

Way We Were  
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The Park City Lineman  
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"I am a lineman for the county, and I drive the main road searching in the sun for another overload," crooned the late Glen Campbell in the popular song "Wichita Lineman," written by Jimmy Webb. Ranked in *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time, "Wichita Lineman," evokes the solitary and existential mood of a county lineman's work on telephone and power poles across rural America.

In an interview, Webb stated that he was inspired to write the song while driving the Oklahoma panhandle after he noticed a lineman perched atop one of a long line of identical poles with a telephone in his hand. Webb was struck by the "exquisite aesthetic balance of all these telephone poles just decreasing in size as they got further and further away...and as I passed him, he began to diminish in size." The song, he said, "came about, really, from wondering what that was like, what it would be like to be working up on a telephone pole and what would you be talking about?"

Parkite Earne Anderson was a lineman early in his career with the telephone company right here in Park City. The stories he told in an oral history interview he conducted with the Park City Museum offer some insight into that and other questions the "Wichita Lineman" provokes in its listeners.

Maintaining phone lines was vital to keeping Park City and the surrounding areas connected to the larger outside world. "We repaired lines anywhere and we didn't care about time or anything. We wanted to get the phone service going because we knew how important it is," Earne said in his interview.

He was not exaggerating. During the winter of 1948-1949, Earne and the other company employees faced a near disaster when hiking through deep snow in Thaynes Canyon to reach downed lines. Hearing a noise like "a crack of thunder," Earne looked up to see a "wall of snow coming down." The avalanche caught James "Windy" Winchester first, then Earne as it raced down the mountainside.

The slide stopped at a grove of aspen trees and Earne, caught from the waist down, fought to dig himself out. Not seeing any sign of Windy, he hiked down to the Thaynes mine shaft. "I have no idea how I got there," Earne reminisced. "All I can remember is [thinking] what Windy's wife and kids were going to do."

After telling the mine watchman what had happened, Earne climbed a nearby telephone pole and called into the switchboard to report the incident and ask for help. Wilma Larremore,

the operator on duty, summoned emergency services. Somewhat miraculously, Windy was found and rescued, escaping with just a bruised eye.

While “Wichita Lineman” induces a sense of quiet nostalgia, Earne Anderson’s stories show that the job was not always as solitary and uneventful as the image of a lone lineman in rural America might suggest. Working day and night, in good weather and bad, telephone linemen kept the country connected.



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Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Kendall Webb Collection

Caption: Earne Anderson, right, started working with the telephone company in high school as a janitor. After graduating in 1947, he was promoted to installer and repairman. “Windy” Winchester is on the left and manager Edward Allen is center.