

I remember when...

Quality colour television is now something we take for granted in Geraldton, but the prolonged battle to get official and reliable reception here is a vastly different story.

It is now barely believable that the Geraldton area impatiently waited ten frustrating years for TV after it commenced in Perth.

Probably there would be rioting in the streets if this happened today.

Public television in Australia commenced in Sydney in September 1956 and by 1959 broadcasting began in Perth with scant mention of its extension to other areas.

In the mid-1960s the Federal election campaign saw Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies arrive in Geraldton for a campaign speech in the town hall. There was great public anticipation that he would announce a start on TV for this area, but he made no mention of it.

Meanwhile, quite a few local residents had embarked on their own efforts to receive TV reception from Perth.

An early popular theory was you need a very high antennae to get TV from Perth and quite a number installed steel towers combing a wind-up antennae which could extend up to 100ft.

This device had to be lowered whenever cyclones threatened and some discovered TV reception was virtually the same with the mast raised or lowered, thus casting doubts about the

high antennae theory.

At that time TV reception was often a very hit and miss experience with the viewing marred by "snowing" on the screen and to counter this blue cellophane paper was draped across the front of the black and white TV set.

Local electrical retailer Charles Boyes tried long and hard to get early TV reception here. At one stage he had a TV set and high antennae on the hill on the northern end of Boronia Avenue in central Geraldton and night after night he tried for reception, with long periods of just "snow" on the screen.

Eventually he overcame reception problems and had TV sets in the front window of his Marine Terrace store of Boyes Radio Service, the broadcasts at night attracting large gatherings of local residents, many viewing TV for the first time. At times the crowd extended half way across Marine Terrace.

Other early viewing efforts varied with theories of cloud layers, air density etc but some freak events occurred.

A resident in Ord Street, Bluff Point received reception from a South Australian station with an antenna on top of a former windmill frame.

In a unit in Milford Street there was good TV reception via an indoor rabbit ears antenna on top of the TV set.

The Beachlands area had a number receiving reception without high antennae

Thus it was the fortunate few who saw TV in their homes while the rest of us waited and waited and waited.

Finally officialdom got its act together, the coaxial cable was constructed from Perth to Geraldton by the end of 1968 and a 100ft distribution tower was erected behind the Marine Terrace post office in mid-1969.

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At this time the dramatic news was America's proposal to send astronauts to land on the moon and walk on it in the glare of worldwide TV coverage

Feeling the Geraldton area had for too long missed out on major world events, I wrote to the then Prime Minister suggesting that as TV was close to becoming a reality here, the Geraldton area should be rewarded for its patience by having the moon landing and walk broadcast here.

The Prime Minister concurred and on July 21, 1969 we watched the spectacle of astronaut Neil Armstrong take those historic first steps on the moon.

I watched this historic event at King & Brown's electrical store in Durlacher Street, the broadcast lasting about 20 minutes.

Finally official television was in Geraldton in November 1969, the ABC in magnificent black and white.

Later a locally sponsored channel operated from the Wonthella Hall

Colour TV reached here in 1974 and now we have digital TV with a dozen or more channels offering a host of programmes

By Neville Thompson 2014