

## William Aberhart

William Aberhart's voice could persuade and inspire.

First the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, then a voice on the radio, Aberhart exhorted Albertans to challenge the eastern establishment and join the Social Credit movement.

Both teacher and preacher, "Bible Bill" Aberhart's charisma and physical energy combined with his oratory to sweep the despairing population into his whirlwind. People were starving, eating the moss chinked between the logs of their houses. They had not a dime in their pockets. In the depths of the Great Depression, Aberhart sold them hope.



William Aberhart broadcasting from radio station CFCN, Calgary, Alberta  
Glenbow Archives NA-2771-2

When Aberhart spoke, electricity crackled in the air. Coated with dust and despair, the people of Alberta responded to his promise of prosperity, and in 1935 Social Credit was elected with a landslide. But the movement found it easier to make promises than to fulfill them. Alberta was broke and, ironically, Aberhart had to travel to Ottawa and beg for a loan from Prime Minister Bennett to keep the province afloat.

Aberhart's experiment was a failure, but one that would change Alberta's religious, social, and political fate.

## Broadcasting Hope

William Aberhart's debut as a radio host in 1925 seemed effortless. His energetic and compelling delivery – honed through years of experience and a teacher and a preacher – drew listeners to his weekly religious broadcasts.

Rural radio listeners became members of his “radio church,” sending Aberhart collection money that might have gone to local congregations. In ten short years, more people tuned in to Aberhart's Back-to-the-Bible Hour broadcast than The Jack Benny Program, a popular American comedy show.

During the Depression, listeners sent Aberhart more letters of despair than donations. He believed the solution to poverty and misery lay in the theories of the Social Credit Party, which he discussed in his radio broadcasts.

In 1935, Aberhart called for “100 honest men” to run for government under the Social Credit banner. Thousands were nominated. Although Aberhart was a political novice, his listeners were loyal. The Social Credit party won the 1935 provincial election by a landslide.

Born: December 30, 1878 – Died: May 23, 1943

## Additional Resources

- **The Canadian Encyclopedia**  
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/william-aberhart>

## Our Collections

### Glenbow Museum

<https://www.glenbow.org>

### Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives

<https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives>

### Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection

<https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1>