

CORBETT AND RADIO AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA EXTENSION

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Abstract

Much of what has been written about Edward Annand Corbett concentrates on his role as the first national director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE). This article deals with an earlier period of Corbett's career, at the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta (U of A) during the 1920s and early 1930s. It introduces a seldom mentioned or acknowledged aspect of Corbett's legacy to the development of the field of Canadian adult education and describes his very significant contribution to the advancement of a powerful new medium for the delivery of adult education, that of radio. After initial personal hesitation as well as some political and financial restraints, in his hands radio became an important tool for the enrichment of the quality of life of many Canadians, especially those isolated by distance and weather in rural Alberta. Corbett came to see and to understand that in radio there was a unique opportunity for every Albertan to have access to knowledge, which he believed to be an expression of the democratic ideal, as well as being an effective means of fulfilling the mandate of the university and of extension. As director of extension, Corbett expanded radio programs to deliver quality education to Albertans.

Résumé

Parmi les nombreux écrits consacrés à Edward Annand Corbett, la plupart traitent de son rôle en tant que premier directeur national de la Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE). Le présent article couvre une période plus ancienne dans la carrière de Corbett, alors qu'il oeuvrait au sein du département d'Extension de l'Université d'Alberta durant les années vingt et trente. On y trouvera des renseignements sur un aspect méconnu de sa contribution à l'éducation des adultes, notamment pour ce qui est de l'utilisation d'un puissant nouveau média à l'époque: la radio. En dépit de quelques hésitations de départ, et malgré certaines difficultés d'ordre financier et politique, la radio prit entre les mains de Corbett une importance cruciale pour la qualité de vie de nombreux canadiens, particulièrement en milieu rural où la rigueur du climat albertain contraignait la population à l'isolement. Corbett a compris que la radio offrait à tous les Albertains la possibilité d'accéder au savoir, ce qui représentait à la fois une progression vers l'idéal démocratique, et une occasion pour l'Université de remplir son mandat communautaire. Dans ses fonctions de directeur du service d'Extension, Corbett a guidé l'essor des programmes radiophoniques communautaires, et offert aux Albertains l'accès à une éducation de qualité.

Much of what is written about Edward Annand (Ned) Corbett concerns his involvement with the CAAE. This article deals with an area not previously considered an important part of Corbett's contribution to adult education, namely, the role he played in the formation and expansion of radio as a vehicle for the delivery of education to rural Alberta. It discusses Corbett's participation in the development of radio station CKUA at the Department of Extension, U of A, from

1920 until his appointment as first director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education in 1935. Because this area has not been previously explored, this article is (at times) primarily descriptive in nature.¹ In addition, the article addresses the relationship between the work of the Department of Extension (Extension) and the mandate of its university.

Edward Annand Corbett, B.A., B.D., M.A., L.L.D., born in Truro, Nova Scotia, in 1887, was the third of eight children. Son of a Presbyterian minister, he too started his career as an ordained minister of the Church at a time when the intellectual framework of Presbyterianism in Canada was guided by a strong social gospel influence. The concepts embedded in his ministerial training consisted of a blend of three elements:

1. An idealistic philosophy which maintained that men and women through positive corrective action, often educational in nature, could overcome evil and be transformed
 2. A critical analysis of the Bible which, it was believed, led to a more effective means of winning the minds and hearts of a nation for Christ
 3. Urban revivalism which centered on the concept of creating opportunities for self-help and upward mobility for the lower classes and for the disadvantaged²
- It was especially this last concept upon which Corbett and many other social activists of the time³ put their emphasis. Corbett's concerns transcended the urban; he sought opportunities for all Albertans.

When the First World War broke out, Corbett, already ordained, joined the war effort through the University Companies and went overseas. In 1917 he was in England and later in France as part of the staff of Khaki College.⁴ It was while working at Khaki College that Corbett met two men who would invite him to be part of what they were doing in Alberta, Henry Marshall Tory, a Methodist minister who was president of the U of A, and A.E. Ottewell, director of the Department of Extension at the same institution.⁵

The achievements at Khaki College⁶ "...prompted Dr. Tory on his return to Edmonton after the war, to remark that his eyes had been opened to a shortcoming in educational opportunities at home—adult education."⁷ He was determined that something should be done about adult education in Alberta.

In 1918 Corbett was sent home from the war suffering from mustard gas poisoning and tuberculosis. Two years later, sufficiently recovered, he accepted a job offer from Tory. The U of A president wrote, "If you've kept your mind alive there's a job for you here,"⁸ as assistant to A.E. Ottewell at the Department of Extension. Tory, who had a reputation for being able to choose the right man for the job, remembered Corbett from Khaki College and actively recruited him to become part of the team that was to make the U of A a powerful voice in adult education in Canada.

When Dr. Tory interviewed me...he emphasized, as he always did...that the Department of Extension existed for the purpose of relating the thinking and the research going on in the University to the needs and demands of the people of the Province.⁹

Robert C. Wallace writes in the foreword of Corbett's book on Henry Marshall Tory, "Together, [Tory and Corbett] in an outstanding way, they made the University the servant of the people. They worked as one."¹⁰ Their mutual understanding of the Christian social gospel and the value of education as a means to improve the lot of the average man gave them a common bond. They saw education as the route to power for the common people.

When Corbett joined Extension in 1920, Alberta was still a pioneer province. The last of the prairie provinces to be settled, it was experiencing agricultural hard times. Much needed farm machinery was purchased with borrowed money, and life was precarious. Large distances between settlements and the long, bitter winters added to the feelings of isolation and loneliness experienced by the settlers.

The early 1920s saw discontented Albertans desert the traditional governing political parties in favor of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) and later the Social Credit Party. The time was ripe for innovative, energetic ideas to help improve living conditions for the average citizen.

