

# History of Communication

## in South Carolina

### How do people communicate?

People have been finding ways to communicate with each other for thousands of years. At first, information could only be shared through spoken word and stories passed down through generations as **folklore**.

Some cultures started sharing information through drawings. The Egyptians used **hieroglyphs**, drawings on walls, to relay information and record history. By the 16th century BC, the Phoenicians developed an alphabet similar to the one we use today.

Keeping track of information really took off in the first 100 years AD when the Chinese invented paper and then again in 1250 AD when writing with **quills** became the standard writing tool.

### Communicating in the 21st Century

South Carolinians have found unique ways to communicate information to each other for the last **350 years!** Today, we still use some of these techniques. People learn to speak new languages, read the newspaper, and write using pencil and paper.

In the 21st Century, television provides 24 hour news broadcasting so we don't have to wait to hear the news from around the world. We use computers, smart phones, and social media to share information, pictures, tell stories, and even video chat.

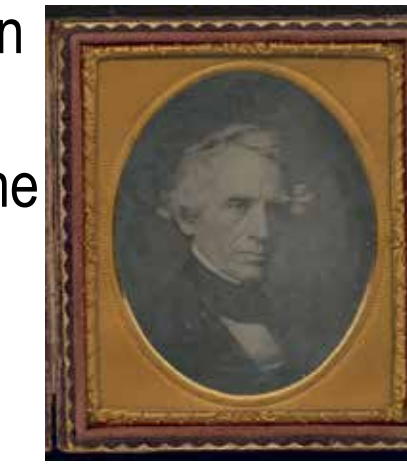
We read weather maps on our phones and receive instant warnings if there is a storm nearby. With GPS, we don't even need paper maps to know where we are!

**What forms of communication will we see in the future?!**

**1736-1750** King Charles of England ordered the colonial governors to build the **Kings Highway** to connect the colonies from Boston south to Charleston. The project started in 1650, but the South Carolina portion was built from 1736-1750. The highway followed trading paths constructed by the Native Americans, and the colonists used it to send mail and transport goods. Today, **Highway 17** follows the same path of the Kings Highway, and in some parts of the state, like around Myrtle Beach, the road is still referred to as the Kings Highway.

**1700s** The **Gullah Geechee** people descended from Africans enslaved in the **Lowcountry**. They created their own culture with a unique language, music, food, and art that merged their various African roots with the European influences in the colonies.

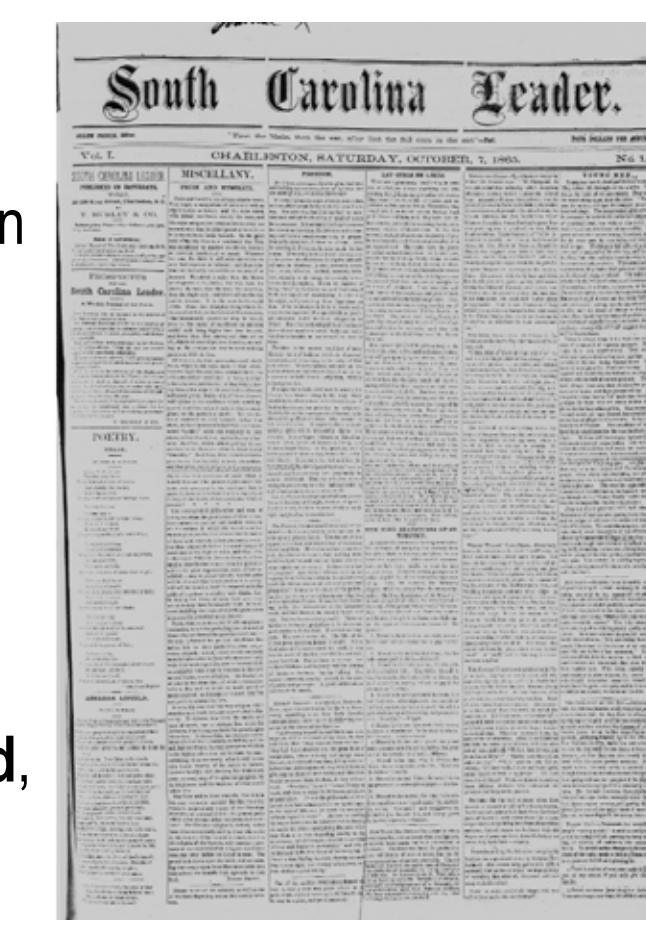
**1836** **Samuel Morse** invented the electric **telegraph** and the specific code of dots and dashes used to transmit messages over the wire. Morse's career began as an artist, and he spent several winters in Charleston in his studio. When Morse received news that his wife died, he failed to make it home in time for the burial due to slow mail service. The need for rapid message transmission sparked his creation of the telegraph and communication method, **Morse Code**.



Samuel Morse, 1845  
Library of Congress

**1865-1877**

During **Reconstruction**, African Americans began circulating newspapers specifically tied to their communities, sharing news and information. These publications included **South Carolina Leader**, **Charleston Advocate**, **Missionary Record**, **Free Press**, the **Georgetown Planet**, and the **Orangeburg Free Citizen**.



South Carolina Leader,  
October 7, 1865  
Library of Congress

**1941-1948** Novelist and poet **Josephine Pinckney** used this Smith-Corona Sterling model typewriter, owned by four generations of the Pinckney family, to write her creative works: *Hilton Head* ('41), *Three O'Clock Dinner* ('45), and *Great Mischief* ('48).



