
Memoirs from Early History of Cable TV in the Tri-Towns

These are memoirs that my grandfather,

Ira Homer Ferrell (b. Lone Tree, Tyler Co., WV, 1904; d. Westernport, MD, 1965)

wrote concerning his efforts in setting up the original cable television system in the Tri-Towns region of Piedmont, West Virginia, and Westernport and Luke, Maryland. As far as I know, the resulting Upper Potomac Television Co., Inc. 1951, Piedmont, WV, and Carl Gainer's company in Richwood, were the first cable TV companies in West Virginia, and among the earliest in the U.S. These notes, probably written in the late 1950s, may be of some interest to those interested in the early history of cable TV in the Tri-Towns region.

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[Bryan F. Putnam](#)

It was February 16th on a Wednesday night, 1949, in Baltimore where I first saw a television broadcast reception. The show I remember best was Arthur Godfrey's show. I was so favorably impressed that immediately I decided if at all possible I would like to have such a thing in my own home in Westernport. I had been doing quite a bit of work in my spare time on telescopes and binoculars. As soon as I returned home I put all of my telescope equipment in storage and purchased some books on television and proceeded to study all that I could.

Back in 1949 television was not considered acceptable beyond 50 miles from the broadcasting station. Since Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C. were the closest cities that had any TV stations, I was picking out quite a job for myself. To be frank about the whole deal, I sometimes doubt if I would have had any idea of the terrific job it turned out to be that I would have had the courage to attempt such a thing. However, in the summer of 1949, Zimmerman Wholesale in Cumberland loaned me a television set but I had to purchase an antenna. With the help of a couple of neighbors I managed to get the antenna up on the roof of my home at 312 Maryland Avenue. We kept it there for about two weeks. With the use of two Masco boosters connected in series I had the audio from Channel Three, WDTV in Pittsburgh a couple of times very faintly, but never at any time could we see any trace of a picture.

From my home we moved the television and antenna to the Westvaco Club, Luke, where again we tried for three or four days with absolutely no success at all. The next move was made to my brother Rymer's cottage at Deep Creek Lake which is situated at the top of Allegany Mountain. I had read and been told that television signals traveled in a straight line and will not bend very well, however, I did not know they would not go through a hill to an antenna that is located close by, but if the antenna is a mile or so away the signal will not be affected nearly as much as when close by. It might be likened somewhat to sunlight, the closer one will move to the base of an object when the sun is on the opposite side the deeper will be the shadow. Television signals work very much the same way. We were fortunate the first time we tried at Deep Creek -- there was nothing blocking us from the direction of

Pittsburgh and that was entirely a stroke of good luck because at that time I had no idea that a small hill or mound or even a tree with heavy foliage will tend to reduce the amount of signal that may be received.

When I first turned the set on and started to turn dials then all of a sudden a picture came on and I well remember that picture, it was a girl walking on her hands and in my excitement of seeing a picture I told one of the boys the picture was coming in upside down. As near as I could find out that was the first picture ever received in this section of the country.

After trying it for a while Rymer decided to buy the set and we kept it although there was a lot of snow in the picture. We got quite a lot of pleasure in watching it.

One day shortly after we got it working at Deep Creek Lake, I was talking to Earl Dodge who lives high on Westernport Hill and he thought he would like to see television so we visited Rymer to look at TV. Earl was quite favorably impressed and right away he wanted to try one at his home. We felt there was a good chance he could get a picture because he lived high on a hill. Still not knowing the position of the hill where he lived would make any difference but once again luck was with us. Since Earl lived on the side of the hill facing Pittsburgh we received a picture almost as good as was at Deep Creek, of course at all these places we had to use a booster in the lead-in line to have any success at all and this is also important because this very thing brought forth the idea of the cable system which is being used in so many places today, but I will talk more about the booster later. Needless to say we were all happy and thrilled that we had it working even a little. I am sure this was the first successful television picture ever received in the Tri-Towns.

At this same time Mr. Ed Pagenhart, who since has passed on -- God rest his soul, saw the television at my brother's and I honestly believe he wanted television almost as badly as I did. He wanted me to try a set at his home. I was sure it would work as well as it did at Earl's home because, I reasoned, he lived on the same hill as Earl at just a little higher elevation; but the thing I didn't reason on was, that he was located at a place where the hill came in between him and Pittsburgh. Anyway, I had to go away for a few days and Mr. Pagenhart was so anxious to get television that he didn't want to wait until I had the time to try. He told me he had a son in Washington who could get a Muntz TV for him, which he did. I do not recall who installed it for him but when they tried it out it did not work very well. Once in a great while there would be some picture show on the screen then it would be gone. He asked me to check it for him, this I did but could do no more for it than anyone else who had tried.

