

Carl A. Pollock



If a coin toss in 1907 had landed tails, the broadcasting and business community in Waterloo Region may have looked very different. But it was heads, so true to his word, Arthur Bell Pollock stayed here to sell phonographs rather than seek his fortune in Western Canada.

That fateful coin toss created all sorts of ripple effects, especially for Pollock's bright, ambitious son, Carl A. Pollock, who was only four years old when the coin was flipped.

The younger Pollock transformed the local community with his energy and vision, first as the president of Electrohome Ltd., at one time the largest manufacturer of televisions and radios in Canada. Then Pollock became a founder of the successful regional television station, CKCO-TV and finally he served as a founding father of the University of Waterloo, now the world's largest co-operative education institution in the world.

Recently Carl Pollock became the first member of the Waterloo Region Entrepreneur Hall of Fame. In honouring Pollock posthumously it was noted, "Electrohome was not only a very successful company in this community but really was a trailblazer for other technology companies."

Pollock, who was born in 1903, began to show promise early as a top athlete and electrical engineering student at the University of Toronto. He won a Massey Foundation fellowship, which included two years of study at Oxford University in England where he studied physics. His plan was to become a university professor but soon after returning to Toronto, Pollock and his wife Helen Chestnut moved to Kitchener where his father owned three companies – The Phonola Company of Canada Ltd., Grimes Radio Corporation Ltd. and Pollock-Welker Ltd.

In the early 1930s, Pollock persuaded his father to amalgamate the three companies under the name of Dominion Electrohome Industries Ltd. and became its president, navigating it through the difficult 1930s. Electrohome survived several financial crises to enjoy its heyday between 1949 and 1984. It is written that Pollock "was a man who kept abreast of new technological advances in the rapidly-changing field of home entertainment."

In the late 1940s Pollock turned his attention to the broadcasting world by gaining an FM radio licence and putting CFCA-FM on the air in 1949. By 1954 he expanded his holdings into the world of television, as one of the partners of the new CKCO-TV, owned at the time by Central Ontario Television Ltd. Pollock's vision of a community-based regional television station seemed far-fetched at the time with only 3,000 people owning television sets in Kitchener-Waterloo. However, today more than one million viewers tune into CKCO-TV. When the station went to air for the first time on March 1, 1954 from the basement of the Concordia Club on King Street West, Pollock said, "Our purpose is to provide an entertainment and education service – an interesting home companion for you."

By the late 1950s, Pollock had become a prosperous businessman recognized across Canada for his success. At this point his initial dream of becoming a university professor dovetailed with his business acumen when he became one of the founders of Waterloo College Affiliated Faculty, which evolved into the University of Waterloo. Pollock teamed up with the likes of Ira Needles, president of B.F. Goodrich, and Gerald Hagey a Goodrich public relations executive, to start the innovative university in 1957 that would offer engineering students the opportunity to work in industry as part of their studies.

Despite all of his business success, Carl Pollock is remembered as a man who always made time for his employees' concerns. His own son John said once that his father "considered Electrohome as family. Whatever happened to Electrohome, happened to him. He gave the company heart and conscience and character . . . (he) did everything and knew everybody personally. He was a warm and caring person."

Photo courtesy of University of Waterloo Archives.