

The 1920s

1922

Carbonear native Rev. Joseph Joyce had been married about a year when he arrived in St. John's in the summer of 1922; the same year his 25-year-old wife, Susan, gave birth to their first child, Douglas. Rev. Joyce met Susan Carlton when they were both studying at Mt. Allison University in New Brunswick. She was from Prince Edward Island. After Mt. Allison, Rev. Joyce continued his studies at Boston University and then took his first posting as a Methodist minister on Random Island.

As a student of Newfoundland history this Methodist minister would be well aware of the level of religious sectarianism, and he would be aware of its divisive nature and the inordinate weight it carried in shaping Newfoundland's educational, political, and social life. Rev. Joyce brought a fresh approach. As Jeff Webb wrote in his book *The Voice of Newfoundland*, "Rev. Joyce was Newfoundland born, but educated in Canada where he had been influenced by the social gospel with its concern for improving the material conditions of people's lives, not just concern for their souls". And that mission of bringing people of different religions together is what he set out to do as he marched into his new position at Wesley Church. Ecumenism was his way forward.

At about the same time as the Joyce family arrived in St. John's to begin work at Wesley Church, the Canadian Government was issuing its first radio licenses. The Government of Canada issued 23 commercial licenses in its first year plus a smaller number of licenses for amateurs. Radio broadcasting was officially underway in Canada.

1923

One of Rev. Joyce's first tasks at Wesley was to concentrate on retiring a significant debt. He started a campaign among his parishioners by donating \$100 of his own money. There may have been an ulterior motive for his haste in retiring the church debt. He had been watching and developing an interest in the unfolding of radio throughout Canada and the United States and he envisioned radio as a way to reach people who, for various reasons, could not attend regular church services. A young minister having just started in a new church, and now sharing a plan with parishioners about creating a radio station was simply on a plateau that, understandably, most of them could not fathom. Rev. Joyce got pushback from people who felt strongly that their church had much greater needs that demanded his attention.

1924

On July 20th, 1924 radio station 8WMC with a power of 100 watts was officially born. It consisted of a morning service from St. Thomas Anglican Church and an evening service from Wesley. History would record the symbolism of its transmission tower being constructed in the church yard by a group of volunteers who happened to consist of an Anglican, a Methodist, and a Roman Catholic. The entire project was led and driven by a minister who had to persuade and convince his naysayers, and then push through every obstacle in his way to make it happen. The Reverend knew very well

that his radio station would be heard far beyond the confines of his church building, and it should rightfully appeal to everyone despite their religious beliefs. His philosophy was that aside from delivering a spiritual message, radio would not only help educate people and bring some culture to their lives, but it would help alleviate isolation. It would bring them together. Put simply, they would be better off.

While Rev. Joyce had some volunteer help, and while the church permitted him to use their yard for his tower along with a basement storage closet for his transmitter and radio equipment, he assumed personal responsibility for running the operation and raising money to pay the costs. It was a humble beginning for the broadcaster and the listener. Like most new technology, radios were very expensive and far beyond the reach of too many Newfoundlanders in the 1920s. Many listened through crude home-made devices. They were constructed with some cheap basic materials with help from Rev. Joyce and others familiar with the technology. They were called crystal sets. The receivers had no speaker. A listener had to use a headset.

VOWR's place in history is that it became the first radio station in the country of Newfoundland, as it was then known. The radio license for 8WMC was issued to Wesley Methodist Church by the Dominion Government of Newfoundland. As for its place in North American history, by the time Rev. Joyce started his operation, a total of 57 radio stations had been licensed by the Government of Canada. Some of those Canadian stations were owned by church organizations, one of which was the Centennial Methodist Church in Victoria, BC. as owners of station CKCL. It claims to have broadcast the first church service in Canada on Easter Sunday in 1923. As for the United States, the first licensed radio stations there received government approval in 1920, and by the time Rev. Joyce's station went on air, there were about 500 radio stations in the US.

1925

It quickly became apparent to Rev. Joyce that his small 100-watt transmitter with limited power and limited range could not fulfill his vision of reaching the small isolated communities beyond St. John's. It even had difficulty getting to certain areas within the city. Undaunted, and against considerable odds, not the least of which was money, he decided he needed a bigger transmitter. And he set out to get it. He spent part of his summer at the Marconi headquarters in Montreal to learn more about radio transmission.