I came to the conclusion the trouble must be in his set or the antenna. My first move was to take his set over to Earl's home and try it on his antenna and it worked almost as good as Earl's set. Then I was sure his antenna was no good. I had built the antenna that Earl was using so I proceeded to build another one like it for Mr. Pagenhart. When finished we assembled it, tried it out on Earl's set and matched it up for the best reception. In order not to disturb anything we didn't take it apart and Earl carried it, completely assembled, through the field to Mr. Pagenhart's. We connected up his set but still the reception was not any better than before.

While we were doing all this I had bought a General Electric television Model 10T6 which was small in size and easy to handle but was one of the most powerful sets of its day. If reception couldn't be gotten with that set there was no need to try with any other. I tried it at Mr. Pagenhart's and it was better than his Muntz but far from being satisfactory. I had read where some folks bought steel towers and mounted the antenna on top which was supposed to give a lot better reception. Mr. Pagenhart and I thought that if that would increase the signal just a little we would be able to see a picture, so we bought a 75 ft. tower. I think it cost \$1.00 per foot. Potomac Edison thought if it were assembled they could erect it in one piece, we assembled the tower for them but when they attempted to raise it with their truck it buckled in the center. However, they did get about one half of it up and left it. Then with the help of a couple of my friends we managed to get it all up but the last 10 foot section, making us a tower of 65 feet. On top of this we mounted the antenna which I had made -- now we were going to see television, we thought, but instead we could get scarcely nothing. "Well," I said, "The lead-in wire has to be broken or no good." We tested the wire and found that OK, so we took down the antenna put up another one, still no good, then we carried the antenna I had built back to Earl's and it worked fine.

I was really puzzled but not ready to quit and by now I was getting anxious to know what was going on. I was standing at Earl's home, which was not quite as high up the hill as Mr. Pagenhart's, and wondering why I couldn't get a picture nearly so good over there. I happened to look in the direction of Pittsburgh and all of a sudden it dawned on me what was taking place. Earl and Mr. Pagenhart lived on the same hill but it lies in sort of a semi-circle of about 1/2 mile and the end of the circle does not extend far enough to come between Earl's and the direction of Pittsburgh. Mr. Pagenhart, however, lived back in the cove and the end of the hill extended back past him and blocked the signal from Pittsburgh to his antenna.

I figured that in order to get signal for him we would have to build a tower as high as the top of the hill and that would have been two or three hundred feet which was not practical. At that I could see no hope for us to get any reception for him. None of the fellows who worked on the thing, other than the Potomac Edison Co., ever made any charge; if we had it would have probably cost him a thousand dollars in labor. We even built a rhombic antenna and it worked no better than the rest. I was completely stalled on that deal, at least for the time being. However, about a year later, after I had discovered that signal could be relayed by wire, I told him I could get him a picture by bringing it from the top of the hill. He was afraid someone would tear his line down and we never did build it for him so he died without ever having good reception. That is one job I have always been sorry I wasn't able to accomplish because he wanted television so bad. Many times I would be going on the mountain or somewhere else to watch television and would call him up, invite him to go along and he would say "Sure." He said to me one time "I can be feeling real bad until you call me to go watch television, then I feel just like I had taken some kind of a pep pill." His daughter told me that the night he died when she went to bed he was sitting in front of his TV set watching it and she could see nothing but snow on the screen. That was the last time she saw him alive.

After I discovered the hill was blocking us at Mr. Pagenhart's, I started working an entirely different approach to the problem. I knew then I would

absolutely have to get to the top of the hill where there was no other hill higher or closer in the direction from which we wanted to receive the signal; and that very thing I did. I rented a piece of ground on Backbone Mountain about 6 miles from Westernport and from this location you can look in the direction of Washington, D. C. and see no hills which are higher.

