

Life in Canada

What was it like to live in Canada at the turn of the century? Changes were occurring in almost every aspect of life.

Horses

Horses played an important role in everyone's life. When a baby was born, a horse-drawn carriage brought the doctor to the house. At the end of a person's life, the undertaker's sleek black horses pulled the hearse to the cemetery. Farmers used horses to pull their ploughs and town dwellers kept them for transport. Every bakery, dairy, and coal company had to have horses to pull its delivery wagons.

Horse-drawn streetcars were still in use in many Canadian towns and cities. Montreal and Toronto, however, were beginning to make the switch to the electric railway. Horse-drawn fire engines racing through the streets were exciting to behold. A more common cause of excitement was a runaway horse that had to be stopped by a police officer or a brave passerby.

Wheels

By the turn of the century, the bicycle craze was sweeping Canada. One in every 12 persons owned "a wheel." Police found

the bicycle useful for patrolling city streets. Bicycles were cheaper to buy and operate than horses, which had to be fed and housed. For many city residents, a bicycle solved the problem of transit. People could now live farther from their place of work and get to their jobs more easily.

Yet bicycles were more than transportation, they were romance. Couples honeymooned on them. On summer Sundays the roads were dusty from cyclists heading into the countryside for picnics. Those willing to take up the sport found a new sense of freedom and mobility.

Automobiles

The automobile was just being introduced. Henry Ford had founded the Detroit Automobile Company in 1899, nine years after Daimler started his company in Germany. King Edward VII was an enthusiastic supporter of "horseless carriages" and helped to make them popular. In Ontario the first motorist was John Moodie of Hamilton, who imported a \$1000 Winton from the United States in 1898.

By 1908, an Oshawa carriage-maker, Sam McLaughlin, was producing automobiles in Canada. McLaughlin had signed a contract with the Buick Motor Company in the United States. McLaughlin built the body of the



A horse-drawn fire engine roars down a street in 1912.



Bicycles were used for transportation and romantic picnics in the country.

cars and Buick provided the engines. The Oshawa firm in 1908 produced only 200 automobiles, but it was the beginning of the mass production of cars in Canada.

Until the 1920s, the automobile was considered a rich person's toy. But with the development of the assembly line, the prices of cars dropped and moved to within the grasp of nearly everyone. Certainly no one at the turn of the century could predict the problems of accidents, parking, and congestion that the new invention would bring.

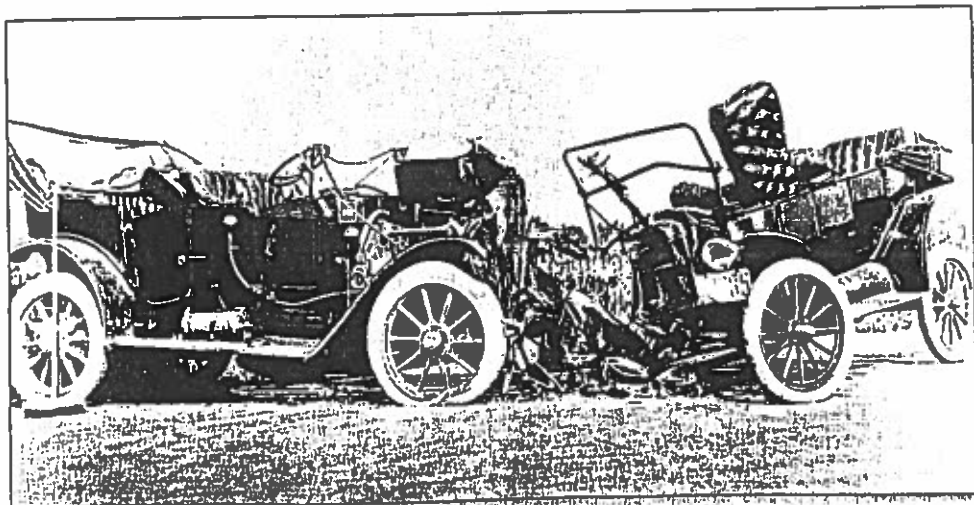
Flight

In 1903 the American brothers, Orville and Wilbur Wright, successfully flew the first

