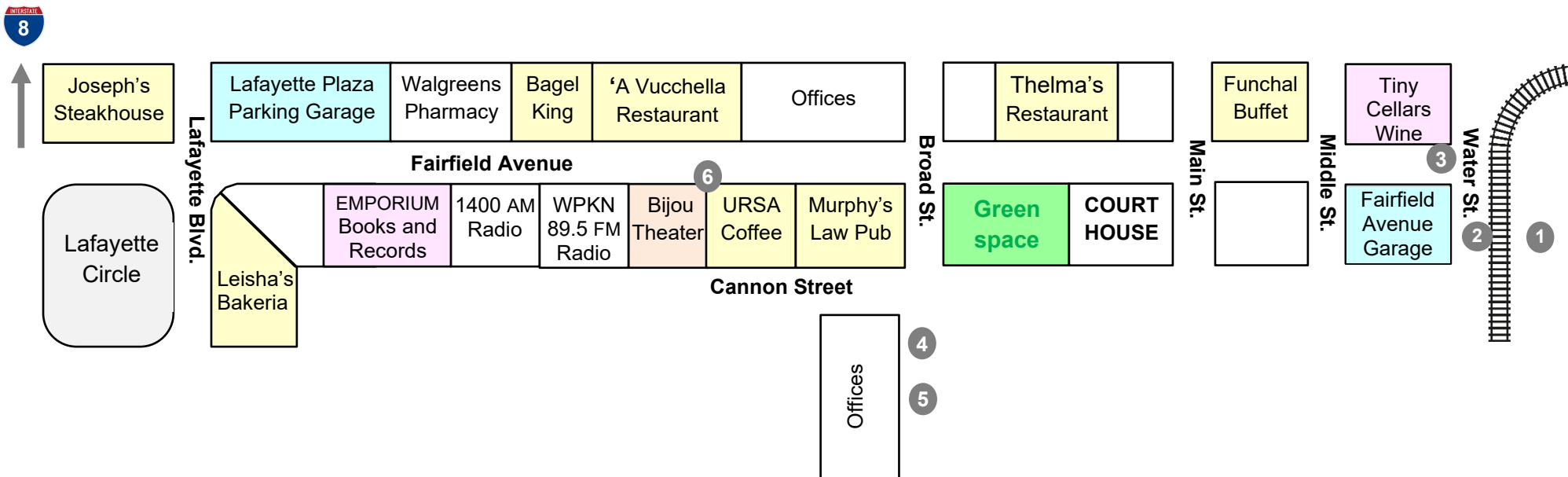
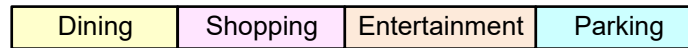


Bridgeport Walking Tours

#1 - Fairfield Avenue

(West from train station)



