



Radio station CJBQ has become a well recognized part of Belleville's heritage.
Photo courtesy CJBQ

A breath of fresh air

CJBQ Radio trusted voice of the region

By Shelley Wildgen

**'IT'S NOT TRUE I HAD NOTHING ON.
I HAD THE RADIO ON.'**

-MARILYN MONROE

And so it goes. Since the early 1920's, radio has woven a continuous thread into the fabric of our lives with music, information, nostalgic rumbings, and in the case of Ms. Monroe - a blanket of imagery.

Often referred to as 'theatre of the mind', radio toes that fine line between passive techno consumption and the brain calisthenics of reading. From the 'Fireside Chats' of Franklin D. Roosevelt to the launch of rock and roll, radio rides the tide of cultural awareness, rarely missing a beat.

Here in Hastings County, it all started in Belleville at a 250 watt AM radio station.

On August 12, 1946, CJBQ erupted onto the airwaves with 25-year-old general manager Bill Stovin at the helm. Managing a staff of no more than 20, the crew announced/op-

erated, pulled music, ripped news from the teleprinter, even ad-libbed children's stories.

Stovin remembers sitting in his office on Victoria Avenue.

"I'm reminded of the ire of one ladieswear merchant I had to face who was extremely unhappy with one of our announcers giving weather forecast details and suggesting that people not venture out that day. The window in my office overlooked a brief alleyway to the rear of The Belmont restaurant where the garbage cans rested with the swill waiting for a farmer to pick it up for his pigs. The aroma was a bit overpowering."

The NBC Thesaurus transcription service provided music and programming on LPs with accompanying scripts. Horatio Hornblower starring Gregory Peck was a favourite.

Bill Arnold was Program Director, Jack Devine held the title of Sports Director. Sales Manager was Tommy Wilkinson. Hamie McDonald became his sales staff and Jack "Bucky" Buchanan, the Engineer. All were RCAF veterans.

But not every new hire was airborne.

Bill Boyle, ex Royal Canadian Navy took up duties as an operator, and Phil Flagler, another Navy man arrived just a little later.



Phil Flagler joined CJBQ early on and was a graduate of the Lorne Greene Academy of Radio Arts. But he says a lot of the education came on the job.

Photo courtesy CJBQ



Lee Jourard came on board in the 1950s as a production manager and stuck around.

Photo courtesy CJBQ



Marg Farrell (standing) and Margo Hall confer with Phil Flagler. In the early days of the station roles for women were limited.

Photo courtesy CJBQ

Arnold and Flagler were grads from the highly respected Lorne Greene Academy of Radio Arts.

“We were trained to talk well,” Flagler explains, “but the business surrounding the talk, that was different. Had to learn that once the job was landed.”

By the 1950’s, Scott Hannah was program director and Lee Jourard had joined the team as production director. When asked to define his role and announcing shift, Lee stated that there was no “shift.”

“We did it all. Everything was a production. Starting at six in the morning till five in the afternoon, we put it all together LIVE. From the Party Line and Trading Post, which was chit chat and the selling of household items, to Jack McCaughen and the Trent Valley Ramblers performing in the Trianon Ballroom, to the Commodores at the Belleville Fairgrounds’ Club Commodore. We were there, putting it all on air.”

“We were broadcasters,” Jourard says with a smile. “That was it. We worked all day.”

Somewhere along the line, news reporter Harry Mulhall nestled into the red leather couch at CJBQ’s Victoria Avenue location. Long since passed away, Mulhall still defines the spirit of old school radio. Boasting a charming Irish brogue, shaggy black hair, and an uncontainable twinkle, his name is never mentioned without a smile.

Always working far too late, Mulhall sometimes slept at work, on Stovin’s couch. His mop of black hair would pop up at the first sound of a key in the door.

From day one, CJBQ has been owned by the Morton family, who bought out two minority shareholders very early on. The station has been owned solely by the family ever since. Good business instincts, along with the wisdom to hire some amazing talents have helped the Mortons secure the continuing success of “CJBQ - 800 on your AM dial.”

Perhaps you were raised by Quinte’s original morning man, Russ Hawkshawe, or you took to Tom



This 1961 flyer celebrates 15 years of CJBQ. While some of the names moved on a number couldn’t pull themselves away from the Quinte region.

