

CJAT turns 75

*From the Boundary to Grand Forks and
Creston Valley*

*In Rossland, Fruitvale, and Castlegar
Salmoites, Nelsonites, they all agree
They like radio CJAT!*

— Wonderful Town Trail, B.C., an early 1960s
promotional 45 rpm record

On Christmas Day 1931, Trail radio station
10AT signed on air for the first time.

It was a small-time affair, conceived by a group
of enthusiasts who applied for a license and erect-
ed a transmitter. The station had a 25-watt output
and offered a few hours of live programming every
day, mostly by local musicians.

In 1933, the station went commercial, boosting
its power and adopting familiar call letters CJAT.
The volunteer group hired a professional manage-
ment firm to run day-to-day operations.

Seventy-five years later, after several changes of
ownership and locations, the station remains on
the air — now known as the Kootenay Broadcasting
System (KBS), although the old call letters are still
heard every hour. It is one of the oldest radio sta-
tions in the B.C. interior, and has launched the
careers of hundreds of broadcasters.

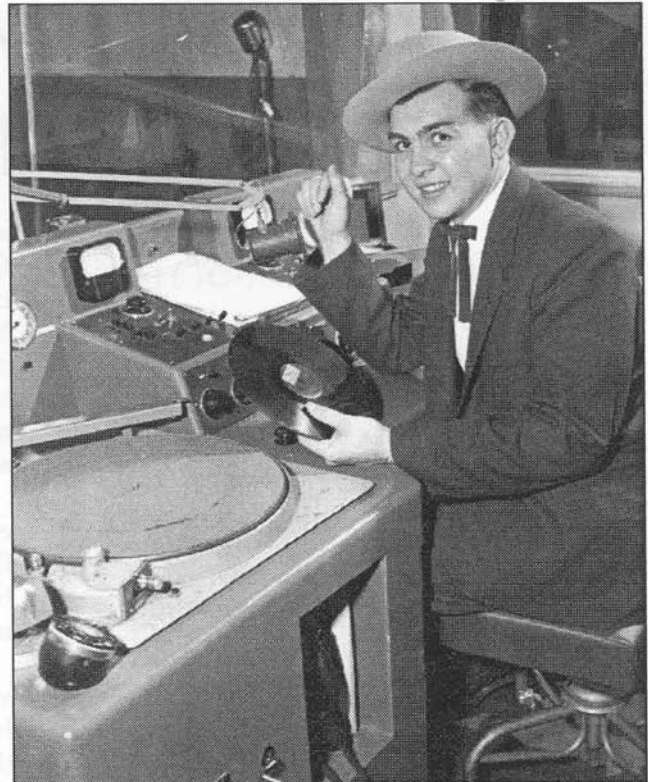
Joe Kobluk and **Dave Glover** were the sta-
tion's longest-serving employees. Kobluk joined in
1942 while still in high school and quickly rose to
program director. He became manager in 1960
and stayed until 1976.

Glover spent 44 years at CJAT. He was hired as
engineer in 1949, then became an announcer. The
following is from their unpublished memoirs.

Joe Kobluk

Ten years after the first Marconi radio broad-
cast, a group of Trail citizens banded together
to experiment with the new communication medi-
um.

With a hand-made carbon microphone, a small
home-made transmitter neatly packed into a dis-
carded apple box, and a four foot square 'studio'
on a stairway landing in the K of P Hall on
Eldorado St., the first radio message was electroni-



*Above: Bob Meneer, a country and western disc
jockey who ultimately joined the sales department
and spent his last years as sales manager.*

*Opposite: Joe Kobluk at the Masonic Temple
control room as program manager.*

BOTH COURTESY JOE KOBLUK

cally transmitted to eager listeners in Trail tuned
in to crude home-built receivers. Station 10AT, an
amateur broadcasting system, not yet licensed, was
on the air. That was on Christmas Day 1931.

The start up of 10AT was prompted by the fact
there was very little radio reception for residents,
so a local group of amateurs decided to start their
own entertainment: **Tom Robinson, W.G.
Carrie, and Fred Morel**. In February 1932, the
group became known as the Trail Amateur Radio
Association. **Byron A. Stimmel** was the first
president, and Robinson became the first station
manager. **Bill Busby** directed the technical and
programming end of the station, and **Harold
Doyle** was the treasurer. Others associated with
the group were **Charlie Mear, Bill Thomson**



and **J.R. Forgie-Thompson**, who handled various chores in announcing.

