
OUR RADIO STATION

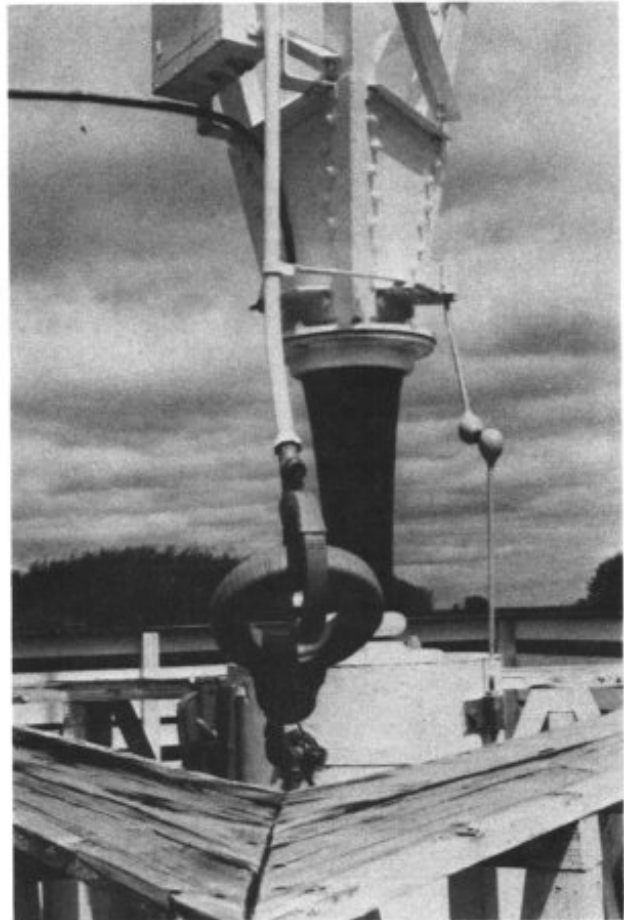
CBK

by Doug Squires

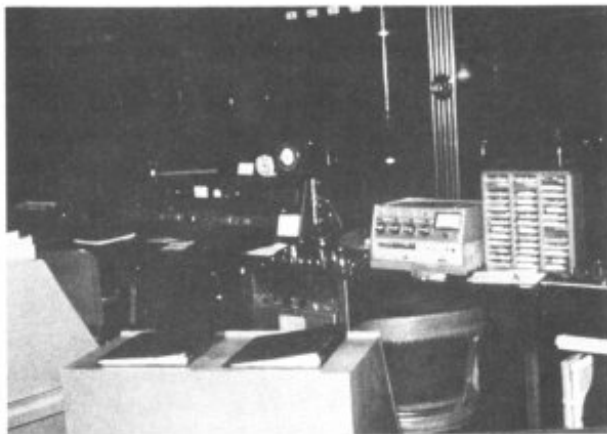
For years the claim to fame of Watrous was its proximity to Lake Manitou, "The Carlsbad of Canada". On July 29, 1939 an additional attraction was added with the opening of CBK, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's 50,000 watt prairie transmitter. It was the only CBC outlet between Winnipeg and Vancouver. Engineers tell us that in order to get as large a coverage area as CBK, a transmitter located in Ottawa would have to have 20 times the power. The reason? Well, it's the same as for Lake Manitou — minerals! This gives the soil greater conductivity and hence, greater coverage. Radiating from the base of the 465 foot tower, like the spokes of a wheel, 120 wires each five hundred feet long are ploughed underground for a proper ground system. Reception has been reported from as far away as New Zealand and Australia. The low broadcast frequency of 540 Ke. also helped give excellent primary coverage to the prairies — so Watrous was chosen.



C.B.K. The Prairie Transmitter at Watrous.



C.B.K. Tower Base Insulator Lighting Transformer and Lighting Ball Caps (Sandbox Dismantled)



C.B.K. control console.



Visitors in the Transmitter Room — C.B.K.



Original Staff 1939
Front: Roy Cahoon, Dick Punshon, Pat Henderson, Sam Haggerty, Bill Grant.
Back: C. F. (Nick) Pattenson, Lawrence Marshall, Alf Sheffield, Paul Johnson.



