"Broadcasting's oldest station" is a title coveted by several radio pioneers. However, amongst all the U. S. publicity, few scholars have taken note of the one Canadian station that may, too, have a claim on the title. The station is CFCF, Montreal.

Broadcasting historians have long sought to dispel the many confusing contradictory claims to the title "broadcasting's oldest station." It is a title coveted by several radio pioneers in the U.S. KDKA, WWJ, KCBS and WHA are among the most publicized claimants. KCBS, San Francisco, has been heralded as "the real pioneer of broadcasting..." (Greb, 1958, 13). WHA, Madison, "the oldest station in the nation..." (Smith, 1959, 45 - 55) and WWJ, Detroit, "the world's first radio station" (Smith, 1959, 40). KDKA has received the most publicity, declaring itself to be "the world's first..." (Lichty, 1975, 102 - 110). The Cox - Harding election returns broadcast by KDKA were cited by most U. S. texts as the "historical beginning of broadcasting"
Barnouw in discussing the "Decision in Pittsburgh" declared KDKA, the "symbol of the age" (1966, 74). The argument over which station is oldest was supposedly put to rest by Baudino and Kittross. In comparing the records of KDKA, KCBS, WWJ, and WHA they concluded, "It is clear...that KDKA...deserves the title ... as the oldest station in the United States" (1970, 80).

In the scholarly enthusiasm to bestow the title "broadcasting's oldest", little reference has been made to stations outside the United States. In fact, the reader of such studies often must seek the definition of terms before realizing that the discussions revolve around only the first "U.S." stations as opposed to North American or world claims of the title "broadcasting's first." In Canada, this oversight was particularly apparent. With comparatively few Canadian authored mass communication textbooks, students and scholars have been dependent on U. S. publications. Unknowingly, they have been mislead by U. S. information.

Although Canada and many countries lagged behind the United States in the development of a national system, wireless experimentation was taking place throughout the world. Asa Briggs noted that during 1920, "regular concerts began to be broadcast in Europe from the Hague" (1961, 20). In Great Britain, Marconi was pioneering experimental broadcasts near London. The "high point" of this experimentation "was a live broadcast on June 15, 1920, by Dame Nellie Melba, the great Soprano" (Paulu, 1961, 8 - 12). Russian interest in broadcasting developed parallel to the Western system. Vladimir Lenin was "broadcasting his revolutionary messages via a radio station" as early as 1916 (Kitaram, 1979, 106). Lenin was an active supporter of radio's early experiments seeing the medium as a tool whereby he could achieve wide distribution of his messages (Paulu, 1974, 29 - 34).
Before the argument of which station was "first" can be put to rest, scholars must consider what was happening in other parts of the world. The question has been criticized as being something of a non-issue and it may be purely academic. However, the industry, with its preoccupation for "first", has sustained an interest for station promotion and a body of literature has grown supporting and contesting the differing U. S. claimants. All the primary broadcast textbooks, both Canadian and U. S. note, at least in passing, the "first" status of various title claimants. Academically, Gordon B. Greb (1958) was the first to raise the issue. E. Franklin Smith (1958) responded one year later with his examination of stations WHA and WWJ. Charles Sussking's (1962) report before the Institute of Radio Engineers, while going almost unnoticed, gave important "first" credits to Marconi. Larry Lichty saw the issue as important enough to reproduce the corporate version of KDKA's history (Lichty, 1975). As already noted, Baudino and Kittross (1977) supposedly put the argument to rest. Among all this periodical literature, only one Canadian author appears: Sandy Stewart in his "How Radio Got Started... A Canadian View" (Stewart, 1980).

It is not the purpose of this study to put the argument to rest. Such would require a massive review of broadcasting in both English and non-English countries, especially Great Britain and Russia. Amongst all the U. S. publicity, however, one Canadian station stands out as being overlooked — the Canadian Marconi operation, CFCF. The purpose of this article is to place CFCF's history within the context of the existing historical record by an examination of its historical roots with the thought that the title, "North America's oldest broadcasting station," might well go to this Canadian operation.

On May 20, 1920, the members of the Royal
Society of Canada assembled in Ottawa to observe Canada's first wireless operation. The occasion marked the first demonstration of commercial radio in Canada. The London Times described the event as "an unusual kind of concert..."

Wireless telephony apparatus was installed (in Ottawa) and connected with Montreal and a concert was given at the Marconi Wireless station ... which by means of a simplifier was heard distinctly by the whole audience. (London Times, 1920, 14).

This broadcast marked the first of CFCF's regular programming. As such, it predates all other United States operations claiming to be "North America's oldest broadcasting station."