ADDITIONAL TOURS from TRAIN and BUS STATIONS and FERRY

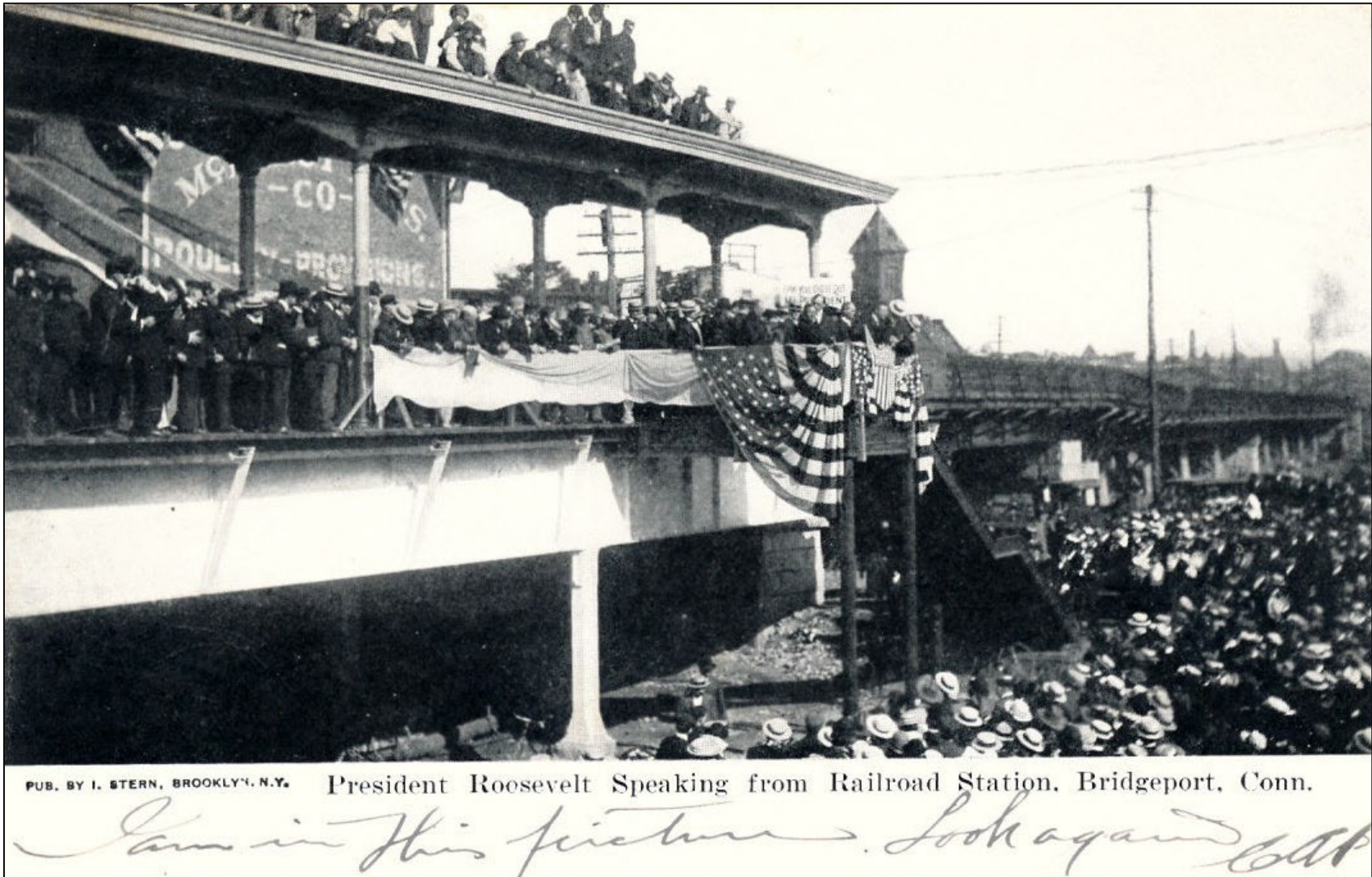
2. North on Main Street – Paugussett village, Orator O'Rourke office in Fairfield County Courthouse, Poli and Majestic Theaters
3. South on Main Street – Arcade, Barnum Museum,
4. West on State Street (off South Main) – McLevy Hall, Housatonic Art Museum

INTERWEAVE ALL TOURIST INFORMATION: Parking, Historic Places, Architecture, Murals, Eateries, Entertainment, Galleries, Antique Shops

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1 Presidential Train Spotting

At least 16 presidents visited the Park City, sometimes staying a day or two and speaking at major venues like the Klein Auditorium. Others spoke during whistle stops from the elevated station platform to throngs of well-wishers gathered below.



Teddy Roosevelt speaking in 1905; on one of his five visits to Bridgeport.



JFK stumping, November 6, 1960

<https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/bridgeport-ct-19601106>

For more on presidential visits, see <http://www.bridgeportintheknow.com/famous.htm>

2 The Wreck of the Federal Express.

It was 3:30 am and the fast "Federal Express" from Philly to Boston was running an hour late. To make up time the engineer opened the throttle allowing the heavy passenger train to hurtle at 60 mile per hour toward the "S" curve at Bridgeport. The safe speed was 15 mph. As the engine hit the curve on the elevated line, it began to rock, jumped the track and tore up ties for a mile before careening off an embankment onto Fairfield Avenue 20 feet below, pulling seven passenger cars crashing with it onto the street. Fourteen passengers lost their lives and 47 more were injured in the crush of metal

Even more would have died, had it not been for the quick reaction of the St. Louis Cardinals who were on their way to Boston for a game with the Braves. The players pulled passengers from wrecked and burning cars



[TOP LEFT] *Fairfield Avenue viaduct is visible behind wreckage.*

[TOP RIGHT] *Steam cranes grapple with shredded cars.*

[LEFT] *The twisted engine is sticking up from the rubble. Note the splintered railway ties plowed up by the out-of-control locomotive.*

16 KILLED, 65 INJURED, WHEN 60-MILE-AN-HOUR TRAIN LEAPS FROM VIADUCT COACHES FALL INTO BRIDGEPORT, CONN., STREET

The New York, New Haven & Hartford Viaduct at Bridgeport, Conn., from which the passenger train leaped, with the resulting roll of dead and injured; some of the St. Louis Cardinals who were on the train and did heroic rescue work.



