INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

“Among the Necessities”:
A Social History of Communication Technology on the Canadian Prairies,
1900 to 1950
by
Nadine Irène Kozak, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
August 1, 2000
© 2000, Nadine Kozak

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-57666-3

Canada

The undersigned recommend to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
acceptance of the thesis

“‘AMONG THE NECESSITIES’: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGY ON THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES,
1900 TO 1950”

submitted by NADINE KOZAK, B.A.
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Chair

Department

Thesis Supervisor

External Examiner

CARLETON UNIVERSITY
September 7, 2000

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between rural Prairie Canadians and telephones and radios in the first half of the twentieth century. The work argues that although the telephone and radio did not revolutionize rural life, residents viewed the technologies as significant improvements to the quality of life on the Prairie farm. It considers the actual and perceived benefits of the devices and also compares the ownership of communication technology to farm and home labour-saving devices and transportation technologies. It considers the factors influencing rural dwellers' consumption choices. The work also recognizes that the context of the time, especially the Great Depression, influenced the consumption and abandonment of radios and telephones. The work relies extensively on the writing of Prairie farm residents found in archives and newspapers to include the sentiments of the consumers and explore the benefits that they perceived of having communication devices on their farms.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for providing me with opportunities that they did not have themselves. I am aware and greatly appreciative of the love and support they gave me and the sacrifices they made, so I could continue with pursuits they often did not understand.

I would also like to acknowledge the unfailing support and guidance of Dr. Dwayne Winseck, my thesis advisor, for his help with my work and also for his tolerance of my idiosyncrasies.

I need to also thank the professors of Communication for allowing me to merge my love of Canadian history with my graduate programme at Carleton University.

Finally, I would like to thank my undergraduate professors in History at the University of Calgary, especially Dr. Sarah Carter, for showing me the wealth of interesting topics to be uncovered about the Prairie West.

Table of Contents

Acceptance Form	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vi
1 “Great Efforts at Contact”: Introduction.....	1
2 “Of Minor Importance”: A Paucity of Research.....	17
3 “The Consumption Junction”: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework	58
4 “An Invaluable Service to the Farmers of Western Canada”: Availability and Ownership	77
5 “Among the Necessities”: People’s Relationship to Communication Technologies	146
6 “Life Within the Four Walls of My House”: Analysis and Conclusions.....	192
Bibliography	210

List of Tables

Table 1: Percentage of Farms Subscribing to Telephone Service, 1921 to 1951	94
Table 2: Percentage of Farms with a Radio, 1931 to 1951	112

“Great Efforts at Contact”: Introduction

Canadian scholars of communication and its history have conducted several studies of telephones and radios in the Canadian context. The majority of these studies explore the organizational structure of the telecommunications and radio broadcasting industries. A few of the studies, such as Michele Martin's “Hello, Central?”: Gender, Technology, and Culture in the Formation of Telephone Systems, foray into the relationship between the communication technologies and their users. The major focus of these studies, however, is the relationship of urban Canadians with telephones and radios. Little communication research and writing exists about the adoption and use of communication technologies in rural Canadian communities.

The lack of scholarly attention given to the relationship between rural people and communication technology is remarkable when the comments of contemporary observers are considered. In 1939, American sociologist Florence M. Swire discovered an “uneven diffusion of material culture . . . in the countryside. Automobiles and radios are not uncommonly possessed by families who have the crudest of outdoor privies and water supplied by bucket from well or stream.”¹ In 1951, Canadian sociologist Jean Burnet published Next-Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta. This book made the same claims as did Swire: rural homes lacked modern household

¹ Florence M. Swire quoted in Katherine Jellison, “Women and Technology on the Great Plains, 1910-1940,” Great Plains Quarterly, 8 (Summer 1988), 152.

conveniences, but possessed communication and transportation technologies. Burnet quotes a 1943 article from the Hanna Herald at length:

homes in towns and cities [are] equipped with electricity, water systems and, in many places, gas heating, while the great majority of farm homes have to put up with primitive conditions -- oil lamps and water carried from the pump are relics of the past as far as the urban centres are concerned. The introduction of electricity to farm homes would make a tremendous difference. The average home equipped with electricity uses the current for at least half a dozen different jobs. If a farm could have electricity for lighting, running a refrigerator, operating an electric iron, a radio, and even for cooking, what a boon it would be to the farm housewife. If the farmer could use the current for power it would be a great help to him.²

This quotation was a testament to the lack of household technologies on the Prairie farm.

Rural homes, in contrast to urban ones, were stuck in a primitive state. Only a few pages later, Burnet comments on communication and transportation devices in rural Alberta.

She wrote:

[t]he hardships of frontier isolation were severe enough to lead to great efforts at contact. . . . Newspapers were started. Railway lines were extended. Mail-order services grew popular. The telephone was widely used, and the battery radio came to be regarded as almost a necessity. Cars became numerous, and one of their important uses was to take people to movies in the nearest village or town. These facilities spread as a result of social contacts, but, more important, they served to increase contacts. In the free-spending frontier atmosphere, especially in the years when wheat brought large cash incomes, the amount of money spent on means of transportation and communication was astounding to outsiders.³

² Hanna Herald quoted in Jean Burnet, Next-Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), 17.

³ Burnet, Next-Year Country, 23.

Burnet does not discuss the lack of “labour-saving” household devices and the abundance of communication technology, but the disparity calls for further exploration. The recent work of historians of the American Great Plains and Canadian Prairies, including Katherine Jellison, Mary Kinnear, Sara Brooks Sundberg, and Angela E. Davis, also illustrates the gap that Swire noticed in 1939.⁴ On the whole, however, sociologists and historians do not explore the disparity in the diffusion of technologies. This lack of historical and sociological analysis is the stimulus for this study.

The study is a social history of the telephone and radio on the rural Canadian Prairies between 1900 and 1950. Factors influencing the acquisition of communication technologies, how people used the new devices, and the role the technologies played in the lives of rural families will be studied. The claim that Prairie farm families especially valued communication technology compared to “labour-saving” household and farm technologies, such as vacuums, washing machines, tractors, generators, and even running water, will also be explored.⁵ Despite rural people’s high evaluation of the devices, for

⁴ Katherine Jellison, “Women and Technology on the Great Plains, 1910-40,” *Great Plains Quarterly*, 8, (Summer 1988): 145-157; Mary Kinnear, ““Do you want your daughter to marry a farmer?”: Women’s Work on the Farm, 1922,” in *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, 6, ed. Donald H. Akenson, (Gananoque: Longdale Press, 1988): 137-153; Sara Brooks Sundberg, “A Female Frontier: Manitoba Farm Women in 1922,” *Prairie Forum*, 16, no. 2, (Fall 1991): 185-204; Angela E. Davis, ““Valiant Servants”: Women and Technology on the Canadian Prairies, 1910-1940,” *Manitoba History*, 25, (Spring 1993), 33-42.

⁵ Davis, ““Valiant Servants,”” 36; Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 190-193; Kinnear, “Women’s Work on the Farm,” 145; Julie Dorsch, ““You Just Did What Had To Be Done”: Life Histories of Four Saskatchewan Women,” in “Other Voices”: *Historical Essays of Saskatchewan Women*, eds. David de Brou and Aileen Moffat, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995): 120; Marilyn Barber, “Help for Farm Homes: The Campaign to End Housework Drudgery in Rural Saskatchewan in the 1920s,” *Journal of the History of Canadian Science, Technology and Medicine*, 9, no. 1, (June 1985): 5.

the half century being considered, they had fewer communication technologies than did people in urban Prairie centres of all sizes.⁹

There are several interpretations of the Prairie farm families' wider acceptance of communication technologies than household "labour-saving" devices or farm technologies. First, communication technologies were cheaper than many "labour-saving" devices. Perhaps they were the only modern conveniences affordable to many farmers. Second, it may have been that farmers and their wives did not mind the farm and household labour as long as they had devices available for communication. On the farm, families painfully missed the ability to communicate and integrate socially with others, as seen in their writing about the isolation of the Prairie farm. Rural Prairie families valued the ability of the telephone, radio, and automobile to overcome distance more than the "labour-saving" household and farm technologies that would reduce the drudgery of labour. Many rural women were used to city or town life with neighbours, and other social contacts, nearby. Third, it might have been the communication technologies' usefulness for the family business, the farm, that influenced their purchase. Finally, it could have been that farm families believed that a string of telephone poles running from the section road to their home or a radio antenna spiraling from the roof made them look more progressive. Visible communication technologies may have helped farmers combat the stereotype that they were backward compared to urban dwellers.

⁹ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Eighth Census of Canada, 1941: Volume IX: Housing, (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1949), 82-83; Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III: Housing and Families, (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1953), 40-4, 40-5, 82-83.

It is impossible to determine exactly what influenced whom and why. Despite this, it is a valid exercise to use available evidence to explore some of the factors involved in the diffusion of telephones and radios on the rural Canadian Prairies in the first half of the twentieth century. This means studying the context of the consumers' lives because technology is a social construct, answering a human problem.⁷ On the Prairies, the human problem was the vast distances between farms, the difficulty of social interaction, and the perceived social isolation.

This study discusses Canadian Prairie farm families' perceptions of communication technology in the early twentieth century and how families incorporated communication technologies, specifically radios and telephones, into their daily lives. It looks at whether families used the technologies in new ways or if they employed the devices to do old tasks in more efficient ways. The study explores how the use of these technologies fit into the employment of other technologies, such as the automobile and farm and household devices, and also what devices rural families kept or discarded in times of hardship.

The objectives of the work are to look at the consumption of communication technology through the eyes of rural Prairie consumers using their discussion of the technologies. The study explores people's evaluation, consumption, and uses of technology on the rural Prairies. As well, it strives to accurately portray individuals' joy, frustration, and other emotions in relation to communication and transportation technologies.

⁷ Technology scholar Barbara Drygulski Wright wrote in the introduction to her book, Women, Work and Technology: Transformations, that technology concerns the "'solutions of real problems in a concrete

The main argument that the thesis will entertain is that although the uses of new communication and transportation technologies by rural communities were not new or revolutionary, farm families' perceptions of these devices were of technologies that were life-altering. Farm families saw communication technologies as life-altering because they fulfilled the families' desire to bring the outside world into the farm home. A desire for entertainment and a way to escape the hard labour and the difficulties of Prairie farm life, especially during the agricultural depression of the 1920s and 1930s, drove people to purchase communication technologies. The study will also explore an additional theme, previously unexplored by scholars of the Prairie region. The thesis will argue that the acquisition of communication technologies was different across the three Prairie provinces and also across Canada.

The study draws several conclusions. First, rural residents viewed new communication technologies as significant improvements to their quality of life because they decreased feelings of rural isolation. Second, families made choices about which technology to buy based on income, cost, utility to the farm, and entertainment value. Third, farm families seemed to prefer cars and radios over the telephone if they could not afford all three. Finally, communication technology helped increase the efficiency of tasks farm families already performed.

While contemporary governments and Royal Commissions created the organization and structure of the national telephone and radio broadcasting system, rural Prairie Canadians had different priorities. They were more concerned with attaining local service attuned to their needs, than they were with questions of policy.

environment." Wright quoted in Davis, "Valiant Servants," 33.

The study of uses and perceptions of communication technologies will be complemented with a consideration of the availability of the devices and a short institutional history. To consider availability, the numbers of people who had radios and telephones throughout the period will be discussed and also telephone line and radio station availability will be considered. For the institutional history, the ownership of telephone companies and radio stations and the policies they followed will be studied. A look at the diffusion of the technologies and their ownership is a necessary starting point for an examination of the uses and importance of communication technologies to rural people.

This history of communication technologies on the Prairies is of interest to scholars for two reasons. First, the Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta telephone systems and Manitoba radio stations were owned under comparatively unique situations from the rest of Canada and the United States. The provincial governments of the three Prairie provinces owned the telephone systems and Manitoba Government Telephones held monopoly rights to radio broadcasting in the province for ten years. This is different from the private ownership of telephone companies and radio stations elsewhere in Canada.⁸ The unique ownership of Prairie communications influenced their policies. One of the main goals for the Prairie provincial governments at the time was a strong focus on universal, or at least increased, access to communication technologies for

⁸ Robert E. Babe, *Telecommunications in Canada: Technology, Industry, and Government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 103; Mary Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922-1932* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 52-53; Robert M. Pike, "A Chequered Progress: Farmers and the Telephone in Canada, 1905-1951," Unpublished International Sociological Association Paper, (1998), 3.

residents, especially those in rural areas.⁹ Second, the rural areas of the three Prairie provinces had some of the lowest population densities of the country and, therefore, social integration was problematic. The relative isolation made communication difficult and the perceived need for communication technologies greater.¹⁰ The social implications of these two factors appear to be a wider diffusion of communication technologies than household conveniences in rural areas.

Neither communication scholars, historians, nor sociologists cover the topic of communication technologies on the Prairies adequately. Social historians of Canadian communication have neglected the study of communication technologies on the Prairies in favour of a concentration on Ontario and Quebec. The history of communication technology on the rural Prairies is distinct from that of Central Canada and, as such, a study of it helps to create a full understanding of Canadians' use of telephones and radios. A combination of the tools from communication, history, and sociology and a focus on communication technologies from a social and consumer perspective would greatly enhance the existing literature on the history of radios and telephones on the Prairies. It is in this sense that the study will make an original contribution to scholarship on the history of communication technologies in Canada.

The project uses the tools of history and its sources, especially anecdotal sources and work about the conditions of Prairie life. Historical research is crucial to the study of

⁹ Babe, *Telecommunications*, 89, 103, 107, 110, 140; Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 283; Claude Fischer, "Technology's Retreat: The Decline of Rural Telephony in The United States, 1920-1940," *Social Science History*, 11, no. 3 (Fall 1987), 313; Cheryl Cowan Buchwald, "Canadian Universality Policy and the Information Infrastructure: Past Lessons, Future Directions," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 22, no. 2 (1997), 166.

Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 24; Davis, "'Valiant Servants,'" 39.

communication technology on the Prairies because an account of life on the rural Prairies is necessary. American historian of technology Ruth Schwartz Cowan writes that it is necessary to use the tools of history to study the sociology of technology:

[t]he processes by which one artifact supplants another (technological change) or by which an artifact reorganizes social structures (technological determinism) or by which an artifact diffuses through society (technological diffusion) are fundamentally sociological in character, subsets, as it were, of the larger topic of social change. Properly constituted historical investigations can be used (and indeed must be used) as the raw material for studies of social change. . . .¹¹

A history of social change, therefore, is the foundation for an investigation of the consumption of communication technologies.

The study is different from a historian's study of telephones and radios on the Prairies, though, for two reasons. First, the work will be directly based on a theoretical framework, the social construction of technology thesis and the "consumption junction" concept, which is unlikely in many historical studies. Second, the work is appropriately called a communication study because the depth of analysis goes beyond that of a history paper. In history, authors point out the uneven diffusion of home "labour-saving" and communication technologies on the rural Canadian Prairies, but they do not discuss why this occurs or what it means in any depth. This study will do both.

Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "The Consumption Junction: A Proposal for Research Strategies in the Sociology of Technology," in The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology, eds. Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), 261.

The project is an amalgamation of three disciplines: communications, history, and sociology; it is an academic hybrid. The tools of each of the three disciplines will be used when and where appropriate to carry out the analysis: a communications theory and two communication artifacts, a statistical analysis of a specific context as in a sociological study, and archival evidence characteristic of historians.

This study is very context specific, as are social histories. It is an examination of one place, at one time, and perhaps it has limited applicability to other situations: yet because the context cannot be explained as part of a larger phenomenon does not mean that it should be abandoned. In itself, the context and the people who lived within it are worthy of scholarly attention. The evidence presented in the study does not claim to be representative of the wider social experience of people with communication technologies in Canada, rather it is a study of a particular location, the Canadian Prairies, at a particular time, 1900 to 1950, for a particular group of people, farm families. It is not a study of the entire experience of the radio and telephone in the Prairie region.

There are significant difficulties to be overcome in any social history. The task of gaining a glimpse of what people were doing and thinking at any period in time is still a valid one. The way in which social historians complete this task, nonetheless, is different from how scholars studying politics or economics go about their research because all of the evidence cannot be gathered in official government and corporate documents. Evidence must be uncovered in personal letters and papers.

The use of personal papers in social history, although allowing a window from which to view the sentiments of the people involved, also provides additional challenges to the scholar. The difficulty for social historians of the Prairie region is twofold. The

first concern is selecting the material that best illustrates the sentiment of people on the Prairies. It is often difficult and inaccurate to use one person's words to generalize the experiences of many. Yet, the limitations of the work require that a patchwork of sources be sewn together to discover common trends and experiences. The second issue is that there are only a limited number of comments on personal experiences penned by Prairie dwellers. The researcher must hunt for the few occasions where Prairie residents wrote about communication technologies. Good sources include the occurrences in letters to the Grain Growers' Guide, submissions to the Aird Commission, letters to government departments, survey responses, and personal writing.

The sources of social history are important because they give scholars an opportunity to focus on the experiences of individuals and their families and not just generalize about groups of people based on statistics. Beyond this, the value of these sources is that they provide a way to bring people's sentiment and daily lives into historical work in a way that political and economic studies cannot. For studies of communication technology, this means that the consumers of the devices can be studied and not simply the owners and producers.

There is an enormous wealth of archival and primary research to be uncovered about the telephone, radio, and rural Canadians. For this study, national, provincial, and local sources were used to find the broadest range of rural people's responses regarding communication technology. Several record groups at the National Archives of Canada were thoroughly researched to uncover rural people's letters to various dominion government departments regarding the telephone and radio. These record groups were also important for outlining the structure of radio broadcasting in the Prairie region from

its start until 1936. The questionnaires from the United Farm Women of Manitoba's 1922 Rural Home Survey were attained from the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. This survey provides an additional source about rural families, communication technologies, and labour-saving devices. The Glenbow Archives in Calgary provided the records of several rural mutual telephone companies, organizations established and run by the farmers desiring rural telephone service in Alberta. The Grain Growers' Guide, The Country Guide, and the Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer issues from between 1908 until 1939 were read for additional letters, advertisements, and contemporary commentary about telephones and radios. The purpose behind the extensive archival research was attaining the widest range of sentiment about communication technology as possible from the largest number of rural Prairie Canadians. Consulting such a broad number of sources helps to balance and negate some of the drawbacks of using individual's sentiments in a work such as this.

The letters written by rural people are the core of this work. The letters were found in government files, as letters to the editor, as responses to contests in the Grain Growers' Guide, and as correspondence with telephone companies and radio stations. They are interesting and invaluable because they convey people's individual experience with either the radio and telephone and many explain how having such devices has altered their life on the farm.

Beyond the letters written by rural people, this work uses a few rural surveys found in various archives and newspapers. The first of these surveys is the 1922 United Farm Women of Manitoba Rural Home Survey. This survey was designed to give the executive of the UFWM a comprehensive look at the lives of rural women in Manitoba.

Due to this goal, the survey is useful to contemporary historians because it allows for detailed comparisons between telephones, automobiles, and various other devices. The other benefit of this survey is that the questionnaires are still extant and not only the statistical summary information. The second survey of the most use is the Crawford Harris Agency Survey conducted in 1930 of radio listeners in central and southern Saskatchewan to measure the popularity of the leading Saskatchewan stations. In contrast to the UFWM survey, the Crawford Harris questionnaires are not available, but despite this, the survey offers data from Regina, Moose Jaw, and the "country" thus allowing for comparisons across rural and urban listeners.

Survey and Census data are useful complements to this work because they offer a way of checking the responses provided by the letter writers. Having statistical data about larger groups of people helps to confirm or deny the sentiments of letter writers. In this way, conclusions drawn from letters can be supported by aggregate data offering a measure of accuracy unavailable solely from individuals' responses.

In themselves, the sources listed above present both benefits and challenges. The most consistent limitation is that the correspondents were self-selected. Letter writers and survey respondents were not forced to write or respond. There were, therefore, many people who chose not to participate. Of those who did reply, some had a motivation to do so, such as explaining their point of view. A separate set of reasons likely motivated the people who did not respond. The evidence presented here, however, does not and cannot include the voices of those who remained silent, although their positions were likely different from the people who did speak. There are three results of this self-selection: the evidence presented does not provide a random sample of the general popular sentiment:

the evidence is biased toward telephone subscribers and radio owners because people who did not own the devices generally did not write letters or answer surveys pertaining to them; and the people who wrote letters and answered surveys were doing so for a purpose. The correspondents were writing for a reason, not just to describe events as they were. That the letter writers were supporting a cause must be remembered for it likely influenced what they had to say.

A further limitation of the study is that the archival records used may not be complete. It is impossible to tell if the government departments or companies concerned kept all of the letters submitted to them. In one case, a radio station manager admitted, with some embarrassment, that an employee discarded most of the station's historical records: "[a]long about 15 years ago, most of our archive material was thrown out by a zealous girl with a penchant for cleaning up. While I can't fault her cleanliness, it has put us in a bind for material concerning the early days of what is now CFAC."¹² In other instances, it is even less clear whether the records are complete or not. In some cases, it appears that the companies kept much of the official correspondence as well as large numbers of letters from the public concerning major issues, but the day-to-day mail dealing with listeners and subscribers appears to be lost. In some instances, such as rural mutual telephone companies or local radio stations, personnel conducted day-to-day issues orally and there are no documents to uncover.

Another limitation of the evidence is that some of the surveys available were not scientific. The surveys deal with issues important to the work at hand, yet they were not

¹² Jim Kunkel (Program Manager at Broadcast Station CFAC) to Stuart B. Sturrock, 10 March 1977, Glenbow Archives (GA), M8210, CFAC Radio Fonds, 1921-1984, box 127, file 125.

done in a way that makes them representative of the general sentiment. According to American rural social historian Hal S. Barron, there are three main shortcomings of early twentieth century rural surveys: “[t]oo often, the sampling technique is faulty or vague. . . . More important, surveys usually present data for only one point in time or over a short time span, making any discussion of longer-term change difficult. Finally, the data presented in the published surveys are aggregate data.”¹³ It is often difficult to locate the individual response forms for the surveys, although these documents likely exist somewhere.¹⁴ As a result, it is impossible to tell who said what within the surveys. The limitations of rural surveys do restrict their usefulness, however, they still offer a measure of people’s sentiment that is valuable when combined with other sources.

The final two challenges of the evidence presented in this work are perhaps the most serious. First, the evidence used is exclusive to people literate in English and, to a lesser extent, French. Only the people and organizations who could read and write one of the two aforementioned languages could write letters or respond to the surveys. Second, the primary sources available do not allow for the recognition of ethnic diversity in the Prairie region in relation to radio ownership and telephone subscription. The Census of Canada data does not permit for a cross referencing of rural telephone subscription, or radio ownership, to ethnicity. In addition, the other primary sources rarely discuss ethnicity. To partially combat this limitation, a handful of published sources dealing with different ethnic groups have been located. These include newspaper articles written by a

¹³ Hal S. Barron, “Rural Social Surveys,” *Agricultural History*, 58, no. 2, (April 1984): 116.

¹⁴ There are some exceptions to this statement, however. The complete set of response forms for the United Farm Women Manitoba’s 1922 Rural Home Survey are available at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

Manitoba farm woman of Dutch birth, letters written by a Danish immigrant to Saskatchewan, and a recollections about life in rural Alberta written by an English woman.¹⁵ These sources, although not as useful as archival evidence, can help uncover some information about the ownership of radios and the subscription to telephone service in relation to ethnicity in specific communities.

The final point to consider is the selection of evidence for use in this study. It is impossible, of course, to account for the voice of every person on the rural Prairies concerning the new communication technologies. What is possible, and what this work seeks to do, is to provide a measure of the general sentiment and also a range of opinions. As such, the purpose is to investigate what most people believed about radios and telephones but also to gauge what people outside the majority opinion were thinking and doing. This method should ensure that the study achieves a fairly accurate portrayal of sentiment.

¹⁵ Mark Boekelman, in his introduction to Dutch immigrant Jane Aberson's article collection, notes a lack of primary literature penned by immigrants other than those from Britain: "[t]he articles of Jane Aberson are among the few instances of social-historical writing that do not reflect a British settler's point of view." Mark Boekelman, "Introduction," in Jane L. Aberson, From the Prairies With Hope, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1991), xxi.

“Of Minor Importance”: A Paucity of Research

In her 1993 article, “‘Valiant Servants’: Women and Technology on the Canadian Prairies, 1910-1940,” the late Canadian historian Angela E. Davis expressed frustration with the lack of research on the experiences of rural communities with radios:

[m]ost studies of the history of Canadian broadcasting are concerned with the politics and economics of government (public) versus privately operated radio stations. Beyond a remark here and there, *the impact of radio on its listeners is generally ignored*. The pleasure it brought to isolated rural households has been deemed of minor importance compared to the wrangling between entrepreneurs and provincial or federal governments. Most listeners were not concerned with who transmitted the broadcasts but with how well they could receive them.¹

Davis’ comment can be extended beyond radio to include research about telephones as well. Historians and communication scholars historically have paid little attention to rural people’s experiences with new technologies. This pattern is especially visible in relation to the farming communities of Canada.

Davis’ remark sets the tone and purpose for this study, to explore the impact of the telephone and radio on rural consumers. There are, nonetheless, few Canadian studies that even remark about communication technologies on Prairie Canadian farms. Despite this paucity of research, however, there is a small core of relevant literature that can be

¹ Emphasis added. Davis, “‘Valiant Servants,’” 37.

used as a starting point to explore rural communities' uses and perceptions of communication technologies. This literature can be divided into three bodies: political-economic studies, popular literature, and social histories.

The first body of literature includes studies that deal with the politics and economics of the telephone system and radio stations. These studies are an important place to start because they provide a foundation for studying people's experiences with technology. For this review, work by political economist Robert E. Babe, communication scholar Dwayne Winseck, and Canadian historian Mary Vipond will be considered. The commonality between these studies is a focus on the political, economic, and institutional nature of the telephone and radio industries. These books describe the structure of the industries on the Prairies and consider the ownership and physical availability of the technologies.

These books all explore three related themes. They consider the development of independent companies and monopolies that control telephone or radio service. They also consider the alternatives available to the established systems. In addition, these studies examine the control that governments and owners exercised over the distribution of the technologies.

The authors use the Prairies to discuss policy alternatives to the route taken in the East, or the route later taken by Canada. The value of these studies is that they provide an important understanding of how the technologies became available within Canada, an understanding important for further study of people's relationship with them.

Babe's 1990 book, Telecommunications in Canada: Technology, Industry, and Government, and Winseck's 1998 work, Reconvergence: A Political Economy of

Telecommunications in Canada, both devote small sections to the topic of telephone system ownership on the Canadian Prairies, although neither is centrally concerned with this issue. Both Babe and Winseck's books are studies of the political economy of telecommunications in Canada. In similar arguments, Babe states that "corporate and government power" and Winseck writes that "power, politics, and democracy" shaped the Canadian telecommunications industry.² Winseck suggests that the transition of Canadian telecommunications through phases of unregulated monopoly, regulated competition, and regulated monopoly "had little to do with technological change, and everything to do with the dynamic interplay of legal, economic, political, and governmental forces."³ Regulators and companies, therefore, created the structure of Canadian telecommunications.

Both authors disagree with older arguments which expound that technical factors shaped the structure of the telephone system. Babe writes that it was not technological determinism or natural monopoly, but the choices of government policy-makers and the "predatory" practices of large monopolistic telephone companies that chiseled out the structure of Canadian telecommunications. The books illustrate that corporate, business, and social interests helped to shape the telecommunications industry in Canada.

To study the political and economic relations that shaped telephony in Canada, Winseck argues that providers had to answer several key questions when establishing their systems. These questions included "which uses would predominate, whose interests would be served in the first instance, and what organisational framework would prevail. .

² Babe, Telecommunications in Canada, 4; Dwayne Winseck, Reconvergence: A Political Economy of Telecommunications in Canada (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1998), 1.

...¹ Service providers across the country answered these questions in their own way, thereby creating differently structured telephone systems.

To illustrate how the choices of governments, regulators, and companies influenced the structure of the telephone systems that emerged, Babe and Winseck discuss the various telephone companies of Canada. While the large private telephone companies, such as Bell Telephones, figure prominently in both books, the authors also include sections about the history of telephones on the Prairies. These sections illustrate the policy alternatives pursued by the Prairie governments. Winseck employs the examples of the Prairie provinces to illustrate different responses to his questions from those generated by Bell Telephones in Ontario and Quebec. Babe and Winseck include a discussion of the Prairies to provide examples of how Western telephone systems followed a course that significantly diverged from the path pursued by telephone companies, provincial governments, and citizens in the East. Both treatments, however, are short. Babe relegates his discussion to one twelve-page chapter, "Western Reaction," and two pages about radio in Manitoba. Winseck provides a few consecutive pages on the topic and additional references peppered throughout his book. Despite their brevity, the accounts are two of only a handful written about the take-over of telephones by the Prairie provincial governments and the resulting foibles and follies of public telephone systems from the first decade of the twentieth century until the 1980s.

Babe and Winseck describe how the governments and citizens of the Prairie provinces were upset over Bell's policies, especially that the company refused long-

¹ Winseck, *Reconvergence*, 149.

² Winseck, *Reconvergence*, 148.

distance link-ups to municipally owned companies and that Bell neglected service to rural areas. In response to these issues, the Prairie provincial governments bought out Bell in 1908 to 1909 to create publicly owned enterprises, established in the name of the public good.⁵

In the period immediately following the provincial take-overs of Bell, there was intense construction of new pole line mileage and the addition of new subscribers to the provincial systems.⁶ The construction boom and euphoria over throwing out Bell, Babe contends, ended abruptly in each province: 1912 in Manitoba, 1915 in Alberta, and 1916 in Saskatchewan.⁷ In contrast to Bell's predatory pricing, neglect of rural subscribers, and refusal to allow locally owned systems interconnection with its lines, the provincial telephone companies committed follies of their own. In all three provinces, these included lax bookkeeping and economic mismanagement.⁸

Babe and Winseck discuss the different organizational strategies used by the three Prairie systems. Babe notes in his assessment of Saskatchewan's provincially owned telephone system that the Saskatchewan government established its system differently than the one in Manitoba. Whereas its eastern neighbour controlled the entire telephone system, Saskatchewan reserved "for itself only larger municipal exchanges and all long-distance construction; here the government was content merely to assist rural settlers in building their own telephone systems, albeit providing them with free poles and advice."⁹ Winseck includes a discussion of the Prairie telephone labour unions to illustrate the

⁵ Babe, *Telecommunications*, 102; Winseck, *Reconvergence*, 127-128.

⁶ Babe, *Telecommunications*, 103, 107-108, 110; Winseck, *Reconvergence*, 137-138.

⁷ Babe, *Telecommunications*, 104, 108, 110-111; Winseck, *Reconvergence*, 139.

⁸ Babe, *Telecommunications*, 104, 108, 110-111.

⁹ Quoted from Babe, *Telecommunications*, 107; see also Winseck, *Reconvergence*, 137-138.

more socialist, or universal service, ideals of the telephone generated in the three Prairie provinces than those in the East.

Babe and Winseck's discussions of the structural composition of the Prairie telephone companies are among the only academic work on this subject. Their studies, therefore, are valuable for providing background information on the western provinces' telephone policy. In a way similar to that used by Babe and Winseck, Vipond provides organizational information about the radio in Canada.

Vipond's book, Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922-1932, is a comprehensive study of the first era of radio in Canada. It is an important study because it explores the nature of the broadcasting industry before the creation of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, CRBC.¹⁰ The period that Vipond concentrates on was one of lax government control over broadcasting and the deference of government officials to the developing American model of competitive private enterprise as the best plan for Canada.¹¹ Vipond's book focuses on policy and regulatory issues and the responses of the regulatory branch, the Radio Branch of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, to a host of concerns.¹² The central argument of the work is that Canada's radio broadcasting system did not "naturally," and from the technology's inception, include a broadcaster funded by the government. Canadian radio broadcasting was initially a competitive and private enterprise. According to Vipond, issues over acceptable content, Canadian programming and culture, foreign policy, and mounting political pressures all accounted for the striking of the Aird Commission in 1928 and the

¹⁰ Vipond, Listening In, xiii.

¹¹ Vipond, Listening In, 282.

subsequent creation of the CRBC, Canada's first national public broadcaster. Vipond's argument is that other configurations of Canadian broadcasting than public ownership were possible, and indeed previously explored, in Canada. Vipond states her "intention in this work, then, is to examine the development of Canadian radio broadcasting in all possible dimensions from its beginnings until the passage of the Radio Broadcasting Act of 1932."¹³ She studies this intention through the triangular relationship of broadcasters, the manufacturers of radio equipment, and the audience.¹⁴

Vipond does not discuss her subject regionally. She routinely uses examples from across the nation, including Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, sometimes including rural people as well. She pays particular attention to CKY Winnipeg, the station owned by Manitoba Government Telephones, the provincially owned telephone system. The MGT station was the only one permitted in the province, even though the province operated it as a commercial enterprise and not a public service.¹⁵

Listening In, a detailed narrative account of radio before the 1932 Broadcasting Act, is an important work because it considers the relationship between listeners, equipment manufacturers, and the broadcasters themselves. Later, the government became a factor in this relationship.¹⁶ The needs and desires of each party helped to shape the direction of broadcasting in Canada.¹⁷

The political, economic, and institutional studies discussed above provide important information about the ownership and regulation of telephone systems and radio

¹³ Vipond, Listening In, 284.

¹⁴ Vipond, Listening In, xv.

¹⁵ Vipond, Listening In, xv.

¹⁶ Vipond, Listening In, 52.

¹⁷ Vipond, Listening In, xv, xvi.

stations and the policy options available to them. This type of information is a necessary foundation for social histories because people's experiences with technology occurred within the greater organizational structure. To understand rural people's use and perceptions of new communication technologies, however, further secondary studies are needed to provide insight into how individuals and rural communities perceived and used communication technology.

A second body of literature concerning the telephone and radio on the rural Canadian Prairies is popular and corporate literature written by industry sources, media employees, and "pioneers" in the respective industries. The authors in this group include: Tony Cashman, Robert Collins, E. B. Ogle, T. J. Allard, William McNeil and Morris Wolfe, and Wayne Schmalz. These sources are largely anecdotal histories of the devices told through recollections and stories of the pioneers who helped bring the technologies into the Prairie region and across Canada.

In his work, Telecommunications in Canada, Babe discusses these anecdotal books about Canadian telecommunications in the following way:

[m]ostly they have been "living histories" that have tried to place the reader in the period; describe the adventures, misadventures, tricks, and heroism of the personalities; recount anecdotes, humorous and otherwise; describe the evolution of an industrial art; and even, perhaps, detect interrelations between the social customs and the industrial techniques ("technologies") as they changed.¹⁸

¹⁷ Vipond, Listening In, 26-27.

¹⁸ Babe, Telecommunications, 3.

This portrait also describes the popular histories of the radio. The benefits of a “living history” approach are that the books are interesting, informative, and lively. These histories provide a wealth of detail for social historians and offer an abundance of anecdotes about telephones and radios during the period under consideration. In addition, they provide valuable references to primary source documents. The major weaknesses of this approach, however, are that writers do not analyze the material they present and the histories focus on the producers and not the consumers of the technology.

One of the common problems with the “living histories” written about the telephone and radio is that they are narrative and non-analytical. The writers’ relationships to the industries involved or the funding source for their work appears to partly influence their view of the industry. Either the owners of the communication systems commissioned these histories, as in the case of Cashman’s, Collins’ and Ogle’s books, or media employees wrote them, such as Allard’s, McNeil and Wolfe’s, and Schmalz’s work. With these origins, the research is biased in favour of the ownership and status quo of the technologies and the books are generally celebratory accounts of history.

Another weakness of the popular histories is that they are told from the point of view of the industry and sometimes the consumers are lost. In these books, the line workers, operators, and owners in case of the telephone and the station owners, managers, and announcers for the radio play central roles. The authors make little mention of anyone who was not an employee, a “pioneer,” or a patron of telephones or radios. The individual subscribers and listeners, who provided the *raison d’être* for the companies involved, are often not discussed.

McNeil and Wolfe's book, Signing On: The Birth of Radio in Canada, for example is composed entirely of interviews. According to the interviewers, their book "contains one hundred and twenty-five interviews with broadcasters, producers, technicians, entrepreneurs and ordinary listeners."¹⁹ Although the compilers do include listener accounts, these interviews are anonymous and the least prevalent interviews in the book. Out of thirty-four accounts in the section entitled "The West," only six are interviews with listeners. The majority of the discussion is with station owners, operators, and announcers. This pattern is evident in other "living histories" as well.

Each of the authors considers several major themes. The histories all look at private versus public ownership of telecommunications and broadcasting, the Prairie experience in contrast to national issues, and anecdotal evidence from key figures in the history being presented, including employees of the telephone systems or radio broadcasters, and sometimes audience members and telephone subscribers.

The "living histories" written about the telephone in Canada all share an interesting commonality. The books were all published as the corporate histories of different telephone companies and organizations. Cashman was the company historian of Alberta Government Telephones when he wrote Singing Wires: The Telephone in Alberta and the company funded the project. The resulting book is, therefore, a very positive account of AGT. Collins wrote his 1977 book, A Voice from Afar: The History of Telecommunications in Canada, with the financial support of the Canadian Telecommunications Carriers Association, C.T.C.A. The member companies of the

¹⁹ William McNeil and Morris Wolfe, Signing On: The Birth of Radio in Canada (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1982), 10.

C.T.C.A. include all the major service providers in Canada. Collins writes that although this organization funded his work, the opinions in the book may not always be those of the C.T.C.A. or its members. Ogle, a journalist, was commissioned to write the history of the TransCanada Telephone System, TCTS, and his book, Long Distance Please: The Story of the TransCanada Telephone System, is under the copyright of the member companies of this organization, which include all the major service providers in Canada.²⁰

The origins of these studies are closely related to the companies involved.

The popular histories written about the telephone in Canada all consider the anomaly of the Prairies, where the provincial governments decided to take-over the provision of service from the Bell Telephone Company in the first decade of the twentieth century. The books all contrast the public telephone service offered in the Prairie provinces with service in the rest of Canada. Each author, however, has his point of view about the wisdom of these decisions.

Cashman, as the historian for Alberta Government Telephones, provides a positive account of the take-over of Bell's plant and subscribers in the province, despite all the later problems that AGT would face.²¹ Ogle, in contrast, is very critical of the Prairie provincial governments' decisions to take-over the provision of service within their borders. He wrote: "[t]he starry-eyed politicians who set up provincial companies all too soon discovered that the business of running an efficient telephone system called

²⁰ In 1979, Alberta Government Telephones, Bell Canada, British Columbia Telephone Company, The Island Telephone Company, Manitoba Telephone System, Maritime Telegraph and Telephone Company, The Newfoundland Telephone Company, The New Brunswick Telephone Company, Saskatchewan Telecommunications, and Telesat Canada were the member companies of the TransCanada Telephone System.

²¹ See Chapter 4, "'An Invaluable Service to the Farmers of Western Canada': Availability and Ownership" for an extended discussion of these problems.

for considerably more know-how than the ability to yap at the heels of someone else trying to do the job.”²² The authors, therefore, do not uniformly celebrate the Prairie provinces’ decisions.

Ogle’s Long Distance Please and Collins’ A Voice from Afar share many similarities. Although the works have slightly different purposes, Ogle’s book is a history of the TransCanada Telephone System and Collins’ is a history of telecommunications in Canada, at many points, the authors discuss the same events. Collins looks at three technologies: the telegraph, telephone, and wireless and the book deals with all the regions of Canada. Ogle’s book looks only at the telephone throughout all of Canada.

Both of the studies are nationalistic in their perspectives, in contrast to Cashman, considered below, who adopts a regional perspective. Ogle’s and Collins’ books share a sense that the telephone system, once interconnected and spanning the country, helped to make a nation out of the vast Canadian landscape. This sentiment makes both books romantic celebrations of the telephone companies’ role in conquering the wilderness and linking the nation of Canada by telephone wires. The authors tell stories of how telephone “pioneers” braved numerous hardships to bring the best and most efficient service to the customers of Canada. The books, therefore, celebrate Canadian telecommunications and the associated companies. The main theme throughout the books is the myth of technological nationalism, stating that like the Canadian Pacific

²² E. B. Ogle, Long Distance Please: The Story of the TransCanada Telephone System (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1979), 134.

Railway, the telephone system united Canadians in the far-flung reaches of their vast country.

The accounts of Prairie telecommunications presented by both Collins and Ogle are livelier versions of the standard story, fusing both the political wranglings of government telephone systems with anecdotes about the region. Collins devotes three sections to the Prairies, "Dwindling Empire," "The Agonies of Government Ownership," and "Bad Years."²³ Ogle includes two chapters about the Prairie telephone companies, "The Prairies -- Part One: Doing It Their Way" and "The Prairies -- Part Two: It Wasn't Easy."²⁴ Both authors discuss the discontent of the Prairie provincial governments with Bell service within their borders. Ogle highlights disagreements between the Bell officers in the East and the employees in the West to provide rationale for the later developments on the Prairies.²⁵ Collins and Ogle also discuss the take-over of Bell Telephones' plant and subscribers by the Prairie provincial governments between 1908 and 1909.²⁶ Both authors also explore the successes and failures of the new systems, including the material advances of the Prairie provincial telephone companies and the follies associated with having politicians in the telephone business. Besides these topics, Collins writes about party lines and he describes the Great Depression and the Prairie telephone companies' reaction to financial difficulties in their corporations and among subscribers.²⁷

²³ Robert Collins, *A Voice from Afar: The History of Telecommunications in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1977), 186-190, 203-207, 207-211, 221-222.

²⁴ Ogle, *Long Distance Please*, 123-134, 135-147.

²⁵ Ogle, *Long Distance Please*, 134.

²⁶ Ogle, *Long Distance Please*, 134; Collins, *A Voice from Afar*, 186-190, 203-207.

²⁷ Collins, *A Voice from Afar*, 207-211, 221-222.

While Ogle and Collins study all three of the Prairie provinces, Cashman's 1972 book, Singing Wires, is a popular history of telephones in Alberta from the arrival of the telegraph in the province until 1971. The book features Alberta Government Telephones, AGT, and is unique from other popular and academic histories of the telephone because it concentrates on only one province. Cashman's account is the most in-depth and chronologically longest discussion of rural telephones in Alberta available, therefore making the book valuable to this study.

Cashman's work explores rural telephones in Alberta from their arrival until the 1970s. He outlines the attitude toward telephones in ranching communities when the first devices were installed in 1903.²⁸ Cashman also provides segments of transcripts of the oratories heard in the Alberta legislature on February 14, 1907, when members spoke in favour of public ownership of the Alberta telephone system to provide service to rural areas neglected by Bell.²⁹ He writes that the government began to permit the establishment of rural mutual telephone companies during the First World War to further rural service. AGT stopped rural line construction, but allowed rural lines constructed by farmers access to AGT's long distance lines.³⁰

Cashman also provides a rare discussion of the sale of Alberta's rural systems to rural mutual telephone companies in 1933 as a measure of economy. The government had to sell its equipment at five percent of its book value.³¹ Over the next three years,

²⁸ Tony Cashman, Singing Wires: The Telephone in Alberta (Edmonton: Alberta Government Telephone Commission, 1972), 115.

²⁹ Cashman, Singing Wires, 137-141.

³⁰ Cashman, Singing Wires, 256-261.

³¹ Cashman, Singing Wires, 363.

