

WHAT HAPPENED TO ARCHIE'S MODEL-A

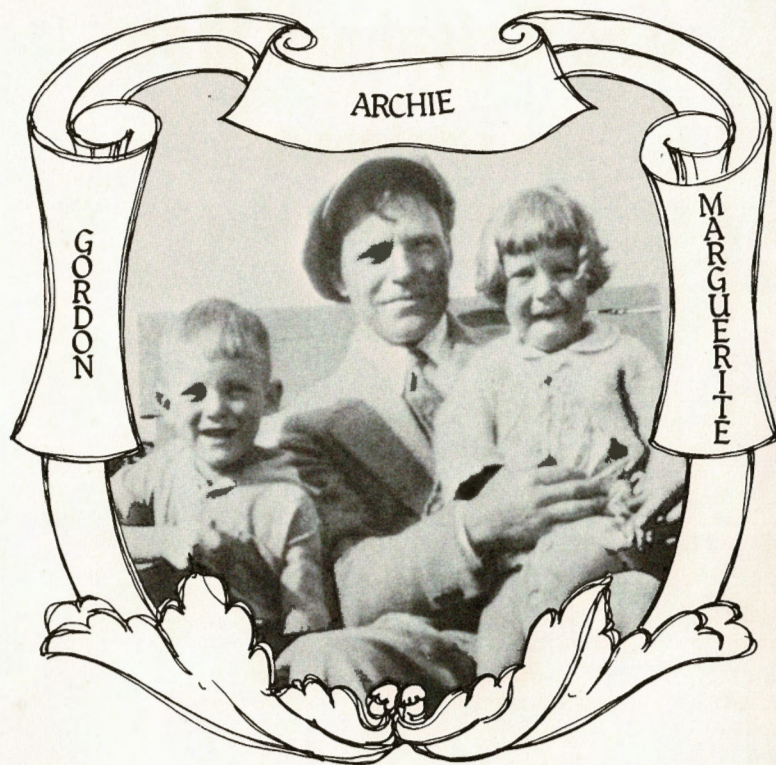
Archie laughed about it, although the joke was more on him than on Wilf Horrocks' sisters. When the car burned up they were not so much in the line of fire as in the line of water. It happened on a Friday evening when Wilf appeared at Archie's door asking for a ride to Hazel Bluff. Wilf worked for AGT in Edmonton but liked to go home to the farm on weekends. The Ford's engine began to clank and sputter as they bounced over the pioneer road in the darkness, and as they rolled into the farm yard and up beneath the kitchen windows the motor shut itself off. Wilf's two sisters came to the open window to watch and give advice as Archie probed for the trouble, and if Wilf hadn't decided to give Archie more light it would never have happened. Wilf held the lantern too close and the car erupted in flame. Wilf's brother Albert came rushing to the rescue but skill is required to aim a pail of water. Albert swung the bucket with amateur enthusiasm and the contents went over the top of the car, through the kitchen window and drenched the sisters.

Even with his car burning up Archie just couldn't help laughing.

The Telephone Man



...a story about Archie Hollingshead



This is a true story!

The storm is not imaginary. It's a composite of all the winter storms which challenged Archie and his fellow Telephone Men in the Alberta of fifty years ago.

Only one fact has been altered. Bill Craswell became agent at Perryvale in 1935, slightly past the time of the story, but we moved him up in time because of the important picture of his store which appears on Page 27.

The Telephone Man

a story about
Archie Hollingshead

Written for



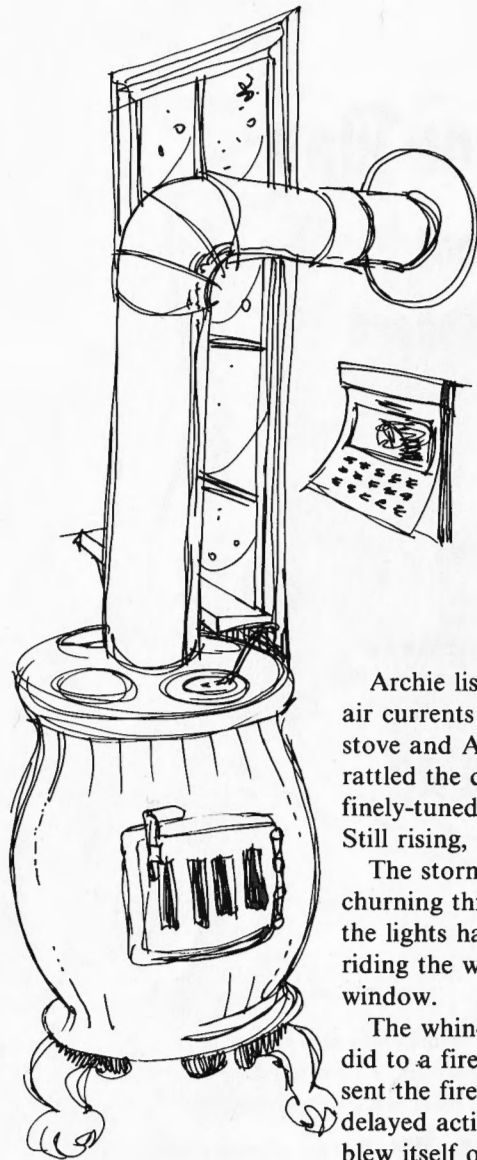
ALBERTA GOVERNMENT TELEPHONES

by

Tony Cashman

with

illustrations by
Vivian Chierfelder



Archie listened to the wind. Inside his workshop gentle air currents carried warmth and cheer from the pot-bellied stove and Archie didn't feel the wind, except when it rattled the chimney or tugged at the window. With his finely-tuned ear Archie made a note of the wind's pitch. Still rising, he thought.

The storm had come at noon, surging in from the west, churning thick woolen clouds which made the sky so dark the lights had been on all day. By midafternoon snow was riding the wind, blotting out half the view in Archie's window.

The whine of a storm came to Archie as the alarm bell did to a fireman. But there was a difference. The alarm sent the fireman into instant action; in Archie's case it was delayed action. He couldn't begin his work until the wind blew itself out. So he relaxed and smoked and joked, planning what he would do when the wind was still and he could step out into the wintered landscape to do his job.

Archie's job was with Alberta Government Telephones. He was known as a District Plant Inspector, and fifty years ago, the time of this story, a storm could make Archie's job the most important in the system.

In the telephone business, the **plant** is the physical part of the system, all the telephones, switchboards and lines which connect them. In his **district** the inspector had to maintain and repair the entire system, all of it, all by himself. There were only twenty-five District Plant Inspectors in Alberta. Archie lived in Westlock and his district was eight thousand square miles: 40 miles west to the Pembina River, 30 miles southeast to Legal, 80 miles north to Athabasca and Calling Lake, and east from there again to Lac La Biche.

