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Milestones in the evolution of communications

"I have two major programs to announce today, and, although I lack the perspective of history, I would venture to say that both of these will be considered as important milestones in the evolution of communications in Canada. One involves the infant technology of fibre optics, and the other relates to a new satellite communications program. Both are aimed at finding innovative ways of harnessing new technologies for the benefit of Canadians everywhere." Minister of Communications Jeanne Sauvé, addressing the Canadian Telecommunications Carriers Association in Quebec City, on June 19, went on to describe the effects of the new programs soon to be implemented:

* * * *

...More than five million Canadians, 27 per cent of the population, live in rural areas of Canada. And while the degree of satisfaction with the telephone service varies across the nation, indications are that a third to one-half of rural telephone subscribers are unhappy with the service they receive, compared with about 3 per cent of urban subscribers. About 30 per cent of rural subscribers are still on lines with more than four parties, and while four-party line telephone service is fast becoming the norm for rural areas, the demand for single-party service — as telecommunications carriers are well aware — is rising sharply.

It would be both unfair and unproductive to lay the blame for the urban-rural communications gap on the doorstep of the telecommunications carriers or the broadcasters. The underlying painful truth relates to economics. It costs so much more to serve low-density rural regions in comparison with urban areas — about seven times more, on average, for telephone alone.

One of my responsibilities as Minister of Communications — in fact it is chiseled into the Department of Communications Act, is "to promote the establishment, development and efficiency of communication systems and facilities for Canada". It is a responsibility that I take seriously. And while the Department is looking at a number of ways in which rural services can be improved, I am particularly pleased to announce today that the Government in partnership with your association has agreed to undertake a major



Communications Minister Jeanne Sauvé

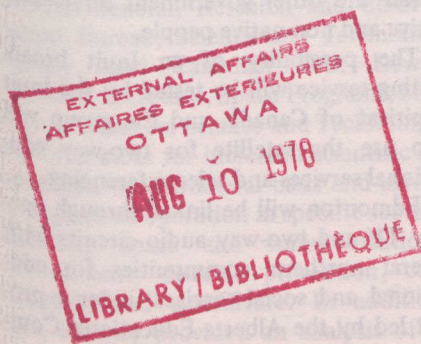
project which has, as one of its aims, the improvement of communications to rural Canadians. At the same time, the project will stimulate industrial activity in a new and promising area of technology — fibre optics.

Fibre optics — a revolution

The small rural town of Elie, Manitoba may seem an unlikely place to begin a technological revolution. Located 60 kilometres west of Winnipeg, it enjoys characteristics similar to those found in small-town Canada everywhere. Its 350 people are mainly farmers or work in farm-related activities, although a few do commute to Winnipeg.

One hundred and fifty householders in Elie and the surrounding countryside will

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One hundred and eight years ago this week... The Northwest Territories was transferred from the Hudson's Bay Company to Canada.