C.B.K. Staff Party 1950's
Front Row: Mr. and Mrs. George McFadyen, Anne Squires, Arlene McIntosh, Stan Stacey, Orin McIntosh.
Back Row: Wayne and Marlene Bjorndahl, Lorna Wakaluk, Mae Stacey, Orval Wakaluk.

Construction started in the autumn of 1938 and was continued during the winter under a huge tarpaulin-covered shelter with a steam heat plant supplied by Emil Hamerston. Much local labor was used. Stan Stacey, a nearby farmer, dug the basements for both transmitter and staff town residences as well as a quarter-mile long, fourteen foot deep water main trench to the transmitter, using a team of horses, walking plow and scraper (at \$3.00 per day).

The brick, tile and stucco building was very modern — imagine having air conditioning in 1939. It has four split levels. The basement contains furnaces, air conditioning pumps and fans, storerooms and all walls are finished in two-tone brick with floors of terra cotta tile. The next level was built with a reception room, modern kitchen, bath, bedroom with double bunks and locker hallway. There is also a heated, two-car garage. The main floor houses the transmitter with its forty-foot long

red panel and chrome trim.

There is a workshop, tube room and a foyer with curved glass panels. The top level has two studios, a stereo office, a main office and half-bath.

An interesting feature of the main transmitter floor is a huge map of Canada. It is of inlaid battleship linoleum approximately forty feet by seventeen feet. Each province is shown in alternating colors of buff and terra cotta with lakes, bays and oceans in mottled blue. All radio stations (in 1939) are marked with small black triangles with call letters inlaid in black. This floor is still in excellent condition after over forty years of service.

A few technical details about the transmitter may be of interest. It consists of two parts — a low power 5 Kw. section which drives the high power 50,000 watt section. This consists of two 898A tubes, each of which provides 100,000 watts of power for peak modulation. These tubes are about five feet long and have water cooled jackets. This requires a radiator type cooling system using distilled water (which doesn't conduct electricity) and spiral porcelain hose coils for insulation of high operating voltages from ground.

The 465 foot tower rests on a porcelain cone about 3½ feet long with a base about the size of a saucer resting on a concrete foundation. This supports nearly 100 tons, including antennae weight and pull of the guy wires. So important was this insulator during wartime, that it was protected by a sandbox as a bullet could have shattered it.

A special type of transformer is required to supply 60 cycle AC power for red beacon lights. It passes the AC voltage but not the radio frequency voltage — looks like two interlocking doughnuts. Spark ball gaps are also provided for lightning hits.

Town water is used for much of the building and equipment cooling. It was often routed to the roof before going to the sewer. The roof acts as a copper covered tank two feet deep and gives additional cooling by evaporation. Kind of expensive though, often \$600 per month for water.

CBK was a very popular tourist attraction after its opening in July of 1939. Hundreds of people toured it daily. With the start of World War II in September, however, it was closed to visitors for the duration. A chain-link fence topped with barbed wire was erected around the ten-acre property, gates were locked, eight powerful floodlights were installed and four armed guards patrolled the property — (Ed Smith, P. McCurrie, George Minor and H. C. Meadows).

The war delayed the prairie expansion which the CBC had planned so that the temporary programming from Watrous continued until 1948. This programming was in English and French. CBK was the only French station west of Winnipeg. In 1948, studios moved to Winnipeg and a few years later to Regina, the present location.

The original staff as far as can be recalled, consisted of Roy Cahoon (engineer in charge), Bill Grant (Supervisor), Lawrence Marshall, Dick Punshon, Sam Haggerty, Alf Sheffield, Bill Roxborough, Paul Johnson, Pat Henderson, Nick Patterson, Bill Ward (a pioneer announcer from Moose Jaw), Luella Johns of Zelma

(steno), and Roy Murdock (caretaker).

Staff members over the years included Vic Rowe (chief announcer from CFQC), Ron Backhouse, Harry Heywood, Jim Paterson, George McFadyen, Howard Simmonds, Doug Squires, George Brackman, Stan Davis, Ralph Reed, Norm Micklewright (announcer), John Smith, Frank Duffield, Ian Stephen, Orval Wakaluk, Dore Malmberg, Wayne Bjorndahl, Kent McKerie, Hannes Vidal, Stan Walberg, Frank Friesen, Nick Kanigan.