AGT sold virtually all of its rural plant. The sale turned out to be positive for rural telephone subscribers in the province, because as Cashman notes:

something remarkable had happened in the countryside. . . . Under AGT and the principles of a central telephone company the rural system had dropped below eight thousand phones. By the end of 1936, under older principles of rural cooperation, the number was back up to 14,500. A desperation maneuver to save AGT had the effect, in a very bad time, of reachieving the aim of the founders of the province.³²

It was not until the rural residents took over their own telephone service that subscriber numbers began to climb.³³

Cashman discusses how the rural telephone in the first half of the twentieth century was more than just a point-to-point communication device to farmers and their families. In Alberta before the 1970s, most farm telephones were on twenty-one party lines. Cashman argues that these party lines were more than telephone service, they were social institutions or communities of interest.³⁴ These communities of interest were what farm residents needed most from telephones in the first part of the century because they allowed rural communities to share their lives and experiences.

Cashman's book provides a wealth of detail about the organization of AGT. In some places, it goes beyond institutional history to explain the value of telephone service to its customers. It is unique when compared with the other corporate histories and

³² Cashman, *Singing Wires*, 365.

³³ This was, according to Babe, a fact that Saskatchewan had realized from the outset, when it allowed small companies to run rural telephone service. Babe, *Telecommunications*, 107.

³⁴ Cashman, *Singing Wires*, 457.

academic work because it is a more in depth account of the telephone in Alberta than provided anywhere else.

There is a remarkable similarity in the work of Collins, Ogle, and Cashman. In some cases, the authors use the same quotations and examples and in others, even the text bears remarkable similarity. Since none of the authors referenced their books, it is impossible to tell if all three were using the same sources or if one of the books was the source for the others. Regardless, there are notable similarities among the three.

Despite some problems, the books provide factual and anecdotal evidence about the structure and diffusion of the telephone in Canada. Some of this evidence cannot be located within academic sources. As with the popular telephone studies, the popular radio studies use evidence and a point of view different from other available sources.

Allard calls his book, Straight Up: Private Broadcasting in Canada: 1918-1958, “a narrative of broadcasting in Canada” written by a “narrator” that “has been in the broadcasting business since 1934.”⁵⁵ He outlines the purpose of his volume as three-fold. The first two goals of the book are to describe how the “present,” meaning 1979, framework of broadcasting in Canada evolved and “[t]o document the fact that the so-called ‘private sector’ is now and always was, the most significant and useful element in Canadian Broadcasting.” The final purpose of the book is “[t]o demonstrate that there has never been any ‘master plan’ or coherent philosophy of development for broadcasting. Our present structure grew from ‘private sector’ service; and the ambitions of a handful of men who wanted to control the shape and content of broadcasting from

⁵⁵ T. J. Allard, Straight Up: Private Broadcasting in Canada: 1918-1958 (Ottawa: Canadian Communications Foundation, 1979), i, iii.

Ottawa.”³⁶ With these goals, Allard devotes his book to correcting alleged misconceptions in the historical record produced by journalists, academics, and other commentators. Since he served as the private broadcasters’ representative at the Canadian Association of Broadcasters for a quarter century, Allard maintains that he is the person to set the inaccuracies in the historical record right.³⁷

The author devotes the book mainly to a discussion of policy and regulation that shaped broadcasting in Canada. Allard does, however, pause to discuss “the regional mosaic,” providing a few pages on radio broadcasting in the provinces and regions of Canada. In Allard’s treatment, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta warrant individual entries, although he lumps New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia together as “The Atlantic Area.”³⁸ These sections mainly detail the ownership of the major broadcasting outlets in each province from 1922 until the mid-1930s, but it also accounts for some of the small amateur stations.

Allard concludes that “[b]roadcasting’s *operation* was shaped by the desire of Canadians to have acceptable information and entertainment service; and the ability of the private sector to meet that demand. Broadcasting’s *structure* was shaped by developing technology; circumstances; most of all by personalities.”³⁹ Allard maintains that the majority of Canadians were happy with the private sector service they received from 1918 until 1932 and did not favour a public broadcaster.⁴⁰ This study, like the academic works of Babe, Winseck, and Vipond, argues that there were other paths of

³⁶ Allard, *Straight Up*, 3.

³⁷ Allard, *Straight Up*, 267.

³⁸ Allard, *Straight Up*, 29.

³⁹ Emphasis in original. Allard, *Straight Up*, 269.

⁴⁰ Allard, *Straight Up*, 269.

development open to telephone systems and radio stations. Choices by governments, officials, and companies decided the routes taken.

The other two histories under consideration are less concerned with the policy and regulatory aspects of broadcasting in Canada. McNeil and Wolfe's collection and Schmalz's book, however, both provide a mixture of anecdotes and information about stations, announcers, and entertainers during the initial era of private broadcasting and after 1932.

McNeil and Wolfe's 1982 book, Signing On: The Birth of Radio in Canada, does not provide overarching arguments about broadcasting's structure. Instead, it is a collection of recollections by Canadian radio "pioneers." The authors stress that theirs is a unique book because they pay attention not only to the history of public broadcasting in Canada, but also to the private broadcasting that occurred before 1932. McNeil and Wolfe present the same point of view as Vipond on this subject: "[a]lmost always omitted from histories of the development of Canadian radio is the story of the important pioneering work done by *private* broadcasters -- especially in the years *before* 1932."⁴¹ They believe, as does Vipond, that their book will help to correct the omission.

The book is both important and unique due to its oral and visual components. The work is composed entirely of recorded oral interviews and reproduced artifacts. The interviews record the thoughts and experiences of early radio personnel, performers, and their listeners in their own words. The editors learned that the "advantage of using the raw material of oral history is that it has the colour and flavour and rough edges of real life: it allows one to experience the past in a more immediate way. Sometimes that

results in insights that the neat perspectives of more formal approaches to history fail to capture.”⁴² The oral histories presented in McNeil and Wolfe’s book provide an additional face to the history of broadcasting: that of the employees. Unfortunately, the interviews are organized regionally and the editors do not discuss the larger trends emerging from them. Along with the one hundred twenty-five oral statements, McNeil and Wolfe include hundreds of advertisements for radios and stations, schedules, and photographs that provide an additional visual account of radio from its introduction until the 1950s. The two components merge to help the reader explore the early days of the medium.

The section on broadcasting in the West includes pioneers in radio from the beginning in 1922 until the mid-1940s in the four western provinces. Many of the interviews include stories of becoming involved in radio and others retell pranks and accidents that occurred in the studios. There are a handful of other accounts, however, that focus on the value of radio to rural listeners, such as Edmonton broadcaster Dr. G. R. A. Rice, broadcaster T. J. Allard, and Regina newscaster Andy McDermott.⁴³ There are also six accounts by Western listeners, all generically labeled “A Listener.” Unfortunately, these accounts are anonymous and it is unclear whether the respondents were male or female, living in cities, small communities, or on farms. Despite this anonymity, the listeners’ comments do provide an additional window through which to view listeners’ responses to radio.

⁴² The italics are McNeil and Wolfe’s. McNeil and Wolfe, *Signing On*, 10.

⁴³ McNeil and Wolfe, *Signing On*, 17.

⁴⁴ McNeil and Wolfe, *Signing On*, 144-145, 146-147, 124-125.

McNeil and Wolfe's book is useful for details, however, their shortcoming is that they do not analyze the material they present. The authors' use of oral history and artifacts, nonetheless, is a unique way of approaching radio on the Prairies, and in Canada, and it presents some views untold by conventional histories. The next book under consideration also presents unique information not found in other sources about radio in Canada.

Schmalz's book, On Air: Radio in Saskatchewan, is unique because it is a local history about the development of radio in the province of Saskatchewan. The book, in comparison to Vipond's history of radio in Canada, examines the local level in more depth. Schmalz focuses not only on the larger centres of Saskatchewan, but also on the small commercial and amateur broadcasting stations scattered in the smaller towns and villages including Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, and Unity.⁴⁴ By looking specifically at one province, the author avoids the pitfalls of other histories of communication technologies in Canada: relegating the Prairies to a paragraph, or a short chapter, and not integrating the region into the wider text. On Air is a social history and relies mainly on qualitative evidence.

A lesson learned from Schmalz's book is that specific histories are important and that generalizations often do not account for the unique variations of the history of radio in the Prairie provinces. Schmalz's book is also instructive, because at times he directly, and at others unwittingly, makes an important point for the scholar studying the Prairie provinces. In the book, Schmalz argues that Saskatchewan's radio listeners were more involved than those in the other Prairie provinces in station phone-in events and social

gatherings and were more enthusiastic about community-based amateur stations.⁴⁵ He notes that the history of radio in Saskatchewan is different from that of its neighbours, Alberta and Manitoba. Although there are similarities in the history of communication technologies on the Prairies, there are also differences and scholars must account for these. It is not sufficient to generalize across the three provinces in all cases. Schmalz furthers his point by illustrating differences between radio stations within Saskatchewan, for example, rural versus urban and northern versus southern stations.

In essence, the popular histories are useful for the detail they provide to the scholar of communication history. Since the authors are often employees of radio or telephone companies and these concerns often funded the studies, the historical and archival material of the companies was available to the researchers. Hence, the books provide new information in print for scholars to consider. The general failing of all the books is that they do not analyze the data that they present. They do, however, provide one way -- the corporate way -- of viewing the rural listeners. The producers, or companies and their employees, are one of the relevant social groups in this study and therefore it is important to know how they viewed the technologies that they provided and how they viewed the rural people that consumed them. These studies help do that.

The final body of literature to be considered is that written by Canadian social historians. These authors include sociologist Robert M. Pike and historians Mary Kinnear, Sara Brooks Sundberg, Angela E. Davis, and Donald G. Wetherell. These works consider peoples' consumption, adoption, use, and reaction to communication and

⁴⁴ Wayne Schmalz, *On Air: Radio in Saskatchewan* (Regina: Coteau Books, 1990), 20, 22, 24.

⁴⁵ Schmalz, *On Air*, 82.

transportation technologies in various depths. These are the only studies that put the primary focus on the consumers and that explore the topics in the consumers' own words.

The social histories have several benefits. The primary one is their attention to the people that used the technologies in their daily lives. As none of the studies here is a book length work, however, there is no room for the authors to explore the consumers of the technologies as individuals. Instead, the authors present and explain the general trends of the consumption of communication technologies.

Canadian women's historians have looked at women, labour, and technology on the Prairie farm. The three articles on the subject are Kinnear's 1988 "Do you want your daughter to marry a farmer?: Women's Work on the Farm, 1922," Sundberg's 1991 "A Female Frontier: Manitoba Farm Women in 1922," and Davis' 1993 "'Valiant Servants': Women and Technology on the Canadian Prairies, 1910-1940." The former two articles have much in common and therefore will be discussed together while the last article, Davis', will be examined alone due to its uniqueness. The articles under consideration provide important information about the daily lives and work of Prairie farm women from the turn of the century until the start of the Second World War.

The three authors concur that hard labour and long hours characterized the lives of Prairie farm families.⁴⁶ For women, this meant many domestic and farm tasks using primitive technology, that increased both the time and drudgery required to perform the labour. Women's indoor tasks during the period included cooking and baking, cleaning

⁴⁶ Kinnear, "'Do you want your daughter,'" 149; Sundberg, "A Female Frontier," 186; Davis, "'Valiant Servants,'" 34; Angela E. Davis, "'Country Homemakers': The Daily Lives of Prairie Women as Seen through the Woman's Page of the *Grain Growers' Guide*, 1908-1928," in *Canadian Papers in Rural History* VIII, ed. Donald H. Akenson (Gananoque: Longdale Press, 1992), 163.

and maintaining the house, caring for children and farm workers, washing the laundry, and doing most of the sewing and mending. In addition, they were responsible for hauling water from the well to the house and doing food processing, preserving, and storage. Most farm women also kept the household accounts. Finally, farm women worked outside as well. They cared for poultry and dairy animals, they marketed surplus eggs, butter, and cream, and they tended the vegetable garden.⁴⁷ This hard work was coupled with relative geographic and social isolation in the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ Farm homes were often far apart and farm women recounted feeling isolated and lonely in their homes.

Kinnear and Sundberg's studies both focus on women's farm lives and work in 1922. The authors chose this particular year for consideration because of the available primary sources. Both studies rely heavily on the United Farm Women of Manitoba's, UFWM's, 1922 Rural Home Survey because it provides quantitative evidence about farm women's work and lives. Kinnear views the survey as valuable because it "sharpens the impression created by individual recollections and provides a broader framework to help distinguish the typical from the unusual."⁴⁹ In addition, Kinnear states that the survey provides historians with "a wealth of detail" about the expected work of farm women.⁵⁰ Manitoba farm women submitted 364 responses to the UFWM, a sizable number from which to draw conclusions.

⁴⁷ Kinnear, "Do you want your daughter," 149; Davis, "Valiant Servants," 34.

⁴⁸ Davis, "Country Homemakers," 163; Kinnear, "Do you want your daughter," 148; Davis, "Valiant Servants," 33.

⁴⁹ Kinnear, "Do you want your daughter," 138.

⁵⁰ Kinnear, "Do you want your daughter," 149.

While the survey is Sundberg's major primary source, Kinnear uses an additional contemporary source to explore the topic. Responses to an essay contest from the popular agrarian journal, the Grain Growers' Guide, called "Do you want your daughter to marry a farmer?" provide "qualitative evidence of farm women's attitudes towards their work" for Kinnear's article.⁵¹ The essay question asked farm women "'[i]f you had a daughter of marriageable age, would you, in the light of your experience as a farm woman, want her to marry a farmer and make her future life on the farm? If so, why? If not, why not?'"⁵² The journal received 440 replies from Prairie farm women, 360 saying yes and eighty saying no.⁵³ To Kinnear, the essays add testimony to augment the UFWM survey responses.⁵⁴

One of the interesting differences in the two articles is that although both Kinnear and Sundberg use the 1922 Rural Home Survey, each author used a different number of surveys in their statistical calculations. The UFWM executive received 307 replies in time to include in their summary report. Kinnear used 364 surveys in her work, all the surveys that the UFWM ever collected. Sundberg only used 330 surveys in her article. She did not include thirty-four either because they were incomplete or because male farmers completed them, which to Sundberg, negated the survey's purpose of exploring the work lives of farm women. The different number of surveys used by each historian in their statistical calculations is the cause of their slightly different final percentages.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Kinnear, "'Do you want your daughter,'" 137.

⁵² Kinnear, "'Do you want your daughter,'" 147.

⁵³ Kinnear, "'Do you want your daughter,'" 147.

⁵⁴ Kinnear, "'Do you want your daughter,'" 141.

⁵⁵ Sundberg, "A Female Frontier," 200, note 22.

Interestingly, the authors also disagree about how representative the survey respondents were of the entire population of Manitoba. While Kinnear concludes that there is insufficient evidence to either label the respondents “typical” of the province’s female farming population or not, Sundberg argues that the respondents were above average in wealth and land ownership.

Kinnear’s analysis illustrates that when compared with the entire rural population of Manitoba, the survey respondents had higher socio-economic status. First, a greater proportion owned their land in the survey than in the province. Second, more of the survey respondents worked larger farms than was true for the whole province. Third, the women who responded to the survey tended to live in larger homes than did Manitoba’s rural population as a whole.⁵⁶ Finally, the survey over-represented respondents from the older, established, and more prosperous regions of the province. The survey underrepresented the population of the poorer and more recently settled areas of Manitoba.⁵⁷ Kinnear’s evidence seems to suggest that the respondents were above average, especially her claim that “[t]he existing clues suggest that the UFWM respondents had greater capital assets than the average farm family.”⁵⁸ Despite these findings, Kinnear concludes that the survey and contest participants cannot be called “typical” because there is insufficient evidence to prove whether this claim is true or not.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Kinnear, “Do you want your daughter,” 142.

⁵⁷ Kinnear, “Do you want your daughter,” 143.

⁵⁸ Kinnear, “Do you want your daughter,” 150.

⁵⁹ Kinnear, “Do you want your daughter,” 150.

In contrast to Kinnear, Sundberg argues that the survey held a “conservative bias” and that it favoured women who were more likely to benefit from labour-saving technologies in their homes. She bases this argument on two findings: first, the UFWM printed the questionnaire in English only and the women who responded were therefore literate in English and second, the women in the survey came from “slightly wealthier families measured in terms of the number who owned land, and the amount of land they owned.”⁶⁰ Sundberg concludes that these biases only serve to underscore the relevance of the UFWM’s findings: even those women who were better off than the “average” Manitoba farm wife endured physical drudgery and few labour-saving devices. “Average” farm women, therefore, were even worse off, with more primitive homes, than the Rural Home Survey suggested.⁶¹ In a footnote, however, Sundberg negates her first reason, admitting that “[b]ecause literacy figures compiled in the census do not indicate whether or not literate persons could read or write English, it is difficult to measure to what extent the English requirement of the questionnaire biased the survey sample.”⁶² For Sundberg, the second factor, land ownership, still illustrates that the respondents were above average.

Although the survey respondents lived in the more prosperous areas of the province, the UFWM survey revealed that few farm women had “modern” household conveniences, even though cataloguing the rural diffusion of these devices was largely the purpose of the UFWM survey.⁶³ Kinnear and Sundberg discover that farm women in

⁶⁰ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 189.

⁶¹ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 189.

⁶² Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 200, note 20.

⁶³ Kinnear, “Do you want your daughter,” 145, 147, 149.

Manitoba “lacked . . . the most basic labour-saving improvements within the farm home.

...⁶⁴

Sundberg employs these findings to demonstrate “the persistence of a female farming frontier in Manitoba to 1922, a frontier determined by the work lives of farm women.”⁶⁵ She argues that the low number of household conveniences on the farm illustrates that farmers prioritized both land ownership and farm machinery over household devices.⁶⁶ Sundberg claims that farm mechanization was far in advance of basic household labour-saving improvements in 1922. Although the majority of women contributed to farm income through egg, cream, and butter sales, Sundberg argues that many women did not receive an equal share of cash income to spend on labour-saving conveniences.⁶⁷ The paucity of household devices in comparison to farm machinery, therefore, caused the persistence of the female farming frontier on the Prairies to last longer than the male farming frontier. Sundberg writes that the UFWM survey illustrates that the lives of farm women in 1922 bore a “striking resemblance” to farm women’s lives fifty years earlier.⁶⁸ The lack of home improvements, she states, increased the work load of farm women.⁶⁹ Physical drudgery characterized the lives of these “pioneer” farm women and labour-saving household technologies could have eased the physical burdens of female farm work.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 185.

⁶⁵ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 185.

⁶⁶ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 192, 196.

⁶⁷ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 195.

⁶⁸ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 185, 197.

⁶⁹ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 197.

⁷⁰ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 191, 197.

Kinnear draws less controversial conclusions from the UFWM survey. She writes that in 1922, farm women made both major direct and indirect contributions to the farm's productivity by doing outside work and by "catering to the needs of the other workers on the farm."⁷¹ Women, she writes, were "producers as well as reproducers" on the farm and their work increased with the size and composition of the rural household.⁷² Women, however, performed all of these tasks with few of the "modern" labour savers available at the time.

One of the survey's four sections was concerned with farm women's relative geographical and social isolation and communication and transportation technologies.⁷³ Neither author explores this section to the same extent as they discuss the other parts of the survey. Kinnear devotes only two short paragraphs to the issues of isolation and communication devices and Sundberg's treatment of cars and telephones covers half a page. Kinnear explains the survey's findings regarding communication and transportation technologies by stating: "[b]y 1922, however, the geographic isolation of many of these UFWM members could partly be overcome by telephone conversations. A large proportion, 70 percent, had a telephone. Fewer, 62 percent, had a car -- but the survey did not ask whether 'car' could be interpreted as 'truck.' Only 22 percent said they drove the car themselves."⁷⁴ Sundberg notes that the UFWM summary report "lauded" the number of farms with communication and transportation technologies. In her statistical calculations, sixty-three percent of respondents had a car and seventy-two

⁷¹ Kinnear, "'Do you want your daughter,'" 138.

⁷² Kinnear, "'Do you want your daughter,'" 138, 143.

⁷³ Kinnear, "'Do you want your daughter,'" 141.

⁷⁴ Kinnear, "'Do you want your daughter,'" 145.

percent had a telephone. Sundberg points out that although observers heralded the automobile as a boon to farm life because it reduced isolation and was important to community social life and farm operation, less than half of the women who noted cars on their surveys said they could drive them. Sundberg admits that telephones reduced farm isolation as well, but she also argues that “[i]ronically, women living farthest from hospitals, doctors, and markets, and therefore the most likely to benefit from telephone service, were the least likely to have a telephone.”⁷⁵

Neither Kinnear nor Sundberg contrast or explain the paucity of household machines with the relative abundance of communication and transportation devices on the Prairie farms included in the UFWM survey. Sundberg concludes her discussion of these devices by stating that the rate of adoption of these technologies did not extend to the uptake of home labour-saving devices.⁷⁶ A discussion of why communication and transportation technologies were more prevalent in Prairie farm homes than household labour-saving devices would have been instructive for Kinnear and Sundberg to pursue.

The two articles provide invaluable assistance to academics studying the daily life and working conditions of Prairie farm women before the Second World War. Kinnear and Sundberg’s work adds knowledge to the historical literature about farm women’s work lives in 1922 and provides summary statistics calculated from the Rural Home Survey. The articles focus mainly on labour-saving farm and household technologies, and only briefly point to communication and transportation devices. These authors do not explore the reasons for the disparity in the acquisition of home and communication

⁷⁵ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 192, quotation from 193.

⁷⁶ Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 193.

devices. This task is left to Davis' article which discusses telephones, radios, and automobiles on the farm to the greatest extent.

Davis' article seeks to help fill the void of research concerning the impact of technology on rural Canadian women in the early years of the twentieth century.⁷⁷ Her thesis is that "rural women did not have the advantages (and disadvantages) that technology made available to town-dwellers in the early years of the twentieth century, and that their ultimate acceptance and their appreciation of certain types of technology differed from that of their urban sisters."⁷⁸

The article considers three types of technology: household inventions, communication and transportation devices, and farm machines. Davis uses scholar Barbara Drygulski Wright's definition of technology as "'solutions of real problems in a concrete environment.'"⁷⁹

Davis advances three sub-arguments in her work. First, although farm women were aware of the "modern" household technologies available, they believed that the devices would change their lives minimally. Women realized that the devices would reduce the drudgery of household tasks but that they would not decrease their actual work load, or the time spent on housework.⁸⁰ Second, Davis contends that home improvements did not always lag far behind farm improvements as some scholars and contemporary writers insist.⁸¹ Third, Davis argues that communication and transportation devices, the

⁷⁷ Davis, "'Valiant Servants,'" 33.

⁷⁸ Davis, "'Valiant Servants,'" 33.

⁷⁹ Davis, "'Valiant Servants,'" 33.

⁸⁰ Davis, "'Valiant Servants,'" 33, 35.

⁸¹ Davis, "'Valiant Servants,'" 34-35.

telephone, radio, and automobile, were the most desired technologies on the farm because they changed the quality of rural women's lives by removing the isolation they felt.⁸²

Davis considers her first argument with a discussion of available labour savers, dubbed "valiant servants" by one editor of the Grain Growers' Guide. There were two important factors discouraging the purchase of washing machines, dish washers, and vacuum cleaners: they were expensive and they were "dubious in utility," especially in homes without running water or proper flooring.⁸³

Despite the belief of Grain Growers' Guide editors Francis Marion Benyon and Mary P. McCallum that there was a wide gap between home and farm improvements, Davis questions this idea. Davis illustrates that farm men and women were hesitant to adopt both labour-saving home and farm technologies.⁸⁴ She suggests that this reticence was due to two factors: first, farm families did not trust the claims of the proponents of the new technologies. They wanted to see if the devices worked before they bought them. Second, Davis implies that many farmers and their wives did not mind the hard work, they accepted it as a part of their "lot" in life and were skeptical of devices that promised to save labour.⁸⁵

Davis argues that farm families did not show the same reluctance to adopt communication devices. Radios, telephones, and automobiles were more widely accepted in Prairie farm homes than household conveniences.⁸⁶ Farm families were much more willing to adopt communication technologies because radios, telephones, and

⁸² Davis, "Valiant Servants," 33.

⁸³ Davis, "Valiant Servants," 34-35.

⁸⁴ Davis, "Valiant Servants," 35.

⁸⁵ Davis, "Valiant Servants," 39.

⁸⁶ Davis, "Valiant Servants," 35-36.

automobiles allowed for communication, entertainment, independence, and personal enjoyment.⁸⁷ Farm women who had access to telephones, radios, or automobiles felt that they decreased the geographical isolation of the farm by providing more social contact. In many instances, women saw communication technologies as necessities for “modern” farm living because they provided a break from the monotony of household drudgery, isolation, and loneliness.⁸⁸

Davis’ article documents women’s desire for, and pleasure received from, communication technologies and she also discusses the sadness women expressed when they did not own the available communication technologies. Farm women who did not have access to the devices were wishful that they could afford them. Davis states that the women who owned communication technologies seemed much more content with life on the farm than those who did not.⁸⁹

Despite the usefulness of, and enjoyment received from, communication technologies on the rural Prairies, some farmers could not afford to buy them and others who could afford them did not purchase the devices. Farmers may have felt the technology was not useful.⁹⁰

Davis concludes that communication technologies were more important to improving the quality of life of rural women than their urban counterparts because urban women had neighbours close by, entertainment in their town or city, and public transportation. Her second conclusion is that before World War Two, the “positive

⁸⁷ Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 36-37.

⁸⁸ Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 36-38.

⁸⁹ Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 38.

⁹⁰ Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 36, 38.

impact of technology on farm women” was the removal of isolation and not the saving of labour.”⁹¹ To Davis, the true “valiant servants” of the farm household were not washing machines, dishwashers, or vacuum cleaners, but instead, they were the radio, telephone, and automobile.⁹²

The Kinnear, Sundberg, and Davis articles provide insight into women’s lives on the farm in the first half of the twentieth century and illustrate the lack of labour-saving household technology compared to communication devices. Davis provides the most comprehensive study of the question of communication technologies on the rural Prairies. While Kinnear and Sundberg’s articles are important for reconstructing a picture of women’s work on the farm in the early twentieth century, Davis’ article is critical to understanding women and their relationship to communication technology on the Prairies.

Research consultant Donald G. Wetherell’s 1986 article, “Some Aspects of Technology and Leisure in Alberta, 1914-1950,” also considers the use of communication technologies in the farm home. Wetherell’s article “reviews the evolution of leisure activities in Alberta in the early decades of the twentieth century.”⁹³ His research illustrates that leisure and recreational activities in Alberta were “often the focus of a number of social, economic and political issues.”⁹⁴ He begins with a short discussion of the social dimensions of leisure. Wetherell claims that people in the early twentieth

⁹¹ Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 39.

⁹² Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 39-40.

⁹³ In 1990, Wetherell and Irene Kmet published a book, *Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta, 1896-1945* (Regina: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism / Canadian Plains Research Center, 1990) that expanded on the points Wetherell made in his article. Donald G. Wetherell, “Some Aspects of Technology and Leisure in Alberta, 1914-1950,” *Prairie Forum*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 51.

⁹⁴ Wetherell, “Some Aspects,” 51.

century believed that environmental influences largely formed character. People viewed the home as the central social institution, complemented by the church, the school, and the surrounding community.⁹⁵ These beliefs, combined with twentieth century communication and transportation technology, created new recreational activities and greatly altered established ones. Social interests and political and economic priorities were then used by citizens and politicians to either support or criticize the resulting leisure activities.⁹⁶

According to Wetherell, in early twentieth century Alberta, social institutions operated in a largely rural society. Provincial social policy worked to preserve the rural community and uphold the home, school, and church as the primary institutions of society. Modern technology increasingly came to play a role as either a way to reinforce or challenge these objectives. Wetherell argues that politicians believed that public control in the form of censorship was necessary or else motion pictures would challenge the fabric of the rural society and its values. On the other hand, the radio and the automobile could be used to confirm the basic values of the rural Alberta society.⁹⁷

Movies were contentious in Alberta because most of the films were made in the United States. The Alberta government censored and classified films to ensure that the quality and integrity of the movies was consistent with what was taught in the province's churches and schools. Then, children and adults would not learn wrong doing from movie screens.⁹⁸ Wetherell argues that politicians in the early twentieth century feared

⁹⁵ Wetherell, "Some Aspects," 53.

⁹⁶ Wetherell, "Some Aspects," 52.

⁹⁷ Wetherell, "Some Aspects," 53.

⁹⁸ Wetherell, "Some Aspects," 54.

that movies made for sophisticated audiences in large American cities would corrupt the rural and family-oriented values of Alberta society. As a result, Alberta censored, classified, and even banned movies based on content.⁹⁹

Radio, in direct contrast to the movies, generated little reaction. Wetherell submits several reasons for the acceptance of radio as compared to film. First, movies were viewed as a more powerful psychological force than radio because they included a visual element. Second, radio producers seemed to prepare their content for a wider audience than did the movie makers, who created content primarily for large urban audiences. Third, nearly all of Alberta's radio stations had local owners. Hence, radio had a powerful local lobby in its favour that film did not share. Fourth, Albertan William Aberhart used the radio for both political and religious broadcasting which Wetherell suggests lent legitimacy to the argument that radio was a "family" medium. Finally, the "radio was an example of 'modern civilization' that could be controlled through the traditional social agency of the family: almost everyone who listened to radio did so at home."¹⁰⁰ The radio kept entertainment within the home in contrast to other forms of popular entertainment, including movies, that drew people away from the hearth.¹⁰¹ These factors combined to decrease reactions against the radio. Radio was heralded as supporting, and indeed even preserving, traditional values and relationships in Alberta. The radio was said to provide a means of saving the family farm because it helped combat rural isolation and make farm life more attractive.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Wetherell, "Some Aspects," 54-55.

¹⁰⁰ Wetherell, "Some Aspects," 56.

¹⁰¹ Wetherell, "Some Aspects," 58.

¹⁰² Wetherell, "Some Aspects," 58.

Despite the popular perceptions that radio was a more “family” oriented medium, Wetherell argues that the content on Alberta radio was primarily “mass-appeal” shows produced in the United States, as were the movies. In spite of this, however, Wetherell notes that there was never the outcry against the radio as there was against the movies. He thinks that the different reaction to radio was because radio provided in-home entertainment to help counter the boredom and isolation of the winter months on Alberta farms. As well, the radio provided some measure of information, such as documentaries, religious and political broadcasts, news, and weather and commodity reports that provided a measure of utility to the radio that could not be applied to film.¹⁰³

Along with the movies and the radio, Wetherell considers the impact of the automobile on leisure in Alberta. In this section, the author focuses considerably on the rural areas of the province. He notes that people in rural Alberta acquired automobiles at a faster rate than did urban Albertans. He credits this increase to the fact that the car had the most to offer to rural families. Besides allowing increased personal mobility, vehicles were also useful for the family business, the farm. Urban dwellers could easily move about using public transportation, but rural families could not.

As with the radio, boosters billed the automobile as an important invention for the preservation of rural life. The automobile, by giving farm families mobility, helped to decrease the gap that existed between rural and urban standards of life. The car helped to decrease rural isolation and it became central to the recreational life of rural dwellers.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Wetherell, “Some Aspects,” 59.

¹⁰⁴ Wetherell, “Some Aspects,” 61.

Wetherell provides examples of the recreational activities dependent on modern transportation, including fairs, stage performers and midways, hunting, and holidaying.¹⁰⁵

Wetherell argues that the new recreational activities created by modern communication and transportation technologies also had wider impacts. One impact of the car was that the perceived community widened so greatly with enhanced mobility that local institutions, such as rural community halls, began to wither and die. Older rural groups began to dissolve in favour of larger rural-village groups.¹⁰⁶

The author maintains that the perception of “motoring” as a family activity, and the fact that cars made people’s lives easier, suppressed criticism of the new machines. The author suggests, however, that the economic benefits of cars, roads, and related services to the province’s population ought not be overlooked either.¹⁰⁷

Wetherell concludes that modern communication and transportation devices confronted Alberta’s largely rural residents with a period of unprecedented change. Some changes were accepted as beneficial to the traditional society and others were accepted as “an inevitable part of modernization.” Therefore, “a broad mix of economic, political and theoretical factors in provincial life united to shape the response to the impact of modern technology on leisure and social life in Alberta.”¹⁰⁸ Wetherell’s article provides an interesting look at media and transportation technologies in the context of the times, including perceptions about learning and the desirable society.

¹⁰⁵ Wetherell, “Some Aspects,” 61-63.

¹⁰⁶ Wetherell, “Some Aspects,” 64.

¹⁰⁷ Wetherell, “Some Aspects,” 64.

¹⁰⁸ Wetherell, “Some Aspects,” 65.

Pike's unpublished paper "A Chequered Progress: Farmers and the Telephone in Canada: 1905-1951" explores the "discontinuous and contingent" development of farm telephones in Canada, with a major focus on the Prairies. Pike explores four themes in his paper. First, he considers the "social and institutional framework of rural telephone development in Canada at around the turn of the century, focusing upon the attitudes of the major interest groups which played their parts as proponents or tacit opponents of the spread of rural telephony."¹⁰⁹ Second, the paper employs the available statistical data and archival material to trace both national and regional trends in urban and rural demand for telephones, in particular the boom in rural telephony from the 1900s until the 1930s and the decline of telephone subscription during the Depression. Third, Pike offers some explanations for the trends described above, including the impact of competing communication technologies. Fourth, the paper draws comparisons between the Prairies and other Canadian provinces with private telephone companies and between Canadian and American experiences with rural telephony.¹¹⁰

Pike explores the reign of Bell over telephones in Canada, noting that the company favoured larger urban markets over small towns and rural areas.¹¹¹ He also discusses the Prairie province's buy-out of Bell and their subsequent telephone policies.

The "chequered progress" of farm telephones in Canada began with a "major diffusion" of phones from 1905 until the early 1920s and then the stagnation and retreat of diffusion between the late 1920s and 1930s, when a large number of farmers had their

¹⁰⁹ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 3.

¹¹⁰ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 3.

¹¹¹ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 4.

telephones removed as a measure of economy. Prairie farms did not regain previous rates of farm telephone diffusion until the 1940s.¹¹²

Pike, in the tradition of scholars Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles in their 1986 study Monopoly's Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830-1930, believes that the relative success of farm telephones in Saskatchewan was due to their different ownership concept than in Alberta or Manitoba. In Saskatchewan, the government controlled only the major exchanges and the trunk lines, whereas local cooperatives provided rural service.¹¹³ In addition to this argument about telephone organization, Pike points out that the farms of Saskatchewan did have the highest provincial level of net farm income in Canada in the years leading up to the Depression. Referring to the work of Armstrong and Nelles, Pike points out a relationship between net farm income and telephone ownership across Canada in 1921 and 1931.¹¹⁴ During the Depression, farm income in Saskatchewan fell by ninety-one percent in comparison to its 1928 level. Farmers had to give up communication technologies they deemed "social necessities" for rural life, including cars and telephones.¹¹⁵

To further explain the trends in farm telephone ownership, Pike credits the organizational systems of the Prairie provinces with initially spreading telephones into rural areas. While Bell shied away from serving rural areas because of their scattered populations, and hence limited profits, the public telephone companies looked toward the farms. To Pike, "the logic of establishing government telephone systems in the region

¹¹² Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 26.

¹¹³ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 14.

¹¹⁴ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 14.

¹¹⁵ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 16.

was, at least in part, to use public planning and resources, often in the form of subsidies, to overcome . . . physical and economic barriers to the delivery of rural service.”¹¹⁶ Pike suggests that public ownership in the Prairie provinces helped to mitigate the effects of the Depression on the telephone system and government ownership helped to assist the recovery of telephone systems once the Depression ended.¹¹⁷

Pike notes that a second trend influencing the vicissitudes of rural telephone ownership in Canada was other communication technologies. He states that the evidence suggests that many farmers considered the car to be more of a “functional necessity” to the farm than a telephone could be.¹¹⁸ In the 1920s, a “substitution effect” was strong and farmers were substituting cars for telephones. By the late 1920s and through the Depression, however, there was a “competition” between continuing to rent a telephone and buying gas for a car that a farmer already owned.¹¹⁹

The value of these social histories is that they explore the topic of rural communities’ uses and perceptions of communication technologies. Unfortunately, the available studies either do not look at more than one communication technology in depth or they look at the question too briefly for a detailed analysis. This study will considerably augment the available secondary literature of the social history of communication technologies on the rural Canadian Prairies between 1900 and 1950.

All three bodies of secondary literature make important contributions to the history of telephones, radios, and automobiles on the Prairies. The political-economic

¹¹⁶ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 21.

¹¹⁷ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 22.

¹¹⁸ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 23.

¹¹⁹ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 24.

studies provide an institutional and organizational understanding of the industries. The popular literature provides much anecdotal evidence about producers and, to a lesser extent, consumers of the devices. The social histories begin to explore factors influencing people's consumption, use, and perceptions of communication and transportation technologies. This study, however, will attempt to further explore the social history of telephones and radios on Prairie farms using the studies mentioned above as a foundation.

The “Consumption Junction”: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Communication scholars have historically studied communication technology and media by using one of three underlying theoretical frameworks. These frameworks are “hard” and “soft” technological determinism and “symptomatic” analysis.

Technological determinism focuses on the development of technologies and the changes that they cause. According to communication scholar Raymond Williams, technological determinism:

is an immensely powerful and now largely orthodox view of the nature of social change. New technologies are discovered by an essentially internal process of research and development, which then sets the conditions of social change and progress. Progress, in particular, is the history of these inventions which “created the modern world.” The effects of the technologies, whether direct or indirect, foreseen or unforeseen, are as it were the rest of history.¹

This perspective tends to view technologies and their producers as all-powerful. In concert with Williams’ explanation above, sociologist Claude S. Fischer writes that technological determinism treats “technology as an external, exogenous, or autonomous

¹ Raymond Williams (1974) quoted in Brian Winston, “How Are Media Born and Developed?,” in *Questioning the Media: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed., eds. John Downing, Ali Mohammadi and Anabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 57.

‘force’ that ‘impacts’ social life and alters history. . . .”² In this view, therefore, technology appears to come from outside of the society in which is employed.

Technological determinism is a grand approach that sees the history of communication devices as central to the history of the modern world. Communication scholar James Carey wrote that the approach views the “media not merely as technical appurtenances to society but as crucial determinants of the social fabric.”³ Through this approach, the history of the mass media becomes synonymous to a history of Western civilization. The media devices bias the formation of social organizations in societies because the device “will favor the growth of certain kinds of interests and institutions at the expense of others and will also impose on these institutions a form of organization.”⁴ From the technological determinist point of view, therefore, the central effect of communication technology is on social organization, regardless of the content of the media.⁵

This perspective holds that technological devices are both created and used in the most rational and efficient manner possible.⁶ Scholars that use this approach maintain that technologies develop from “the logical unfolding of scientific rationality” and they find their place within a society “according to principles of economic optimization.”⁷ If

² Claude S. Fischer, America Calling: The Social History of the Telephone to 1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 8.

³ James W. Carey, “Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan,” The Antioch Review XXVII (1967): 5; see also Manuel Castells, “The Information Technology Revolution,” in The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 36.

⁴ Carey, “Innis and McLuhan,” 9.

⁵ Carey, “Innis and McLuhan,” 36; Nick Stevenson, Understanding Media Cultures: Social Theory and Mass Communications (London: Sage, 1995), 127.

⁶ Fischer, America Calling, 8.

⁷ Fischer, America Calling, 9-10.

the technologies are both created and used in the most efficient manner possible, they will be used to the greatest advantage in a society.

The second or “soft” form of technological determinism still envisions a causal link between technology and society, but this link is less mechanical than in the “hard” determinism. “Soft” determinism, also called the “impact-imprint model,” holds that new technologies do alter history, but in a different way than in the previous approach. Scholars that use the “soft” determinism approach believe that technology alters history “by the cultural and psychological transfer of their essential qualities to their users.”⁸

Political scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool used this approach when studying the telephone. Pool wrote that “the study of the telephone’s social impact belongs to the important and subtle class of problems in the social sciences which demands a logic more complex than that of simple causality -- a logic that allows for purposive behavior as an element in the analysis.”⁹ He explained that the telephone changed people’s relationship to both space and time. He did, nonetheless, state that other social variables shaped the use of the “newfound power” of the device.¹⁰ Pool admits, although he sees that social variables helped to shape the uses of the telephone, that the technology itself is in command in some circumstances and respects.¹¹ This “soft” determinism, therefore, admits that there is more to the “social impact” of a technological device, but it still gives technology a power over uses and impacts.

⁸ Fischer, *America Calling*, 10.

⁹ Ithiel de Sola Pool, “Introduction,” in *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, ed. Ithiel de Sola Pool (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977): 4.

¹⁰ Pool, “Introduction,” 4-5.

¹¹ Pool, “Introduction,” 9.

Fischer believes that “hard” technological determinism is “too rationalized, mechanical, and lacking in social context” to be useful in all studies of communication technologies and societies.¹² He argues that “soft” technological determinism is too reliant on imagery and not concrete evidence to prove its point.¹³

By attributing power to technology, research, and development, the technological determinism theory tends to neglect history and the social context. It views consumers as malleable and not influenced by their economic and social circumstances.¹⁴ This passive view of people’s adoption of technology is not useful for studying the adoption of communication technology on the rural Canadian Prairies because, as this thesis shows, people were quite active in their uses and choices of communication technologies.¹⁵

Fischer argues that “[o]ur way of thinking about the *causal* link between technology and social action impedes our understanding of technology’s role. Even the language we employ can be a problem, as in the common use of the word *impact* to describe the consequences of technological change.”¹⁶ He suggests, therefore, that scholars abandon the idea of the “impact” of technology entirely for it misleads scholars’ attentions away from social concerns. The view that technological developments impact elements of society does not adequately explain the different development of technologies in different nations and cultures. Consumers of technologies are not, as the technological determinists would have it, always influenced by economic and

¹² Fischer, *America Calling*, 12.

¹³ Fischer, *America Calling*, 12.

¹⁴ Winston, “How Are Media,” 73.

¹⁵ Winston, “How Are Media,” 72.

¹⁶ Italics are Fischer’s. Fischer, *America Calling*, 6.

technological efficiency. Rather, they are influenced by the institutions and cultures of their society.¹⁷

A second theoretical framework, called “symptomatic” analysis, describes technologies as expressions of a culture, not as intrusions into it. Fischer wrote that scholars that use this approach: “treat a technology as the embodiment or symptom of a deeper cultural ‘logic,’ representing or transmitting the cultural ethos that determines history.”¹⁸ An illustration of this is the idea of the grand march of history and the railroad in the United States as a symbol of inevitable progress and development. Technologies become expressions of social change, progress, or rationalization. Specific technologies are not important. Instead, scholars who use “symptomatic analysis” view technologies as “the actual instrument of a deeper process or just a sign of it, a synecdoche for all technology.” The analysis is not concerned with either the uses or misuses of technology.¹⁹

This approach is insufficient, however, because it assumes that technologies operate in parallel with homogenous effects. Rather than being parallel, however, the uses of different technologies may clash or compete, such as the telephone and radio on the rural Prairies from 1921 to 1951. This approach also assumes that the effects of any device are the same for all people, but this too is unsatisfactory.²⁰ This grand approach to technology does not allow scholars to understand why and how people come to use technologies and how it affects their lives.²¹

¹⁷ Fischer, *America Calling*, 9.

¹⁸ Fischer, *America Calling*, 8.

¹⁹ Fischer, *America Calling*, 13.

²⁰ Fischer, *America Calling*, 12-15.

²¹ Fischer, *America Calling*, 16.

Fischer criticizes this approach mainly because it assumes that “modern technologies form a coherent, consistent whole -- a contention that follows almost necessarily from the idea of an underlying process.”²² The three problems with this approach are all tied to this idea of holism. Fischer objects to the claims that “technologies operate in parallel with homogeneous effects,” that “the several effects of any device operate in parallel and are the same for all people,” and “that technology has cumulative effects: . . .”²³

Scholars have recently begun a movement away from these approaches, citing that they do not allow the consumer any agency and that they assume that all people’s relationships with technological devices are the same. These frameworks, therefore, do not adequately study the history of communication technology. In answer to these inadequacies, scholars have developed new approaches to study technology and society.