The basic moral passion that Corbett brought to his new work and to the environment of Extension had roots in his attitude towards the value of work, the benefit of education, and Presbyterian social gospel beliefs. In a profound sense, an educator, he insisted that everyone had the right of access to learning as a means, perhaps the only means, by which the average person could prepare himself or herself for a new social order, a means of organizing the moral and ideological basis from which action could begin and life could be improved.¹¹ He was resolute in his belief that, once aroused, plain and ordinary people would continue to learn ever-better techniques and better systems than those with which he was able to provide them.¹²

The notions of democracy and education were very closely aligned in Corbett's thinking. This grew from his experiences in the First World War and was firmly established by the onset of the Second. Freedom to learn and to express ideas was a critical democratic issue. He approved of the mandate of the Department of Extension to encourage community solidarity, to strengthen morale for those isolated by distance or weather, and to awaken the civic conscience of the pioneer.

Corbett enjoyed his work with Extension, relishing the lively discussions late at night in small country school houses around the province. He enjoyed the frequent travel in the Model "T" Ford over bad roads, taking books, lantern slides, news, and motion pictures to the people. He liked to meet with farmers and their families who were eager for the information, news, and materials brought to them.¹³

These were the days of Henry Wise Wood and the United Farmers of Alberta: the cities were small and the farm populations very big and mostly very poor. The villages were small and the roads bad and Corbett knew them all.¹⁴

The work was consistent with Corbett's convictions and with his background. Adult education in Alberta offered him an opportunity to deploy creatively the missionary zeal he had inherited from his father and the social gospel training of his pre-war life. Thelma LeCocq, in an article on Corbett, writes that he sold education, "if not exactly from door to door, at least from town to town."¹⁵

Together Ottewell and Corbett were a dynamic team taking adult education to rural Alberta, performing the mandate of Extension. Corbett reminisced that "...one was caught up and exhilarated by the spirit of change which lived like wine in the air in the early twenties."¹⁶ Tory, in a letter written on May 29, 1922, to one of his close friends overseas, Capt. David Corbett, reported that, "Ed Corbett is with us now on the University staff as secretary to the Department of Extension...I think that he has really found himself."¹⁷

EARLY BEGINNINGS OF RADIO

In 1921, H.P. Brown, who was in charge of visual aids at Extension, visited the United States during the summer holidays. He went to study some advanced techniques in photography, and in Pittsburgh he heard one of the early broadcasts of radio station KDKA, the first radio station to broadcast in the United States. It had commenced experimental broadcasting in 1916 but launched its first scheduled programming on November 2, 1920, reporting on Warren Harding's easy U.S. presidential election victory over James Cox and his vice-presidential running mate, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.¹⁸ Brown became intrigued with this new technology and on his return to Edmonton built a homemade receiving set to pick up and listen to the increasing number of stations being established in the United States. Excited about the possibilities for radio spreading Extension programs around the province, Brown approached Ottewell regarding the potential of this new medium.¹⁹

Ottewell, who had grown up in rural Alberta, could see the potential for radio as a valuable medium for reaching isolated Albertans. He could see the benefit for those who needed a release from the hard grind, the loneliness, and the isolation of everyday work on the farm and in the home.²⁰ However, he felt the time was not yet right. Considering the events of the day, there are perhaps three possible reasons for this hesitation:

1. University authorities realized that radio was so new the initial equipment would soon be obsolete and that it would be wise to wait a year or two before embarking on such an experiment.²¹
2. In 1921 the Liberal government of Charles Stewart was defeated and a UFA government elected. This was not considered a politically expedient time to launch such a new endeavor.²²
3. Ottewell and Corbett knew Tory was heavily involved in the establishment of a medical school at the U of A and did not have time to give to another venture.²³

In addition, Corbett was not as thrilled or convinced about the use of radio as Ottewell or Brown. "As Assistant Director of the Department, [I] was skeptical and slightly contemptuous of the whole undertaking."²⁴ He complained of radio fans (probably referring to Brown) who were continually:

...bursting into your office in the morning to tell you that the night before he got Kalamazoo or some other absurd place, and if by chance he heard a short-wave station from abroad he was raving made [sic] for several days.²⁵

In his book, *Henry Marshall Tory Beloved Canadian*, Corbett talked of the experimental educational practices of the times, "we continued to experiment with every new educational device we could find."²⁶ Ottewell and Corbett were keen to try any new idea that might make education more easily available to those Extension served. It was likely therefore, only a matter of time before Corbett would be "caught up" and converted to radio as another educational tool.

EDMONTON JOURNAL STATION CJCA

The first radio broadcasting in Canada was sporadic programming in September, 1919, from XWA in Montreal. On May 20, 1920, XWA aired a program to five hundred of the nation's elite in a crowded ballroom of the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa, one hundred miles away. Among those present were Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden, the soon-to-be Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, the governor general, noted explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, and Dr. A.S. Eve, a McGill University physicist. People everywhere were amazed by radio. The idea that voices could fly through the air and be heard a long distance away was both exciting and mystifying.²⁷

Radio exploded across the nation. By March 31, 1923, licenses had been issued to 62 private commercial stations and eight amateur stations. Included in these licenses were two for Southam Newspapers in Alberta, CFAC in Calgary and CJCA in Edmonton.²⁸ There were only three years between the first scheduled broadcast in Canada and radio becoming available to Albertans. Little was known about radio, but the public was astonished by its potential.

In the fall of 1924 Ottewell, Corbett, and Brown judged that radio was worth an experiment, and it was "decided to make at least a gesture in the direction of educational broadcasting."²⁹ The question these men asked themselves was:

Could the Radio, the new science, be used to still further extend the walls of the University until the dream of its founders would be realized and all the people in the Province could if they so desired turn naturally to the University for entertainment, for instruction, and for an answer to the problems ever before the western farmer and business man?³⁰

With the mandate of Extension in mind, the radio pioneers decided on a gamble. There was little or no precedent to follow. Everyone was new to the concept of broadcasting, especially educational broadcasting. Those involved in radio "like ourselves, were only toying with the idea."³¹ Extension began "in a somewhat halting and uncertain fashion to feel its way over this new and untraveled territory."³² It is easy to see that the excitement of reaching many more people than they could in their Model "T" cars on bumpy and often impassable Alberta winter roads would have interested these early radio pioneers.