I had purchased a 110 volt, 60 cycle, 600 watt gasoline motor generator, two people could easily lift it and I usually carried it in the trunk of my car, along with my little 10T6 G.E. TV set and an all wave antenna. I was well equipped to receive television anywhere signal was available. However, at the location on Backbone I put an all wave antenna in the field not far from a small tree and under this tree I built a small box with one side open and this way I could slide my 10T6 in and out of the damp air and still be able to tune it and also see the screen. I put an attachment plug on the back of the set which was connected up with the speaker and with this I could connect one or more speakers which we would put in our cars where we could sit and watch TV as long as we liked. If we got cold we could start the car motor and get heat that way.

My family, my friends and myself spent many a pleasant evening there watching television during the summer and fall of 1950. In all of my work in trying, worrying and studying I had learned that due to a considerable loss in signal strength while traveling through a wire it was necessary to keep the TV set as close to the antenna as possible, which was a good enough reason for most people not to try to mount an antenna on top of a hill and run a wire down to their home at any great distance.

All of the time we were enjoying reception we would say how nice it would be if we could only get it down in the valley some way and be able to see it in our living rooms. One day I began to wonder, since it appeared to be that the loss in the lead-in wire was the only reason the set had to be close to the antenna, so why couldn't I merely put an R.F. booster in the line and raise the signal strength equal to the amount of loss in the cable and why wouldn't this work just the same as if I were close to the antenna. I decided to get about 800 feet of twin-lead cable and string it up across the field to Mr. Bernard's home, put the television set there and the generator and booster at the antenna. Again, luck seemed to go along with me because we had no means of communication and just haphazardly set the booster at no particular channel, but when we turned on the set we had a beautiful picture. I do not remember what channel it was. What meant most to me, I knew, now my idea would work. Another thing I had learned by this time was that it was taking plenty of money and time and I didn't have too much of either.

I talked with the boys who had been working with me and all seemed to be willing to go along with some sort of a scheme. Then we started trying different hilltops around the community until we finally decided on the place where the antennas are located at present. I might mention here that there are some other locations which might give us better reception than that which we are getting, but as distance is added to a cable system the troubles also multiply. Since it is only 4000 feet from the antenna to our first television set we feel it would be best to use the present site until there are further developments in cable systems.

But to get back to the story, until the time we had decided to locate the

antenna site on top of Piedmont Hill, my wife and I had done all the financing and at this place I would like to mention how cooperative she was and the faith she had in my ability to do what I had undertaken. In fact, I think she had more faith than I had in myself because she even had the place picked in the living room for the television set before we ever ran the first line from the top of the hill. I really believe if it had not been for the confidence she and our two daughters had, I never would have had the courage to stay with the project until finished, but I just couldn't let them down in something they believed I could do. Anyway, the time had arrived when the job of financing was more than we wanted to carry alone. Some of the fellows who had worked with me and helped all along did not have enough faith to invest even as much as one dollar; some of the others who were just a little bit warm toward it were Walter Croan, George Failing, Robert Gerfin, Bruce Dunn, John DeVore, William Thompson -- they all agreed to pay their share for the purchase of enough twin-lead wire to run from the top of the mountain to Bill Thompson's house, which is located approximately at the foot of the mountain.

On Saturday, September 23, 1950, we all assembled at the top of the mountain. Some of us cut poles and some pulled the poles down the hill. Bob Gerfin had two boys we had hired to help him blast out holes and set poles. Some of us were stringing wire, but even as hard as we all worked that day we were not able to finish until the following Monday evening. Tuesday evening, September 26, we planned to try our line to see if it would operate.

I had my 10T6 television set in Bill's living room and at the antenna we used my motor generator and one Masco booster, just a one tube job. George and Bill went to the antenna to operate the generator and booster while I stayed at Bill's home to operate the television. By this time we had devised a set of hand phones which we could communicate between points. In this case we disconnected the TV wire and used that as our telephone circuit. We had the booster tuned for Channel Five in Washington since, at that time, this was the station from which we received the most signal. When they connected up the booster and started the generator, Bill's wife and I were watching the television set to see what would happen and, lo and behold, we could see a picture and hear voice real well. The picture was some sort of western movie and awfully snowy, but we could see it all right and that, I am sure, was the first picture received by TV in any home in Piedmont. We didn't operate it more than about 10 minutes. We knew now it would work but we must have more booster power in order to get the same quality as we had at the antenna.

