniper branch or a small cedar post was placed between the rocks to keep the "pole" upright and hold the wire high enough to keep it from grounding. These crude monuments served for years. Makeshift equipment like this did little for the clarity of voice as people tried to communicate. PPTC patrons occasionally grumbled about the problem.

Minutes of the September 6, 1913, board meeting indicate that the company was having problems keeping a business manager. Lawrence Bracken resigned. Although managers received a dollar a day while on company business, various minutes show that managers



came and went. The lines were too long for one man or even two to maintain on horseback and still have time to collect monthly telephone bills. During this meeting the board decided to increase revenue by dividing the company territory into divisions. The minutes do not show the boundaries of these divisions, but they do note that a charge of ten cents was added to each monthly bill. However, Bull Valley ranchers were to pay twenty-five cents for telephone use in their division, and thirty cents was added to the Mesquite/Bunkerville/Moapa division.<sup>11</sup>

The PPTC did not receive the revenues projected when the company was founded. In addition, maintenance costs were much higher than expected. Subscribers used the lines to capacity, but they did not pay their monthly telephone bills. Mounting costs and dwindling revenues constantly challenged the company.<sup>12</sup> The board decided to install phones at cost in every home wanting a telephone and allow the subscribers the use of it until the \$25.00 installation fee was paid at the rate of \$1.00 per month. Almost everyone within the PPTC coverage area had a telephone installed, and the line load increased accordingly.

In December 1913 when the Mesquite/Bunkerville Telephone Company officially came into the PPTC fold, its former owners, Hubert Leavitt and Vie Hancock, were paid with PPTC stock. The two men received jointly 1,700 shares of stock "issued by said secretary upon proper receipt of deed and bill of sale" from Leavitt and Hancock. A. B. Andrews was named business manager of the Mesquite division.<sup>13</sup> The company continued to grow and optimism ran high. Those stockholders who grumbled that no dividends had been paid to date were given the explanation of "growing pains."

At the January 2, 1914, board meeting held in Gunlock, Holt reported on a trip he had made to Enterprise at the northern end of the line. Some subscribers were monopolizing the lines, he stated. A motion was made and carried, limiting each call to five minutes. Subscribers were to be notified of this new rule. John H. Bowler reported that some subscribers were making unauthorized purchases for telephone repairs. Officials passed a motion stating, "Any persons making any agreement, or signing any contract pertaining to supplies or repairs

<sup>11</sup> PPTC Minutes, September 6, 1913.

<sup>12</sup> Holt interview.

<sup>13</sup> PPTC Minutes, December 6, 1913.

or lines of PPTC without the approval of the board, would be responsible for same." Bowler also proposed that "improper language shall not be allowed on our lines." The motion carried.<sup>14</sup>

Collections continued to be a problem, the board learned. Money was not coming in. Secretary J. S. P. Bowler was instructed to notify each subscriber by letter that "bills must be settled promptly at the end of each month." The board also instructed Bowler to transmit a copy of the minutes of this meeting to A. B. Andrews, business manager, who had been transferred to Enterprise, and to Vie Hancock, who was now the manager in Mesquite at the southern end of the company lines. Bowler was to advise the two managers "to take up capital stock for necessary improvements." The minutes verify the struggle PPTC was having to maintain a proper cash flow for day-to-day business. The company had succeeded in providing isolated families with communication, but it was hurting for operating capital. The lack of consistent follow-up by the managers was believed to be one of the main problems in collecting from subscribers. The money crunch had a negative effect on all company operations.

Another topic of importance discussed by the board at length centered around the signed agreement John H. Bowler had obtained from Vie Hancock in which Hancock agreed to begin construction of the last leg of the telephone line from Mesquite to Moapa. Hancock agreed to begin work on February 1, 1914. Equipment and material would be needed, and secretary Bowler was instructed to order 30 miles of telephone wire from Western Electric in Salt Lake City at a projected cost of \$300 to be paid in three installments of \$100 on February 14, March 31, and July 1, 1914.

Officers of PPTC began to dream of connecting their company with Southern Utah Telephone Company in St. George. It was a logical expansion. Overtures to connect the two systems met with solid resistance from E. H. Snow, owner of SUTC. He expressed no concern about residents of remote areas not being able to call the world outside of the PPTC telephone lines. St. George was the hub of the country, and when ranchers drove to town they generally spent money. If the two telephone companies connected, some businessmen in St. George believed that there would be fewer visitors to St. George from the outlying districts. Merchants might suffer.

<sup>14</sup> PPTC Minutes, January 2, 1914. Attending this meeting were Holt, John H. Bowler, J. S. P. Bowler, and Bert Truman. There is no mention in the minutes regarding the absence of other officers.

