

THE WGL STORY

WGL RADIO —
Fort Wayne's FIRST
Broadcasting Station
... serving since 1924

What were you doing on January 24, 1924?

In New York a young pianist was rehearsing for a concert which would see the premiere of his composition, "Rhapsody in Blue."

If you were a young woman of Fort Wayne you were trying hard to live up to the label "flapper," braving the January cold with four-buckle arctics that flapped provocatively below knees bared by the day's daringly short skirts.

If you were among Fort Wayne's masculine population you were more interested in that new-fangled gadget radio than you were in fashion. The man who could report, "I got KDKA last night!" was the envy of his fellows. And if one was really lucky he was among those chosen few who heard the premiere broadcast of Fort Wayne's first station, WGL!

For it was in this setting (a scant three years and three months after Pittsburgh's pioneer station took to the air, and less than a year and a half after WEAF, New York first sold air time to an advertiser) that Fort Wayne's own WGL... then known as WHBJ... brought commercial broadcasting to the Summit City. On January 24, 1924, WHBJ went on the air, thanks to the efforts of Chester W. Keen, and became one of the country's earliest stations.

Keen, operator of the American Products Corporation and the Reflex Manufacturing Company and inventor of the transmission bands then used in Ford Motor cars, became interested in radio in 1921 and while on a business trip to New York that same year, purchased the equipment that later made it possible for WGL to go on the air. Anyone interested in viewing it, most of this equipment including the original transmitter, can now see it at the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society Museum at 1424 Swinney Court. Its current value is estimated to be \$40,000.00.

In 1924, Keen and the now-extinct Lauer Auto Company joined forces to inaugurate Fort Wayne's first station. During that year Keen and Lauer divided their air time equally, with Keen broadcasting from the mezzanine of the Keenan Hotel and Lauer from its showrooms. Harold Blausler, a Lauer salesman, handled that company's air activities. In 1925, Keen bought out Lauer and enlarged operations, moving to new studios at 1729 South Lafayette Street. At the same time, he changed the station's call letters from WHBJ to WCWK. The new call letters, of course, stood for Chester W. Keen.

On September 1, 1928, Keen transferred his interests in WCWK to Frederick C. Zieg. In addition to a new owner, the station received new call letters... WGL, as well as new studios on the second floor of the Main Auto Supply Company on West Main Street. And a new era in Fort Wayne radio had begun! It is interesting to note that official documents say the new call letters... WGL... stand for "With God's Love." However, Zieg recalls that they evolved through expediency. "W," of course, was required of all stations east of the Mississippi by licensing authorities. "G" was chosen because in this highly agricultural region it was an easily recognizable sound—the command to a horse to go to the right. "L" was the best sounding of the five remaining letters available for use by the station. Zieg operated WGL until August 1, 1936 at which time he sold his budding radio property to Westinghouse Radio Stations, Inc. Two months later, on November 1, 1936 WGL became an affiliate of the National Broadcasting Company.

Moving day rolled around again on May 1, 1937 when WGL moved to 925 South Harrison Street, where Westinghouse had opened brand new studios. Broadcasting continued from this location until WGL became the property of the Farnsworth Television & Radio Corp. The sale to Farnsworth was effected on May 25, 1945 and in March, 1946 WGL began broadcasting from its new, modern studios at 201½ West Jefferson Street in downtown Fort Wayne, its present location. And at 8:00 p.m. on September 24, 1947, WGL dropped down the broadcast band to 1250 kilocycles, increasing its power from 250 to 1000 watts, its present power. Three tall towers in Waynedale mark the site of WGL's transmitter.

WGL became the "Voice of the News-Sentinel" on June 17, 1949 when it was purchased by The News-Sentinel Broadcasting Co., Inc. In October, 1950 it transferred from the National Broadcasting Company to the American Broadcasting Company. August 17, 1970 WGL became an affiliate of the Columbia Broadcasting System, NAB (National Association of Broadcasters), and the Indiana Broadcasters Association.

WGL RADIO is known throughout the Fort Wayne area as the "101 Club" station which during the month of December solicits in various ways contributions for the local Christmas Bureau to be used in purchasing gifts, toys, food, clothing and other necessities for needy Allen County families.