**1666** **Dr. Henry Woodward**, the first British colonist to settle in the Carolina Colony, was one of the first Europeans to traverse the entire length of the **Great Catawba Trading Path**. He spent a year in the vicinity of **Port Royal**, learning Native American languages and establishing trade contacts.



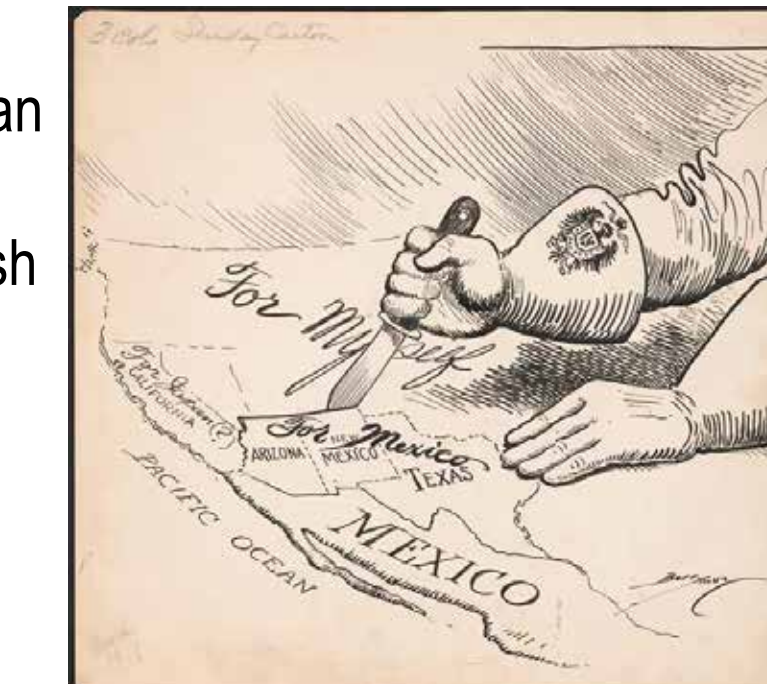
Dr. Henry Woodward  
South Carolina Historical Society

**1776** During the **Revolutionary War**, a watchman in the bell tower of St. Michael's Church in Charleston kept lookout for British war ships. Citizens also used the church tower as a lookout for fires. If the watchman spotted a fire, he rang the bells and hung a red light in the tower.



Looking south on Meeting Street, Fireproof Building on left with St. Michael's Church.  
South Carolina Historical Society Collection

**1917** In January 1917, Germany's foreign secretary, **Arthur Zimmermann**, sent a coded telegram to the German ambassador in Mexico. This electronic message offered Mexico Germany's support in attacking the United States and reclaiming the lands lost during the Texas Revolution (1836) and the Mexican War (1845). In return Mexico had to join the Central Powers against the Allies. The British intercepted this telegram, and the United States published in contents in newspapers across the country in March 1917. The **Zimmermann Telegram** served as one of the reasons the US joined the fight in World War I. Over 65,000 South Carolinians fought in The Great War.



Cliff Berryman cartoon in the newspaper published alongside the Zimmermann Telegram  
Library of Congress

**1947-1990** By the mid-1900s, the sending and receiving of information and news to the public took off, partly due to the technological advances that came from World War II. The first commercial **television broadcast** occurred in 1947, allowing people to receive the news quicker than waiting for the daily or weekly newspaper. Only three decades later, in 1976, the first personal computer was created and by 1990, the modern day format of the internet, the **World Wide Web**, setting the foundation for instant communication, news updates, and sharing images with family and friends.

**1670** Lord Proprietor **Anthony Ashley Cooper** works with John Locke to create the **Grand Model**. These documents detail the economic development and an urban plan for the new colony.

**1670-1800** Colonists used taverns and coffee houses to gather and share information. The **Carolina Coffee House** in London served as a gathering place for people hoping to learn news from the Carolina Colony or to pick up mail from their friends and family in Carolina.

**1694-1695** The **SC legislature** established a letter office in Charleston at William Smith's house. This house became the start of the post office system in South Carolina.

**1820** People used **quill pens**, made from the five outer feathers of geese or swans, to write for hundreds of years. The end was shaped to a point and the hollow feather shaft was the ink reservoir. Mass production of **dip pens** began in 1820.

**1861-1865** During the **American Civil War**, armies used drummer boys to convey orders during battle because soldiers could not hear their commanders over the sound of cannon and gunfire. These young boys, sometimes under the age of ten, were targeted by enemy troops because without the musical directions troops did not know what to do next during battle.



Union Drummer Boy  
Library of Congress

**1900-1910** **Alexander Graham Bell** patented the **telephone** in 1876, and within three years Charleston had a telephone exchange. The **Columbia Exchange** opened in 1880 and the **Newberry** and **Greenville** in 1882. The Greenville Exchange had lines to other more rural areas so that textile executives could communicate to mill personnel in outlying areas.

It was not until the first decade of the 1900s that this handy tool became a common and affordable household item. Even though some had phones in their homes, they could not dial directly to the person they wanted to call. Instead, when they picked up the phone, they told the **switchboard operator** who they wanted to call. The operator connected the two wires from the two houses at the switchboard. At that time, the operator was supposed to disconnect, and let the two parties talk, but often, the operator stayed on to hear the latest gossip!



Wall telephone ca. 1900-1910  
South Carolina Historical Society

**1943-1945** During **World War II**, the **Weather Bureau's** primary role was to provide meteorological information to the Army and Navy for military campaigns. The fear that the enemy could take advantage of those reports led to the stoppage of displaying signal flags that shared the forecast among other security measures. The displaying of the flags was reinstated after the war, and then ceased again in 1989.