In What I Came to Say, Raymond Williams expresses discontent with the traditional ways of studying technology and social change. He reminds the reader that communication systems must always be seen as social institutions and he urges that scholars think about “the real relations between communications technologies and social institutions.”²⁴ Technology, to Williams, is always social and he urges scholars to remember that “technical inventions are always made *within* societies and that societies are always more than the sum of relations and institutions. . . .”²⁵

²² Fischer, America Calling, 13.

²³ Fischer, America Calling, 14-15.

²⁴ Raymond Williams, What I Came to Say (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 172.

²⁵ Italics are Williams’. Williams, What I Came to Say, 173.

Several scholars have arrived at conclusions similar to Williams. In an introduction to their groundbreaking collection, Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch wrote: “[a]uthors have been concerned with moving away from the individual inventor (or ‘genius’) as the central explanatory concept, from technological determinism, and from making distinctions among technical, social, economic, and political aspects of technological development.”²⁶ They have been moving towards a new approach to the study of technologies that they call the social construction of technology.

The theoretical framework guiding this thesis is the social construction of technology (SCOT) perspective, also called social constructivism. The best work explaining the aspects of the theory is The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Direction in the Sociology of History and Technology, a collection edited by Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch. Studies that employ social constructivism to analyze communication technology include Fischer’s America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940, communication scholar Carolyn Marvin’s When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electronic Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century, and Cowan’s More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave.²⁷

There are several different variations of the social construction of technology approach, each fashioned by the particular scholar who employs the thesis. There are,

²⁶ Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch, “General Introduction,” in The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology, eds. Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), 3.

²⁷ Claude S. Fischer, America Calling: The Social History of the Telephone to 1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Carolyn Marvin, When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electrical Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford University Press,

however, some underlying points, foundational points, used in each social constructivist approach. These include the indeterminacy of technological change, technology as a social construct, relevant social groups, and the experiences of people, not technology, as the central focus of the approach.

The indeterminacy of technological change challenges the idea of technological determinism. SCOT theorists argue that there is another way to study technology than just viewing technological development as the “inevitable result of scientific progress. . . .”²⁸ Technological development, to these theorists, is not a “seamless sequence of technical events, each automatically triggering its successor.”²⁹ The development of technologies is not a predetermined element of “progress.” Instead, outside influences and factors help to determine the development of new technologies. These factors are social, political, and economic. Media scholar Brian Winston divides these factors into the “supervening social necessities” that accelerate the development of media and technology and the “‘law’ of the suppression of [media’s] radical potential” which includes the factors that work to slow the disruptive impact of new technology.³⁰ A variety of factors other than “progress,” thus, influence technological change.

Technology, to social constructivists, is not following a pre-determined path in the name of progress. Instead, technology is a social construct: the life experiences of a host of social actors determine the development and use of communication technologies. People and their choices influence the direction of technological development. The

1988); Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

²⁸ Winston, “How Are Media,” 60.

²⁹ Winston, “How Are Media,” 61.

³⁰ Winston, “How Are Media,” 68-69.

SCOT perspective holds that struggles and negotiations occur among interested parties, including producers and consumers, that shape the history of technology. As communication scholar Robin Mansell writes, the SCOT perspective is useful because it draws "attention to the way that the social histories and biographies of individual and collective actors affect the entire life-cycle of technologies from their conception to their abandonment."¹¹

The approach studies "individual and collective actors" through Pinch and Bijker's concept of "relevant social groups." These are "institutions and organizations (such as the military or some specific industrial company), as well as organized or unorganized groups of individuals. The key requirement is that all members of a certain social group share the same set of meanings, attached to a specific artifact."¹² These groups are crucial to any study using the social construction of technology theory because, as Cowan notes, they "influence the creation, the demand for, the production, the diffusion, the acceptance, or the opposition to new technologies."¹³ One of the first tasks in any SCOT analysis, therefore, is to identify and describe the relevant social groups. The identification of a group involves the selection of groups or individuals who had an impact on the development of a technology or who are consumers of the technology. There are several relevant social groups involved in this study. There were the government politicians and policy makers at both the federal and provincial levels:

¹¹ Robin Mansell, "Communication by Design?," in Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies, eds. Robin Mansell and Roger Silverstone. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 33-34.

¹² Trevor J. Pinch and Wiebe E. Bijker, "The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other," in The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology, eds. Wiebe E. Bijker, Trevor J. Pinch, and Thomas P. Hughes, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989), 30.

the companies and cooperatives that owned the technology, manufactured it, and provided service; the agrarian journalists; the potential and actual consumers of the device; and those who were too impoverished to own communication technology. The thesis will explain how the different relevant social groups perceived communication technologies and how these perceptions compared with those of Prairie farm people. The description of the groups examines their power, economic strength, the use of the artifact to the group, and other factors to help give an explanation of the developmental process. Another task for describing the relevant social group is to identify the problem each group has and wants to solve through the use of technology.³⁴ For rural Prairie people, the problem to be solved was the relative social and geographical isolation of farm families from their neighbours and from services such as the market, train station, school, doctor, and church.

A focus on relevant social groups through the social construction of technology thesis allows the life experiences of people, rather than technologies, to be central in explaining the development of new devices. Scholars following the thesis see technology as a result of the society in which it emerges. It allows scholars to study the wider context around a technological artifact, the "sociopolitical milieu" in which it developed.³⁵

The reality for some consumers, however, was that they had little or no interaction with the producers of technology because of their remote location or impoverished economic situation. This is especially true of consumers who lived in rural areas. These

³³ Cowan, "The Consumption Junction," 262.

³⁴ Pinch and Bijker, "The Social Construction of Facts," 34-35.

consumers, however, still experienced and reacted to the technologies. This work will look at these experiences. It begins with the observation that the experiences of consumers with communication technologies appear to follow a pattern. In order to understand such patterns, we must look at various theoretical concepts taken from a number of scholars of communication technology. The cycle begins with the "consumption junction," or the place and time when consumers chose between competing technologies. The choice of a technology, therefore, involved competition between available devices for the consumer's money. The next phase in the cycle was domestication, which occurred once a technology had won the competition. Families now found a role for the technology within their homes. In the initial period that a technology was in the home, consumers appeared to experience the technology as a wondrous marvel capable of great, new things. The initial enthusiasm, however, appeared to wear off as the technology becomes an aspect of daily life. In the end, consumers replace the technology with something that outperformed it or the device remained in the background, useful only for its daily functions. These stages are outlined below in further detail.

Communication scholars Roger Silverstone and Leslie Haddon suggest that information and communication technologies have biographies that involve production and consumption as well as design and domestication.³⁶ The aforementioned pattern of competition, consumption, domestication, and replacement fits loosely within this notion

³⁵ Pinch and Bijker, "The Social Construction of Facts," 46.

³⁶ Roger Silverstone and Leslie Haddon, "Design and Domestication of Information and Communication Technologies: Technical Change and Everyday Life," in Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies, eds. Robin Mansell and Roger Silverstone, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 67.

of a technology's biography. It does, however, leave out the production and design events. As well, caution must be exercised in using the terms "biography" and "life cycle" with respect to inanimate objects. Perhaps the pattern suggested here is more a biography of people's experience with technology, than a biography of the technology itself.

While the social construction of technology thesis is an important step toward giving people more agency in the development of new technologies, some scholars view the perspective as too focused on the producer, as Cowan and Fischer argue. To direct her attention to the consumer of technologies, Cowan created the idea of the "consumption junction," a user heuristic, to examine what happens to technology once it is taken up by consumers. The "consumption junction" is the point where "the final consumers choose, employ, and experience a technology."³⁷

Cowan's 1989 article, "The Consumption Junction: A Proposal for Research Strategies in the Sociology of Technology," focuses on the "actual or potential consumer" of a device. Cowan writes that the scholar must imagine the "consumer as a person embedded in a network of social relations that limits and controls the technological choices that she or he is capable of making."³⁸ Cowan's analysis of the "network" examines a consumer's context and experiences. She looks at the:

consumption junction, the place and the time at which the consumer makes choices between competing technologies, and [tries] to ascertain how the network may have looked when viewed from the inside out, which elements stood out as being more important, more determinative of

³⁷ Fischer, *America Calling*, 17.

³⁸ Cowan, "The Consumption Junction," 262.

choices, than the others, and which paths seemed wise to pursue and which too dangerous to contemplate.³⁹

To analyze the “consumption junction,” several things must be considered. Scholars must define consumers in relation to the artifact that they are thinking about buying, in the case of this study, the “potential consumers of radios” or “potential subscribers to telephone service.” Scholars must try to determine the reasons that caused consumers to act in the way they did. The factors influencing consumption include socioeconomic variables, such as living in urban or rural areas, social and physical relations in the home, and the evaluation of a technology’s usefulness to a family. The reasons for consumption differ between each potential consumer.⁴⁰

The “consumption junction” concept of the SCOT perspective is the most useful theoretical framework for an examination of people’s evaluation, consumption, and uses of technology on the Canadian Prairies. It is a valuable tool for studying radios, telephones, and Prairie farm families because Prairie farmers were often not involved in making production choices at the development or regulation stage. They had few opportunities to negotiate and interact with the producers of technology and the policy-makers, although there were some notable exceptions, such as the 1928 Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting hearings. Farmers did not have much of a voice in the design and development stage of communication technologies but they did influence the domestication of the technologies: their purchase, uses, and adoption into the farm

³⁹ Cowan, “The Consumption Junction,” 263.

⁴⁰ Cowan, “The Consumption Junction,” 263-264, 274.

home. Farm families were more likely the consumers of the devices. It is here, therefore, with the potential consumer and user, that the inquiry must be focused.

Despite the usefulness of this conceptual approach to the study of radios and telephones on Prairie farms from 1900 to 1950, a limitation to the framework must be noted and explained. The primary limitation of the "consumption junction" is that it does not tell the whole story because it does not focus on policy or successive inventions and improvements to technology. The "consumption junction," according to Cowan, does not "penetrate deeply into the processes of invention, innovation, development, and production (the initial stages in the evolution of a technological system), but it can open up the 'black box' of diffusion (the final stage)."⁴¹ The approach examines only one stage in a process, but scholars have generally neglected this stage in previous work.

The "consumption junction" approach is useful for a social history such as this because it looks at the level of the users, in their own situations, instead of at the greater organizational context. The approach, therefore, allows scholars to understand the particularities and nuances of the perception and use of communication technology on the rural Canadian Prairies.

One of the important factors affecting the consumption of communication technologies on the rural Prairies was the economic position of each family. Different technologies, according to G. J. Mulgan, always compete for scarce family resources. His "law of relative constancy" of media expenditure proposes that families allot only a certain amount of household income to the purchase of media and communication

⁴¹ Cowan, "The Consumption Junction," 278.

technologies.⁴² As such, media and devices compete among themselves for the available money. Not only did families decide between telephones, radios, and automobiles, but also between these and newspapers and magazines. This “law” holds especially true for the Prairies where the vicissitudes of wind, hail, drought, frost, and pests created a wide fluctuation of yearly farm returns. Prairie farmers often did not have a lot of money and they had to choose between communication technologies, if they could afford them at all.⁴³ During the agricultural depression between 1921 to 1941, for example, economic necessity forced some families to substitute one communication technology for others they perceived as more useful. Many could not afford to possess all of the available devices. Thus, telephone subscriptions fell, but radio and automobile ownership increased. The telephone lost the competition.⁴⁴

Once a consumer purchases a communication technology, it is domesticated, or found a place and role in the buyers’ home. The domestication of technology concept is borrowed from Silverstone and Haddon. It is the process where families appropriate a technology and make it acceptable and familiar in their household. The authors acknowledge that the domestication process is a complex one. The complexities are “informed not just by available resources, but by household priorities: informed not just

⁴² G. J. Mulgan, Communication and Control: Networks and the New Economies of Communication (New York: New Guilford Press, 1991), 15.

⁴³ Farmers called the rural Prairies “next-year country” because often drought, wind, pests, or disease destroyed crops. Despite losing crops, farmers stayed on the land, saying that “next year” they would have a bumper crop. Barry Broadfoot, Next-Year Country: Voices of Prairie People (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), xi; Burnet, Next-Year Country, 4-5.

⁴⁴ During the Depression, telephone subscriptions on the Prairies fell in favour of the automobile because some farmers preferred the use of their cars to paying rent on their telephones. The need for rural telephones decreased once automobiles were introduced and roads improved. The Census data illustrates that despite the decline in rural Prairie telephone ownership from 1921 to 1941, the rate of radio and automobile ownership increased. Farmers were willing to substitute one technology for other devices they deemed more useful. Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 23-24; Fischer, “Technology’s Retreat,” 300, 314.

by gender but also by age and class; and informed above all by a mixture of both high and, for some, disappointed, expectations, principally with regard to the software [content]; as well as anxieties, principally with regard to whether the new purchasers had backed the 'right' technology."⁴⁵ To Silverstone and Haddon, the domestication of technology is fundamentally conservative because families find new technology a place beside, or as a replacement for, existing ones. They are used for tasks already performed differently within the home: "consumers look to incorporate new technologies into the patterns of their everyday life in such a way as to maintain both the structure of their lives and their control of that structure."⁴⁶ This concept is useful because it looks at how people adopt technology into their daily routines. It does not infer that technology has a revolutionary impact. Instead, a new technology makes a previous task easier or more efficient. For example, farm families always ran errands: they used horses and wagons to get the mail, pick up supplies, deliver products to the train, or go visiting. The automobile allowed these chores and pleasures to be performed more quickly and without using a precious farm labourer, the horse. The telephone and radio, as well, replaced the agricultural journal as the main source of farm information, such as price reports and weather forecasts, because the telephone and radio were sources of instant and up-to-date information, whereas the agricultural newspapers delivered "old" news.

A related concept to domestication is communication scholar Paddy Scannell's idea of dailiness. In his 1996 book, Radio, Television & Modern Life, Scannell illustrates that consumers initially greeted radio broadcasting as a wonderful and

⁴⁵ Silverstone and Haddon, "Design and Domestication," 56-57.

marvelous invention. Audiences' references to the marvels of broadcasting, however, soon disappeared. Scannell argues that the "wonder" of communication devices are hidden once the technology becomes a part of daily life; they are no longer noteworthy. He writes:

[t]he kind of theory presented in this book finds the world (and in particular the world of broadcasting) as enchanted and enchanting, meaningful and full of meaning. This is not a fanciful trope. The language used to describe the invention of radio first and, later, television expressed over and over again a sense of wonder at them as marvelous things, miracles of modern science. Their magic has not vanished. It has simply been absorbed, matter-of-factly, into the fabric of ordinary daily life.⁴⁷

Technology, to Scannell, becomes a part of consumers' daily routines. The radio became a reliable instrument of daily programming. People incorporated it into their lives and they expected the same information and entertainment from radio each and every day at the same time.⁴⁸ People's perception of the device as wonderful and revolutionary was lost in its daily usefulness.

The final concept useful for this study is Brenda Maddox, Lana Rakow, Fischer, and Scannell's idea of sociability. Maddox, Rakow, and Fischer discuss the intrinsic uses of the telephone, or use of the telephone for social contacts between family, friends, neighbours, and clients.⁴⁹ Personal conversation played a key role in the acceptance of

⁴⁷ Silverstone and Haddon, "Design and Domestication," 60; see also Vipond, *Listening In*, 98; Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New*, 325.

⁴⁸ Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television & Modern Life* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 21.

⁴⁹ Scannell, *Radio*, 145-146.

⁵⁰ Brenda Maddox, "Women and the Switchboard," in *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, ed. Ithiel Sola de Pool, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1977), 285; Fischer, *America Calling*, 75; Lana Rakow,

the telephone into farm homes. This idea of sociability can extend to the radio as well because listeners often treated radio announcers as their friends.⁵⁰ Scannell asserts that the relationship between broadcasters and their audiences is purely social.⁵¹ A concept of social conversation is important for studying communication technologies on the rural Prairies because the lack of sociability was the problem that farm families attempted to mitigate through the consumption of communication technologies.

The cycle of people's experiences with technology can be condensed into three questions formulated by Fischer. In his study of telephones in three California towns, Fischer proposes to employ a "user heuristic" composed of the questions. These questions are important for this study because they provide important entry points for an exploration of people's acquisition and use of communication devices. The questions are: first, "why and how did individuals use the technology?" Second, "how did using it alter other, less immediate aspects of their lives?" and third, "how did the collective use of a technology and the collective responses to it alter social structure and culture?"⁵² Fischer writes that these questions are important to exploring the user's experience with the technology. He argues "[h]istorians have documented the development of many . . . technologies, but have rarely described their social roles. . . ."⁵³ The questions that Fischer proposes are a way to explore the social role of technology on Prairie farms.

Fischer's questions, and the concepts discussed above, are useful for a social history of communication technologies in rural Prairie homes. Together they will

Gender on the Line: Women, the Telephone, and Community Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 37.

⁵⁰ Scannell, *Radio*, 56.

⁵¹ Scannell, *Radio*, 23.

⁵² Fischer, *America Calling*, 20-21.

compose the conceptual and theoretical framework used to study the radio and telephone on the rural Canadian Prairies between 1900 and 1950.

⁴² Fischer, America Calling, 20.

“An Invaluable Service to the Farmers of Western Canada”: Availability and Ownership

This chapter illustrates the availability of telephone service and radio broadcasting stations from the technologies' inception until 1950. In addition, it explores the number of Prairie farm people who possessed telephones, radio receiving sets, and automobiles and it discusses federal, provincial, and corporate policies that either increased or restricted access to communication and transportation technologies and consumers' choices about them. This exploration serves as a foundation from which to view people's uses, perceptions, and reactions to the communication and transportation technologies discussed in the next chapter.

The ownership of the communication systems and the official policy of governments and corporations were two factors that affected the diffusion of communication technologies on the Prairies and across Canada. This chapter illustrates that the ownership and diffusion of communication technologies on Prairie farms rose and fell in part depending on the ownership of the technological systems, the policies that the companies followed, and the cost of equipment and rates for service. Other factors, including income, decisions of utility, and the socio-geographical context of the Prairie region will be discussed later.

Two concepts are particularly important for examining the institutional histories of the telephone systems and radio broadcasting on the Prairies. These ideas are universal service and universal access. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries, the idea of “universal service” became prevalent in the provisioning of communication services. Policy-makers formulated two conceptions of universal service. The first, called universal service, is “a telephone network that covers all of a country, is technologically integrated, and connects as many citizens as possible.”¹ This means that the telephone systems were all connected so that all subscribers could call all other users.² The second concept, called universal access, implies “a telephone in every home, affordability, or government policies to subsidize telephone penetration.”³ The universal access concept had a greater influence on the diffusion of Prairie telephones and radios than did universal service.

Originally, the Montreal-based Bell Telephone Company provided telephone service to the Prairie provinces. The rhetoric, although not always the practice, of the contemporary telephone companies was to provide the best possible service to the greatest number of people. An amendment to Bell’s charter legislation in 1882, requested by the company’s president Charles F. Sise, stated that Bell was “a work for the general advantage of Canada.”⁴ Despite this charter clause, the company was notorious for avoiding rural areas and small towns in favour of more profitable urban markets.⁵ A small, scattered population over expansive distances was not appealing to commercial ventures who did not view rural residents as a viable market for their technology. As a

¹ Milton Mueller, Universal Service: Competition, Interconnection, and Monopoly in the Making of the American Telephone System (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), 1.

² Mueller, Universal Service, 3.

³ Mueller, Universal Service, 8.

⁴ Charles F. Sise quoted in Armstrong and Nelles, Monopoly’s Moment, 72; see also Sise quoted in Ogle, Long Distance Please, 130.

⁵ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 4; Winseck, Reconvergence, 127; Babe, Telecommunications, 130.

result, telephone development in Manitoba and the North-West Territories were in their infancy.

In 1903, a handful of ranchers in what would soon become the province of Alberta received the area's first rural lines. C. W. Peterson, an early champion of rural telephones and the secretary of the Calgary Board of Trade, managing director of the Territorial Livestock Association, and founder of the Farm and Ranch Review, worked to have more rural areas connected to Calgary by telephone. Peterson's efforts seemed to be in vain, however. The Bell representatives told him that to connect five ranches to the Calgary central telephone exchange by a rural line, the ranchers would have to put up the poles themselves and then pay fees of sixty dollars per year per telephone for service.⁶ Peterson thought that this was unfair and he claimed that Bell was withholding telephone service from the rural areas of the territories. He wrote to the Toronto World in May of 1904:

I have long since maintained that the evolution of the ranch and farm requires the generous use of all modern inventions. The telephone, I believe, is the most useful of the many modern devices for rendering farming easy and profitable. In the past few years I have called many meetings of farmers to discuss the subject of cooperative work in this direction but in every instance we have been blocked by the Bell people. That we are being damaged, directly and seriously, by the Bell people, I am certain.

There are two important ideas in Peterson's sentiments. First, he believed that the telephone could help improve the quality of farm life. Second, he saw the cooperative

⁶ Cashman, Singing Wires, 116.

efforts of farmers as a good way to further telephone development in rural areas.

Peterson's words foreshadowed later developments in the three Prairie provinces. After the publication of this letter, local Bell representatives asked him for suggestions of which ranches ought to be connected with Calgary. Although Peterson provided the company with a list, Bell did not construct the rural lines.⁸

To combat the telephone problem in the newly formed Prairie provinces, businessmen and municipalities formed independent telephone companies to service areas neglected by Bell. Bell, however, often refused connection of the independents to their long-distance lines, effectively ending universal service through the interconnection of rural areas.⁹

In 1905, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier formed the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Telephone Systems, under postmaster Sir William Mulock, to study the Canadian telephone system. The Committee heard witnesses criticizing Bell's policy. One witness presenting before this committee argued "'this branch of telephony [rural telephony] has in the past been absolutely neglected and discouraged in Canada by the existing companies, for the reason that it does not prove such a lucrative business as the exchanges in the towns and cities.'"¹⁰ The Bell president agreed, stating to the committee:

[i]f it is a question of erecting an exchange in one large place and of giving a service needed by 1,000 people we certainly . . . *give preference to the*

⁸ Peterson quoted in Cashman, Singing Wires, 116.

⁹ Cashman, Singing Wires, 116, 118.

¹⁰ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 4-5; Canada, Mulock Committee, Proceedings of the Select Committee on Telephones (Ottawa: Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1905), 821.

¹¹ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 4-5.

*needs of a large number rather than to a lot of farmers. . . . [I]f a line is required to give a service to the . . . mercantile community of Montreal and Toronto, and on the other hand the same amount of money is required for farmers' lines . . . on any proper business principle anyone would say: build the long line, and give the service to the greatest number of people to whom it is of the greatest value.*¹¹

Bell Telephones neglected rural areas for telephone service based on economic principles. They knew that urban lines were more profitable and they assumed that urban dwellers and businesses had a greater number of uses for the telephone.

Bell provided the Committee with figures about the state of rural telephone development in Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba. The statistics only highlighted Bell's concentration on urban areas. In the three provinces there were 2,493,471 rural people and 2,000 rural telephones, or about one telephone per 1,250 people. In towns and cities of greater than 7,000 people in Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba, there was one telephone per 21.9 people.¹² Only 2.7 percent of Bell's telephones in Canada were "rural telephones."¹³

Telephone service had not reached many parts of the Prairies by 1905. In a letter to Walter Scott, the West Assiniboia Member of Parliament, W. R. Abbott, the Mayor of Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, wrote that "[t]his town and district has not yet enjoyed such facilities [telephone facilities], yet look forward to the time when such will be within their

¹¹ Sise quoted in the Minutes of Evidence, Mulock Committee, in Winseck, Reconvergence, 128. emphasis added.

¹² Mulock Committee, Proceedings, 810-811.

¹³ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 4-5.

reach. . . . [U]p to the present no steps have been taken to give such facilities. . . ."¹⁴ This was the situation in many other rural areas and small towns in Canada, especially on the Prairies.

The Committee recorded the rates of telephone service in the cities and towns of the West. The rates show further discrimination by Bell against the Prairies. As of May 22, 1905, the annual residential rates in various Prairie cities were as follows: thirty dollars in Winnipeg, eighteen in Neepawa, between twenty and thirty dollars in Portage la Prairie and Brandon, between twenty-five to thirty-five dollars in Lethbridge, and between twenty and thirty-five dollars in Calgary. The average rate in the western cities was from \$21.33 to \$29.67. In the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, the average minimum and maximum annual price for Bell telephone service was \$16.65 to \$23.16.¹⁵

The Manitoba provincial government began to examine the telephone situation at the same time as the federal government held its inquiry. In 1905, the premier, Sir Rodmond Roblin announced:

the telephone is . . . one of the natural monopolies, and yet is one of the most desirable and necessary facilities for the despatch [sic] of business and for the convenience and pleasure of the people. Therefore, *the price of telephones should be made so low that laboring men and artisans can have the convenience and advantage of the telephone*, as well as the merchant, the professional man and the gentleman of wealth and leisure, and it is our intention to recommend to parliament (i.e., the Provincial Legislature) a proposition of this kind with a view of giving a telephone system to all classes at cost.¹⁶

¹⁴ W. R. Abbott to Walter Scott, 10 May 1905, quoted in "Appendix A," Mulock Committee, *Proceedings*, 80.

¹⁵ Calculated from Exhibit No. 150, Mulock Committee, *Proceedings*, 657-658.

¹⁶ Roblin quoted in James Mavor, *Government Telephones* (New York: Moffat, Yard & Company, 1917), 17-18; emphasis added. Mavor was a distinguished University of Toronto political scientist. His book was an attack on publicly owned telephone systems. The American Telephone and Telegraph

Roblin emphasized the universal access idea, the provisioning of service to those who wanted it at an affordable price. The ideas contained in this announcement were the basis for the formation of Manitoba Government Telephones in 1908.

When the Bell Telephone Company wanted to establish a national telephone network after the turn of the twentieth century, it met with significant resistance on the Prairies, where farmers felt Bell ignored their needs. Since the majority of the population of the three Prairie provinces was rural at this time, the provincial governments heeded the farmers' opinions.¹⁷

On February 14, 1907, the Alberta legislature heard the Liberal government's proposal for the future of telephones in the province. W. H. Cushing, the minister of public works, outlined the policy that the Alexander Rutherford government would take:

the government must largely control all the telephone business of the province. The government gives a clear, bold enunciation that Alberta is in the telephone business to stay. The policy of the government is (1) to own and operate all the long distance or trunk lines; (2) to own and operate

Company funded the book, but it sold as independent scholarship. Mavor wrote the study in the midst of mounting pressure for the government takeover of telephones in the United States. See Babe, *Telecommunications*, 282, note 1.

¹⁷ The population of Canada from 1900 to 1950 was predominantly rural, although by the latter period, the numbers began to shift toward urban areas. The Census of Canada illustrates that Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta were predominantly rural although people left the farm and moved to urban areas increasingly throughout the period. From 1891 until 1951, over half of the Prairie residents were rural. Only in the 1951 Census in Alberta did the percentage of people living in rural areas dip below half of the provincial population, to 48.04 percent. Manitoba and Saskatchewan, however, still had larger rural populations than urban ones. In the former province, 50.49% of the people were rural and in the latter, 55.43% of the population was rural in 1951. From Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics (DBS), *Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume 1 -- Population: General Characteristics* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, Queen's Printer, 1953): Table 13, page 13-1; Mavor, *Government Telephones*, 38-39.

municipal exchanges where desired by the municipality; [and] (3) to construct, own and operate rural telephones.¹⁸

This plan would effectively end Bell's monopoly on telephones in the province and it would remove the company from Alberta.

The lack of willingness on Bell's part to provide rural areas access to the telephone led the provincial governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta to buy out Bell's plant and subscribers in their regions in 1908 and 1909.¹⁹ The provincial governments established public telephone systems that were unique in North America in this respect.²⁰

The Manitoba Government bought the Bell interests in Manitoba for \$3.3 million. On January 15, 1908, Manitoba Government Telephones, MGT, began. Bell had 17,000 of the 25,000 subscribers in Manitoba.²¹ Alberta and Saskatchewan soon followed Manitoba's lead. In 1908, Alberta bought the Bell Telephone interests for \$1.9 million and the government received 1,170 subscribers. On May 1, 1909, Saskatchewan bought the Bell Telephone interests in that province for \$369,000. The takeover gave Saskatchewan Government Telephones 1,600 subscribers. The government also purchased the independent Saskatchewan Telephone Company in June of 1909 for \$150,000.²²

¹⁸ Cushing quoted in Cashman, *Singing Wires*, 138; see also 137. Biographical data from John Blue, *Alberta Past and Present: Historical and Biographical*, vol. 1 of 3 (Chicago, Ill.: Pioneer Historical Publishing Co., 1924), 117; Cashman, *Singing Wires*, 130.

¹⁹ Babe, *Telecommunications*, 103, 107, 110.

²⁰ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 3.

²¹ Babe, *Telecommunications*, 103; Ogle, *Long Distance Please*, 131.

²² Ogle, *Long Distance Please*, 133, states that the Alberta government bought out Bell for \$675,000 and received 2,270 subscribers and that the Saskatchewan government bought out Bell for \$358,000 and

The telephone systems in Alberta and Saskatchewan at the time of the provincial takeovers were very small. Even a decade later, when University of Toronto political scientist James Mavor studied the telephone systems in the three Prairie provinces, the telephone systems in Alberta and Saskatchewan still existed on a smaller scale than that of Manitoba.²³

Although each of the Prairie provinces bought out Bell within a year of each other, the three provinces did not manage their purchases in the same way. Both Manitoba and Alberta created centrally controlled telephone systems. Saskatchewan, in contrast, established a more diffuse system. In that province, the government controlled large municipal exchanges and long distance lines and they allowed local cooperative telephone companies to provide and control rural and small town service.²⁴ As Babe writes, "here the government was content merely to assist rural settlers in building their own telephone systems, albeit providing them with free poles and advice."²⁵ In Alberta, the city of Edmonton owned and operated its own municipal telephone service. Due to this, Alberta Government Telephones, AGT, later found that they could not subsidize rural lines from urban profits as Manitoba Government Telephones did with revenues garnered from Winnipeg.²⁶

The ownership changes of the telephone companies from the Bell Company to publicly owned monopoly utilities controlled by the three provincial governments

received 5,710 subscribers between Bell and the independent companies that they bought. Babe, *Telecommunications in Canada*, 103, 107, 110; Ogle, *Long Distance Please*, 131, 133, 136.

²³ Mavor, *Government Telephones*, viii.

²⁴ Armstrong and Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment*, 189; Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 9; Babe, *Telecommunications*, 107.

²⁵ Babe, *Telecommunications*, 107.

²⁶ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 21, 39-40, note 71.

affected service because the company philosophies and practices of the governments encouraged wider subscription to telephone service.²⁷ After their formation, the Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta provincial telephone companies attempted to expand telephone service farther into their provinces than Bell had accomplished, especially farther into rural areas.²⁸ Each of the Prairie companies adopted a policy of universal access to telephone service.

In the period immediately following the provincial takeovers of Bell, there was intense construction of new pole line mileage and the addition of new subscribers to the provincial systems. The expansion attempts of the Prairie systems worked. In the years following the purchase of the Bell system, each Prairie province increased the number of subscribers to telephonic service. Between 1908 and 1910, Manitoba Government Telephones increased subscribers by 19,446 subscriptions. Saskatchewan Telephone's subscriber rolls had quadrupled by 1912 from 3,410 to 14,826. Alberta Government Telephones increased its number of subscribers by 11,000 between 1908 and 1911.²⁹

Despite the advances made by the provincial telephone systems, in terms of increased rural service, there were some drawbacks to having politicians in the telephone business. The construction boom and euphoria over throwing out Bell, Babe contends, ended abruptly in each province: 1912 in Manitoba, 1915 in Alberta, and 1916 in Saskatchewan.³⁰ At these times, citizens learned that the provincial telephone companies

²⁷ Babe, Telecommunications, 89, 140; Armstrong and Nelles, Monopoly's Moment, 283; Fischer, "Technology's Retreat," 313.

²⁸ Babe, Telecommunications, 103, 107, 110; Cowan Buchwald, "Canadian Universality Policy," 166.

²⁹ Babe, Telecommunications, 103, 107-108, 110-111; Armstrong and Nelles, Monopoly's Moment, 283.

³⁰ Babe, Telecommunications, 104, 108, 110-111.

were losing money and that their governments had employed questionable practices while running the companies.

Before they took over the Bell system, Prairie politicians ranted about the company's unfair policies. These policies included refusing municipally owned companies access to long-distance lines, the neglect of service to rural areas, and predatory pricing.³¹ The provincial telephone companies, however, committed follies of their own. In all three provinces, these included lax bookkeeping and economic mismanagement. The provincial companies claimed high profits, but their bookkeeping procedures omitted accounting for bond repayment and the depreciation of the plant.³² In addition, politicians in Manitoba and Alberta used the telephone company for political purposes. In 1910, an election year in Manitoba, the government promised to bring telephone service to the district of Woodbridge, approximately sixty miles south of Winnipeg, if it was re-elected. To lend support to this claim, Manitoba Government Telephones moved a large number of telephone poles out to the area. The Manitoba Free Press called them "fishing poles for voters."³³ The government even hired local citizens at a rate of six dollars an hour per man and team to construct the lines. Voters reelected the government, but shortly thereafter, MGT took the telephone poles back to the capital city and did not build the promised lines.³³ In Alberta in 1913, the AGT yard contained 47,000 extra telephone poles, costing the province over one million dollars. The year was an election year and the opposition discovered that the company had bought the poles

³¹ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 4, 6; Winseck, Reconvergence, 127.

³² Ogle, Long Distance Please, 137; Babe, Telecommunications, 104, 108, 110-111; Mavor, Government Telephones, 41, 53.

³³ Quoted from Babe, Telecommunications, 103; Mavor, Government Telephones, 76-77.

from people who might be politically expedient during the election.³⁴ In 1921, another election year, Alberta politicians again bought AGT over 400,000 poles, despite the company's financial problems.³⁵ One commentator and critic, Mavor, summarized Manitoba Government Telephones' problems in 1917: "[t]he management has been ineconomical, the enterprise has been handicapped by political intrigue, the finances mingled as they have been with the general finances of the Province have been unsoundly administered from the beginning, and the obligations of the public have been enormously increased without adequate compensatory advantages."³⁶ His observations can be extended to include Alberta and Saskatchewan as well. To Mavor, the problems with MGT afforded "evidence of the most positive character against Government ownership."³⁷

The increased acquisition of telephones on the Prairies due to public ownership did not result in uniform subscription to telephone service across the provinces. One reason for this was the different system structures. The form of organization used by Saskatchewan was more successful, for telephone diffusion, than the centralized model. In the 1920s, Ontario and Saskatchewan were the provinces with the two highest proportions of rural telephone subscription in Canada and the provinces' ownership rates for farm telephones were almost the same as the rates for all the households in the provinces.³⁸ In the rest of Canada, there was a greater gap between farm and urban telephone ownership. In 1921, fifty percent of Ontario farms subscribed and 44.4 percent

³⁴ Ogle, Long Distance Please, 139-140; Babe, Telecommunications, 111.

³⁵ Ogle, Long Distance Please, 140.

³⁶ Mavor, Government Telephones, 163-164.

³⁷ Mavor, Government Telephones, 163.

³⁸ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 13.

of Saskatchewan farms did. In 1931, these figures were 54.1 percent and 34.3 percent. Pike notes that the fall in Saskatchewan farm telephone diffusion was due to the near collapse of the Prairie telephone system during the Depression.³⁹

Despite the early gains in all three provinces, during the 1920s and 1930s, the spread of telephone diffusion eventually slowed, stopped, and then began to recede. The plan adopted by the Saskatchewan telephone company provided the most stable system of telephones over time. The result of Saskatchewan's plan was a wider diffusion of farm phones in the province than occurred for either of its neighbours.

In contrast to Saskatchewan's success, Alberta Government Telephones' rural subscription rates were low. Out of the three Prairie provinces, Alberta had the lowest rate of rural telephone subscriptions for the 1921 to 1951 Census counts.⁴⁰ In 1921 and 1931, Alberta's rural telephone subscription rates were half of those in Saskatchewan. Under-financing and under-servicing plagued Alberta Government Telephones through the province's agricultural depression of the 1920s and caused it to slip from its rank as the fourth largest provider of rural telephones in the country to the last, the ninth, between 1921 and 1931.⁴¹ A low farm telephone diffusion in Alberta, compared to Manitoba and Saskatchewan, lasted for several decades as a result. In the end, Alberta sold its unprofitable rural telephone service to locally owned rural mutual telephone companies.

³⁹ Canada, DBS, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Volume V – Agriculture* (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1925), xxxvi; Canada, DBS, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume VIII – Agriculture* (Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1936), lxxiv; Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 14, Table 2, 16.

⁴⁰ Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Volume V – Agriculture*, xxvi; Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume VIII – Agriculture*, lxxiv; Canada, *Eighth Census of Canada, 1941: Volume IX – Housing*, 83; Canada, *Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III – Housing and Families*, 40-5; Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 21.

⁴¹ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 21.

By the First World War, the Alberta government began to permit the establishment of rural mutual telephone companies to further rural service in the province. AGT stopped rural line construction, but allowed lines constructed by farmers access to the company's long distance lines. AGT planned to take these systems over when the government had money available; however, this takeover did not occur until the 1970s. Sixty companies were in operation by the end of the war.⁴²

Although Alberta originally chose to control the rural lines in the province itself, the dire economic circumstances of the Great Depression made the company cut the rural lines loose. The company sold its rural plant, at five percent of its book value, to locally organized rural mutual telephone companies from 1933 to 1936.⁴³ In Alberta, the sale of Alberta Government Telephones' rural lines turned out to be a boost to rural telephony. Farmers and their wives ran the rural mutual telephone companies from the 1930s until the 1970s, doing all the work including operation of the system, building and maintaining the lines, collecting bill payments, and filing annual reports. As Cashman notes:

something remarkable had happened in the countryside. . . . Under AGT and the principles of a central telephone company the rural system had dropped below eight thousand phones. By the end of 1936, under older principles of rural cooperation, the number was back up to 14,500. A desperation maneuver to save AGT had the effect, in a very bad time, of reachieving the aim of the founders of the province.⁴⁴

⁴² Cashman, Singing Wires, 256-261.

⁴³ Cashman, Singing Wires, 363.

⁴⁴ Cashman, Singing Wires, 365.

It was not until the rural residents took over their telephone service that subscriber numbers began to climb. The rural mutual companies, although they were a measure of desperation on the company's part, at a time when the economic situation of Prairie farmers was unstable, increased rural telephone subscription in Alberta. The rural mutual telephone companies collected money from shareholders to pay for the AGT plant.⁴⁵ Farmers canvassed neighbours and tried to persuade them to join the companies. Despite the gains due to the rural mutual telephone companies, however, rural telephone subscriptions in Alberta lagged behind those in the other Prairie provinces until after the Second World War. The mutual telephone companies controlled rural service in the province from the mid-1930s until the early 1970s, when AGT took control over the rural lines again.⁴⁶

Alberta Government Telephones seemed to see rural subscribers as people contented with limited telephone service. The legislation that permitted for the establishment of the rural cooperatives limited the type of service that the companies could give. The Rural Mutual Telephone Companies Act of 1935 and Articles of Association limited these companies to "furnishing multi-party line telephone service to subscribers within the limits of the rural telephone area created by the Minister of Telephones. . . ."⁴⁷ The companies could only serve people in small rural areas and

⁴⁵ Certificate of Incorporation, GA, M6671, Conrich Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970, box 1, file 1 -- Certificate of Incorporation, Rural Mutual Telephone Companies Act, etc., 1935, 1936, 1970; Certificate of Incorporation, GA, M2289, Freshfield Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1935-1972, box 1, file 1 -- Documents re. Formation of Company, 1936-1937; Annual Return for Year Ended 31 December 1936, GA, M2290, Hampton Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970, box 2, file 37 -- Annual Returns, 1936-1953.

⁴⁶ Cashman, *Singing Wires*, 437-438.

⁴⁷ Rural Mutual Telephone Companies Act, 1935, GA, M2247, Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1934-1974, box 2, file 26 -- Rural Mutual Telephone Companies Act, 1935, p. 11.

subscribers had to be on a line with several other parties. In a letter to Howard P. Wright, future secretary-treasurer of the Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company, on February 21, 1935, J. D. Baker, the Deputy Minister and General Manager of AGT, wrote that "[a] rural subscriber is usually only interested in getting in communication with his neighbor and his market town and is willing to pay the toll charge for the occasional call beyond that."⁴⁸ The Alberta Government attempted to sell rural residents on the idea of rural mutual telephone companies that provided limited service by telling them that "with amalgamation and cooperation, the lines could be operated by the farmers less expensively and just as efficiently as by the Government."⁴⁹ AGT convinced farmers that it was in their best interests financially to take over telephone service. If rural communities decided against forming a rural mutual telephone company, the AGT representative used pressure tactics to compel farmers to change their minds. If the farmers voted against a mutual company, the representative promised to start rolling up the wire the next day. Farmers quickly changed their minds.⁵⁰

Despite the challenges faced by Prairie farmers to receive rural services, one third of Prairie farm homes had a telephone by 1921. By 1931, however, the percentage of Prairie farms with a telephone fell to twenty-five percent and climbed to forty percent

⁴⁸ J. D. Baker (Deputy Minister and General Manager, AGT) to Howard P. Wright, 21 February 1935, GA, M2247, Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1934-1974, box 1, file 2 -- Correspondence, etc., 1934-1935.

⁴⁹ A. M. Munro (Calgary Service Supervisor, AGT) quoted in Minutes of Meeting, 19 June 1936, GA, M2289, Freshfield Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1935-1972, box 1, file 2 -- Minutes of Meetings, 1936-1971.

⁵⁰ Cashman, *Singing Wires*, 364.

only in 1951.⁵¹ For all of Canada in 1921, nearly one third of farms reported a telephone, the lowest rate of ownership at 11.2 percent in Prince Edward Island and the highest at 50.1 percent in Ontario.⁵² By 1931, 32.1 percent of all Canadian farms had a telephone and 54.1 percent of Ontario farms possessed the device. On the Prairies the diffusion rates were 24.2 percent for Manitoba, 34.3 percent for Saskatchewan, and 17.1 percent for Alberta. The agricultural depression and drought combined with a badly maintained rural telephone system in Alberta accounted for the drop in rural telephones in Alberta and Manitoba.⁵³ Alberta had the lowest rate of farm telephone diffusion in the country at this time.⁵⁴ The Census of 1941 found that the rates of farm telephone ownership all over Canada had decreased slightly from the previous count, except for Alberta, where ownership rates increased by one percent. Despite this, Alberta still had a much lower diffusion rate than Manitoba or Saskatchewan. Table 1 shows the percentage of farm telephone subscribers in the three Prairie provinces, Ontario, and Canada from 1921 to 1951.

⁵¹ Canada, Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Volume V -- Agriculture, xxxvi; Canada, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume VIII -- Agriculture, lxxiv; Canada, Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III -- Housing and Families, 40-4 to 40-5.

⁵² Canada, Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Volume V - Agriculture, xxxvi, Table XXIII.

⁵³ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 21.

⁵⁴ Canada, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume VIII -- Agriculture, lxxiv, Table XXIX.

