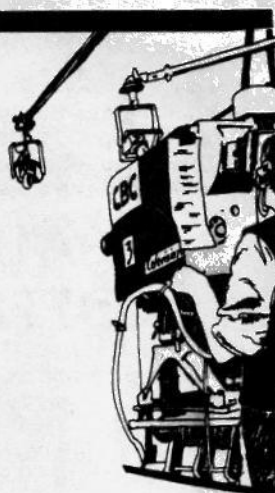
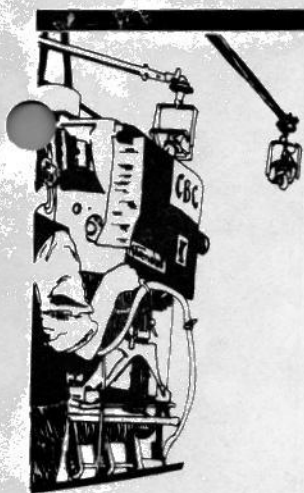


30 Years of Canadian TV



THE WONDER of television came to Canada officially 30 years ago this September. The real wonder given the size of this country and the limited population is that it came at all.

Back in the early 1930's, what was known then as "radio vision" was already being transmitted in Montreal. It was primitive but it worked; the picture was in red and black. The television receiver you have in your living room today scans 525 lines; the "radio vision" receiver of 1931/32 scanned about one-tenth of that. It was a bit like viewing a moving picture through a partially-opened Venetian blind.

The shoe-string company responsible for producing this ancient mechanical-system signal was called Canadian Television Limited and a name emerged from that early experimental period in Canadian television: J. Alphonse Ouimet. Remember the name. Despite the technical success of the Canadian Television Limited, the organization lacked the money to finance the actual broadcasting of their TV signals and they went broke.

TV or not TV

As early as 1925 the British had demonstrated "radio vision" with some success. By 1936 the British Broadcasting Corporation was running the world's first regular TV service, providing scheduled programmes for about 50 receivers in Britain. But the Second World War came along and British television shut down for the duration, initially because the powerful 40MHz transmitter would become an excellent direction finding beam for German bombers. By this time there were about 10,000 TV sets.

The Americans had also been conducting experimental TV in the

TV in Canada predates even Pierre Berton, if such a span of time can be conceived. The chronicles, by John Brickenden.

early thirties. It cost a lot of money. By the time RCA, for example, had progressed from the early stages to the "commercially possible picture" to the present 525-line electronic system and introduced it to the public in 1946, the company had spent \$50,000,000. Canada wasn't in this financial league despite the brilliant pioneer work done by Alphonse Ouimet.

Ouimet was one of those farsighted young men in the early part of this century who could foresee the role television would play in modern society. He designed and built the first TV receiver intended for commercial distribution in Canada. He has been associated with the development of television in this country from the beginning. After Canadian

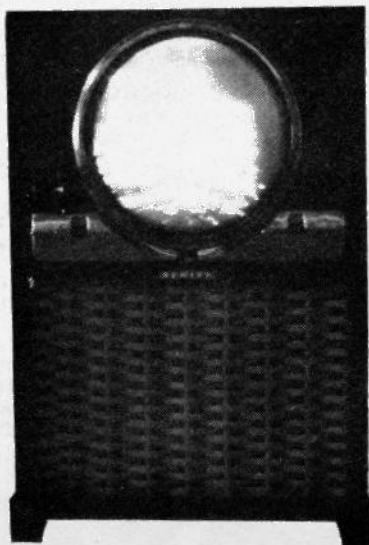
Television Limited went broke, he was hired by the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission in 1935 "for investigation into present state of television". His salary was \$2000 per annum. Under his guidance, television developed in Canada. By 1958 the national service was within reach of nearly 90% of the population ... the fastest growth of television of any country in the world.

Al Ouimet progressed through CBC Engineering to become president of the Corporation and, ultimately, he became chairman of the Board of Directors of Telstat, from which he retired recently as chairman, though remaining a member of the board.

Canada could have had its own TV in the forties. Back in 1946, when TV became available to the general public South of the border, the Canadian government adopted a "wait-and-see" policy. It wasn't in a hurry to commit large sums of money to launch an untried TV system in this country. So, while the Americans were spending millions of dollars to solve key technical problems, Canada waited. The decision to wait was economically sound but universally unpopular. It created a vast hue and cry from the public as well as from dealers and manufacturers. The public wanted this new toy and it wanted it right away.

