Phone Man Should Have
 Been Bank President

BY VERA MILLER

REMEMBER the telephone
that was installed in its
throne within the arched door
cavern of the commode in the
front hallway? Above this parsoned muehgan
item were hanging family
heirlooms pictures in their amber oval frames
attached by some mysterious force
to the ceiling woodwork.

Behind the stately ebony soldier
forever in a right armed salute to
the unknown caller were two empty
salphor match boxes. The kind you
will cut out to open. In were the
shag and in the other box were
the nickels.

TO CALL Pa at the store was
a ceremony that enthralled the
family. Ma would approach the
front hallway shinning everyone as
she went. The little spindly
ugly seat was pulled out (just
partly) and Ma would install itself
upon it.

Ever since the day the
phone was installed Ma was carefully
rehearsed for the four phone
numbers which enabled her to main
tain contact with the outside
world, the family doctor, the
butter, Aunt Egie and THE
STORE, she still pulled the
tattered scrap from under the
telephone to carefully enunciate
the number first to herself. The shag
was deposited and signaled its
downward arrival by a bell sound
giving an "all clear."

REPEAT NUMBER
"NUMBER puh-lee-ah" and Ma
would draw herself up with dign
ity and clearly and distinctly
repeat the number at least twice.
There were no wrong numbers in
those days, just four digits and the
exchange. Sandwiched between
were various jiggles of the
receiver as Ma discussed with the
operator, whom she was trying to
reach, her relationship to the
called party and the importance of
the operator to make the proper
connection.

After the series of buzzings to
indicate the electronic compatibilit
ity between the caller and the same
company, Ma would invariably
start the conversation with "Po-
Po, you're all right? So long it
took me to call I thought maybe
you were sick. Po, you're too busy
I should talk? Maybe I should come
to the store for a minute "efhshur."

REMEMBER THE thin drawer
in the commode? The city tele
phone book was the family
dictionary, the direction
finder, the primary
reader to learn the alphabet and
continuity of the numerical system
and, of course, the 'extra'
send when a high chair was needed.

Sometimes this meant borrowing
the neighbors telephone books for
the desired elevation for the Fri-
day night dinner.

Once a month the telephone was
once. He was one of the family.
Ma usually had a little "mash" for
him. The young boys learned to
dollar his bottle like the 'telephone
man' and the girls were cautioned
not to bite their nails in his
presence.

AND WHEN he opened the black
box and started to work, more
than ever Ma would be convinced
that he was in the wrong job—
he should be a bank president.

After the shags were counted and
the eldest given the job of mak ing
the monetary payment for them,
they were returned to the match
box. The big squared dollar
bills (remember them?) were given
to him in exchange for the nickels
and the nickels returned to their
stored case box. Of course, the
telephone box also revealed such
items as hair pins, thin pencil
leads, and other miscellaneous.

LISTEN IN
The ringing of the telephone
was a signal to "man the battle
stations" as whenever was in the
house hovered in the vicinity of
the telephone to listen to the con
versation. The older young people
who received calls from a person
of the opposite sex, resembled
ostiches as they spoke on the tele
phone with their heads telescoped
in the dark recess of the telephone
cabinet.

And remember way back when all
the telephones were black and
they were all the same size and
the operator on the party line was
the "Mrs. Anthony" between the
four party-line users. And maybe
you remember how you used to
have a pre-arranged signal so that
the bell would ring on one of the
other party lines and you could talk
until the operator made those
"I'm listening!" sounds.