

RADIO CRAZE

The first broadcast radio signal heard at Perth was probably received on a home-built set assembled by Edward 'Leslie' Danner (1902-1954) in the late summer of 1922. Danner built the set while on holiday from Upper Canada College as a gift for his father, William Edward Danner (1860-1934), manager of the Wampole Company plant. The receiver was built partly from purchased components and partly from components Danner manufactured himself.

Danner's radio receiver was powered-up only a few weeks or days before another home-built unit, assembled by father and son Charles Pringle Grierson (1870-1946) and Walter Grierson (1904-1969) was completed. Grierson Sr. was an executive with the Caldwell Perth Carpet Company. Grierson Jr. was a student at the Perth Collegiate Institute (PCI).



Crystal radio receiver c1922

Over the fall and winter of 1922-1923 five more receiving sets arrived in Perth. There were single tube homebuilt sets assembled by William 'Will' Hammond (b.1902), son of Perth Public School Principal Ira Hammond (1872-1953); by Arthur Huddleston Rabb (1906-1984), son of building contractor William Joseph Rabb (1861-1933); and by Anson Lonsdale Bowes (1905-1968), son of Alfred Anson Bowes (1883-1965) -- although, strictly speaking, the Bowes set was at Glen Tay powered by the generator at the mill dam. Factory-built Marconi sets, purchased through the Perth Hydro Shop, were owned by Don McMaster and by Arthur Isaber McDowell (b.1895), son of machinist John Sydney McDowell (1868-1942).

The Perth Hydro Shop at 23 Gore Street East sold electrical appliances ranging from lamps and table fans to Findlays Electric Ranges and Easy Vacuum Electric Washing Machines. Early in 1923, to promote radio sales, store manager R. J. Smith¹ opened a radio room and invited the public to attend every evening, free of charge,

... not excepting Sundays when sermons may be heard without the annoyance of the collection plate – and if you don't like the sermon, you can simply tune to another church. Neatly printed programmes tell the radio fan what is on the boards for the night. He tunes in on the favorite program and, that's all. Simple, isn't it?²

Six months earlier the *Perth Courier* had opined that “radio religious services will never be popular because the women can't see each other's hats”³, but that prediction was proven wrong.

¹ R. J. Smith was manager of the Town of Perth Hydro-Electric System & Water Department and the department's 'Hydro Shop'.

² *Perth Courier*, March 2, 1923.

³ *Perth Courier*, June 23, 1922.

Radio receivers soon appeared beyond Perth and Glen Tay. In October 1923 the *Lanark Era* reported that “Dr. J. A. Charbonneau⁴ has installed a radio in his residence and is now listening in, getting connections with far away cities.”⁵ Two months later the *Era* reported that Dr. W. J. Scott “has placed a radio in his home and is enjoying the wireless reports broadcast from far away stations”.⁶

Someday they may get radio down to where it doesn't sound as if the needle needs changing.
- Perth Courier, February 20, 1925.

Commercial radio in Canada was born in 1918 at an experimental facility of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company in Montreal. In December 1919 the lab was issued a wireless broadcasting license for station XWA and a year later launched a regular schedule of transmissions as station CFCF. By the time Leslie Danner built his radio set at Perth in 1922, there were 39 stations in Canada and 500 more in the United States.



CFCF Montreal



KDKA Pittsburg

Those first radio receivers built by Perth hobbyists were crystal sets, listened to with earphones, and operating in what is now the AM⁷ broadcast band, between 540 and 1700 kilohertz. Their owners most often tuned to the more powerful signals, and wider range of programming, emanating from stations south of the border. The Westinghouse Company's 500-watt station KDKA in Pittsburgh offered the world's first regularly scheduled broadcasts when it went on air on November 2, 1920. KDKA was closely followed by Westinghouse stations in Newark, New Jersey, New York, New York, Boston, Massachusetts, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, all of which could be heard with reasonable clarity at Perth.

⁴ Dentist James Alfred Charbonneau (1875-1929).

⁵ *Lanark Era*, October 12, 1923.

⁶ *Lanark Era*, January 15, 1924.

⁷ Amplitude Modulation.