1926

Rev. Joyce spent part of his second summer in Montreal at the Marconi plant where he was a sponge for knowledge about the medium of radio. His more difficult task was convincing the parishioners of Wesley it was necessary to purchase another transmitter that was 5 times more powerful. But his most difficult task was, after his ordeal of paying for the first, how would he pay for the second.

1927

13 years after that 1914 sealing tragedy where 77 Newfoundlanders froze to death on the icefields, there were still strong memories of that infamous disaster. Now, with the advent of the new radio station, a letter to the newspaper suggested that, since sealers couldn't afford radios, people with proper receivers might consider lending them to sealers to monitor weather conditions at the next hunt. Several people did just that. Despite Radio 8WMC's limited range with a 100-watt transmitter, it was possible that, with

ideal atmospheric conditions, radio waves could carry long distances over water, and particularly at night. Also, radio broadcasts could be picked up from stations in Canada and the United States.

After returning from the hunt that spring, a sealer by the name of G. Barbour wrote a letter to the Evening Telegram and thanked those who had loaned their radio receivers. He wrote, “although there is no guarantee from any radio yet that one will always get good results, speaking from experience, many times this spring we got exceptionally good results. On several occasions Wesley Church was exceptionally good both morning and evening, and much credit and thanks are due the Rev. Mr. Joyce.”

An International conference in Washington, DC in August of 1927 was a follow-up to previous European conferences that were establishing international standards and rules to regulate the new era of wireless communication. At the Washington conference there was an agreement on sorting out call letters so that the country of origin could be quickly identified. Radio stations in the USA would use call letters starting with W and K, depending on whether you were East or West of the Mississippi River. In Canada all radio stations would commence with the letter C. In the country of Newfoundland call letters would begin with a V.

Rev. Joyce quickly became well known in the city because of the publicity surrounding the new radio station, especially among influential businessmen and politicians and other community leaders. One such person was Judge Francis Morris of the St. John’s District Court, and a staunch Roman Catholic. He was on the RC Board of Education for 28 years and was a lifelong member of the Benevolent Irish Society.

In September 1927 Judge Morris wrote a letter to a gentleman in New York City; a Presbyterian Minister whom he had recently met at a celebration for the Grenfell Mission. Judge Morris wrote: “I am introducing you to the Rev.

J. G. Joyce, Pastor of the Wesley Church, St. John's, who is a great admirer of the Grenfell Mission work. Mr. Joyce, although being the city's youngest minister, carries a wise head on young shoulders, and although being a good RC myself, I do no violence to my conscience in recommending him to you, not only as an excellent churchman, but a good fellow."

Two and a half weeks before Christmas 1927 the new 500-watt transmitter went on air. Rev. Joyce arranged to have the Governor of Newfoundland, Sir William Allardyce, perform the official launch. Sir William broadcast live from his study in Government House via telephone, and was moved by the fact he could talk to people right in their communities well beyond the confines of St. John's.

Sir William, who was at the end of his tenure as Governor of the colony, thought people might like to know what his office looked like. He told them it was cozy, centrally heated, and had a fireplace at one end with a large bookcase at the other. Then he began to describe his hundreds of books. Law books and text books, biographies, and proceedings of the House of Assembly, and authorities on Government. He went on to talk about his books on travel, and books written by Shakespeare. Then he described the interesting pictures over his fireplace and on his walls. Portraits of the King and Queen, British admirals and Lords and other celebrities like General Alexander Haig.

A century later one might wonder how well that speech resonated with an audience in Newfoundland outports. But this was 1927. This was live radio. And this was the Governor speaking. The contents of his message were likely less significant than the fact that a person of his stature was speaking directly to them in their own homes.

The Governor's address kicked-off a week of special programming to celebrate the more powerful transmitter. Announcements in the daily papers made people aware of what was available aside from the regular church services on Sunday.

On Wednesday the Governor's wife, Lady Allardyce, gave an address about the work of a new organization called NONIA. It encouraged women in outport communities to knit garments to raise money for health services.