Engineers in charge were Roy Cahoon, Lawrence Marshall, Dick Punshon, Vic Rowe, Steen Walters, Ed McDuff, George McFadyen, Wayne Bjorndahl and Orin McIntosh, now in charge.

The French Department had such names as Pelletier, Lessard, Betty Baril, Chislaine Gravel, Ron Morrier and Charles Chapais.

Stenographers following Luella Johns were Esther Krikau, Joyce Shirkey and Gladys McLaren.

Caretakers were Roy Murdock, Stan Stacey (who helped build the place) and Cliff Stewart. Duties are now handled by Mrs. Stewart on a part-time basis.

Many local boys worked as summer relief operators — Burt Crawford, Philip Hicke, Wayne Bjorndahl and Dr. David Munday. Other local people were hired as relief caretakers — Jack Anderson, Jack Reynolds, Oscar Jorde, Sam Odne, Hugo Rask to name a few.

Space doesn't permit a follow-up to their future happenings. Roy Cahoon went on to become vice-president in charge of radio and TV engineering for Canada. Lawrence Marshall served as a recording engineer overseas during the war and then went to head office in Montreal. Dick Punshon opened the new xmtr CBW at Carman in 1948, managed Regina Studios and went to Winnipeg as director of radio. George McFadyen and Wayne Bjorndahl became engineering supervisors for Saskatchewan radio and TV transmitters. Johnson and Roxborough went to headquarters at Montreal. Bill Grant opened CBX transmitter at Lacombe. Micklewright announced at Winnipeg (Northern Messenger), Luella and Roxborough were married. Some left the CBC and went into business and many are now retired. The staff has dwindled from 14 to only one — Orin McIntosh holds the fort.

Sad to relate many are deceased — Roy Cahoon, Harry Heywood, Vic Rowe, George McFadyen, Ron Backhouse, Gil Lessard, Frank Duffield, John Smith, Cliff Stewart, and Roy Murdock.

There have been many changes over the years. In 1948, studios were moved to Winnipeg (both English and French) reducing local staff from 14 to about 7.

In the 1960's an addition was built to house an emergency power plant with a 10,000 gallon fuel tank. This was partly due to the atomic bomb scare. Later a fall out shelter was added for the same reason. This was about 24 feet square with 18 inch concrete thickness all underground. Transmitter and diesel controls were duplicated here. Facilities provided would enable staff to continue operation for weeks.

1974 saw the retirement of the reliable old RCA 50 Kw transmitter after 35 years of service — quite a record considering the guarantee period is only 10 years.

It was replaced by a newer type of the same power but only about 1/20 the physical size. This could be controlled from Regina studios.

On June 4, 1976 the 465 foot tower blew down during a violent windstorm. A fortieth anniversary at the transmitter in 1979 drew hundreds of loyal fans and in 1980 an extra 10 Kw emergency transmitter was installed. Transmitters are now mainly controlled from Regina.

In all its year of operation, CBK has an enviable record in safety — never an accident. This was due to excellent maintenance procedures and safety features built into the equipment.

There has been talk of moving the transmitter from Watrous but "soil conductivity" still prevails to keep it here radiating the most powerful signal in the West!

MEMORIES OF CBK 1939-1944

by J. L. Marshall

The war brought many changes to CBK. Among the several guards at CBK during the war was "Big" Ed. Smith, who was well known in the town.

Toward the end of the war when an allied victory seemed certain the guarding of the station was gradually relaxed. However, a relief announcer, Ron Morrier, who just arrived from Winnipeg, didn't know this. Ron loved practical jokes — at someone else's expense. Dick Punshon saw an opportunity to turn the tables on him. Ron intended to spend his nights in the CBK bunk room; Dick explained to Ron that a guard was not available and asked him if he would get up each hour during the night, take the shot gun which was still at the station, and patrol the grounds. Ron reluctantly agreed and during the night carried out his duties. The next day Dick revealed to a weary Ron that patrolling wasn't necessary. Ron weighed in at about 200 lbs. and Dick a mere 140 lbs. or so. The result was that Dick almost became our first wartime casualty.

When the reserve army unit was formed in Watrous some of us joined it. It was an odd mixture of youth and age of all shapes and sizes and from all walks of life. There was a women's reserve unit also, trained by Frank Cole, and the C.O. was Sidonie Marshall.