By 1949 nearly 10,000 TV receivers had been sold in Canada to watch border U.S. stations. Some of the more ardent fans would sit cheerfully by the hour, endangering their eyesight while they strained to watch dim figures move in and out of the heavy snow on sets whose pictures were being brought in from enormous distances with the assistance of sky-high aerials.

By late 1951, with Canadian television still a year away, more than 60,000 TV receivers had been sold



here. By mid-1952, still before Canadian television was functioning, this figure was approximately 150,000. Today the sets-in-use figure is close to 12,000,000. That's about one TV set for every two people in Canada.

Finally, with the CBC grunting and puffing from the effort, Canadian television was born. Officially TV came on the air on September 6, 1952, with CBMT Montreal. Two days later, CBLT Toronto came on the air with its now famous upside-down station identification slide.

Television had arrived.

From that moment on, no-one's life was quite the same again. Since TV first burst upon the Canadian scene it was cheered, condemned, hated, enjoyed, feared, worshipped, blamed for every crime and medical ailment in the book, praised by those who got what they wanted when they wanted it, and criticised by those who wanted something else. Medical experts talked wisely about "TV squat". Some Canadian newspapers, such as the *Winnipeg Free Press*, refused in a state of terror to carry TV listings (until public pressure forced them to change their policy and admit that TV was indeed a part of everyone's life).

The viewing public's appetite for television was insatiable. Canadians wanted everything the Americans had and more. The government's stance from the beginning had favoured the long view. Unfortunately this was like telling your child that you understood that he thought candy tasted good but wouldn't he like it better if he didn't have very much right now, so that the little boy next door could have some too!

CBC's single-station policy was undoubtedly the best thing for the most people, but it didn't sit well with the people who had one station in their city and wanted more.

The policy of the day was that no private stations would be licenced until the CBC had created a national service of television programming, and that all future private stations be required to serve as outlets for the national service. Translated, this meant one station per city until the majority of the population was within range of a Canadian television signal. Cities like Montreal, Toronto, Halifax, Winnipeg and Vancouver took this as a curtailment of their God-given rights and mentioned this point-of-view to the CBC and to their MPs from time to time. The private broadcasters seeking "second stations" weren't all that thrilled either.



J. Alphonse Ouimet

Young Al Ouimet was a research engineer with the fledgling Canadian Television Limited in the early 1930's. Shown here with the first television receiver built for commercial distribution in Canada (built, by the way, with his own two hands . . . cabinet included) he represents the one single person in Canada who has been identifiable with TV from the beginning to the present. He progressed through Engineering in CBC to become president of the Corporation and ultimately became Chairman of the Board of Directors of Telstat from which he has recently retired as chairman, remaining a member of the board.

Says Ouimet: "We produced in those early days a very coarse picture which showed just enough detail to barely recognize one's own mother on a full face close-up."

At that time the different experimental systems around the world used a variety of dummies or models to test their systems. NBC had Felix the Cat, BBC had a papier mache head of some kind. Canadian Television Limited couldn't afford a dummy so the staff used to take turns acting as "test pattern" while the others worked. Ouimet was in the greatest demand because he had something the others didn't have: a close-up of Ouimet's face revealed a great canyon between his two upper teeth that was the perfect focal target for TV.

"Not only am I one of Canada's first television pioneers," says Ouimet, "but I was certainly its first test pattern!"

No one in Canada had properly anticipated television's appetite for staff and money. (Is there another country in the world that is serving a public distributed spottily over seven time zones across one fifth of the girth of the world and including communities north of the Arctic Circle?) There were, nonetheless, certain farsighted Canadians who had a feel for what was coming. One of those was Sir John Aird, grandfather of the present Lieutenant Governor on Ontario. Sir John was head of the Aird Commission whose report led to the creation of public broadcasting in Canada. Back in 1932 Aird said: "It is coming, gentlemen, and we should be prepared in dealing with this question of radio broadcasting to keep this question of television well before us."