On Thursday the station broadcast a speech by the principal of Memorial College at the Rotary Meeting at the Newfoundland Hotel. It also featured a performance by the Mount Cashel band from the orphanage.

On Friday there was a broadcast of the joint choirs of Gower and Wesley churches.

The announcement in the paper also reminded people "It is hoped to have the firing of the noonday gun broadcast on Saturday to give the correct time to the outports".

An editorial in the Daily News shortly after the special week of broadcasting was entitled The Blessings of Radio. It encouraged people to support the new station financially. It said, in part, "The appreciation expressed already from many listeners of the splendid service offered by 8WMC and the blessings of radio are sufficient evidence of the importance of this great facility, and we trust the support it receives is in tangible shape, for it should not be forgotten that the installation and maintenance of the new station is by no means inconsiderable". Throughout VOWR's history St. John's newspapers were strong supporters of the church-run radio station. They promoted the work of the station and encouraged people to make donations to help maintain the service.

The next special broadcast was late December 1927. An amphibian plane flying from New York to London had planned to refuel in Harbor Grace. The plane disappeared during a storm over the Atlantic with 3 people on board. An onshore marine radio station reported a message, believed to be from the plane, "plane down". At the request of Harbor Grace airport, radio station 8WMC went on air at half hour intervals during the afternoon and evening advising of a plane down somewhere off the Newfoundland coast. There was a search but the plane and its crew were never found.

1928

In October 1928 Rev. Joyce wrote the famous inventor Guglielmo Marconi in London, England. There was an accompanying supportive letter from the Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Sir Richard Squires. Rev. Joyce was looking for financial help in paying for his new transmitter. Marconi gracefully declined the request in that it might create a dangerous precedent, but said he had advised the company's managing director in Canada to assist Rev. Joyce with any prospective purchases.

While Rev. Joyce was always on the hunt for money to support his radio station, he was also very much a man of principle. He did not want anyone to pay directly for any content on the airwaves. The Bulova Watch Company

in 1928 offered a large sum of money annually if the station would add to its 'Sign On' and 'Sign Off' that "the current time is -----courtesy of the Bulova Watch Company". Rev. Joyce declined the offer. It would be 65 years later before advertising made its debut on VOWR.

After 4 years of running the station by himself with some limited support, Rev. Joyce arranged for a Programming committee to take over the ongoing management and operation. While the radio station was owned by (what was now) Wesley United Church, the committee would consist of a cross section of individuals from other denominations. Within the next year the programming extended into Tuesday and Thursday evenings for a 1-hour live broadcast from the Newfoundland Hotel. This would consist of a talk from a special guest, some news from the daily newspapers, weather reports, some messages, and some live music. This regular remote broadcasting on Tuesdays and Thursdays lasted about 3 years.

While VOWR was a station in the country of Newfoundland in 1928, its place in Canadian radio history was transformed as a result of what happened to church-owned stations in Canada that year. It was the beginning of the end. At that time there were about 75 radio stations in Canada and several were owned by religious organizations. With very few Government regulations in a new, unfamiliar and loosely-controlled environment, some troublesome actors were operating on the margins of the new industry. While it might not be unusual to espouse extreme religious positions within the confines of a church building, it was certainly unusual to listen to it on the public airwaves. In some places radio became a bully pulpit to lambast other religious groups. The reaction from most listeners was shock and dismay. In response to numerous complaints, the Federal Government acted quickly.

One of its immediate decisions was to deny any future licenses to church-based groups, and it refused to renew any current broadcast licenses held by religious organizations. It also set up a Commission to study the new industry and establish further control of the public airwaves. As of 1932 not a single radio station owned by a religious organization was operating in Canada. It would be 60 years before the Federal Government changed its position.

The Wesley station was not part of Canada, and was not affected. For six decades, two church-run radio stations in Newfoundland, VOWR and VOAR (which is owned by the Seventh Day Adventist Church and began broadcasting in 1930) were the only church-run radio stations north of the US/Canada border.