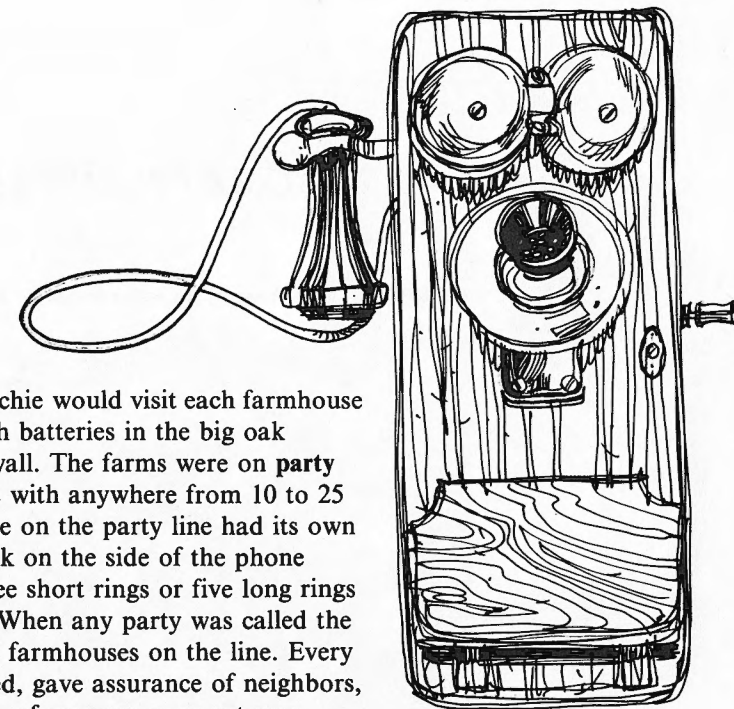
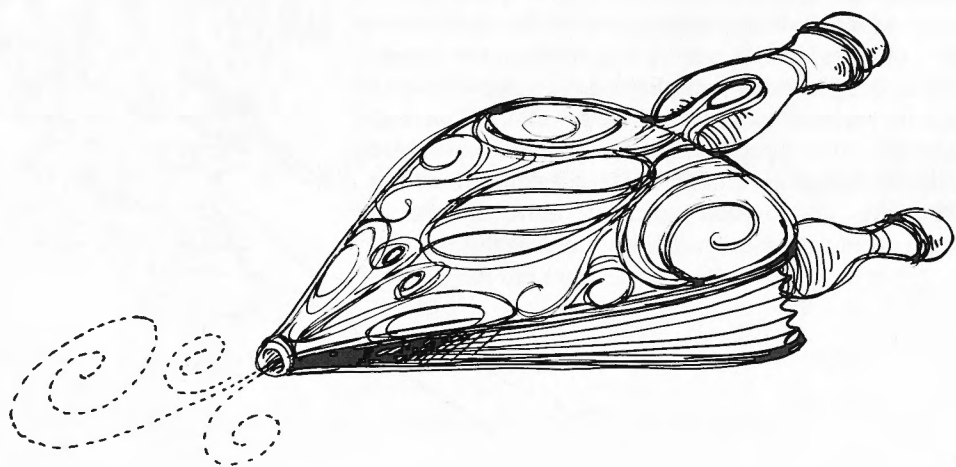
The wind that rattled Archie's workshop was shaking and worrying a network of wires — copper and iron strung on wooden poles — which the young province of Alberta had built to combat the isolation of pioneer life. Alberta's first elected assembly had pledged the credit of the new province to a program of making the telephone available to every farm. That network of wire, unrolling mile after mile down the raw, rutted trails, meant more than a telephone system. It meant that the new technology of electricity had been put to work on a scale wide as the province, and for the first time. Those were all telephone poles along the country roads. There'd be no power poles on the other side for years to come.

The telephone system stood tall and proud against the sky, but exposed to the elements, at the mercy of every wind that blew, and a splendid example was blowing now. Out in the turbulent dusk those unprotected wires were being bounced like skipping ropes, they were sawing at the glass insulators which held them to the poles, and the poles were being shaken to their roots. Archie didn't know yet where his repair work would take him but the snow was making his job more complicated. It was packing in drifts across the roads and trails he'd have to follow in the storm's wake. He cupped his eyes to the window to watch the hard little flakes go knifing past, and dance in eddies under the eave. This storm could never blow itself out in Alberta. It would need Saskatchewan and Manitoba as well.



Before the storm moved out of Archie's district it would tangle wires and snap others. It would blow down trees and some would fall across telephone lines. It would crack poles and bring them to the ground and bury them in snow. Wherever these things happened, isolation would return, and when the fury passed all would be depending on Archie: the farmers, the merchants, his bosses in Edmonton, the politicians who'd made the fiery speeches back in 1907 when Alberta legislature voted to build a provincial telephone system.

They knew Archie and knew he'd be coming. In any district there was no man better known than the telephone man. No one was up and down the roads more often, maintaining the lines, the switchboards and telephones in town and farm house. It was hard work, and as everyone knows, all work and no play is dull, so Archie brightened things by finding fun in the little jobs that made up his work. One of these jobs was cleaning switchboards, which became dusty and oily inside from the continual raising and dropping of the cords. The vacuum cleaner had been invented and would have been ideal for drawing out the dust but A.G.T. could not afford to buy Archie anything so grand. He had to employ the most primitive technology, a hand bellows, which blew the dust right through and out the front — into the faces of the operators. Archie laughed when the girls squealed in protest.



Once or twice a year Archie would visit each farmhouse in the district and put fresh batteries in the big oak telephone on the kitchen wall. The farms were on party lines, a single pair of wires with anywhere from 10 to 25 farms attached. Each house on the party line had its own coded ring. Using the crank on the side of the phone callers would send out three short rings or five long rings or two shorts and a long. When any party was called the phone would ring in all 25 farmhouses on the line. Every call, for whomever intended, gave assurance of neighbors, people within reach in case of emergency or extreme loneliness, and in the pre-telephone days extreme loneliness could bring an emergency devastating as any. Some people found entertainment eavesdropping on conversations and Archie knew who they were. Their batteries wore out quicker.

They didn't realize that listening drew as much current from the batteries as talking. And they couldn't understand why the sound was weak when the ring was still strong. That was because they were two different systems. Talk was transmitted by direct current (DC) from the batteries; the long and short rings travelled by alternating current (AC) which the caller generated turning the crank.

Something else besides eavesdropping could cause premature weakening of the batteries. In most farmhouses the only electric appliance was the telephone, but if there was a second it would be the latest invention for combatting isolation. That was the radio. Radios ran on batteries. Batteries out of the phone could help a farmer hear CFCN or CJCA or the big American stations in Denver and Salt Lake City.

SOME OF THE TELEPHONE OFFICES

CAMPSIE — farm home of his father-in-law Will Wallace.



VIMY — the general store. Note AGT sign on second post.



ARCHIE VISITED IN HIS TRAVELS

ROSSINGTON — William Tennant's store.



HEATON MOOR — home of Fred Carter.



Telephones and oil lamps went together in rural Alberta. Around Westlock the only electric lights were in the town itself and there only because one citizen understood the technology. Bob Wheatley was the citizen. Bob had a garage, and lighted the town with a diesel engine in the back of the shop. From six in the morning till midnight Bob's power plant went chug chug chug chug, generating alternating current. Bob played this end of his business by ear. If the number of chugs suddenly increased he knew somebody had put an extra load on the system. An electric iron drew 1,000 watts, equal to 17 60-watt light bulbs. Appliances were banned but people sneaked them on anyway. At 11:30 each evening Bob would blink the lights and make people scramble to finish their bridge games by midnight, when he pulled the switch and plunged the town into darkness. The townspeople knew Bob's engine couldn't run all the time and appreciated what it did for them. And he would always light up for Dr. Miller if a patient required an emergency operation in the dark hours. The charge was five dollars; which the doctor would send over in the morning — or on the first morning he happened to have so large a sum of money.