On April 28, 1913, after many meetings and persistent requests from PPTC to SUTC and the city of St. George, an ordinance granting a franchise to PPTC to operate within the city was passed. PPTC had not, however, come to an agreement with SUTC to hook into their already existing lines. The franchise, granted for a period of twenty-five years, included some stringent requirements. City engineer Leo Snow, who was opposed to allowing PPTC in St. George, made it very clear that there was no possibility of connecting PPTC lines to those already in place. PPTC was allowed to place its telephone poles only on designated streets. The franchise contained specifications for length of poles, type of wood used, number of cross arms, distance between cross arms, and distance between poles. The franchise also stipulated that "the City of St. George shall have free use of one telephone, furnished and connected to PPTC lines, placed at a designation indicated by the St. George City Council, for the use of city business with free connections to all PPTC service areas." Further, "the city [was] to have full use and right of all the upper five feet of the Peoples Progressive Telephone Company telephone poles; however, all maintenance of the poles and lines would be the responsibility of said company." Nonuse of the franchise for a period of two years would result in a forfeiture of the rights and privileges granted. Thus the city of St. George gave way grudgingly.<sup>15</sup>

Despite all the effort spent in obtaining the franchise, lack of revenue and the stifling franchise requirements prevented the company from taking much action. On March 30, 1914, a board meeting was held at the Bigelow ranch, home of John H. Bowler. The minutes reveal that the mayor of St. George, Thomas Judd, attended along with SUTC owner E. H. Snow and city engineer Leo Snow. PPTC service was in St. George, but it was not to the liking of some office holders and the movers and shakers in that community. Secretary J. S. P. Bowler reported on "a meeting held with St. George City Council on March 24, 1914." PPTC had requested that the city consider "an extension of PPTC franchise lines to enable our company to give service to stockholders in St. George." Mayor Judd stated that PPTC must re-pole the streets. Leo Snow said there could not be two sets of poles on St. George streets. Nothing definite was decided, "excepting E. H. Snow stated that PPTC might be able to hook into his switchboard with PPTC lines and his poles and they would connect us for five cents

<sup>15</sup> Franchise in PPTC Papers.



*Pine Valley LDS Chapel. This once remote area of Washington County was served by the PPTC. USHS collections.*

each call, but we must take our own phones.” The board discussed the matter at “considerable” length and asked the secretary to take the rate matter up with SUTC. The meeting lasted until 2 a.m.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, billing and service problems surfaced in Pine Valley, Utah. They demonstrate some of the day-to-day difficulties of running a company like PPTC. H. O. Gardner, a Pine Valley subscriber, wrote to company vice-president John H. Bowler on June 12, 1914:

Received my phone bill and I think my bill was paid up in the first of March. Your Pa will know. I think he had a receipt from the bank for some time in February. Will enclose \$3.00. Phone has been out of commission for a long time. Can't use it at all now, only would like to have it fixed as soon as possible.<sup>17</sup>

During a board meeting on April 21, 1915, a new slate of officers took control of the company. Bert Truman was elected president; Lyman Canfield, vice-president; Delos Hyatt, secretary-treasurer; and Frank O. Holt and James L. Bunker directors.<sup>18</sup> There is no record of discord within the company, but with this new group of officers the

<sup>16</sup> PPTC Minutes, March 30, 1914.

<sup>17</sup> Gardner to J. H. Bowler, June 12, 1914, PPTC Papers.

<sup>18</sup> PPTC Minutes, April 21, 1915.

founders of the company, with the exception of Truman, were no longer in positions directing the course the company would follow.

The company continued its struggle to survive. Fierce winter storms brought many lines down. Few men were willing or able to ride the weary desert miles to make the necessary repairs. Moreover, records indicate that the company had almost no money available for repairs or other expenses.

Milton A. Bowler, at the urging of his father, John H., rode without pay as often as possible through the desolate hills and desert between Gunlock, Utah, and Mesquite, Nevada. In bitter winter weather he and his horse, fighting cold and fatigue, would trace and repair more than fifty miles of telephone lines. He often found that a sagebrush stick was all he had to repair the line with. His job was to see that the line did not touch the ground, and it was he who built the rock cairns to hold up the "poles." John H., though not an officer at that time, still had faith in the company and felt responsible for its welfare. When he could, he rode with his son to help with line repair.<sup>19</sup>

On June 15, 1915, by a decision of the board, the ranches were cut off the main line by a switch. The ranchers now had to repair their own lines if they wanted telephone service.<sup>20</sup>

There were more changes in company officers, and Lyman Canfield was appointed business manager. But the PPTC was floundering. The drive and vitality of the founders of the company was missing. In the constant change of business managers and board members, collections suffered badly. No salaries were being paid, and money was owed to Western Electric Company for wire. Payment was long past due. Director George O. Holt was asked to write to Western Electric for an extension of time before the bill had to be paid.<sup>21</sup>

There was not another board meeting held until June 19, 1916, when the officers convened at the Truman ranch for the stated purpose of "doing business necessary for the welfare of the company." Even though there was almost no money with which to operate, the board voted to pay the corporation license tax along with county taxes. G. Delos Hyatt, schoolteacher and son-in-law of Henry D. Holt, was asked to remain as business manager of the upper division, which included Enterprise, Newcastle, Central, and Veyo.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> M. A. Bowler interview.

<sup>20</sup> PPTC Minutes, June 5, 1915.

<sup>21</sup> Invoice and letter in PPTC Papers.

<sup>22</sup> PPTC Minutes, June 19, 1916.