Extension made arrangements in the autumn of 1925 with George R. Rice of CJCA for the U of A to broadcast lectures or talks by university professors. The

professors were asked to donate their time and to leave classrooms and research work to travel across the river to the *Edmonton Journal* building in order

...to stand before a small round disk and speak for 20 minutes to an unseen audience without other reward than the doubtful satisfaction of having done something worthwhile.³³ ... The following year, to make things easier, a microphone and amplifier were installed in a corner of the director's office in Extension with a telephone line hook-up to the Journal station.³⁴

The programs, mainly live, were quite ambitious. There were 15-minute talks delivered mostly by U of A staff members; recordings of symphonic music with commentaries; evenings of lively song, poetry, and readings with a specific nationality as the theme (these programs were designed with immigrants in mind, as Alberta had been settled by many and various immigrant groups); orchestral concerts organized by Mrs. J.B. Carmichael, conductor of the University orchestra; and variety shows arranged by R.R. Couper.³⁵

Evidence that the people of Alberta were equally excited about radio broadcasts from Extension appeared in Ottewell's annual report of August 20, 1926:

...we have received from all parts of the province and from different parts of Canada and the United States many letters of appreciation of our program.... In order to lighten the burden of acknowledging this correspondence, we have had a post card prepared.³⁶

Obviously, the department had been overwhelmed by this correspondence. In October of the same year Tory wrote to Premier Brownlee, commenting on the hundreds of letters of commendation being received by Extension.³⁷ Radio was showing considerable promise. "The rapidity with which that listening public grew soon made it apparent that there had been discovered the most adequate means of reaching people the human race had yet evolved."³⁸ It is easy to see how this would be an exciting notion for men with missionary zeal. Ottewell and Corbett had visited many communities in Alberta and knew and appreciated the life of the pioneer. They were committed to do all that they could to help improve life for Albertans. The concept of being able to reach so many Albertans with educational talks and good quality entertainment was exciting and rewarding.³⁹

A letter received at this time from a listener, William Best, exemplifies the public's reaction:

The organ recital of this evening came in better than any organ music we have heard before. It was a great treat and you and Dr. McMillan and CJCA can congratulate yourselves. It is mighty fine after hauling manure all day, when you are dead beat, to lie on the sofa and undo your flannel shirt at the neck, kick off your rubbers, and clap on the earphones. Oh! boy! but it's fine!⁴⁰

Response like this from the public gave assurance to Ottewell and Corbett that they were fulfilling the aim of the university. They were expanding the boundaries of the university and reaching Albertans. This encouraged Extension to approach CJCA and request increased time for departmental programming. However, the

management of CJCA faced increasing costs of broadcasting and felt that it could no longer offer the U of A program time free of charge. As a result, in 1925, Ottewell, Corbett, and Brown persuaded Tory to allow them to proceed with the building of a radio station on the University campus.⁴¹

RADIO STATION CKUA

Like many other governments, the UFA government then in power, on hearing the news that the university was about to construct its own radio station, was quick to realize how valuable this could be for the isolated rural population and for the government's own political ends. This government knew and understood the needs of those in remote parts of the province who were beyond the reach of the University resources of entertainment and practical help. The UFA saw how radio could serve these needs and help to alleviate the isolation for those not living in settled areas. In addition, something that was probably of more immediate interest to the government was the fact that voters could be reached in a more effective manner than ever before. After Corbett and Ottewell convinced Premier Brownlee of the capability of the radio station to broadcast into schools and homes as far away as the Peace River country, the government made available a grant of \$5,000 to build a transmitter on campus.⁴²

Despite the support of both President Tory and the government, the task of building a radio station at the U of A was not easy. There was the matter of obtaining an operating license. When Ottewell applied to Ottawa for a license, Extension was refused on the grounds there were already three licenses operating in Edmonton, and that was considered adequate. However, this was not sufficient reason to deter the radio pioneers. A sum of \$600 was somehow raised, and the radio license was purchased from one of the three existing license holders, CFCK, Radio Supply Company.⁴³

Tory then wrote to Alex Johnson, the deputy minister of Marine and Fisheries in Ottawa, with the following information:

On enquiry here, we find that one of the licenses already in use in Edmonton could be secured by us along with the essential equipment in connection with it. We have made with the people here an arrangement to take over this license, subject of course to the sanction of your Department in the usual way. I may say that we are exceedingly anxious to get a station at the University as the calls upon us have been very great especially from the country. The work carried on by us will be of a purely educational character, the only organization here doing that sort of work.⁴⁴

The group at Extension applied for the call letters to be CUOA, "U.O.A." to stand for the U of A. The authorities advised, however, that the first two letters "CU" had been given to another country. After much controversy, the letters CKUA were agreed upon.⁴⁵

This undertaking and experimentation in the field of radio were unique in Canada. The Extension group of Ottewell, Corbett, and Brown went about establishing the University radio station with limited funds. Sarah Ahmed describes radio CKUA as the radio station constructed on a shoestring by people with vision and dedication.⁴⁶ Those most concerned with its beginnings realized that radio had an important role to play in adult education, and they promoted it with determination and zeal. "They were people who had a vision and to such people no real difficulties exist."⁴⁷

H.P. Brown discussed the problems of setting up the new station: One of the hurdles of starting up CKUA was where to locate the radio station itself. No space could be found for the radio station anywhere else on the campus so we had to provide it on our already crowded visual instruction floor. Thus we lost our screening room which was divided into a control room and speech studio, and by moving the partitions and desks around in the main office we created a space of 15 feet by 30 feet for a main studio.⁴⁸

The studio was housed in the building now known on campus as The Power Plant. For sound proofing, the walls of the studio were draped in burlap which was purchased from a local brewery for the sum of \$25. The studio contained a grand piano and some chairs.

The electrical engineering students at the University and a radio engineer from Calgary, W.W. Grant, became involved with the building of the radio transmitter and antenna for the new station. The two tallest farm windmills that could be purchased were obtained (80 feet topped by 20 foot iron poles to make them 100 feet). The antenna was attached to these. This apparatus stood on campus until 1966. All of these assorted items cost about \$2,000. The 500 watt transmitter and towers were installed, "along with a small shack south of Athabasca Hall."⁴⁹ With all of this the new station was ready.