Close by the garage with its electrifying diesel engine stood Archie's workshop and the AGT telephone exchange. In the exchange were a few batteries producing direct current. Aided by the batteries Archie put in each farm telephone the Westlock exchange could reach farms



*Archie's
Wedding
Day*

many miles away. But Bob's power plant could not transmit current beyond the town. The telephone system, ambitious and difficult to maintain though it was, ran on a fraction of the cost required to transmit alternating current over the same distance.

In his telephone travels Archie had got to meet almost everyone in the district; he'd even got to know his wife in the performance of his duty. Only a few weeks after taking over his job he received a complaint of trouble in the region of sharp hills and tall trees near Campsie. He found that some of the tall timber had fallen across the line. By the time he'd played lumberjack and restored service the sun was sinking. Travelling telephone men soon learned the best farm houses to be near at meal times. Archie had been tipped that Will Wallace, the telephone agent at Campsie, set a fine table so he urged his car over the so-called road and just happened to arrive at suppertime. He was made welcome by all the family including Will's daughter Helen. "Nelly Wallace awakened in me a distaste for further bachelorhood," wrote Archie. Mrs. Hollingshead was at home now, preparing the telephone man's favorite supper. She knew Archie might not be home for another for many days.

The wind paused for a moment, just long enough to shake the workshop and then race on into the darkness. "Sneaky, aren't you?" Archie chuckled. He thought he'd better push his head out into the blast and check the temperature. Advancing to the door he took the latch in a firm grip and pushed — just enough to read the thermometer. He liked what he read. The mercury was dropping.

Now it might seem strange that Archie could welcome colder air when he already had wind and snow to contend with, but he had a good reason. The mercury had stood at 31 degrees fahrenheit at noon; now it was down to a reassuring 16. It guaranteed dry snow, which could hit the wires but couldn't grab a perch like wet snow or sleet. The worst damage occurred with temperatures around the freezing mark. Even in weather clear and calm, moist air could coat the wires with a weight of frost that would weaken transmission or bring the wires down. Archie pulled the door tight, happy that there would be no frost on the wires.



Archie had written a poem about that — see the facing page — and it was through his poetry that he'd become the best-known "district" man in Alberta. He did the same work as others but he could find words to express what others could only feel. His poems were simple and sincere like Archie himself. They appeared in the AGT magazine and were reprinted in the newspapers of other telephone companies. He wrote somewhat in the style of Robert W. Service, who was able to put in words what many people felt but could not express about the Yukon gold rush. Archie was a friendly fellow who loved company but he could also enjoy the companionship of his own thoughts in the long hours when he had to travel alone. His poems took form in those solitary hours.

But now a skreek of hinges and stamp of feet informed Archie that he was about to have visitors. "Hi Archie!" "Looks like a big one eh?"

Tumbling out of the storm on their way home from school came George and Bob, sons of Mrs. Selfridge the telephone operator. The boys lived in the exchange building at the front of the lot, and it was considered proper for their mother to work because she was a widow; their father had died in the flu epidemic which swept the world in 1919. As agent and chief operator for A.G.T. she worked seven days a week. As agent she collected the money for long-distance calls and subscriber rentals. As chief operator she ran the switchboard with the help of local high-school girls at peak hours. Like Mr. Wheatley's power plant the Westlock exchange was on **day service**, from six in the morning till eight in the evening, but during the night there were emergency calls — for Dr. Miller, for the district nurse, for the druggist. They couldn't be refused, so Mrs. Selfridge slept beside the switchboard.



WHEN THE FROST IS ON THE WIRES

*When the frost is on the wires and the strings are
breaking down
And the Wire Chief is harrassed half to death,
Then the snooty Trouble Shooter must really go to
town
Out in weather that would nearly freeze his breath.*

*When the poles are bent and broken and the wire's in
the brush
And the snow descends in showers down your neck,
Then we use the sort of language that would make a
lady blush
And we earn at least a portion of our cheque.*

*It's a life, this trouble shooting, that has bitter
with the sweet
And a versatile producer it requires;
If you think you'd like to try it I will sell it to
you cheap —
Especially when the frost is on the wires.*



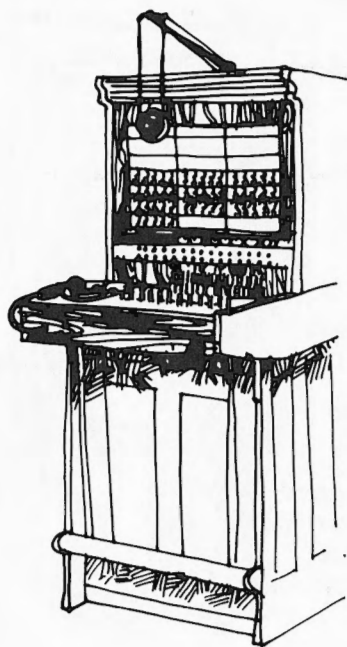
*More of Archie's poems, about his job and the people he
met and the places where he was a frequent visitor, will be
found at the back — along with the story of what
happened when a friend tried to douse a fire in Archie's
Model-A Ford.*

The switchboard stood close behind a counter, so Mrs. Selfridge could handle calls or cash by swinging 'round on the high operator's stool. The wide-eyed kids who stood outside the counter to watch were in some awe of Mrs. Selfridge, because of the clicking, clacking, jangling wonder of her performance — plugging in cords, pulling them free, whirling cranks, telling the caller who wanted Mrs. Smith that she had just seen the lady go into Mr. Tice's drug store, talking to people in faroff places. The most dramatic performance was a real long-distance call.

In the rare event that someone should place a call to Winnipeg the kids standing in awe could hear it progressing across the three provinces and through six operators. Mrs. Selfridge would get Edmonton first, and then the call would advance through Calgary, Medicine Hat, Regina, and Brandon — cities where the prairie telephone systems had installed **repeaters** to boost the sound of voices — and finally reach Winnipeg. With alert operators it took only about fifteen minutes and to ensure no slowdown at the Winnipeg end operators there were forbidden to smoke, even on their own time. The company thought cigarettes slowed a girl's reactions.

On an occasion so rare as to be news in the community, someone might call Vancouver or eastern Canada, and in this event the call had to go down to Montana and then over American lines. A person driving a car to Vancouver or Toronto had to go the same route. The railroad builders had penetrated the mountain barrier of British Columbia and the wasteland of northern Ontario to give the country a trans-Canada railway system. But there was not yet a trans-Canada highway, or radio network, or telephone system.

Most kids were fascinated by the telephone office, and the high school girls, chosen to work there at twenty-five cents an hour, were much envied. But George and Bob, who lived there, found Archie's workshop much more attractive. The only exciting thing that had ever happened at home was the night Dr. Miller wheeled over the operating table to remove George's tonsils. A farmer named Luke Giesebrecht was in the office watching, and was so impressed that when George's tonsils were gone, Luke climbed up on the table and had his out too.



The Westlock Exchange — a snow scene.

Archie's workshop was definitely more interesting. When the boys scrambled in out of the storm the District Plant Inspector was busy winding a half-mile of fine wire on to a piece of old broomstick. Nothing was ever thrown away in the telephone business, especially as conducted by the Alberta government. When the broom wore out Archie cut up the stick for rollers. When he replaced a faulty generator in a farm telephone he started to make a test set out of the old one. The generator wouldn't work because of a break somewhere in a mile of fine wire (sheathed in green cotton) which wound the armature. Through patient trial Archie located the break somewhere in the middle. He was now unrolling half a mile of wire to get at it. When he got there he would solder the broken ends together, wrap the knot with a cigarette paper, gum it tight and roll the half mile the other way.

