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25 years of Canadian television — from technical oddity to way of life

September 6, 1952 marked a significant event in the annals of Canadian cultural history: on this date, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) made its first official television transmission from station CBFT in Montreal. The broadcast, consisting mainly of important "talking heads" (television jargon for a head-and-shoulders image of a speaker) making perfunctory speeches, was followed two days later by initial broadcasts from CBLT-TV in Toronto, the first of which began with the station identification slide upside down! With these two stations on the air, Canada had inaugurated its own television service.

By this time, however, the technique of transmitting electronic signals by a visual medium had been perfected and popularized. C. Francis Jenkins first telecast a moving object in 1925, from a radio station outside Washington D.C. in the United States to a receiver in his nearby laboratory. A year later, in Britain, John Logie Baird obtained an experimental television licence.

First faltering steps

The first major television experiments in Canada were those of Jean-Charles Bernier at l'Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal in 1930. Attempts to promote television into a national communications medium were made as early as 1932, when the Canadian Television Ltd. was organized by a British engineer, Douglas West; the fledgling company's research engineer was J. Alphonse Ouimet, who later became president of the CBC.

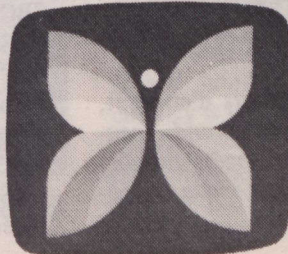
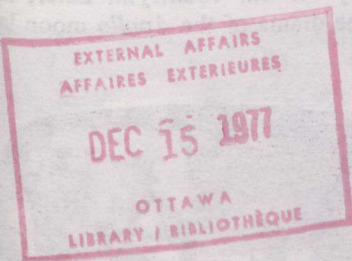
A large public demonstration of the

marvel of the century took place at a Montreal department store, visited by an estimated 100,000 people who watched a very dim "black and red picture". (The picture was produced with a special neon crater tube, resulting in a pure neon-red in the highlights and black in the deep shadows.) Despite the impression television had on its viewers, however, Canadian electronics manufacturers were reluctant to invest in the production of television equipment.

The introduction of television networks in the United States in 1946 obliged the Canadian Government and the CBC to take the new medium more seriously. Alphonse Ouimet was assigned the task of surveying television developments in the U.S. and in Europe, from which evolved the blueprint for the establishment of a national television service in Canada.

World's longest network

Since then, television has expanded at a speed unparalleled by any other invention of the century. By December 1954, there were nine TV stations in Canada; six months later, 26 stations were in operation. In June 1953, the three main CBC stations of Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto were linked by microwave circuits, which were gradually extended to London and Kitchener in Ontario, Quebec City, Winnipeg in Manitoba and the Atlantic provinces. On July 1, 1958, a special program, *Memo to Champlain*, was created to celebrate the linking of Sydney and Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Vancouver, British Columbia. The "electronic highway", costing \$50 million, was extended



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