Corbett announced during his regular Radio Talk on October 17, 1927, that the station was due to open on Thanksgiving Day, November 7, 1927. There must have been some delay, as it was not until November 21, that the ...cue was given, and the first chords of a Chopin etude filled the room and filtered through the microphone into the air. At the same time, H.P. Brown determined to record on film the birth of his dream, ignited his pan of magnesium flash powder-and the burlap covering on the walls burst into flame!⁵⁰

With this unfortunate beginning the "Voice of the U," Edmonton Radio CKUA, was on the air. Fortunately, this incident in no way foreshadowed the future of the development of CKUA. Newspapers all over the country announced the event. The Manitoba Free Press in Winnipeg editorialized on February 13, 1928:

In Alberta the university has set up a station of its own-CKUA-and every Monday and Thursday the "U" is on the air. And out of the air its message is

picked up north to the Yukon, south to Texas, east through Saskatchewan and west to the Pacific—an extension department of some size.

The enthusiastic publicity the department was receiving nation-wide proved to the educators at Extension that they were fulfilling the mandate of the Department and that the work they were doing was being noticed and approved across the country. Their efforts to develop educational radio programs were being encouraged and supported.

GOVERNANCE

When the U of A Extension Department received its operating license, the ownership of the new radio station was placed in the hands of the Governors of the U of A.⁵¹ Since its inception, Extension had been governed by a Senate Committee of the University which rarely met during the war years. In May, 1921, a motion submitted by Tory and drafted by Ottewell advocated that this ruling body for Extension be dispensed with and a new one formed. The new committee would consist of the director of extension, the president of the University, and any other members that the Extension director and/or the president of the University deemed suitable.⁵² In a report written in December of the same year to the Senate, Ottewell stated that the Department "has been placed on an independent basis, being responsible to the President."⁵³

Furthermore, in January, 1927, when the new radio license was granted, Ottewell asked the General Faculty Council (GFC) of the U of A to appoint a committee to oversee the business of the radio lectures. In February, the GFC urged Tory to appoint a Radio Broadcasting Committee.⁵⁴ On May 7, 1927, he established a Senate Committee on University Broadcasting with Ottewell and Corbett serving as chairman and secretary respectively. The Committee which met for the first time that day was not required to report to the Senate.⁵⁵

Responsibility for extension work was now entrusted to the Senate Committee on University Extension which consisted of the University president, Ottewell, Corbett, the University librarian, and the Extension librarian. "There is no evidence to indicate it ever met formally."⁵⁶ Extension was not subject to deliberation in the Senate, although annual and semi-annual reports were presented through the president.

With the governance of Extension firmly within the grip of the director of Extension and a few chosen members, decisions on policy and programming could be, and were, easily made. More importantly perhaps, they were seldom challenged. Corbett, as a member of the Committee on radio broadcasting, had a decisive hand in deciding the direction radio would take at Extension. Corbett had maneuvered himself into a position of control over matters pertaining to radio programming and its development at Extension.

EDUCATION BY RADIO

From the beginning those involved, and Corbett especially, realized that a program in adult education, like any other commodity, had to be sold to the audience and that a certain amount of showmanship was necessary to encourage its development and acceptance. "It was difficult to find the correct balance of information and vaudeville ability," he said, "to hold the attention of a country audience."⁵⁷

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the studio was not sound-proof. "Every car horn and barking dog and passing plane could and did go on the air..."⁵⁸

On one occasion, a play about the Indian Mutiny was being played. After the line, "Hark, I hear Bagpipes," the next record was not ready so the audience heard instead the CPR on the high level bridge giving two long and two short whistles.⁵⁹

If the concept of radio as a vehicle for education was to work, many accommodations would be necessary. Lecturers would have to learn to do things differently: "A new art must be developed in keeping with the character of the new science."⁶⁰ Corbett realized that material would have to be presented in such a way as to make the listener want to listen through to the end of the program.

Corbett was especially determined that programming be consistent and of high quality. He recognized that high-class entertainment was a legitimate field for an educational institution. He was particularly resolute that music and plays presented by CKUA be entertaining and of a higher quality than those received from commercial stations. In light of the social and economic background of Alberta at this time he saw entertainment as one of the important functions of an educational program: to deliver quality enrichment to rural communities. Corbett, in an interview with Alan Thomas in February of 1956, noted that the Carnegie Corporation had given CKUA 3,000 symphony and grand opera recordings. This gift enabled the station to broadcast fine music, uncluttered with talk or announcements other than introductory remarks, every evening between seven and eight o'clock.

Corbett was often heard complaining about the quality of music on the American commercial stations. He was especially hard on the "oceans of jazz" and the "Knights of the Wobbling Larynx," otherwise known as tenors.

Mr. Vallee really needs only four words in addition to his orchestra to earn his \$5000.00 a night, or whatever they pay him.... I think this depression would soon end if we could lead all these "moaning tenors" out into the cold grey dawn on a winter's morning when it's 40 below and leave them there till they've got it all out of their systems.⁶¹

Perhaps his disdain for popular music was a notion grounded in his Presbyterian upbringing.

Another important aspect of the work of radio for the Alberta farmer was delivered by the technical and research department of the University. Information on insect pests, plant diseases, crop and live-stock production problems; seasonal talks on poultry, bee-keeping, gardening, tree-planting, and pig farming, and discussions on mechanical problems of farm power and machinery were part of the radio programming. Farmers wrote letters testifying to the value of these broadcasts, stating how often this information had saved them money which, in an economy of hard times, was most appreciated.

Resulting from this response the Board of Governors in 1927 passed a motion to grant an additional \$4,000 to the Extension budget for broadcast expansion.⁶² On March 31, 1928, just four months after CKUA commenced broadcasting, Ottewell wrote in his Annual Report for the Department of Extension, "there is no doubt that expansion of our radio program in particular has been much appreciated by the people of Alberta, and there is a wide field of usefulness still to be developed in this line of work."⁶³

By 1928, when Corbett succeeded Ottewell as director of the Department of Extension, he was convinced that the future of adult education was firmly entwined with the development of radio. He commented, "space has been annihilated and thousands of listeners, in the comfort of their homes, regardless of distances or weather, are able to hear the world's best music and benefit by lectures on a wide variety of subjects."⁶⁴ Corbett had, in addition to these programs, initiated a Question Box Period, whereby listeners were invited to send in questions on their problems. The questions were dealt with by experts and answered on succeeding evenings' programs.⁶⁵

Corbett, in response to the letters and feedback he received from listeners, continued to expand radio broadcasting through Extension. He was interested in developing courses specifically with adult education as the major focus. He believed that, if these courses were properly handled, they could help in changing the attitude "of the masses of the people from one of indifference and often antagonism towards the University, to one of affection and loyalty,"⁶⁶ thereby fulfilling the dream of its founders.