When Archie was occupied with chores like wire-rolling he was free to tell stories, of which he had a large supply, and the kids liked to hear about his adventures in his first career. Archie had not always been a telephone man. He'd started out as a cowboy, and that's where he'd learned the rope tricks he performed at community entertainments. Archie's lasso (and Barney McAlpine's Irish step-dancing) were on every program.

*With bar
(right hand)
and spoon
(left hand)
Archie digs a
hole in which
to plant a
telephone pole.*



Kids had their own perception of Archie. Adults saw a small man, stocky and below average height, whose mild accommodating manner made him somehow smaller. But kids saw a large man. They sensed the power in his arms and fingers and the endurance in his broad frame. And they identified with him because he'd left home at the age of twelve to become a cowboy.

Archie had a plan when he scrambled aboard a freight train, pulling out of his hometown of Listowel, Ontario. He outlined it to older non-paying passengers in the freight car and they laughed, but he had to invent all sorts of unorthodox schemes in the telephone business and most of them worked. His cowboy plan worked. He was riding freights to Chicago to get a job in the great Chicago stockyards. He figured that big cattlemen must come to the yards. He would meet them and talk himself into a job. The older hobos laughed but within a year Archie was riding the ranges of Colorado, learning the tricks of handling cattle and horses, and the rope tricks he performed at community concerts.

Like most men who followed the trail, Archie kept following it over distant horizons, and eventually he came to Wyoming and took part in the last big roundup of wild horses. 87,000 mustangs were captured in three years. By the 1920s the boss of that roundup was one of the most famous cowboys in the world. He was Tom Mix, star of western movies which were shown in the Westlock hall.

From Wyoming Archie drifted on to the Canadian prairies. In 1912, when he was nineteen, he was in Calgary and worked with the rodeo performers who put on the first edition of that classic western show, the Calgary Stampede. By the 1920s the famous founder of the Stampede, Guy Weadick, was an AGT agent just like George and Bob's mother. At the request of the government he kept a public long-distance telephone in his ranch home near High River, and the one-phone station was called officially Stampede.

After the Stampede Archie went to the coast and sailed for the far east, but even on the high seas he was a cowboy. He went as a hand on a cattle boat.

Then his adventuring spirit took him to gold rush country, where he made a living handling horses. He freighted mining supplies in northern British Columbia and drove a stagecoach in the Yukon.

When war broke out Archie joined the army, but was soon a cowboy again. Heavy guns were still moved by horses. When his experience became known he was put in the Artillery, just in time to supervise the breaking of a trainload of artillery horses "recruited" in the foothills of Alberta. Few armies have ever had such a bunch of wild, undisciplined recruits, but Archie broke them to the harness and went into battle with them.

When Archie came home from the war he had an eye out for some more permanent job, one that still offered lots of outdoor work and travel. So he traded the spurs of the cowpuncher for the climbing spurs of the telephone man and got on with AGT. When the position of District Plant Inspector was created in Westlock in 1922 Archie was first in line, and that's how he happened to be in his workshop now, winding green wire and waiting for the storm to end. As he worked he picked and chose stories from his colorful career. The boys listened, and Archie listened too, to the wind. He noted that it was losing its sharp cutting edge.

Five o'clock struck, and another wrestling match with the doors let George and Bob out into the deepening dusk. It was the supper hour, the most important of the day for Mrs. Selfridge. A teen-age girl came in to mind the switchboard so the agent-chief operator could leave the clack and jangle for an hour and have supper with her family. It was a time set apart, to which she looked forward, and on which the boys, in years to come, would look back with fondness.

*With climbing
spurs Archie
gets up the
pole to work.*



*In the grip
of the storm:
the telephone
office at
Flatbush.*



Archie soon laid off winding the green wire and started home for his own supper. But he didn't travel as the crow flies, supposing any sensible bird was out in such weather. He made a detour to a farmhouse at the south edge of town — all of four blocks away — to confer with the companion who'd go with him to pick up the pieces thrown about by the storm. On pleasant days of summer Archie would drive his Model-T Ford on maintenance trips and liked to take George or Bob for company, but the car ran in fair weather only. Any storm, be it snow, be it rain, could make the roads impossible. In the present state of the elements Archie needed a light sleigh with a team of strong horses. He needed a resourceful driver who could help him make repairs. And he needed a companion who rejoiced in the challenge of rough weather, and made jokes when things went wrong.

When Archie thought of all these requirements he thought of Dios Smith, and Dios knew Archie would be coming. He hadn't called to say so but among kindred spirits there is a communication beyond technology. When Dios heard the first catlike whine of the wind he had put down his **Family Herald** and gone out to the barn to check the sleigh and the harness and the horses. AGT allowed Archie to hire a team and driver in emergencies, and Dios was paid six dollars a day for this service. However, he gave much more service than that. Dios had left the farm for some years to be a telegrapher with the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and rose to be western manager. But city life confined him. He longed to be back where he could fish and hunt when he felt like it, and could go into the tall timber with his rifle and bag the family's winter meat supply. So he'd returned to his pioneer homestead on the edge of Westlock, and since the technology of the telegraph was so much like the telephone, he gave Archie professional help when they went together, into a storm-



*In the grip
of the storm:
the telephone
office at
Meanook.*

tossed landscape. Dios never thought of charging for this expert service — (anymore than AGT thought of paying him for it) — because he had the pioneer spirit; if he had a skill that could help the community, he felt an obligation to use it.

So Dios was a useful companion, and as for being cheerful and entertaining, you never knew what he'd do next. Archie laughed as he thought of the last meeting of the Masonic Lodge. It proved to be a very long one. Dios decided eventually that the meeting had outlived its usefulness but still the brothers wouldn't stop talking. So he slipped out, went next door and rang the town fire bell. The members of the Lodge also belonged to the Volunteer fire brigade. While they hastily adjourned the meeting Dios walked home chuckling.

He chuckled as he opened the door for Archie. Smiling down from his full six feet he held out a strong hand. Shake the hand of Dios Smith and you'd recognize strength to boost a team of horses through a drift, or hoist a fallen crossarm from a snowbank, or winch a broken pole to the upright position and lash it to the stump.

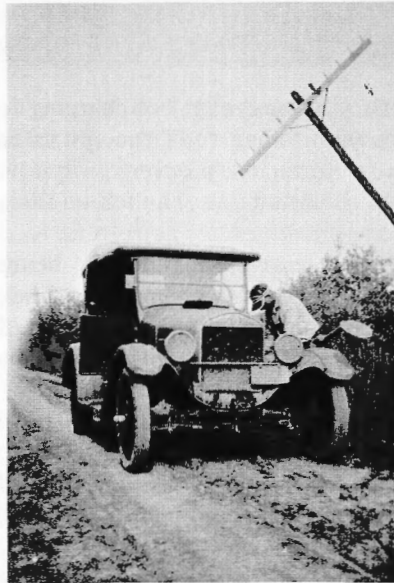
They agreed that Dios would bring the sleigh around to the shop later in the evening and they'd pack supplies for an early-morning start. They speculated on what time that would be. Like doctors they listened to the hard breathing of the wind and detected unmistakable gasps of weariness. Dios had been listening to prairie winds since 1903, when he'd come as a boy pioneer from Illinois, and had a few years on the telephone man.