1929

Raising funds to support his endeavors was a never-ending job and it was left to Rev. Joyce to be the chief fundraiser. Ever the salesman, he spoke to business groups and media representatives in Toronto and Montreal, appeared on radio stations in Western Canada and was guest speaker at numerous events selling the country on a unique Newfoundland radio station that was run by volunteers. In a May 1929 visit he was seeking help to pay for a new pipe organ in the church. He said the current one was 47 years old and entirely unsuitable for broadcasting. As the local newspaper article put it, "For \$8,000 Mr. Joyce can buy an organ suitable for broadcasting programs during the long and, in Newfoundland, lonely summer months".

On May 20, 1929 there was a front-page story in the Daily News titled The Advantages of Radio.

People in Wesleyville were concerned about a local schooner The Mack Lake that was caught out in a raging storm. They were unaware that the schooner had been safely towed to Port Union by another ship. That news reached St. John's but there was no way of communicating it to Wesleyville because the telegraph office was closed. As the newspaper article put it, "Rev. Joyce announced the good tidings both at the beginning and the end of his Sunday service at Wesley Church".

In November 1929 a major earthquake tore through the Grand Banks resulting in a powerful tidal wave that lashed the Burin Peninsula. 27 people drowned. Hundreds were left homeless and destitute after the tsunami washed houses into the sea.

Radio station 8WMC stayed "on air" day and night maintaining the only communication with the stricken area. The station put out an appeal for food, clothing and shelter. According to an Evening Telegram article, "Lady Middleton, wife of the Governor, made a wonderful appeal which went out on the airwaves to the public with results beyond all expectation. She personally expressed her sincere thanks to 8WMC radio for their assistance on the tragic occasion".

The 1930s

1930

In April Rev. Joyce returned from meetings in Western Canada and shocked his congregation with the news that he was leaving Wesley Church. Shortly after, he became the new United Church minister in Merrickville, Ontario. After three years in Merrickville, he moved to Verdun, Quebec where he remained until his retirement in 1957.

A letter dated Nov 5, 1930 arrived at the station from a gentleman in Corner Brook inquiring as to whether 8WMC Radio might be interested in selling him their old 100-watt transmitter. He wanted to start his own radio station on the west coast of Newfoundland. The station declined the invitation saying it wanted to keep the transmitter as a back-up. The gentleman's name was J. R. Smallwood.

1931

March 15, 1931 was the date of the SS Viking disaster. The tragedy occurred among the ice fields off the Horse Islands on Nfld's northeast coast. At the time a film crew was onboard shooting scenes for a film 'The Nfld. Seal Hunt'. There was an explosion and fire aboard the ship when its supply of dynamite blew up killing 28 men including the film's producer. Many others were injured. Dynamite was often taken aboard ships for use should the vessels become stuck in ice. The facilities of 8WMC were used throughout the night broadcasting information and releasing names of survivors. An article in the Evening Telegram a week later said: "The service of the station to the whole country of Newfoundland is beyond dispute".

1932

Radio station 8WMC had a new name. The 1927 regulations governing the International Call Letters for radio broadcasting came into effect for radio station 8WMC. It would now be known as VOWR.

The unrelenting hardship of the Great Depression was well underway by January 1932, and it was during one of VOWR's twice-a-week live broadcasts from the Newfoundland Hotel that Mayor Charles Howlett made a passionate appeal for aid for the large numbers of destitute in the city. It was a story of winter cold, hunger, and misery. The mayor described in graphic details the condition of a family he had visited that day. A widower out of work and with six children, the youngest of whom was three, and whose mother had died from malnutrition. Everyone sleeping in one room, a stove lashed together with wire but without coal or wood. Water dripping from a leaky roof and rags stuffed into broken windows to keep out the cold. Two hollow-eyed emaciated children lying on a couch and two small boys hugging each other in a tumbledown cot trying to stay warm. A few crusts of bread left by neighbors who were not much better off. Mayor Howlett ended his gripping address urging everyone to help, and added, "tonight's broadcast may be made memorable by your donating now".

1933

On Feb 6th VOWR received a message through the Newfoundland Postal Telegraphs. It said: Reception Service Last Night Best for Year. Very Loud and Clear. Signed by S. W. Brazill. Battle Harbour on the coast of Labrador.