In 1949 the Canadian government made its first official pronouncement on TV policy. The general direction of the new medium was to fall under the jurisdiction of the CBC Board of Governors. CBC was instructed to establish production centres in Toronto and Montreal as early as possible as the basis for a future national network. Private broadcasters would become involved at some future date. About that same time the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences was appointed... the famous Massey Commission.

This commission's specific recommendation relating to TV included an expression of concern about the possible domination of American programming in Canadian TV. Massey recommended that the control of TV be left with CBC because the considerable financial investment required would otherwise force private stations in Canada to become "mere channels for American commercial material". That was when it was suggested that no private stations be licenced until CBC had set up a TV service that would serve the majority of the Canadian public. And that's what happened.

Years later Austin Weir noted in his book "The Struggle for National Broadcasting in Canada" that the issue of television was complex and had important cultural implications. Said Weir: "The government saw the rapid expansion of television as of potential value to industry and employment too. It also glimpsed the irresistible pressures that must inevitably develop for the importation of American commercial programs as the new medium asserted itself. It

was important that this should be adequately counter-balanced. The inherent capacity of the new medium for human as well as material development for information, entertainment, and education must be conserved and developed for Canadians."

Some of these humans alluded to in Weir's comments should belong in a *Who's Who* of Canadian television. Names like Mavor Moore, Norman Jewison, Alphonse Ouimet, Lorne Greene, Joyce Davidson, Percy Saltzman, J. Frank Willis, Larry Henderson, Earl Cameron, Henri Bergeron, Amanda Alarie, Arthur Hailey, Rene Levesque, Stan Harris, Andrew Allan, Fergus Mutrie, and Uncle Chichimus graced the first years of TV in Canada. Then there was Patrick Watson, Robert Homme, Juliette, Ross McLean, Norman DePoe, Pierre Nadeau, Wayne and Shuster, Peter Trueman, Don Messer, Charlie Chamberlain, Nathan Cohen, Fletcher Markie, Gordon Pinsent, The Hewitts, Wally Koster, Ed Russenholt, Max Ferguson, John Hirsch and even Uncle Bobby.



The Plouffe Family

Probably the only completely successful bi-lingual program series to appear on Canadian television was The Plouffe Family. The series was presented in both French and English... same cast but separate productions. In La Belle Province these were the real stars of the fifties and people waited outside the stage door in Montreal to greet them as they emerged after each week's show. And in English Canada, during a coast-to-coast tour for the famous television family, the Anglos also turned out in force at every stop to greet and adore the Plouffes. Superstar for the program, however, was ex-opera-singer Amanda Alarie who played the warm and vital role of Mama Plouffe and may have done more for national unity in that day than all the Bi-and-Bi Commissions this country has ever seen or will ever see.

Television marched relentlessly on.

Those were heady days. Enthusiastic and dedicated people worked under unbelievable conditions to produce our first home-grown TV. In Winnipeg for the first year of television, an overworked and under-trained staff produced 16 live TV programs a week out of a radio studio with only one camera. In Toronto, the building housing the Graphics Department was an old school that had been condemned by the city fire department as unsafe for human habitation.

The Last Post

Toronto was the site of that classic make-shift studio dating back to the hey-days of radio in the forties when an old abandoned church on Elizabeth Street had been rented by the Corporation as a studio for the production of live symphony concerts for the network. Unfortunately, and probably unbeknownst to the radio crews taking part, the basement of that same building had been rented to the Banting Institute. As a result, as soon as Geoffrey Waddington tapped his baton on the lectern to bring the orchestra to attention, the sound would wake up the rabbits and chickens in the basement, and throughout the concert the CBC Symphony Orchestra would be accompanied by a chicken obbligato from the lower regions, live coast to coast.