"I guess six o'clock," said Archie.

"Archie, you always were a pessimist. I make it five o'clock."

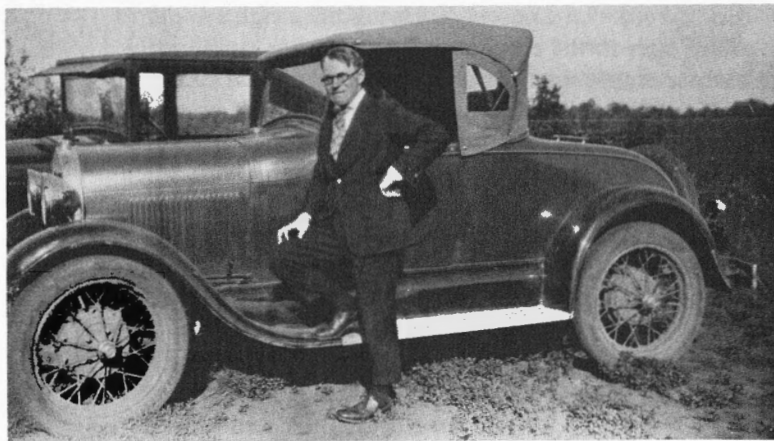
"Too bad you can't ring the firebell and shut off the storm," said Archie.

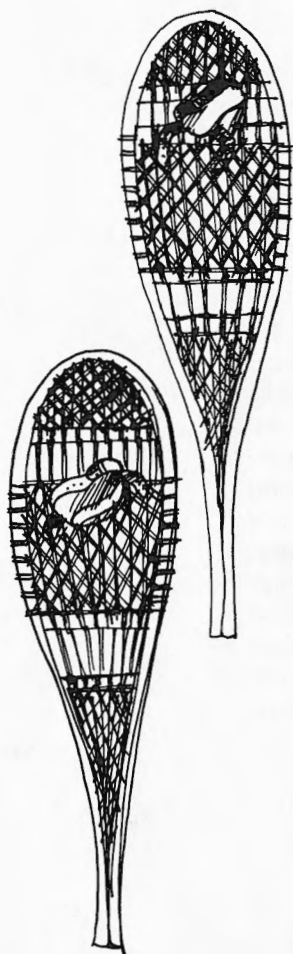
"I'll try if you like," said Dios with a deep chuckle.



ON THE ROAD WITH ARCHIE IN THE 1920s

Archie parks his Model-T Ford beside a pole which has broken off at the base and is being held up only by the wires. In the back seat he has a home-made invention which will set the pole to rights in ten minutes. (See page 32). Archie also carries a lasso device by which the car can haul itself out of mud. He got that idea watching a steer pull itself out of quicksand down in Texas. Note the high set of the Ford body. Clearance was very important in getting over the rutted roads. The Chrysler coupe, which Archie is showing off so proudly at lower left, got hung up so often between deep ruts that he had to go back to the Model-T. In winter most cars were put up on blocks and sleighs were used. Below is a team of Archie's own horses pulling a cutter. The cutter was a light sleigh for drifted roads. Travelers could hoist it over a drift. The horses are named Nip and Tuck.



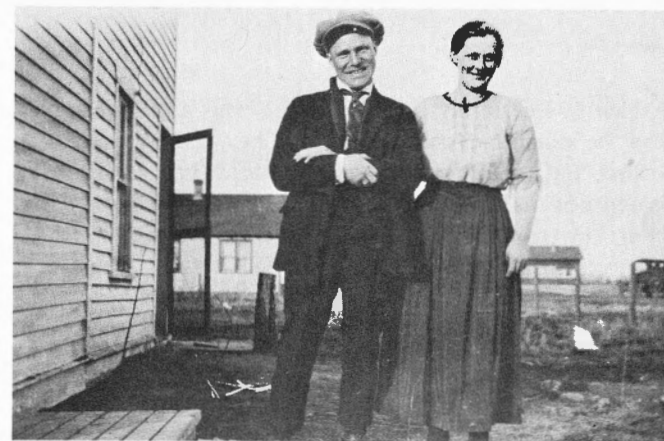


"I'm scared to ask," laughed Archie, as he let himself out and started home, meeting the wind face to face. In his writings Archie was often a nature poet. He respected nature, in its beauty and in its force, and responded to its every mood. Perhaps that's why nature had never beaten him. Even when a blizzard stopped the trains running to Athabasca Archie had strapped on snowshoes and clopped his way to The Landing along the railroad right-of-way repairing the telephone line as he went. He had tried skis, which were new and popular, and whose fans derided snowshoes as old fashioned, but he'd found that snowshoes worked better over drifts and tangled brush. There'd be a pair in the sleigh tomorrow. Once, at least, he'd have to leave Dios and the sleigh on a country road and make a side-trip on his own. He practiced the chopping leg strokes of the snowshoer as he strode home to a cottage he'd named Trail's End, to signify the abode of a retired cowboy.

When Archie reached his own door two delightful perfumes leapt out to mingle with the chill night air. One fragrance was of roast beef, on the back of the stove, the other of apple pie, hot and fresh and cooling against the kitchen window. Archie smacked his lips in appreciation. Then he planted an appreciative kiss on the mouth of the young cook. Then he turned his attention to the one-year-old boy tugging at his trousers. Wishing to be recognized was Gordon, first of the new generation of Hollingsheads.

Archie sat Gordon on his knee, and turned on the radio, hoping for some dinner music to go with the roast beef and pie. Archie powered the radio on the principle that nothing ever be thrown away. He had taken seven depleted batteries, too weak for telephones, and connected them in series. Archie's radio required six volts. It would play on four 1½ volt batteries if they were new. At the moment, seven depleted batteries were adding up to six volts.

Most stations in Alberta broadcast two hours or so in the evening, and on a power of only 100 watts. There was so little electrification in the province that 100 watts carried like 50,000 later on. Archie turned to CFCN,



*Archie and
Mrs. Selfridge*

hoping to hear the string orchestra play from the dining room of the Palliser Hotel, but when the tubes warmed up the speaker poured out a hard buzz, livened by whoops and bleeps — sklee-EEEEEE-wup-WOW! Wheeeee-oh-HURP! The night was full of electrical disturbances, unusual for winter, **jamming** radio signals with static. However, Archie left the radio on. The static struck Gordon as vastly amusing and he laughed heartily at each bloop and wheep.

When Gordon eventually grew tired of this entertainment Archie turned his attention to food. Apple was actually his second choice in the pie department. Rhubarb was the favorite, and he and Nelly grew it in their garden, but rhubarb pie was on the menu only in season. Apples could be dried and cooked year round, but the technology of deep freezing was many years off. How Archie would have loved a rhubarb pie on this night, even though the deep freeze, if invented, would have given Mr. Wheatley's power plant a breakdown.

But he celebrated his good fortune in having apple pie with an extra-large serving. And then, having packed away a second helping "for the road," and having paid all suitable compliments to the chef and having entertained Gordon to the point of drowsiness, he went to the exchange to spend the evening looking for trouble.

"Well, here comes the man of the hour," they said. They all said it. Mrs. Selfridge, the girl helping at the switchboard, the man trying to phone Calgary, the farmer taking shelter from the storm before starting the last five miles home.

