

# Alberta Government Telephones/Telus

## Book Digitalization Project

Telephones were established in Alberta in 1885 in Calgary and Edmonton. The Bell Telephone Company established itself in Calgary in 1887 up to 1906.

Alberta Government Telephones (AGT) was the telephone provider in most of Alberta from 1906 to 1991. It was formed by the Liberal government of Alexander Cameron Rutherford in 1906 following the acquisitions by the government of several independent (mutual) telephone companies in Alberta. In 1906, AGT acquired the Bell Telephone Company's Alberta operations for \$675,000. It eventually served almost all telephone customers in Alberta outside of the Edmonton area, where telephone service was operated by the Edmonton municipal government. In 1932 most rural lines were destroyed by winter storms and AGT did not want to rebuild and as a result Mutual Telephone Companies were created for rural customers. The mutual telephone companies were purchased by AGT in 1974 and became part of AGT infrastructure.

Alberta Government Telephones was directly managed by the province's Department of Public Works as a public utility until 1958, when it was transformed into the **Alberta Government Telephones Commission**, a crown corporation.

In 1969, AGT built what was then Edmonton's tallest skyscraper as its new headquarters, joined by a second tower in 1971; they are now called TELUShouse at ATB Place.

In 1990, the Alberta government began the process of privatizing AGT, and formed Telus Communications as a holding company to facilitate the transfer. In 1991, the province of Alberta sold its remaining ownership interest in AGT to Telus for \$870 million. Telus acquired Edmonton Telephones Corporation (Ed Tel) from the city of Edmonton in 1995; Ed Tel had been created only five years earlier. In 1996, the AGT and Ed Tel brands were retired in favor of the Telus name. Telus merged with BC Tel in 1999 to form the present-day Telus Corporation.

Telus Yellow Pages were downsizing their business and had a collection of 10 decades of old AGT and Ed Tel telephone directories that needed a new home. After they were moved from Edmonton to Calgary, the Medicine Hat Telus Community Ambassadors headed by Rick Brown, acquired the collection of books, including the shelving to store the books. Rick Brown then contacted Clark Lang of the Medicine Hat Genealogy Society and asked if the Society was interested in keeping the books. Clark wasted no time in transferring the collection from the Telus Toll office to a private heated storage facility and under the ownership of the genealogy society. After an inventory of the directories, Clark began the scanning and digitalization of all the directories which will be put on the website "mhdgs.ca" for the general public to use for reference. The scanning project began in 2015 with the acquisition of an overhead scanner and a high speed computer and ended in 2022.

The huge project was divided into five phases. Phase 1 was the cataloguing and recording of all the books in the collection. Phase 2 consisted of scanning of all the early and oldest books dating back to 1903. This phase included the original Alberta directory, Calgary, Edmonton, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Central District and Northern District to 1960. Phase 3 consisted of finishing southern Alberta directories to 2001. Phase 4 completed the other directories of northern Alberta to 2001. Phase 5 was the completion of the many books of yellow pages. The scanning of the yellow pages of Calgary and Edmonton was only completed to 1980. Due to the size of the books, time needed to scan, difficulty in scanning these books, the project

was considered complete. The remaining unscanned books are in storage and can be researched upon request. The Telephone book project began in 2015 and finished in 2022.

Thanks to Clark Lang and Leanne Balfore for the hours of organizing and scanning of the volumes of books. They scanned more than 1100 telephone books in the collection including the books lent to us by other collectors. Researchers from around the world are now using the digital copies of the books on a daily basis.