Table 1: Percentage of Farms Subscribing to Telephone Service, 1921 to 1951.⁵⁵

Province	1921	1931	1941	1951
Canada	32.6	32.1	29.3	44.2
Ontario	50.1	54.1	50.9	68.2
Manitoba	33.6	24.2	23.9	43.2
Saskatchewan	44.4	34.3	32.6	50.0
Alberta	21.3	17.1	18.0	27.1

The cost to bring telephones to rural areas varied depending on how far the farm was to the road. The telephone company counted each post and charged the farmer when they installed the line to the farm.⁵⁶ Alberta pioneer Kathleen Strange remembered installing a telephone into the family farm home that was about one mile from the road. She recalled that the installation “cost us quite a large sum,” around three hundred dollars.⁵⁷ The Northern Electric Company, merchants of telephones and telephonic equipment, advertised in the Grain Growers’ Guide to encourage farmers to build their own rural telephone lines to reduce the cost of getting telephone service.⁵⁸ In rural Alberta, some of the mutual telephone companies adopted this practice as well. In 1936, the directors of the Freshfield Mutual Telephone Company, which owned rural lines north of Calgary near Balzac, included in their bylaws that subscribers had to pay all of the expenses for the construction of a new telephone line from the main line to their farm home, although the company would supply new subscribers with poles and wire while the

⁵⁵ Canada, Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Volume V – Agriculture, xxxvi; Canada, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume VIII – Agriculture, lxxiv; Canada, Eighth Census of Canada, 1941: Volume IX – Housing, Table 18 – Occupied Dwellings with Specified Conveniences, 81-83; Canada, Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III – Housing and Families, Table 40, 40-1, 40-2, 40-3, 40-4, 40-5.

⁵⁶ Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 37.

⁵⁷ Kathleen Strange, With the West in Her Eyes: The Story of a Modern Pioneer (Toronto: George J. McLeod Limited, 1937), 160-161.

⁵⁸ Northern Electric Company Advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, IV, no. 23 (January 3, 1912), 32.

company's supply lasted. Once the supplies ran out, the subscriber would also have to pay for the insulated wire and poles on their private property.⁵⁹ The members of the Crossfield Mutual Telephone Company, located north of Calgary, were willing to "spend up to the value of the share paid by a new subscriber to connect his telephone to the nearest line. . . ." The subscriber, however, had to pay for anything more than the amount of the share.⁶⁰ In 1937, the directors of the Crossfield Mutual Telephone Company agreed that a potential new subscriber, farmer Mark Cameron, "would be expected to dig the holes for the poles on his land & also to haul the necessary poles & erect them, if he desired a phone [sic]. . . ."⁶¹ The Hampton Mutual Telephone Company, near Ohaton, calculated that it would cost the company approximately \$159.52, excluding labour, but including equipment and one mile of line to install a telephone to a subscriber. In their by-laws, the same company wrote that "[a]ll extension of service to new subscribers such as posts, wire, insulators, side blocks or all material used to connect to Companys [sic] line must be paid for by new subscribers. Subscribers must do own line building but company will furnish material at cost [sic]."⁶² By having subscribers do their own labour and pay for the materials installed on their property, the rural mutual telephone companies were able to reduce their expenses. This allowed them to keep relatively low subscription fees.

⁵⁹ By-laws of the Freshfield Mutual Telephone Company, 26 June 1936, GA, M2289, Freshfield Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1935-1972, box 1, file 3 -- Correspondence, 1936-1950.

⁶⁰ Minutes of Rural Telephone Subscribers' Meeting, 27 November 1934, GA, M2288, Crossfield Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1937-1974, file 1 -- Crossfield Mutual Telephone Company Minutes, 1934-1974.

⁶¹ Minutes of the Director's Meeting, October 1937, GA, M2288, file 1.

⁶² Estimate and Bylaw number 16 of "Bylaws, Hampton Mutual Telephone Co.," III and IV, GA, M2290, Hampton Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970, box 1, file 1 -- Correspondence, etc., 1936-1938.

Once farmers constructed rural lines, they had to pay monthly or annual fees for telephone service. In 1906, when the Manitoba Government proposed to takeover the Bell Company, the government's spokesperson repeatedly promised rural telephone service for one dollar per month: "'I might say that it is absolutely certain that the majority of your farmers can obtain rural service at \$12 a year, . . .'" and "'[w]e are absolutely satisfied that with few exceptions every farmer in this Province can be supplied with telephone service at the rate of \$1.00 per month.'"⁶³ Manitoba and the other Prairie provincial telephone companies found, however, that keeping this promise was impossible.

The telephone rates on the rural Prairies varied. In 1909 in Central Canada, Bell charged rates of ten to twelve dollars per year. In Alberta, in 1908, the provincial telephone company charged fees of fifteen to twenty dollars per year. To provide affordable service, in April of 1909, Manitoba Government Telephones decreased their existing rates by up to thirty percent despite the company's financial losses. The farmers previously charged twenty-four dollars would now pay twenty and the farmers with an existing annual charge of thirty dollars had their rates reduced to twenty-five.⁶⁴ In 1912, the company could no longer cover up its financial problems. Manitoba Government Telephones increased their rates. In rural areas and small towns, the increases were as high as sixty-seven percent.⁶⁵ In August of 1921, the rates for a rural wall telephone set in Manitoba were either twenty-nine, thirty-two, or thirty-four dollars per year, depending on the location of the farm. The highest rates were for farms near Brandon and Portage la

⁶³ Unnamed government spokesperson quoted in Mavor, Government Telephones, 23.

⁶⁴ Mavor, Government Telephones, 62-63.

Prairie. Farms around centres such as Dauphin, Morden, Neepawa, Binscarth, Manitou, Boissevain, and Carberry paid thirty-two dollars per year. Farms located around smaller centres, such as Altona, Beausejour, Gimli, and Headingley paid only twenty-nine dollars per year.⁶⁶ By 1927, the price for telephones in rural areas across Canada was twenty to thirty-five dollars per year. Eventually, the Prairie government telephone subscribers ended up paying as much or more for their provincially-owned telephone service than did people served by Bell.⁶⁷

In Alberta, the rural mutual telephone companies set low rates for service once they took over AGT's plant and service provision.⁶⁸ A. M. Munro, the Service Supervisor of AGT in Calgary, remarked to one nascent rural mutual telephone company that the typical rates for service for such a cooperative varied from seventy-five cents to more than two dollars per month, however, the majority of companies charged \$1.50 per telephone per month.⁶⁹ Most of the rural mutual telephone companies had rates that fell within this span. In 1937, the Hampton Mutual Telephone Company charged subscribers one dollar per month for service.⁷⁰ The Allied, Kent-Interlake, and Rimbey Mutual Telephone Companies charged \$1.25 for monthly service the same year.⁷¹ In 1935 and

⁶⁶ Mavor, Government Telephones, 121.

⁶⁷ Manitoba Telephone System advertisement, Grain Growers' Guide, XIV, no. 31 (September 7, 1921), 10.

⁶⁸ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 12.

⁶⁹ By the end of 1933, there were thirty-three cooperative telephone companies in Alberta. The holdings at the Glenbow Archives consist of partial records for only eleven telephone companies. This argument, therefore, is based on the records available, even though they comprise only a third of the cooperative telephone companies in the province at the time. Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1934-1935: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion (Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1935), 783.

⁷⁰ Minutes of Director's Meeting, 4 June 1936, GA, M2288, file 1.

⁷¹ Bylaw 23, "Bylaws, Hampton Mutual Telephone Company," GA, M2290, box 1, file 1.

⁷² History of Company, 1936-71, n.d., GA, M2253, Allied Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1971, box 1, file 1 -- Allied Mutual Telephone Company Papers: Shareholder's Meeting Minutes, 18 June

1936, the Crossfield and Airdrie Mutual Telephone Companies charged shareholders \$1.50 per month for service.⁷² Some companies kept higher rates. The Freshfield company charged two dollars and the Conrich Mutual Telephone Company charged \$2.50 per month in 1936.⁷³ Some of the rural mutual telephone companies maintained their low rates throughout the Depression and a few of the companies held the same low rates until the Second World War. The Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company, for example, charged shareholders \$1.50 per month from 1935 until 1944.⁷⁴ In 1945, the rate for shareholders increased to \$1.75 and from 1947 until 1950, it was set at \$2.50 per month.⁷⁵ The Hampton Mutual Telephone Company charged one dollar per month from 1937 until 1950.⁷⁶ Rates at the Crossfield company fluctuated from \$1.50 per month in 1935 to two dollars per month in 1945 and finally to \$2.50 per month in 1946.⁷⁷ These low rates meant that the small companies did not make much money to apply to telephone repairs and improvements.

1936, GA, M7813, Kent-Interlake Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1974, file 1 -- Minutes 1936-1974; Account Book, 1935-1936, GA, M2301, Rimbey North East Telephone Company, file 1.

⁷² Director's Meeting Minutes, 15 April 1936, GA, M2247, Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1934-1974, box 1, file 1 -- Minutes, Annual and Director's Meetings, p. 15; Special Meeting Minutes, 8 March 1935, GA, M2288, file 1.

⁷³ Minutes of Meeting, 23 November 1936, GA, M6771, Conrich Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970, box 1, file 3 - Minutes, 1936-1970; Minutes of Meeting of Telephone Subscribers, 19 June 1936, GA, M2289, box 1, file 2.

⁷⁴ Minutes of Public Meeting, 2 March 1935, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 15 April 1936, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 5 May 1937, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 16 February 1938, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 10 February 1939, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 6 February 1940, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 18 February 1941, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 12 March 1942, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 13 March 1943, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 11 March 1944, GA, M2247, box 1, file 1.

⁷⁵ Minutes of Director's Meeting, 14 March 1945, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 11 March 1946, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 12 March 1947, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 12 March 1949, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 25 October 1949, GA, M2247, box 1, file 1.

⁷⁶ Telephone Statistics for Years Ended December 31, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, and 1950 (compiled for the DBS), GA, M2290, box 2, file 37.

⁷⁷ Special Meeting Minutes, 8 March 1935, Director's Meeting Minutes, 5 December 1944, Director's Meeting Minutes, 5 June 1946, GA, M2288, file 1.

The archival documents illustrate that few, if any, of these companies accounted for the depreciation of their equipment and the companies did not upgrade their lines or instruments unless they were torn down by storms, ruined by fire, or they could not be repaired. Cashman notes that the rural telephone systems of Alberta used technology installed in 1914 until the 1970s.⁷⁸ Even without accounting for depreciation, the companies made little money. As Munro warned the Crossfield company in 1936, "the forming of large Telephone Cos was far better than the forming of small Cos. . . . [T]he larger Cos. were better off financially because they were in a position to start making a reserve account, but this was impossible with a Small Co. [sic] . . ."⁷⁹ For example, the Hampton Mutual Telephone Company's annual reports to AGT did not include a reserve account between 1936 and 1950. For all years except three, the company reported revenues greater than their expenditures, but the incomes ranged only from five cents in 1939 to a peak of \$138.90 in 1941. The three years where the company reported a deficit were 1942 with a deficit of \$67.47; 1946 with a loss of \$7.33; and 1950, with a net deficit of \$343.75.⁸⁰ The rural mutual telephone companies seemed to work for the public good and not for profit. Some of the companies never got enough shareholders to fully capitalize their companies, apparently leaving the repayment to AGT short. By mid-century, at least three rural mutual companies still reported that they had not issued all of

⁷⁸ Cashman, *Singing Wires*, 437; Manager's Report, 9 June 1936, GA, M2247, Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1934-1974, box 1, file 3 -- Correspondence, 1936-1943; Directors' Meeting Minutes, 6 February 1940, GA, M2247, box 1, file 1, page 51; Report of the Board of Directors, March 1942, GA, M2247, box 1, file 3; Report of the Board of Directors, 14 March 1945, GA, M2247, Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1934-1974, box 1, file 4 -- Correspondence, 1944-1949; Directors' Meeting Minutes, 2 June 1944, GA, M2288, file 1, page 93-94.

⁷⁹ Munro's statements paraphrased in the Director's Meeting Minutes, 4 June 1936, GA, M2288, file 1.

⁸⁰ Annual Returns sent to AGT for the Years Ended 31 December 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, and 1950, GA, M2290, box 2, file 37.

their shares, although they had been in operation for nearly fifteen years. While some companies were only short a few subscribers, the Aldersyde Mutual Telephone Company had only issued thirteen of thirty shares by 1949.⁸¹

Some of the rural mutual telephone companies eventually levied extra charges to help cover their expenses. In 1937, for example, the Hampton Mutual Telephone Company required subscribers to pay a one-time payment of \$2.50 each, along with their rental fees, to cover the operating deficit of 1936.⁸² The Hampton company also levied a two dollar charge on new subscribers to account for work done by previous and current shareholders before the new subscriber connected to the service.⁸³ Other companies, such as Airdrie and Conrich, levied higher monthly fees on subscribers that were not shareholders, usually between fifty cents and one dollar more per month than the fee for shareholders.⁸⁴ The Crossfield company introduced a two dollar charge to connect or disconnect a telephone in 1935 and in 1946, they introduced a fee of sixty cents per month on unused and disconnected phones. The charge was to help keep up line maintenance.⁸⁵

Telephone service on the Prairies endured permutations and changes all in the name of improved service for rural residents. Initially, the newly formed Prairie governments ousted the Bell Telephone Company to create provincial telephone utilities

⁸¹ Annual Return for 1949, n.d., GA, M2251, Aldersyde Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1935-1972, box 1, file 23 -- Annual Statistical Returns, 1940, 1946-1949: Annual Report, 31 December 1951, GA, M6671, Conrich Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970, box 1, file 7 -- Annual Reports, 1948-1952: Annual Report, 31 December 1950, GA, M2290, box 2, file 37.

⁸² Minutes of Director's Meeting, 17 March 1937, GA, M2290, Hampton Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970, box 2, file 36 -- Reports, Annual and Director's Meetings.

⁸³ Bylaw 15, "Bylaws, Hampton Mutual Telephone Co.," GA, M2290, box 1, file 1, p. III.

⁸⁴ Minutes of Director's Meeting, 4 April 1939, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 30 January 1940, GA, M6671, box 1, file 3.

to better serve the people of the regions, especially the rural dwellers. Then, the provincial telephone utilities in Saskatchewan and Alberta assigned rural dwellers the task of organizing and maintaining their own telephone service. Before even half of rural Prairie Canadians had telephones in their homes, however, another communication technology was brought into the region.

Before many farm families had even secured telephone service to their homes, a new communication technology was introduced in Canada. The radio proved to be cheaper to use than the telephone. The popularity of the new technology soared. By 1931, nine years after the start of commercial broadcasting on the Prairies, radio ownership rates neared those of the telephone. By 1941, more than twice as many Prairie farms had radios as had telephone service.

There were many radio broadcasting stations available to Prairie listeners in the 1922 to 1950 period. Stations on the Prairies in the early 1920s included: CFAC Calgary owned by the Calgary Herald; the privately owned CFCN Calgary; CJCJ Calgary owned by the Calgary Radio Service and Repair Shop; CNRC and CNRE, Calgary and Edmonton respectively, owned by the Canadian National Railway; CHUC Saskatoon and CHCY Edmonton operated by the International Bible Students Association, later the Jehovah's Witnesses; CHMA Edmonton run by the Christian Missionary Alliance; 10AB Moose Jaw, an amateur station; CKCK Regina run by The Leader; and CKY Winnipeg operated by Manitoba Government Telephones.⁸⁶ The number of radio stations in the two

⁸⁵ Minutes of Director's Meeting, 6 August 1935, Minutes of Director's Meeting, 5 June 1946, GA, M2288, file 1.

⁸⁶ Vipond, Listening In, 177, 49, 118-119, 85, 196, 44, 89, 51, 301 note 107 respectively; Schmalz, On Air, 25; Letters submitted to the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting (RCRB), National Archives of Canada (NAC), Marine Branch, Record Group (RG) 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3, Royal

western-most Prairie provinces led D. R. P. Coats, Moose Jaw radio manager for CJRM and the radio columnist for the Grain Growers' Guide, to remark in 1927: "[t]here is certainly variety for radio fans in Saskatchewan and Alberta. With plenty of healthy competition between the numerous stations, the programs are generally good."⁸⁷

Throughout the 1920s, more radio stations began broadcasting in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Manitoba's broadcasting policy circumscribed competition in the province and there were only a few stations as a result.⁸⁸ In Manitoba, there were four radio stations, three in Winnipeg and one in Brandon by 1929.⁸⁹ In Saskatchewan, there were ten radio stations: one in Fleming,⁹⁰ one in Moose Jaw, four in Regina, three in Saskatoon, and one in Yorkton. In Alberta, there were twelve radio stations in 1929: five in Calgary, two in Red Deer, four in Edmonton, and one in Lethbridge.⁹¹ Besides the commercial stations, there were a few amateur stations located in smaller towns. There were three amateur broadcasting stations in Saskatchewan in 1929. These stations were 10AB Moose Jaw, 10BI Prince Albert, and 10BU Canora. There were no amateur broadcasting stations licensed in Manitoba or Alberta in 1929.⁹² Although an amateur

Commission on Radio Broadcasting -- Suggestions -- Alberta, 1928-1929; NAC, Marine Branch, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3, Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting - Suggestions - Manitoba, 1928-1929.

⁸⁷ D. R. P. Coats, "R-a-d-i-o," Grain Growers' Guide, XX, no. 13 (July 1, 1927), 36.

⁸⁸ Babe, Telecommunications, 204.

⁸⁹ The small number of Manitoba stations, compared to Alberta and Saskatchewan, resulted from the Manitoba Government Telephones' monopoly over radio broadcasting in the province until 1933. Vipond, Listening In, 52-53.

⁹⁰ Vipond, Listening In, 52-53.

⁹¹ Canada, Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting (RCRB), Report (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1929), 27-29; Vipond, Listening In, 44, 46, 49, 51, 85, 89, 118-119, 177, 196, 301 n.107; Schmalz, On Air, 24-25.

⁹² Schmalz, in his history of radio in Saskatchewan, notes that by 1922, there were sixty-one amateur stations in Saskatchewan: "[m]ost were situated in the larger centres like Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw and Regina. But there were also others in Buchanan, Indian Head, St. Louis, Strasbourg, Lajord, Morse, Davidson, Rosetown, Yorkton, Swift Current, Loreburn, Steven, Churchbridge, Landis and Qu'Appelle." It is unclear why the Aird Commission report and Schmalz's count of amateur broadcasters

station, 10AB, run by the Moose Jaw Radio Association, was popular with its community. The station was the first one in Moose Jaw, receiving a license in 1922.⁹³

By 1932, Prairie listeners had lost some of the stations existent in the 1920s, but they gained new stations including Lethbridge's CJOC; CKUA Edmonton run by the University of Alberta; CFQC Saskatoon run by a local electrical store; and four stations run by grain companies: Saskatchewan Co-op Wheat Producers' CJBR Regina; Winnipeg Grain Exchange's CJGX Yorkton; Alberta Pacific Grain Exchange's CKLC Red Deer; and James Richardson and Sons Limited's CJRM Moose Jaw and CJRW Fleming, which later became CJRC Winnipeg.⁹⁴

In the late 1930s, broadcast stations began to conglomerate. The trend of individual stations independently owned and operated by small stores, newspapers, and large grain companies began to change. Companies whose only business was broadcasting began to manage some stations. The Taylor, Pearson, Carson company managed five Prairie stations: CJOC Lethbridge, CFAC Calgary, CJCA Edmonton, CKCK Regina, and CJRC Winnipeg.⁹⁵

Between 1937 and 1943, the radio situation on the Prairies remained fairly stable. There were eighteen radio stations in the three provinces as of December 13, 1937, six fewer than in 1929. In Alberta there were eight stations. In Calgary, there were CFAC, CFCN, and CJCJ. In Edmonton, the stations were CFRN, CJCA, and CKUA. In two

are divergent. Perhaps Schmalz is recording licensed amateur transmitters that were experimenting but not carrying out broadcasting. Schmalz, *On Air*, 7; RCRB, *Report*, 29.

⁹³ License to Use Radio, April 1922 to March 1923, NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, CHAB Limited, Moose Jaw, 1922-1934, part 1.

⁹⁴ Vipond, *Listening In*, 46, 49; Schmalz, *On Air*, 24-25.

⁹⁵ Frank W. Peers, *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting, 1920-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 287.

smaller cities there were also stations, CJOC Lethbridge and CFGP Grande Prairie. In Saskatchewan, there were six stations. Saskatoon had one station, CFQC, and Regina had CJRM and CKCK. Moose Jaw had station CHAB, Prince Albert had CKBI, and CJGX was located in Yorkton. In Manitoba, there were four stations. Two of these were in Winnipeg, CJRC and CKY. Brandon had CKX and Flin Flon, Manitoba, had a station, CFAR.⁹⁶ In 1939, CBK Watrous was added to this list.⁹⁷

By 1943, the same nineteen stations were still operating on the Prairies. Nine of these stations were affiliates of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.⁹⁸ Other stations only took on some of the CBC programmes or shared the CBC broadcasts with another station in the same city.⁹⁹

By the mid-1940s, the broadcasting situation in the larger Prairie cities had changed little from the two previous decades: Winnipeg had CKY, owned by the Manitoba Telephone System, and three private stations: CKRC, CJOB, and CKSB. The stations in Edmonton included CKUA run by the University of Alberta and two private

⁹⁶ "List of Broadcasting Stations in Canada as of December 13, 1937, part A: As of December 13, 1937," NAC, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), RG 41, series A-IV-2-c, vol. 356, file 19-6-1, Regional Radio Conference, Havana, March 1937, part 2, pp. 1-6.

⁹⁷ "List of Broadcasting Stations in Canada as of December 13, 1937, part B: "As of the date of transmission thereof together with changes authorized to be made on or before the effective date," NAC, CBC, RG 41, series A-IV-2-c, vol. 356, file 19-6-1, part 2, pp. 1-7.

⁹⁸ The CBC affiliate stations were CKY Winnipeg, CKX Brandon, CKCK Regina, CBK Watrous, CHAB Moose Jaw, CFQC Saskatoon, CKBI Prince Albert, CJCA Edmonton, and CJOC Lethbridge. List of Canadian Stations and Classes, 1943, NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 148, file 6206-1, Broadcasting -- License and Inspection, General, 1942-1944, part 4; Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1943-44: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1944), 648.

⁹⁹ Two stations, CFAC and CFCN, both of Calgary, shared CBC affiliated services. Two other stations, CJGX Yorkton and CJRM Regina, received full supplementary CBC service. Six stations, CFAR, CFGP, CJRC, CFRN, CKUA, and CJCJ, did not receive regular CBC service or American network service. List of Canadian Stations and Classes, 1943, NAC, RG 97, vol. 148, file 6206-1, part 4.

stations, CJCA and CFRN. Calgary had three private stations: CFCN, CFAC, and CJCJ. The city of Regina had two private stations, CKCK and CJRM.¹⁰⁰

In the early years of radio broadcasting on the Prairies, the services that stations rendered were minimal and unvaried, with a few exceptions. In the beginning, only stations backed by large companies could afford to make expensive programmes, such as concerts and dramas. Between 1922 and 1927, the number of hours that all the stations broadcast increased significantly and the types of programmes broadcast became increasingly varied. Smaller stations, nonetheless, still kept shorter hours than larger ones. These trends were not uniform, however, and some stations, such as CJOC, decreased their services once they were sold to new owners. Other stations kept almost the same schedules for nearly a decade as did stations 10AB and CFCN.

Stations 10AB Moose Jaw and CFCN Calgary were remarkably dissimilar in organization, yet their programming trends were quite similar. The amateur station, 10AB, run by the Moose Jaw Radio Association, had limited financial resources and funded the station's programmes by membership fees of one dollar per year.¹⁰¹ The station could not collect advertising revenues because it was not a commercial station. In contrast to 10AB, CFCN, the Calgary station owned by radio manufacturer W. W. Grant Limited, was one of the most powerful Prairie stations.

Two general trends are evident from the examples of 10AB and CFCN. The first of these was that over the initial decade of broadcasting, stations increasingly broadcast more hours per week. In June of 1925, station 10AB broadcast a maximum of six and a

¹⁰⁰ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 369-370.

half hours per week. Five years later, the station had increased its service to twenty-five and a half hours per week.¹⁰² CFCN began by broadcasting three hours and thirty minutes per week in November of 1924. By August of 1930, the station broadcast thirty-seven and a half hours per week.¹⁰³

Second, music was, even at an early time, the staple of many broadcasters' fare, whether the station was large or small. In June of 1925, station 10AB used 61.5 percent of its total air time for broadcasting music. The remainder of the hours were used to broadcast church services and a test programme.¹⁰⁴ By August of 1930, 10AB used 60.8 percent of its time for broadcasting concerts. The amateurs divided the rest of the air time between church services and the Canadian Pacific Railway chain programmes.¹⁰⁵ Originally, the owners of CFCN devoted all of their air time to music.¹⁰⁶ In August of 1930, the station broadened the programmes it offered to include market reports and church services, nonetheless, CFCN still used seventy-two percent of their time for music.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Alfred J. Wickens (Vice President, Moose Jaw Radio Association) to the Radio Branch, 29 November 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1; Schmalz, *On Air*, 20.

¹⁰³ 10AB station programme, 25 June 1925, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1, item 52; 10AB station programme, 1 August 1930, NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, CHAB Moose Jaw, 1922-1934, part 2.

¹⁰⁴ CFCN station programme, 14 November 1924, NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, *The Voice of The Prairies*, Calgary, 1922-1930, part 1, item 74; CFCN station programme, 9 August 1930, NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, *The Voice of The Prairies*, Calgary, 1922-1930, part 2.

¹⁰⁵ Calculated from 10AB station programme, 25 June 1925, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1, item 52.

¹⁰⁶ Calculated from 10AB station programme, 1 August 1930, NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, CHAB Moose Jaw, 1922-1934, part 2.

¹⁰⁷ Calculated from CFCN station programme, 14 November 1924, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 1, item 74.

¹⁰⁸ Calculated from CFCN station programme, 9 August 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2.

The programming offered by radio stations of the 1920s was remarkably similar. Station operators originally pieced the content together mostly in the style of variety shows, club programmes, and church concerts.¹⁰⁸ The common content included music -- concerts, symphonies, jazz, pianists, solos, and phonograph records; church services and sacred music; children's entertainment and stories; educational lectures; and informational broadcasting -- news, weather reports, market reports, and time signals.¹⁰⁹

On the Prairies, stations were careful to produce programming for and about farmers and their concerns. Western stations, including CJRM, CFAC, CKCK, CFQC, and CFCN broadcast grain prices during the noon hour as a service to farmers.¹¹⁰ CJRM, operated by a grain firm, was "anxious to serve the farmers and the three western provinces with a very complete 'noon-day' broadcast, covering grain prices and prices of

¹⁰⁸ D. R. P. Coats, "Canada's Fifty Years of Broadcasting and Stories Stations Tell: Featuring the Pioneer Station XWA, later given the call letters CFCF, 1919-1969," (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), Canadian Marconi Library, 14.

¹⁰⁹ NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 148, file 6206-51, CJCJ Radio Service and Repair Shop and the Calgary Albertan, parts 1 and 2; NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, 10AB/CHAB, Moose Jaw Radio Association, parts 1 and 2; NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, CKCK, The Regina Leader-Post, parts 1 and 2; NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-111, CJOC J. E. Palmer and H. R. Carson; NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-132, CHMA Christian and Missionary Alliance; NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-140, CFQC The Electric Shop; NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, CFCN, W. W. Grant, Ltd., parts 1 and 2; NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-166, CJCA The Edmonton Journal; NAC, Department of Communications RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, CJRM and CJRW, James Richardson and Sons, Limited, parts 1, 2, and 3; NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-176, CKUA, The University of Alberta; NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-179, CFAC, The Calgary Herald; Mary Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg in the 1920s: Canada's Only Experiment in Government Monopoly Broadcasting," Manitoba History no. 12 (Autumn 1986): 7.

¹¹⁰ Memo for File from W. R. Pottle's (Saskatchewan Radio Inspector) July 1926 report, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1; Night Letter from A. V. Evans (Calgary Radio Inspector) to Radio Branch, 27 September 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-164, part 1, item 182; L. D. Parker (Regina Leader-Post) to C. P. Edwards (Director, Radio Branch, Department of Marine and Fisheries, DMF), 2 April 1925, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 1, item 58; J. Macklem (Saskatoon Radio Inspector) to Edwards, 12 January 1924, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-140, item 15-16; W. W. Grant (W. W. Grant Limited) to Edwards, 14 June 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 1, item 143.

farm products. . . .¹¹¹ The station prided itself on being the only Prairie station of the number that broadcast grain prices “whose chief endeavor was to carry to the farmers up-to-the-minute information on prices of everything they produce.”¹¹² Stations also ran special talks on topics the managers deemed of interest to the farmers.¹¹³ CFQC Saskatoon broadcast nightly talks of interest to the farming community in 1924. Staff members of the University of Saskatchewan gave the lectures.¹¹⁴ The University of Alberta broadcast agricultural lectures by the faculty of the agriculture department through station CJCA, owned by the Edmonton Journal, in 1925 to 1927. Later the university provided these lectures over its own station, CKUA.¹¹⁵

The CBC launched regional farm broadcasts in 1939. Each of the broadcasts included a daily drama about a fictional farm family.¹¹⁶ The one on the Prairies was called “The Jacksons and Their Neighbours,” broadcast at noon. Mary Pattison of Saskatoon wrote the scripts and the show was broadcast live from Winnipeg. The purpose of the programmes was to provide listeners with agricultural information in an “entertaining fashion.”¹¹⁷ CBC radio producer Wayne Schmalz argues that the drama was important to Prairie farm families because:

¹¹¹ Paul P. Dow (James Richardson and Sons Limited, JRSL) to E. Hawken (Acting Deputy Minister, DMF), 16 November 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1, item 52.

¹¹² Dow to Acting Deputy Minister (DMF, Hawken), 23 November 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1, item 58.

¹¹³ Memo for File from Pottle’s July 1926 report, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1.

¹¹⁴ Macklem to Edwards, 12 January 1924, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-140, item 15-16.

¹¹⁵ H. P. Brown (Department of Extension, University of Alberta) to A. Johnston (Deputy Minister, DMF), 27 February 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-176, part 1, item 39; University of Alberta, Department of Extension, Radio Program for February 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-176, part 1, item 40.

¹¹⁶ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 283; McNeil and Wolfe, Signing On, 249.

¹¹⁷ Schmalz, On Air, 80

"The Jacksons and Their Neighbours" may not have been considered high drama, but it did give rural people a sense that their lives and their work were as worthy of dramatic treatment as subjects from distant places. By broadcasting this series at noon, when everyone was gathered at the table for dinner, the CBC ensured that the people these plays were in some measure about actually heard them. For many, this was the only drama they ever . . . heard.¹¹⁸

In 1941, a weekly series of serious discussions about topics relevant to farmers across Canada began. The "National Farm Radio Forum" promoted cooperative action among farmers and provided panels of experts every week.¹¹⁹ Three groups, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Association for Adult Education and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, sponsored the "Farm Forum." Discussions in the 1943 series included planning, prices, and controls; planning for health; farm finance; planning in the rural community; and current farm plans.¹²⁰ In 1945, "Farm Forum" discussion topics included marketing, price stabilization, rural education, future farmers, and rural communities.¹²¹ Both the "Jacksons" and the "Farm Forum" aired from the World War Two period until 1964.¹²²

The programmes of the CBC differed little in genre than those of the private stations. News and market reports, music, religious broadcasting, and informative talks were the majority of the fare on both private and CBC stations from the 1920s until 1950. Both private stations and the CBC broadcast programmes from the United States. In

¹¹⁸ Schmalz, *On Air*, 84.

¹¹⁹ Schmalz, *On Air*, 81-82; McNeil and Wolfe, *Signing On*, 249.

¹²⁰ "National Farm Radio Forum," Planning for Plenty Series pamphlets, 1943, GA, Louise and Russell Johnston Fonds, M8634, file 335, National Farm Radio Forum, 1943-1964.

¹²¹ "National Farm Radio Forum" Scripts from 1945, NAC, Boards, Offices, Commissions, RG 36, series 31, volume 19, file 10-A-11, National Farm Radio Forum.

¹²² Schmalz, *On Air*, 83.

contrast to private stations was the CBC's ability to broadcast programmes from other countries, especially those from Britain and Europe.¹²³

By 1938, the CBC broadcast eighty-nine hours a week. Fifty-seven hours were Canadian programmes without advertising. Seventeen and a half hours were American programmes without advertising. The CBC devoted twelve hours to British programming. Finally, American commercial programmes occupied eight and one-half hours a week.¹²⁴ Some of the American commercial programmes broadcast over the CBC were the "Kraft Music Hall" with Bing Crosby, the "Jack Benny Show," "Fibber McGee," and "One Man's Family."¹²⁵

With the wide range of stations available, and the relatively low cost of the device, radio had the potential to be very popular on the Prairies. As Davis noted: "[o]ne of the great advantages of the radio, in its early years, was its availability. It was cheap, could be made at home and did not need electricity: it was thus accessible to most people. For this reason its popularity did not decline with the onset of the Depression in the 1930s."¹²⁶

Potential listeners could buy pre-assembled radio sets or make receivers at home using a kit. Prices varied depending on the model bought and the time of purchase. In

¹²³ Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1939: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion (Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1939), 729; Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1940 (Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1940), 729-731; Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1941 (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1941), 637-638; Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1942 (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1942), 660-661; Canada, The Canada Year Book, 1943-44, 648-649; Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1945 (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1945), 734-735; Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1946 (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1946), 718-719; Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1947 (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1947), 742-743; Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1948-49 (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1949), 775-776; Canada, DBS, The Canada Year Book, 1950 (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1950), 820-821.

¹²⁴ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 216.

¹²⁵ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 229.

1927, the price of radios ranged from \$70 for a table top model without a loud speaker to \$350 for a chassis cabinet model with accessories.¹²⁷ In 1928, however, the average annual farm income in Saskatchewan was \$1,802, in Alberta it was \$1,684, and in Manitoba it was \$1,053.¹²⁸ The decision to buy a radio, therefore, meant spending a significant portion of the year's income on the device. By 1938, radios were cheaper to buy. Prices for similar sets to those in 1927 ranged from \$14.95 for the economy table top model to \$199.50 for the console model with batteries.¹²⁹

The 1931 Census revealed that eighteen percent of rural Prairie homes had radios. By 1941, seventy percent of farm homes had a receiving set. Unlike the telephone, during the 1920s and early 1930s, farm ownership of the radio did not decrease.¹³⁰ The 1951 Census showed that ninety percent of Prairie farms had radios, a figure that was higher than those for all the other "living conveniences" that the Census measured, such as powered washing machines, electric vacuum cleaners, telephones, and automobiles.¹³¹ Table 2 shows the percentage of Prairie farms with radios in 1931, 1941, and 1951.

¹²⁶ Davis, "Valiant Servants," 38.

¹²⁷ Baronet Radio Advertisement, Grain Growers' Guide, XX, no. 17 (September 1, 1927), 37; General Electric Radio Advertisement, Grain Growers' Guide, XX, no. 17 (September 1, 1927), 38; Stewart-Warner Radio Advertisement, Grain Growers' Guide, XX, no. 17 (September 1, 1927), 45; Marconi Company Advertisement, Grain Growers' Guide, XX, no. 19 (October 1, 1927), 18; Davis, "Valiant Servants," 37.

¹²⁸ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," Table 3 and 14-15.

¹²⁹ Philco Farm Radio Advertisement, The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer (September 1939), 15; Stewart-Warner Radio Advertisement, The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer (September 1939), 21; General Electric Battery Thrift Radio Advertisement, The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer (September 1939), 26; Canada Marconi Company Radio Advertisement, The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer (September 1939), 35; RCA-Victor Radio Advertisement, The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer (September 1939), 37.

¹³⁰ Canada, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume VIII - Agriculture, lxxiv; Canada, Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III - Housing and Families, 40-4 to 40-5; Canada, Eighth Census of Canada, 1941: Volume IX - Housing, 82-83.

Table 2: Percentage of Farms with a Radio, 1931 to 1951.¹³²

Province	1931	1941	1951
Canada	16.4	60.6	88.7
Ontario	21.5	66.2	88.4
Manitoba	18.1	66.8	89.8
Saskatchewan	20.2	71.8	92.0
Alberta	17.7	72.7	89.3

The broadcasters on the Prairies were a diverse group, ranging from very large corporations to small businesses. Some companies, such as the Manitoba Telephone System, were afraid that the radio would become a competitor to their regular business, therefore, they became involved in broadcasting. Others believed that the radio could complement their current pursuits and they thus established broadcasting stations, as happened with the Prairie newspapers, the Regina Leader-Post, the Calgary Herald, and the Edmonton Journal. Radio sellers established stations to help spur their businesses and to provide listeners with greater choice, including the Calgary Radio Service and Repair Shop, W. W. Grant Limited of Calgary, and The Electric Shop in Saskatoon. Grain companies established radio stations to quickly relay market information to farmers. Examples of such stations include CJGX Yorkton owned by the Winnipeg Grain Exchange and CJRM and CJRW of the James Richardson and Sons firm. Finally, some stations were established for greater goals, including CKUA of the University of Alberta

¹³¹ Canada, Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III - Housing and Families, Table 40, pages 40-4, 40-5.

¹³² Canada, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume VIII -- Agriculture, lxxiv, Table XXIX; Canada, Eighth Census of Canada, 1941: Volume IX -- Housing, Table 18 -- Occupied Dwellings with Specified Conveniences, 81-83; Canada, Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III -- Housing and Families, Table 40, 40-1, 40-3, 40-4, 40-5.

and CHMA of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The founders of the two Edmonton stations hoped to bring educational advancement and spiritual edification to listeners.¹³³

James Richardson and Sons Limited was one of the largest grain companies in the country.¹³⁴ The company practically set the grain prices on the Prairies. As a result, the firm was the recipient of much hostility from Western producers. One Prairie resident reflected that in the 1920s and 1930s, "the name 'James Richardson and Sons' was especially hated, for this firm set the price for the grain each year in Winnipeg." Farmers believed that the company unfairly controlled the price of wheat, causing them to live in perpetual poverty, even in years with good harvests.¹³⁵ To combat their negative image, the firm established radio stations on the Prairies, in an attempt to placate farmers. Besides the purpose of broadcasting grain prices for the knowledge of farmers, perhaps the firm invested so heavily into radio because it was trying to increase the farming public's goodwill toward the company. In a letter to Commander C. P. Edwards, the Director of the Radio Branch of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, the supervisory body for radio broadcasting at the time, Paul P. Dow of James Richardson and Sons

¹³³ Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 3-4; Vipond, Listening In, 44-45; T. A. Crowe (Calgary Radio Service and Repair Shop) to Minister (DMF, P. J. A. Cardin), 17 June 1926 and Crowe to Minister (DMF, Cardin), 25 May 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 148, file 6206-51; D. F. Streb (General Manager, The Electric Shop) to Edwards, 12 November 1924, and "Application for License to Install and Operate a Radio Station in Canada," for The Electric Shop Limited, Saskatoon, 1925, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-140; Vipond, Listening In, 45-46; "Application for License to Install and Operate a Radio Station in Canada," for James Richardson and Sons Limited, 3 July 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1; Vipond, Listening In, 49; Henry Marshall Tory (President of the University of Alberta) to Johnston, 15 March 1927, and "Application for a License to Install and Operate a Radio Station in Canada," for the University of Alberta, 13 April 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-176, part 1; "Application for a License to Install and Operate a Radio Station in Canada," for Christian and Missionary Alliance, 19 March 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-132.

¹³⁴ T. G. Murphy (Minister of the Interior) to Alfred Duranleau (Minister of Marine), 2 April 1932, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 3, item 73.

¹³⁵ Quotation and data from Craig W. Miller, "Introduction" to Union of Opposites: Letters from Rit Svane Wengel, edited by Craig W. Miller, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1996), xv.

admitted that “owing to the great number of elevators that our firm own[s] in Western Canada, it has been demonstrated by our small station [CJRM] that it is a practical method of securing good will. . . .”¹³⁶ By 1932, Richardson admitted that he had a “large investment” in the radio business.¹³⁷

The Richardsons were not alone in their desire to foster a relationship with rural Prairie listeners. In their correspondence with the Radio Branch, many of the Prairie radio stations claimed that they operated primarily in the interests of providing service to the farmers of the West and they believed, as did CKCK Regina, that their station had “been rendering an invaluable service to the farmers of western Canada. . . .”¹³⁸ Many of the stations wanted rural communities to recognize them as the voice of the Prairie farmer. Some stations even adopted slogans to this effect. CHAB Moose Jaw called itself “The Voice of Wheat Country” and CFCN Calgary adopted the slogan “The Voice of the Prairies.”¹³⁹

Distance reception was better on the Prairies than in many other parts of Canada, so the listeners could tune into stations as far away as Chicago and Toronto if the weather permitted.¹⁴⁰ Atmospheric conditions greatly affected both radio receiving and transmitting apparatus in the early years of radio. As one author wrote in the Grain Growers’ Guide in 1922, “[a] clear, cold winter’s night is the best time for hearing, while

¹³⁶ Dow to Edwards, 24 February 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 79.

¹³⁷ James A. Richardson (JRSL) to Murphy, 26 March 1932, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 3, item 72.

¹³⁸ Parker to Edwards, 2 April 1925, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 1, item 58.

¹³⁹ H. C. Buchanan (Secretary, Moose Jaw Radio Association) to J. C. Stephen (Moose Jaw Radio Inspector), 18 December 1933, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 2, item 158; “The Voice of the Prairies Ltd.” to E. A. Weir (Director of Programmes, CRBC), 30 December 1932, GA, M693, H. Gordon Love Fonds, 1922-1969, file 10 – Correspondence, 1933-1938.

¹⁴⁰ Vipond, Listening In, 84-85.

a hot summer's day presents the worst conditions."¹⁴¹ Radio receiving conditions were best in the winter, when Canadian farmers could listen to the American stations.¹⁴² In the summer months, the atmosphere was not conducive to long distance reception.¹⁴³ Heavy static conditions decreased reception¹⁴⁴ to the point where some farmers put their sets away during the summer months. Radio columnist D. R. P. Coats wrote in the Guide that by 1926 "real honest-to-goodness static troubles us only at times, and, fortunately, chiefly in the summer, when many listeners put their radios on the shelf and seek recreation in the great outdoors."¹⁴⁵ Some radio stations ceased broadcasting operations during the summer months or they modified them by decreasing their programming hours or putting shows later at night to decrease static interference.¹⁴⁶ The radio "season" began in the fall, after harvest time, when atmospheric conditions became more favourable to reception. This was ideal for families who used their car battery to power their radio, for in many farming areas, cars could not be used in the winter and radio reception was poorer in the summer, during the automobile season.¹⁴⁷ Even the good winter reception, however, could cause problems. When reception conditions were particularly good,

¹⁴¹ John W. Ward, "The Wonders of Radio," Grain Growers' Guide XV, no. 19 (May 10, 1922), 8.

¹⁴² Dow to Hawken (Acting Deputy Minister, DMF), 29 November 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1.

¹⁴³ D. R. P. Coats, "Summer Radio" in "R-a-d-i-o," Grain Growers' Guide, XIX, no. 15 (May 1, 1926), 28; H. S. Craig (Managing Director, H. G. Love & Co. Edmonton Ltd.) to Donald Manson (Secretary, RCRB), 24 April 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3.

¹⁴⁴ Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 5; M. V. Chestnut, "Difficulties with Static," Grain Growers' Guide, XVIII, no. 31 (August 5, 1925), 4.

¹⁴⁵ D. R. P. Coats, "Interference," R-a-d-i-o column, Grain Growers' Guide, XIX, no. 5 (February 3, 1926), 12.

¹⁴⁶ "Radio Stations in Canada," Grain Growers' Guide, XVIII, no. 35, (September 2, 1925), 17; Coats, "Summer Radio," 28; Crowe to Minister (DMF, E. L. Patenaude), 20 July 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 148, file 6206-51, item 48; Crowe to Minister (DMF, Patenaude), 17 July 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 148, file 6206-51, item 37.