EDWARD KONETCHY.



IVEY WINGO.



ROGER BRESNAHAN.



"RUBE" GEYER.

**All Cardinal Players Safe
Roger Bresnahan Wires**

CARDINAL PLAYERS ESCAPE AND AID IN RESCUING INJURED

**Bresnahan, Barefoot and Pajama Clad
Leads His Band When Splintered
Coaches Take Fire.**

**ENGINEER HELD AT FAULT,
FOUND DEAD AT HIS POST**

**Mistake of Switchman Saved Lives of St. Louis-
ans, Who Lose Uniforms and Baggage
—Mother Hurt, Child Dead
Under Her.**

BRIDGEPORT, Conn., July 11.—The Federal Express, one of the New York, New Haven & Hartford railroad's fastest trains, carrying passengers without change from Washington to Boston, plunged down a 20-foot embankment here at 3:30 this morning while running 60 miles an hour.
Of 100 passengers that went down with the first six cars

**CLOUDLESS SKIES ARE
PREDICTED; SLIGHTLY**

So why the “S” curve at Bridgeport. Until the 1840s, the line from Boston terminated at Bridgeport. (See arrow on map.) Goods for New York and points west were transferred to barges. At the time the tracks turned sharply south to follow the west side of the harbor. When the New York and New Haven Railroad was allowed to extend the road to New York, it was deemed less costly to simply continue the line from where it terminated, adding yet another sharp turn. There were alternatives, as shown on this route planning map of 1845. The dotted or solid red lines would have not only been safer but would have avoided all trains having to slow to a crawl as the passed through the Park City for the past century and a half.



For more on the train wreck of 1911, see <https://connecticuthistory.org/bridgeports-catastrophic-1911-train-wreck/> and <https://www.stlredbirds.com/2021/06/08/july-11-1911-following-a-horrific-train-crash-the-cardinals-spring-into-action-to-save-lives/>

3 The First Social Network.

When Bell invented the telephone, it was initially received as an “interesting novelty” but of “little practical value.” There was no one to call, at least not until a group of tech enthusiasts in Bridgeport established the first telephone *exchange* in the summer of 1877. The group already had in place a “little private [telegraph] system,”¹ the Bridgeport Telegraph Association.

At the time, Bridgeport had one of the highest literacy rates in the first digital language: Morse Code, Children were taught Morse in the schools.¹ The association included individuals—many of whom had learned Morse as members of the Army Signal Corp during the Civil War—and businesses eager to improve the speed of their communications.

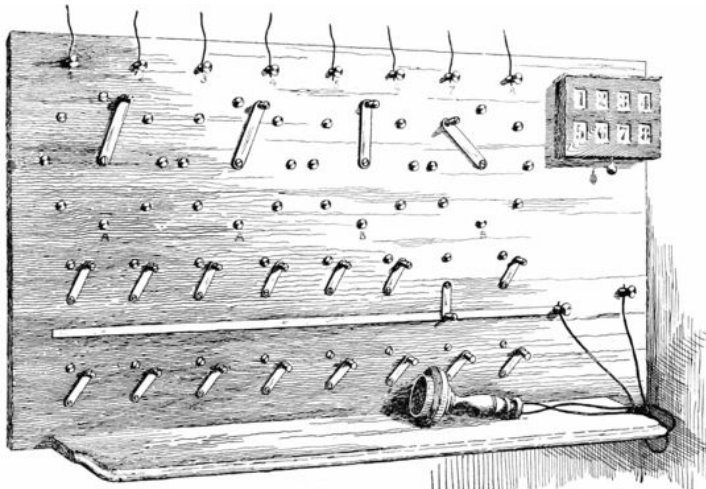
A member of the group, Thomas Doolittle, a Bridgeport resident and manufacturer of stamped brass products and barbed wire built a switchboard to connect the subscribers. The exchange was located in offices of the Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Co. in the Atlantic Hotel on the northwest corner of Fairfield Avenue and Water Street.

