

W-R-J-M

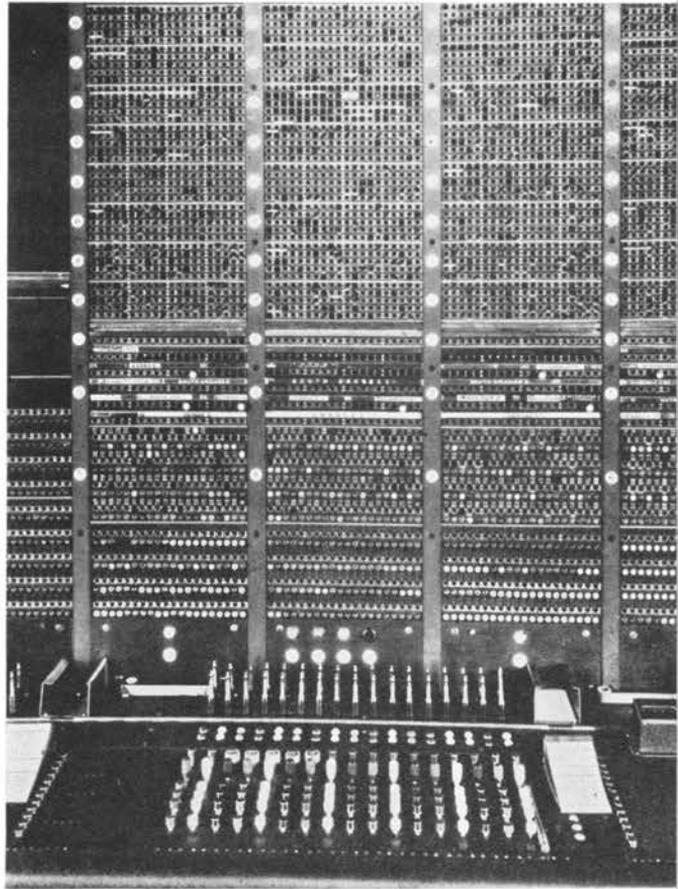
On March 6, 1911, the Engineering Department of A T & T issued a circular (T.C. 30) to the Bell operating companies pointing out the desirability, from the point of view of the general public, of a uniform plan of designating jack-per-line party-line stations. At this time some companies were using letters only, and some a combination of letters and numerals. There was also a considerable difference in the letters chosen by the various companies. In four-party service, for instance, such combinations were being used in the different large cities as L.X.J.Y., Y.R.X.L., A.Y.M.Z., X.Y.J.M., X.Y.Z.K., and J.L.M.R.

With the thought that there must be some combination of letters which would involve fewer misunderstandings than any other when calls were passed by subscribers to operators, extensive tests had been made, the results of which were given in the circular. It had been found that the letters which gave the fewest misunderstandings were W, R, J, and M, and the circular requested comments by the operating companies regarding the standardization of those letters.

The replies received in answer to this circular indicated a general agreement with the recommendations, and the letters W, R, J, and M were accordingly standardized for four-party service in a circular issued on October 28, 1912 (T.C. 52). For two-party service, the letters W and J were chosen, it having been determined that they occasioned fewer misunderstandings than M and R.

One form of a subscriber's position at a No. 1 manual switchboard is shown in the accompanying illustration. The front four horizontal rows of push buttons are, from back to front, the W, R, J, and M ringing keys. Behind them are the operator's talking keys, and then the message register keys, the supervisory lamps, and the switchboard cords.

At the time these letters were adopted, manual service was predominant, and the easy distinguishability of the four letters adopted was the important factor. With the



rapid expansion of dial switching, and the adoption of lettered dials an additional advantage became evident, since the four letters selected were sufficiently separated in the alphabet to bring each letter opposite a different finger hole. The same letters could thus readily be used with the dial system since each corresponded to a distinct digit: W = 9, R = 7, J = 5, and M = 6.

This becomes important only when a subscriber in a dial exchange calls a party-line subscriber in a manual exchange with jack-per-line party-lines, since under these conditions the party-line letter must be dialed after the four-digit station number. When a dial subscriber calls another dial subscriber, however, no party-line letter is used, since all party-line subscribers in a dial office are given separate numbers in the directory, without party-line letters.

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