¹⁴⁷ "Charging Batteries," Grain Growers' Guide, XVII, no. 50, (December 10, 1924), 15; "Radio Stations in Canada," 17; D. R. P. Coats, "Radio Gets Better and Better," The Country Guide, XXI, no. 19, (October 1, 1928), 28.

powerful American stations near on the radio dial to Canadian ones would interfere with the Canadian stations and vice versa.¹⁴⁸

In the 1920s and into the 1930s, farmers could hear stations from the United States across the border that often overpowered those in Canada. Saskatchewan listeners could receive Omaha, Detroit, Chicago, and Salt Lake City.¹⁴⁹ Listeners at various points in Manitoba could receive a variety of American stations. Manitobans seemed to pride themselves on receiving stations other than CKY Winnipeg. B. M. Bain from Grosse Isle, Manitoba, wrote to the Guide: "I am able to hear from coast to coast, or, in better words, all the high-power stations in America, of which some of the most important are Winnipeg, Vancouver, Regina, Minneapolis, Davenport, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Pittsburg [sic], New York, Detroit, Dallas, and many other stations too numerous to mention."¹⁵⁰ The ability to receive American stations allowed Manitoba listeners to overcome the Manitoba government's broadcast monopoly.

Alberta listeners at different points could also receive a number of United States stations. Around Edmonton, during good air conditions, listeners could hear Toronto, Cleveland, Des Moines, and Harrison, Ohio, stations.¹⁵¹ In Central Alberta, listeners could pick up American stations such as Denver, Salt Lake City, and Seattle.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Pottle to Edwards, 16 March 1931, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 2, item 159.

¹⁴⁹ Schmalz, On Air, 7, 43.

¹⁵⁰ B. M. Bain letter published in "Experiences with Radio," Grain Growers' Guide, XVII, no. 13 (March 26, 1924), 32.

¹⁵¹ Craig to Manson, 24 April 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3; A. J. Ritchie (Western Grocers Limited) to Manson, 11 January 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3.

¹⁵² J. F. Hodson (Hobbema, Alberta) to RCRB, 10 January 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3; F. W. Galbraith (The Red Deer Advocate) to RCRB, 24 April 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3.

Poor summer reception conditions decreased the listening choices of Prairie residents. Northern areas with few radio stations relied on programmes from "outside" stations farther south. During the summer when reception was not good, residents in Edmonton could go for over a week without getting programmes from an outside radio station.¹⁵³ Tom A. Crowe told the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting in 1929 that even in the southern city of Calgary, during the spring, summer, and early fall, residents were "forced to listen to our Local Stations for the greater part of the time" because the reception of outside stations was not good.¹⁵⁴ By the summer of 1928, radio manufacturers had invented equipment that would eliminate static and improve summer radio reception.¹⁵⁵ These improvements, however, affected only those farmers who did, or could afford to, buy new equipment.

A problem that the Royal Commission confronted was the uneven diffusion of radios across the country. There was a large variation among and within the provinces in terms of radio ownership.¹⁵⁶ In Canada, urban ownership of radios was twice as great as rural ownership. Across Canada in 1931, forty-four percent of urban homes were equipped with a radio, but only 21.5 percent of rural homes had one. On the Prairies, the gap narrowed, but more urban households possessed the technology regardless. In Manitoba, 37.6 percent of urban homes and 23.2 percent of rural homes had a radio. In Saskatchewan, 36.3 and twenty-three percent of urban and rural homes, respectively, owned a set. In Alberta, 33.5 percent of urban homes had a radio as compared to 20.1

¹⁵³ Vernon Pearson (Branch Manager, the Electrical Engineers) to the Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries (Acting Deputy Minister, Hawken), 4 September 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-132, part 1, item 126-127.

¹⁵⁴ Crowe to Manson, 30 April 1929, NAC, RG 42, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3.

¹⁵⁵ D. R. P. Coats, "R-a-d-i-o," Country Guide, XXI, no. 13 (July 2, 1928), 19.

percent of farms.¹⁵⁷ Vipond attributes the smaller percentage of rural homes with radios to the relative lack of “good programming” received in many rural areas before 1932.¹⁵⁸

The Aird Commissioners believed that one of the greatest problems in Canadian broadcasting was the “crowding of stations into urban centres and the consequent duplication of services in such places, leaving other large populated areas [presumably rural] ineffectively served.”¹⁵⁹ As with telephone exchanges, owners located radio stations in urban areas. The clustering of stations into cities and large towns occurred because of the owners’ need for coveted advertising revenues and programme sponsorships for station funding and survival.¹⁶⁰ Another reason that owners located stations in cities was so that the live talent that performed over the air could easily reach the studios.¹⁶¹ The Richardsons’ station at Fleming had studios located in Winnipeg connected by telephone to the transmitter. The location of the studios at Winnipeg was important to give the company access to talent.¹⁶² The firm found it tough to secure talent for the studio shows they produced in Moose Jaw.¹⁶³ CJRM station manager D. R. P. Coats found that there was only “average human talent available in the smaller cities and towns of Western Canada.”¹⁶⁴ As a result of this requirement for advertising money and talent, people living in areas not in the listening range of an urban transmitter did not have accessible radio broadcasting in the 1920s.

¹⁵⁶ Vipond, Listening In, 38.

¹⁵⁷ Canada, DBS, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume V -- Earnings of Wage Earners, Dwellings, Households, Families, Blind and Deaf Mutes (Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1935), 984-987.

¹⁵⁸ Vipond, Listening In, 41.

¹⁵⁹ RCRB, Report, 6.

¹⁶⁰ RCRB, Report, 6.

¹⁶¹ Edwards to J. H. MacLeod (Calgary), 28 October 1924, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 1, item 64.

¹⁶² Dow to Edwards, 14 December 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 123.

There were negative effects associated with the urban transmitters. Having high power stations in the cities caused a blanketing effect on local receivers, especially the less selective ones.¹⁶⁵ When a city station was broadcasting, listeners could not bring in outside stations.¹⁶⁶ This caused complaints from city residents who desired to reach outside stations.¹⁶⁷ Between 1922 and 1939, the Radio Branch, the Aird Commission, and the CBC received complaints regarding the blanketing effect of all the major Prairie radio stations.

The Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting received a host of complaints about CKY because it was a high powered station of 5,000 watts located near the city of Winnipeg, creating an "intolerable nuisance" for the radio listeners of the city.¹⁶⁸ The owners located CKY Winnipeg's transmitter at the Agricultural College, only eight miles

¹⁶⁵ Dow to Hawken, 13 November 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1.

¹⁶⁶ Coats to Stephen, 29 January 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 2, item 67.

¹⁶⁷ Hawken (Assistant Deputy Minister) to JRSL, 10 December 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1, item 59a; Pottle to Edwards, 24 February 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 2, item 19.

¹⁶⁸ Dow to Edwards, 24 February 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 79; Coats to DMF, 24 February 1927, NAC, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 79.

¹⁶⁹ Complaints about CHMA in Edmonton, R. Ainslie (Alberta Radio Inspector) to Director (DMF, Edwards), 28 February 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-132, item 64; There were also complaints from people who had broad tuning receivers about CFQC in Saskatoon, Macklem to Edwards, 31 October 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-140, item 135.

¹⁷⁰ James B. Bascom (Winnipeg) in the Manitoba Free Press, 5 November 1928, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3; "Another Neutrodyne" and "Radio Fan" in the Manitoba Free Press, 22 November 1928, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3; "A Radio Licensee" in the Manitoba Free Press, 19 November 1928, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3; Albert Grimshaw (Winnipeg) to the RCRB, 20 January 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3; E. G. Cass (Amalgamated Radio Trades Association, Winnipeg) to the Minister of Public Works (Manitoba Provincial Government), March 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3; K. D. Ewart (Assistant Advertising Manager, Country Guide) to Manson, 17 January 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3; Grimshaw to RCRB, 8 January 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3; F. Fielding Cottrill (Winnipeg) to Manson, 5 January 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3; Percival R. B. Jones quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 19 November 1928, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3.

from the city, the only station in Canada of such power located so close to a large urban area.¹⁶⁹

Citizens in Saskatchewan complained about interference in their areas as well. The Radio Branch received complaints from Regina, Saskatoon, and Moose Jaw regarding the interference of local stations with the reception of others further away. Intermittently, listeners complained of how CFQC Saskatoon and CKCK Regina blocked each other out or how CJRM Moose Jaw blanketed the popular KFYZ Bismarck.¹⁷⁰ Listeners, such as R. A. Reid, complained of the "public nuisance" that Saskatchewan stations were creating by "trespassing" on the air and blocking other stations.¹⁷¹

Albertans, as did their neighbours, intermittently complained about blanketing from city stations. Many of the province's radio stations covered many points on listeners' receiving sets, decreasing the number of outside stations that they could bring into their homes.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Cass to the Manitoba Minister of Public Works, March 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-4; Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 8.

¹⁷⁰ H. Perras (Regina Radio Inspector) to Edwards, 28 November 1924, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-140, item 40; Alice M. Paine to DMF, 6 January 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1, item 65; John F. Hepburn to DMF, received 10 February 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 2, item 13; A. S. Bottrell to DMF, 18 January 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 2, item 10; E. B. Williams to DMF, 12 January 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 2, item 8B; C. C. Gibson to Edwards, 8 January 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 2, item 6; C. W. Morgan (Moose Jaw) to DMF, 7 March 1931, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 148-149; B. Woodhouse (Moose Jaw) to the Radio Inspector, 18 October 1933, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 3, item 140; Mr. and Mrs. R. Sanderson (Moose Jaw) to RCRB, 17 October 1933, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 3, item 138.

¹⁷¹ R. A. Reid to DMF, 14 December 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 2, item 112.

¹⁷² J. H. MacLeod to Edwards, 25 September 1924, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 1, item 67; J. H. MacLeod to Edwards, 3 November 1924, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 1, item 71; Frank D. Barnes (Edmonton) to Deputy Minister (DMF, Johnston), 30 January 1925, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-166, item 40a; F. W. Galbraith (Red Deer) to RCRB, 24 April 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3; P. Ransom (New Hill) to RCRB, 7 January 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3; F. J. Carpenter (Calgary) to Edwards, 14 October 1934, NAC, RG 97, vol. 148, file 6206-51, part 2, item 74; H. J. Smith (Calgary) to Ainslie, April 1935, NAC, RG 97, vol. 148, file 6206-51.

One radio inspector, W. R. Pottle, dealt with the verbal complaints he received about blanketing, by reminding citizens to think of “the situation from the view point of the Crystal and small set owner, and also that of the better class set owner. . . .”¹⁷³ The crystal and small set owners could only tune into local stations and the better sets could tune more selectively and receive outside stations even when the local one was on the air. It was only the people with average receivers that could tune into outside stations only when the local one was silent. Once the Radio Branch understood the blanketing problems, they created a policy that transmitters be built fifteen to twenty miles from major population centres. The Radio Branch later increased this distance to forty miles.¹⁷⁴

The blanketing and interference of stations did not only occur in urban areas, however. One man from Stenen, Saskatchewan, complained to the Radio Branch in 1923 that at his location, CKCK Regina and CKY Winnipeg collided.¹⁷⁵ In 1926, the Radio Branch received a petition from Mildren, Saskatchewan, with twenty-five names. The petitioners complained that Saskatoon and Regina would collide if the Radio Branch changed Saskatoon’s frequency. One of the petitioners wrote “we farmers haven’t or cannot afford sets yet which can cut out nearby stations [sic].”¹⁷⁶ The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation received letters from indignant listeners at Yorkton, Buchanan, Sintaluta, and Cut Knife, Saskatchewan, in 1939 and 1940 because the new CBC station,

part 2, item 82; J. H. J. Friend (Calgary) to Edwards, 1 September 1934, NAC, RG 97, vol. 148, file 6206-51, part 2, item 81.

¹⁷³ Pottle to DMF, n.d. (sometime in 1927), NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 2, item 95-96.

¹⁷⁴ Vipond, “CKY Winnipeg,” 8.

¹⁷⁵ H. E. Brockwell (Chief Engineer, MTS) to Edwards, 4 April 1923, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 1.

¹⁷⁶ Mrs. Maude McKee to DMF, 6 January 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 1, item 82.

CBK Watrous. was interfering with the NBC broadcasts over KFYZ Bismarck. North Dakota.¹⁷⁷

In 1927, the owners of CJCA Edmonton considered moving their radio station outside of the required ten mile limit due to the number of stations operating in the city. Eventually, they settled on a location at the Provincial Government Farm.¹⁷⁸ The Radio Branch applauded this move, stating “this is a step which the Department has every desire to encourage as it is believed that the removal of stations from centres of population reacts to the benefit of broadcast listeners in these centres, permitting at the same time greater scope for the stations themselves.”¹⁷⁹ Greater scope of urban stations benefited farmers as well, because the service radius grew when a station was located outside a city because the interference of the urban area affected the transmitter less.

In the three Prairie provinces, owners clustered private commercial radio stations in large and medium-sized urban areas to access advertising revenue and talent, a possible explanation for the larger number of radios in urban areas than in rural ones.

The problem was not only that owners centred stations in major urban areas but also that they used weak transmitters. Vipond describes “local stations” as those with low power, from 500 to 1,000 watts; high powered stations were 5,000 watts and greater.

¹⁷⁷ Clarence G. Langrill (Yorkton) to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 23 April 1940, NAC, RG 41, series A-IV-2-c, vol. 356, file 19-6-4, part 1; W. O. Findlay (CBC) to C. H. Bryce (Buchanan), 21 September 1939, NAC, RG 41, series A-IV-2-c, vol. 356, file 19-6-4, part 1; Letter to the Editor from D. B. M. (Santaluta) in the *Regina Leader-Post*, 25 August 1939, NAC, RG 41, series A-IV-2-c, vol. 356, file 19-6-4, part 1; D. A. Henderson (Cut Knife) to General Manager (CBC, Gladstone Murray), 26 April 1939, NAC, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, RG 41, series A-IV-2-c, vol. 356, file 19-6-4 -- Regional Radio Conference, Havana, Cuba, March 1937, part 1.

¹⁷⁸ Arthur Yockney (Business Manager, *Edmonton Journal*) to Deputy Minister (Johnston), 10 June 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-166, item 75; Yockney to Deputy Minister (Johnston), 11 August 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-166, item 79.

¹⁷⁹ Hawken (Assistant Deputy Minister) to Yockney, 28 June 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-166, item 76.

Some of the large American stations broadcast at very high power. In 1928, three American transmitters broadcast at 50,000 watts and by 1932, thirteen stations did so.¹⁸⁰ In the three Prairie provinces in 1929, nineteen of the twenty-six stations broadcast at 500 watts, a low power. Three stations operated at even lower powers and there were only four Prairie stations above 500 watts.¹⁸¹ Due to the concentrated location and low power of the commercial stations, many rural listeners could not bring in radio signals, a problem especially during the day when signals did not travel as far as they did at night. Vipond writes that before 1932, beyond fifty miles north of Edmonton and fifty miles south of Calgary, there was no day time radio reception.¹⁸² Many rural areas could only tune into powerful American stations at night and receive them poorly. Farmers achieved better reception through the purchase of more expensive receivers that, Vipond concludes and rural people confirm, many farm people could not afford.¹⁸³

In the first year of radio in Manitoba, the situation in the province was similar to those of the other Prairie provinces: a diverse array of concerns, including newspapers, stores, and other companies owned, licensed, and operated a handful of stations. After the initial year, however, the radio situation in Manitoba became unique in contrast to those in the other Prairie provinces and in the rest of Canada.

By 1923, there were six broadcasting stations licensed in Manitoba. Two newspapers in Winnipeg, the Tribune and the Free Press, each established a radio station in the capital city. These stations were the only ones in operation. The owners of two

¹⁸⁰ Vipond, Listening In, 183.

¹⁸¹ RCRB, Report, 27-29.

¹⁸² Vipond, Listening In, 41.

¹⁸³ Vipond, Listening In, 41, 183; McKee to DMF, 6 January 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 1, item 82.

other stations, one licensed to the T. Eaton Company and the other to Westinghouse, had not begun building their stations. The final two stations, one owned by the Salton Radio Corporation and the other by the Radio Corporation of Winnipeg, had been built but had not yet begun operation. Their owners assumed that the Radio Branch would renew their licenses each year until they were ready to begin broadcasting.¹⁸⁴

Late in 1922 and early in 1923, the provincial telephone utility, newly renamed the Manitoba Telephone System, MTS, developed an interest in the medium of radio broadcasting. The Commissioner of the MTS worried that radio broadcasting would, if privately run, decrease the revenues of the telephone system.¹⁸⁵ To guard against this alleged infringement, the provincial government sought to control broadcasting within its borders. The telephone company arranged to take over the two operational broadcasting stations in Winnipeg, CJNC, owned by the Tribune and CJCW, owned by the Free Press. Both the Winnipeg Tribune and Free Press ran an announcement on March 8, 1923, regarding the MTS takeover of radio in the province. The announcement stated:

[w]e do not wish to convey the impression that the Manitoba Government Telephones have forced us out of broadcasting. They do feel, however, that transmission via the ether is next-door-neighbour to transmission by wire: that it is a natural development of communication by telephone, and should therefore be their concern rather than that of the newspapers. In that point of view we cheerfully concur.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 4.

¹⁸⁵ The Manitoba Government changed the telephone company's name from MGT to MTS sometime in 1923. Coats, "Canada's Fifty Years," 139; Babe, Telecommunications, 203; Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 4.

¹⁸⁶ Announcement quoted in Coats, "Canada's Fifty Years," 138.

Perhaps the fact that both of the newspaper-owned radio stations in Manitoba were having financial difficulties fostered this cheerfulness at being bought out of the business.¹⁸⁷ The radio station owned by MTS, CKY, officially went on the air on March 13, 1923.¹⁸⁸ This station was the first publicly owned broadcasting station in Canada.

In the spring of 1923, at the same time as the telephone company arranged to purchase the newspapers' broadcasting stations, the Manitoba Government negotiated a deal with the Radio Branch. The agreement allowed the Manitoba Government veto power over radio station licensing and the Radio Branch agreed to forward all applications for broadcasting stations in Manitoba to the provincial government for consideration and consent by the Minister of Telephones before the Radio Branch granted a license.¹⁸⁹ The Manitoba Government interpreted the agreement to mean it had a monopoly over radio broadcasting in the province.¹⁹⁰ The Manitoba Commissioner of Telephones, J. E. Lowry, explained the province's understanding of the agreement in 1927 to the James Richardson and Sons grain firm: "by arrangement with the Federal Government no other licenses for similar service would be granted."¹⁹¹ Manitoba never agreed to allow a private broadcaster into the province for the duration of their veto power and virtual monopoly.¹⁹² In 1923, Lowry would not agree to renew the licenses for the two stations owned by the Salton Radio Corporation and the Radio Corporation of

¹⁸⁷ Babe, *Telecommunications*, 203; Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 4.

¹⁸⁸ Coats, "Canada's Fifty Years," 140-141.

¹⁸⁹ Hawken (Acting Deputy Minister, DMF) to E. H. Woodward (Superintendent, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Western Canada District), 4 March 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-132; Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 4.

¹⁹⁰ Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 4.

¹⁹¹ J. E. Lowry (Commissioner, MTS) to Dow, 16 March 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1, item 11. See also Lowry, "The Manitoba Situation," to the RCRB, April 1929, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3.

Winnipeg that were built but not yet operational.¹⁹³ The only broadcasters the MTS allowed in the province were amateurs, radio training schools, and after 1924, the Canadian National Railway radio station, but the federal government owned this station.¹⁹⁴ By not allowing private stations to be licensed by the Radio Branch, the MTS held a broadcasting monopoly in Manitoba until 1928.

The Manitoba Government's broad interpretation of the agreement it had with the Radio Branch gradually became clear to the federal government. In March of 1927, James Richardson and Sons applied to the MTS and the Radio Branch for a license to establish a broadcasting station at Brandon, Manitoba.¹⁹⁵ Brandon did not have a radio station and residents of the area did not receive CKY clearly, which was only a 500-watt station at the time.¹⁹⁶ The Brandon Board of Trade favoured the establishment of a private radio broadcasting station and they pressed both the Manitoba Government and the Radio Branch for a favourable response.¹⁹⁷ The province refused the Richardsons' application. In 1928, the Manitoba Telephone System established station CKX at Brandon, a rebroadcast station for CKY. The new station used the 500-watt transmitter previously installed at CKY, once the latter obtained a new 5,000-watt transmitter.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Johnston to the Honourable R. Forke (Member of Parliament, Brandon), 5 April 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1, item 27.

¹⁹⁴ Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 4.

¹⁹⁵ Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 5.

¹⁹⁶ Dow to Lowry, 17 March 1927, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1, item 10; Application for a License to Install and Operate a Radio Station In Canada, from W. Campbell (Manager, JRSL), 11 March 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 1.

¹⁹⁷ Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 8; Dow to Lowry, 19 March 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 7; Coats, "Brandon Wants a Station," in "R-a-d-i-o," Grain Growers' Guide, XX, no. 7, (April 1, 1927), 39.

¹⁹⁸ Telegram, A. E. McKenzie (Brandon Board of Trade) to Edwards, 29 March 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174.

¹⁹⁹ Vipond, Listening In, 177, 49, 118-119, 85, 196, 44, 89, 51, 301, n107 respectively; Schmalz, On Air, 25; Letters submitted to the Royal Commission, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3;

MTS acquired a license for, and established, the Brandon station after they refused the James Richardson and Sons' request.¹⁹⁹ Lowry felt that permitting the establishment of a private Brandon station would lead to a host of applications from other smaller centres, like Portage la Prairie and Neepawa, who desired similar treatment. MTS favoured using the "remote control principle" and rebroadcasting from CKY rather than establishing "a duplicate station" at Brandon.²⁰⁰

Apparently unhappy with the extensive power the Manitoba Government assumed it possessed in relation to radio in the province, the Radio Branch began to place limitations on the agreement. Since the Minister of Telephones would not allow the Richardsons a license to broadcast in the province of Manitoba, the firm placed a transmitter at Fleming, Saskatchewan, three miles from the Manitoba border, and broadcast into the province this way, effectively overcoming the MTS' monopoly. The Richardsons' plan included the establishment of studios located in Winnipeg.²⁰¹ Lowry wrote to the Radio Branch, hinting that the physical location of the studios broke the agreement between MTS and the Radio Branch. He stated that the MTS took no exception to the physical location of the Winnipeg studios, but suggested that he would if the federal government granted the James Richardson and Sons firm a high enough power to broadcast across the Saskatchewan border into Manitoba.²⁰² The Radio Branch replied that they considered the physical location of the transmitter and antenna, not the studios.

Letters submitted to the Royal Commission, NAC, RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-8-3; D. R. P. Coats, "R-a-d-i-o," Grain Growers' Guide, XXI, no. 3, (February 1, 1928), 28.

¹⁹⁹ Johnston to Lowry, 26 April 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 31.

²⁰⁰ Lowry to Dow, 18 March 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 8.

²⁰¹ Dow to W. A. Rush (Controller of Radio), 9 February 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 156-157; Night Letter from Radio Marine to Dow, 9 May 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 153; Vipond, Listening In, 46, 49; Schmalz, On Air, 24-25.

to be the determining factor in a station's location. Since the transmitter and antenna for the Richardsons' station were in Saskatchewan, the station did not violate the agreement with Manitoba, regardless of the power allowed.²⁰³ In reality, this move by the grain firm and the Radio Branch's response were the beginnings of the end of the MTS monopoly over broadcasting. From this point onward, the Radio Branch became less accommodating to the provincial government's monopoly.

The James Richardson and Sons company intended to use their Fleming station to broadcast into Manitoba. In July of 1928, Coats sent a telegram to Edwards asking for a higher power for CJRW Fleming because "INDICATIONS ARE THAT FIVE HUNDRED WATTS WILL NOT CARRY INTO WINNIPEG . . . SLIGHTLY HIGHER POWER WOULD LIKELY COVER THE DISTANCE SATISFACTORILY."²⁰⁴ In October of 1928, the company discovered that due to congestion on their wavelength, listeners could only hear CJRM and CJRW up to one hundred fifty miles away from the transmitters at night. This was not enough to consistently reach Winnipeg, so the company sought a new wavelength on a less congested channel.²⁰⁵ In 1932, Coats reported to the Radio Branch that "[w]hen receiving conditions are fairly good, CJRW Fleming can be heard clearly. . . ." at Winnipeg.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Lowry to Johnston, 6 February 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 133.

²⁰⁴ Johnston to Lowry, 11 February 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, items 134-135; Johnston to Lowry, 26 April 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, items 29-30; see also Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 4.

²⁰⁵ Telegram from Coats to Edwards, 28 July 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1.

²⁰⁶ Telegram from JRSL to Johnston, 9 October 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1, item 203.

²⁰⁷ Coats to F. McVeigh (Radio Branch), 10 March 1932, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 3, item 61-62.

The Radio Branch allowed an even more direct challenge to the agreement it had with the MTS than the Fleming station. In 1928, the Radio Branch allowed James Richardson and Sons to establish a short-wave station at Winnipeg as long as it did not interfere with "regular," or long wave, broadcasting there.²⁰⁷ The federal approval of the short-wave station angered Lowry. He sent a letter to the Deputy Minister of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, A. Johnston, stating that to the MTS, "broadcasting is broadcasting regardless of whether the wave used is long or short, and my impression is that it is a method to be used for the purpose of breaking into broadcasting arrangements in this Province."²⁰⁸ The Radio Branch argued in reply that short-wave stations did not come under the agreement they had with the province.²⁰⁹

Eventually the federal government broke the monopoly. In the winter of 1933, the Radio Branch terminated the agreement they had with the MTS. It was no longer necessary for the Radio Branch to consult the Manitoba Government before they issued broadcasting licenses in Manitoba.²¹⁰ Once the Radio Branch broke the telephone company's monopoly over radio broadcasting, the Richardsons relocated their Fleming, Saskatchewan, transmitter to Winnipeg.²¹¹

Although the Aird Commission envisioned a role for the provinces in future radio broadcasting in Canada, in practice, the provinces would be shut out in this period. In 1932, the provincial government of Quebec challenged the federal government's assumed

²⁰⁷ License to Use Radio for 1928-1929 for JRSL, 10 August 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 182.

²⁰⁸ Lowry to Johnston, 29 June 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, item 163.

²⁰⁹ Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 9.

²¹⁰ Memo to the Minister (Duranleau) from Edwards, 1 December 1933, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 3; Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 10.

²¹¹ Vipond, Listening In, 46, 49; Schmalz, On Air, 24-25.

jurisdiction over radio broadcasting. The current premier, L.-A. Taschereau, believed that “provincial control of radio would result in programs better suited to the mentality and taste of the Quebec people.”²¹² The Minister of Marine, Alfred Duranleau felt that allowing Quebec jurisdiction over broadcasting would only serve to decrease freedom of speech in the province.²¹³ The Supreme Court of Canada and later the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London both decided that radio was a dominion government concern because radio extended beyond the boundaries of single provinces.²¹⁴ The major result of these decisions was to alienate the provinces from broadcasting within their boundaries.

For a decade after the Radio Branch ended CKY’s monopoly, MTS owned and operated CKY and CKX without incident. In the early to mid-1940s, the desirability of provincial government broadcasters became an issue for the federal government. While the Radio Branch of the Department of Marine and Fisheries made the 1923 agreement with the MTS, in the mid-1940s, when Canada was fighting the Second World War, the federal cabinet made decisions regarding broadcasters. In 1944, the provincial governments of Alberta and Quebec applied for licenses for governmental broadcasting services. Quebec wanted to establish a provincial broadcasting service to counter the CBC, which the provincial politicians believed was centralist and imperialist.²¹⁵ The federal government rejected Quebec’s application.²¹⁶ The province of Alberta applied to have the University of Alberta station license transferred to itself. When the CBC refused

²¹² Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 69.

²¹³ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 70.

²¹⁴ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 71-72; Vipond, Listening In, 252-253.

²¹⁵ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 373-374.

²¹⁶ Babe, Telecommunications, 204.

this application, the government of Alberta applied for a high-power station at Red Deer. The CBC also refused this application.²¹⁷ These refusals must have raised suspicion in the legislatures at Alberta and Quebec: although the government would not permit them to own radio broadcasting stations, they allowed the government of Manitoba to own broadcasting stations.

In 1946, the federal government solved the uncertainties around the issue of provincial broadcasters. The Privy Council decided to disallow provincial government ownership and operation of radio broadcasting stations. In 1946, the Saskatchewan government applied to Ottawa for a broadcasting license. The provincial government sought approval to take over CHAB Moose Jaw and create a provincial broadcaster.²¹⁸ The Cabinet, under Prime Minister Mackenzie King, decided to disallow provincial ownership of radio stations. As such, the Privy Council recommended that the request of Saskatchewan for a provincial station be denied and "negotiations be undertaken immediately with the Provincial government of Manitoba, with a view to acquisition of stations owned by that government."²¹⁹ CKY, by the mid-1940s, was one of the most powerful radio stations in Canada. The CBC viewed the station as key to national broadcasting and they took the station over in 1947.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Peers, *Canadian Broadcasting*, 374-375.

²¹⁸ Cabinet Conclusions Meeting Minutes, 21 March 1946, NAC, Privy Council Office, RG 2, series A-5-a, vol. 2637, Cabinet Conclusions, 7 September 1945 to 5 April 1946, p. 7.

²¹⁹ Cabinet Conclusions Meeting Minutes, 21 March 1946, re. Radio Policy: Transfer of Moose Jaw Station to Provincial Government, NAC, Privy Council Office, RG 2, series A-5-a, vol. 2637, Cabinet Conclusions, 7 September 1945 to 5 April 1946, p. 3; quoted from Cabinet Conclusions Meeting Minutes, 11 April 1946, re. Radio Policy: Provincial Government Stations, NAC, Privy Council Office, RG 2, series A-5-a, vol. 2638, Cabinet Conclusions, 8 April 1946 to 25 September 1946.

²²⁰ John D. Jackson, "Broadcasting: Centralization, Regionalization, and Canadian Identity," in *Communications in Canadian Society*, 4th ed., ed. Benjamin D. Singer (Toronto: Nelson Canada, 1995), 228-229; Babe, *Telecommunications*, 203.

The Premier of Manitoba, Stuart Garson, explained the government's reasons for giving up CKY in a radio address to the province:

the development of a national radio policy for Canada requires Manitoba to withdraw from radio broadcasting. . . . If [Manitoba] were to insist upon staying in this field it would be impossible, I think, for the Dominion government to refuse licenses to eight other provinces, with the result that your airwaves could ultimately be congested with broadcasts from ten different governments in Canada.²²¹

Perhaps this hints at the reason that led the federal government to disallow provincial broadcasters. The governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Quebec all faced hostile presses in their provinces. Allowing the provinces ownership of radio stations could have provided them with a powerful medium by which to broadcast their ideas, policies, and complaints. The provinces complained that Ottawa's refusal to allow provincial broadcasters denied them free speech.²²² CKY Winnipeg became CBW, the CBC station in Winnipeg.²²³ The ownership of broadcasting stations by provincial governments ended with the sale of CKY.

The Moose Jaw amateur station, 10AB, was a community station run by a local radio association. The station paid for the required mechanical equipment from the one dollar annual membership fee paid by each member in the Moose Jaw Radio Association and from donations. The performers and announcers provided their services for free.²²⁴

²²¹ Garson quoted in Coats, "Canada's Fifty Years," 176.

²²² Peers, *Canadian Broadcasting*, 373-377.

²²³ Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 10.

²²⁴ A. J. Wickens to the Radio Branch, 29 November 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1, item 115; Schmalz, *On Air*, 20.

The amateur station, therefore, had to provide a good service to listeners or it would lose its funding and talent.

The amateur station was in a somewhat precarious position. Although 10AB was the first station in the city, once a commercial station, CJRM owned by James Richardson and Sons, opened up, 10AB began to lose broadcasting time and privileges to the new station. When the amateurs complained, the Radio Branch replied firmly that the commercial station had priority and stated that should any of 10AB's "hours be required by a local station of the Private Commercial Broadcasting class, at a future date, they would have to be released."²²⁵ The Radio Branch was not very sympathetic to the plight of 10AB Moose Jaw. Once there was a commercial station in a region, the Radio Branch no longer saw a need for amateur stations, regardless of the quality of service they provided or for how long. As P. J. A. Cardin, the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, wrote to J. Gordon Ross, the Member of Parliament for Moose Jaw in 1926, the amateur broadcasting license:

is primarily intended for issue to Radio Associations at the more remote or isolated places not covered by stations holding licenses of the Private Commercial class. . . . When a Private Commercial Broadcasting Station enters the field, the underlying idea is that the need for one of the Amateur class disappears, and the general policy is that the commercial station shall have preference in selection of hours. . . .²²⁶

²²⁵ Hawken (Assistant Deputy Minister, DMF) to E. Swain (Secretary, Moose Jaw Radio Association), 1 December 1927, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1.

²²⁶ Cardin to J. Gordon Ross (Member of Parliament, Moose Jaw), 13 November 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1, item 47; see also Johnston to Swain, 5 April 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1.

The Moose Jaw Radio Association was particularly upset over the Radio Branch's policy governing amateur stations. The members believed that the length of service should determine priority, not the class of the station. In 1932, the secretary of the Association wrote to the radio inspector for Moose Jaw:

[i]f the interpretation of the regulations were not in accordance with our contention [that CJRM cannot choose time already taken up by 10AB] it would mean that we, the pioneer broadcasting station of Moose Jaw and a station which has, and is, serving the general public of this City and Western Saskatchewan with a calibre [sic] of programme and length of time on the air comparing favourably with any Commercial Station in the Province, could be arbitrarily forced off the air at any time by a neighbor Commercial Station.²²⁷

The amateurs felt that as the first station in the city, they held some right to hours and they believed that it was not fair to "prevent the Amateur station from giving community service free and to allow such service to be given by a commercial station which is operated purely for profit."²²⁸ In the years immediately after the Aird Commission, there existed an uneasiness and an emerging struggle over the model of broadcasting to be finally adopted in Canada, whether it was to be governed solely by the CBC, what the role of the private stations would become, and also where the other broader, interests would fit into the picture.

When the amateurs tried to get a commercial license in 1928, the Radio Branch refused because there was already a commercial station in the city and because the

²²⁷ Buchanan to Stephen, 19 August 1932, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 3, item 87-88.

²²⁸ A. J. Wickens to the Radio Branch, 29 November 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1, item 115.

Richardsons were also setting up a station at Fleming, Saskatchewan, which would require a further adjustment of hours for the amateur station.²²⁹

The amateurs asked the Radio Branch and later the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission for a commercial license, a privilege that the CRBC did not grant until the spring of 1933,²³⁰ although the association had asked for the license since September of 1925.²³¹ The station wanted a commercial license so that it could collect advertising revenue and enjoy programme sponsorship.²³² Membership revenues could not raise the amount of money that advertising could. In March of 1933, a representative for the station had to beg Ottawa for a favourable response to their pleas for a commercial license because at the time, the station's "FINANCES NECESSITATE COMMERCIALIZATION OR CLOSING IMMEDIATELY."²³³ Residents of Moose Jaw took the conflicts as another example of big business versus small communities. The citizens and members of the radio station felt that they were being sacrificed to a large company. It likely rankled the residents of Moose Jaw and the surrounding community even more because the big business that the Radio Branch favoured was the Richardsons' grain firm. Prairie residents already resented the grain firm because it was involved in setting the price of wheat each year.

²²⁹ Johnston to Swain, 21 April 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1.

²³⁰ W. Arthur Steel (Commissioner, RCRB) to Edwards, 3 May 1933, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 2, item 114.

²³¹ Dr. S. A. Merkley (President, Moose Jaw Radio Association) to Minister of Marine and Fisheries, 25 September 1925, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1, item 54.

²³² A. J. Wickens to the Radio Branch, 29 November 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1, item 115.

²³³ Roy Dunlop (CHAB programme director) to Edwards, 31 March 1933, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 2.

The conflict over a commercial license for the Moose Jaw Radio Association was really a struggle over the model of broadcasting to be adopted in Canada, media ownership, and the political economy of media, especially in relation to a large company such as James Richardson and Sons.

The problems between the amateurs, CJRM, and the regulatory agencies continued. Two events occurred that angered Moose Jaw residents further. The CRBC provided private stations a source of much needed revenue during the Depression. The Commission chose CJRM as the basic station for the city of Moose Jaw because it had a good frequency and 1,000 watts of power. Its competitor, CHAB Moose Jaw (formerly 10AB), was unhappy that the Commission chose CJRM over their station. Although CHAB had only 100 watts of power, they wanted and needed the CRBC programmes to fill up their broadcasting schedule and to bring in money. The station had to become commercial because the depression and poor crops led many citizens to default on paying their membership fees in the radio association. In the winter of 1933, soon after the station became commercial, the CRBC ordered CHAB to make eight thousand dollars' worth of renovations in order to continue broadcasting. Being financially unable to complete the upgrades required by the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, CHAB shut down for just over a month until the station secured enough money to make the necessary repairs.²³⁴ The Regina Daily-Star and Leader-Post published a firestorm of protest while CHAB was off the air. Journalists and letter writers alleged that the

²³⁴ Schmalz, On Air, 52-53.

Commission was being unfair to CHAB and the station believed that the Commission was misinterpreting its powers.²³⁵

The technical problems and uneven diffusion of radios and radio stations, led the Canadian government to create a royal commission to study broadcasting. The 1929 radio commission was similar to the Mulock Committee formed to examine the telephone system in 1905. The federal government struck the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, chaired by Sir John Aird, to examine the contemporary situation of Canadian broadcasting and provide recommendations for its future. The Commissioners took a trip to Europe to examine broadcasting in countries including Britain, Belgium, France, and Germany.²³⁶ In addition, they traveled across Canada hearing briefs presented by interested parties in twenty-five cities. The Commission heard 164 verbal statements, sixty-four of which were on the Prairies.²³⁷ Finally, the commissioners encouraged people to write to them giving their views on the present state of broadcasting in Canada, including whether they favoured the current situation of broadcasting or if they would prefer a system similar to Britain's. The Commission received 124 written statements, forty of which were from the Prairies.²³⁸ Communication scholar Mike Gasher argues that the hearings of, and submissions to, the Aird Commission attracted mainly the "organized intellectual, social, or, financial elite." The majority of people involved had distinct interests in the future of radio, such as radio station owners, radio

²³⁵ "[A. J.] Wickens Says Radio Commission Misinterprets Powers," Regina Leader-Post, XXX, no. 269 (November 18, 1933), 1 in NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 2, item 146.

²³⁶ RCRB, Report, 5.

²³⁷ RCRB, Report, 5, 18-19.

²³⁸ RCRB, Report, 22; Vipond, Listening In, 213-214.

clubs, businesses, and community groups. The minority of the interveners and correspondents were independent radio listeners or “disinterested citizens.”²³⁹

From the information the Aird Commission gathered at home and abroad, including that about the high concentration and weak power of radio transmitting stations, the Commission recommended establishing a public service broadcaster, run as a public utility. The Commission’s report presents the public’s opinion as a consensus in favour of a public service broadcaster. According to Gasher, the records of interveners do not show agreement on public service broadcasting.²⁴⁰ Although the Aird Commission recommended public service broadcasting by a national company, the submissions sent and presented to the Commission illustrate that the interveners were not uniformly in favour of such a plan. Of 176 written and oral submissions at the National Archives of Canada, thirty-four favoured government ownership and control of radio. Fifty-three of the submissions favoured private enterprise. Eighty people were neutral or did not address the issue at all.²⁴¹ Using these statistics, Gasher questions the weight the Commission placed on public opinion when making its recommendation to establish a public service broadcaster.

This evidence raises considerable suspicion about the role of the interveners in the Aird Commission and suggests that their opinions were not considered. Gasher suggests that the Aird Commissioners may have come to their tasks with their recommendations already in view.²⁴² Knowing that the interveners’ letters and submissions did not figure

²³⁹ Mike Gasher, “Invoking Public Support for Public Broadcasting: The Aird Commission Revisited,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 23 (1998): 192, 204.

²⁴⁰ Gasher, “The Aird Commission,” 189.

²⁴¹ Gasher, “The Aird Commission,” 201.

²⁴² Gasher, “The Aird Commission,” 195, 206.

largely into the report, this also lends support to the argument that rural Prairie residents, and many ordinary Canadians for that matter, had little say in the creation of the radio broadcasting policy. Gasher concludes that although the Aird Commission played an important part in establishing “a tradition of public consultation in cultural policy development,” the Commission did not present a truthful account of the public’s fractured opinions on the question of the ownership of broadcasting. He concludes that “while there is little evidence to suggest the public hearings swayed the Aird commissioners one way or the other, the public consultation process allowed the commissioners to legitimize their central recommendations by making selective reference to public opinion in their final report.”²⁴³

The letters and submissions from Prairie dwellers to the Aird Commission, in particular those in rural areas, are important for consideration. Unfortunately, the written submissions for the province of Saskatchewan and the interventions from the western Canadian hearings are not in the National Archives and appear to be misplaced. Only the written submissions from Alberta and Manitoba remain. This gap in the historical record is problematic for examining the responses of rural Prairie dwellers to the radio.²⁴⁴ This gap considerably limits the usefulness of the Aird submissions as their impact as a whole cannot be studied since historians cannot reconstruct the conclusions that the Aird commissioners made.

²⁴³ Gasher, “The Aird Commission,” 205-206.

²⁴⁴ Gasher, “The Aird Commission,” 215, note 2. The National Archives records skip from RG 42, series C-1, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3 to 227-8-3. The file 227-7-3 is likely the lost Saskatchewan file. Also, in the archival files there are no transcripts from the Prairie hearings.

To provide public service to the people of Canada, the Commission called for the national broadcaster to build a transmitting station in each Canadian province, with one transmitter serving the entire Maritime region.²⁴⁵ The public service broadcaster would:

eventually cover effectively and consistently that vast northern territory of Canada which at present has comparatively few inhabitants at remote and scattered points. . . . The Company's immediate objectives should be, however, to provide *good reception over the entire settled region of the country* during daylight or dark under normal conditions on a five-tube receiving set.²⁴⁶

The public broadcaster, thus, would follow a policy of universal access. The Aird Commission Report of 1929 was the benchmark for universal access in Canadian broadcasting, a policy that has remained to the present.²⁴⁷

After the Aird Report, in 1932, the current Prime Minister R. B. Bennett announced "'no other scheme than of public ownership can ensure to the people of this country, *without regard to class or place*, equal enjoyment of the benefits and pleasures of radio broadcasting.'" ²⁴⁸ The Broadcasting Act of 1932 established the expanded access to broadcasting that Bennett heralded through the establishment of national public service radio stations.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ RCRB, Report, 6-8.

²⁴⁶ According to the Aird Commission report, receiving sets of less than five tubes were going out of use in 1929 RCRB, Report, 7; emphasis added.

²⁴⁷ Vipond, Listening In, 41.

²⁴⁸ R. B. Bennett quoted in Cowan Buchwald, "Canadian Universality Policy," 169; emphasis added.

²⁴⁹ When television was introduced in Canada in 1952, the Massey Commission recommended that the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Corporation be given control over it, and therefore following in the path of the radio, television was also to be universally accessible to Canadians "without regard to class or place." Cowan Buchwald, "Canadian Universality Policy," 169-170.

By the 1930s, the face of broadcasting on the Prairies began to change. For many listeners, however, the change was not as great as what they expected in the wake of the Aird Commission's report. Communication scholars have explored the history of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in great depth. The attention here, therefore, will be on a simple outline of what broadcasting was like for Prairie listeners in the 1930s and 1940s, with the political and regulatory aspects left largely unexamined.