1934

In terms of radio in Newfoundland and Labrador, VOWR was the only local radio station for the first half dozen years of its existence. But by the early 1930s other regular broadcasters were coming on stream. There was the other church-run radio outlet VOAR which started in 1930. And then, after some closures and some mergers by 1934 the Commission of Government had ownership of VONF, which became the forerunner of the CBC. A commercial license was issued to VOCM in 1936. These stations made available a wide range of programming throughout the week.

A listener from Winterton, Trinity Bay shared his thoughts on VOWR programming in this letter of July 1934.

Dear Sir:

Your radio broadcast of yesterday was a great improvement on previous efforts, both morning and night. I may say in reference to the night, for the first time the pedal notes of the organ came in clear and distinct, also the tone of the organ was the same as heard in the church. In my opinion, it's the first time your broadcast did justice to your organ. In fact, the whole service came in excellent.

Yours truly,

E. J. Sampson

The 1940s

1940

The 1924 ecumenical story of erecting the wooden structure in the church yard was again noted in the minutes of a VOWR Board meeting on Sept 3, 1940. The wooden masts that were built to hold that initial antenna needed to be replaced. Crane Limited was paid \$612.74 for steel piping for erection of new towers. In the minutes of proceedings at the Board meeting there's a note attached which said, "Original wooden masts (2) each 60 feet long were given by a Roman Catholic and an Anglican supporter".

1944

From the very beginning Rev. Joyce made it a policy that the station would be used to transmit messages for people in isolated areas. They would be read on Sunday mornings and/or evenings before and/or after the regular church service broadcasts. Here's a letter from Jan 1, 1944.

Dear Sir:

Would you send the following message for me at your Sunday morning service on January 16th and if it costs anything let me know and I will forward the money for it. This is the message. Anyone listening in at Trap Cove, Battle Harbour Labrador please inform Mrs. John Rumboldt that her brother Ernest's wife died on December 20th. The rest of the family are well.

Signed her brother Ernest Sutton Victoria via Carbonear

1948

After 20 years, Rev. Joyce's 500-watt transmitter reached the end of its lifespan. The station purchased a 1000-watt transmitter from the Marconi Company at a cost of \$7,389.28. Because of the increased power, the new transmitter had to be installed outside city limits to a new site near the airport on Torbay Road. However, because the station was licensed for a power output of only 500 watts, the output of the new transmitter had to be cut by half. It was installed in 1948. Rev. Joyce came back for the official launch. 700 tickets were sold for the event. Admission was 50 cents.

1949

Twenty years after church-run radio stations had been shut down by the Government of Canada, and any new applications from religious groups were disallowed, the Dominion of Newfoundland was about to become part of the very country that shunned church-run radio. Wesley United Church was understandably concerned about the future of its radio station. No one knew what would happen as of April 1st. The VOWR Board went so far as to make an application to operate under a different name, "The Pioneer Broadcasting Association of Newfoundland" (even though it would be associated with Wesley Church). An application was made in February 1949 to the Federal agency responsible for broadcasting. April 1st came and went, no decision had been made, and VOWR remained on the air. That application was considered at a regulatory meeting in July. It was denied.

Subsequent to that rejection, an approach was made to the new Premier, J. R. Smallwood, to meet with the chairperson of the Federal regulatory agency on VOWR's behalf. And he did. Nothing official came from that encounter but the chairperson of the regulatory Board did indicate to Premier Smallwood that the station should not have taken the course of action it did with its application under a new name, but better that it had simply carried on as usual.

The 1950s

1950

Nearly 18 months after Newfoundland became part of Canada, the station's confused state of licensing was settled. On September 11, 1950 VOWR was licensed by the Canadian regulatory agency. It and VOAR became the only church-owned radio stations in Canada. One can only imagine the quandary of the Federal Government's regulator in deciding whether it should grant a license to VOWR while continuing to shut out the rest of the religious organizations in the country.

And one can only speculate about what effect, if any, Premier Smallwood might have had in the positive decision for VOWR. He did have an extensive background as a radio commentator in Newfoundland for many years, and his use of the medium of radio during the National Convention had a major effect on his winning the battle for Confederation. Then, there was the fact that Mr. Smallwood, ever the politician, was more than well aware of the place that religion held in Newfoundland affairs. And being a former Methodist himself, it's hard to imagine the station having chosen a better ally than the Premier. And if that were not enough, anyone familiar with his command of the English language can only imagine him in full Smallwoodian rhetorical flourish articulating his case before the Chair of the regulatory authority. After all, it was Mr. Smallwood who said, "Radio was invented by God, especially for Newfoundland. And then, having done it for Newfoundland, graciously allowed it to be used in other parts of the world."