With this tradition to set the pace, it was no wonder that the earliest TV studio operated by CBC Toronto was an old RCAF barracks building that was being required to



Lorne Greene

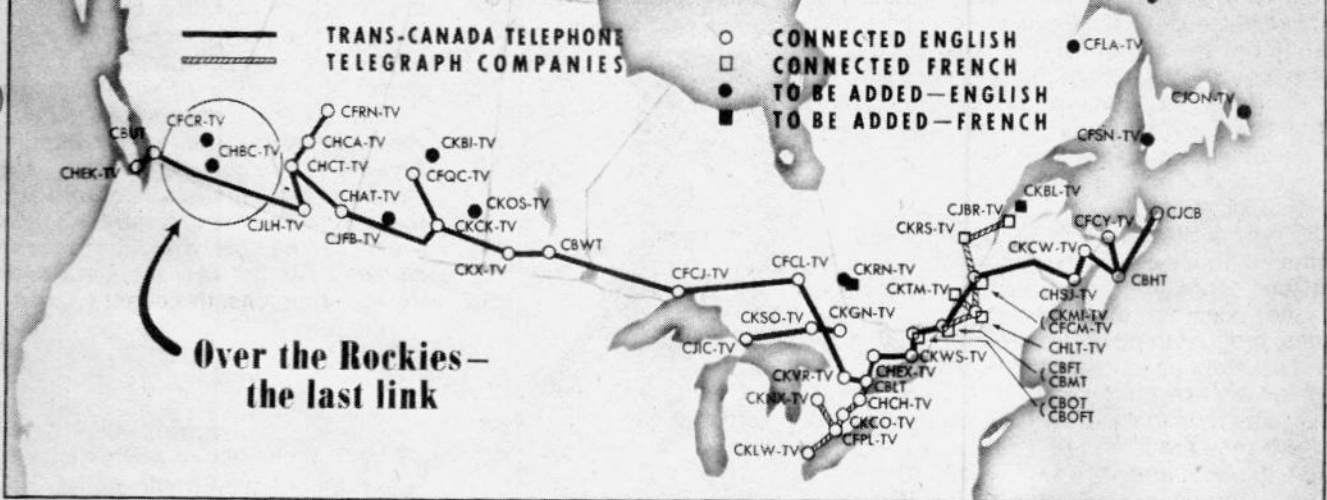
It's a long way from a CBC Radio announcer booth to the Ponderosa and Lorne Greene made some interesting stops along the way. Another prominent Canadian who was involved in the first days of television, Greene had left CBC prior to the coming of TV to set up his own broadcasting school across the street from the famous Jarvis Street headquarters. His students were forever dropping in on the Radio Newsroom to borrow file copies of bulletins so they could practice reading the real thing. Greene dropped in too, in early 1953, to play in the Corporation's first TV production of Shakespeare. Here's Pa Cartright as Othello back in the days when everything was live and you lived with your mistakes.

develop another life-style for the age of communications. Unfortunately there was a pillar in the middle of the only open floor space in the building. It had to be there, as it held up the roof. This pillar appeared in every production from the studio and sorely tested the ingenuity of the early production people as they gamely wrote it into the script. Sometimes it was a tree; sometimes a telephone pole; sometimes a post holding up a verandah facade. But, like the sponsor's brother-in-law, it was always there.

Montreal was probably better off, having the use of part of the old Ford Hotel, which had been taken over some years earlier by Radio Canada and the CBC International Service.

The construction of the CBLT tower was a social highlight on Toronto's Jarvis Street in early 1952. Pedestrians lingered by the hour to

Canada's 'Live' TV Network Goes Sea to Sea July 1st



The Microwave Network

Six years after TV came to Canada, the country was linked from coast to coast by a series of microwave towers . . . one every 30 miles, on the average. . . and Canadians were finally able to receive live programming from sea to sea. The occasion was marked with an artificial but well-intended program confection called MEMO TO CHAMPLAIN whose co-hosts have gone on to greater things . . . Joyce Davidson to international TV fame; Rene Levesque to politics. Prior to the microwave network, CBC had what it termed "the nonconnected" TV network . . . not unlike a semi-detached house which, in reality, is attached. The link in this non-structure was Air Canada, which delivered misty kinescopes of network programs to network stations across the country on a daily basis. Quite over and above the generally bad quality of the films, the delivery service also left something to be desired. It was not uncommon in Winnipeg, for example, in the mid-fifties for the program planners to sit down at 9.00 am to discuss what would be broadcast when CBWT went on the air in the afternoon. There just wasn't any point in planning until the Air Canada flight arrived if it arrived. On the days when the expected programs didn't show up the viewing public became a little bit testy and usually accused the Corporation of deliberately removing wrestling or Bishop Sheen or whatever from the air because of a deep-seated bias against whatever the public really preferred. Once, as a result of some pretty effective lobbying from the pulpits, CBC Winnipeg received more than 1,000 letters accusing the Corporation of religious prejudice because someone thought Bishop Sheen was going to be taken off. The public was very interested in television.