The following year, 1929, Corbett wrote in his annual director's report for the Department of Extension:

Our radio work has been greatly expanded this year, and we have been on the air regularly Monday and Thursday afternoons and evenings with special broadcasts at other times. After one or two Sunday programs had been put on, so many requests for their continuance were received that Sunday afternoon broadcasts of music, lectures, and religious drama have become a regular part of the radio work. There is no doubt that expansion of our radio program in particular has been much appreciated by the people of Alberta, and plans are being made to put on special courses for adults next term.⁶⁷

The expansion continued, and in the following year's annual report Corbett pointed to the increasing role of the radio activities of Extension. The highlight, however, of the 1930 report was the experiment in delivery of definite courses of lectures. Professors E.K. Broadus and R.K. Cameron gave a course on English Literature, and W. Everard Edmonds and Corbett gave a course on Western Canadian History.

The reports received [by listeners] on these broadcasts have fully justified the experiment and we are planning to continue this work next season as we are fully convinced, from the work that has already been done, that broadcasting is likely to take a more and more important place as one of the greatest agencies in adult education.⁶⁸

To try to estimate how many people were listening to his lectures on Western Canadian History Corbett had a number of maps printed. After announcing during one broadcast that anyone who took the time to write and request a map would receive one free of charge, he received close to 500 requests for maps. He estimated that even more people were listening to Broadus' talks.⁶⁹

In 1930 Corbett attended the first Institute for Education by Radio held at the University of Ohio. At this conference he was amazed to find that radio programming in Alberta had proceeded along comparable lines to those employed by universities in the United States. What interested and excited him even more was the fact that at CKUA programming had been achieved by volunteers willing to donate their time. Electrical engineering students kept the equipment running, and the lines were supplied free of charge by the Alberta Government Telephone system.⁷⁰ This contrasted sharply with the program at the University of Ohio where there was a \$10,000 budget for operating costs. In his Radio Talk on October 29, 1930, Corbett announced this finding and thanked all of the volunteers, "the musicians and artists and lecturers of the City of Edmonton and ... those members of the university staff who so generously give their time and talents to this kind of work."⁷¹

Also in 1930 Sheila Marryat was appointed as the first paid program director of CKUA.⁷² Bringing to Extension an abundance of energy and motivation coupled with a practical knowledge of drama and music, she organized and directed a group called the CKUA Players. It consisted of some 30 to 40 members and was probably the first such group in this field in Canada. The plays she presented, many of them the work of local playwrights, notably Elsie Park Gowan and Gwen Pharis, won wide acclaim.⁷³

THE CARNEGIE GRANT

Corbett's annual reports between 1931 and 1934 commented on reduced and increasingly obsolete collections of lantern slides, movies, and books, the result of reduced budgets and hard times. CKUA, however, flourished over the next few years in spite of the fact that these were the Depression years. The reason for the expansion of U of A radio was linked primarily to a grant from the Carnegie

Foundation. In 1932, William Learned of the Carnegie Corporation of New York visited U of A Extension to see what was happening in adult education. He was so impressed with the radio programming that he suggested the University submit a proposal for funding. A committee consisting of Corbett, J.M. MacEachran (Department of Philosophy), W.G. Hardy (Department of Classics), and R.C. Wallace (the new President of the University who replaced Tory in October of 1928)⁷⁴ met to make recommendations.

The committee was successful in securing a promise of \$10,000 per year for three years. This was later renewed for two additional years, making a total of \$50,000. Rural Alberta, particularly, received good value from the Carnegie money.⁷⁵ The development of radio for adult education in Canada would be indebted over the next 20 years to Corbett's affiliation with the Carnegie Corporation.

Programming increased to seven days a week. Courses of instruction were increased to allow access to learning for students who, because of the economic times, were forced to remain at home. These young people could, by means of these broadcasts, receive the equivalent of university degree courses, although no credit was ever given or considered for them. Evidence of the popularity of these courses is found in the fact that *The Press Bulletin* (Extension's publication) began publishing the CKUA program guide every three months to keep up with the demand for information about these programs.⁷⁶

Extension earned much praise and recognition for the quality of its programming during these hard times. In 1931, in a radio talk titled "The Place of Radio in Education," Corbett stated, "We have good reason to be proud of the fact that we are the only University in the Dominion that has gone in for this kind of work on such a large scale."⁷⁷ Armstrong in his 1968 thesis, "Corbett's House: The Origins of the Canadian Association for Adult Education and its Development During the Directorship of E.A. Corbett," commented that at this time Extension enjoyed the prestige of having one of the largest and most innovative programs in the country.⁷⁸

In the summer of 1931 Corbett developed a questionnaire to be sent out to all on the station's mailing list, asking for comments and suggestions. He was anxious and curious to know what his subscribers needed in their radio listening and how CKUA could improve service to its listening audience. He was pleased to report in October that the general sentiment seemed to be that the programming, as it stood, constituted a well-balanced arrangement of entertainment and educational features.

Corbett noted in his annual report of March 31, 1931:

We are now convinced that if our lecture program is to increase in value there must be some form of follow-up work, such as the organizing of discussion groups in connection with the various series of broadcast talks. Development along this line would mean an increased interest in the medium of adult education.⁷⁹

The follow-up that was suggested by Corbett became increasingly difficult and would not come to full fruition until much later in the form of Farm Radio Forum and Citizens' Forum. One reason for the difficulties was that radio stations in the United States became more popular and increased both in numbers and in broadcast power. As a result, the smaller Canadian stations found they could no longer transmit as far as previously possible. Corbett reported a number of letters received from listeners complaining that they were unable to receive CKUA because of this interference. Faced with the dilemma of shrinking boundaries, CKUA staff began to search for solutions. Networks of smaller stations became one way of dealing with the matter.