At a January 1917 board meeting in Gunlock company officers were elected. Bert Truman remained as president with Frank O. Holt and James L. Bunker retained as directors. On Bunker's motion J. S. P. Bowler was asked to again assume the post of secretary-treasurer, which he accepted.<sup>23</sup>

Again the matter of connecting PPTC lines with those of Southern Utah Telephone Company in St. George surfaced. Apparently, E. H. Snow now desired to connect his lines with those of PPTC in order to be able to offer his St. George subscribers access to Mesquite and Bunkerville residents. PPTC director Frank Holt agreed to negotiate an arrangement with Snow and report back to the board.

Lack of money and collection problems were, however, the main topics of discussion at this board meeting. J. S. P. Bowler undertook to write to each subscriber and list the amount owed the company. J. L. Bunker and Bert Truman were appointed to ride to Pine Valley and Central either to collect all past due rent and message fees or to remove the subscriber's telephone. The meeting concluded "with all final actions agreed upon."

The date of June 17, 1917, was published for the annual stockholders' meeting. When this was found to conflict with an LDS church conference, another date of June 23 was set. No one came except the board of directors. Nothing was done. The incumbent board decided to "hold the present board in position until a change can be effected." There was no mention of further dealings with E. H. Snow or the Southern Utah Telephone Company. The words quoted above were the last recorded minutes found of the People's Progressive Telephone Company.<sup>24</sup>

Founded with such high hopes and altruistic motives, PPTC was a valiant effort that lasted five years. Without the financial support of those subscribers upon whom the founders had depended and built their dreams, the company failed.

The area of southwestern Utah encompassed by the PPTC was home to poverty. Many residents were poor beyond most standards. Their courage and indomitable will kept them alive. With limited capital and manpower the PPTC found it nearly impossible to keep its miles of lines repaired and operational. The distances were so great, the terrain so rough, and although those who lived there needed and

<sup>23</sup> PPTC Minutes, January 1917.

<sup>24</sup> PPTC Minutes, June 23, 1917.

wanted the telephone, many could not pay the monthly rent. Blanche Bowler summed up the company's problem:

Well, the main reason it failed was that people did not pay their bills. Money was so hard to come by in those days and the managers of PPTC would go out to collect and there was just not much money to be had. There were rumors of mismanagement and shady business with what cash was collected, but as far as I know there was no stealing. Some said there was, but I can't say that. . . . When you go out to collect and you know everyone, or are related to everyone and you know their circumstances, it would be hard to disconnect their phones if they couldn't pay. My Dad (Henry Holt) always was the softest touch and he used to say that he couldn't cut off anyone's phone and he could see why the managers didn't do it.

Everyone needed or depended on their phones. To take out a phone from one of the remote ranches would have been almost criminal. That's mostly why the company failed. People just didn't pay their bills because they had no money. And the managers and directors just didn't have the heart to take out the phones if the bills were not paid.<sup>25</sup>

Six men especially nurtured the PPTC—the five founding officers and John H. Bowler, who probably gave more time to the venture and mourned the passing of this dream as much as or even more than anyone. But all of them were tired, troubled, and disillusioned by 1917. Some officially resigned; some simply left the company without any notice, leaving their investment in time and money behind. Most felt the loss of their time and their dream more keenly than anything else.

Lewis Pulsipher, a stockholder in Mesquite, acquired the Nevada portion of PPTC. The lines and telephones in Mesquite, Bunkerville, and Moapa became and still operate as the Rio Virgin Telephone Company servicing those towns originally as part of the Hube Leavitt-Vie Hancock Virgin Telephone Company and then as part of PPTC before passing into the Rio Virgin Telephone Company.

As late as 1945 ranches and homes in and around Gunlock, Veyo, Central, and Enterprise maintained and used PPTC telephones and lines. A line to the Royal Hunt ranch midway between Pine Valley and Central was connected to both towns. In 1941 Hunt, shot and robbed by a drifter he had picked up in St. George, managed to drag himself to his wall-hung phone, ring the handle to alert neighbors miles away, and whisper into the phone, "Help, I've been shot," before he died.

<sup>25</sup> B. H. Bowler interview.

(This set off a manhunt that lasted well into the next day before the assailant was found some ten miles away hiding in rough underbrush.) Also, a telephone at the Truman ranch in 1945 was connected to the Bigelow ranch, the home of John H. Bowler in Veyo, and several homes in Gunlock.<sup>26</sup>

For all intents and purposes, however, the PPTC had collapsed. Remaining assets in the form of telephones in the homes of subscribers and miles of telephone lines north from Mesquite toward Gunlock were left in place.

The consensus of older residents of the PPTC service area is that Southern Utah Telephone Company took over PPTC lines. The franchise granted to PPTC by the city of St. George provided that in case of a default by PPTC its lines would be taken over by SUTC. That seems to have been the case, although no written record other than the original franchise has been found. Later, these older residents assert, Mountain States Telephone Company (later Mountain Bell, presently US West) acquired former SUTC customers.

As late as 1946 Henry Holt still shed tears when he spoke of the People's Progressive Telephone Company. So did John H. Bowler. Their tears refreshed the memory and washed away the dream.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.