Photo courtesy CJBQ

Hookings, who was “Up With The Sun” and never failed to deliver the best of the double entendres, once even broadcasting live while milking a cow. Maybe you greeted your day with the big city tones of Peter Thompson, who spent some valuable core career years as ‘Red Knight’ at CFTR in Toronto. If you’ve been a BQ listener since the mid-eighties, you’ve been enjoying a.m. laughs with mighty Matt Mitchell in the morning. Whoever led the way, you’re not likely to forget the radio announcers and their music, nudging you through the early part of your days, year after year.

Flagler believes, “It’s not the music that matters; it’s what happens between the songs.”

Who could forget the long running open-line talk show host Quinte loved to hate – ‘Why Not Call’s’ Milt Johnston? For almost 30 years Johnston covered a myriad of topics ranging from farmers’ woes to federal election candidates -sometimes with an acerbic wit, but often with stone cold silence. If Milt was bored by your call, then you were no more. But despite his cool manner, Milt’s ratings grew, as did the unshakeable popularity of CJBQ.

And say what you will about the moody man with the mike, he managed to land a most impressive guest in the early seventies - then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. The Bridge Street radio station was bustling with local folk, all craning their necks to get a better look at the glamorous politico. In his seersucker suit, and everpresent lapel rose, the PM glided into Milt’s studio with smiles and handshakes for all.

Johnston left the radio station in the nineties and was last seen shuffling along a tropical beach. It’s been rumoured that he was grinning.

In contrast to the mercurial temperament of Johnston, many decades were guided by the steady and affable Flagler. He took a turn as program director, ran the sales department, wrote award-winning ads, and was one of the most recognized voices on BQ, heard daily on the noon hour Farm Report as well as on oodles of commercials.

You may think that such a likeable guy wouldn’t be bothered with surly Milt, but that wasn’t true. The duo could be seen every lunch hour, sharing bologna sandwiches and a newspaper in Milt’s soundproof studio. They are still friends today.

That’s the thing about radio in general. Personalities and friendships that wouldn’t thrive in other daily grinds often flourish within the unconventional rhythms of a radio station.



Together again (clockwise from top left): Peter Thompson, John Ferguson, Phil Flagler and Lee Jourard. Photo courtesy CJBQ

(Below) A memento of the grand opening, suitable for the times.
Photo courtesy CJBQ



Virginia and Bill Morton now run the station their great grandfather founded over 60 years ago. Selling to a larger broadcasting company is not in the immediate plans.
Photo courtesy CJBQ

As with many industries, the early years were arguably the best according to those who were there.

By the late fifties, Stovin left for greener Saskatchewan pastures and Frank Murray became general manager. Murray's vast sales experience included a knack for schmoozing, very elegantly! He liked his people to be professional, and they were – Bill McKay and Al Hall on air, Ted Snider in Trenton, sales mavericks Dave Sovereign and Bob Rowbotham in both Belleville and Trenton.

No women.

In the sixties, Murray did not like women to wear pantsuits and he didn't fancy them in sales.



The sixties and seventies brought many changes to radio. What started as a big contraption in the living room providing family entertainment was now music driven and moveable – the Beatles, Elvis Presley and the advent of the transistor radio. The medium now shimmed, shook and went to the beach! CJBQ needed a rock 'n roll deejay, and so it got one. Dave Charles shot out of high school and took on the 'British Invasion!' His knowledge of rock 'n roll

charged through the airwaves with excitement and yes, sex appeal. This was a new genre for the staid radio station and it somersaulted through all the changes.

Charles got the kids listening, but what about the country and western fans? They were there long before the Beatles grew bangs and darn it, they were loyal. So Ryerson grad, sloooooow talkin', homespun Dick Lovering saddled up, came to Quinte and carved a notch in the Country audience, hosting his radio show by day and Stirling's live Trent Valley Country Jamboree on Saturday nights. Eventually, Lovering felt the call of the west and returned to his hometown of Winnipeg, but by the mid-eighties he too returned to Belleville to be best friends with his grandkids - and he is.

Then there were the old standards. Classical music expert Eugene Lange played album after album of classical favourites on Sunday afternoons, Art Watkins took on the world of Jazz late into the night, and if you listen carefully after a quiet snowfall, you just might hear Jimmy Corradi tickling the ivories from his grand piano in the back studio.