Archie was certainly the man of the hour at all the spots where the storm had made trouble. The wind was still growling, but its bite was now so reduced that Archie felt it would not make any more trouble. He could now begin to chart the trouble spots and plan the tour that would last for days until he had visited every one.

Mrs. Selfridge had a list of five town phones which were out of order but town dwellers would have to wait till last. A person with four blocks to walk was not so inconvenienced by loss of the phone as a farmer living four miles from town. On the other hand, a long-distance line out of order in one corner of the province could inconvenience people in the opposite corner, so they came first. "How are the rural lines?" he asked.

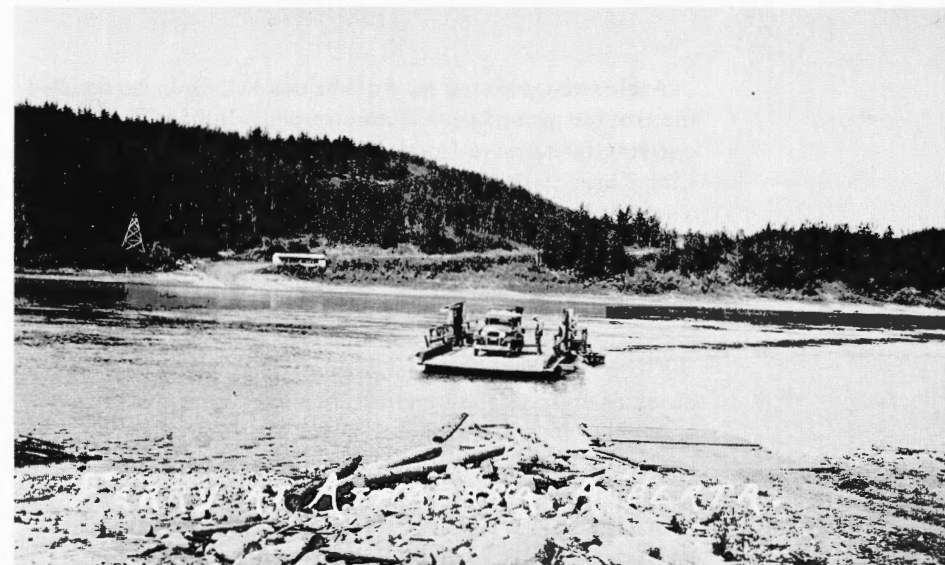
"Lines One and Four are OK, but Line Two is out past McQuarrie's and on Line Three I can only get as far as Greenfield's."

Archie was pleased that Herbert Greenfield still had service. He was a provincial cabinet minister and former premier of Alberta. W. A. C. Bennett, who had the hardware store in town, would one day become premier of British Columbia, but Archie didn't know about that.

"Better test them out," he said. So he went behind the switchboard with a test set similar to the one he'd been making that afternoon. The set had two wires with a clip on each end. He attached one clip to Line Two and the other to the **telltale**.

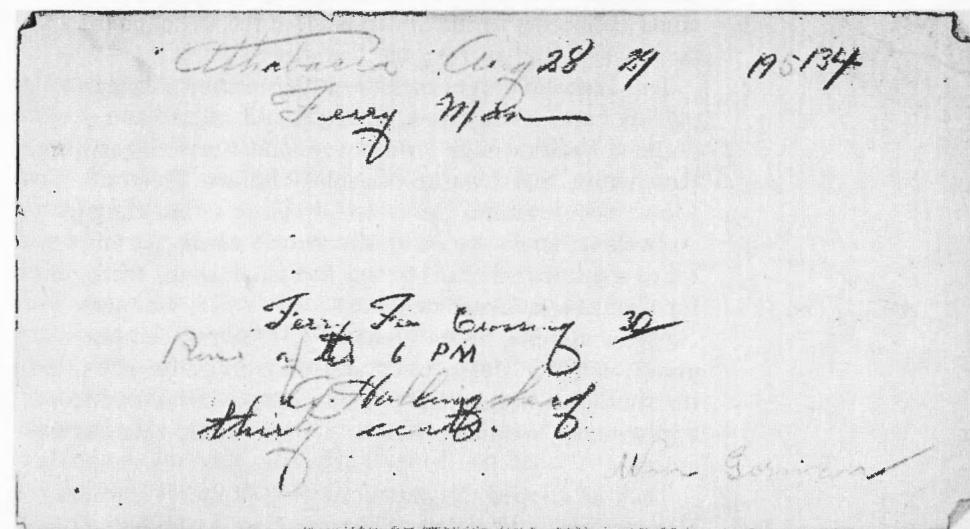
The telltale was a buzzer inside the switchboard. It could tell Archie something about the nature of the trouble, whether it was an **open** or a **short**. When a line was **open** it meant the wire was physically broken. If it was **short** it meant two wires had crossed to create a short circuit. Archie would know which it was when he turned the crank of the test set and sent a burst of alternating current out on the line. If the current came back and jangled the buzzer the line had a short. If the line was broken there was no return for the current and the telltale remained silent.

Archie turned the crank and listened for a report on Line Two. The telltale remained mute. Then he clipped his testwire to Line Three and cranked again. This time the telltale produced a jangled yawping.



To reach the northern limit of his territory Archie had to cross the Athabasca River. Here he is on the cable ferry at the town of Athabasca. The ferryman charged thirty cents for a trip after six p.m.

Below is a carbon copy from Archie's AGT chequebook.



Archie had a sketch map of the district. On it he marked the trouble accordingly. He noted that on Line Two seven outlying farms were isolated from the exchange and on Line Three twelve farms were cut off. However, and this is a very large however, they were not isolated from each other. People on the outlying farms could still ring each other in the normal way, and if an urgent message had to go to Dr. Miller or Mr. Tice, the English druggist, it could be relayed from McQuarrie's or Greenfield's. Archie knew the isolated ones would be patient. They knew he'd be along as soon as the long-distance lines were working.

Archie's next move was to check the long lines, beginning with Toll Route 196 which ran west, into the steep hills and tall timber and ended in the back kitchen of his father-in-law Will Wallace at Campsie. For this check he wished to talk to AGT agents on the route so he connected his **butt-in** to Toll Line 196.

The butt-in was a small portable telephone designed especially for technicians. It doubtless had an official name which everyone had forgotten. It was so light and compact that Archie could carry one to the top of a pole, connect it to a line and "butt in" to talk to the operator in the nearest exchange. Or, if he was in the exchange he could connect it to the line in back of the switchboard and work without disturbing the operator.

Toll Line 196 might have been laid out by a rabbit playing games with a fox. It zigged and zagged and doubled back through farm houses and stores at Eastburg, Rossington, Southworth, Manola, Lunford, Heaton Moor, Freedom and Carlton Hill before terminating in Archie's father-in-law's kitchen. Archie connected his test set to the line and cranked out five short rings, the signal for Campsie, and was delighted to hear Mr. Wallace's Glasgow accents, fuzzy but steady. Archie traded news about daughter Helen and grandson Gordon for news that the snow was not so heavy farther west. Archie nodded approvingly. With any luck Route 196 would ride out the storm.