peek through the boardings as the grid mounted higher and higher to become the city's tallest structure of that day. They watched in awe as workers swarmed over the massive structure like ants on a peony, hooking together the huge mechano set that was to dominate the Toronto skyline for years to come. They weren't quite so enthusiastic, though, when the tower was painted in its alternate red and white sections. Despite extensive posted warnings to keep away, both humans and machines that strayed within range began to discover tiny red or white dots all over themselves, particularly when the gentle winds of summer wafted the miniscule droplets in



CHRONOLOGY OF CANADIAN TV EVENTS

- 1930-31 First Canadian television experiments. Montreal.
- 1949 Government announced interim plan for development of Canadian TV.
10,000 TV receivers sold in Canada for viewing border United States stations.
- 1952 150,000 TV receivers sold in Canada before actual start of Canadian TV service.
Opening of Canadian television service: CBFT Montreal on Sept. 6; CBLT Toronto on Sept. 8
- 1953 First private TV station to go on the air in Canada . . . CKSO-TV Sudbury.
- 1954 TV comes to British Columbia, Manitoba and Nova Scotia.
- 1958 Opening of Calgary delay centre with videotape recording facilities to delay network programs for western time zones.
Completion of microwave network connecting Victoria with Sydney, Nova Scotia . . . the longest TV network in the world
Occasion marked by special July 1 feature program to full network entitled MEMO TO CHAMPLAIN, with co-hosts Joyce Davidson and Rene Levesque.
- 1959 Microwave network extended to Newfoundland.
- 1960 Second TV stations licenced for Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver
- 1961 Second network arrives: CTV network opened October 1.
- 1962 First Telstar communications satellite transmission from North America to Europe, with CBC taking part.
- 1966 First regular color TV programming.
- 1967 International CBC telecast by space satellite of EXPO '67 official opening.
First Frontier Coverage Package in operation, bringing taped TV service to Northwest Territories.
- 1969 The Telstat Canada Act was passed to "establish a Canadian corporation for telecommunication by satellite."
- 1970 Opening of first UHF television station in Canada. CICA-TV Toronto, broadcasting programs of the Ontario Department of Education.
CRTC's Canadian-content regulation in force for CBC-owned TV stations: Minimum 60% Canadian content. Private stations to reach same minimum within two years.
- 1971 Opening of Canada's first French-language private TV network, with member stations in Montreal, Quebec City and Chicoutimi.
- 1972 Canada's third English network, Global Television, licenced by CRTC to serve five Ontario cities.
Launch of Anik I, Telstat Canada's domestic communications satellite, from Cape Canaveral, Florida.
- 1973 Official start of CBC network television transmission to the north by Anik satellite.
- 1974 Accelerated Coverage Plan announced in Ottawa to bring CBC television and radio in English and/or French to unserved communities of 500 or greater population.
- 1975 With start of fall TV schedule CBC removed all commercials from TV programs directed at children of 12 years and under. (Pre-school TV programs were already free of commercials.)
- 1976 TV and FM Radio transmissions commenced from the CN Tower in Toronto. This included both CBC and private stations.
- 1981 Television households in Canada totalled 11,855,000, of which 7,708,000 had colour receivers.

every direction for blocks around. There was a regular stream of angry citizens, displaying what appeared to be a hybrid strain of red and white pox, marching into the CBC building to demand restitution.

The real behind-the-scenes story of how television was brought to Canadians is well illustrated by a simple list of the strange facilities that were made available for television crews of the day as TV grew across the country. CBC was not the exclusive force behind the development of Canadian TV, but the public corporation was charged with the responsibility of serving the total Canadian population. Therefore, a unique measurement of how television evolved in those early days can be noted through a glimpse at the quixotic CBC production facilities from coast-to-coast.

Take Halifax. The first CBC television studio in Halifax was in an abandoned separate school. The building was beyond value as an institution of learning, so CBC was able to rent it for TV. The price was right but the floors weren't. In order to dolly a camera, without giving the viewers the impression one was taking pictures from the deck of a World War II corvette during a typhoon, it was necessary to build tracks for the cameras. Not unlike railway tracks, these pre-determined streets and avenues in the studio floor carried the cameras evenly and without vibration to and from their appointed tasks. Unfortunately, they also limited considerably the naturalness and spontaneity of the camera shots.