In the early years of CBK it was manned 24 hours a day. After the midnight to 7 a.m. — shift the single members of the staff would sometimes go to the CNR station restaurant for breakfast where Norman Barker was proprietor, cook, and waiter at that early hour.

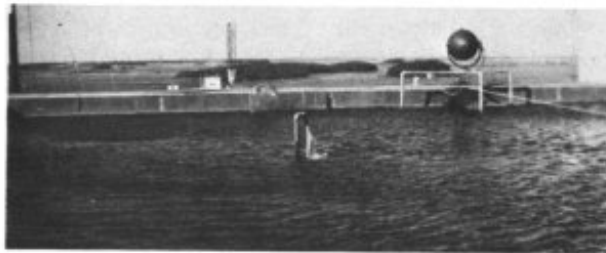
During the first months of the war, when France was being invaded, news bulletins would arrive from Toronto or Winnipeg in the early morning for broadcast over CBK. I well remember having to pick up the long telegrams at the CN station about 6 a.m., take them out to the transmitter, and read them over the air at 6:30 or 7 a.m.

During the winters, snow drifts sometimes made it impossible to drive to the transmitter, particularly at 6 a.m.; and often it was both cold and windy. Norm Micklewright, the program man, had a method of lessening the pain. He would wear a cardboard carton over his head as he hiked to work.

When CBK started up, its strong signal "swamped" many local radio receivers. A supply of "wave traps"



C.B.K. Staff Party (in the 40's)
 L.-R.: Ralph Reed, Norma Heywood, Mrs. Roy Murdock, Doug Squires, Norm Micklewright, Mrs. Stan Davis, Anne Squires, Stan Davis, Toots McFadyen, Mrs. John Smith, Marion Punshon, George McFadyen, Dick Punshon, Howard Simmonds, Ghislaine Gravel, Gina Micklewright, Laura Reed, John Smith, Anne Simmonds, Harry Heywood.



Roof of C.B.K. tank.

was ordered; announcements were made that they were available, and for several months we had a stream of visitors — not always happy — to obtain a wave trap, which one would connect between his antenna and the radio set. Many other visitors came to CBK. On one occasion I took John Diefenbaker out to the transmitter after he had spoken to our Rotary Club. He was an M.P. for Lake Centre then.

In the week preceding the opening of CBK, the enthusiastic young staff members wanted to climb the 465 foot tower which had a ladder going up inside. This was frowned upon officially, but most of us could not resist the temptation. The first painting of the tower was done by two young men of Watrous, Hugh McCreadie and Don Ansell.

As part of our wartime security Roy Cahoon asked me to design a barricade to enclose the support insulator of the tower. This turned out to be a three-sided trough-like structure which was filled with sand. I think Mark Bollinger of Watrous built it.

Another war time effort was the construction of an emergency antenna for use if the main tower was sabotaged. To obtain wooden poles tall enough the contractor had to splice two sixty-foot poles together to make each of the tall poles. This was a notable feat, as was the erection of the poles with the help of a truck

and plenty of rope.

A couple of planned features of CBK did not turn out as well as expected. The roof of the building was intended to hold several inches of water for general cooling. After a year or two the occasional leak appeared; and the repairs became rather a nuisance, so that scheme was discontinued. During the first summer of CBK it was decided to plant trees along the roadway fence. Mr. Brown of Watrous planted them and pruned them back. However, the hot dry summer, and probably our neglect in watering them, was more than they could stand, so we never did see a row of trees along the front fence.