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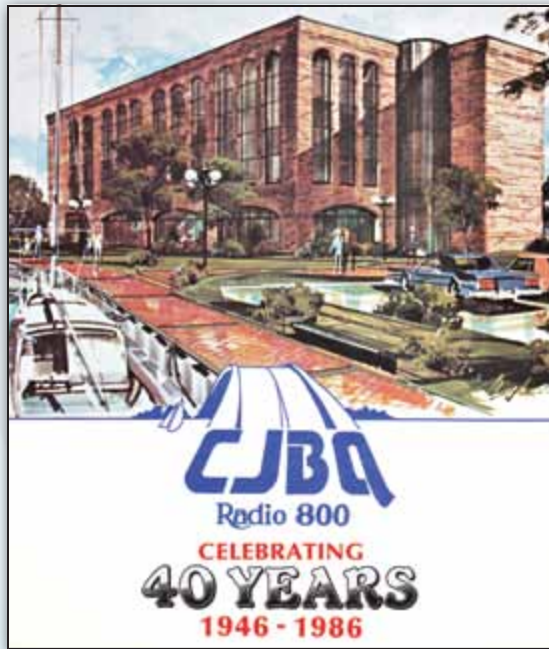
DODGE

FIVE STAR



Bill Stovin (shown with his wife Doreen) was just 25 years old when he became general manager of CJBQ upon its launch in the summer of 1946.

Photo courtesy CJBQ



A station poster from 1986. CJBQ owes much of its success to an ability to adapt to the times and keep abreast of listeners' tastes.

Photo courtesy CJBQ

Longhaired Jack Miller joined the staff in the early seventies, first as a daytime rock jock, later moving into sports, even spending some time with Global TV. Miller maintains his title as sports director at CJBQ today, as well as city Councilman.

The seventies is also the decade the station rolled out promotions like Pandemonium, whereby big buses delivered giant Pandas to long term advertisers. Why? Don't ask. It was huge and everyone wanted one.

Many BQers, like CBC's Roy Bonisteel, Hollywood producer/director Bill Davis, and CTV's Beverly Thomson cut their teeth at Quinte Broadcasting then moved on - although both gentlemen are residing again in the Quinte area. There are also a curious number of individuals who rode the waves and stayed at CJBQ. Despite the transient nature of the business, Quinte's mothership consistently held onto Flagler, Jourard, John Fer-

guson, Mary Thomas, Miller and ultimately the station's prodigal son, Peter Thompson.

Son of local photographer Lloyd Thompson, Peter started out at BQ after graduating from Ryerson, but soon headed for the 'Big Smoke' and beyond, Toronto and Windsor being his more notable stops. Not for long though.

Home, hearth and raising a happy family were more valuable and so Peter returned in the seventies, first as morning man then, after Mil's abrupt departure, he pulled up a chair and brought a new flavour to the open line show.

Gerry Fraiberg, Tom Gavey, Paul Laing, John Henderson and Lance Jeffrey also polished up the airwaves as the best in their field of news, sports and music respectively.

Ferguson started at CBC Ottawa then came to CJBQ, twice, the second time after working in Hamilton, Ontario and then Hamilton, Bermuda. Ferguson met everyone from the Queen

to the Pope, but as with Peter, he wanted family stability and Belleville was his best bet, so he returned to BQ as news director.

No one knows exactly how long Thomas has been steadfastly reporting the news, but let's just say she's attended all retirement parties, including her own, written books, taken assignments in war weary Bosnia, and still shows up for regular work.

With a current staff of 46, and a wattage of 10,000, CJBQ is now run by Bill Morton and his sister Ginny Morton. This is a family business.

Bill has been managing the day to day business of the station since 1984. Ginny manages the reception desk while her dachshund, Lily sits on her lap and greets the guests at 10 South Front Street, the third building to house the 64-year-old radio station, as well as its FM offspring, MIX 97 and ROCK 107.

CJBQ AM lives well with a full-on retro fifties show, starring Freddy Vette in the afternoons, Lorne Brooker hosting the open-line show, Jim Wright playing the hits of yesteryear and Mitchell kicking off every weekday. Miller continues to cover local hockey and the station is front and centre with all election coverage.

With AM radio stations becoming almost non-existent, and the recent passing of Bill and Ginny's dad, Myles Morton, grandson of founder W.H. Morton, the question of the station going on the auction block sometimes travels through the streets of Quinte.

"There may come a day when it makes business sense to sell to a larger company," Bill Morton says, "but at this time we don't see that day coming anytime soon."

If it ever happens, Harry Mulhall will no doubt sleep through the huge party from the big red couch in the sky, while the many former BQ broadcasters still walking among us will gather at downtown Belleville's Cozy Grill, hoist a coffee and celebrate having had a great run.

But it's not today.

It's seven minutes past nine at 800 CJBQ, on a pleasant Thursday morning in November, and you're on the air. ●

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