In early 1877 Doolittle attended one of Alexander Graham Bell’s demonstrations of the telephone, and saw the future. He acquired a “number”¹ of Bell’s early telephones and installed them on the telegraph network and thereby launched the first practical telephone exchange in the world. Doolittle inaugurated the system at a demonstration for the Association members at the George Hotel in Black Rock on Sunday afternoon, June 25, 1877.^{ENDNOTE 1}

Association members with instruments in their homes or factories were:²

INDIVIDUALS: E. O. Cole, residence (manager of The Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Co.), D. W. Kissam, T. L. Watson, George H. Johnson, T. B. Doolittle, George E. Swincoe.

COMPANIES: Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Co.; Hatzel and Watson, Bankers; Bridgeport Brass; Hinks Johnson carriage shop (successors to Wood Bros.); George Hotel, Black Rock; Eaton, Cole and Burnham manufacturers; Wheeler and Wilson Sewing Machine Co.; Union Metallic Cartridge Co.; Sharpe’s Rifle Manufacturing Co.; Western Union Telegraph Co. and the race track at Seaside Park (a popular place to see and be seen).



Doolittle moved quickly to make a serious business from his innovation. He relocated the switchboard from the A&P Telegraph Company to a telephone company he established at 31 Fairfield Avenue, across the street from the Atlantic Hotel. Doolittle threw his lot in with Bell and in the “Fall of 1877” obtained the agency for Bridgeport.³

He worked closely with Bell, Watson, Charles Williams on perfecting the telephone. He helped to design and perfect the ringer. Until this addition in 1878, the only way to rouse someone on the other end was to scream into the phone.

The First Switchboard.

¹ *Bridgeport Herald*, May 15, 1904

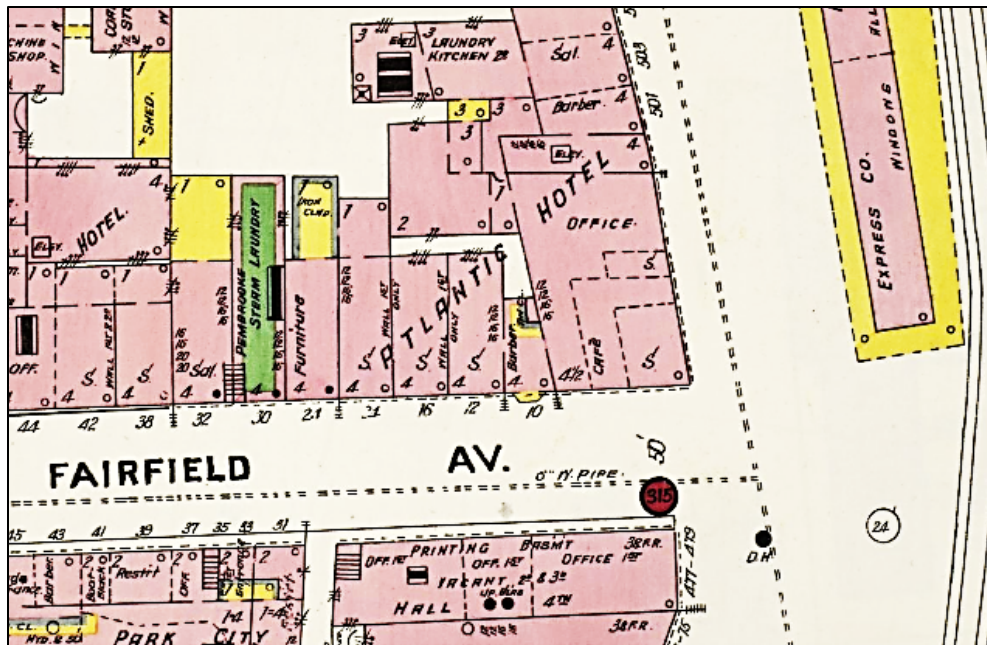
² *Bridgeport Post*, March 23, 1927.