If it was the Premier's intervention that resulted in the positive outcome, it can safely be assumed that he didn't hold a grudge because of the station's decision to deny him their old 100-watt transmitter 20 years earlier.

It would take another 43 years, not until 1993, before the CRTC rescinded its policy and permitted applications from church-run groups in Canada. And even then, the agency considered church-run-radio as "controversial" and a "matter of public concern". The change was made after considerable lobbying by the churches, and the added pressure that came with Canada's new Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

1952

Program transmission logs from January 1952 indicate that VOWR regular broadcasts were still on Sunday only. In the morning for 2 hours starting at 10:15, and the evening from 5 to 8:30. However, as has been noted earlier, there were irregular broadcasts when the station was on-air for various special events and times of crisis. One such event was the address by Winston Churchill on Feb 7th, 1952. The British Prime Minister was eulogizing the late King George VI who had died the previous day, and welcoming his replacement, the 26-year-old Queen Elizabeth II. VOWR made arrangements with the CBC to transmit their feed of Mr. Churchill's address.

1954

VOWR relocated its transmitter/tower site to Mt. Scio Road and after receiving approval for a power increase, it broadcast at full capacity of 1,000 watts. Shortly after, the station received a letter from a listener in England to say VOWR was clearly received.

Later that year Rev. Joyce returned to St. John's for a week-long celebration of the station's 30th anniversary. In an address at the official dinner, he had an answer for the generous support that made it possible for the station to operate for its first 30 years. He said, "Financial support came from people of all religious denominations. I think the amazing response was due to the broad-minded policy of making the station an ambassador of goodwill, rising above denominational barriers as much as possible in using it for the common good. It became an instrument to exemplify the spirit of the Christian religion".

1956

In one of its issues of Onward, a periodical published by the United Church of Canada, it made this reference to VOWR.

"In a marketplace where some commercial radio stations peddle outrage and shock to pull in listeners, VOWR exudes civility and polite charm."

1957

In 1957 the Sunday transmission extended into the evening. It started at 5 o'clock and ended at 10. The morning transmission was from 10AM to 1PM. There is evidence that about this time, the station was experimenting with adding other limited programming on Thursday evenings.

1958

While competition is inevitable among radio stations, there are numerous examples of co-operation with VOWR. In March 1958 CBC Radio lost its transmitting capability during a sleet storm in St. John's; as did Radio station VOXM. But 2 VOXM personnel did help VOWR stay on the air. They used rifle shots to break up ice on the antenna. CBC approached VOWR for the use of its facility until a replacement could be installed, and the station agreed. It would last 3 weeks. The proviso was that VOWR have 90 minutes each Sunday morning for its church services, and 1 hour each Thursday for a spiritual program of hymns.

1959

On March 24, 1959, the VOWR world was shocked to hear of the passing of Rev. Joseph Joyce. He died in Washington, North Carolina where he had retired 2 years earlier. Rev. Joyce was 69.

Seven months after his death the new radio studio was officially opened by Rev. Joyce's son, Douglas. He unveiled a plaque which is affixed to the studio entrance door. Reminiscing back to that first church service on VOWR Radio, Douglas Joyce talked about how his mother often spoke of that first radio broadcast in 1924. (He, obviously, couldn't remember much about it; he was only 2.) He said his mother spoke of it fondly. One of her most vivid memories was how well Mrs. Wallace Goobie could sing.

The 1960s

1960

One-off programming for specific occasions and events was not uncommon in VOWR's first 25 years on the air. But regularly scheduled programs could be expected only on Sundays. October 1960 marked a change with the addition of regular programming on Thursday evenings. It began a gradual expansion over the next 25 years to include programming each day of the week and a gradual extension of the daily broadcasting hours.