Mr. Morton Rogers⁸ had a radio connection with the Calgary Herald the other night. This is considered a record around here in long distance radio connection.⁹

What the handful of Perth radio aficionados heard in 1922 were musical performances, orchestral and vocal, popular and classic, (both live and from phonograph records played into the station's microphone); lectures on the arts and sciences; newscasts; weather forecasts; farm and financial market reports; sporting events and scores (from baseball to boxing); story readings; dramas; political speeches and commentary; church services and revivalist preachers.



Marconi Crystal Radio Set

Yes, the radio is a wonderful invention. Its the only device ever invented that would make Americans listen while someone else talked. - Perth Courier, July 21, 1922.

In March 1924, “*through the kindness of Mr. R. J. Smith at the Perth Hydro office*”, sports fans heard the play-by-play of that season’s NHL championship final between the Ottawa Senators and the Montreal Canadiens.

Great interest was manifested in the finals The first game in Montreal Saturday night went to the Canadiens 1 to 0 who repeated a win in Ottawa Tuesday night 4 to 2 thus winning the round 5 to 2 and with it the Stanley Cup¹⁰ ... Ottawa’s supporters in Perth are a disappointed lot while the Canadiens’ supporters are jubilant, believing the Ottawas held the championship and the Stanley Cup long enough and were due for a fall from supremacy at the hands of the Frenchmen.¹¹

Later that year the final of the World Series, won 4 – 3 in 12 innings by the Washington Senators over the New York Giants, “*was heard by radio in Perth and caused much interest, practically as though the listeners were actually at the game*”¹²

⁸ Morton W. Rogers (1896-1963), electrician, son of Joseph McKenzie Rogers.

⁹ *Perth Courier*, October 12, 1923.

¹⁰ The Montreal Canadiens had not actually won the Stanley Cup by defeating the Ottawa Senators but went on to defeat the Western Canada Hockey League (WCHL) champion Calgary Tigers, two games to none in the best-of-three game series, to secure the 1924 championship.

¹¹ *Perth Courier*, March 14, 1924.

¹² *Perth Courier*, October 17, 1924.

*Local radio enthusiasts say they can hear music several hundred miles away. We hope it is more desirable than some of the music people have to listen to in their neighborhood.*¹³
- Smiths Fall Record News, September 1922.

Even in those earliest years of broadcasting, from time-to-time Perth listeners heard a familiar voice through the ether. In April 1924,

*Perth radio fans were privileged to enjoy hearing a song on Monday night rendered in Pittsburgh, Pa., by Mr. Frank Davis, formerly of Perth,¹⁴ [and later that year] the musical setting of Col. McRae's¹⁵ poem, 'In Flanders' Fields', by Mr. W. R. Spence¹⁶, of Perth, which was specially composed for the unveiling of the memorial tablet in St. James Church here ... was recently performed in Carnegie Hall in New York. The chorus numbered 90 voices, and there was a full orchestral accompaniment. It was broadcasted by radio and a lady at Staten Island who was 'listening in' report the applause to have been most vigorous and prolonged.*¹⁷

The only drawback the experience party-line listener finds in the radio is that nobody ever sends out any secrets over radio. - Perth Courier, August 25, 1922.

In January 1922 the Canadian government introduced licencing for 'Private Receiving Stations' at a cost of \$1 annually. The permits were sold by the Department of Marine and Fisheries in Ottawa and by postmasters located in larger towns and cities. Perhaps because a trip to Ottawa was required, radio set owners at Perth (as elsewhere) were not always compliant. The *Perth Courier* noted that,

*While there are evidences that the craze of radio is developing strongly, it is apparent that great numbers of those installing receiving sets are forgetful of the necessity of taking out a government license. It is estimated roughly that there are fifty thousand receiving sets in operation in Canada, yet only 16,118 have so far taken out the license which is necessary from the Marine Department at Ottawa. Steps are being taken towards an awaking of those concerned, while the license is only a nominal fee of \$1 the penalty for non-payment varies from \$50 to \$500 and there is even the possibility of imprisonment.*¹⁸

¹³ *Smiths Fall Record News*, September 1922.

