

*The connecting link between the North Campus and the Main Campus is a pert woman who puts personality and service into the job of*

## Switchboard Operator

By RUTH FOREMAN UPDEGRAFF, '28ba, '40ma

One day last week a call came into the north campus PBX board located in building 601. Someone asked for information about Mrs. McNatt who used to work on the main campus telephone exchange some years ago.

"I'm still here, Herman Ziemer," a throaty voice chuckled. "Don't you know me?"

"How do you do it?" screamed Herman, "After all those years?"

"Ah, it's not hard. I should know you. Think how many times you called from the band office. Besides I work on remembering people."

Thinking back over the time I knew her while working in the registry office and handling calls, and after talking with others who know her, I believe she does work on remembering people.

She does it by getting acquainted with

them, making them something more in her life than just voices. Why she does it is another thing. It's all wrapped up in her personality, her inherent kindness, her interest in people and how she can do her job better.

How she got started has its beginning at a one-operator switchboard owned by her father in Texola, Oklahoma. This board with another at Wheeler, Texas, was maintained by her only brother, and run by her sisters, the seven Wright girls. Each girl took her turn as she became old enough to work.

In those days, the telephone operator gave service. If she could not reach her customer by phone, she yelled out the window. Plenty of practice made Mae Wright adept at getting calls through.

So adept did she become in her profession that after her marriage, the birth of

her son, James, '41p.eng, one of O.U.'s basketball greats, and the return of her husband from World War I, she went to work for Southwest Bell Telephone Company in Norman, as a long distance operator.

The McNatts came to Norman because of the University. Jim is a barber. He figured trade would be good in a college town and Jimmy could go to school.

In 1927, Mrs. McNatt applied for a job on the University PBX and got it. With the exception of one year's sick leave, she has worked for the University ever since. And during that time she has heard lots of voices.

If she hears a voice that intrigues her, she looks it up. If she sees something in the paper about one of her telephone acquaintance, she clips it and sends it along to the person.

Many people will attest to this. Mrs. Bruce Drake tells about the pretty stranger who came to call bringing complete doll outfits for the two small Drake daughters.

Deonne, Now Mrs. Monte Moore, used to call for her daddy. Questioning by the operator revealed that daddy was Bruce Drake, '29phys.ed, physical education instructor and later Jimmy's basketball coach.

Another one of her telephone friends was Anna Mae Dearden, '24ba, then assistant registrar. Mrs. McNatt became so curious about this nice voice that she walked over to the registry office one day after work to meet her. When Miss Dearden returned for a visit after several years as Mrs. Alec Baynes of New York, she made a call to the university.

"Why, Miss Dearden, I didn't know you were back in town," Mrs. McNatt said.

Prankster Harold Keith, '29ba, '39ma, sports publicity director, known to his intimate friends as "Grantland" tries to disguise his voice in an effort to fool her. She always knows him. One of her prize stories concerns the time Harold interviewed her between "Wait a minute!" and "What did you say?" She still blushes at some of the things she told him and that he printed.

Another person who tries to prank her is Emil Kraetli, '18, secretary of the University. He is always calling her for the book bindery or the post office in what he considers an unfamiliar tone, one which says, "Now I want it right away."

Mrs. McNatt just laughs and replies, "You can't fool me, Mr. Kraetli, I know your voice."

One of her favorite customers is her boss, Walter Kraft, physical plant director. She has kept up with him on his trips around the campus since she started to work for him twenty-three years ago. Their chief



MRS. MAE McNATT  
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## Switchboard Operator . . .

talking point now is stories about each other's grandchildren.

All the physical plant people got together upon the occasion of the president's open house last fall. Mrs. Cross invited every one who had anything to do with remodeling the house. Possessed of an unusual voice herself, she assured Mrs. McNatt that the party would not be complete without her.

Letters accumulated over the years show that other high ranking University people appreciate Mrs. McNatt's courteous manner and helpfulness. Hugh McDermott, '20ba, coach of the "Boy Scats" cited her for meritorious duty in 1938.

W. H. Carson, engineering college dean, commended her for "the excellent manner in which she took care of the numerous long distance calls which came in during the Southwestern Gas Measurement Short Course in 1950."

Thurman White, '40ma, extension service dean, in writing to Mr. Kraft about her stated, "As long as we have McNatt, you can have the dials."

Every Christmas, her mail is loaded with cards from her "telephone friends." The

late Dr. Alma J. Neill never forgot to send her a card.

One of her treasured letters is written in a boyish scrawl and signed "Graham B." (Johnson) whose tragic at Christmas last year grieved the entire campus.

But the one which brings sparkles to her eyes, over the tears underneath, says this, "I don't believe I'd be bragging too much when I say I've got two of the best people for Mom and Dad that anyone ever had."

"If I have any regrets," said this woman who never forgets a voice, "It's that I did not get to see Jimmy play in every basketball game in his life."

## Another Was Outstanding . . .

accomplishments while at the University. He passed the state bar exam in 1942 with only two years of law school behind him. He made the second highest score in his law class. He was also elected to Phi Beta Kappa while a college junior.

Oklahoma City's outstanding young man is a vestryman of St. Paul's Episcopal church and is a delegate to the church's state convention.

## Pearson Is Dead

**Prominent Alumnus Dies.** An active

member of the Alumni Association and friend of the University died last December.

John R. Pearson, '29ba, '29Law, Pawhuska attorney was preparing for a trip to Tulsa to meet his two sons, John and James, both students at Amherst College. Resting before the trip, when he arose he was stricken with a heart attack and died.

Pearson was a member of Beta Theta Phi and Phi Delta Phi at the University. In 1950 Pearson was listed in "Who's Who in the South and Southwest." He was active in Boy Scout work, a member of the county draft board at the time of his death; had served as president of the Rotary Club; president of the Osage County Bar Association, and had been active in Republican political activities in his area.

## Foreign Students . . .

gears of industry in their home nations whether it be a war or peace economy to which they return.

Africa, Asia, South America, Canada . . . these are the places from which they come. They are all studying engineering, but each has his own story, his own reason for selecting the University, his self-styled ideals and hopes for the future.

Listen to Kamal, the Iranian, who

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