1968

VOWR made application to the CRTC for an FM license. In November the application was turned down. The reason for its rejection was that the CRTC was not issuing any licenses to church-owned radio stations. It was obvious that the regulatory agency had bent the rules in 1950 to make an exception for VOWR's AM license, likely due to its on-air longevity before becoming part of Canada. However, they were not prepared to enlarge the envelope by issuing an FM license while still rejecting all applications from similar religious organizations throughout the country.

The 1970s

1974

July 1974 marked VOWR's 50th anniversary. The Provincial Government commissioned Hans Melis, sculptor at the Provincial Museum and Historic Arts, to prepare a plaster mold of a bust of Rev. Joyce. The mold was sent to Holland for bronze casting. 2 years later, in October '76, at a Sunday morning service at Wesley Church, Mrs. Susan Joyce officially unveiled the bronze bust of her husband. It is now located in the VOWR archives.

1975

In July the CRTC approved VOWR's application for a power increase to 5,000 watts. On December 7th the station's new 10,000-watt transmitter began broadcasting with a reduced output of 5,000 watts to conform to its license. It wouldn't broadcast to its full capacity of 10,000 watts until 1987.

In December 1975 VOWR began airing a short spiritual program called Meditation each weekday morning at 9 o'clock. It was at the suggestion of

Wesley United Church's new minister Rev. Robert Mills. Rev. Mills was Meditation's first participant.

1979

In January 1979 the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in St. John's published an article about VOWR in its monthly journal, The Monitor. It mentioned that announcers on the station were from all religious backgrounds, and went on to say the vision of its Board and its clergy is an example to all who profess a spirit of ecumenism. It said, "In an age where ecumenism is preached and advocated and where so much theoretical idealism is sought, VOWR stands out as a practical example of what can be done, what is being done, without fanfare, based on good will and a spirit of mutual respect".

In March of 1979 a major appeal was launched to raise \$55,000 for the purchase and installation of the new transmitter. The project was promoted and supported by United, Anglican, and Roman Catholic churches. It was so symbolic of the ecumenical relationship that Rev. Joyce struck a half century earlier when a Methodist, an Anglican and a Catholic came together and erected the first tower in the church yard. The appeal for funds was successful.

The 1980s

1982

In January a heavy sleet storm crashed VOWR's 210-foot antenna. Within 3 months it was replaced thanks to VOWR supporters who donated \$40,585.

1984

Two years later, in April 1984, VOWR's 2 AM towers collapsed during a heavy sleet storm. VOWR allowed VOWR the use of its transmitter and tower until their replacement arrived and was installed. The exception was that VOWR have access for its Good Friday service and its Easter Sunday service. The radio stations have had a healthy working relationship through the years with VOWR taking the lead in raising funds to help VOWR when its transmitter was knocked out during a lightning storm in 2021.

Many VOWR listeners write to express their appreciation for the programs they hear. Sometimes they share a personal story. This one was especially poignant. On August 16, 1984 a lady wrote to say she listened to 8WMC the first year it went on the air.

Dear Sir,

Please accept the enclosed donation as a token of my appreciation for the many years of enjoyable radio-listening I have received from VOWR.

One of the happy memories I recall of my childhood is listening to your station with earphones when I was in the United Church orphanage in St. John's 60 years ago.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express appreciation to all the volunteers who help keep the station going.

Dinah Mackey

Cluney's Road, Kelligrews

The 1990s

1990

VOWR received a historical donation from one of its listeners. Mrs. Mildred Crotty donated the headphones and crystal set that were used by her family during the initial years of VOWR when regular radio receivers were financially out of reach for many people.

1992

Everett Hudson, a tireless volunteer, took a break from VOWR but only because he ended up in hospital with pneumonia. Everett spent untold hours at the station where he had been volunteering since 1947. Upon recovery, he was advised to cut back his radio involvement. Everett was not only a very active member in senior roles on the Radio Board, but also acted in the challenging job of Program Director for nearly 40 years. In 1993, a year after his hospitalization, he was honored as a Life Member of the VOWR Radio Board in appreciation for his contributions to the station. Everett passed away in 2001.

1994

For the first time since it went on-air 70 years earlier, VOWR began selling advertising on the station in a limited form. Until now its source of income was from jumble sales, radio auctions, the sale of turkey teas, cash donations from the public, and bequests left to VOWR after someone's death.