³ *Bridgeport Post*, February 1, 1953

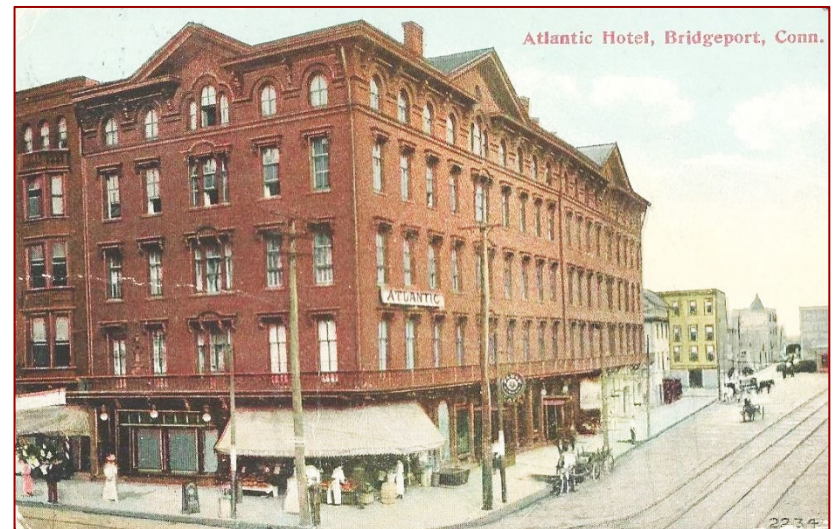
Doolittle's Bridgeport company was responsible for a number of firsts in addition to the switchboard:

- A. TELEPHONE WIRE. The invention of hard-drawn copper wire in 1878, used to this day to connect telephones. The iron wire used for telegraphy was too staticky to clearly convey the human voice; and the drawn copper wire did not sag between poles from summer heat as did iron.¹
- B. PUBLIC PAY PHONE in 1878. first installed further down Fairfield Avenue at Clinton Avenue where the trolley line ended, so folks could call home to be picked up.¹
- C. INTER-CITY SERVICE. The first towns connected were Bridgeport, Fairfield, and Southport on October 18, 1878.²
- D. LONG DISTANCE. The first "long-distance" connection, between Boston and New York, in 1884.³ The wires were made by Ansonia Copper and Brass.

Thomas Benjamin Doolittle also, with three other telephone pioneers, founded on February 28, 1885, a little company called AT&T.⁴



*Atlantic Hotel on the corner of Fairfield Avenue and Water Street.
Sanborn Map Company, 1898*



¹ H. M. Boettinger, *The Telephone Book*, Riverwood Publishers Limited, Croton-on-Hudson, NY, 1981, p. 104.

² *Bridgeport Daily Standard*, October 18, 1878

³ John R. Pierce, *Signals: The Telephone and Beyond*, W. H. Freeman and Company, San Francisco, 1981, p. 7.

⁴ "The Early Corporate Development of the Telephone," *Bell Telephone Quarterly*, published by AT&T, July, 1923. (Doolittle owned 25% of the company.)

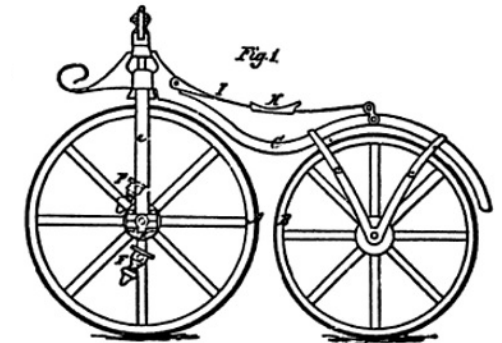
4 Wood Brothers: Carriage Builders to Presidents

The two buildings on the west side of Broad Street, south of Cannon were built on the former site of Wood Brothers Carriage Factory. The Woods were one of the first manufacturers of "Bone Shakers" (AKA bicycles prior to rubber tires) c1869.¹ But they were best known for their top-of-the-line carriages.²

Wood built carriages for the Russian Czar, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, and Abraham Lincoln who rode in it to Ford's Theatre.³



"Bone Shaker" 1869⁹



The Lincoln Carriage



¹ David V. Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History*, p. 103

² http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/h/hincks_johnson/hincks_johnson.htm

³ Smithsonian National Museum of American History

https://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/lincolns-carriage?utm_source=si.edu&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=exhibitions

"The open barouche model carriage was built by Wood Brothers in 1864 and was presented to Lincoln by a group of New York merchants shortly before the president's second inauguration. Clement Studebaker bought the vehicle from F. B. Brewer of New York, who had acquired it from Robert Lincoln, the president's son."