In 1932, the federal government introduced the Broadcasting Act. This act allowed for the creation of a public service broadcaster as recommended by the Aird Commission. The Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission could not afford to build a physical network of stations as planned and instead they selected private stations as key, or basic, stations and paid them for broadcasting time.²⁵⁰ Since the CRBC needed private stations to cover the nation, private broadcasters, according to Canadian historian Margaret Prang, "were allowed to proliferate to an extent unforeseen either by the Aird Commission or the Radio League."²⁵¹ This was a different course of action than most had expected: "[t]he Aird Commission had not foreseen any private stations; the Radio League had contemplated a number of local stations to serve their community and to provide alternative programming."²⁵² Since the CRBC could not afford to build its own network, the Commission had to allow the private stations. They did not, however, give the private stations everything they wanted. Some stations, nevertheless, did benefit. For example, CKY Winnipeg got an increase in power from 5,000 to 15,000 watts, because

²⁵⁰ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 134.

²⁵¹ Prang quoted in Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 161.

the Commission saw this station as an important part of national coverage.²⁵³ The city of Edmonton received a new station, CFRN, at this time.²⁵⁴ The number of privately owned radio stations in Canada increased after 1932. In that year, there were sixty-nine private broadcasting stations in the country. In 1936, there were seventy-three private radio stations and only eight public ones.²⁵⁵ Private broadcasters, although they had originally feared being shut down once the national broadcaster was established, now were a critical distribution arm of the national network. In the 1930s, the public service CRBC relied on private sector broadcasters across Canada to help it fulfill the mandate laid down for it in the Aird Commission report and by the Broadcasting Act.

On the Prairies, the CBC did not reach as many people as it hoped. To accomplish its goal of reaching the largest number of listeners possible, the CBC needed the high power Prairie stations to broadcast its programmes. While CKY Winnipeg, a 15,000 watt station, did broadcast CBC programmes, CFCN Calgary did not. CFCN was one of the largest Canadian stations. It had a very high power of 10,000 watts and a good frequency, but it was not on the CBC basic network.²⁵⁶

The government incorporated the Aird Commission's recommendations into the Broadcasting Act, but built only one transmitter for the Prairie region, located at Watrous, Saskatchewan, instead of building one transmitter per province. The decision was due to the "distressing economic situation" of the 1930s. The government chose Watrous because of its central location, thus allowing signals to reach the most listeners possible.

²⁵² Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 161.

²⁵³ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 161.

²⁵⁴ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 161.

²⁵⁵ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 185.

²⁵⁶ Peers, Canadian Broadcasting, 201, 349.

The station went on the air in July of 1939 with 50,000 watts of power; it was one of the most powerful transmitters in North America.²⁵⁷ The CBC estimated that the Watrous station and one located in Sackville, Nova Scotia, increased the CBC's coverage of the Canadian population from forty-nine percent in 1936 to eighty-four percent in 1939.²⁵⁸

Although the CBC was attaining its purpose of providing broadcasting to the settled regions of Canada, it affected Canadian radio programming negatively. John D. Jackson in his article, "Broadcasting: Centralization, Regionalization, and Canadian Identity," suggests that the CBC had the effect of giving broadcasting a more centralized rather than regional identity. Although the Aird Commission did envision a role for the provinces in broadcasting, the Broadcasting Act of 1932 did not enshrine this role.²⁵⁹ In the structure that emerged, central and national voices subordinated regional ones. To illustrate his argument, Jackson studies CKY Winnipeg, the MTS station. When the government established the CRBC in 1932, the station became one of the Commission's major affiliates. One year later, the CRBC leased three hours of time each night from CKY and the station produced some programmes for the Commission. By 1936, the Minister of Telephones noted that "CKY then averaged only four hours per month in sponsored regional network programs compared with 27 hours per month in 1931."²⁶⁰ The amount of regional material broadcast by the station decreased significantly over five years. In 1947, the CBC took over CKY. In the summer of 1948, the station that the CBC established in Winnipeg, CBW, went on the air.²⁶¹ Over time, the CBC began to

²⁵⁷ Schmalz, *On Air*, 67; Peers, *Canadian Broadcasting*, 221.

²⁵⁸ Canada, *The Canada Year Book, 1939*, 726; Peers, *Canadian Broadcasting*, 221.

²⁵⁹ Jackson, "Broadcasting," 228.

²⁶⁰ Jackson, "Broadcasting," 229.

²⁶¹ Jackson, "Broadcasting," 229.

produce increasing amounts of its content in Toronto rather than in regional centres including Winnipeg and Halifax.²⁶² Jackson argues that the CBC sacrificed regional identity for a nationalist perspective. Due to this, the CBC lost the local voice characteristic of regionally produced programmes.²⁶³

The Second World War solidified the position of radio broadcasting in Canada. A growing appetite for news of the conflict in Europe contributed to radio's soaring popularity on the Prairies and elsewhere in Canada.

There are two key themes explored in this chapter worth reiterating that question the common assumptions made about Canada's broadcasting history. The first of these themes is the discrepancy that existed between the Aird Commission report and the actual submissions to the Commission. Although the Aird report mentioned that a "large majority" of the representative bodies that intervened favoured public service broadcasting, in truth, the public's opinion was divided on the question.²⁶⁴

The second theme to note is the rough edges that surrounded the transition from entirely private enterprise broadcasting to the national broadcasting model of the 1930s. The transition was marked by the assertion of federal authority over provincial authority, which became marginalized in the new broadcasting model. The example of 10AB Moose Jaw and its considerable wrangling with the Radio Branch illustrate the marginalization of the community amateur radio station in favour of the private commercial broadcasters, such as the James Richardsons and Sons stations. Finally, the private sector became the core of the public service broadcasting system for a time in the

²⁶² Jackson, "Broadcasting," 230.

²⁶³ Jackson, "Broadcasting," 234.

1930s. After 1932, the CRBC allowed private broadcasters rights unforeseen by the Aird Commission out of necessity. Private broadcasters were incorporated into the heart of the Canadian broadcasting system as a vehicle to further the organized, public service broadcasting outlined by the Broadcasting Act and the Aird Commission.

This chapter discusses the structural framework of the telephone systems and radio broadcasting stations on the Canadian Prairies from 1900 until 1950. It illustrates three things. First, that a complex array of dominion, provincial, and corporate policies and regulations influenced the telephone system and radio broadcasting stations. Second, the ownership patterns of the communication technologies varied within and between the three Prairie provinces. Finally, the costs and fees of the communication devices fluctuated with time. It was within this context that rural Prairie residents made choices about which communication and transportation technologies to consume.

²⁴ Aird Commission, Report, 6.

“Among the Necessities”: People’s Relationship to Communication Technologies

This chapter will explore Canadian Prairie farm families’ uses and perceptions of communication technology in the early twentieth century. The objectives are to look at the consumption and use of communication technology through the eyes of rural Prairie consumers using their discussion of the devices. As well, the chapter strives to accurately portray individual people’s joy, frustration, and other emotions about communication technologies.

This chapter, and the next, will use the three questions proposed by Fischer, discussed in chapter three. His approach provides important entry points for an explanation of people’s acquisition and use of communication devices. The questions are, first, “why and how did individuals use the technology?” Second, “how did using it alter other, less immediate aspects of their lives?” and third, “how did the collective use of a technology and the collective responses to it alter social structure and culture?”¹ The chapter will also employ the idea of a technology’s life cycle presented in chapter three. It focuses on the potential or actual consumer of technological devices and tries to reconstruct the network of social relations around the consumer that shaped the choices they could make.

There are three relevant social groups studied in this chapter. The first of these groups is advertisers and promoters of products, the second is the journalists who wrote

¹ Fischer, America Calling, 20-21.

for the farm periodicals, and the potential and actual consumers of the devices, the farm families, comprise the third group. This chapter will seek to explore whether the broad uses that promoters attributed to the devices, the perceived benefits, were also the ones that rural dwellers used and valued them for, the actual benefits.

Farm families on the Canadian Prairies used telephones and radios in two broad ways. The first way included uses that made an old task more efficient. The other use of the technologies was to do new things that farm people could not do before. The farm families who chose to consume them incorporated communication devices rapidly into their homes, their daily lives, and their family businesses, the farm. Largely, farm families used communication technologies to do tasks they had long performed. The new devices, however, made the tasks faster, easier, or more efficient to perform.

There were two main ways for potential buyers to gather information about communication technologies. The first of these was interpersonal communication. Farm families learned of new technologies and their merits and detriments in part from neighbours and other social contacts. Social contacts are extremely difficult for the historian to reconstruct, however, because they were largely verbal interactions not recorded in a permanent form. These contacts, therefore, cannot be studied here. The second way of learning about new devices was through newspapers, magazines, and farm journals.

There were a variety of farm periodicals available to Western Canada farmers throughout the period in question. This chapter uses one of these journals, the Grain Growers' Guide, as its major evidence. A farm periodical is an appropriate source for uncovering the uses and perceptions of Prairie farmers as farm journals are an important

source for rural history. Prairie historian David C. Jones noted that in the farmers' papers:

[e]very aspect of rural existence was reflected and the coverage overlapped most other sources in the period. with commentaries, articles, speeches, and letters from those who wrote books, those who preached the social gospel, who represented federal and provincial departments of agriculture, women's institutes, homemakers' clubs, agricultural societies and other farm organizations, and those who attended important agrarian conventions, or who were simply farmers and farm wives. That is, the source by its very nature was multi-faceted. It also represented the whole region. . . . The farm press, in sum, was something of a catchall, not sufficient in itself as a means of understanding the time, but probably the single source most likely to address most themes which agricultural historians deem significant.²

As the "single source most likely to address" themes important to historians and the source covering "every aspect of rural existence," the rural journals can help explore Prairie farm families' uses and perceptions of communication technologies.

The Grain Growers' Guide was arguably the most popular farm journal of the period. It is also the most complete western Canadian agrarian paper from the period available to historians. The first issue of the Grain Growers' Guide appeared in 1908 and it was printed in Winnipeg. Davis has pointed out the importance of this journal to the organized grain growers of Western Canada from its beginning. The journal's main purpose was to provide Prairie farmers with a forum to discuss contemporary political, economic, and social issues that affected them. The political purpose of the Guide was to promote cooperation against farmers' "exploitation by grain merchants, bankers and

government imposed tariffs.”³ The paper also provided education though information and advice to rural dwellers. In the first twenty years that the Guide was published, farmers called it a “Bible” and a “life-saver” because it linked them with the outside world. Subscribers could read about a host of international, national, and local issues, and they were given the opportunity to express their views as well. Readers’ letters were an integral part of the journal, especially in the first two decades of its existence.⁴

The Guide’s circulation numbers illustrate the journal’s importance to Prairie farm families. The paper had high circulation figures that often surpassed other farm journals of the period. On April 30, 1913, five years after it began, the paid circulation of the Guide was 30,043. There were 6,790 subscribers in Alberta, 14,541 in Saskatchewan, and 7,325 in Manitoba.⁵ At the end of the same year, the Guide published the circulation figures for a number of western farm magazines. The Guide had 31,423 subscribers, the western edition of the Farmers’ Advocate and Home Journal had 29,355, the Nor’-West Farmer had 28,007 subscribers, and the Farm and Ranch Review had 18,000.⁶ Numerically, the Guide had the greatest number of subscribers in the West.

By 1920, the Guide was still the most popular of the four major western farm periodicals. The Farmer’s Advocate had 40,917 subscribers, the Farm and Ranch Review

³ David C. Jones, “‘There is Some Power About the Land’: The Western Agrarian Press and Country Life Ideology,” Journal of Canadian Studies, 17, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 97.

⁴ Davis, “Country Homemakers,” 164.

⁵ Davis, “Country Homemakers,” 164.

⁶ This evidence may suggest that more of the readers’ letters published in the journal were from Saskatchewan. Circulation figures, Grain Growers’ Guide, VI, no. 20 (May 14, 1913), 3.

⁷ “Common Business Honesty,” Grain Growers’ Guide, VI, no. 44 (October 29, 1913), 3.

had 48,844. The Nor'-West Farmer had 67,401, and The Grain Growers' Guide topped the list with a circulation of 74,606.⁷

The United Farm Women of Manitoba's 1922 Rural Home Survey further illustrated the importance of the Grain Growers' Guide in rural households. In total, 65.5 percent of the survey respondents read the Guide, 43.7 percent read the Nor'-West Farmer, 12.7 percent read the Farmers' Advocate, and 0.28 percent, or one respondent, read the Farm and Ranch Review. For 61.9 percent of the survey respondents, the Guide was the only farm paper they read. A majority of the respondents, 67.4 percent, received the Grain Growers' Guide along with other farm papers, such as the Nor'West Farmer and The Farmer's Advocate.⁸

In February of 1923, the Guide had a circulation of 80,000 but by the same time in 1924, the number of subscribers dropped to 75,000.⁹ The editors did not record the circulation of the Guide from February of 1924 until 1928. In time for the April 2, 1928, edition, the Grain Growers' Guide changed its name to the Country Guide. As the new name suggests, the purpose of organizing grain farmers had become less central to the editors by this time. The journal became less politically oriented and more of a variety magazine for rural dwellers. In April of 1928, the Country Guide claimed a circulation of over 120,000 and by December of 1930, the paper had a net paid circulation of 140,000.¹⁰

⁷ Jones, "The Western Agrarian Press," 97.

⁸ The Farm and Ranch Review readership numbers were likely low because the survey was done in Manitoba, but the Review was published in Calgary. UFWM 1922 "Rural Home Survey" Question Sheets, Public Archives of Manitoba, MG 10 E1, box 12.

⁹ Grain Growers' Guide, XVI, no. 8 (February 21, 1923), front cover; Grain Growers' Guide, XVII, no. 7 (February 13, 1924), front cover.

¹⁰ The Country Guide, XXI, no. 7 (April 2, 1928), front cover; The Country Guide, XXIII, no. 16 (December 1930), front cover.

In June of 1936, the journal merged with one of its main competitors to become The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer. During the Depression, the Country Guide had gone through cuts to its length and frequency to save printing and mailing costs.¹¹ The publishers, however, still merged the two papers.

Manufacturers and sellers of a host of new farm, labour-saving, communication, and transportation devices advertised their wares in the farm journals. Potential consumers of telephones and radios had to evaluate a plethora of advertisements and endorsements in the popular press and make decisions about communication technologies. The net result of the advertisements, columns, and letters from rural people in the Grain Growers' Guide was the lauding of new communication technologies for their benefit to farm life. The letter writers, however, did not uniformly express their enjoyment with, and the usefulness of, communication technologies. Some farm women spoke of a daily existence devoid of "luxuries," such as communication devices. Their financial situation prohibited these women and their families from knowing how ownership of a telephone, radio, or automobile would improve life on the farm.

The advertisements published in the Guide sold a particular brand of device. The company that manufactured or sold a device or service touted its specific merits and technological achievements in the journal. At the same time, however, the advertisements also promoted the general social and economic benefits of telephones and radios to their rural readership. The Grain Growers' Guide contained many feature articles, editorials, advertisements, and letters to the journal about technology and the

¹¹ Although the Grain Growers' Guide was originally a weekly paper, on April 1, 1926, it began to be published twice monthly, on the first and fifteenth day. On May 1, 1930, The Country Guide became a

benefits that specific technologies could provide to rural families and farm life, from both male and female points of view.

Along with articles, advertisements, and letters touting the benefits of communication technologies, the Guide also published items exploring the hardships of rural Prairie life. One female writer to the Country Guide in 1934, "M. J. H." from Saskatchewan, poignantly summarized the problems faced by rural Prairie dwellers that they attempted to combat through the purchase of communication technology. She felt that the problems of farm life in Western Canada included small shacks without rooms; extremes in temperature from the freezing cold to the extreme summer heat; inadequate food and clothing; and loneliness.¹²

Telephone service providers and the sellers of telephonic equipment were the major promoters of the device in the agrarian press. This group advertised that telephones had six benefits to the farm. Pike summarized that the telephone service providers and manufacturers sought to sell telephones to potential consumers by showing the "convenience, economic rationality, crisis resolution, family maintenance and enhanced sociability (aimed particularly at farm wives), and -- above all -- the belief in progress: . . ." that the instruments provided to rural dwellers.¹³ Service providers and manufacturers directed their advertisements toward different segments of the farm population, including farmers, farm wives, children, and older people. Proponents of the telephone system, such as the Northern Electric Company that manufactured telephone equipment, promoted rural telephones as an important device that could revolutionize

monthly magazine.

¹² "M. J. H.," "Homesteaditis," The Country Guide, XXVII, no. 1 (January 1934), 16.

rural life on the Prairies. In 1917, the company called the telephone “THE BIGGEST LITTLE THING ON THE FARM.”¹⁴

Manufacturers and service providers promoted the telephone for the convenience it provided to farm families in their farming operations and their daily lives. The telephone companies and manufacturers discovered that one of the greatest selling points of the device for rural people was its ability to overcome distance, for various purposes, be they related to business or pleasure. Often, the selling of these benefits overshadowed the advertising of the specific company’s product or service. In 1911, the Canadian Independent Telephone Company, a competitor of Northern Electric, noted the convenience that a telephone offered because farmers could “call the railway station and learn if an expected shipment has arrived.”¹⁵ In 1917, the Northern Electric Company informed Guide readers that farmers could use telephones to order supplies.¹⁶ The companies implied through these advertisements that it was more convenient for rural people to place a telephone call than it was to drive several miles to the station or town to achieve the same purpose. Manitoba Government Telephones also tried to sell telephonic service for the convenience it offered. A 1921 advertisement reminded farmers of unpleasant winter errands and then explained how simple the tasks could be made with a telephone installed:

Telephone Farmers Defy Winter’s Blast = No need to drive tired horses over snow-swept roads, to endure numbed fingers and frost-bitten flesh, or

¹³ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 10.

¹⁴ Northern Electric advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, X, no. 50 (December 12, 1917), 44.

¹⁵ Canadian Independent Telephone Company (CITC) advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, IV, no. 13 (October 25, 1911), 31.

¹⁶ Northern Electric advertisement, (December 12, 1917), 44.

to spend long, expensive, tiresome hours in stuffy trains, when The Telephone will carry your message, and bring back the instantaneous reply. One winter's trip avoided, saves your Telephone Tolls for months. The twin wires that lead from your fireside connect you instantly with your tradesmen, your doctor, your markets and the world.¹⁷

The telephone, according to its promoters, allowed farmers to do their business from their homes. In 1911, the Canadian Independent Telephone Company stated that a telephone in the farm home allowed farmers to “talk business with the creamery, the implement agents, the stores, the bank and your lawyer.”¹⁸ The device, therefore, saved farmers time, money, and trouble.

The second benefit of telephone service mentioned by manufacturers and providers was the economic value of the telephone to the business of farming. The major economic benefit of the telephone seemed to be the “up-to-the-minute market reports” that it provided to farmers who lived in a telephone locality.¹⁹ According to the Northern Electric Company, the telephone kept farmers constantly up to date with market reports and prices, allowing them to buy and sell at the right times to make the greatest profit.²⁰

The economic benefits provided by the telephone made it a “practical investment” for farmers.²¹ In 1920, Northern Electric marketed telephone systems to farmers by appealing to their desire to be progressive and to improve their farming businesses. The advertisement stated: “[i]n instantaneous, every-day contact with the business and markets of the Dominion, Canadian farmers are steadily strengthening their influence on

¹⁷ Manitoba Telephone System advertisement, Grain Growers' Guide, XIV, no. 43 (October 26, 1921), 12.

¹⁸ CITC advertisement, (October 25, 1911), 31.

¹⁹ Northern Electric advertisement, (December 12, 1917), 44.

²⁰ Northern Electric advertisement, Grain Growers' Guide, XX, no. 9 (May 2, 1927), 51.

the affairs of the nation.”²² The telephone, to the company, allowed farmers to be more involved in the business side of farming.

Beyond use for daily farm business, the telephone, advertisers were quick to point out, could also be used to resolve emergency situations or prevent them from occurring in the first place: thereby making the farm a safer place to live. Both the Northern Electric and Canadian Independent Telephone companies used this approach to sell telephone sets and the idea of telephones to rural Canadians. In 1917, Northern Electric reminded potential subscribers of the “*safety* of being able to telephone for help in case of fire for the doctor in case of illness.”²³ The Independent company went further, telling customers that with a telephone, “[i]n time of sickness you can summon the doctor immediately. You can call your neighbors to assist you in case of a fire, an accident, or an unwelcome visit by tramps.”²⁴ The phone, therefore, added a measure of protection to the farm home, that could be a lonely and vulnerable place in times of emergency.

Promoters also argued that the telephone had the potential to enhance the sociability of farm life. Closely tied to this argument was the manufacturers and service providers’ claim that the telephone was an instrument of family maintenance that would help keep the farm family at home. In a 1917 advertisement directed at farmers, Northern Electric advertised that one of the benefits of a telephone on the farm was the sociability that kept farmers’ wives from “heart-breaking loneliness” and their children from “city-fever.”²⁵ In another advertisement directed at farm women in the same year, Northern

²² Quotation from Northern Electric advertisement, (January 3, 1912), 32.

²³ Northern Electric advertisement, *Grain Growers’ Guide*, XIII, no. 8 (February 25, 1920), 88.

²⁴ Emphasis in original. Northern Electric advertisement, (December 12, 1917), 44.

²⁵ CITC advertisement, (October 25, 1911), 31.

²⁶ Northern Electric advertisement, (December 12, 1917), 44.

Electric advertised telephone systems by stating: “[t]o the woman on the Farm, the Telephone has proved the greatest boon. It keeps her in touch with her neighbors and the various social activities of the community. It banishes loneliness and creates contentment.”²⁶ In a 1921 advertisement, Northern Electric depicted a wistful farm wife saying “[o]h! If I only had a Telephone.”²⁷ The company stated that farm life was better when the farmer installed the telephone, a “modern servant.”²⁸ To farm wives, Northern Electric advised, “[f]or the sake of your home, children and yourself, urge that you be given the telephone.”²⁹ According to the company, the device decreased family members’ desire to leave the land by making the farm a more pleasurable place to live. The Canadian Independent Telephone Company also felt that the telephone increased the pleasure of living in rural areas: “[i]t’s more enjoyable, more sociable, . . . living in a telephone locality. You are always in touch with your neighbors.”³⁰ By “Keeping the Family connected” and “Strengthening the Bonds of Friendship” on the farm, Northern Electric claimed that the pleasure element of the telephone was how it enabled people to keep in touch with friends and neighbours, allowing for feelings of companionship on the farm. In this way, the telephone could add “to the happiness and contentment of your home.”³¹ This ability to keep farm families in touch with their friends and neighbours, according to the telephone promoters, decreased farm people’s desires to leave the rural community for the city by providing increased social contacts to rural dwellers.

²⁶ Northern Electric advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, X, no. 44 (October 31, 1917), 40.

²⁷ Northern Electric advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XIV, no. 10 (March 9, 1921), 29.

²⁸ Northern Electric advertisement, (March 9, 1921), 29.

²⁹ Northern Electric advertisement, (March 9, 1921), 29.

³⁰ CITC advertisement, (October 25, 1911), 31.

³¹ Quoted from Northern Electric advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XX, no. 10 (May 16, 1927).

36: Northern Electric advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XX, no. 19 (October 1, 1927), 55

From the writing of rural dwellers, farm telephones had three categories of uses: utility, emergency, and sociability. The utility value of the rural telephone was its benefit to the farm, usually measured in how much money the telephone made in the selling of agricultural produce. The telephone allowed farmers access to the markets that they did not have before. While farm journals, including the Grain Growers' Guide, and daily Prairie newspapers published the grain and market reports, few farmers got these reports quick enough to make use of them.³² By the time the journal arrived at the farm home, the market prices were days old. With the telephone, however, farmers could call the grain companies and elevators to check on commodity prices before they sold their grain.³³

Rural people recognized and appreciated the convenience and time saving aspects of the rural telephone. Some farm families saw the telephone as important to their farming operations. The Strange family, who farmed near Fenn, Alberta, discovered that their farming and seed growing operations required a telephone. Kathleen Strange wrote: "[w]e found it increasingly difficult to do this necessary business owing to the lack of a telephone."³⁴ The telephone provided farmers with faster access to information that was important for increasing their profits.

Having telephones installed could also save farmers precious time. They could use the phone to call up neighbours and ask to borrow a piece of machinery or inquire about missing cows or horses.³⁵ The farmer did not have to drive, or "motor," about the

³² Amy J. Roe, "When the Farmer Listens In," Grain Growers' Guide, XVII, no. 37 (September 10, 1924), 5.

³³ Northern Electric advertisement, (May 2, 1927), 51.

³⁴ Strange, With the West in Her Eyes, 160.

³⁵ Jane L. Aberson, From the Prairies With Hope (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1991), 27.

countryside to find the items and livestock. As well, farmers believed that having telephonic connection with the railway station was necessary so that they could call in advance and ensure the train they awaited was on time or the freight shipments they expected had arrived. Farmers without telephones spent time driving to the station only to learn the train or freight did not arrive.³⁶

Farmers described the importance of the telephone to their farming operations when the railway companies threatened their connections with the train stations. When the Canadian Pacific and Canadian Northern Railways wanted to remove the telephones from a host of Prairie stations, farmers and their local governments reacted with consternation. They wrote letters to the Board of Railway Commissioners stressing the importance of telephonic connection between their farms and the railway agent. The districts involved were numerous and nearly all the letters said the same thing: that telephonic connection with the railway stations was important to farmers because it was convenient.

Several rural municipalities wrote letters to the Board to stress the importance of the station telephones to their communities. Representatives from the Manitoba districts of Beausejour, Strathclair, Springfield, Rhineland, De Salaberry, Turtle Mountain, Franklin, North Cypress (Edrans/Sidney, Manitoba), Gimli, Arthur (Melita), Manitou (Snowflake), Pembina (Snowflake), Shoal Lake, and Wallace (Elkhorn) all wrote letters to protest the removal of telephones from local Canadian Pacific Railway train stations.³⁷

³⁶ H. H. Edgington (Secretary, Village of Birch Hills) to A. D. Cartwright (Secretary, Board of Railway Commissioners, BRC), 5 April 1920, NAC, Canadian National Railways Records, RG 30, series V-A-9-h, vol. 8729, file 26-1013 -- Operation Matters, The CNR Complaint of the Village of Birch Hills, Sask.

³⁷ R. J. Morgan (Secretary-Treasurer, Rural Municipality of Edrans/Sidney) to R. F. McWilliams (MGT lawyer), 3 March 1917, NAC, Canadian Transport Commission, RG 46, series C-II-1, vol. 1536, file

The village of Birch Hills, Saskatchewan, the Rural Municipality of Grandview, Manitoba, and the Hearne Board of Trade at Hearne, Saskatchewan, complained that the Canadian National Railway was removing the telephones from their stations.³⁸

The officials of the rural municipalities were divided on the value of the telephone in railway stations. Some felt that the service was a convenience to farmers and others felt that it was a necessity. Most of the letters stressed that the telephone was a convenience to farmers. Representatives from Franklin, Rhineland, and Springfield all agreed that the telephone in train stations was of "great value" to farmers because it was convenient.³⁹ The Rural Municipality of Rockwood (Stonewall, Manitoba) also stressed the convenience factor of the station telephones. They wrote to the Board of Railway Commissioners in 1917:

8883.6.4 -- Statement of Facts, Edrans/Sidney, Manitoba; Statement of Facts for Gimli, Manitoba, 17 July 1920, NAC, RG 46, series C-II-1, vol. 1536, file 8883.6.5 -- Statement of Facts for Gimli, Man.: H. F. Thomas (Secretary-Treasurer, Rural Municipality of Arthur, Melita, Manitoba) to McWilliams, 17 July 1920, NAC, RG 46, series C-II-1, vol. 1536, file 8883.6.7 -- Statement of Facts for Melita, Man.: Statement of Facts for Snowflake, Manitoba, 17 July 1920, NAC, RG 46, series C-II-1, vol. 1536, file 8883.6.9 -- Statement of Facts for Snowflake, Man.: Statement of Facts for Shoal Lake, Manitoba, 17 July 1920, NAC, RG 46, series C-II-1, vol. 1536, file 8883.6.8 -- Statement of Facts for Shoal Lake, Man.: Municipality of Pembina to the Secretary, BRC, 13 March 1917, NAC, RG 46, series C-II-1, vol. 1536, file 8883.6.9; Statement of Facts for Elkhorn, Manitoba, 17 July 1920, NAC, RG 46, series C-II-1, vol. 1536, file 8883.6.10 -- Statement of Facts for Elkhorn, Man.: John R. Witty (Secretary-Treasurer of the Municipality of Franklin), Copy of Resolution, to Chairman (BRC), 14 March 1917, M. Rollius (Secretary-Treasurer, Rural Municipality of Turtle Mountain) to BRC, 13 March 1917, H. H. Hamm (Secretary-Treasurer, Municipality of Rhineland) to BRC, 12 March 1917, C. Christopherson (Secretary-Treasurer, Rural Municipality of Springfield) to BRC, 10 March 1917, all from NAC, RG 46, vol. 1415, file 8883.6 -- Manitoba Government Telephone Commission.

³⁸ Edgington to Cartwright, 5 April 1920, NAC, RG 30, Series V-A-9-h, vol. 8729, file 26-1013; William Dickie (Secretary-Treasurer, Rural Municipality of Grandview) to Chairman (BRC), 9 October 1914, NAC, RG 30, series V-A-9-h, vol. 8790, file 53-166 -- Stations, The CNR Company; F. M. Livingston (Secretary, Hearne Board of Trade) to BRC, 28 July 1913, NAC, RG 30, series V-A-9-h, vol. 8713, file 26-522 -- Operation Matters, The CNR Co.

³⁹ Quoted from Hamm to BRC, 12 March 1917, NAC, RG 46, vol. 1415, file 8883.6; Witty to Chairman (BRC), 14 March 1917, NAC, RG 46, vol. 1415, file 8883.6; Christopherson to BRC, 10 March 1917, NAC, RG 46, vol. 1415, file 8883.6.

[w]e would beg leave to point out that the telephone is a great convenience to the patrons of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, especially in the rural districts. During the summer months, especially seeding, haying and harvest time and more so during the present war crisis when farm help is scarce and every possible pressure is being exercised to bring our available lands under cultivation it is a great inconvenience for a farmer to have to drive from three to ten miles to the Station and find on his arrival that the freight or express which he expected has not arrived.⁴⁰

Other rural municipalities pointed out that along with being a convenience, the telephone had crossed into the realm of a necessity for carrying out business. The Rural Municipality of Turtle Mountain declared that “[t]he telephone is a source of great convenience to our farmers during the Fall, particularly during the wheat season. In fact the telephone in all places of business has become a necessity, particularly at the station, where inquiries are made re [sic] arrival and departure of trains. . . .”⁴¹ The Rural Municipality of Morton (Whitewater/Boissevain) and the Rural Municipality of Russell (Binscarth) saw the telephone in C. P. R. stations as necessary as well.⁴²

The railway company, however, would not comply with the rural municipalities’ wishes. On April 10, 1917, E. W. Beatty, the Vice President and General Council of the Canadian Pacific Railway Law Department, wrote to the Board of Railway Commissioners, dismissing the complaints of the municipalities. Beatty stated: “[t]his Company receives no benefit from telephones at country points, and in fact the

⁴⁰ V. W. McFarlane (Secretary-Treasurer, Rural Municipality of Rockwood, Stonewall, Manitoba) to Cartwright, 13 March 1917, NAC, RG 46, series C-II-1, vol. 1536, file 8883.6.2 – Rural Municipality of Rockwood.

⁴¹ Rollius to BRC, 13 March 1917, NAC, RG 46, vol. 1415, file 8883.6.

⁴² Jno. Peacock (Reeve) and G. C. Smith (Secretary-Treasurer, Rural Municipality of Morton, Whitewater/Boissevain, Manitoba) to McWilliams, 23 June 1917, NAC, RG 46, series C-II-1, vol. 1536, file 8883.6.3 – Statement of Facts for Whitewater; C. Thom (Secretary-Treasurer, Rural Municipality of

installation of telephones in these circumstances simply adds to the work of the agent without any compensating advantage to the Company. It is a common thing for country subscribers to call up for very trivial reasons and thus interfere with the agents in the proper discharge of their duties."⁴³ The railway company did not appear to find the farmers' convenience a valuable use of their employees' time.

The utilitarian value of the telephone to the farm went beyond business. Farm people often mentioned the use of the telephone in times of emergency as one of the major benefits of having the device. The doctor could be summoned in times of sickness or accident and the neighbours could be alerted of fires or storms.⁴⁴ Manitoba farm woman Jane L. Aberson stated that the "benefit of a phone on a farm can hardly be overrated. . . ." especially when "there is sickness or an accident and you need to make an emergency call."⁴⁵ One woman, who called herself "Saskatchewan Mother," wrote to the Grain Growers' Guide that telephones were helpful to connect farm families with "proper medical care."⁴⁶ The telephone was so valuable in emergency situations that some doctors set up private telephone lines at their expense to keep in contact with the people that they served, before the widespread use of telephone systems in rural areas.⁴⁷

Despite these important uses, the major benefit of having a farm telephone seemed to be enhanced sociability. Farm woman Anne Whyte admitted in 1922 that farm

Russell, Binscarth, Manitoba) to McWilliams, 27 January 1920, NAC, RG 46, series C-II-1, vol. 1536, file 8883.6.6 -- Statement of Facts for Binscarth.

⁴³ E. W. Beatty (Vice President and General Counsel, CPR Company) to R. Richardson (Assistant Secretary, BRC), 10 April 1917, NAC, RG 46, vol. 1415, file 8883.6.

⁴⁴ Aberson, From the Prairies With Hope, 27; "Saskatchewan Mother," "Should My Daughter Marry a Farmer?," Grain Growers' Guide, XV, no. 28 (July 12, 1922), 9; Anne Whyte, "Should My Daughter Marry a Farmer?," Grain Growers' Guide, XV, no. 32 (August 9, 1922), 8.

⁴⁵ Aberson, From the Prairies with Hope, 27.

⁴⁶ "Saskatchewan Mother," "Should My Daughter Marry a Farmer?," (July 12, 1922), 9.

telephones were useful in times of emergency, but that the farm wife “can do quite a bit of neighboring on that same telephone.”⁴⁸ The telephone, according to Aberson, replaced the “face-to-face gossip between neighbours” that occurred in urban areas, but was virtually impossible on the Prairie farm. Besides the gossip of neighbours, with party lines there was also a significant amount of eavesdropping, or “listening in,” for entertainment.⁴⁹ Although officially illegal, Prairie telephone companies did little to stop it, beyond issuing warnings to subscribers not to listen in on other people’s conversations.⁵⁰ Farm people stated that people had two reasons for eavesdropping: loneliness and nosiness. Aberson commented that bachelors and other lonely folk listened in on telephone conversations just to hear human voices.⁵¹ Strange noted that the law-breakers were usually a “lonely man or woman, cut off from contact with other human beings for days and even weeks at a time. Just to hear another human voice was something of a thrill” to them.⁵² Other people eavesdropped because the activities of everyone else interested them.⁵³ Farm people knew that other subscribers listened in to their conversations and that anything said over the phone was public knowledge.⁵⁴

The sociability provided by the rural telephone introduced new discontents into the rural community. One of these discontents was the problem of people tying up the

⁴⁷ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 8.

⁴⁸ Whyte, “Should My Daughter Marry a Farmer?,” (August 9, 1922), 8.

⁴⁹ Aberson, *From the Prairies With Hope*, 27.

⁵⁰ Minutes of Director’s Meeting, 11 March 1944, GA, M2247, file 1, page 74; Minutes of Annual Meeting, 30 March 1950, GA, M2247, file 1, page 115.

⁵¹ Aberson, *From the Prairies With Hope*, 27.

⁵² Strange, *With the West in Her Eyes*, 161.

⁵³ Strange, *With the West in Her Eyes*, 161.

⁵⁴ Aberson, *From the Prairies With Hope*, 27; see also Michèle Martin, “Hello, Central?”: Gender, Technology, and Culture in the Formation of Telephone Systems (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 152-153.

party line for too long or using the phone for conversations that others deemed “unnecessary.” Aberson wrote to the Dutch readers of her articles that:

[m]any farm women, too, make a lot of use of the telephone, not only for listening in but often for tying up the line for a very long time. You will hear them exchange recipes over the phone. They tell each other how busy they are because they have to do the laundry today and they are also baking bread. They are so very, very busy! It can happen that suddenly a male voice interrupts and says, “I’m sure, Mrs. X, that your bread is getting hot -- I can smell it here. You better have a look and give me the line for a change.”⁵⁵

Many rural dwellers mentioned that people eavesdropped on other people’s conversations and that some people tied up the line for long periods of time. The rural mutual telephone companies wrote by-laws and circulars about these problems, but they seemed to be handled by farm families themselves.

In March of 1944, the Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company’s Board of Directors voted to draft and mail a circular to each subscriber asking that “conversations should not be over 5 minutes.”⁵⁶ The problem of call length must have persisted, however, because the company voted to draft another circular requesting that local calls be limited to five minutes in March of 1950.⁵⁷ The necessity of reminding subscribers to limit the length of telephone calls hints at tension in the rural community of the Airdrie Rural Mutual Telephone Company.

⁵⁵ Aberson wrote articles in Dutch for publication in a weekly newspaper in Holland called *Het Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*. Aberson, *From the Prairies with Hope*, 27.

⁵⁶ Minutes of Director’s Meeting, 11 March 1944, GA, M2247, file 1, page 74.

⁵⁷ Minutes of Annual Meeting, 30 March 1950, GA, M2247, file 1, page 115.

Before the use of farm telephones for market information, emergencies, and sociability, farm families carried out these functions in other ways. The farm journal, for example, brought market information to the farm home, families dealt with emergency situations by bringing the patient to the doctor, and farm people carried out contact with neighbours through personal visits. Having a telephone installed undoubtedly made these tasks easier and more efficient, but they were not new to farm families.

The telephone, however, also provided some new opportunities to rural subscribers. In later years, when telephone systems were interconnected, rural people could place and receive long distance calls. These calls allowed farm families to hear the voices of relatives who lived far away and they had not seen for long periods of time, even years. In Alberta in 1928, the average distance spanned by a telephone call was sixty-one miles.⁵⁸ Other long distance calls crossed provincial and national boundaries. Aberson, in an article to her Dutch readers, describes a Christmas Eve conversation with her brother in 1934. The Abersons farmed near Dauphin, Manitoba, and Aberson's brother and his wife lived in New York. The siblings had not spoken for ten years. Although the call lasted only three minutes, Aberson felt that by talking on the telephone to her brother long distance, "[i]t seemed as if distance fell away, as if they were right with us in the room!" It was the "illusion of being close together. . . ."⁵⁹ Long distance telephone calls, regardless of the length, provided farm families with a connection to relatives they had never been able to achieve through letters.

⁵⁸ Wetherell, *Useful Pleasures*, 20.

⁵⁹ Aberson, *From the Prairies With Hope*, 141-142.

The benefits of farm telephones described by the device's promoters, including service providers and equipment manufacturers, were similar to those mentioned by farmers and farm women on the Prairies. Both advertisers and rural residents recognized the benefits of the telephone to the rural home, its utility to the farm, value in emergency situations, and enhanced sociability.

These examples illustrate the adoption and incorporation of the telephone into rural Prairie homes during the device's life cycle. The domestication of a technology meant that consumers found the device a place in their homes. Farm families domesticated telephones into their homes by their placement of the device either in the kitchen or else in the hallway, locations where people could and did gather. The idea of communication technology as marvelous for the new opportunities that it could add to rural life was best illustrated by long distance calls. Long distance calls were important and marvelous because they put farm families in touch with relatives and friends across the province and across the continent. Without the interconnected telephone system, farm families would not have had contact with many of their family members. The "technology as daily" concept is best illustrated by the use of the new communication devices to do chores previously performed on the farm. The telephone quickly found itself a place in the home because it was able to make chores previously performed easier and it became valuable to farmers' daily lives and work. The next step in the life cycle of a technology is the daily use or replacement with another technology. Some people kept their telephones and found a daily use for them: to help keep in contact with friends and neighbours and to help with the actual farm work. Other people found that different

technologies, especially the radio and the automobile, were more desirable to them and they gave up their telephones to purchase another device.

The value and benefit that radios provided to the farm were similar to those provided by the telephone. While the telephone was a medium for interpersonal communication, the radio and the programmes broadcast over it were not. Telephones allowed farm families communication largely within the community through local calls. The device also allowed for communication outside the local community through long distance calls. Radios only allowed for communication from the world outside the local community.⁶⁹ Farm families valued the radio for how it brought the world into the farm home. Although there were significant differences in the kind of communication allowed by the radio broadcasting receiver and the telephone, the former was a mass medium and the latter was a point to point communication medium, sellers of the devices promoted them with very similar benefits to the farm family.

The advertisers and journalists who wrote about the radio and its benefits to people living in rural situations promoted the purchase of receiving sets in rural communities using four main benefits. The major benefits of the device that its promoters mentioned included: economic rationality, information and entertainment, family maintenance, and bringing the benefits of the city to rural dwellers.

Some companies, such as the Morrison Blackwood Hardware company of Moose Jaw and the Westinghouse Corporation, advertised radio sets for their technical

⁶⁹ Burnet, Next-Year Country, 22.

superiority, such as dependability, power, or low battery consumption.⁶¹ Other companies advertised radios for the social benefits that they provided to consumers.

For the farming community, the economic value of a device was an important consideration before families spent limited funds on a technology. Radio manufacturers and sellers, therefore, touted the benefits of the radio to the farm. The major economic benefit of a radio was quick access to market and weather reports.⁶² The Marconiphone company persuaded potential buyers by stating that “[n]o Farmer can *Afford* to be without a Marconiphone” because “[k]nowing prices and conditions *before* going to market assures the farmer of *hundreds* of dollars of extra yearly profit on what he sells.”⁶³ The King Quality Products Company, selling the King radio, stated that their set “[e]arns as much as a good Tractor.” The advertisement claimed that their set “will *make money* for you. It will reach out into the markets of the country and bring you the latest market prices. It will give you these market reports 24 to 48 hours earlier than you can get them any other way.”⁶⁴ In another advertisement, the King Company stated that having their radio set was the same as having “A Trusty Scout at Every Market.”⁶⁵ The Westinghouse Company stated that a radio receiver was not an expense but an investment, for “[m]any a farmer states ‘the extra profit has paid for my set.’”⁶⁶ In October of 1927, Westinghouse ran an advertisement in the Guide that depicted an illustration of two farmers talking.

⁶¹ Westinghouse advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XIX, no. 25 (October 1, 1926), 17; King Quality Products advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XIX, no. 25 (October 1, 1926), 18.

⁶² See, for example, Westinghouse advertisement, (October 1, 1926), 17; King Quality Products advertisement, (October 1, 1926), 18; Westinghouse Radio advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XIX, no. 28 (November 15, 1926), 33.

⁶³ Marconiphone advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XVIII, no. 40 (October 7, 1925), 29.

⁶⁴ King Quality Products advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XIX, no. 23 (September 1, 1926), 17.

⁶⁵ King Quality Products advertisement, (October 1, 1926), 18.

⁶⁶ Westinghouse Radio advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XIX, no. 30 (December 15, 1926), 25.