Corbett approached radio CKLC in Red Deer. In October of 1930 station CKLC, owned and operated by James Stewart of the Alberta Pacific Grain Company, became associated with CKUA. Simultaneous broadcasting by both stations greatly extended the listening areas. Corbett explained in his annual report of March, 1931, that if CKUA had not entered into a co-operative arrangement with CKLC, it would have resulted in a greatly reduced listening audience because many U.S. stations had increased their power and because the University station, having only 500 watts, could not compete with the signals of these high-powered stations.

Corbett also contacted the Canadian National Railway (CNR) and was happy to arrange to join with it to gain access to its high-quality programs. In June, 1923, the CNR had established a radio department and had equipped some of its parlor cars with radio-receiving sets to entertain its passengers on its long distance runs. The programs it broadcast were ambitious and of high caliber. For instance, in 1929 the CNR contracted with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra to perform a series of twenty-five Sunday afternoon concerts to be broadcast nationally.⁸⁰

Following these affiliations by the University station with CKLC and the CNR, arranged by Corbett, came the formation of the Foothills Network which consisted of stations in Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Calgary as well as CKUA. This network was connected by Alberta Government Telephones and shared such programming features as music and speakers. Corbett wrote in a 1933 letter to E. Austin Weir that "...the foothills network is going to show Canada the way in good programs, inside of two years."⁸¹ These affiliations represented Corbett's skills at networking to achieve the results that he deemed important.

NEW DIRECTIONS

The UFA, at their 1931 annual convention, passed a resolution asking the provincial government to proceed with the building of a 5000 watt radio station to extend the University station's lectures and broadcasts to cover the whole of Alberta. The following year a delegation of school trustees, appointed by the Alberta School Trustees' Association, went to U of A President Wallace to urge him to increase the power of the radio station so as to reach all corners of Alberta.⁸² This was during the Depression when money was scarce and programs of expansion were routinely delayed or canceled.⁸³

Corbett's *Annual Report to the Department of Extension* in 1932 stated that, in spite of the obstacles under which the radio work was being done, "...we can definitely say that it is filling a real need in the life of the Province." Corbett was encouraged and supported by letters such as the following:

Unquestionably, the University programs are the ones that are being taken seriously, and the others—and this includes the States' programs—are being considered as casual and transitional and more of a novelty, but the University programs have become a definite part of the daily life of the people.⁸⁴

In 1933 Corbett reported a new development in educational radio work, an experimental course in French phonetics given by Professor Hector Allard. Initially, "we circularized 50 High School principals asking if they would co-operate with us in the effort."⁸⁵ There was an immediate response from 25 groups of students who would meet with their instructors two afternoons a week to learn French by radio. After the first broadcast, 1500 letters flooded the station requesting the mimeographed materials.⁸⁶

A week after the French course started Corbett received a protest from a large group of Calgary businessmen who suggested that if the hour were changed to 9 p.m., there were several hundred men in Calgary who would like to take the course. Corbett assured them that "next year we will arrange a similar course for business at a late hour."⁸⁷ A foreman from a mine in Castor, Alberta, wrote:

The men under my charge are a mixture of French and English. We all come up from the mine at 4:45 so as to be ready for your lecture at 5 o'clock. The English men are learning to speak French and the French learning to speak more correctly.⁸⁸

In his annual report of 1933 Corbett stated that the teaching of languages over the radio was no longer an experiment. It had been successful. Corbett could see that each year programming could be expanded to engage a larger and more interested class of students.

During the past year there has been a greatly increased demand for the Press Bulletin giving details of our radio programs. This indicates that there is a steadily growing appreciation of, and interest in the University program. We feel justified in reporting a significant advance in our lecture programs from the point of view of listener appeal, our policy being to broadcast talks on live current issues. That this has been appreciated is shown by the following remark taken from a letter:

Education in the past has been a kind of backing process. We have had our faces to the past and our backs to the future. The debates on live current topics, together with the series, "The World Today," and other talks mark a new era in public life and reveal a future when the most fitted shall guide our destinies.⁸⁹

Corbett, in his presentation to the Special Parliamentary Committee on Radio Broadcasting in 1936, mentioned that CKUA broadcast a great many programs of Ukrainian folk-songs and dances performed by the Ukrainian Choir of Edmonton.

Alberta had, at that time, 70,000 persons of Ukrainian descent in the province, and they tuned to CKUA to address many of their practical language problems. Groups of teachers would gather children by the radio on Thursday nights to listen to the Canadian history programming. The following day, in class time, the children would be required to write compositions in English on the story they had heard the previous night. "Here again the opportunity new Canadians have in this way of learning correct English," Corbett argued, "is surely a worth-while service to the strangers within our gates."⁹⁰

Corbett was firmly convinced that, in radio, education had found a new and powerful ally which could be used to bridge the gulf between the University and the people outside its walls. He was convinced that these programs led towards attaining the goal of a richer and broader life.⁹¹ In this conviction he was never far from his social gospel origins.

Corbett saw radio as a powerful tool for delivering education and worked energetically to develop and deliver programs of high quality to enrich the lives of all Albertans, but most particularly those in rural areas. As a member of the Committee on University Extension, he could suggest, implement, and control policy which, in turn, enabled him to present and expand new and innovative ideas for radio programming. Corbett believed that people had, within themselves, a craving for knowledge and the potential to recast that knowledge into ways of bettering the conditions of their situation.⁹² He saw in radio a means to provide this opportunity even to those who were otherwise isolated by distance or weather.

When nation-wide rumblings were heard at the end of the 1920s regarding the future of Canada's radio programming and the creation of a national broadcasting system, Corbett became involved. The Aird Commission was appointed to examine the state of radio in Canada and make recommendations for its future management, direction, financing, and control. The state of radio in the nation was chaotic and largely unregulated. Extension had hired Sheila Marryat as full time staff which enabled Corbett to travel, meet and work with the organizers of the Canadian Radio League, and to make representations to the commission.⁹³ Just as the Aird commission was finished and its recommendations about to be implemented, the government changed hands. The new government under MacKenzie King established a Special Parliamentary Committee on Radio Broadcasting. Because of his experience with Alberta radio, Corbett (not Ottewell or Brown) was summoned as an expert witness to testify in 1936 at Committee hearings on the future of radio in Canada. Determined and convinced that radio should be a public utility to serve the educational needs of adult Canadians, Corbett remained actively involved in the controversial debate which resulted in the CBC being established as a public utility, a tension and controversy that continues today.