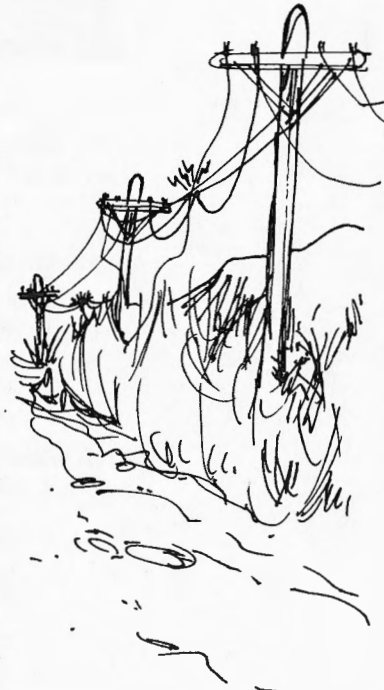
Then he clipped the butt-in to Toll Route 117, which also ran west and ended at historic Fort Assinaboine on

the Athabasca River. "I think there's a **swinging short** on that one," said Mrs. Selfridge from the other side of the board.

A swinging short was caused by one wire swaying in the wind, making sporadic contact with another. When the momentary short circuit resulted, the voice faded — and then came back. Archie could use his test set to fix the location of a regular short, but not one of the swinging variety, so he went to work with the butt-in, calling the most remote station on the line and working closer.

He began with Mrs. Thompson, who had the agency in her farm home at Fort Assiniboine. Her familiar voice faded and surged. He tried Elmer Lucas at Bloomsbury. Still fading. He paged Chris Ingwersen at Neerlandia, with the same results. From Mellowdale the voice of Mrs. Elmendorf came and went. Davis was next, in the ranch house of T. M. Davis, and Mr. Davis came through deep and clear. Archie marked in a swinging short between Davis and Mellowdale, and told no one in particular that when the wind puffed out he'd be either lucky or unlucky. If he was in luck the swinging wire would sag clear of its neighbor and there'd be no more trouble. But it could just as easily droop into a permanent contact and he would be out of luck. Archie was out of luck.

Having dealt with the west, Archie focussed on the south-to-north route. He put his equipment on Toll Line 264, which came from Edmonton through St. Albert and Westlock and on north through Pibroch, Dapp, Jarvie, Fawcett and Flatbush. Eventually AGT would extend that route to connect with the Peace River Country, but it would not be for many years, not until after the second world war. Within the Peace River country an AGT phone network linked the towns and farms but communication with the rest of Alberta was by telegraph or mail. For another twenty years the province would be too poor to bridge the gap. Archie found Route 264 noisy but strong as far as it went. He then turned his attention eastward and asked Mrs. Selfridge to get Miss Cuthiell, the agent at Clyde.



Miss Cuthiell had a smaller switchboard, with a dozen town subscribers and fifty farms on party lines, but she also had Toll Route 116, the most important long distance line in Archie's territory. It ran from Edmonton to Athabasca, with connections to Lac La Biche and Calling Lake.

Archie heard Miss Cuthiell's voice. "Oh, I have news for YOU," it said. Archie smiled. The local telephone operator was the ace reporter of all events in range of her switchboard: the details of accidents, the scores of hockey games, the whereabouts of doctors, the lateness of trains. Miss Cuthiell delivered the telephone news in dramatic steps.

"I have five locals out."

"Mmmmmm-HMMMM!"

"On Rural Line Two the corner pole has fallen a mile from town and all the phones are out."

"Mmmmmm-HMMMMMMMM!"

"And Toll Line 116 is out north of Perryvale."

"Mmmm-HMMMMMMMM!"

Miss Cuthiell had saved the worst for the last. "Toll Line 116 is out north of Perryvale" meant that Athabasca, Lac La Biche and Calling Lake were isolated from the rest of the AGT network. Archie underlined Perryvale on his map and asked for Mr. Craswell, the agent there.

Mr. Craswell was agent for almost everything else, as the picture shows, so it was logical that he would represent AGT as well. His familiar voice came down the line:

"Hi, cowboy, coming to see us soon?"

"As soon as I can," Archie laughed. "It's seven miles to Clýde and twenty-two to your place. Dios and I should be there tomorrow night. How's the weather north of you?"

Mr. Craswell told Archie what he'd heard from northern operators before the break, and from travellers afterwards. What he'd heard added up to a certainty that the wind and snow had been much heavier in the north.

"Hold the line open and we'll see what the trouble is," said Archie.



Here is William Craswell's place at Perryvale, a typical commercial centre of the time, a place to buy and to sell. The Craswells live in the house on the right.

In the general store Mr. Craswell is also postmaster, agent for the single AGT long-distance phone, and grain buyer for the only elevator. Free parking for horses is offered at the left, with a fence for tethering and a pump at which customers can provide a drink of well water for the horses or themselves.

The pump next to the store is for farm fuel, a low-octane gasoline for farm machinery, patronized mostly in spring and fall. Just out of sight is a self-serve kerosene barrel for home lighting.

The pump for Number One gas is in front of the store and note the three stars of Imperial Oil at the top.

The oil company sponsored the hockey broadcasts which Archie and most Canadians heard from Maple Leaf Gardens on Saturday night. The tradition of choosing three stars of a hockey game began as a radio commercial.

He spun the crank of his home-made test set and the telltale buzzer set up a feeble protest. So it was a short circuit. At least the wires were still connected. He cranked several times trying to estimate the distance.

In city offices the telephone men had megameters, which gave an exact reading of the distance to the trouble spot. The megameter put an exact charge on the line, one that lost 66 ohms per mile in transmission. Divide the reading on the meter by 66 ohms and it gave the distance within a few yards. But Archie and the district men had nothing so sophisticated. They had to play it by ear, gauging the distance by how much noise the telltale made.

Archie cranked and listened, again and again. He worked out the location to be about three miles beyond Perryvale. Then he cranked once more, to be sure. And the telltale was silent.

Archie sat back and reached among his tools for a cigarette. He said "Ho ho ho," softly but clearly enough so that Mrs. Selfridge inquired whether Santa Claus was behind the board. Archie staged in his mind an instant replay of the dramatic action which had just taken place out there in the night. He could see a pole, leaning at a critical angle, driven over by the wind. He could see the crossarm, which had twisted to bring two wires together and cause the short. Then he saw the pole lean one degree too much. He saw it tremble and go down, taking half a dozen others with it, breaking wires as they fell.