Rossland historian **Jack McDonald**, in a newspaper interview on the occasion of CJAT's 40th anniversary, recalled the early days of 10AT. Cominco's radio communications department in 1931 was under the control of **Don Hings**. It was his job to keep communications with the company's northern operations.

There was no Christmas Eve at home for Hings in 1931. Due to go on air for the first time the next morning, some technical problems arose at 10AT. Don came down and spent most of that night making sure the Trail amateur radio station would commence broadcasting on schedule.

When the station went on the air, many people made the trek to Hazlewood's drug store on Spokane St., where **Ed Hazlewood**, himself an interested amateur radio buff, began to stock and display radios and records for sale.

In the early days of radio, it was necessary to

purchase a license to operate a receiver. The federal government would send inspectors out to look for aerials strung from houses, knock on the door, and ask to see the license. Licenses were \$2.50 — a fairly large sum in those years.

When 10AT went on air, it didn't have a license either. It took a few weeks for that certificate to arrive from the fisheries department, which licensed radio stations.

Occasional live music was the program schedule of the early days at 10AT. Most frequent performers were the **Reid** brothers, **Jimmy, Sam, and Steve**, on violin, guitar, and accordion, along with their sisters **Jean, Peggy, and Rebecca**. It was usually a Saturday night of reels, strathspeys, and waltzes. The stirring strains of McLeod's Reel invariably started the programme.

Bob Parton was the announcer. Rebecca Reid, whose married name was **Rebecca Freed**, sang along with the group on many occasions. She was professional enough to be offered a job eventually

*Opposite: Staff
Christmas
card, 1948.
COURTESY
JOE KOBLUK*

*Right:
Tommy Evans
at the piano in
10AT Warfield
studios, early
1930s. The site is
now occupied by
the old Catholic
church.*



with **Mart Kenney's** orchestra — however she chose not to make the move.

When the station became a commercial venture in the mid-'30s, it became an affiliate of the Canadian national broadcasting system known as the Dominion Network. The Reid Brothers orchestra played for all Canadians over that network at least once, but could not continue on a regular basis due to time constraints and the fact the network was not paying very well for professional performers.

There were other musical groups that eventually became popular by way of the radio waves: the Luncheoneers, the Silvertone Seven, and the Kootenay Boys. They didn't get paid — they did it for the love of it — because 10AT at that time was a real community venture. Everybody joined in the fun of radio broadcasting in those early days. Even the technical staff from CM & S would come down to help put the programmes on the air at lunch time or early evening.

Saturday nights was the prime programme schedule. The Reid Brothers would often play all night long on what were called DX programmes, and cards and letters would come in from far away places like New York, Mexico, South America, and even New Zealand.

They were so popular they had to move their live dance broadcasts to the Orange Hall, behind the Knox Church on Eldorado St., then to the Crown Point Hotel's Palm Room, the Legion Hall,

and ultimately the Colombo Hall.

Presenting musical groups also made it necessary to seek out larger premises for studio use, and the amateur group established a studio at the rear of Hunt's store and soda fountain, adjoining the building which became the Bank of Commerce at the corner of Spokane and Bay.

Much of the evening entertainment was provided by people such as **Mr. and Mrs. Tommy Wilson** on piano and violin. Tenor **Frank Chapman** appeared regularly. **Mr. and Mrs. Uno Matson** provided old-time music and **Jessie Anderson** provided vocal delights.

On Sunday evenings, the Sunday Salon Orchestra played to appreciative audiences. It was a 12-piece orchestra conducted by **Thomas Wilson** with **Mrs. C.N. Jeffares** as featured vocalist. **Ernie Leschiutta** played the accordion.

Another group that played frequently on 10AT was the Tonvarizza Orchestra. I think it was the first all-string Bohemian group to play on radio in North America.

Albert Hild formed the Luncheoneers, which opened the station's broadcast day at noon. Albert, who played the saxophone, was joined by his brother **Vic** and by **Tommy Evans** on piano.

10AT would broadcast for about an hour at noon then go off the air until about 4 p.m. when *Uncle Billy's Childrens Program* would appear. Uncle Billy was **Bill Reeves**, who ran a music shop just around the corner from the studio.



Following Uncle Billy, **Mrs. Hobbs** would come on the air to continue to present stories for kids.

10AT was only one month old when it tried successfully to do its first remote broadcast. It was a hockey game between Trail and Kimberley, live from the Kimberley arena. Play-by-play commentator **Bill Leaman**, who became a district judge in Kimberley, recalled in an interview:

"There I was, sitting at the arena boards with a microphone in hand. There was no such thing as a radio broadcast booth in those years. Kimberley fans were sitting around me and they were pretty rabid too. I had to report the game to Trail listeners so naturally I had to try to be impartial and praise the Trail players when they scored a goal or made a good play. Boy, were those Kimberley fans steaming! I often wonder how I got out of there alive."