One farmer said to the other “I’ll tell you why I’m going to buy a Westinghouse--”. . . .” His reasons for purchasing this particular brand of radio set included that another friend with a Westinghouse radio heard a market report and made enough money, on a load of produce, by selling at the right time to pay for the set.⁶⁷

Beyond the economic value of a radio, manufacturers and sellers advertised the entertainment and information available through the air. Westinghouse advertised that the radio brought cheerfulness to farm homes on dreary days.⁶⁸ In the 1927 Westinghouse advertisement of the farmers talking, two of the reasons the farmer was going to buy a Westinghouse included that there were “instructions on better farming” aired on the radio and there was also “entertainment and instructions for the whole family.”⁶⁹ The H. M. Kipp Company of Toronto, merchants of the Mercury Super-Ten set, told consumers that “[t]here is Never a Lonesome Minute on the Farm Equipped with a MERCURY SUPER-TEN. No farm home is so remote that you cannot summon at will a gay company of entertainers to play or sing for you.”⁷⁰ The Kolster Company encouraged farmers to “Bring the Air-World to Your Farm” with their receiving set because “[t]here is no home entertainment to-day to compare with radio. At every hour of the day and night there is something interesting ‘on the air’”⁷¹ The advertisers tried to convince potential buyers that theirs was the set to bring entertainment and information to the farm home. In truth, however, all the tube sets provided the content as long as they were powerful enough to bring in distant cities.

⁶⁷ Westinghouse Radio advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XX, no. 19 (October 1, 1927), 33.

⁶⁸ Westinghouse Radio advertisement, (December 15, 1926), 25.

⁶⁹ Westinghouse Radio advertisement, (October 1, 1927), 33.

⁷⁰ Mercury Super-Ten advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XIX, no. 27 (November 1, 1926), 43.

⁷¹ Kolster Radio advertisement, The Country Guide, XXI, no. 20 (October 15, 1928), 27.

Connected to the educational and informational value of the radio was its ability to keep families at home. The Northern Electric company, “[t]he people that made your ‘phone,’” was advertising radios in the Guide by September of 1924. The company saw the radio as “The New Heart of the Home.” Previously, the company had referred to telephones in this manner. They argued that the “real pleasure of Radio and the thing that draws whole families night after night to the little magic mahogany box is . . . the wonderful life that fills the air, and that is brought to us by Radio.”⁷² In late 1928, in The Country Guide, Westinghouse stated “[r]adio is a necessity on the farm every day of the year. It has a double value, providing varied entertainment for all the family, as well as definite information on crops, markets, weather reports and more profitable farming.”⁷³

The final social benefit that the manufacturers and sellers of radios promoted was how the radio brought the benefits of urban life, especially entertainment and instruction, into the farm home. In an October 1924 Northern Electric advertisement, the company promised that “[n]o city dweller can keep more abreast of events than the farm home equipped with radio.”⁷⁴ The Canadian General Electric company stated that a farm with a radio allowed farm folk to “visit the city every night.”⁷⁵ A decade later, the J. H. Ashdown Hardware Company, sellers of Stewart-Warner radios, advertised that their sets brought “the world to Western Farm Homes.”⁷⁶

⁷² In a 1910 advertisement, the Northern Electric Company called the telephone “The Heart of the Community.” Northern Electric advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, II, no. 51 (July 20, 1910), back cover, 36; Northern Electric advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XVII, no. 38 (September 17, 1924), 24. Other advertisements from the company were similar to the one discussed here, such as Northern Electric advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XVII, no. 44 (October 29, 1924), 4.

⁷³ Westinghouse Radio advertisement, The Country Guide, XXI, no. 19 (October 1, 1928), 28.

⁷⁴ Northern Electric advertisement, (October 29, 1924), 4.

⁷⁵ Canadian Electric advertisement, Grain Growers’ Guide, XIX, no. 26 (October 15, 1926), 36.

⁷⁶ Stewart-Warner Radio advertisement, The Country Guide, XXVII, no. 9 (September 1934), 29.

Similar to the advertised benefits of the radio in the farm home were the actual benefits as discussed by farm people themselves. Rural dwellers described four main activities for which they used the radio. These activities were getting information, education and instruction, "going" to church by radio, and entertainment.⁷⁷ Amy J. Roe, the editor of the women's section of the Grain Growers' Guide, believed that the radio provided farm people with cultural, educational, and social advantages that they did not have ready access to before.

The radio had a utilitarian value to the farm home as did the telephone. Farmers could receive the market prices of grain, livestock, and dairy products they produced daily on various Prairie stations, including Moose Jaw, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, and Winnipeg.⁷⁸ Farmers calculated the value of the radio to their farm in the dollars and cents it made for them when they sold their produce. Some even stated that the money they made paid for their radio set more than once.⁷⁹ One Manitoba farmer wrote to Coats, the radio editor for the Grain Growers' Guide, that he "saved exactly \$100 by listening to the grain market reports."⁸⁰ Other farmers' profits from the radio totaled even more. Grain farmer G. F. Stooke from Drumheller, Alberta, wrote to the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, "I made four hundred dollars by my radio less than a month ago. . .

⁷⁷ D. R. P. Coats, "The Radio on the Farm," Grain Growers' Guide, XX, no. 17 (September 1, 1927), 4, 38.

⁷⁸ Memo for File from Pottle's July 1926 report, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1; Night Letter from Evans to Radio Branch, 27 September 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-164, part 1, item 182; Parker to Edwards, 2 April 1925, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 1, item 58; Macklem to Edwards, 12 January 1924, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-140, item 15-16; Grant to Edwards, 14 June 1926, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 1, item 143; Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg," 7; Howard Holden quoted in "Experiences with Radio," 32.

⁷⁹ Roe, "When the Farmer Listens In," 5.

⁸⁰ Coats was the "R-a-d-i-o" editor of the Guide from January of 1926 until January of 1929. Quoted from D. R. P. Coats, "R-a-d-i-o," Grain Growers' Guide, XX, no. 5 (March 1, 1927), 44; "Announcing a

..” by listening to the daily market reports.⁸¹ The radio allowed farmers to receive current market information and hence they could buy and sell at the right times, the time financially beneficial to them.⁸²

Besides market reports, weather forecasts were of utilitarian value to the farmer.⁸³ They gave farmers valuable information about when to plant and harvest as well as news of impending storms. Roe admitted “[t]rue, he can get the forecast from his daily newspaper; but few farmers are so fortunately situated that they can get the daily paper every day. And an old forecast is absolutely worthless.”⁸⁴ Roe wrote “[i]magine how the farmer could be helped if he knew what kind of weather he might reasonably expect the next day!”⁸⁵ The radio could routinely provide such important information to the scattered Prairie listeners unlike any other media.

Coats believed that the features on the radio, including market reports and weather forecasts, that could be “converted into hard cash” were “the backbone of any broadcasting service.”⁸⁶ He felt, however, that it would be difficult to calculate the “full value” of the radio to rural listeners in monetary value.⁸⁷

More than the telephone, the radio brought new opportunities to geographically isolated farm homes. There were new opportunities for education, spiritual edification, and entertainment that had not existed before.

New Service,” Grain Growers’ Guide, XIX, no. 4 (January 27, 1926), 4; D. R. P. Coats, “R-a-d-i-o,” Grain Growers’ Guide, XXII, no. 1 (January 1, 1929), 34.

⁸¹ G. F. Stooke to RCRB, 26 April 1929, NAC, RG 42, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3.

⁸² Amy J. Roe, “The Radio on the Farm,” Grain Growers’ Guide, XVII, no. 11 (March 12, 1924), 8.

⁸³ Roe, “When the Farmer Listens In,” 5.

⁸⁴ Roe, “When the Farmer Listens In,” 5.

⁸⁵ Roe, “When the Farmer Listens In,” 5.

⁸⁶ Coats, “The Radio on the Farm,” 38.

The radio held an educational value to farm people. The instruction most appreciated by the farm family seemed to be the lectures and courses held by the agricultural colleges that provided practical agricultural instruction for farmers.⁸⁸ Coats recognized the educational benefits of the radio: “[r]adio is valued by the farmer as an educator. It helps him in his business by bringing to him the latest information and advice from the agricultural colleges and other seats of learning at which his problems are being persistently subjected to scientific study.”⁸⁹ Staff at the Manitoba Agricultural College and the departments of extension at both the Universities of Alberta and Saskatchewan were involved in providing lectures on topics that were of interest to the farming population.⁹⁰ In 1925, Coats, then an announcer at C. K. Y. Winnipeg, and a Professor Herner broadcast the “first Canadian radio diploma course.” The subject of the course was Poultry Husbandry and interested farmers and their wives took the course by listening to lectures over the radio. Coats received a large number of letters outlining the benefits of the course. One particularly grateful woman wrote:

I cannot express adequately what a boon that course is to us. You know it isn't necessary to be a well-established farmer to own a radio set or a flivver. . . . Those of us who have come from older countries have a lot to learn here. . . . Many of us would like to come to the college for the short courses, but cannot get away from our mixed farms. . . . I wouldn't like to tackle the house and farm during the winter months, neither would I care to leave our little children entirely dependent on their daddy while he tackled the job. Too many accidents happen on farms. So you see the radio course fills a very real need.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Quoted from D. R. P. Coats, “R-a-d-i-o,” *Grain Growers' Guide*, XX, no. 5 (March 1, 1927), 44; D. R. P. Coats, “The Radio on the Farm,” 4.

⁸⁸ Roe, “When the Farmer Listens In,” 5.

⁸⁹ Coats, “The Radio on the Farm,” 4.

⁹⁰ Roe, “When the Farmer Listens In,” 5.

⁹¹ Farm woman quoted in Coats, “The Radio on the Farm,” 4.

Radio courses fulfilled both farm families' quest for knowledge and they also helped to improve profits by furthering rural people's knowledge about relevant issues.⁹² The radio could be used to broadcast information about plant and stock diseases, insect infestations, and their cures.⁹³ Other courses given over the air were less directly related to the farm. The staff of the University of Alberta gave lectures on a variety of subjects over their broadcasting station, CKUA. In 1929 and 1930, the university offered courses in History and English over the air. The department of extension estimated that between fifteen hundred and two thousand people "followed these lectures regularly with maps and text books."⁹⁴ The radio provided educational opportunities to farm people that they would not have had without the device.

The radio also offered alternatives to traditional church attendance for farm families. Farmers who lived considerable distances from a church, far enough to make year-round attendance difficult or impossible, appreciated the church services that were broadcast over the radio. On the radio, farmers could hear the best sermons and music from various cities each Sunday.⁹⁵ Howard Holden farmed fourteen miles from Deloraine, Manitoba. He appreciated the radio for the "[c]hurch services we receive each Sunday -- fine for the country here where we have no church during the winter months."⁹⁶ Various denominations broadcast their services over the radio without debate. For other religious groups, however, there was more discussion about the material they broadcast.

⁹² Coats, "The Radio on the Farm," 38.

⁹³ Roe, "When the Farmer Listens In," 5.

⁹⁴ E. A. Corbett, "Education by Air," The Country Guide, XXIV, no. 10 (October 1931), 37.

One of the largest discussions about radio and religion on the Prairies concerned the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute led by William Aberhart. Some people opposed Aberhart's broadcasts because they disagreed with his religion, disliked how he delivered his sermons, resented how long he was on the air each week, or objected to his depreciation of other religions."⁷

There was considerable discussion in the files of the Radio Branch about Aberhart's Sunday services. First, the type of religion that Aberhart broadcast concerned some listeners. Bert Huffman of the Glen Doris Ranch at Langdon, Alberta, wrote to the Radio Branch concerned that "[t]he continual prophecies of the end of the world, the awaiting terrors of hell fire and brimstone for people who do not believe the Institute's terrifying creed, have a bad effect on nervous old people and immature young children, who are lead [sic] to believe that the end of the world may come at any moment, and who are nervous, fearful and terrified by these threats."⁸ Other people did not like how Aberhart delivered his sermons. Calgary S. E. Andrews objected to the Aberhart broadcasts for several reasons including "[t]he overbearing, bombastic, shouting method of preaching his sermons. . . ."⁹ Third, listeners complained about the length of time that the Institute's material was on the air each week. Huffman and Andrews also complained that the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute had "'hogging' the air" every Sunday in

⁷ Coats, "The Radio on the Farm," 4.

⁸ Holden, "Experiences with Radio," 32.

⁹ Bert Huffman (Glen Doris Ranch) to Radio Branch, 3 February 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2; S. E. Andrews to Ainslie, 15 January 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2; Mrs. F. C. Watts to RCRB, 14 January 1929, NAC, RG 42, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3.

¹⁰ Huffman to Radio Branch, 3 February 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2.

¹¹ Andrews to Ainslie, 15 January 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2, item 21.

Calgary for three years.¹⁰⁰ Aberhart himself admitted that he broadcast “the first two Sunday Mornings and the last two Sunday Evenings of the month, and . . . every Sunday Afternoon.”¹⁰¹ Finally, some radio listeners were unhappy with Aberhart’s treatment of other religions. Andrews brought up Aberhart’s negative references to other religions and sects in his letter.¹⁰² Mrs. F. C. Watts, from near Carstairs, Alberta, protested the Sunday broadcasts stating “[t]he religion taught may be all right, but the lecturer, Mr. Aberhart, has never missed an opportunity of attacking other religions, & he is also teaching intolerance [sic].”¹⁰³ Most of these objectors wanted Aberhart’s broadcasts censored or even off the air.

In contrast, the supporters of Aberhart and his Institute consistently mentioned that the radio sermons benefited farm people. Mrs. Jean Howard of Rainbow, Alberta, believed that “[i]t would be a crime to stop him as we on the Prairie living 18 miles from town never have an opportunity of hearing God’s word expounded -- except over the radio.”¹⁰⁴ Other farmers shared Howard’s views. Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Plewes of Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, wrote the Radio Branch in support of the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute services. They wrote: “like many others in the country districts where there is no Church Service held during the winter months, it was chiefly to get these Sunday afternoon Broadcasts from the Calgary Institute that we had a radio installed. . . .”¹⁰⁵ H.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted from Huffman to Radio Branch, 3 February 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2; Andrews to Ainslie, 15 January 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2.

¹⁰¹ William Aberhart (Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute) to Ainslie, 21 January 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2.

¹⁰² Andrews to Ainslie, 15 January 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2.

¹⁰³ Watts to RCRB, 14 January 1929, NAC, RG 42, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3.

¹⁰⁴ Mrs. Jean Howard to Minister (DMF), 22 February 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2.

¹⁰⁵ Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Plewes to DMF, 8 February 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2.

P. Wickens also of Maple Creek listened to the Aberhart broadcasts. He believed that the Radio Branch should have conducted a vote of the people in the listening range of Aberhart's broadcasts to see if the people wanted the services to continue. Wickens stated: "I am convinced, that our objectors will be out numbered [sic], by thousands, who prefer to hear the old time religion (in place [of] jazz music)."¹⁰⁶ Albert Kreutzwieser of Hughton, Saskatchewan, stated to the department that "[i]f your department is going to stop one sect from broadcasting you will have to stop them all. . . ."¹⁰⁷ Another letter writer tried to sway the Radio Branch by arguing that it was the "Devil's henchmen" who wanted the Institute services off the air.¹⁰⁸

In his defense, Aberhart provided the Radio Branch with information about his religious services and listeners in January of 1929. Aberhart estimated that there were 795 radio owners who listened to his broadcasts from outside Calgary and one hundred from within the city. He stated that he received 2,383 letters from his audience between January first and twenty-first of 1929. He believed, however, that his audience was "easily double" this number, about 4,750. Aberhart offered that he had 1,143 children registered in his Sunday School, many that "have no other opportunity of church or Sunday School." Finally, listeners from 272 towns and villages contributed money to the Institute. In the previous year, Aberhart stated that residents from over 350 towns and

¹⁰⁶ H. P. Wickens to Deputy Minister (DMF), 8 February 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2.

¹⁰⁷ Albert Kreutzwieser to Minister (DMF), 28 January 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2.

¹⁰⁸ Cliff Dawson (Arnode, Alberta) to Radio Branch, 28 January 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2.

villages had contributed.¹⁰⁹ By providing such figures, Aberhart undoubtedly hoped to show the value of his work to the Radio Branch.

The Radio Branch chose not to become involved in the dispute over the Prophetic Bible Institute. The Minister of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, Cardin, wrote "[t]he Department does not propose to take any action in regard to the matter one way or the other."¹¹⁰ In another letter, to Howard, Deputy Minister Johnston wrote: "I would state that the jurisdiction of this Department over broadcasting stations is limited to technical matters, hours of working, interference, etc., [sic] and that we exercise no censorship over the actual programs."¹¹¹ Aberhart's broadcasts, therefore, were left on the air for some listeners to enjoy and for others to avoid.

Perhaps the most enthusiastically discussed benefit of the radio to the farm home was its entertainment value. According to Coats: "the outstanding feature which commends [the radio] to the farmer is that of entertainment -- good, clean, honest amusement to fill in the hours that used to drag so slowly."¹¹²

The radio on the farm provided entertainment and information to those who were injured or ill and therefore confined to the hospital or their homes, as it did in urban areas. The amateur broadcasting station at Moose Jaw, 10AB, installed radio sets, headphones, and loud speakers in the local Moose Jaw hospital for the pleasure of the patients.¹¹³ The same benefits could be derived at home. In 1927, Coats wrote that radio was "a heaven-

¹⁰⁹ Aberhart to Ainslie, 21 January 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2, item 22.

¹¹⁰ Cardin to E. J. Garland (Member of Parliament, House of Commons), 14 February 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2, item 45.

¹¹¹ Johnston to Howard, 2 March 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 153, file 6206-164, part 2, item 67.

¹¹² Coats, "The Radio on the Farm," 4.

¹¹³ Swain to Johnston, 12 April 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 150, file 6206-73, part 1.

sent blessing to the sick and shut-in.”¹¹⁴ The next year, a young listener confirmed his statement. The listener, ten year old Clarence Murray of Lyleton, Manitoba, wrote to Coats after a loaded grain wagon rolled over him and broke his leg. Murray told Coats: “I have my bed downstairs so Mother can look after me, and Daddy put a long cord on the loud speaker so I can hear your [children’s] stories every day. I am also interested in the rest of the program.” Murray spent his four weeks in traction listening to CJRM Moose Jaw.¹¹⁵ The radio made convalescence more pleasurable for people in both rural and urban areas.

Besides easing the burden of the ill, the radio also helped to decrease the monotony of women’s indoor tasks. Women found the chores of sewing, darning, mending, and even laundry more pleasurable when accompanied by music.¹¹⁶

Associated with the entertainment value of the radio was its ability to overcome distance and, in turn, decrease the isolation felt by some members of the rural community. How the radio brought distant cities into farm homes was part of the mystery and marvel of the radio.

In the spring of 1922, the Grain Growers’ Guide printed an article by John W. Ward called “The Wonders of Radio.” Ward predicted that the ability of the farm family to sit “comfortably in their own home, to hear great singers, speakers and preachers hundreds, and even thousands of miles away” would revolutionize life upon the farm and “[r]ural isolation will be a thing of the past.”¹¹⁷ Although the radio did provide

¹¹⁴ Coats, “The Radio on the Farm,” 4.

¹¹⁵ Clarence Murray, “The Case of Clarence Murray,” “R-a-d-i-o,” The Country Guide, XXI, no. 23 (December 1, 1928), 32.

¹¹⁶ Coats, “The Radio on the Farm,” 4; Wetherell, Useful Pleasures, 283.

¹¹⁷ Ward, “The Wonders of Radio,” 8, 9, 35.

entertainment, education, and market information to farmers in their homes, whether these things were revolutionary is a matter for debate. Ward believed that the radio would be an "Instrument of Democracy" because it would allow the farmer's movement and political groups to broadcast speeches and other talks for everyone with a radio to hear.¹¹⁸ Ward concluded his article by stating: "[w]ith a radio receiving set in the home, the farmer and his family will be able to enjoy many advantages which they are now denied. . . . It will give them ears with which they can listen to what is going on in the cities far away. Truly the radiophone is the greatest wonder of the age."¹¹⁹

Early and later radio listeners shared Ward's excitement for the potential of the radio on the farm. In 1922, one woman from southwestern Manitoba, who called herself "Ex Teacher," wrote to the Grain Growers' Guide that modern inventions were helping to improve farm life. She said: "[t]he country is often condemned for its lack of social intercourse and entertainments. If the visions of 'radio' enthusiasts become realized, we shall no longer be isolated from the outside world, even in [the] most remote settlements."¹²⁰ Within two years, Prairie farmers confirmed that the radio did help decrease their isolation. In 1924, Harold M. Pearce from Muvihill, Manitoba, remarked about the radio, with perhaps a little over-exaggeration: "[j]ust imagine, wherever you may be, in whatever desolate or out-of-the way place you may be in, you have only to twirl a couple of dials, and instantly you have the companionship of distant civilization, and, moreover, the choice of numerous forms of entertainment and education. . . ."¹²¹ A

¹¹⁸ Ward, "The Wonders of Radio," 8.

¹¹⁹ Ward, "The Wonders of Radio," 35.

¹²⁰ "Ex Teacher," "Should My Daughter Marry a Farmer?," (July 12, 1922), 22.

¹²¹ Harold M. Pearce quoted in "Experiences with Radio," 11.

farmer of forty years from the Gainsboro, Saskatchewan, district noted the value of the radio to him in 1924: "[t]he radio supplies a long felt want on the farm -- it helps to banish isolation. We . . . pick up practically all the broadcasting stations on the North American continent."¹²² One man from rural Manitoba wrote in the same year: "I firmly expect to see the time when every farm house will be equipped with a radio set the same as today it has the telephone."¹²³ By 1927, one enthusiastic Alberta listener lauded the radio's virtues: "[t]he radio is wonderful! The mystery never dies. When we sit and hear in our homes, as plainly as we would in a hall, concerts coming from a distance that would take many days to travel by train, we appreciate it. God speed the day when a radio set will be installed in every farm home. It subtracts the years and multiplies the joys of living."¹²⁴ Eldon Clark, a farmer from near Springstein, Manitoba, wrote of the radio in the same year: "I consider the radio a great boon to us and we really do not know what we would do now without it."¹²⁵ Later in his letter, Clark remarked about the marvelous nature of the radio: "I have heard people say that they think that they would soon tire of it. I do not find this to be the case. There seems to be something fascinating about listening-in to the voices and music coming through space from places one has never seen and perhaps never heard of before."¹²⁶ To J. K. Sutherland, an Alberta farmer in 1938, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was "an almost priceless blessing" because it gave isolated, lonely, and discouraged farm folk "a taste -- just a little taste -- of what is

¹²² Quoted in Roe, "The Radio on the Farm," 8.

¹²³ Quoted in Roe, "The Radio on the Farm," 8.

¹²⁴ Alberta woman quoted in Coats, "The Radio on the Farm," 4.

¹²⁵ Eldon Clark quoted in Roe, "The Radio on the Farm," 33.

¹²⁶ Clark quoted in Roe, "The Radio on the Farm," 8.

available to nearly everyone resident in our cities."¹²⁷ The marvel and amazement that people attributed to the radio did not appear to decrease over the period being considered.

Another illustration of the daily companionship that the radio brought to farm homes was how some letter writers to the Prairie stations addressed the announcers as personal friends. One man, Alex Gall of Crane Valley, Saskatchewan, began a letter to the CKCK announcer and operator, Albert Hooper, with "Dear Bert -- Excuse this familiarity but I feel as if I had a right to address you as above because we have been listening to you talking for the past four years."¹²⁸ Other letter writers, such as D. A. Williams of Totnes, Saskatchewan, called announcers their "good friends," even if they had never met.¹²⁹ Naming the announcers as a sort of personal friend seems to hint at the importance that rural dwellers placed on the voices on the radio. The announcers were one of the only voices from outside the farm that farm people heard each day.

The use of records over broadcasting stations was a contentious issue. The Radio Branch generally banned the use of records between seven thirty in the evening and midnight, preferring live human talent instead.¹³⁰ The Branch, however, did make some concessions to smaller stations, but told the majority of stations that listeners did not want to hear phonograph records on the radio because they had phonographs at home. In 1926, Coats wrote that the government's argument was not a valid one because "few private individuals can afford to buy a tenth of the records which are placed at the disposal of

¹²⁷ J. K. Sutherland, "The Case for the C.B.C.," The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer, LVII, no. 6 (June 1938), 12.

¹²⁸ Alex Gall to Bert Hooper (Announcer, CKCK Regina), 6 March 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 1.

¹²⁹ D. A. Williams to Hooper, 7 March 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 1.

¹³⁰ Vipond, Listening In, 157.

broadcasters.”¹³¹ On the Prairies, residents and broadcasters came to realize that records were often preferable to the human talent procurable in the Western cities and towns. To one letter writer, Coats said “[m]ost Canadian stations use phonograph music in day programs. Personally, I prefer good records to sub-average human talent.”¹³² To another correspondent, Coats wrote that listeners should not object to phonograph records as long as the stations selected good ones, reproduced them properly, and announced them as phonograph records, including the title and make of each. He wrote that broadcasters “playing records for hours without mentioning that they are records is not only an injustice to the manufacturer but is unfair to other stations which are paying large fees to artists. Also, of course, it indicates a low estimate of the listener’s intelligence. Barnum may have been right, but when we hear grand opera coming from WXYZ in Pumpkin Centre, we are not deceived.”¹³³ Coats and a contingent of the listeners felt that records could improve Prairie broadcasting.

Despite the favourable arguments for records on the air, there was a segment of the listening public who did not appreciate recorded music. P. Ransom from New Hill, Alberta, wrote to the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting in 1929: “[t]he most we get is phonograph records. If this is all we are to get we might as well sell the radio & buy a phonograph [sic].”¹³⁴

Early in 1930, Coats repeated his arguments in favour of records to Moose Jaw radio inspector, J. C. Stephen. Stephen, in turn, wrote to the Radio Branch admitting that

¹³¹ D. R. P. Coats, “R-a-d-i-o,” *Grain Growers’ Guide*, XIX, no. 24 (September 15, 1926), 28.

¹³² Quoted from D. R. P. Coats, “R-a-d-i-o,” *Grain Growers’ Guide*, XX, no. 4 (February 15, 1927), 37; D. R. P. Coats to Stephen, 29 January 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 2.

¹³³ D. R. P. Coats, “R-a-d-i-o,” *Grain Growers’ Guide*, XX, no. 21 (November 1, 1927), 53.

¹³⁴ Ransom to RCRB, 7 January 1929, NAC, RG 42, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3.

although CJRM violated its license by broadcasting records, “[t]here is no doubt that good local talent is hard to be obtained and GOOD RECORDS would be more desirable to the general public.”¹³⁵ The Radio Branch admitted that the technical quality of records had improved since the start of broadcasting and that local talent was scarce. Due to these factors, they agreed to survey the Moose Jaw listening public about their views on the broadcasting of records.¹³⁶ This was one of the rare occasions, excepting the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, that the government involved rural people in the making of radio policy. The Radio Inspector received 203 replies to his request for correspondence on the matter. One hundred ninety-seven of the letters received, or ninety-seven percent, were in favour of records and six were against them.¹³⁷

A more formal survey done in Saskatchewan also revealed compelling numbers in favour of recordings. The Crawford Harris Radio Survey of 1930 surveyed the radio audience of Central and Southern Saskatchewan to “measure the popularity and effectiveness of the leading stations serving this section.”¹³⁸ The last question of the survey asked respondents whether they had any objections to recorded programmes. Seventy-one rural people responded. Fifty-six of them had no objections. Fourteen objected to records being played on the radio and one person did not answer the question.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Stephen to Edwards, 31 January 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 2.

¹³⁶ Statement to be Broadcast over Station CJRM Moose Jaw by the Local Radio Inspector, n.d., NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-154, part 2.

¹³⁷ It is impossible to tell how many of the respondents were urban or rural dwellers as the file contains only the results and not the letters sent by listeners. Stephen to Edwards, 18 March 1930, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-174, part 1.

¹³⁸ There are no questionnaires in the file, only the compiled data is available. Crawford-Harris Limited Radio Survey, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 2, page 2.

¹³⁹ Crawford-Harris Limited Radio Survey, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 2, page 12.

Although most people were satisfied and even impressed with what radio broadcasting brought into their farm homes, there were others who were not as happy. Some people objected to the popular music broadcast over many Prairie stations. Watts was irritated by the local broadcasts she received, "consisting mostly of cheap jazz records."¹⁴⁰ Another farm woman, Mrs. Josephine Kilpatrick of Foremost, Alberta, was displeased with her local station, CJOC Lethbridge. Although her family had bought a radio for the "broad cultural value it might be to our children," Kilpatrick found that the local station was "fouling the air" with "loathsome stuff" like "unequivocally low and suggestive songs" with titles such as "I want to be bad," "Let's do it," and "She let me stay all night tho' she knew it wasn't right." Kilpatrick accused the station of running the "lines of . . . songs together in an endless string. . . ." thereby suggesting indecent things when the announcer read all the titles together.¹⁴¹ Kilpatrick went so far as to write to the Lethbridge Board of Trade: "[t]here are certain songs whose words give the farm listener in the impression that the City of Lethbridge openly countenances an institution whose object is to drum up business for the houses of ill-fame."¹⁴² Kilpatrick thought the station should play cleaner music for the benefit of the impressionable, a category within which she included young people and immigrants.¹⁴³

Kilpatrick's daughter, however, was of a different opinion about the programmes broadcast from CJOC. Margeret E. Kilpatrick wrote to the station that "[t]he programs

¹⁴⁰ Watts to RCRB, 14 January 1929, NAC, RG 42, vol. 1077, file 227-6-3.

¹⁴¹ Mrs. Josephine (Raymond L.) Kilpatrick to RCRB, 31 May 1929, NAC, Department of Communications, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-111 -- CJOC, J. E. Palmer and H. R. Carson.

¹⁴² Mrs. J. Kilpatrick to the Secretary of the Lethbridge Board of Trade, 22 May 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-111.

¹⁴³ Mrs. J. Kilpatrick to the Secretary of the Lethbridge Board of Trade, 22 May 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-111.

from your station are appreciated and enjoyed. I prefer classical popular and less dance music, otherwise your programs are too well balanced for any fault-finding in this direction."¹⁴⁴ From the differing opinions exhibited by the Kilpatricks, it is fair to assume that selecting programmes caused discontent in some Prairie farm homes.

In contrast to those who found fault with the popular jazz music of the day, there were others who criticized public service stations. L. Halliday of Viking, Alberta, was annoyed with the programmes broadcast from the university station, CKUA. He wrote to the Radio Branch that "C.K.U.A. puts out such trash over the air that it is really not interesting to about 75% of the people anyway."¹⁴⁵ The so-called "trash" that Halliday objected to consisted of educational lectures, religious discussions, and classical music.¹⁴⁶ Halliday's criticisms offended the University of Alberta. To the Radio Branch, the university wrote that they had heard from "a great many sources" that "CKUA has set a new standard for programs from Western Canada. . . ." Beyond this, the university said of the matter "[w]e are glad that critics like Mr. Halliday are in a distinct minority."¹⁴⁷ It seems that no station, whether it broadcast university lectures, classical music, or popular tunes could escape the criticism of a section of the listeners.

The Crawford Harris Radio Survey of 1930 asked listeners which type of radio programme they preferred. Sixty-nine rural respondents answered the question. Fourteen said they preferred classical music, thirty-one preferred popular music, and twenty-four

¹⁴⁴ Margeret E. Kilpatrick quoted in Stuart B. Sturrock (Announcer, CJOC Lethbridge) to Radio Branch, received 2 July 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-111; Ainslie to Edwards, 15 July 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 152, file 6206-111.

¹⁴⁵ L. Halliday to DMF, 15 December 1928, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-176, item 81.

¹⁴⁶ University of Alberta Radio Program Station CKUA for the Period October 1st to June 30th, 1928-1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-176.

preferred a combination of the two.¹⁴⁸ With such varied tastes in rural Central and Southern Saskatchewan, pleasing all the listeners all the time was impossible.

The benefits of the radio to farm dwellers were numerous. These advantages led Coats to generally laud the impact of the radio on the farm family, saying in 1927: "[c]onsidering the amount of enjoyment and profit to be derived by listening in, it seems true, as one of my farmer friends expressed it, that radio is no longer a plaything and a luxury, but should be classed among the necessities."¹⁴⁹ Radio listener B. M. Bain from Grosse Isle, Manitoba, wrote "'a home without a radio is missing a great deal of fun and money, as the market reports, as well as music and educational talks, are broadcasted daily.'"¹⁵⁰ Not everyone, however, had modern communication technology on their farms.

Before farm families introduced the radio into their farm homes, the functions performed by the device were either done differently by or were unavailable to rural dwellers. Market reports and weather forecasts could be obtained from newspapers and agrarian journals or from the telephone. Rural dwellers sought education and information in the farmers' journals or from other printed sources. Before the radio, farm families without a church nearby, or without a church close enough to attend year around, missed religious services. Entertainment before the radio included phonograph records, entertainment of the variety produced at home, and entertainment outside the home, such as movies and trips to town.

¹⁴⁷ H. P. Brown (Studio Director and Announcer, CKUA) to Johnston, 22 January 1929, NAC, RG 97, vol. 154, file 6206-176.

¹⁴⁸ Crawford-Harris Limited Radio Survey, NAC, RG 97, vol. 151, file 6206-109, part 2, page 5.

¹⁴⁹ Coats, "The Radio on the Farm," 39.

¹⁵⁰ B. M. Bain quoted in "Experiences with Radio," 32.

The radio provided new opportunities to rural dwellers because it instantaneously allowed farm families to connect to the affairs of the wider world. Although farm families had access to most of the content that the radio provided through other media and institutions, the radio brought the content to farm homes faster and more consistently than traditional forms.

Many of the perceived benefits of the farm radio as advertised by the equipment sellers and manufacturers were also mentioned by the rural Prairie consumers of the device. Both relevant social groups discussed market information and entertainment as key benefits of a radio in a rural setting. The advertisers discussed the family maintenance aspect and the idea of bringing the city to the farm home more than did the rural consumers. The farm people, in their replies, focused on the educational and religious value of the device more than the advertisers.

The adoption of the radio into rural Prairie homes can best be illustrated through the dichotomy of practical versus marvelous use. Farm families whom could afford them quickly adopted radios as practical devices to help with daily life on the farm, shown especially through the device's use for market and weather information. The marvelous nature of the radio was the sentiment that the radio brought "the world" to the isolated farm home. In the material studied here, "the world" could be a Sunday sermon from a Prairie town, a university lecture from a Western city, or national and international news from Ottawa or abroad.

Although there were many benefits of modern communication technologies to rural people, not everyone could afford to purchase the telephone and radio. The contingent of people who did not own either device, to a large extent, exhibited

wistfulness and even frustration. Economic considerations were important for farm people when deciding whether to acquire a communication technology. One writer to the Grain Growers' Guide who called herself "M. A. M." stated: "[t]he monotony of farm life is hard to bear, though of course in sections where the telephone is in use it is minimized somewhat, and of course a car is a great help, though only well-to-do farmer[s] can have cars."¹⁵¹

Strange noted that in the prosperous times in their district, farmers improved their homes and acquired new belongings. Families bought labour savers, communication devices, and transportation technologies, including electric lighting plants, radios, telephones, and automobiles. People who did not have communication technologies could borrow those owned by a neighbour. The Strange family received a crude radio set for Christmas in 1920. They had the only set in their neighbourhood for several years. Strange wrote of the radio:

[a]mong our Christmas gifts we found one from the Old Country that gave us particular pleasure and delight. This was a 'wireless set' -- a home-made radio. . . . People came from far and near to listen in to it. For many years it was the only radio within a radius of many miles, and we were kept busy by neighbours who called to know the latest weather reports and grain prices and the news of the day that came to us regularly over the air.¹⁵²

Sharing a neighbour's communication devices was one way to received the benefits of the devices without owning them.

¹⁵¹ "M. A. M.," "Which Should My Daughter Marry?," Grain Growers' Guide, XV, no. 24 (June 14, 1922), 9.

Many people were too poor to have any communication technology during the period under study, especially the Depression years. Calamity came to the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba in the 1920s and 1930s. People sold or put away their cars and some had the telephone company remove their sets.¹⁵³ During the Depression, Prairie farmers suffered one of the greatest income losses of all Canadians. The farmers worst hit by the disaster were those in the drought-stricken areas of the Prairie provinces. In 1928, the net income of farming operations in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta was \$363 million. In 1931, it was negative \$10,728,000.¹⁵⁴ The Allied Mutual Telephone Company found that “the depression years saw many phones removed.”¹⁵⁵ Aberson was thankful that her service provider, the Manitoba Telephone System, lowered their rates in 1931 “or many might not have been able to afford the phone in these hard times.”¹⁵⁶ Mrs. F. H. Merrill of Balzac, Alberta, wrote to the Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company in April of 1936, inquiring about getting telephone service at her farm and the costs of such service. Merrill stated that “[w]e had our phone taken out several yrs. ago [sic], . . .” but they would again like a telephone; however, if the “expense is too great, we could not afford one.”¹⁵⁷ Other rural people also found this to be the case.

To be eligible for relief during the Depression, families had to disconnect their telephones, put their automobiles in storage, and sell their radios or else the rural

¹⁵³ Strange, *With the West in Her Eyes*, 137-138, also 282.

¹⁵⁴ Strange, *With the West in Her Eyes*, 284.

¹⁵⁵ L. M. Grayson and Michael Bliss, Introduction to *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R. B. Bennett, 1930-1935* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), ix.

¹⁵⁶ History of the Allied Mutual Telephone Company, 1936-1971, n.d., GA, M2253, box 1, file 1.

¹⁵⁷ Aberson, *From the Prairies with Hope*, 27.

municipality considered a family to have “luxuries” and not be in need of relief.¹⁵⁸

Devices that families had come to consider “social necessities” were now “luxuries.”¹⁵⁹

Historian James Gray wrote that during the Depression: “[f]or farm families, a radio in working order was a categorical imperative. It broke the barrier of isolation that had held the prairie West in its grip for almost 50 years. The radio was not only entertainment, it enabled the farm people to shut themselves away from the depression itself, from the dust, and from the wind that blew night and day with its incessant, deranging whine.”¹⁶⁰ Unlike Gray, Prairie relief boards did not see that communication and transportation technologies were necessities of life. Burnet wrote that:

[p]overty denied the people access to almost every means of communication. Newspaper circulation dropped, and many country weeklies failed. Great numbers of telephones were disconnected. Cars either wore out and were made into Bennett buggies and Anderson carts or were not used because gasoline had to be hoarded for use in tractors and because there was no money to buy a licence. Radios were kept in use longest, and almost all families had them, but eventually they too wore out or were sold.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Mrs. F. H. Merrill to the Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company, 11 April 1936, GA, M2247, box 1, file 3.

¹⁵⁹ Often, however, rural municipalities had no money to provide relief to farm people. Grayson and Bliss, *The Wretched of Canada*, xiii; John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 211.

¹⁶⁰ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 16.

¹⁶¹ Gray quoted in Helen Potrebienko, *No Streets of Gold: A Social History of Ukrainians in Alberta* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977), 206.

¹⁶² Bennett was the Depression-era Prime Minister of Canada and Anderson was the Premier of Saskatchewan at the time. Burnet, *Next-Year Country*, 23-24.

For the very poorest people of Canada. “[e]ven the ordinary escape-hatches of the radio, the newspaper, the cinema, and liquor have been closed for many of them. They can’t even afford a fantasy world.”¹⁶²

Some people from the tenth of the Canadian population worst hit by the Depression wrote to the current Prime Minister R. B. Bennett asking for relief, begging for money, and describing their situation.¹⁶³ Mrs. Thomas Perkins of Kingdom, Saskatchewan, wrote to Bennett in 1933, stating: “[w]e seem to be shut out from the world altogether we have no telephone[,] Radio or newspaper [sic].”¹⁶⁴ Mrs. Clara Leibert of McVittie, Saskatchewan, complained in 1933 that “[w]e even have too Pay towards [the] Telephone and yet cannot Afford too have one [sic]. . . .”¹⁶⁵ Mrs. L. Stern from Moose Lake, Manitoba, wrote in 1935 that she wanted to hear Bennett speak in Brandon but “lack of fare prevented me from going and I have not even the radio to tune in and listen.”¹⁶⁶ The poorer farmers called the telephone and radio “luxuries” that they could not afford to possess, whereas the more prosperous farmers called them “necessities” that they could not afford to do without. The people lacking a telephone, radio, or automobile could not share in the enthusiasm of those with whom this thesis is concerned.

¹⁶² Grayson and Bliss, The Wretched of Canada, xxv.

¹⁶³ Grayson and Bliss, The Wretched of Canada, xxiv.

¹⁶⁴ Mrs. Thomas Perkins in L. M. Grayson and Michael Bliss, eds., The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R. B. Bennett, 1930-1935 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 54.

¹⁶⁵ Mrs. Clara Leibert quoted in Grayson and Bliss, The Wretched of Canada, 61.

¹⁶⁶ Mrs. L. S. Stern quoted in Grayson and Bliss, The Wretched of Canada, 194-5.

“Life Within the Four Walls of My House”: Analysis and Conclusions

There are five factors influencing the acquisition of telephones and radios argued throughout this study. These factors include ownership, government and corporate policies, socio-geographic considerations, the evaluation of a technology's usefulness, and economic circumstances. The first mediating factor, discussed in Chapter 4, was the ownership of communication systems and company policies.

The ownership of the communication systems and the official policy of governments and corporations were two factors that affected the diffusion of communication technologies on the Prairies and across Canada. The amount of service provided in the Prairie region differed depending on the owner of the communication medium and their view of the degree of service required by Prairie people.

While important factors in the diffusion of telephones and radios across the Prairies, ownership and policy do not provide a complete picture. The socio-geographic context of the Prairies was an important factor affecting the acquisition of new communication technologies as well. The daily experiences of Prairie dwellers, such as a sentiment of isolation and loneliness, influenced their purchase of communication technologies.

One of the realities of Prairie farm life was vast distances that separated friends and neighbours. Farm women reported traveling miles to see a neighbour or family member. Other women traveled little. Davis reports of a woman who had not been to the

city for seven years and a farm woman admitted: "I know women who have lived in our own district for eight years who have never been to a town."¹ The vast distances and low population density on the Prairies led people to feel isolated and lonely on their farms. This geographic isolation was a factor influencing the acquisition of radios and telephones. Space and time enable and constrain human activities, however, the telephone and radio helped to overcome these barriers.² On the Prairies, space was a significant constraint to human interaction and communication and farm families sought to overcome these barriers through the purchase of communication technologies. Many farm families bought, or desired, telephones, radios, and automobiles to overcome their feelings of social isolation.³

The greater distance of rural Prairie dwellers from services, compared to urban Prairie residents and rural people in Ontario, coupled with communication technology's ability to overcome space,⁴ implies that rural dwellers had a greater need for communication devices. It would seem to follow, therefore, that rural Prairie residents should have had more communication devices than urban ones, with ownership increasing as population density decreased. Such a trend, however, did not occur. Throughout the period, a greater proportion of rural households in Ontario owned communication technology than on the Prairies, despite Ontario's much higher population density. In 1941, half of rural Ontario homes had telephone service, whereas only slightly less than twenty-four percent of rural Prairie homes subscribed. More urban

¹ Davis, "'Country Homemakers,'" 168; quoted from "M.A.M." "Which Should my Daughter Marry?," (14 June 1922), 9.

² Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures*, 125.

³ Davis, "'Valiant Servants,'" 39.

households, moreover, owned telephones and radios than did rural ones in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.⁵

With the perceived isolation and loneliness of farm households and the great distances between farms and services, farm families had an arguably greater need for communication technologies than did urban people who lived closer to services and neighbours. Fewer rural people, however, owned telephones and radios. Distance was, therefore, not the only factor affecting the acquisition of communication technology.