C.B. KELSEY AND ME

by Joyce (Mackie) Edison

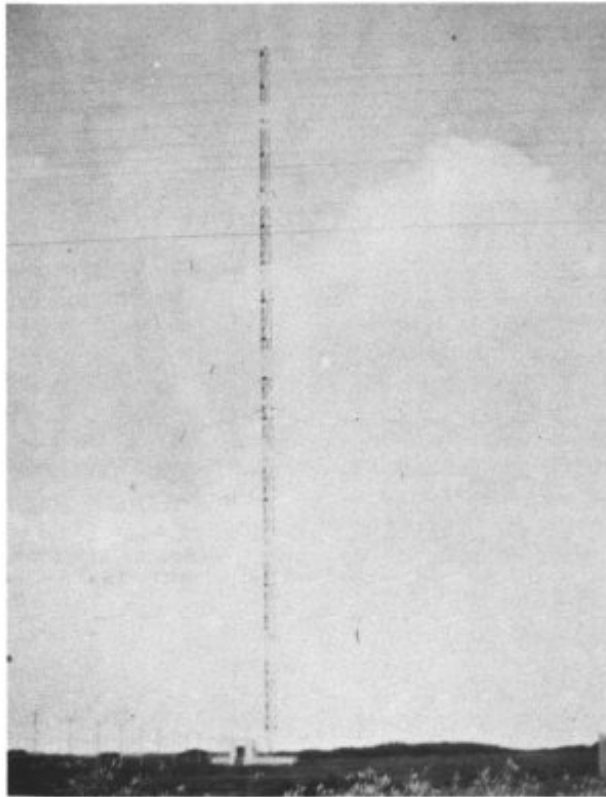
In the early hours of a June morning, "my beacon" went crashing to the earth and part of me went with it. I wept for the loss of both.

It had come to our town in my tenth year, and sat atop a 500 foot tower. Until it and its base was torn from the salt-laden earth, by a vicious summer storm, I hadn't realized how large a part it had played in my life.

A small prairie town that hadn't had a new building in a number of years, now had a modern structure rising out on the edge of it: Stucco finish with blue trim, and blue lettering proclaimed that this was Canadian Broadcasting Kelsey, about to go on the air with the aid of that tower, sending its 50,000 watt signal over a vast area of North America.

A block of land east of our home started to fill with houses. A two-story dwelling for the manager; followed by duplexes for the men who would operate the station. Two-story duplexes! Indoor plumbing! What wonders they were!

Being born at the beginning of the Great Depression now held an advantage, for I was old enough to baby-



C.B.K. Tower.



What was left of C.B. Kelsey.

sit when the families moved into those beautiful, new homes. I sat for several, and for a child of the Thirties to spend an evening in a house that must be at least as grand as those of our movie star idols, and earn the usual sitting fee of twenty-five cents too, was a privilege, not a job. (As a reader of television credits, since "mother CBC" adopted our son, I wonder when seeing Dean Heywood's, if he could be Harry and Norma's boy.)

Visiting the station gave one the impression of entering never-never-land. Even the familiar faces of the operators took on an alien-ness. For there they sat with strange gadgets over their ears, surrounded by turntables and other wierd assortments, in a light that had



'C.B.K.' Houses — 1944.

another-world quality. Aside from the fact that the light didn't come from a bare bulb, dangling at the end of a cord, there was something eerie about it. The first visit gave a feeling that must surely be akin to that felt by the first man to step onto the surface of the moon.

Then, suddenly, this building was vulnerable, for who knew, in those days of war, just when a Nazi saboteur might come, and in the dead of night blow up the station. In the middle of the Canadian prairie, we were part of a war being fought on the other side of the world.

A high, chain fence was erected between the station and the Nazi Bomber. A trusty veteran of the 1914-1918 war, was armed and sent to guard CBK Watrous. The fact that he was one of the locals didn't detract from his important position. It was just the opposite. "We" stand on guard for "thee".

As we listened to the news, and heard the Voice of Doom, or Ben Cartwright, as he was later known, we followed the advance of German and Italian troops across Europe. We heard the dreaded words "Missing, and presumed dead". Our handsome, dashing, young men. We took our quarters to school on Friday afternoons and bought stamps for our War Savings Certificates. We turned our sugar rations into fudge, which we sold at public gatherings, and sent the proceeds to the Red Cross. This was our way to stop this march of tyranny.

Part of summer vacation was spent on an aunt's farm, miles and miles from home, even as the crow flies. When stricken with homesickness, our aunt told us that if weather conditions were just right, you could see CBK in the night sky. Our eyes would search that sky to the east, and see nothing. But she said that it was over there, and home was nestled under it and we slept.

The next night found us again looking for that elusive light. Was it not there because of what she had called weather conditions, (she was a teacher, and knew about such things) or had the bomber blown it off the prairie skyline? No radio — batteries dead: and on the trip home, we strained our eyes to see through the grimy windows of the train, looking for that beacon. And there it was! On the horizon, safe, and we were almost home.