When Corbett left Extension in 1935 to become the first director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, he left behind a rich legacy. Extension was broadcasting over 477 radio lectures per year in addition to its other functions.⁹⁴ He had helped to create and expand a medium that was the most potentially useful

means yet discovered for delivering adult education. This was especially efficient in hard times. He had helped to set up a model of adult education by radio that was the most impressive and innovative in the Dominion. As national director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, his work in radio did not stop. He went on, in fact, to engineer the establishment of two of the biggest adult education experiments in radio, National Farm Radio Forum in 1941 and Citizens' Forum in 1943. These program series resulted in Canadians talking to each other across the nation on issues of national importance. Corbett sought to fulfil the vision of Henry Marshall Tory and the founders of the U of A, to deliver the University and education to the people. Through radio he succeeded.

To give Corbett the entire credit for initiating radio as a vehicle for adult education would be imprecise. He did not invent the notion of using radio for adult education. He was, instead, an extremely astute and nimble "promoter" with an ability to network. At Extension in Edmonton Ottewell and Brown were the first to be excited by radio. It was Corbett, however, who, once converted, recognized the potential and the effectiveness of the medium. He expanded and developed the scope of the broadcasts. When radio was threatened by larger commercial stations, he set up networks to allow the broadcasting of radio to cover a greater area and thereby serve more people. He was intensely interested in radio as a means of bringing about the change his social gospel background deemed to be so necessary for the advancement of society.

The words and thoughts that motivated Corbett were never far from their social gospel origins. Corbett saw radio as a powerful means of creating opportunity for self-help and upward mobility for Canadians, especially those in rural areas. "In the long view of things all education seeks a unified society in the welfare of which each individual will find his highest satisfaction."⁹⁵

ENDNOTES

1. Places remain for descriptive history, and this is one such place. Little is known about Corbett's role in radio at the Department of Extension. In order for this aspect of his work to be considered and opened up for historical dialogue it is necessary to know the details.
2. B.J. Fraser, *The Social Uplifter: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875-1915*, (Waterloo, ON: Published for the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion by Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1988).
3. Cf. Michael Welton's "Bolsheviks of a Better Sort: Jimmy Tompkins and the Struggle for a People's Catholicism, 1908-1928," *36th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1995), 337-342, for an insight into what was proceeding on the east coast in adult education, with parallel ideas about the value and power of education to change the lives of the disadvantaged.
4. Thelma LeCocq, "E.A. Corbett," *Pioneers in Adult Education in Canada*, ed. H. Rouillard, (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons Canada, 1952), 84.
5. The social gospel was as prevalent in Methodism as it was in Presbyterianism.
6. Khaki College was an educational institution established and managed by the Canadian Army in Britain during the war. The program was rooted in the study groups of the YMCA and the chaplain services of the Canadian Army. Several thousand soldiers participated in voluntary night classes to prepare themselves for their return to civilian life.

7. University of Alberta Archives (UAA), President's File-Tory. *The Edmonton Journal* article (May 20, 1961), accession Number:2315-6.
8. LeCocq, *Pioneers in Adult Education in Canada*, 84.
9. E.A. Corbett, *Henry Marshall Tory, Beloved Canadian*, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1954), 128.
10. *Ibid.*, vii.
11. Corbett, *We Have With Us Tonight*, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1957), 220.
12. UAA, G.V. Ferguson, *Dr. Edward Annand Corbett*, (December 4, 1964), accession number:2315-2. CBC Broadcast.
13. David Armstrong, "Corbett's House: The Origins of the Canadian Association for Adult Education and its Development During the Directorship of E.A. Corbett, 1936-1951," Master's thesis, University of Toronto, 1986, 65.
14. UAA, Biography File-Corbett. George Ferguson, "Dr. E.A. Corbett," (December 4, 1964), 2, accession number:2315-2. CBC Broadcast.
15. UAA, LeCocq, "Ned Corbett," *Food For Thought*, (February 1949), 8, accession number:2315-2.
16. Corbett, *We Have With Us Tonight*, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1957), 103.
17. UAA, President's File, Tory, *Letter to Capt. David Corbett*, 1922, accession number:2315-6.
18. Knowlton Nash, *The Microphone Wars: A History of Triumph and Betrayal at the CBC*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1994), 27.
19. Grant MacEwan College, *Voices of Alberta Radio Education*, (Edmonton: Learning Resources of Grant MacEwan College, 1974), 21.
20. Corbett, *We Have With Us Tonight*, 50.
21. Alberta Provincial Archives (APA), H.P. Brown, *CKUA 1927-1945*, n.d, accession number:67.86.
22. Corbett, *Henry Marshall Tory*, 134.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Corbett, *We Have With Us Tonight*, p. 51.
25. UAA, Corbett, *Education by Radio, (1932)*, 2, accession number:74-95-4. Radio Talk.
26. Corbett, *Henry Marshall Tory*, 128.
27. Nash, *The Microphone Wars*, 29.
28. F.W. Peers in *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting 1920-1951*, (Toronto, ON: The University of Toronto Press, 1969), 6, provides a more detailed discussion of the beginnings of radio licensing in Canada. He comments on the discretion between the figures provided by the Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries, for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1923, and the numbers provided by the Royal Commission on Broadcasting, Ottawa, 1957.
29. UAA, Corbett, *Brief for Parliamentary Committee*, (1935) 2, accession number:74-95-12. Radio Talk.
30. *Ibid.*, 1.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, 2.
33. UAA, Corbett, *Canada's University of the Air*, (1931), 3, accession number:74-95-4. Radio Talk.
34. APA, H.P. Brown, *CKUA 1927-1945*, 1.
35. UAA, Barbara Villy-Cormack, *CKUA and the Carnegie Grant*, (1972), 6, accession number:67-86.
36. UAA, A.E. Ottewell, *Department of Extension Annual Report, 1926*, no pagination, accession number:74-118-2 R.G.16.
37. R. Clark, "A History of the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta, 1912-1956." (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1985), 130.
38. L. Tyson, "Education Tunes In," *A Study of Radio Broadcasting in Adult Education*, (New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1926), 24.