10AT established itself as a community service right from the first day of broadcast. There was no news service for the first few years, but the station personnel kept people advised of happenings around the community. **Walter Harvey**, one of the first disc jockeys, recalled airing an announcement one afternoon about a lost child in East Trail.

From his broadcast booth at the back of Hunt's store on Bay Ave., Walter could look across the river at the sparsely populated community on that side.

"As I relayed the message," he said, "I could see doors opening all over as people came outside to look around for the lost child."

Early in its history, 10AT broadcast services from the Anglican and United churches. Concerts by the Maple Leaf and Canadian legion bands were also popular.

There certainly wasn't much of a record library at first. So the records played in some instances became a little too much for some regular listeners. **Donal Novas** was a popular Los Angeles tenor who had records out in the early '30s. But there was one announcer who used to play his records from morning to night.

Most of the people involved with early radio in Trail were associated with Consolidated Mining and Smelting. One announcer, **Davie Cooper**, would show up for his regular job at the smelter in the tank rooms after an on-air shift, and could hardly keep his eyes open. But there was always someone like Byron Stimmel or Bill Busby to keep

KBS
image



him out of trouble with his employers.

In June 1932, the first crystal control transmitter was installed at 10AT. During the first two years, only four hours of broadcast time was lost due to technical failure.

In 1933, 10AT became CJAT and broadcast at 1200 kilocycles at 50 watts of power. In 1934, CJAT changed to 910 kilocycles at 250 watts. That July, the transmitter was moved to Warfield.

The transmitter site was also the site of a larger studio, later the location of St. Joseph's Church. In the mid-'30s the station boasted the tallest wooden radio tower made entirely of Douglas fir.

The transmitter and studio building had CJAT painted on the roof in large letters. The Reid brothers used to talk about the individual who came into the region for the first time by way of the Rossland hill and thought the name of the town was See-jat. See-jat became a popular refer-

ence to CJAT by early broadcasters at the station.

In the fall of 1936, CJAT presented a live dramatic series on the Dominion Network, originating from its own studios on Saturday nights.

The Ghost Walker was produced and directed by **Mercer McLeod**, famous for his one-man cast, as he took many parts of a radio drama. He left Yorkshire at 18 and headed for the London stage, went on tour in the West Indies, South America, China, Japan, Malai states, Thailand, and India. Finally in the course of a long U.S. tour he decided to remain in North America. In 1933 he directed the British Guild Players in Vancouver, and in 1935 saw his first microphone at CJAT. He was at once impressed with the great flexibility and dramatic potential of the new medium.

The Man With the Story was the title of another series which emanated from CJAT to all of Canada by way of the Dominion Network.



KBS
image

Left: Announcer Ralph Milton in the control room during the official opening of Radio Centre, Sept. 29, 1958.

Opposite: Consummate professionals.
BOTH COURTESY KBS

McLeod also presented Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* on Christmas Eve. By this time the studios had moved to the basement of the Reibin building on Eldorado and Bay, now the site of the Canadian Imperial bank. In this basement studio, I was among those who participated in the broadcast as a bit player. I was about 11 and played the small part as the boy singer.

Eventually, McLeod moved to Toronto lured by greater radio markets and eventually became a stalwart professional dramatist who appeared regularly on NBC radio programmes.

The amateur radio association was ultimately incorporated into Kootenay Broadcasting Co. Ltd. in January 1934. Ed Hazlewood succeeded Byron Stimmel as president. Upon Hazlewood's demise, **Stan Mawdsley** became president. When Mawdsley retired and moved to the coast, Walter Harvey became president until the company was sold to East Kootenay broadcasting interests in the mid-'70s.

Harvey was a trade superintendent with Cominco's electricians. As I mentioned, He was one of the first staffers at 10AT and held an active, keen interest until the mid-'70s.

As he recalled in a newspaper interview, "the manager of 10AT was Tom Robinson, and I suppose he was looking for some money to keep the amateur station operating. Anyway, he talked me into buying 100 shares of the company at \$1

apiece. I even had to borrow money to do it!"

There was another moment in his career as a record spinner that he remembered well: "I was announcing a number called Lady in Spain. I had a slip of the tongue and said Lady in Pain. It was a long time before listeners forgot that one."