Before we made this test I had planned to use three boosters about evenly spaced in the line but since we had no power available along the line we weren't able to use the other two until we could run an electric line. Since the twin-lead wire was much cheaper than ordinary wire, we decided to try using it as a transmission line until we could give our system a good try-out. By working a couple of Saturdays and every evening that we had an opportunity we just about had all our wire up when a hard west wind storm came along and broke our twin-lead wire between every pole from about half-way up the hill all the way to the top. It surely was a mighty sorrowful sight. The wind whipped the wire around until it wore the grass out in places on the east side of the poles and, I suppose, also damaged the wire because we never did get any signal over this same wire again although we

went over the whole line, spliced everything, and thought we did a good job because we even had electrical circuit. We wired up the three boosters and between wind storms breaking our lines we finally did get it connected up all the way to Bill's home again, but as I stated before we didn't do any good with the three boosters in series. Probably if we would have had a field strength meter we could have set each booster as we progressed and also found where we were losing signal, but we didn't buy a meter until the following summer. By the time we tried the three booster set-up and it didn't work the weather was getting pretty bad so we abandoned the project until the following spring of 1951.

We had several months to plan what we intended to do the following summer and to study new kinds of material which were beginning to come on the market about this time, also to study about the transmission of high frequency current. Finally we came up with the idea of buying coaxial cable, wrapping it to a steel wire, setting all new poles and running a new power line, also adding on extra wire for our telephone. Taco Company had a new booster advertised which they claimed would push a signal for a few thousand feet, but only on one channel.

By the time spring arrived we had accumulated enough money to buy a field strength meter, some coaxial cable and No. 14 wire for a power line. For our telephone we bought army surplus field wire.

Sometime in April, 1951, we started to build a four-legged tower about 60 feet high, the legs at the bottom spread 8 feet between each leg and tapered to four feet at the top. In the top of this tower between the legs we built a small house to protect our amplifier and other equipment and right on the tip-top we mounted a Channel Five antenna. It took over a month to finish the tower, then we started testing again. We had a field strength meter now and we knew a lot more about what we were doing. The signal reading we were getting was not very promising and when we would take the television up to look at the picture sometimes that wouldn't be very good. In fact, the whole deal was discouraging to everyone. John DeVore about this time or a little before sold his interest, which was about \$150.00 to Fred Gartner. Croan was always ready to help and ready to give his share of money whenever it was needed; why he turned the other way later I will never know.

One evening Croan and I took the television to the tower to decide for once and all if we would go ahead or quit. It so happened that night the reception was fairly good and we decided to go ahead with the line at least to the foot of the hill. The week of 23rd to 29th of July, 1951, we took a vacation to work on the line. We hired Elmer VanPelt, paid him out of our own pocket, to help build the line. Once again we didn't finish on schedule and had to finish the next week. However, on Wednesday, August 1, we completed the line and were ready for test. Building a line sounds easy when you only read or write about it, but no one can appreciate the amount of work and hardship that went into the line on that steep and windy dirty hill. I have often wished some of the folks who try to steal television signal or complain about having to pay for it could have worked on that hill with me for a little while, then if their attitude didn't change I would have to pronounce them almost hopeless.

For our 110 volt power we put a receptacle on Carl Walker's porch where we could plug our line in any time we might care to. The first evening we tried

to get signal at the end of our line it didn't work very well. Sometimes we might have a swell picture for about one minute, but the next it would get all full of lines that would black out the picture entirely.

I was operating the television, Croan was at the antenna and I was able to communicate with him now because we had a telephone circuit on our new line. By having him move the lead-in line from the antenna to the amplifier around to different places we discovered the thing which was causing our picture to black out. What was really happening was that the output of the amplifier was so high it was radiating enough to jump through the air back into the 300 ohm twin-lead feeding our amplifier. In order to eliminate the trouble I mounted a small booster which did not have nearly so much gain close to the antenna and used from this booster to the amplifier a piece of coaxial cable which completely eliminated that trouble.

Since it was summer and still warm we were trying the television at the foot of the hill right at our last pole, just across the street from Carl Walker's house. I would take the television up there just about every evening, set it on a box, and sometimes as many as fifty people would gather around, sit on the ground and watch the show just like an outdoor movie. When we would turn it off to go home the youngsters would always object.

One evening when we connected the set it wouldn't work. Carl's younger brother, Raymond, told me he had been part way up the line early that evening and a couple of boys were up there with rifles and were shooting at birds. We figured they had probably shot the cable in half. Bruce and I took my capacitor meter and read the capacity of wire and calculated within a few feet where the bullet went through the coax. The two boys who did this told us it was an accident and they didn't mean to hit the cable.

