

YOU'RE INVITED TO THE GRAND OPENING CELEBRATION OF THE

Ridgely Telephone Exchange



ERECTED 1937 • MOVED 1950'S • RESTORED 2009

The Caroline County Historical Society Invites You to Attend on

Tuesday, October 20th 2009

1:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

A Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony for the Historic Ridgely Telephone Exchange

which presents the theme

***Ridgely, Maryland: Where Entrepreneurship Combined with a
Railroad to Create a Model American Town, 1888-1918***



Event Program

Welcome: J.O.K. Walsh, Society President

Remarks: How We Are Using the Restored Telephone Exchange To Tell The Unique History of Ridgely and Foster Small-Business Development Through Tourism

Remembrance: Eric Harris and George Church

Thanks to the Contributors!

Ribbon Cutting

Exchange Recalls Evolution of Telephone Service in Caroline County, 1903-1937

The 1937 Telephone Exchange marked the transition from an operator-based system to the modern dial telephone system. As noted in the *Caroline Sun* on September 11th, 1937, “with the new equipment [in the building] it is not necessary to turn the crank to signal the operator or to give numbers to operators for completion.” Telephone service had started in Ridgely in 1903 when the Diamond State Telephone Company connected the town to Delaware, plus Hillsboro and Greensboro. However, subscribers could not call Denton or towns in southern Caroline County.

In 1905 the Farmers and Merchants Telephone Company, created by entrepreneurs in Caroline County, erected the finest telephone system on the Eastern Shore, connecting all of the towns in the county, plus major towns in the Mid-Shore. The C & P Telephone Company purchased the Farmers and Merchant system in 1911.

Telephone subscribers in Ridgely increased from ten in 1905 to 120 in 1937. C & P erected a new brick structure in the 1950s, setting in motion the odyssey of the Ridgely Telephone Exchange.

The Ridgely Telephone Exchange, erected on West Third Street in 1937, was discovered in 2005 on a distant country road in the village of Ninetown, where it was moved in the 1950s and used by African-American residents as a church. Although the building was structurally sound, it had been unused for years, and the threat of demolition required immediate action. Following the donation of the building to the Town of Ridgely by the late Mrs. Irene Harris, a mover was hired to bring the Telephone Exchange back to Ridgely in 2006.

The new purpose of the Telephone Exchange is to tell the unique history of Ridgely to residents and visitors, plus promote small-business development by providing a place for visitors to obtain information regarding local businesses and points of interest. Similar one-room buildings for the same purpose are being relocated and carefully restored throughout the county by the Caroline County Historical Society.