39. Gordon Selman and Paul Dampier, *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada*, (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 1991), 15, talk of the functions of adult education comprising four main categories: Vocational, Social, Recreational and Self-Development. Adult education, as perceived by Corbett, was to include all of these categories. Because Corbett understood the isolation of many Albertans he knew that social and recreational programs were every bit as important as instructional programs.
40. UAA, *William Best letter to Extension*, accession number:74-118-2 R.G. 16.
41. Corbett, *Henry Marshall Tory*, 128.
42. CBC Archives, National Archives of Canada, A. Thomas, *Ned Corbett*, n.d., accession number:6913-S. Videocassette interview.
43. UAA, Joe McCallum, ed., *CKUA and 40 Wondrous Years of Radio*, (1967), accession number:75-112-164.
44. UAA, President's File, H.M. Tory, *Correspondence re Extension 1927*, 1.
45. UAA, McCallum, *CKUA and 40 Wondrous Years of Radio*, no pagination.
46. UAA, Sarah Ahmed, *The History of the Faculty of Extension, Research Possibilities*, (1991), accession number:91-116 Box 1, 1.
47. *Ibid.*, 81.
48. APA, Brown, *CKUA 1927-1945*, (1952), 102.
49. UAA, McCallum, *CKUA and 40 Wondrous Years of Radio*, no pagination.
50. UAA, Jean Kirman, "Radio CKUA: A Fifty Year Old Dream," *Canadian Golden West*, 12A, (Fall, 1977), 9, UAA, Radio and Television File.
51. D. Zolf, "Alberta Educational Communications Authority," (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1984), 67.
52. Clark, "A History of the Department of Extension," 96.
53. Ottewell, 1921, quoted in Clark, 96.
54. Minutes of the GFC meeting February 28, 1927, quoted in Clark, p. 131.
55. Clark, 131.
56. *Ibid.*, 154.
57. UAA, Corbett, *Radio Talk*, (1931), accession number:74-95-4.
58. H.P. Brown, "Pioneering Adult Education in the West," *Food For Thought*, (15)4, (Toronto: CAAE publication, 1955), 18.
59. UAA, Ahmed, *A Brief History of the University of Alberta Faculty of Extension, 1912-1991*, (1991), accession number:91-116 Box 1, #1, 7.
60. House of Commons, Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting, *Minutes of proceedings and evidence*, April 18, 1936, 257.
61. UAA, Corbett, *Education by Radio*, 1932, 5, accession number:74-95-4. Radio Talk.
62. Clark, *A History of the Department of Extension*, 133.
63. UAA, Ottewell, *Annual Report for the Department of Extension, 1928*, accession number:74-118-2 R.G. 16.
64. UAA, Corbett, *Adult Education*, (n.d.), 4, accession number:73-23-45. Radio Talk.
65. UAA, Corbett, *October 17, 1927*, 4, accession number:74-95-4. Radio Talk.
66. UAA, Corbett, *Adult Education*, 9. Radio Talk.
67. UAA, *Department of Extension Annual Report, 1929*, no pagination, accession number:74-118-2 R.G. 16.
68. *Ibid.*, 4.
69. UAA, Corbett, *Education by Radio, 1932*, Radio Talk, 8.
70. D.L. Feir, "A survey of Adult Education in Canada." (master's thesis, University of Alberta, 1940), 176.
71. UAA, Corbett, *Radio Talk*, October, 1930, 2, accession number:74-23-42 R.G. 16.
72. Although not financially connected, Sheila Marryat was politically connected. She was the sister of Irene Parlbly, Minister without Portfolio in Herbert Greenfield's 1921 Provincial cabinet. Irene Parlbly was the second woman in the British Empire to receive cabinet rank.

73. UAA, Villy-Cormack, 1972, 8.
74. Tory left the University of Alberta, after almost two decades as president, to accept a position as president of the National Research Council.
75. *Ibid.*, 12.
76. UAA, Ahmed, 1991, 8.
77. UAA, Corbett, *The Place of Education in Radio*, (1931), accession number:74-95-4. Radio Talk.
78. David Armstrong, "Corbett's House: The Origins of the Canadian Association for Adult Education and its Development During the Directorship of E.A. Corbett," (master's thesis, University of Toronto, 1968), 64.
79. UAA, *Department of Extension Annual Report, 1931*, 6.
80. Peers, *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting*, 24.
81. National Archives of Canada, Corbett, letter to E.A. Weir, (November 24, 1933), accession number:MG 30 D67 vol. 2.
82. UAA, Corbett, *Brief for Parliamentary Committee*, 1935, 6, Radio Talk.
83. Personal communication with Gordon Selman, May, 1993.
84. UAA, *Department of Extension Annual Report, 1932*, 5.
85. UAA, Corbett, *Brief for the Parliamentary Committee*, (1935), 4. Radio Talk.
86. UAA, *Department of Extension Annual Report, 1933*, 5.
87. House of Commons, Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting, *Minutes of proceedings and evidence*, April 1, 1936, 258.
88. *Ibid.*, 259.
89. UAA, *Department of Extension Annual Report, 1933*, 6.
90. *Ibid.*
91. UAA, Corbett, *Canada's University of the Air*, (1932), accession number:74-95-4. Radio Talk.
92. UAA, D. Campbell, *Address on the Dedication of E.A. Corbett Hall, University of Alberta*, (1967), accession number:75-112-89.
93. Neither time nor space allow for a development of this point. For a full discussion see Ron Faris, *The Passionate Educators: Voluntary Associations and the Struggle for Control of Adult Educational Broadcasting in Canada 1919-1952*, (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1975); and Knowlton Nash, *The Microphone Wars: A History of Triumph and Betrayal at the CBC*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1994).
94. UAA, *Department of Extension Annual Reports, 1922-1948*, accession number:74-118-2, R.G.16.
95. Corbett, "Adult Education in the Schools," *Food for Thought*, vol. 5, no. 6, (Toronto: CAAE Publication, 1945), 10.