Canadian historians have headlined CFCF, Montreal, with the same prominence KDKA has received in the United States. Frank Peers noted that both stations began about the same time (1969, 4-6). E. Austin Weir went a step further in a footnote comparison with KDKA and WWJ. He concluded, "There seems to be no doubt that both stations were antedated by XWA (CFCF) ... as public broadcasters of regularly scheduled programs. Indeed, it would appear that CFCF is the oldest regularly operated broadcasting station in the world" (Weir, 1965, 2). Warner Troyer accurately credits CFCF as the "North American first radio station" (1980, 25). David Ellis, while not citing CFCF directly, has indicated 1919 as the year of the "first Canadian radio broadcast" an obvious reference to CFCF (Ellis, 1979, Chronology). T. J. Allard boldly declared CFCF as the "World's first" (Allard, 1979, 7, 35-36). While Allard provided a more detailed description than the previous authors, he offered little documentation to substantiate his research. Sandy Stewart has been credited with documenting the place of CFCF in Canadian history (Publications, 1980, 28). Unfortunately, while his writing has provided an
interesting narrative, it does not document CFCF's position within the context of the historical record or its claim on the title "broadcasting's oldest" (Stewart, 1980, 30 - 34).

The obscurity of any early Canadian radio information exists for two reasons: First, the pioneers did not cease experiments at any specific date and begin broadcasting. The process was a gradual progression. Second, between 1900 and 1934, the government licensing authority shifted between the Departments of Public Works, Marine and Fisheries, and Naval Service (Peers, 1969, 15 - 18). The primary function of these offices was not radio and there was only limited concern for it. There was no radio conferences such as those called by the U. S. Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover. There was no demand for legislation, in fact there was little government interest. The regulation which existed was in the hands of the civil servant and "was tentative" (Peers, 1969, 12). It was 1928 by the time Canada appointed its first Royal Commission to study broadcasting and 1934 before the legislation was passed. The Commission was created not to clear the air of chaos, as in the U. S., but to protect Canada's interest from U. S. intervention. In 1934, the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Act was passed and created the Commission which centralized regulation, licensing authority and records.

Criteria for examining the claimants has been established by R. Franklin Smith. In his important contribution to the research, Smith defined a "broadcast station today" as exhibiting five characteristics: "(1) utilize radio waves, (2) send non-coded sounds by speech or music, (3) form a continuous patterned program service, (4) [be] intended to be received by the public, and (5) [be] licensed by the government." Only the first four, however, represent "valid bases for verifying historical claims of broadcasting primacy." Smith continued:
...suppose we are attempting to determine the oldest broadcasting station. We would find that radio station today which has these four valid characteristics, and trace its history back to that point in time where it first had these characteristics. At that point, we would find the birth of a station (1959, 41-45).

These standards set forth by Smith, provide the basis from which CFCF's operation will be examined.

Canadian Marconi

Marconi's preeminence in early wireless experimentation precludes any argument about this utilization of radio waves. Charles Susking, in fact, credits Marconi with being the first person to use radio as a device to both send and receive information (1962, 2036-2037).

The historical record of Marconi's activities in Canada begins with the narrative of the Signal Hill, Newfoundland, wireless experiment. It was in December 1901 that the letter 'S' was sent from Cornwall, England, to Newfoundland (Barnouw, 1966, 20). While this historic broadcast momentarily focused international attention to Canadian territory, it also marked the beginning of Canadian radio. In Canada, Marconi not only concluded his spectacular experiment, but he found a government interested and willing to finance his work. In Canada, he met with Alex Johnston, a member of Parliament from Nova Scotia, who enthusiastically took his request to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance. Unlike the confrontations he experienced with the United States Navy and adverse relations with the total U. S. government, Marconi found Canadian officials wanting to help (Barnouw, 1966,
Troyer noted sarcastically that while the Canadian government denied R. A. Fessenden, a Canadian, financial assistance for his radio experiments, it was "busily funding and supporting an Italian inventor" (Troyer, 1980, 17). Contemplating the value of ship-to-shore and marine wireless communication to their Dominion, "...Canada has agreed to put up $80,000" for Marconi's work, "a tremendous sum in our young and struggling country" (Canadian Sparks; Canada Yearbook, 1932, 608; Marconi, 1962, 114).

Utilization of Radio Waves

Marconi constructed the first Canadian wireless stations for Atlantic coast marine communication. These stations replaced antiquated cable systems which had existed from Chateau Bay, P.Q. and Belle Island, Newfoundland, but whose signals had been continually interrupted by ice flows. Their purpose was the broadcasting of "messages to shipping...weather forecasts, storm warnings, reports in connection with floating derelicts, ices and other dangers to navigation" (Canada Yearbook, 1932, 608).