Sometime around the latter part of August, Croan and I went up intending to do some testing at the tower. When we arrived there someone had taken several boards which we had left, piled them around the base of the tower and set them on fire trying to burn the tower. Fortunately we arrived in time to save it, but of course there was no evidence of who might have been the firebug.

I think it was on the morning of September 4th, 1951, that Hugh O'Rourke called me while I was at work in the Winding Shop and said someone had called from downtown and said the television tower was burning. Right away I called Croan and we went to the top of Luke Hill and from there we could see the smoke from the tower, but knowing there was nothing up there to fight fire with, there was no need to hurry. From the amount of black smoke we knew it was gone this time for sure. Croan and I went to the bottom of the hill and walked up the line to the tower where it was still burning, but everything was beyond saving. There were three boys who had been hunting in a nearby field and saw the fire. They were there when Croan and I arrived, and a strange thing was that one of the three was also one of the boys who had shot the cable a short time before. He said, "This sure looks bad for me but I didn't do it, I was just trying to help." I believed him, which proved to be right. The boy who set the fire both times, later confessed to his crime. We estimated the damage of the fire to be around \$1000.00, and that thousand had been hard to get. All of our amplifying equipment was gone along with quite a lot of other material we had stored in the tower.

I think about that time our spirit had dropped just about as low as it could possibly be. On the way back down the hill we talked over the method we would use in taking down the cable and salvage as much as possible. Maybe we would use it some place else or maybe not at all. However, by the end of the day our spirit had risen and we decided to do nothing at all for a period of two weeks.

The two week period that followed was very important in the development of the television partnership which was not yet a company. We had a meeting and decided to try again. This time we would set large poles for the antenna, put the amplifiers in metal boxes and try bringing in two channels instead of one. Of course, this was still to take a lot more money. We each agreed to invest more and at this time (October, 1951) Malcolm Kight came in with us and a payment of five hundred dollars, which was quite a boost at a time like this.

About this time we had been discussing incorporating into a company in order to get rid of personal liability. Croan had been considered a few times as the president but shortly before this time his attitude had changed and he was becoming more difficult to get along with all the time. It was beginning to be that every time I would want something done a particular way he had another way which he would want to do it, even though I would tell him it wouldn't work. Finally one day he told me when the company was incorporated and he was president things would be done his way. I told him that I didn't know about that, that the directors would have something to say about what was going on. He answered that this company wouldn't have any directors so, of course, I told him if that was his attitude he wouldn't get my vote for president because I had spent too much, both in money and time, not to have any say in what was going on. This was our first real break although he was with me for over a year after that. It was absolutely impossible to get along with him and I believe he did everything in his power to make things look bad for me and to do all he could against me.

Just about the time Malcolm Kight joined with us we started the procedure of incorporating. Since Malc was operating an Esso Standard Oil Station and had made many friends around the community and was well known for his honesty and salesmanship, also because he would be available most of the time while the rest of us were employed at the mill and were hard to get in touch with, we decided that Malc would make an excellent vice president.

In November 1951, we held a meeting to incorporate and elect officers. We named the company, Upper Potomac Television Co., Inc. We elected George Failing, Treasurer; Horace Whitworth, Secretary; Malcolm Kight, Vice President; and myself President. We gave Croan no office at all, however, he was made one of the directors along with Fred Gartner, Bill Thompson, Bruce Dunn and Robert Gerfin.

From that time on any work anyone did was compensated by the payment of one dollar per hour and that money was used to purchase stock at the rate of \$10.00 per share. The reason for that arrangement was to give the fellow who did the most work the greatest number of shares of stock. We all felt this was a fair set up for everyone.

Croan was so mad after the election he would hardly speak to me at all, neither would he do any work. I went ahead with my plans and did a lot of

work myself, also bought and paid for a Jeep myself. Croan said the reason I did that was so I could keep control of everything, but the real reason was that the company didn't have any money in the treasury to buy anything like that. Furthermore, none of the directors were in favor of spending that amount of money but I simply had to have a Jeep in order to get material back and forth to the top of the mountain and I could see no way other than buying it myself and this I did, neither did I make any charge for the use of it for quite a while. Malc used his truck sometimes and neither did he make any charge for it.