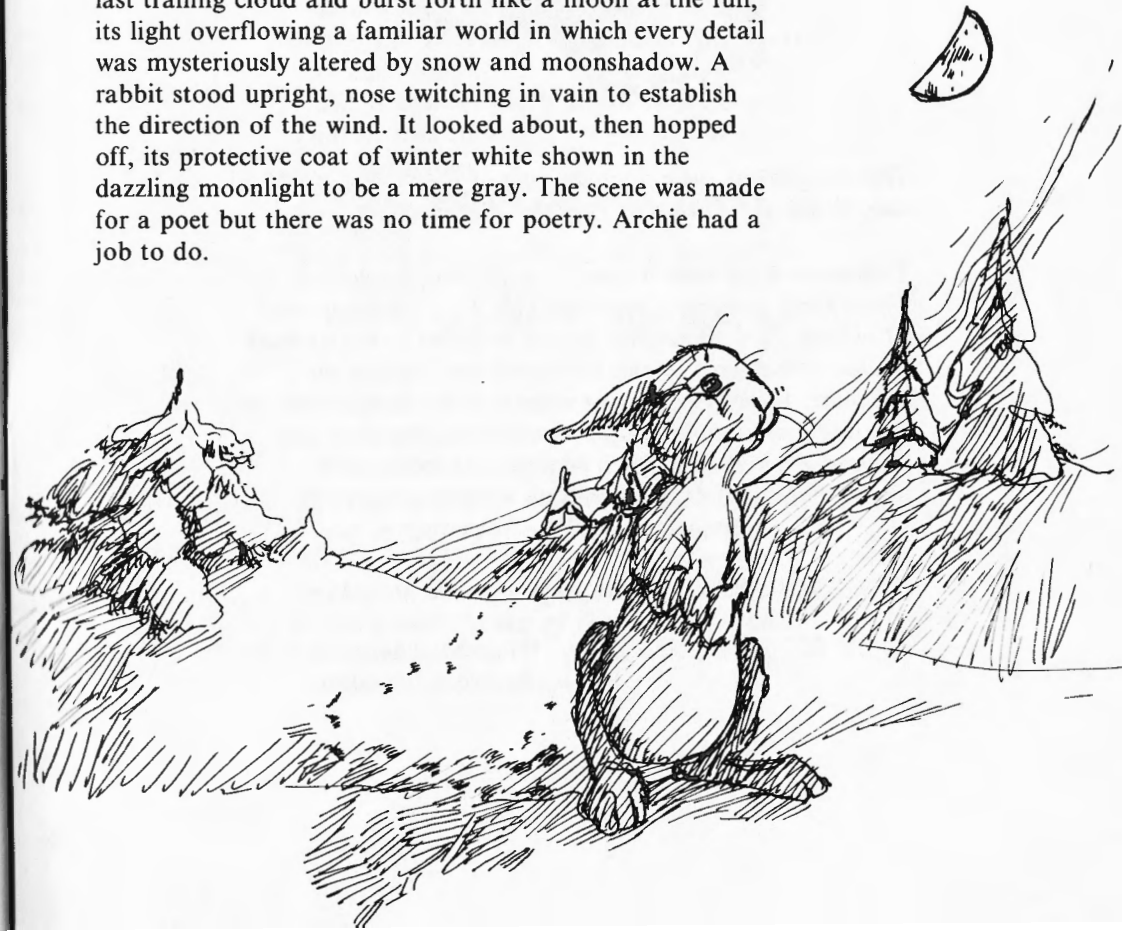
Then, from the replay, he switched to a preview of the next night's episode. He saw Dios Smith and himself arriving at the scene of the wreckage. They'd unbolt the crossarms from the fallen poles and stand each one against a fence or brushpile. They'd untangle the broken wires and splice them, and reattach them to the insulators. Then Archie would clip his butt-in to Toll Line 116 and talk to Sim Lewis, the jovial agent at Athabasca.

And out there in the still whiteness Archie would hear Sim tell him whether he and Dios and the horses would turn for home or go on north to spend days splicing the system back together again. From past experience and the report he'd heard of conditions in the north Archie had little doubt which direction they'd be taking.

It was said of Archie Hollingshead that he did things well. He worked well, he told a story well, he got along well with people, he ate well. And having prepared well for the journey he went home and slept well. Snug inside the covers he switched off his problems as totally as Bob Wheatley doused the town lights at midnight.

He slept, deep and detached from care, nonetheless with a subconscious listening device turned on in his mind. He slept dreamless and with time suspended, until a strange sound tripped the telltale in his subconscious. He came awake and listened. Intently. He opened his eyes and looked about the darkened room. No doubt about it. The sound which had broken his slumber was the sound of silence. The wind which had dominated his working and sleeping for so many hours was gone.

Archie crept to the window, gently so as not to jar the silence. Just as gently he drew the curtain and gazed out on a poet's scene. In a steel-blue sky a half moon shed the last trailing cloud and burst forth like a moon at the full, its light overflowing a familiar world in which every detail was mysteriously altered by snow and moonshadow. A rabbit stood upright, nose twitching in vain to establish the direction of the wind. It looked about, then hopped off, its protective coat of winter white shown in the dazzling moonlight to be a mere gray. The scene was made for a poet but there was no time for poetry. Archie had a job to do.



NOW LET'S MEET ARCHIE THE POET...

TROUBLE SHOOTER'S HYMN

*Praise the Lord, there's no more ammunition
For .22's to disrupt our transmission;
Inner-tubes are also now on ration,
Lessening the sling-shots once in fashion.
Praise the Lord for these two compensators
In favor of preserving insulators.*



This is a parody on a popular song of the second world war, Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition.

Telephone wires were looped around glass insulators, which made popular targets for kids with slingshots and 22-calibre rifles. Whenever a rock or bullet found its mark Archie would have to climb the pole and replace the insulator. Wartime rationing restricted the manufacture of sporting ammunition and innertubes for slingshots and reduced Archie's workload. In honor of rationing he wrote: Praise the Lord, there's no more ammunition.

QUESTION: What was the purpose of the insulator?

EVEN BIGGER QUESTION: What has happened to all the telephone poles?

Archie wrote this poem about one of his favorite seasons, when the days were warm, roads were dry and driving was easy.

INDIAN SUMMER

*Comes a time in the fall that is sweetest
of all —
It's the Indian Summer time;
When the hill-sides are warm with color
and charm
And the air's like a mellow old chime;
When the mornings are kissed with a
silvery mist
And the noon-time is drowsy and still,
When a sweet dreamy haze cloaks the
autumnal days
As it hangs over valley and hill.*

*There's a legend that says this autumnal
haze
Is a wraith of the long long ago,
When the Red Man laid claim to Alberta's
domain
As he hunted with arrow and bow;
That at this time of year he would slay
many deer
To tide him through winter's long
spell,
And with craft and with skill would
cure all his kill
With wood-smoke he understood well.*

*Dotted over the land the wood-fires
were manned
By the women of the nomad tribes;
Burnt orange and red the sun overhead
Set in splendor no mortal describes.
And so to this day the old hunters say
The haze and the air's mellow chime
Is the ghost-smoke of fires and the past
that inspires
The Indian Summer time.*

NOW LET'S MEET ARCHIE THE INVENTOR...

Here is Archie's own sketch of his invention for solving the problem on Page 18. He has come to a pole which has broken off at the base and is being held up by the wires connecting it to poles on either side.

Poles tended to rot at ground level. Constant soaking and drying was one cause. Ant colonies could be another. When they grew weak at this point a strong wind or weight of frost could push them over.

What Archie wants to do here is wrestle the stump out of the ground and drop the shortened pole into the hole. His home-made invention includes a piece of old telephone **messenger** and the following bits of old car:

- half a wheel rim,
- a piece of inner tube,
- a connecting rod from the engine,
- and a bracket for bolting the running board into position.

He even involves the broken pole in the operation. He converts it into a temporary **gin pole**. He gets a solid "grab" on the pole with a grabhook which holds the wheel rim, runningboard bracket and connecting rod in position.

He gets a firm grip on the stump with a sling made of **messenger**. Messenger is not used for transmission. It's a strong rope of steel strands from which a bundle of telephone cables can be hung. It's so strong a lineman can ride it on a special two-wheel chair. It has a breaking strain of 10,000 pounds.

To pull the stump Archie uses a chain and lever on the **ratchet** principle.

The sling is connected to a chain. Each time Archie pumps the lever the chain rotates one link in the jaws of the lever. Eventually something has to give. If the assembly is strong enough the stump will give and rise from the ground.

QUESTION: What is a gin pole?

QUESTION: What is the ratchet principle?