Marconi came to Canada not only to establish ship-to-shore stations. With government support and encouragement, the Canadian Marconi Company grew and under this rubric commercial broadcast experiments began. The first commercial operation established by Marconi was XWA, Montreal. Located in the "Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company factory building" at William Street, XWA later to become CFCF (CFCF, ND2), can be called the Canadian "symbol of age." In a systematic examination of CFCF on the basis of the Smith standards, there is no argument on the first criterion. Marconi did use the radio waves for scientific and broadcast purposes. The inauguration of commercial broadcasting by Canadian Marconi, however, was secondary to his many scientific tests. In the early 1900's
Marconi, as other pioneers, was more interested in "the effect of solar light...electrical disturbance and...mountainous terrain" (Marconi, 1962, 123) on radio. Documentation of the conversion from science to general broadcasting is sparse. Baudino and Kittross note the same problem in their examination of KDKA. These pioneers were more involved in the creation and development of their apparatus than they were in leaving "complete records of exactly what they did and when they did it" (Baudino, 1977, 63).

From Sound to Regular Programming

Marconi's entry into the field of broadcast speech or non-coded sound was evolutionary. The XWA voice experiments evolved from the previous signal communications and grew rapidly with growing interest and Canada's involvement in World War I.

Research provided contradictory dates regarding the inception of CFCF's sound broadcasts. Stewart claims they began as early as 1914, but offers no documentation (1980, 31). The documented sources record the date as 1918. A Short History of CFCF published by the Company as part of a marketing pamphlet noted, "In September, 1918 the ... Company established the first broadcasting station in Canada..." (C1930). Marking the fiftieth anniversary of broadcasting in Canada, the Montreal Star and the Canadian Trade and Commerce cited CFCF's inauguration as "the fall of 1918" and "December, 1919" respectively (TV Week, Lab File). The Canada Yearbook stated "broadcasting first commenced with test programs carried out by the Canadian Marconi Company in Montreal during the winter of 1919" (Yearbook, 1932, 608). Troyer noted the station made its first broadcast in December, 1919, which consisted of "playing phonograph records over the air for the first
time on this continent." Regular programming began May 1920 (Troyer, 1980, 25). Commander C. P. Edward, Director Radio, Department of Marine, declared "regular organized programs commenced in December 1919" (CFCF, ND, 2).

Despite the discrepancy of dates, all records agree that speech and music were programmed by 1919. These broadcasts "consisted of gramophone recordings from an old Swedish music box, weather reports and news items" (History, Cl930; Yearbook, 1956, 893). The first programs were irregular, experimental in nature and the audience was small. S. M. Finlayson, a young apprentice engineer who worked for the Marconi Company at the time, described the broadcasts as "largely aimed at amateur enthusiasts ... who had built their own receivers..." The gradual expansion of CFCF's initial service into a continuous pattern of programming, intended for the public, took approximately two years. Finlayson continued that while programming was not regularly scheduled at first, "late in 1919 and increasing in 1920, more and more scheduling and formality crept in ... each broadcast would last for a couple of hours usually starting about 7:00 p.m." (Finlayson, 1978).

The Winnipeg Trade and Commerce has stated that CFCF's service has been uninterrupted since 1919. Evidence of CFCF's regular schedule was supported by commercial enterprise taking advantage of these regular schedules. As early as April 1920, the Canadian Berliner Gramophone Company began advertising their service and CFCF's programming. The announcement read:

His Master's Voice Records by Wireless Telephone!
By arrangement with the Marconi Wireless Telegraphy Company of Canada, a His Master's Voice Victrola Concert, featuring the latest and most popular selections, will be given tonight and every Tuesday from 8 to 10 p.m. for the
benefit of Wireless students. Captains and officers of ships in port are invited to enjoy this entertainment aboard their vessels. Operators tune to 1200 meters. (CFCF, 4)

Regularly Scheduled Programs

The Canadian broadcast which focused attention on radio occurred on May 20, 1920. The event was prearranged, organized specifically to illustrate the impact of wireless communication. The audience was composed of the members of the Royal Society of Canada. The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, William Lyon MacKenzie King, the Duke of Devonshire, and the arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson were assembled in the Chateau Laurier, Ottawa (Stewart, 1980, 31). These special guests heard an address on war inventions and the songs of Miss Dorothy Lutton.