Other milestones in CJAT's history:

- The station's power was increased to 1,000 watts in 1936. The tower was 272 feet high.
- In January 1938, the studios moved from the basement of the Reibin building to the main floor of the Masonic Temple on Victoria St. The station occupied the rear half of the building, then gradually replaced the private suites on the balance of the floor.
- In 1941, the spot on the dial changed from 910 kilocycles to 610 kilocycles.
- In 1945, the station contracted for the radio news service of the Canadian Press.
- In 1950, the transmitter site moved to Duncan Flats. The wooden tower was destroyed and removed and the new all-steel 275 foot antenna was erected.
- In 1953, a new transmitter control system was installed to permit unattended operation.
- On Sept. 29, 1958, the old post office at Eldorado and Cedar became known as the Radio Centre building, just across the street from the original site of 10AT. It was acquired at minimal cost from Crown assets disposal.

● In 1968, the first FM stereo broadcasting station in the Kootenays went on air, operated by Kootenay Broadcasting Co. out of the Radio Centre. The tower was on top of Red Mountain, where it still is today, but operating as a CBC repeater.

There are people whose names remain on the historical list of enthusiastic broadcasters who have influenced the medium in this community. The station's managers were Tom Robinson (1931-38), **Art Balfour** (1938-41), **Art Nicol** (1941-43), **Walter Dales** (1943-45), **Eric Aylen** (1945-48), and **John Loader** (1948-60).

I am proud to be associated with the pioneers of radio broadcasting in Trail. Although I don't recall Tom Robinson, I do recall all the others and have had occasion to be associated with them either as a musician or an announcer. I joined the station as a high school student announcer in 1942, doing after school program stints, and being involved on Saturdays and Sundays.

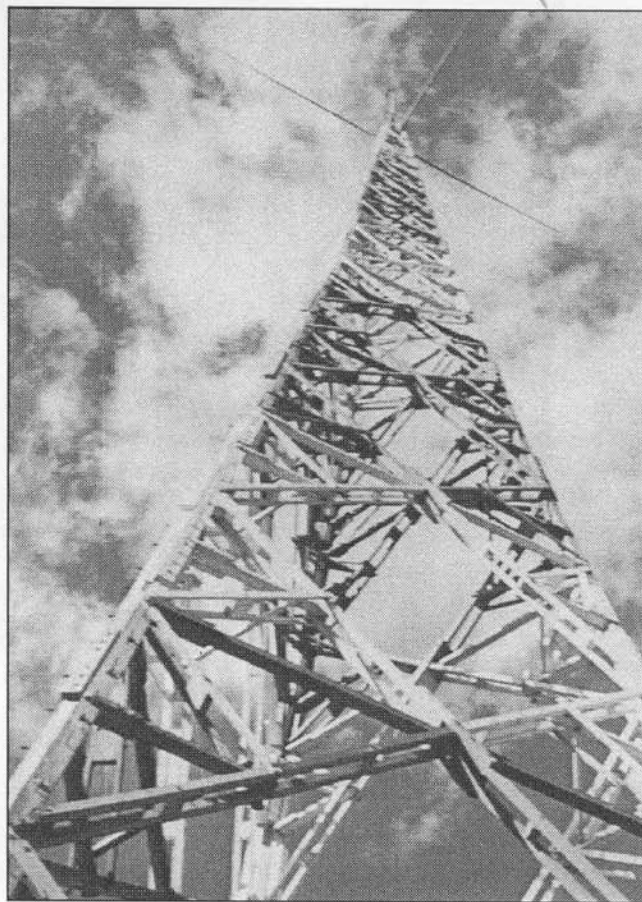
My association with the station lasted 35 years. I had the privilege of managing the operation from 1960 and being its managing director on the board of Kootenay Broadcasting until 1976.

There are many names I can recall with great satisfaction — people who have been associated with the station and were stalwart members of the community, including **Frank Fleming**, production/program manager in the early '40s; **Bill Hughes**, night announcer who went on to become associated with CKNW New Westminster; **Norm Harrod**, sales manager, whose wife **Ruth** was a well-known pianist and teacher; Eric Aylen, who came to CJAT as the technician and ultimately was appointed general manager until his untimely passing in 1948; **John Hepburn**, chief engineer who helped bring cable TV to the Columbia Valley; and the list goes on and on.

Dave Glover

Isigned on in 1949 as a transmitter operator in Warfield, a growing community with ever-increasing demands for electricity; demands that created troubling fluctuations in power during periods of peak usage.

