



Gertrude May Parker
(1891 – 1980)

Gertrude Parker's life began when she was born the daughter of Gordon and Adelaide Fletcher, on the twelfth day of October 1891, in Westmount, Quebec.

In her youth, she very much enjoyed an active lifestyle. She thoroughly enjoyed the outdoors, in particular water and winter sports. Canoeing and snowshoeing seemed to be the two activities she treasured the most. When not engaging in recreational activities, Gertrude found the time to serve her church as a Sunday school teacher. Whatever she set her mind to, she accomplished.

In 1915, Gertrude married Richard Thomas Henry Hewlett Parker. The two moved frequently. Until the time they called Sackville home, they lived in Saint John, Montreal, Toronto, Halifax and Bedford. The Parkers had six boys and one daughter.

Wartimes were particularly hard on Gertrude, as her husband and six sons all served at one point in the wars that waged in 1914 to 1918, 1939 to 1945, and 1950 until 1953. One Parker child was lost to the war cause during the Second World War.

Early in the year 1946 Mrs. Parker took over the Sackville telephone switchboard from a Mrs. Daisy Weir. She operated an old magneto type switchboard with a crank for the Maritime Telephone and Telegraph Company. She received a salary of thirteen dollars a month to provide a service from Bedford to the Hants County line, including Beaver Bank and Lucasville. The switchboard was kept open twenty-four hours a day. Gertrude

often handled the overnight calls, and charged twenty-five cents to anyone making a night call. When she took over the Sackville Telephone Exchange it had less than fifty members; by the time she finished in 1963, Mrs. Parker had around three hundred lines to look after. She held her position with the telephone company until the dial phone system was introduced in 1963.

The Halifax Chronicle-Herald once wrote an article on Parker, stating: "Until the dial system was introduced in 1963, Mrs. Gertrude Parker was the telephone operator, the brains, the human component, through which every call in the area had to funnel. She was as far removed from the computerized dial system, or the nasal recording, as the human heart is removed from the robot." The author of the just mentioned statement went on to say, "To me she represents the human touch, the caring for the individual, true personal involvement in the community, and outstanding courage through many adversities."



**Gertrude Parker on the job for the
Sackville Telephone Exchange**

When not dealing with calls, Gertrude Parker and her family became involved with the formation of the Sackville Fire Department in 1955. She used line number three to contact the members of the volunteer bucket brigade. In thanks to her service and dedication, she was named the Honourary Fire Chief of the Sackville Fire Department.

In honour of this kind and caring lady, the municipal school board named an elementary school after this Sackville pioneer in 1975.

It later became Sackville's first all French school, École du Grand-Portage.

She passed away in 1980 after a struggle with health issues.