5 Elsie Vervane - President of Women's Machinist Union - Broad Street.

By Xhesi Morena, 2015, undergraduate student, Central Connecticut State University

Elsie Vervane (Ver Vane, Vervaene, Von Vane) was born Elsie Probst in New York, New York in approximately December of 1870. She was the daughter of two German immigrants to the United States, George and Augusta Probst, who migrated to Connecticut shortly after her birth. She married Samuel Vervane on September 15, 1895 and they went on to have 8 children. In January of 1926, she divorced her husband in Michigan citing extreme cruelty. She resided in Bridgeport, Connecticut for most of her life, and worked in the city's munitions industry for most of those years, eventually becoming the president of the Bridgeport Ladies Machinist Union.

Her interest in women's suffrage and rights was significant and she went on to be involved in very prominent events in suffrage history. At a local level, she was very involved with her community. On October 9, 1918, Vervane made a speech in favor of votes for women before a meeting of women at Machinists' Hall. Around that time, Mrs. Vervane was running a campaign for the Board of Education on the American Labor Party ticket. She was one of four women running out of eight candidates.

In December of 1918, she was one of 200 state chairmen, delegates, and members of the national advisory council attending a three-day emergency conference called by the National Woman's Party in Washington on December 14-16. The conference was for the purpose of considering ways and means to secure the passage of the suffrage amendment before March 4th of that year. Elsie was an active suffragist, saying herself in an article written in the *Bridgeport Times* on December 16, 1918 that "The suffrage situation is very critical...there is almost no chance of the amendment being passed by this Congress unless the women of the country make an irresistible and constant demand for it."

In January of 1919, Elsie was one of the four Connecticut women who were arrested and sentenced to jail for participating in the Washington D.C. "watchfire" protests. The "watchfire" protest was an event where the National Woman's Party began to light fires in metal cauldrons in front of the White House, promising to keep them burning until Congress passed a woman suffrage amendment. A *Bridgeport Times* article from January 22, 1919 described Elsie's appearance as motherly and around the age of 50, but because of her actions in D.C that month, they call her a "militant suffragist." Her life as a suffragist is well documented in articles about her actions in *The Bridgeport Times and Evening Farmer*.

Link: <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1009554978>



6 First Cinema.

Built in 1909, the Bijou Theatre is the oldest building in America that opened as a movie and vaudeville theater and is still operating as a movie and live entertainment venue. In October, 2003 the Kuchma family purchased the building and completed a wall-to-wall renovation.

Look up! The tile work on the façade between the first and second floors is magnificent. The second floor, now an architectural office, was originally the Colonial Ballroom, later Quilty's, where the big bands of the day would play on Saturday nights.

For current information about the Bijou, please see <https://www.bijoutheatrect.net/>



The Bijou, shortly after opening.



The Bijou today.

ENDNOTE to “The First Social Network”

Bridgeport Post, March 23, 1927. (Information gathered by Post reporter from an account written by Doolittle in 1916 and from an interview of his son, C. B. Doolittle, who in 1927 was the treasurer of SNET. According to C. B., this was the first time the story appeared in a newspaper.)

There are other contenders for this first. Edwin Thomas Holmes or the Holmes Burglar Alarm Company of Boston claims to have installed the first telephone switchboard at the office where the alarm signal lines terminated. For a demonstration he installed phone serial numbers 67 and 68 on May 17, 1877. [Thomas A. Watson, “The Birth and Babyhood of the Telephone,” An address delivered before the Third Annual Convention of Telephone Pioneers of America at Chicago in 1913, published 1934, page 18 and Appendix, p. 42. “Telephone lines first interconnected by means of an experimental switchboard at 342 Washington Street, Boston.”] The company soon offered to allow users to speak to any other customer, but the system was not a commercial success. It seems the Jewelers and bankers who did need burglar alarms, had no need or desire to speak with each other, unlike the members of the Bridgeport Association who joined the system because they did want to communicate. But Holmes, like Doolittle, was smitten and joined the Bell Telephone Company the following year as employee number six and before the end of 1878 was promoted to President. [Boston Holmes Burglar Alarm Exchange: Herbert Cassin, *History of the Telephone*, 1910. and <http://www.hubhistory.com/episodes/all-the-bells-and-whistles-episode-214/>] H. M. Boettinger, *The Telephone Book*, p. 104, claims “The first switchboard was used to connect phones between doctors and drug stores. It was installed at Hartford, Connecticut in July, 1877.” Drug stores were early adopters and this was one reason they became hang-outs for teenagers: it’s where the phone was. New Haven also claims precedence, but with the qualifier as the first *commercial* telephone exchange. (The earlier Bridgeport network was run like a club, members sharing the costs.)