

## Back to Square One

Alexander Graham Bell filed his patent for telephony in 1876.

Western Electric was a company which commercialized Graham Bell's invention. They wanted to expand business in Europe. Since they came to know that exporting American products to Europe was pretty expensive, due to transport and customs cost, they decided to erect a local company.

The establishment of **Bell Telephone Manufacturing Company** took place in 1882, and the offices and factory were located in Antwerp, Belgium.

The founders included :

- *American Western Electric Company,*
- *International Bell Telephone Company,* and
- *A number of local dignitaries.*

In 1890, *Western Electric* decided to buy out *International Bell Telephone*, so their representatives in the board of directors had to leave, among them *Louis De Groof*, and his brother *Jean-Corneille*.

In 1892 the brothers De Groof founded a new competitive telephone company called ATEA.

Both companies followed a similar, but different “trail” throughout the decades , and in the 1980's they followed the market trend. Either of them became part of a bigger unit, resulting finally in one single company (NOKIA) in 2016..

The former ATEA plant in Herentals had to close town, all people had to move to the former Alcatel Lucent plant in Antwerp.

On November 25, 2016 they organized in Herentals a “farewell party” , which I attended. I gave the audience an overview of the telecom history in Belgium, and the final conclusion was:

One telephone company was started in Antwerp in 1882, and after decades of “separation”, we are back together.

We are back to square one (see figure).

Jan Verhelst

# 1882-2016: Back to square 1