We employed the George Construction Co. to set the two large poles and they were finished about the first of December, 1951. Again there was a waiting period for amplifiers. In the meantime we had been discussing the purchase of Philco equipment. They promised us around two weeks delivery on their line amplifiers. We ordered two of them and they did send them right away, but later we had an amplifier order from them for as long as six months before we got delivery. This was one of the reasons we quit using them.

At the antenna site we used the Taco amplifier, at about fifteen hundred feet down we placed another Taco, then about twelve hundred feet down we used a Philco, which took us all the way to the first street in town where we used another Philco for distribution.

We made an installation in Carl Walker's residence, Bill Davis's store and Bill Thompson's residence. This date was somewhere around the 20th of January, 1952.

The Taco amplifiers were not aligned properly when we first tried to use them. When we first connected them up we had a very good picture but not one bit of sound. I sat in Carl Walker's home with a phone while Harry Delinger and Paul Bosley stood in the cold and wind on that mountain and tuned the amplifiers from my instruction. Paul would listen to me on the phone and tell Harry which screw to turn and how much while I watched and listened to the set. I well remember sitting there watching the picture and listening to Paul's teeth chattering at the other end of the line. I sometimes wonder how we ever did it comparing that crude method with the elaborate expensive equipment which we have today, but we did and also did a good job. In fact, those amplifiers were used until October of that year before being replaced.

From the date of about January 20, 1952, the system has been operating continually other than a period of three days due to a heavy storm in January, 1953, which broke our power lines at several places.

On February 1, 1952, the directors held a meeting at Bill Thompson's home to inspect the type of reception being received and to decide the future policy of the company and prices to be charged, etc.

It was decided to proceed with the purchase of necessary bonds and insurance so we might get permission from the utility company for using their poles to string our wire. Since we were going to operate in two states we had to do everything just double. In fact, all added together, we had to buy about six hundred thousand dollars insurance and twenty thousand dollars in bonds.

By the time we got through with all the legality another six months had passed by and, in the meantime, we had connected about ten paying customers.

Mr. Davis Price, Piedmont, was the very first paying subscriber and he was connected up in March, 1952. Bill Thompson was not counted as a subscriber since he was a member of the company. Carl Walker and Bill Davis's store were helping to make the test.

In July of 1952 we got the cable across the Potomac River and Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and were able to run a TV set in the playground on Maryland Avenue for folks to watch, and this was almost every night for several weeks. On August 5th I got a set working in my home by running an open wire from the playground up the ball park fence. Sometimes this worked fine and other times it was so "ghosty" one could hardly watch it. I had run the open wire parallel with some barbed wire which was over the ball park fence and when the signal would get high, which it often did since we had no A.G.C. on our amplifiers at that time, it would jump off the open wire onto the fence then bounce back on my open line and give a double picture.

We then decided to use coax cable in place of the open wire. We laid the coax along the top of the baseball fence, and we used that particular piece of cable until approximately the following spring.

It was close that time that we changed to the Jerrold system of distribution. They did not approve of the type of construction which we had been using. In order to tap a subscriber onto our system we had to cut the main line for each subscriber; while with the Jerrold system the only time the main cable was cut was when it went through a distribution unit called an A.D.O. From the A.D.O. there were three feeder lines, and each feeder line would go to a different street. The feeder lines were isolated from the main line through an amplifying tube. If a subscriber would happen to have a television set that was causing interference, the interference would not go back into the main line as it would have in the old line which we had been using before.

Sometime that fall we rented a small room from Miss Nellie Thrasher on Ashfield Street in Piedmont. Although we were not quite ready to use it we felt it was quite a desirable location for our type of business so we were willing to pay rent on it for several months.

In October we ran the cable back across the river to Piedmont Flat and up the street to our office. That was somewhere around Halloween. I think it was on Halloween night that we got the signal into our office and we were all anxious to see how the picture would look over there, so we connected a television set to the cable and received a beautiful picture. We were all so thrilled with the picture that we couldn't resist the temptation to put the television set in the window so that people could see it. I believe that was on Halloween night of the year 1952.

I don't suppose that there were very many people in the Tri-Towns who had ever seen a television set operating before. In about an hour after we had the set operating in the window, we almost caused a traffic jam in the street due to people going along who stopped to look at the television. Then I suppose other people coming along wondered what the crowd was about, and they also stopped to see. Finally the police came along and tried to get them moving, however, I don't believe he tried too hard because he realized it was quite a novelty and people were very interested in seeing the

television.