The experiment took place at 9:30, and by means of a Magna Vox, the voice of the distant singer was quite distinctly heard in all parts of the call. The Magna Vox, however, not only accentuated the sounds from the telephone received, but also the noises of the city, and for that reason at times the singing was interrupted. Several members of the audience wore receivers similar to those used by centrals at the regular telephone exchange. (Montreal Star, 1920, 3)

Westinghouse publicized the first KDKA broadcast in the newspapers and asked the audience during the program, "Will anyone hearing this...please communicate with us...." (Westinghouse, ND, 10; Baudino, 1977, 65). However, the Royal Society audience for CFCF's first regularly scheduled broadcast was prearranged. As a result, the impact of the experiment was immediate. "People were lining up at the coun-
ters of electrical shops to buy home receivers." Stores established radio departments, and the programs of CFCF were "wired into the local theaters for broadcast during intermission." Radio enthusiasts brought their receiving equipment to the theater. After a day's labor for set-up, they publicized their ability to pick up the signals of distant stations. Since few people had personal receivers at this time, "these events often drew larger billings than the motion picture" (CFCF, 3). The broadcasts broadened the public interest in radio and CFCF. By September, 1921, CFCF was seeking government permission to expand its regular hours in order to accommodate more "concert programming" (Licensed Inspection, 1922 - 28, 62046-72). From this experimental stage, it rapidly ascended into a commercially viable enterprise. Stations began to appear throughout the nation, newspaper publicity increased and schedules were published for a rapidly growing audience.

Government License

The original date on which CFCF was licensed by the Canadian government is obscure. Troyer indicated that the station was licensed in September, 1919, by Donald Manson who was the federal government's "chief inspector of radio" (Troyer, 1980, 25). The earliest government records located by this researcher were dated September 16, 1921. Obviously, however, this does not mark the initial phase of broadcasting by Marconi. The original documents, in the Public Archives of Canada, indicate license renewal, the Government's permission for continued experimentation, and as previously noted, they request permission to extend existing programming. J. Litchfield, in tracing the chronology of the Canadian stations, noted that Marconi began testing before the assignment of call letters. XWA's license and call letters,
according to Litchfield, were issued in 1920 with the initial frequency assignment of 1200 meters and a power of 100 watts. Circa 1921, the call letters were changed from XWA to today's CFCF and power was increased to 500 watts (Litchfield, 1965, 9 - 2).

Service Record

Canadian Marconi radio, CFCF, has a long record of domination on the Canadian scene. In fact, there were no Canadian rivals until April, 1922, about one year after CFCF's first regularly scheduled broadcast (Peers, 1969, 5 - 6). CFCF was the key station for many historical Canadian broadcasts. It participated in the 1927 Canadian Confederation Jubilee as the eastern anchor on a 23 station coast-to-coast network; made its first trans-Atlantic broadcast in 1928; and acted as the key station for the celebration of Marconi Day in January, 1930. This broadcast, marking the 30th anniversary of Marconi's transatlantic experiment, was worldwide. It joined together five continents and fifteen countries. CFCF was affiliated with the U. S. networks as were most of the private stations in Canada at that time. It became an NBC affiliate on November 28, 1929, and following World War II switched to the new American Broadcasting Company. However, as noted, it played a prominent role on the Canadian national scene. Locally, it produced bilingual programs and featured Canadian talent long before the law required it. Today, CFCF is a CTV affiliate (CFCF, 10). A most meaningful tribute to the Canadian Marconi Company and CFCF came in 1965 from the CBC's former Programming Executive, Austin Weir:

...a belated ... tribute must be paid to the unselfish cooperation of the Canadian Marconi Company...No one in this country knows better than I how
whole-heartedly Canadian Marconi cooperated in those numerous inter-
empire and inter-national broadcasts. (Weir, 1965, 43)

Conclusion

The question of which radio station deserves the title of "broadcasting's oldest" is an interesting one. In the opinion of this researcher, having reviewed the periodical literature of the era, the Marconi Files in the Public Archives of Canada and numerous other published resources, the examination of broadcasting's oldest cannot ignore Canadian Marconi's CFCF. CFCF's history is not unlike its U. S. neighbors. Early experimental demonstrations were occurring throughout the world at approximately the same time. However, for CFCF, there was a difference. Because of Marconi's early involvement in the science and the willingness of a Canadian government to underwrite his tests while stations in other countries "were just beginning the process ... Canadians were showing the end results" (Stewart, 1980, 31). Along with the claims of U. S. operations, CFCF must be considered among broadcasting's oldest.

The argument over the title has not been put to rest. Research has yet to be conducted for European and Russian systems. However, if KDKA is the oldest broadcasting station in the United States as Baudino declared, then by comparison it appears that CFCF is North America's oldest station. KDKA began wireless telephone transmission in 1916; the evolution of Canadian Marconi began in 1901. KDKA began public transmission in 1919 (Baudino, 1977, 77); CFCF began such broadcasts in September 1918. CFCF's regular programming schedule, beginning December 1919, predates KDKA by eleven months and the inaugural broadcasts of May 20, 1920, predate KDKA by seven months. Interpreting Smith's four
criteria as characteristics of a radio station, there is no doubt that CFCF predates all other North American competitors. Indeed, it would seem that CFCF is North America's oldest broadcast station.

References


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