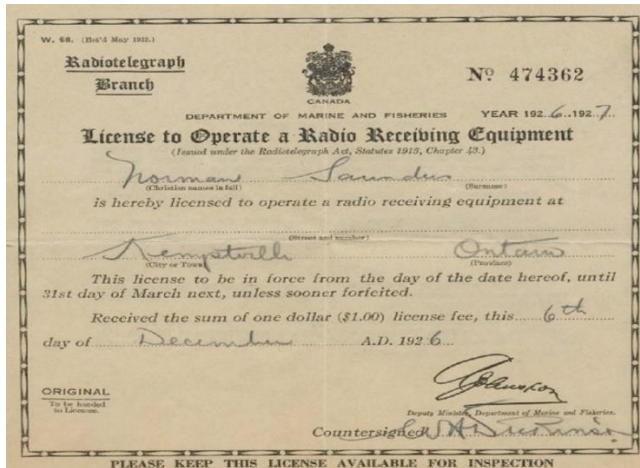
¹⁴ *Perth Courier*, April 11, 1924.

¹⁵ Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae (1872-1918), physician, author, artist, soldier, poet.

¹⁶ William Ramsay Spence, born 1859 at Montreal, organist and choir director at St. James Anglican Church Perth 1914-1929, credited with 192 compositions, chiefly church anthems, wrote music for *In Flanders Fields* in 1922, died 1946 at Perth.

¹⁷ *Perth Courier*, December 26, 1924.

¹⁸ *Perth Courier*, November 3, 1923.



Steps were indeed taken. In July 1924 the *Courier* further reported that,

*Unlicensed radio sets are being seized by the government radio branch. Four were seized in Ottawa Saturday, and unlicensed radios are to be seized similarly all over the Dominion.*¹⁹

The license fee was later increased to \$2.50 annually, to provide revenue for the CBC's radio and television services, but the requirement was eliminated in 1953.

On a sultry summer evening the radio says: "The next number – gzzzh – will be by – gzzzh – who has been – gzzzh – by the famous – gwwwk". - Perth Courier, July 4, 1924.

As the 'radio craze' gripped the local imagination, merchants climbed aboard the band wagon. In 1923-1924 Girdwood's Drug Store advertised "*Radio Cold Cream*" at three for 25 cents, Miller's Service Grocery offered "*Radio Candy*" and Shaw's of Perth was promoting "*Radio Silk Shirts*".



Within a few months of the first radio receiver appearing in Perth, local newsstands were selling weekly broadcast program schedules, covering stations across the continent, and local entrepreneurs were offering a range of radio sets for sale. Little more than a year after he had assembled his first crystal set, Anson Bowes was advertising "*All kinds of radio sets for sale. Also sets repaired. Special price on five tube aerodine*".²⁰ G. Quinn was offering "*all kinds of Radio Sets installed, and outside aerials erected at reasonable rates*".²¹ George M. Hill lured trade by paying the rail fare for Perth customers visiting his Smiths Falls store where he offered a "*special price and privileges the on first set sold by me in your community*".²²

¹⁹ *Perth Courier*, July 11, 1924.

²⁰ *Perth Courier*, November 14, 1924.

²¹ *Perth Courier*, February 22, 1924.

²² *Perth Courier* November 21, 1924.

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Westinghouse Radiola 3-A



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That is the Westinghouse Radiola, the result of the work of the largest electrical concern in the world, and the Radio Corporation of America.

Building your own set is expensive, unsatisfactory and aggravating. It does not pay.

Decide at once to get a Radio, keep in touch with the whole world and its doings, be entertained and educated, when your friends call be in a position to give them an entertainment.

Radiolas are sold at a standard price. I am in a position to give you service at any time. May I have your order?

Radiola IIIA Made by Westinghouse

DON'T FORGET THE ADDRESS

A. H. McLAREN

Phone 215. MUSIC STORE Wilson St.

Perth Courier radio set advertisements, 1925

Taking a page from the Perth Hydro Shop listening room, a radio receiver with speaker 'horn' was installed in St. John's Memorial Hall in January 1924. In September that year, R. J. Smith loaned a Hydro Shop radio to the Great War Memorial Hospital Bazaar, installing it in the skating rink band room to provide music for dancing.

One good thing about radio concerts is the absence of encores.
— Perth Courier, December 19, 1924.

Between 1922 and 1932, the number of Canadian radio stations grew to 77 and on November 2, 1936, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) network went on air.