With some of the men from CBK acting as advisors, and chaperones, we organized a Teen Town Center. Evenings and weekends were spent in scraping the

peeling paint from the embossed, metal walls of an abandoned building. When we had repainted the walls, the floors were tackled, and eventually we were ready to open.

Norm Micklewright and Dick Punshon brought a record player and records. (There may have been others, just as there were bands other than Miller's, but these two stand out in my memory.) We got a hotplate from somewhere for cooking hot-dogs, brought in pop and games, and we were swinging for a while. In our zeal, we had done such a good job of renovating, that the building was sold, and we had to find new quarters.

We were given the use of the dance hall above a garage, and soon grooving again to Glen Miller records — asking Ouija our future — trying to master the steps of the Lambeth Walk — and growing up.

The dance hall has since been turned into suites, but as you pass on the street below, you can faintly hear the strains of tune from the Forties, and you are young once more.

Young: when childhood illnesses kept you home to meet the members of the Happy Gang; when lunch-hour "soaps" introduced you to fine, upstanding, Pepper Young; when you were Set Designer for Lux Radio Theater, and the sets were only as good as your imaginings could make them. Young: when, on a Saturday night, after skating, you warmed your toes over the heat register in the floor, as Foster Hewitt told hockey fans who had shot, and whether or not they had scored; when you sharpened your wit by trying to come out with the punch-line before Wayne or Schuster.

Marriage brought the first of four moves, and as we moved around Saskatchewan, CBK went with us.

In the dead of a prairie winter, we arrived in Grenfell to find that the house we had rented, had not been vacated, and we were to share the premises with the owners for a month. A not-so-large front parlour became kitchen, living, and dining room for four of us. We purchased a two-burner hotplate and set up "room-keeping".

Crowded though we were, we managed to squeeze in W. O. Mitchell, with Jake and the Kid; Peter Sellers, and his Goon Show pals; and the rest of our airwave friends, who, happily, lived in the little green radio on top of the 'frig'. They provided the continuity that helped us through those dismal days.

It was there, in that 100 year-old relic of a house, that we abandoned radio for her offspring, television.

This infatuation with the youngster lasted several years, until that great barren land of daytime television, with its movies of war and the American West, seemed to show that this child would never grow up. In fleeing from it, I re-discovered radio.

Adult radio. CBK radio. Known now as CBC Saskatchewan, I knew her best by her 'maiden name' of CBK Watrous. I remember telling anyone who would listen, that radio was alive and well, and living at 540 on the dial. (Soon CBK was using a short-lived slogan that ran along those "Jacques Brell" lines) CBK and I were still simpatica.

From CBK came our daughter's nick-name: for as a tiny baby, being given her last bottle before bed, over

the air came the voice of Paul Robeson, singing "Mah Lindy Lou", and as I hummed along, she became our Lyndi, and the name has stayed. This, of course, was before McCarthyism silenced that magnificent voice.

Back at CBK, I made the acquaintance of Peter Gzowski; Clyde, Bob and Max; Barbara Frum; Dave Broadfoot, and his ever-faithful Cuddles; Bryce and John; and Bob Knowles introduced me to 'Shelley Old-Cows.'

Over the years, going back to Watrous, that beacon was always there. Even when still miles from town, it was there saying, "You're almost home, almost home." It was a thread of constancy, woven throughout my life.

So many of the threads have been plucked out: Our parents gone; our home and school have been torn down, in the name of progress.

The home that had housed four generations of our family, often three at a time. The home, where we intimately met Life: for we woke one morning to find that a baby brother had been born in the night, and was snuggled in beside mother; and on another morning 12 years later, found that a cerebral hemorrhage was taking our father away.

The school has been taken apart, brick by brick. Each brick holding a memory of the teachers and school friends, who had helped to shape our lives. All of these — gone.

So when I tuned in to CBK on that June morning and found it off the air, I went up the dial and here learned of the devastating storm that had re-arranged a large part of the Saskatchewan landscape. And here, too, a stranger told me of the loss of 'my beacon', and I wept.

Editor's Note: At the time of printing, the tower which blew down in the 1976 storm has been replaced by a new 455 foot tower. The beacon will shine again.



CBK Float — built by the staff for the Watrous Coronation Parade and later shown in the Traveller's Day Parade in Saskatoon.