Then there was Toronto. With the sudden and, for some reason, unexpected mushrooming of staff and facility requirements connected with the onslaught of television, CBC Toronto found it necessary to range about frantically for work space. The Four Seasons Hotel had been buying up property on Jarvis Street, across from Mother CBC, in anticipation of the day soon to follow when it would build a hotel on the location. Four Seasons bought out several old houses on Jarvis. Two of these had been what grandmother would have called house of ill repute. Ill repute they may have been, but close to the scene of operations they most certainly were, and CBC immediately rented them on a short lease.

Then, in its wisdom, the Corporation assigned one of the houses as office space for Sports . . . the other to Women's Interests.

Also in Toronto is the Yonge street building which became and still is TV Studio 4... the home of *Front Page Challenge*. To the everlasting delight of the media it was learned that the old warehouse-like structure had been built originally as a Pierce-Arrow showroom. It is still referred to as such.

When television came to Winnipeg on May 31, 1954, the basic CBC operation was located in what used to be the Pigott Truck and Tractor Building on Portage Ave. The transmitter on the roof was only 238



J. Frank Willis

It is impossible to talk about broadcasting in Canada without mentioning J. Frank Willis. It was Willis, the year CBC came into being, who brought to Canadians and radio listeners all over the world, the thrilling and sad half-hourly reports on the great Moose Mine disaster of 1936... reports carried on all Canadian radio stations and 650 United States radio station and, via BBC short-wave, to every civilized country in the world. In so doing he scooped every newspaper in the world by the brilliant use of that new and amazing medium called radio. Willis moved forward from these considerable pioneering achievements to become involved in a hard-hitting CBC television program called *CLOSE UP* and suddenly his name became a household word from the Atlantic to the Pacific. *CLOSE UP* was a new kind of television journalism which seemed to have spawned such hard-hitting and controversial programs as *THIS HOUR HAS SEVEN DAYS* and *THE JOURNAL*. Willis himself, whose voice was probably better known in Canada than any other, found as a result of TV that his face was known too. People he'd never met began speaking to him as he walked down the street. He loved to tell the story on himself, however, of the time he was signing autographs at a CBC remote and read abject disappointment on the face of a young boy whose autograph book he'd just signed. "Gee," said the youngster. "I don't know this name. I thought you were Paladin." Not one to fly in the face of fate, Willis went out right away and bought a suitable black cowboy outfit.

feet high, but because of the remarkable flatness of the surrounding countryside the TV signal delivered itself to such unlikely places as the State of Georgia (United States, not Russia). But the temporary working space that stood out, even in the exotic history of CBC's makeshift quarters, was the roller rink. In the basement of Winnipeg's stately Civic Auditorium a huge space had been leased for studio use and storage. This space had previously been a roller skating rink and the rolling public had been protected from its own athletic ineptitude by great mattresses that had been tied onto the building's supporting pillars so that the customers didn't brain themselves as they skated around and around in the vast area: When CBC moved in the mattresses were still tied onto the pillars which may or may not have been a reflection of what people thought of television crews in those early days.

Like other early CBC production centres, CBC Vancouver found itself making do with what the Corporation could afford. In this instance it was another truck salesroom and garage. There's always a built-in obstacle in this sort of arrangement, and in Vancouver's case it was a fireplace. For some unexplainable reason there was a fireplace square in the centre of the biggest open area in the garage and this immediately became a permanent prop to be worked into all the television productions. So, for as long as the producers and technicians turned out programs from that building, the fireplace (like the pillar in Toronto and the mattresses in Winnipeg) was written into the script.