It was a situation that caused considerable headaches for operators trying to cope with the



10AT wooden tower at Warfield transmitter and studios, 1940s. COURTESY KBS

whims of an aging transmitter, and outages were fairly frequent during meal preparation in particular. However, being an inventive lot, operators hit upon the routine of jamming the transmitter circuit breakers with broom handles, cut to the appropriate length. It was certainly unconventional, but it did help keep us on the air.

Looking back, I have to marvel at the fact that we also managed to do some very limited programming from the Warfield transmitter. Our equipment consisted of a microphone, an ancient turntable somehow avoiding a long-overdue reincarnation as a boat anchor, and a tall homemade wooden stool.

In the event of a loss of signal from the downtown studios, the transmitter operator, who had to be in reasonably good health, and fairly agile, flipped on the mic, offered the appropriate apology, moved quickly off the stool, gave the relic turntable on the floor a push to get it up to speed,

and prayed the failure would be corrected before the record ran out. Usually we weren't that lucky, and there was a fair amount of dead air during extended breakdowns.

It wasn't too long before our ongoing power problems at the Warfield "plant" lead to the search for a new transmitter location, and so a deal was struck with Cominco. Soon a site was prepared at Duncan Flats, a barren, sandy plateau above the highway east of Trail.

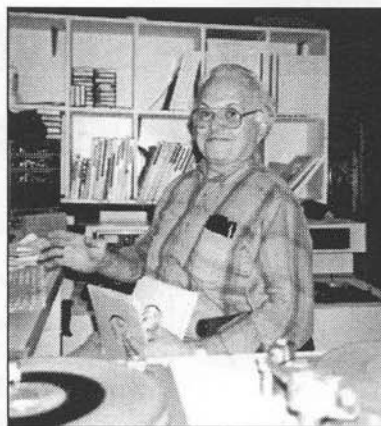
Several hectic months were spent laying out an extensive ground system, erecting a new 275-foot all-steel antenna, and installing the very latest 1,000-watt transmitter and associated equipment.

Upon completion, we said goodbye to the cramped old building, which in its final years had also served as residence for engineer **John Hepburn** and his wife **Beryl**, and moved into our sparkling new home in February 1950.

Little did we realize that transmitter operators would soon become victims of automation, with the installation of a remote control system three years later. This equipment would make it possible to monitor the condition of the transmitter, as well as turn it on and off, from our studios. However, the thought of being replaced was the furthest thing from our minds as we moved to Duncan Flats. We felt we had entered radio heaven when we occupied the new site: two new instant-start turntables, a modern microphone, and a fully-equipped operating console. We never had it so good!

Working conditions at our new home were excellent, with very little maintenance at the outset, thanks to all the new goodies. Much of our day was spent taking meter readings, keeping an ear on the radio, washing floors and windows, and generally keeping things neat in and around the property. This was high on our list of priorities, as you never knew when management or other visitors might drop in, as they did frequently during the summer, to look things over or to escape the stifling heat in downtown Trail.

Transmitter duty also offered another benefit, in that we all learned some basic cooking skills in our



Dave Glover

compact, but adequate living quarters. It was an area that included a double bunk, kitchen sink, electric rangette, small fridge and a fair amount of cupboard space. A full bathroom with shower adjoined the kitchen, along with an oil furnace that had us holding our breath, as it had blown off its cleanout door a few weeks before we moved in. Aside from that temporary hazard, we had all the comforts of home, including a heated garage.

Getting to and from Duncan Flats back in those days was no problem during the spring, summer or fall, but winter was a different matter.

During one particularly heavy snowfall, I had the misfortune to get stuck on the way up the hill. The car bogged down in a snowdrift just a short distance from the transmitter shack. I managed to pull to the side of the narrow road and made my way to the building, relieving the operator on duty.

As we stayed there for 24 hours and then enjoyed two days off, you can imagine my surprise when my shift lasted for several days. Apparently we were at the bottom of the plow truck's list, and so there was nothing to do but wait it out. Thankfully, there was heat, water, a well-stocked pantry, plenty of reading material, and of course, there was also the radio for company.

In contrast to the hazards of winter, the other seasons at Duncan Flats were rather pleasant, aside from the odd rain storm and relatively brief periods of punishing heat. Except for the occasional visits of folks from town and amorous couples seeking a little privacy, our only company was the odd wayfaring bear, deer, coyote, or cows from the dairy farm just up the road.

As it turned out, having the farm close proved advantageous, as the folks there kept us supplied with milk, veggies, fruit, and occasionally home-baked treats.

The mid-1950s were a bit of a transition period, as transmitter automation came on line, and operators had to make a decision: move downtown to the studios to another job or seek employment elsewhere. I chose the former, and remained there until my retirement in 1993.