A household's evaluation of a technology, including factors such as cost, usefulness, and views about consumption also influenced their acquisition of communication technology. Farm families purchased technologies most suited to their specific needs. Rural people's view of consumption, often called the "anti-consumption norm" and the "innate conservatism" of farmers, affected the acquisition of technologies on the Prairies.⁶ Davis argued that farm families' reticence to modernize their homes, farms, and facilities was "based on more than lack of money" and she explained that farm families were reluctant to buy machines to perform tasks that they could do through their own labour.⁷ This explains the relatively small number of farm homes with labour-saving devices. Farm families appear to have established a spending hierarchy where they prioritized land ownership above the possession of conveniences.

⁵ John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social History of the Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 31-32.

⁶ Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume V -- Earnings*, 984-987; Canada, *Eighth Census of Canada, 1941: Volume IX: Housing*, 82-83; Canada, *Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III -- Housing*, 40-4, 40-5.

⁷ Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora, "Structure of Agriculture and Women's Culture on the Great Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (1988): 198; Vipond, *Listening In*, 39.

⁸ Davis, "'Valiant Servants,'" 35.

Sundberg noted that the ownership of farm land received priority over the purchase of “labour-saving” conveniences for the home. The 1922 UFWM Rural Home Survey found that ninety-six percent of respondents owned their farmland, whereas sixty-three percent owned cars, seventy-two percent had telephones, and only forty-three percent owned a washing machine.⁸ These figures suggest that farm families established a hierarchy of spending priorities. Land ownership and communication technologies ranked high, whereas “labour-saving” farm and home technologies were of lower priority.

The Census affirms the UFWM survey’s findings. In 1931, for example, 78.1 percent of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta farmers owned their farm land.⁹ The rate of rural telephone ownership for the three provinces was 25.2 percent and the rate of radio ownership was 22.1 percent.¹⁰ Rates of electric or gas light diffusion were much lower: only 3.17 percent.¹¹ Two decades later, this trend continued.¹² These figures illustrate that ownership of farm land, the means of production for rural farm families, was their first and most important purchase. The Census data and UFWM responses illustrate that more farmers owned land than possessed coveted communication technologies or labour-saving home conveniences.

⁸ According to Sundberg, the UFWM survey had a “conservative bias” because it favoured women who were more likely to have modern conveniences in their homes, those who spoke English and came from slightly wealthier families, than the provincial average, based on land ownership. Sundberg, “A Female Frontier,” 186, 192-193.

⁹ Canada, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume V -- Earnings, 986-987.

¹⁰ Canada, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume I -- Summary, lxxiv.

¹¹ Canada, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume I -- Summary, lxxiv.

¹² By 1951, 81.2 percent of Prairie farmers owned their land, 35.3 percent had a telephone, 88.6 percent owned a radio, 50.9 percent owned an automobile, 16.4 percent owned a vacuum, and 18.2 percent owned a refrigerator. Canada, Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III -- Housing, 40-4, 40-5.

Farm families evaluated technologies on the benefits that they could provide to the rural home. Families seemed to weigh the relative values of the devices and purchase and substitute technology according to perceived usefulness.

At the same time that Prairie residents were considering consumption choices relating to the telephone and radio, they had other choices to make as well. The first half of the twentieth century saw the development of a host of new technologies and devices useful to the farm home. These included automobiles, tractors, electricity, running water, washing machines, furnaces, and even vacuum cleaners. Contemporary sources illustrate that when given the choice of these technologies, farm people generally preferred to spend their money on telephones, radios, and automobiles, instead of the farm and household devices available. There were a variety of reasons for this, including cost, ease of installment, and perceived and actual benefits.

Some farmers felt that certain communication technologies were not necessary, while they consumed other “modern” devices. The case of Kathleen Strange’s husband is illustrative. Major Strange installed a telephone into his farm house, with an installation cost of \$300, and the Stranges received a radio as a gift at Christmas in 1920, which the family greatly enjoyed.¹³ Despite owning these communication technologies, Major Strange saw no use for an automobile and refused to purchase one.¹⁴ He felt that automobiles were for poor men who always had to hurry. The Stranges, however, had to rely on neighbours, and their cars, when Kathleen fell ill and required hospital attention.¹⁵

¹³ Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 37-38; Strange, *With the West in Her Eyes*, 160-161, 137-138.

¹⁴ Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 36; Strange, *With the West in Her Eyes*, 251-253.

¹⁵ Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 41, note 44.

Families substituted one communication technology with another that they perceived as more useful. The need for rural telephones seemed to decline once automobiles were introduced and roads improved.¹⁶ Some farmers, in contrast to Major Strange, saw telephones as unnecessary but automobiles as a “functional necessity.”¹⁷ During the Depression, telephone subscriptions on the Prairies fell in favour of the automobile because some farmers preferred the use of their automobiles to paying rent on their telephones. Farm families may have preferred cars to telephones because they provided physical mobility, not only transmission of voice, over long distances. The Census data illustrates that despite the decline in the rural Prairie ownership of telephones in 1921 to 1941, the rate of radio and automobile ownership increased.¹⁸ Cashman, in his history of Alberta Government Telephones, wrote: “[t]he installers who travelled [sic] the countryside removing phones for nonpayment reported a general feeling. Though the telephone had once ended the isolation of the farm, radio and better roads were now doing it, and if farmers had the cash they’d rather buy gas than rent a telephone.”¹⁹ In other cases, farmers “substituted” the automobile for the telephone because they believed it was unnecessary to rent a phone once they had a car. A competition also existed between the automobile and telephone in times of scarce financial resources. Farmers had to decide whether they ought to continue to rent a telephone or buy gasoline for their car.²⁰

¹⁶ Fischer, “Technology’s Retreat,” 314.

¹⁷ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 23.

¹⁸ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 23-24; Fischer, “Technology’s Retreat,” 300.

¹⁹ Cashman, *Singing Wires*, 362.

²⁰ Pike, “A Chequered Progress,” 24.

The position of the telephone was also compromised by the radio. Some farmers believed that the radio was of greater usefulness than the telephone. When viewing the technologies, farmer J. R. Wilson of Drinkwater, Saskatchewan, wrote:

[i]n my opinion, the radio to the farmers of this great western country is of more value than the telephone. He hears markets, news and weather reports; he hears lectures on subjects in which he is deeply interested, and knows in this way what the rest of the world is doing and thinking. . . . I know of no investment the home, farmer or anyone, can make that will give the same pleasure as a radio and I am pleased to add my experiences that many who are away out on farms, shut off from everything worth while, may get in touch with the rest of the world.²¹

Farmers were willing to substitute the telephone for the automobile or radio when they deemed the latter two more useful than the former.

People's evaluation of a technology's usefulness was a factor affecting its diffusion. If families could afford a desired communication device, they bought it. For some families, however, the Depression and their personal financial situation prohibited them from buying telephone service or a radio.

National, regional, and personal economic circumstances were factors in the diffusion of communication technology. The economic circumstances of farm families must be considered when examining the diffusion of communication technologies. Mulgan's theory of the "law of relative constancy" of media expenditure asserts that families only allot a certain amount of their disposable income to the purchase and use of

²¹ J. R. Wilson quoted in "Experiences with Radio," 10.

media and communication technologies.²² As such, communication technologies were in “competition” with one another to attract families’ media dollars.

With limited incomes, rural families and wage earners often had to choose between competing communication technologies because they could not afford to purchase all the new devices. Purchasing radios and telephone service could take up a large portion of yearly earnings. The Census illustrates growth in the acquisition of technology as farms were prosperous and the decline of technology possession when agricultural depression hit. Acquisition of communication technology, therefore, was related to the income of households and farms.

Being highly correlated with income, the acquisition of technology fell off in times of economic hardship. During the Depression, when farm incomes fell, telephone subscription declined as well. The provinces that were the hardest hit by the Depression were also the provinces with the highest decline in telephone subscription. In this way, the ownership of telephones was “highly income sensitive.”²³ It is also important to realize that the grim realities of farm life forced families to make choices between the technologies they owned. In years with bad crops and the ensuing financial constraints, farm families had to economize and one way to do this was to give up a communication device.

In periods of severe economic hardship, there is evidence that if a farm family could not afford all of the communication technologies they possessed, most farm families eliminated them in the following order. First, the family disconnected the

²² Mulgan, *Communication and Control*, 15.

²³ Armstrong and Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment*, 283.

telephone. Second, they sold their automobile or put it in storage until the family could again afford to pay for gasoline, licenses, and repairs. Third, they used the radio until it wore out or it was sold.²⁴ The poorest rural families never had such “luxuries” and the wealthier people who became poor seemed to give up their telephone first, their auto second, and their radio last of all.

Although the poverty and hardship of the Depression years improved for most people, there were people on the Prairies who “just did not have anything,” people who could not afford communication technology regardless of the economic circumstances of the region and country.²⁵ The ownership and diffusion of communication technologies were related to income. People with higher incomes owned radios and telephones more frequently than did those with lower incomes. When economic hardships hit, ownership of communication technologies declined.

In rural homes there was a greater gap between the acquisition of communication technologies and home “labour-saving” technologies than in urban ones. Rural Prairie homes purchased communication and transportation technologies such as telephones, radios, and automobiles, before they bought vacuums, refrigerators, and other household technologies. The gap between communication technologies and “labour-saving” devices in rural Prairie homes did not narrow until 1951. On the provincial level, there are differences between the percentages of rural households with communication technologies. This lends support to the argument that scholars must not assume that the

²⁴ Burnet, *Next-Year Country*, 23-4; Grayson and Bliss, *The Wretched of Canada*, xiii; Thompson, *Decades of Discord*, 211.

²⁵ Quoted in a farm woman in Dorsch, “You Just Did What Had To Be Done,” 120.

Prairie region is uniform.²⁶ The Census data illustrates that there were significant regional differences in the ownership of communication technologies across the country and there were also intra-regional differences. The variations in the diffusion of communication technology make one explanation impossible. Several factors account for the differences between ownership of communication technologies.

The diffusion of communication technologies was based on a matrix of factors that both promoted and hindered farm and urban families' acquisition of radios and telephones. No factor can be heralded as the sole reason for the diffusion of a communication technology across the Prairies or any other region. Indeed, the uneven diffusion of the radio and telephone across the rural and urban Canadian Prairies is evidence that different situations exist in each region. The acquisition of communication technologies on the Prairies was not uniform and, therefore, cannot be studied as a unit. Instead, there were differences in technology consumption that occurred between the three Prairie provinces themselves and the smaller units within them. A combination of the five factors discussed above: ownership, official policy, socio-geographic context, perceived usefulness of a technology, and income, plus factors not considered here, influenced the inclusion and exclusion of rural Prairie people from the purchase of "modern" communication technologies in the first half of the twentieth century.

Ethnicity was a possible factor that affected the diffusion of communication technologies across the Prairie provinces. Lack of substantial evidence makes it impossible to explore such a link. One disappointment associated with this study was the inability to make any reference to ethnic groups and their use and perception of

²⁶ Canada, Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III -- Housing, 40-4, 40-5.

communication technology. There is little primary material about ethnic groups and the use of telephones or radios. There are only passing comments in secondary sources written by or about ethnic minorities that concern communication technologies. The three collections written by Prairie farm women, Strange's With the West in Her Eyes, Aberson's From the Prairies With Hope, and Wengel's Union of Opposites do provide ethnic voices. Strange was a British immigrant, Aberson was Dutch, and Wengel was from Denmark. Their accounts, however, do not provide enough material to discern anything about the relationship between communication technologies and ethnic groups. As a result of the scarce resources on the topic, this study does not differentiate between the different ethnic groups that were on the Prairies. It is instead a general account, because the primary sources rarely point to ethnicity.

It is imperative, when studying the telephone and radio in rural communities, to examine the role of the automobile in those communities as well. The automobile is important, because it could do something that the telephone and radio simply could not. While the telephone allowed for contact with neighbours and services and the radio brought "the world" into the farm family's living room, the automobile took the farm family physically off the farm. By doing this, it could replace both the telephone and the radio because it could perform some of their jobs on the farm, connecting farm families with neighbours and providing entertainment, and also bring additional benefits.

A larger percentage of rural families owned automobiles than did urban ones. This was likely because cars were a transportation technology that families could use to get them to social arrangements, a use more suited to rural dwellers. In 1941, 36.6 percent of urban Prairie homes had an automobile while 43.7 percent of rural Prairie

homes had one.²⁷ These figures illustrate that rural households saw a greater need for overcoming distance by driving than did urban ones.²⁸

Rural Prairie dwellers praised automobiles with the same enthusiasm as they lauded the telephone and radio. For a Grain Growers' Guide contest asking Prairie farm women to spend an imaginary one thousand dollars to improve life on the farm, one woman, who called herself "Progressive Prairie-ite," decided to spend her money on a car. She justified the purchase based on the difference it would make to her family's quality of life on the farm:

[i]f I had \$1.000 to spend in such a way that farm life would be made more pleasant for my family, I would buy first of all a Ford car. A car is something which can be enjoyed by every member of the family. It can be used for business and it can be used for pleasure. It brings the farm home closer to town and closer to other farm homes. It affords the family a quick way of getting to church on Sundays and to picnics and community gatherings on other days.²⁹

While other contestants wanted devices such as new flooring, water systems, and a host of other home technologies, this woman felt that an automobile would do more good for her family than household improvements or labour saving technologies.

Another writer to the Guide also lauded the benefit of the automobile to the farm. Mrs. R. A. from Manitoba prioritized communication and transportation technologies in this way: "[t]he telephone and the radio have made life within the four walls of my house

²⁷ Canada, Eighth Census of Canada, 1941: Volume IX: Housing, 82-83.

²⁸ Pike, "A Chequered Progress," 24.

²⁹ "Progressive Prairie-ite," "How I Would Spend \$1.000," Grain Growers' Guide, XV, no. 45 (November 8, 1922), 17, 25.

a great deal better for me, but the automobile has taken me to even greater things outside of these four walls.”³⁰ A host of other farm dwellers shared this sentiment. June Jones from Alberta considered life on the farm before and after she had an automobile. She concluded that although some people “talk of the ‘good old days,’ . . . give me the ‘good new days’ every time.”³¹ Since distance was the problem that Prairie dwellers sought to overcome through their purchase of communication technology, it is important to also consider the transportation technologies that could solve this problem as well.

Fischer expands upon his first question, about people’s use of a technological device, with two additional questions. These questions explore the wider implications of a technology to the community into which it is introduced. The second question proposed by Fischer asks how using the technologies altered other, less immediate aspects of people’s lives and his final question helps examine how the collective use of a technology and the collective responses to it altered social structure and culture. These questions are difficult to answer with certainty. There are, however, possible responses to them.

There is a sense, in the case of the radio, that the household receiving set helped to keep farm families at home together.³² The radio, in contrast to other modern inventions, such as the automobile and movies, was a device farm families enjoyed within the home. The radio, therefore, drew people into instead of out of the home. As one farm journalist wrote: “[a] home, with the help of radio, becomes a social centre in which family and

³⁰ Mrs. R. A., “What a Car Means to Farm Women,” *The Country Guide* XXIII, no. 5 (1 March 1930), 43.

³¹ June Jones, “What a Car Means to Farm Women,” 44.

³² Wetherell, “Some Aspects of Technology,” 58; Roe, “When the Farmer Listens In,” 5.

friends delight to gather.”³³ Having a “new heart of the home”³⁴ must have provided some measure of relief to farm families concerned about the exodus of rural dwellers, and especially farm youth, to the cities.

In the same sense, there was some discussion, and perhaps hope, among farmers and farm women that having modern communication technology made rural homes more similar to their urban counterparts. With modern inventions, such as the telephone and radio, the city lost some of its generally acknowledged advantages over the farm, including ready access to information and entertainment and contact with neighbours, places of business, and community services.³⁵

Rural communities seemed to believe that the introduction of telephones and radios to Prairie farms would help to stem the flow of rural people to urban areas, by decreasing the isolation of the Prairie farm and also by bringing some of the characteristics of urban life to rural areas. It is difficult to believe that this is true, however, as the exodus of farmers to the cities was strong throughout the period being discussed and the proportion of rural to urban dwellers gradually increased in favour of the latter throughout the first fifty years of the twentieth century.

Davis suggested a potentially negative aspect of the radio. She suggested that “[t]he only negative aspect of the introduction of the radio into family life (rural or urban) was the possible decline in home produced entertainment. However, letters in the *Guide* continued to refer to piano and choral music, so presumably ‘home’ music was still

³³ Roe, “When the Farmer Listens In,” 5.

³⁴ Northern Electric advertisement, (September 17, 1924), 24.

³⁵ Roe, “When the Farmer Listens In,” 5.

appreciated.”³⁶ Home-made entertainment did not die out as a result of the new devices. Farm people commented on a revival of “home-made” entertainment during the Depression years.

It is also relevant to ponder whether possession of the new technologies resulted in fewer trips to town and neighbours’ homes. The ability to conduct business and maintain social contacts from within the home as well as receive entertainment may have decreased the necessity, especially for families without a car, of going visiting or to town.

Some people felt that the new communication devices subtly altered rural life. Strange perceived, with some nostalgia, that modern inventions changed the patterns and flows of rural life. She sensed that farm people lived differently once they had modern technology, including communication and transportation devices. To her, farm life became more like the city and less the simple life that farmers once led.³⁷

It is difficult to fully colour in the life cycle of technology concept presented in chapter three. The responses of rural people, however, allow us to partially outline people’s consumption, use, and re-evaluation of telephones and radios.

The initial evaluation that farm residents made of devices seem to have included several factors, the most important of these being their use to the business of the farm, the entertainment value the device provided, and whether or not the technology granted something new for farm families or if the device’s major uses were redundant with another technology. The technologies studied here, the telephone and the radio, were quickly domesticated and set into daily use by the farm families that adopted them. The

³⁶ Davis, “Valiant Servants,” 38.

³⁷ Strange, *With the West in Her Eyes*, 281-285.

telephone was used to obtain market reports and for social contact with friends and family. The radio provided entertainment to those that owned one and market information, education, and religious services. There is, throughout the narratives associated with the telephone and radio, the idea of the devices as marvelous. Farm families believed that communication technology brought something new and special to farm life and significantly improved people's lives on the farm. Perhaps this perception of a better rural life was one of the main factors for purchasing the device in the first place. The final stage of the life cycle of a technology was whether to keep it in the home or substitute it for another technology. The focus of this work was mainly on the uses stage in the life cycle, due to primary source limitations.

There are three wider implications of this study to communication research in general. The thesis is important because it challenges some of the traditional work of communication history. It questions the consideration that the Aird Commission gave to the public submissions when making their recommendations. As well, the work looks at the negotiations that occurred when Canada was implementing its plan for national broadcasting and the role that private and amateur broadcasters played. This study is also important to the communication field because it focuses on groups traditionally left out of communication studies about telephones and radios, rural Prairie people. Although the work does not seek to prove that communication technology was more important to Prairie farm residents than people in other parts of the country, it does seek to illustrate that rural Prairie people greatly valued the radio and the telephone for the improvements they brought to Prairie farm life. Finally, this study gives the people themselves a voice in the history. Admittedly, the responses included have been carefully selected, making

this only one version of the history. The thesis, however, is still based on contemporary people's perceptions of the technologies.

The objectives of the work were to look at the consumption of communication technology through the eyes of rural Prairie consumers using their discussion of the technologies. The study explores people's evaluation, consumption, and uses of technology on the rural Prairies. As well, it strives to accurately portray individuals' joy, frustration, and other emotions in relation to communication and transportation technologies.

The main argument that the thesis entertained is that although the uses of new communication technologies by rural communities were not new or revolutionary, farm families' perceptions of these devices were of technologies that were life-altering. The thesis entertained three sub-arguments. First, Prairie farm families valued communication technology over "labour-saving" household and farm technologies, such as vacuums, washing machines, tractors, generators, and running water. Prairie farm families valued communication technologies, such as the radio and the telephone, over farm and home "labour-saving" devices because communication technologies brought the outside world into the home and they took the family off the farm. Second, the thesis argued that the acquisition of communication devices was different across the three Prairie provinces and across Canada. Third, the thesis argued that a desire for entertainment and a way to escape the hard labour and the hardships of Prairie farm life, especially during the agricultural depression of the 1920s and 1930s, drove people to purchase communication technologies.

The study draws several conclusions. First, rural residents viewed new communication technologies as significant improvements to their quality of life because they decreased feelings of rural isolation by bringing people in contact with their neighbours and by bringing entertainment into the farm home. Second, families made choices about what technology to buy based on income, cost, utility to the farm, and entertainment value. Third, farm families seemed to prefer cars and radios over the telephone if they could not afford all three. Throughout the period, the telephone was embattled by the other communication technologies that farm families deemed more desirable. Fourth, communication technology helped increase the efficiency of tasks farm families already performed, such as getting market reports and contacting neighbours. The technologies, however, also introduced some new opportunities previously unavailable to farm residents of the Prairies, such as long distance phone calls and hearing plays, concerts, and lectures broadcast from large cities.

The telephone and radio brought unprecedented amounts of information, entertainment, and social contact into Prairie farm homes. Although their uses were not revolutionary, farm people perceived that the devices, in the words of one farm woman, had greatly improved the quality of life “within the four walls of my house.”

Bibliography

Primary Sources

BOOKS

Aberson, Jane L. From the Prairies With Hope. Edited by Robert E. VanderVennen. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1991.

Strange, Kathleen. With the West in Her Eyes: The Story of a Modern Pioneer. Toronto: George J. McLeod Limited, 1937.

Wengel, Rit Svane. Union of Opposites: Letters from Rit Svane Wengel. Edited by Craig W. Miller. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1996.

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Eighth Census of Canada, 1941: Volume IX -- Housing. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1949.

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Eighth Census of Canada, 1941: Volume I -- General Review and Summary Tables. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1950.

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume III -- Housing and Families. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1953.

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Ninth Census of Canada, 1951: Volume I -- Population: General Characteristics. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1953.

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume VIII -- Agriculture. Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1936.

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume V -- Earnings of Wage Earners, Dwellings, Households, Families, Blind and Deaf Mutes. Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1935.

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume I -- Summary. Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1936.

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Volume V -- Agriculture. Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1925.

- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Volume I -- Population: Number, Sex and Distribution -- Racial Origins -- Religion. Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1924.
- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1934-35: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1935.
- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1939: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1939.
- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1940: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1940.
- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1941: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1941.
- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1942: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1942.
- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1943-44: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1944.
- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1945: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1945.
- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1946: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1946.
- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1947: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1947.
- Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1948-49: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1949.

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. The Canada Year Book, 1950: The Official Statistical Annual of the Resources, History, Institutions and Social and Economic Conditions of the Dominion. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1950.

Canada. Mulock Committee. Proceedings of the Select Committee on Telephones. Ottawa: Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1905.

Canada. Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting. Report. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1929.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Canadian Marconi Library. Coats, D. R. P. "Canada's Fifty Years of Broadcasting and Stories Stations Tell: Featuring the Pioneer Station XWA. Later given the call letters CFCF, 1919-1969." Montreal, n.d.

Glenbow Archives. Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1934-1974. M2247. Box 1, File 1 -- Minutes, Annual and Director's Meetings.

Glenbow Archives. Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1934-1974. M2247. Box 1, File 2 -- Correspondence, 1934-1935.

Glenbow Archives. Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1934-1974. M2247. Box 1, File 3 -- Correspondence 1936-1943.

Glenbow Archives. Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1934-1974. M2247. Box 1, File 4 -- Correspondence 1944-1949.

Glenbow Archives. Airdrie Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1934-1974. M2247. Box 2, File 26 -- Rural Mutual Telephone Companies Act, 1935.

Glenbow Archives. Aldersyde Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1935-1972. M2251. Box 1, File 23 -- Annual Statistical Returns, 1940, 1946-1949.

Glenbow Archives. Allied Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1971. M2253. Box 1, File 1 -- Allied Mutual Telephone Company Papers, History of Company, 1936-1971.

Glenbow Archives. CFAC Radio Fonds, 1921-1984. M8210. Box 127. File 125.

Glenbow Archives. Conrich Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970. M6671. Box 1, File 1 -- Certificate of Incorporation, Rural Mutual Telephone Companies Act, etc., 1925, 1936, 1970.

Glenbow Archives. Conrich Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970. M6671. Box 1, File 3 -- Minutes, 1936-1970.

- Glenbow Archives. Conrich Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970. M6671, Box 1, File 7 -- Annual Reports, 1948-1952.
- Glenbow Archives. Crossfield Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1937-1974. M2288, File 1 -- Crossfield Mutual Telephone Company Minutes, 1934-1974.
- Glenbow Archives. Freshfield Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1935-1972. M2289, Box 1, File 1 -- Documents re. Formation of Company, 1936-1937.
- Glenbow Archives. Freshfield Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1935-1972. M2289, Box 1, File 2 -- Minutes of Meetings, 1936-1971.
- Glenbow Archives. Freshfield Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1935-1972. M2289, Box 1, File 3 -- Correspondence, 1936-1950.
- Glenbow Archives. H. Gordon Love Fonds, 1922-1969. M693, File 10 -- Correspondence, 1933-1938.
- Glenbow Archives. Hampton Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970. M2290, Box 1, File 1 -- Correspondence, etc., 1936-1938.
- Glenbow Archives. Hampton Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970. M2290, Box 2, File 36 -- Reports, Annual and Director's Meetings.
- Glenbow Archives. Hampton Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1970. M2290, Box 2, File 37 -- Annual Returns, 1936-1953.
- Glenbow Archives. Kent-Interlake Mutual Telephone Company Fonds, 1936-1974. M7813, File 1 -- Minutes 1936-1974.
- Glenbow Archives. Louise and Russell Johnston Fonds. M8634, File 335 -- National Farm Radio Forum, 1943-1964.
- Glenbow Archives. Rimbey North East Telephone Company Fonds, 1935-1936. M2301, File 1 -- Account Book, 1935-1936.
- National Archives of Canada. Boards, Offices, and Commissions. RG 36, Series 31, Volume 19, File 10-A-11 -- National Farm Radio Forum.
- National Archives of Canada. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. RG 41, Series A-IV-2-c, Volume 356, File 19-6-1 -- List of Broadcasting Stations in Canada as of December 13, 1937, Part 2.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. RG 41, Series A-IV-2-c, Volume 356, File 19-6-4 -- Regional Radio Conference, Havana, Cuba, March 1937, Part 1.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian National Railways. RG 30, Series V-A-h-9, Volume 8729, File 26-1013 -- Operation Matters, The CNR Complaint of the Village of Birch Hills, Sask.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian National Railways. RG 30, Series V-A-h-9, Volume 8790, File 53-166 -- Stations, The CNR Company.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian National Railways. RG 30, Series V-A-h-9, Volume 8713, File 26-522 -- Operation Matters, The CNR Co.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Transport Commission. RG 46, Series C-II-1, Volume 1536, File 8883.6.2 -- Rural Municipality of Rockwood, Manitoba.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Transport Commission. RG 46, Series C-II-1, Volume 1536, File 8883.6.3 -- Statement of Facts for Whitewater, Manitoba.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Transport Commission. RG 46, Series C-II-1, Volume 1536, File 8883.6.4 -- Statement of Facts for Edrans/Sidney, Manitoba.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Transport Commission. RG 46, Series C-II-1, Volume 1536, File 8883.6.5 -- Statement of Facts for Gimli, Manitoba.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Transport Commission. RG 46, Series C-II-1, Volume 1536, File 8883.6.6 -- Statement of Facts for Binscarth, Manitoba.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Transport Commission. RG 46, Series C-II-1, Volume 1536, File 8883.6.7 -- Statement of Facts for Melita, Manitoba.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Transport Commission. RG 46, Series C-II-1, Volume 1536, File 8883.6.8 -- Statement of Facts for Shoal Lake, Manitoba.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Transport Commission. RG 46, Series C-II-1, Volume 1536, File 8883.6.9 -- Statement of Facts for Snowflake, Manitoba.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Transport Commission. RG 46, Series C-II-1, Volume 1536, File 8883.6.10 -- Statement of Facts for Elkhorn, Manitoba.

National Archives of Canada. Canadian Transport Commission. RG 46, Series C-II-1, Volume 1415, File 8883.6 -- Manitoba Government Telephone Commission.

- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 148. File 6206-1 -- Broadcasting -- Licensing and Inspection. General. 1942-1944. Part 4.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 148. File 6206-51 -- CJCJ Calgary. Radio and Repair Shop and the Calgary Albertan. Part 1.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 148. File 6206-51 -- CJCJ Calgary. Radio and Repair Shop and the Calgary Albertan. Part 2.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 150. File 6206-73 -- CHAB Limited. Moose Jaw. 1922-1934. Part 1.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 150. File 6206-73 -- CHAB Limited. Moose Jaw. 1922-1934. Part 2.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 151. File 6206-109 -- CKCK Regina. The Regina Leader-Post. Part 1.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 151. File 6206-109 -- CKCK Regina. The Regina Leader-Post. Part 2.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 152. File 6206-111 -- CJOC Lethbridge. J. E. Palmer and H. R. Carson.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 152. File 6206-132 -- CHMA Edmonton. Christian and Missionary Alliance.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 152. File 6206-140 -- CFQC Saskatoon. The Electric Shop.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 153. File 6206-164 -- CFCN Calgary. W. W. Grant Limited and The Voice of the Prairies. Calgary. 1922-1930. Part 1.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 153. File 6206-164 -- CFCN Calgary. W. W. Grant Limited and The Voice of the Prairies. Calgary. 1922-1930. Part 2.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 153. File 6206-166 -- CJCA Edmonton. The Edmonton Journal.
- National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 154. File 6206-174 -- CJRM Moose Jaw and CJRW Fleming. James Richardson and Sons. Limited. Part 1.

National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 154, File 6206-174 -- CJRM Moose Jaw and CJRW Fleming, James Richardson and Sons. Limited, Part 2.

National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 154, File 6206-174 -- CJRM Moose Jaw and CJRW Fleming, James Richardson and Sons. Limited, Part 3.

National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 154, File 6206-176 -- CKUA Edmonton, The University of Alberta.

National Archives of Canada. Department of Communication. RG 97, Volume 154, File 6206-179 -- CFAC Calgary, The Calgary Herald.

National Archives of Canada. Marine Branch. RG 42, Series C-1, Volume 1077, File 227-6-3 -- Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting -- Suggestions -- Alberta, 1928-1929.

National Archives of Canada. Marine Branch. RG 42, Series C-1, Volume 1077, File 227-8-3 -- Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting -- Suggestions -- Manitoba, 1928-1929.

National Archives of Canada. Privy Council Office. RG 2, Series A-5-a, Volume 2637 -- Cabinet Conclusions, 7 September 1945 to 5 April 1946.

National Archives of Canada. Privy Council Office. RG 2, Series A-5-a, Volume 2638 -- Cabinet Conclusions, 8 April 1946 to 25 September 1946.

Provincial Archives of Manitoba. United Farmers of Manitoba. MG 10 E1, Box 12 -- United Farm Women of Manitoba Survey of Farm Homes, 1922.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AND ADVERTISEMENTS

"Announcing a New Service." Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 4 (27 January 1926): 4.

Baronet Radio Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 17 (1 September 1927): 37.

Canada Marconi Company Radio Advertisement. The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer LVIII, no. 9 (September 1939): 35.

Canadian General Electric Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 26 (15 October 1926): 36.

Canadian Independent Telephone Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide IV, no. 13 (25 October 1911): 31.

"Charging Batteries." Grain Growers' Guide XVII, no. 50 (10 December 1924): 15.

Chestnut, M. V. "Difficulties with Static." Grain Growers' Guide XVIII, no. 31 (5 August 1925): 4.

Circulation Information. Grain Growers' Guide VI, no. 20 (14 May 1913): 3.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio Gets Better and Better." The Country Guide XXI, no. 19 (1 October 1928): 28-29, 55.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 15 (1 May 1926): 28-29.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 5 (3 February 1926): 12-13.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 13 (1 July 1927): 28, 36.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 7 (1 April 1927): 39.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XXI, no. 3 (1 February 1928): 28-29.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 24 (15 September 1926): 28.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 21 (1 November 1927): 53.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 4 (15 February 1927): 37.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 5 (1 March 1927): 44.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XXII, no. 1 (1 January 1929): 34.

Coats, D. R. P. "Radio." The Country Guide XXI, no. 13 (2 July 1928): 19.

Coats, D. R. P. "The Radio on the Farm." Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 17 (1 September 1927): 4, 38.

"Common Business Honesty." Grain Growers' Guide VI, no. 44 (29 October 1913): 3.

Corbett, E. A. "Education by Air." The Country Guide XXIV, no. 10 (October 1931): 37.

"Experiences with Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XVII, no. 13 (26 March 1924): 10-11, 32.

General Electric Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 17 (1 September 1927): 38.

General Electric Battery Thrift Radio Advertisement. The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer LVIII, no. 9 (September 1939): 26.

Grain Growers' Guide XVI, no. 8 (21 February 1923): front cover.

Grain Growers' Guide XVII, no. 7 (13 February 1924): front cover.

King Quality Products Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 25 (1 October 1926): 18.

King Quality Products Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 23 (1 September 1926): 17.

Kolster Radio Advertisement. The Country Guide XXI, no. 20 (15 October 1928): 27.

"M. J. H." "Homesteaditis." Grain Growers' Guide XXVII, no. 1 (January 1934): 16.

Manitoba Telephone System Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIV, no. 31 (7 September 1921): 10.

Manitoba Telephone System Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIV, no. 43 (26 October 1921): 12.

Marconi Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 19 (1 October 1927): 18.

Marconiphone Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XVIII, no. 40 (7 October 1925): 29.

Mercury Super-Ten Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 27 (1 November 1926): 43.

Murray, Clarence. "The Case of Clarence Murray." The Country Guide XXI, no. 23 (1 December 1928): 32.

Northern Electric Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide II, no. 51 (20 July 1910): 36.

Northern Electric Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide IV, no. 23 (3 January 1912): 32.

Northern Electric Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide X, no. 50 (12 December 1917): 44.

- Northern Electric Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide X. no. 44 (31 October 1917): 40.
- Northern Electric Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIII. no. 8 (25 February 1920): 88.
- Northern Electric Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIV. no. 10 (9 March 1921): 29.
- Northern Electric Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XVII. no. 38 (17 September 1924): 24.
- Northern Electric Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XVII. no. 44 (29 October 1924): 4.
- Northern Electric Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XX. no. 9 (2 May 1927): 51.
- Northern Electric Company advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XX. no. 10 (16 May 1927): 36.
- Northern Electric Company Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XX. no. 19 (1 October 1927): 55.
- Philco Farm Radio Advertisement. The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer LVIII. no. 9 (September 1939): 15.
- "Progressive Prairie-ite," "How I Would Spend \$1,000." Grain Growers' Guide XV. no. 45 (8 November 1922), 17, 25.
- "Radio Stations in Canada." Grain Growers' Guide XVIII. no. 35 (2 September 1925): 17.
- RCA-Victor Radio Advertisement. The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer LVIII. no. 9 (September 1939): 37.
- Roe, Amy J. "The Radio on the Farm." Grain Growers' Guide XVII. no. 11 (12 March 1924): 8, 33.
- Roe, Amy J. "When the Farmer Listens In." Grain Growers' Guide XVII. no. 37 (10 September 1924): 5, 22.
- "Should My Daughter Marry a Farmer?" Grain Growers' Guide XV. no. 28 (12 July 1922): 9, 22-23.

"Should My Daughter Marry a Farmer?" Grain Growers' Guide XV, no. 32 (9 August 1922): 8, 18-19.

Stewart-Warner Radio Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 17 (1 September 1927): 45.

Stewart-Warner Radio Advertisement. The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer LVIII, no. 9 (September 1939): 21.

Stewart-Warner Radio Advertisement. The Country Guide XXVII, no. 9 (September 1934): 29.

Sutherland, J. K. "The Case for the C.B.C." The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer LVII, no. 6 (June 1938): 12, 48.

The Country Guide XXI, no. 7 (2 April 1928): front cover.

The Country Guide XXIII, no. 16 (December 1930): front cover.

Ward, John W. "The Wonders of Radio." Grain Growers' Guide XV, no. 19 (10 May 1922): 8, 35.

Westinghouse Radio Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 25 (1 October 1926): 17.

Westinghouse Radio Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 28 (15 November 1926): 33.

Westinghouse Radio Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XIX, no. 30 (15 December 1926): 33.

Westinghouse Radio Advertisement. Grain Growers' Guide XX, no. 19 (1 October 1927): 33.

Westinghouse Radio Advertisement. The Country Guide XXI, no. 19 (1 October 1928): 28.

"What a Car Means to Farm Women." The Country Guide XXIII, no. 5, (1 March 1930): 43-44, 46.

"Which Should My Daughter Marry?" Grain Growers' Guide XV, no. 24 (14 June 1922): 8-9.

Secondary Sources

ARTICLES

- Barber, Marilyn. "Help for Farm Homes: The Campaign to End Housework Drudgery in Rural Saskatchewan in the 1920s." Journal of the History of Canadian Science, Technology and Medicine 9, no. 1 (June 1985): 3-26.
- Barron, Hal S. "Rural Social Surveys." Agricultural History 58, no. 2 (April 1984): 113-117.
- Bijker, Wiebe E., Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch, eds. "General Introduction." In The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology, 1-6. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987.
- Boekelman, Mark. "Introduction." In Jane L. Abernethy. From the Prairies with Hope. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1991.
- Carey, James W. "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan." The Antioch Review XXVII (1967): 5-39.
- Cowan Buchwald, Cheryl. "Canadian Universality Policy and the Information Infrastructure: Past Lessons, Future Directions." Canadian Journal of Communication 22, no. 2 (1997): 161-193.
- Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. "The Consumption Junction: A Proposal for Research Strategies in the Sociology of Technology." In The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology. Edited by Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch, 261-280. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989.
- Davis, Angela E. "'Country Homemakers': The Daily Lives of Women as Seen Through the Woman's Page of the Grain Growers' Guide, 1908-1928." In Canadian Papers in Rural History, VIII. Edited by Donald H. Akenson, 163-174. Gananoque: Longdale Press, 1992.
- Davis, Angela E. "'Valiant Servants': Women and Technology on the Canadian Prairies, 1910-1940." Manitoba History 25 (Spring 1993): 33-42.
- Dorsch, Julie. "'You Just Did What Had To Be Done': Life Histories of Four Saskatchewan Women." In "Other Voices": Historical Essays of Saskatchewan Women. Edited by David de Brou and Aileen Moffat, 116-130. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995.
- Fischer, Claude S. "Technology's Retreat: The Decline of Rural Telephony, 1920-1940." Social Science History 11, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 295-327.

- Fischer, Claude S. "The Revolution in Rural Telephony, 1900-1920." Journal of Social History 21 (1987-1988): 5-26.
- Flora, Cornelia Butler and Jan L. Flora. "Structure of Agriculture and Women's Culture in the Great Plains." Great Plains Quarterly 8 (1988): 195-205.
- Gasher, Mike. "Invoking Public Support for Public Broadcasting: The Aird Commission Revisited." Canadian Journal of Communication 23 (1998): 189-216
- Jackson, John D. "Broadcasting: Centralization, Regionalization, and Canadian Identity." In Communications in Canadian Society. Edited by Benjamin D. Singer. 221-236. Fourth edition. Toronto: Nelson Canada. 1995.
- Jellison, Katherine. "Women and Technology on the Great Plains, 1910-40." Great Plains Quarterly 8 (Summer 1988): 145-157.
- Jones, David C. "'There is Some Power About the Land': The Western Agrarian Press and Country Life Ideology." Journal of Canadian Studies 17, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 96-108.
- Kinnear, Mary. "'Do you want your daughter to marry a farmer?' Women's Work on the Farm, 1922." In Canadian Papers in Rural History, 6. Edited by Donald H. Akenson. 137-153. Gananoque: Longdale Press. 1988.
- Maddox, Brenda. "Women and the Switchboard." In The Social Impact of the Telephone. Edited by Ithiel Sola de Pool. 262-280. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1977.
- Mansell, Robin. "Communication by Design." In Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies. Edited by Robin Mansell and Roger Silverstone. 15-43. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1996.
- Pike, Robert M. "A Chequered Progress: Farmers and the Telephone in Canada, 1905-1951." Unpublished Paper, 1998.
- Pinch, Trevor J. and Wiebe E. Bijker. "The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other." In The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology. Edited by Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch. 17-50. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1989.
- Pool, Ithiel de Sola, ed. "Introduction." In The Social Impact of the Telephone. 1-9. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1977.

Silverstone, Roger and Leslie Haddon. "Design and the Domestication of Information and Communication Technologies: Technical Change and Everyday Life." In Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies. Edited by Robin Mansell and Roger Silverstone, 44-74. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Sundberg, Sara Brooks. "A Female Frontier: Manitoba Farm Women in 1922." Prairie Forum 16, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 185-204.

Vipond, Mary. "CKY Winnipeg in the 1920s: Canada's Only Experiment in Government Monopoly Broadcasting." Manitoba History, no. 12 (Autumn 1986): 2-13.

Wetherell, Donald G. "Some Aspects of Technology and Leisure in Alberta, 1914-1950." Prairie Forum 11, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 51-67.

Winston, Brian. "How are Media Born and Developed?" In Questioning in the Media: A Critical Introduction. Edited by John Downing, Ali Mohammadi, and Anabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, 54-73. Second edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995.

BOOKS

Allard, T. J. Straight Up: Private Broadcasting in Canada: 1918-1958. Ottawa: Canadian Communications Foundation, 1979.

Armstrong, Christopher and H. V. Nelles. Monopoly's Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830-1930. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

Babe, Robert E. Telecommunications in Canada: Technology, Industry, and Government. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

Blue, John. Alberta Past and Present: Historical and Biographical. 3 vols. Chicago: Pioneer Historical Publishing Co., 1924.

Broadfoot, Barry. Next-Year Country: Voices of Prairie People. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988.

Burnet, Jean. Next-Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1951.

Cashman, Tony. Singing Wires: The Telephone in Alberta. Edmonton: Alberta Government Telephone Commission, 1972.

Castells, Manuel. The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996.

- Collins, Robert. A Voice from Afar: The History of Telecommunications in Canada. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1977.
- Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave. New York: Basic Books, 1983.
- Fischer, Claude S. America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Grayson, L. M. and Michael Bliss, eds. The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R. B. Bennett, 1930-1935. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.
- Martin, Michèle. "Hello, Central?" Gender, Technology, and Culture in the Formation of Telephone Systems. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991.
- Marvin, Carolyn. When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electrical Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Mavor, James. Government Telephones. New York: Moffat, Yard & Company, 1917.
- McNeil, Bill and Morris Wolfe. Signing On: The Birth of Radio in Canada. Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1982.
- Mueller, Milton. Universal Service: Competition, Interconnection, and Monopoly in the Making of the American Telephone System. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997.
- Mulgan, G. J. Communication and Control: Networks and the New Economies of Communication. New York: New Guilford Press, 1991.
- Ogle, Ed B. Long Distance Please: The Story of the TransCanada Telephone System. Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1979.
- Peers, Frank W. The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting, 1920-1951. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969.
- Potrebenko, Helen. No Streets of Gold: A Social History of Ukrainians in Alberta. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977.
- Rakow, Lana. Gender on the Line: Women, the Telephone, and Community Life. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992.
- Scannell, Paddy. Radio, Television & Modern Life. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

- Schmalz, Wayne. On Air: Radio in Saskatchewan. Regina: Coteau Books, 1990.
- Stevenson, Nick. Understanding Media Cultures: Social Theory and Mass Communications. London: Sage, 1995.
- Thompson, John B. The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Thompson, John Herd with Allen Seager. Canada: Decades of Discord. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985.
- Vipond, Mary. Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922-1932. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992.
- Wetherell, Donald G. with Irene Kmet. Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta, 1896-1945. Regina: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism/Canadian Plains Research Center, 1990.
- Williams, Raymond. What I Came to Say. London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989.
- Winseck, Dwayne. Reconvergence: A Political Economy of Telecommunications in Canada. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1998.