1997

May 1997 brought another significant development in the life of VOWR. In its 73rd year the station began broadcasting 24 hours a day.

The New Millennium

2002

Five years after it began a round-the-clock operation, VOWR moved into a realm which was far beyond the vision and imagination of Rev. Joyce when he began his first experiment of broadcasting to nearby homes through telephone lines. VOWR went digital and could now be heard around the world. Listeners could tune in through the internet on VOWR.org. The station began receiving appreciative emails from listeners in countries like Peru, New Zealand, and Kazakhstan. An example:

“Of the hundreds of thousands of radio stations, VOWR is one of my favorites. Have shared with my friends on social media.”

Mike Liew.....Singapore

2015

Since the first wooden poles were supplied free of charge and volunteers helped install them in the church yard to hold the station's first antenna, free labor has been a crucial part of VOWR's existence. 91 years later, the station's staff was recognized by the Newfoundland and Labrador Volunteer Hall of Fame. One of its volunteers that year was 91-year-old Ladd Bursey. Ladd was 7 months old when Rev. Joyce started his station.

2021

In late August, 2021 VOWR's transmitter was destroyed in a lightning storm which knocked out its ability to air programming on AM Radio. For over a

month the station's programming was available only on the online digital network. The cost of replacing the transmitter was in excess of one hundred thousand dollars which was partly covered by insurance and by the generosity of its always supportive loyal listeners.

2022

The volunteer with the most longevity at VOWR in its first 100 years is Henry Pike. He was there for 62 years. Henry was introduced to the station through a young lady he wanted to date. He finally met her in the VOWR parking lot one Sunday evening after church. They were married shortly thereafter. Her name was Frances Martin. Henry and Frances volunteered at the station for the entire forty-eight years of their marriage. She was the on-air announcer and Henry was the technician for her show. Frances passed away in 2007 and that's when Henry started announcing; on the very show that his wife had hosted. VOWR is where Henry spent his last morning introducing his music during his regular shift from 9:00AM to 1:00PM. He died peacefully later that day. He was 93.

2023

It's a hard heart that isn't touched by some of the stories surrounding the mail received at VOWR. In its 99th year, a letter arrived from a gentleman in Texas. He wasn't even a VOWR listener. He had been online looking for radio stations in St. John's. He picked VOWR. The man was searching for a long-lost girlfriend. They had dated when he was in the military and stationed in St. John's in the 1950s. He was now widowed. He wondered if someone at VOWR might be able to help locate his former girlfriend. Station Manager Ron LeDrew read the letter which contained the limited information that her maiden name was Betty Connolly and she had lived on Shea Heights.

Luckily, Ron knew that many people from Shea Heights worked as stevedores at the St. John's dockyard in the 1950s, so he contacted a friend who now worked at Oceanex. His friend made some phone calls and set in motion a chain of events through various people that resulted in a reunion in St. John's in the summer of 2023. 86-year-old Bob Hale flew to St. John's and met 84-year-old Betty Connolly (now Betty Bishop) for the first time in 66 years. He travelled with his 2 nieces and they were met at the airport by Betty, her 2 sisters, and 2 other members of the family.

When he left in the late 'fifties' he had wanted to take her back to Texas but her parents wouldn't allow it. He was 20 at the time; she was 18. They lost contact and married other people. Each was now widowed. They spent a week together visiting tourist sites and reminiscing about the world they left behind. And they paid a visit to VOWR. Bob says he will be forever indebted to the station for such a blessing; a blessing that happened on the eve of the first 100 years of VOWR Radio. Of the several radio stations in St. John's to choose from, Bob was asked why he sent his letter to VOWR. He said, "because it was listed as a Christian station".

One century ago, Rev. Joseph Joyce marched into St. John's with not only a vision, but a firm commitment that his church-run radio station would be shared with all religious denominations. As he put it at the time, "it is meant to bring people together". It's unlikely he had this type of reunion in mind when he made that statement a hundred years earlier, but bring them together, it did. Bob Hale is a Baptist. Betty Bishop is a Roman Catholic. Ron LeDrew, the person who engineered the get-together, was baptized in the United Church and married a Catholic.

Ecumenism, indeed!

THE REVEREND WOULD BE PLEASED