We had planned on opening the office on November 1. My wife wanted me to put an advertisement in the paper, advertising to the public that we were going to exhibit a television program at our office on November 1. This I hesitated to do since I was not sure it would work properly even though we had been using it at home all that fall. I was afraid it would be just my luck to advertise this to the public and certainly, I would think, they would have a terrific interest, there would be a lot of people there, and then it wouldn't work. Believe me, I would have been embarrassed. So I thought it best to display the picture and make no public announcement, but just let the picture speak for itself.

On November 1, 1952, we opened the office at 12:00 noon and stayed open until 5:00 PM and followed this procedure for about a month. At that time the number of cable TV subscribers was only 16 families. We invited people to come into the office, look at our picture and tell us if they were interested. Also, we had a card that they filled out and marked on it if they would be interested in having such a picture in their own home. As I recall, there were a lot of people who stopped in and most of them expressed the opinion that they were very much interested and would like to have television. However, we were handicapped in putting television into any homes because actually the only place we had the line was from Bill Thompson's house, across to Maryland Avenue, up Maryland Avenue, south side of the street; back across the river to our office in Piedmont. Our greatest difficulty was that we didn't have the financial means to expand very much at a time. We had to get a few subscribers in order to get some money in order to purchase some new equipment. The stockholders were all very reluctant to invest further even though we had our office open, people expressed a lot of interest, and it appeared to all of us on the face of the thing that if we had the town covered with television we wouldn't have any trouble selling it. Now just about this time (November, 1952) we were able to sell some stock to Dr. Jimmy Wolverton, Al Zimmerman and Ray Snuder. In addition, some of the stockholders decided to purchase more stock so that we might have some working capital, which we finally managed to raise to about \$1,500 to \$2,000. It was at this time, probably February of 1953, after raising the extra money by the sale of stock, that I went to Baltimore and made arrangements with the Atomic Television Co. to purchase enough Jerrold amplifiers to bring three stations to the foot of Piedmont Hill. As I recall, the amplifiers cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$600.00 each. It was then that we also bought a converter for Channel Nine and converted it to Channel Two, which channel we still carry the same today.

The room which we had rented from Miss Nellie Thrasher was about 15 feet by 30 feet long, and we had taken about 10 feet off the back for a Service Shop, leaving our office about 15 feet by 20 feet. We had an open flame gas heater which caused the walls and windows to sweat badly and the conditions were such that my wife had a cold all winter long. We found out that later on in the winter the store called the Princess Shop in the Mellor Building was going to close and we made arrangements to rent that place and were able to have it remodeled to suit our needs. We planned to have an opening on April 15, 1953, and move from our location at Miss Thrasher's. When we moved we had 72 subscribers.

The subscribers at first came pretty slow, due to not having our lines all

over town and also, people not having the confidence in us that they would have in later years. However, in March, while we were still in the small store, there was quite a controversy as to which way to run the cable because we could not go in all directions at one time due to financial conditions and availability of labor and so forth.

The method that we pretty much used at that time to decide the direction in which the cable would go, was to have people sign the application for television service and then we tried to go in the direction where we had the most applications. In March of that year we obtained permission for crossing the Western Maryland Railroad at First Street on Maryland Avenue then on across to Church Street. I remember that particular crossing caused some hard feelings with some of the folks who lived in another direction; but it was impossible to go all ways at one time.

After we bought the first Jerrold amplifier and as financial conditions improved we would buy another Jerrold amplifier and sometimes, if possible, two at a time. As the company grew we expanded and extended our cable into the neighboring communities. In June of 1955 we made our first cable installations in Bloomington, Maryland. It was about the first of October, 1956, that we extended into Beryl, West Virginia. Recently we have run our lines down the Keyser-Piedmont road into the Keymont section and are presently running our line down the McCoolle road in the hopes of picking up about five additional subscribers. We have done this in the hope of bringing television to every possible family that desired it even if it meant no financial gain for the company.

As the company grew and we continually needed more space we purchased the old Howard High School in March of 1957. The building has been remodeled to suit our needs and we now have a Line Shop and an efficient Service Department located in the building.

I. Homer Ferrell
Westernport, Maryland (ca. 1957)