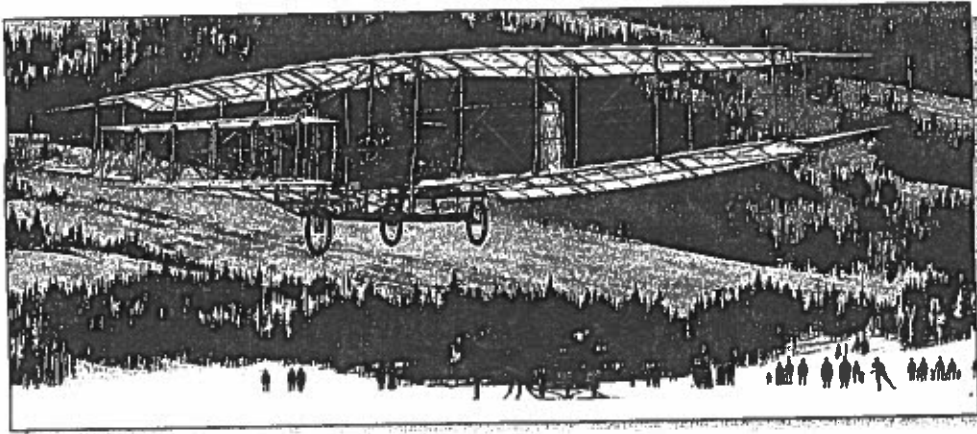
airplane. That flight, on the beach of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, lasted just 12 seconds. But the Wright brothers proved that a machine heavier than air could fly. The air age had begun.

Meanwhile in Canada, Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, also worked on the problem of flight. At Baddeck, Nova Scotia, he formed a group known as the **Aerial Experiment Association (AEA)**. In 1908

Casey Baldwin, a member of the AEA, flew a plane called the *Red Wing*. It travelled a distance of 97 m! By the summer of 1909, Douglas McCurdy was making flights of 32 km over the water at Baddeck in the *Silver Dart*. The *Silver Dart* was the finest and most easily flown aircraft of its day. McCurdy and Baldwin tried hard to convince the Canadian government of the military value of an air force. However, when the *Silver Dart* crash-landed during the flight trials, military officials rejected the idea of using airplanes in warfare. Thirty years later, the Canadian government asked McCurdy to become the director of government aircraft production during World War II.



A collision in Vancouver. Automobile traffic was getting heavier on city streets.



First flight of the Silver Dart at Baddeck, Nova Scotia, 1909.

Communications

Around the turn of the century, more people were getting telephones. Household needs could now be ordered by telephone and delivered to the home. Storekeepers hired youngsters with bicycles to deliver packages. Party lines, where more than one household shared a line, were common. All calls had to be channelled through the telephone exchange. Operators sitting at boards connected the callers. The telephone had an important social impact. It greatly improved communication and provided employment for women as operators.

In 1901, at Signal Hill in St. John's, Newfoundland, Guglielmo Marconi received the first radio signal sent across the Atlantic Ocean. The following year, with the backing of the Canadian government, Marconi built a wireless station at Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. From there, he set up official transatlantic wireless communication.

Entertainment

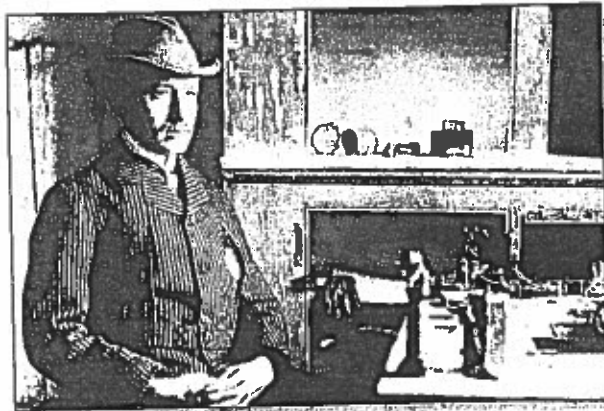
Twenty years elapsed before radio broadcasting became a means of mass entertainment. In the first years of the twentieth century, people were more dependent on home-made entertainment such as the piano,

banjo, and amateur theatrical productions. The phonograph or gramophone was coming in, but the thick, flat discs sounded scratchy and tinny. Not until the invention of electrical recording in the 1920s did the sound made from records improve.

The first movie theatres were opened in the early years of the century. The films were silent and the dialogue had to be shown on the screen as captions. A pianist often accompanied the film and provided important sound effects. It was 20 years before talking films arrived. Canada's own Mary Pickford made her first film in 1909, and Charlie Chaplin made his in 1911.

Lifestyles

In the early 1900s, changes were taking place in life around the home as well. Modern bathrooms and other household conveniences became more common.



Marconi waits for the first transatlantic radio message from England at Signal Hill in St. John's, Newfoundland.

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Lifestyles (continued)

Electric washing machines took some of the drudgery out of washday. Other gadgets included sewing machines, electric hearing aids, and vacuum cleaners.



Canadians who could afford them purchased these gadgets from Eaton's catalogue. The catalogue was considered by several generations to be the most popular book in Canada. Rural families in particular depended on the catalogue for everything from fence posts to fashionable hats. For Canadian children and adults, the Eaton's catalogue became a "wish book" that they could gaze at for hours