Human nature being what it is the stories about what went wrong in television always out-number the

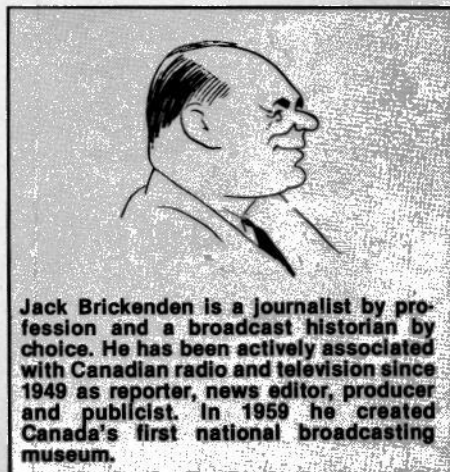
stories about what went right. There is no shortage of horror stories relating to television's early days and it seems only proper to wind up this stream-of-consciousness account of Canadian television with what some of us believe to be the definitive TV horror story... or, *If Anything Can Go Wrong It Most Certainly Will*.

It concerns Max Ferguson.

Ferguson was host of a regional public affairs show out of Halifax in the mid-fifties that was a successful mixture of human interest and sentiment presented with a sensible eye to visual values. It was called *Gazette*.

It was Christmas Eve. The set was resplendent with comfortable livingroom furniture, a cheerful fireplace, a Christmas tree, a costumed Santa Claus and a blazing plum pudding. Max's dog Toughie was asleep under the chesterfield. For some reason that has never been explained satisfactorily, the bulldog woke up just as the show was drawing to its saccharine close with the sound of carols wafting over the set. Toughie emerged from his resting place and clamped his undershot jaw on Santa's rump and hung on. Santa, who was holding the flaming plum pudding in his hands and making "Ho-ho" noises in the proper traditional manner, suddenly flung the pudding up in the air and grasped his bottom. The blazing pudding landed in the Christmas tree and set it alight. While Santa Claus screamed and cursed and the tree blazed merrily, Max tried desperately to persuade Toughie to let go of Santa's posterior as the program credits rolled relentlessly over the scene of chaos and the Yuletide hymns played on and the booth announcer wished everyone a blessed Christmas and to all a goodnight.

And to you... goodnight.



Jack Brickenden is a journalist by profession and a broadcast historian by choice. He has been actively associated with Canadian radio and television since 1949 as reporter, news editor, producer and publicist. In 1959 he created Canada's first national broadcasting museum.



Who's Who?

Trying to satisfy the insatiable appetite for television programming has caused some Canadians to become famous and move on to greener pastures, some to fall by the wayside, some to grow wealthy and others to go broke. Norman Jewison still maintains a home in Canada although his move from Canadian TV to Hollywood and such block-buster film productions as "Fiddler on the Roof" is a classic success story.

Johnny Wayne and Frank Shuster had made it as a comedy team on Canadian radio, then adapted with great success to Canadian TV. They had a standing invitation to appear as often as they wished on the ED SULLIVAN SHOW and wowed the American TV audiences when they presented such Canadian successes as "Wipe the Blood Off My Toga" and their Shakespearean version of a baseball game. They tried Hollywood but didn't like it and returned to Canada to continue with television.

Norman Campbell is known the world over for his spectacular productions of opera and ballet on TV, but he is still Canadian-based and continues to add lustre to the Canadian television scene. Robert Goulet, after a stint as second-banana to Joyce Sullivan in the early days of this country's TV history, began an erratic clamber up the American entertainment ladder and still surfaces from time to time. He managed to achieve a spectacular amount of publicity in New York on one occasion when he was performing in a nightclub and forgot the words to "The Star Spangled Banner". Larry Mann has given character acting a good name on both sides of the border, working out of Hollywood after his considerable achievements in Canada on both CBC and the National Film Board. The late Andrew Allan, with his experimental TV series QUEST, adapted well to television after his outstanding contribution to drama during the so-called "golden days" of radio.

Joyce Davidson is still going strong in both Canada and the States, but her early-TV partner Max Ferguson doesn't surface too often any more. The Thompson name seems to have remained in the limelight one way and another since Lord Thompson delivered his famous quote on receiving his first Canadian TV broadcast licence. . . that it was "like a licence to print money." And the jury may still be out concerning that prominent radio network news personality who is in the process this year of applying her considerable journalistic talent to television. . . Barbara Frum on THE JOURNAL. Such famous Canadian broadcasting names as Don Harron, John Fisher, Wally Koster, Jan Rubes, Geoffrey Waddington, Mavor Moore, Drew Crossan and Glenn Gould were just a few of those associated with the opening program on CBLT Toronto in 1952. Many are still having their influence on television today.

