

VOICES OVER THE PHONE.

THEY WILL NOT BE HEARD FROM CHICAGO, AT LEAST FOR A TIME.

But Kansas Citizens Will Soon Be Able to Talk With People in Guthrie, Which Is Quite as Far Away—Copper Wire Gradually Replacing the Old Construction in the System of the Missouri and Kansas Telephone Company—Underground Wires—An Epidemic of Matrimony Among the "Hello" Girls.

If there were a half dozen long distance telephone circuits in Kansas City like DeWolf Hopper there would be telephonic communication between this town and Chicago in short order. But according to Mr. W. W. Smith, manager of the Missouri and Kansas Telephone company, it is decidedly questionable whether the project would pay under present conditions. The matter has been under discussion and the cost and number of profitable "talks" have all been taken into consideration. If the long distance wire is run it will cost about \$5 for a five minute conversation. In telephonic vernacular these conversations are "talks" and the very best service will not permit of more than half a dozen "talks" in an hour. Mr. Smith is of the opinion that there are not enough people in Kansas City who would indulge in the luxury to reimburse the telephone company for the outlay.

The only way in which moneyed men could be interested in the scheme would be to arrange for a series of long distance concerts. Prof. Bink of the Kansas state university has arranged for a concert from St. Joseph on Friday night, during his lecture at the Y. M. C. A. If a sufficient interest in these concerts can be worked up, some enterprising theatrical manager may come to the rescue, and during the World's fair Kansas City may have an opportunity of hearing the grand musical festival, which will be given in the northwest metropolis. This is about the city's only chance for telephonic connection during the World's fair, for after going carefully over the field it has been estimated that the receipts will not justify the \$25,000 outlay for placing the wires and the additional cost of maintenance. In computing the cost for "talks" the long distance companies have estimated that \$1 for each 100 miles is about the correct thing, and on this basis it would cost about \$1 to inform your friend in Chicago that you would arrive there on the morning train with your family, to spend a few days seeing the sights at the fair.

Just how many families there are in Kansas City, which are going to impose on their Chicago friends can not be definitely figured out, but if each of them would promise to use the long distance phone there is no question about the Missouri and Kansas company undertaking to make the connection.

There are enough telephone wires in Kansas

City, however, to make ten circuits with Chicago, and enough copper wires have already been stretched to make two complete lines. About one-fourth of the wires in the town are of copper and the old iron wires are being rapidly replaced. The copper wires used here come in rolls or bundles of a half mile each and weigh eighty pounds. When all the iron wires have been replaced there will be in the two Kansas City 200,000 pounds of copper wire. These wires are about one-twelfth of an inch in diameter and the wires used for long distance telephoning are about one-eighth of an inch in diameter.

It is the intention of the Missouri and Kansas Telephone company to at once arrange a circuit, which will be just about the distance between Kansas City and Chicago. A dispatch was received at the general manager's office yesterday stating that a franchise had been granted the company in Guthrie, Ok. A few days ago a similar franchise was granted the Missouri and Kansas company in Oklahoma City. The towns are about thirty miles apart and will be connected. Arkansas City is distant about eighty miles, and it is proposed to connect between these three towns. The Missouri and Kansas company already has telephonic connection between Newton, Hutchinson and Arkansas City, and the only link out between Kansas City and Guthrie is the short distance between Otago City and Newton. This gap it is proposed to fill, making a complete circuit.

There is a vast difference between the manner of building telephone lines now and a few years ago," said General Manager Smith to a Times reporter yesterday. "When we first began to build the lines any kind of a wire was good enough, and I can remember that back in Indiana I built 1,000 miles, placing about seventeen poles to the mile. Now we use from thirty-five to forty poles to the mile and for the old iron wires we are substituting copper as fast as possible. The copper wires are better conductors and not nearly so susceptible to rust. I should estimate that we have substituted copper for iron in about one-fourth of Kansas City. So far as short distance conversations are concerned it makes but little difference, but there is a distinct advantage in talking to outside points. Then again it will be cheaper in the long run, because the wires will not have to be replaced so often."

Mr. Smith is an enthusiastic advocate of the underground system for laying telephone wires. The proposition now before the council is being anxiously awaited and the manager of the Missouri and Kansas Telephone company very naturally thinks that his corporation should be granted all the concessions it asks. The difference between Manager Smith and certain members of the city council is that the telephone company thinks its fire alarm service will more than compensate the city for a franchise to use its streets and some of the city fathers think differently. Before this agitation closes Kansas City will know much more about the value of street franchises in other cities than it now does.

"It is only a question of time," said Manager Smith, "when the public clamor will be so great that all telephone wires will have to go underground. In nearly all of the eastern cities the underground system is used and even in many growing western towns it has been resorted to. Denver has her telephone wires underground and Omaha is preparing to dispense with the overhead system. We were very anxious to make the change now, if at all, because it will be necessary for us to renew much of our wire and it would subject us to a great expense to have to put them down twice.

"By the way, the greatest compliment Chief Hale ever had paid him," continued Manager Smith, "was by the girls in our central exchange. Every employe of this company takes a personal pride in the fire alarm service and has every confidence in the department. When the building adjoining the one in which our exchange is located caught on fire some time ago, the impression prevailed that our building would have to go. The cry went up that the walls could not be saved and the operating room was being deluged with water. Ordinarily the girls would have stampeded, but some one brought the word that Chief Hale said the building would stand. The message was quickly delivered from one to the other and so great was the confidence in the fire department that not a girl moved from her post."

Although the telephone manager has not kept a record of the marriages in his office he is of the opinion that 12 per cent of the girls in the central exchange marry every year. There are about fifty-five employed and Manager Smith estimates that there are seven marriages a year. By long practice some of the telephone girls acquire a most captivating tone in inquiring "what number?" and they learn patience and gentleness by the rigid rules of the office. Business men who watch these things and young men who are looking for wives with punch are not slow to "catch on," and Manager Smith accounts in this way for his loss through the numerous matrimonial ventures.

The girls, however, have one constant grievance against the local managers. In every office there is an electrical eavesdropper which the girls call a "detective." It runs direct to the manager's office and home and he can tell at any hour of the day or night every word said in the office. If the girls are inclined to talk to their sweethearts from the switchboard he knows it, and if they are snary to subscribers he knows that. In fact, he can tell all about them except to read their minds, and some of the employes expect an invention of some kind shortly which will do this.