

# Los Angeles radio history repeats itself

H44-1-3

(sort of)

OR

A Look at 1300, 1330 and 1430 kHz. in Southern California

By Jim Hilliker

In early September of 1988, I received a letter from IRCA member Steve Mittman with some news which took me by surprise. It was the announcement that KWKW, licensed to Pasadena, CA on 1300 kHz. had purchased KFAC, licensed to Los Angeles on 1330 kHz., and will move to that position on the AM dial. A new radio station, KAZN, will take over 1300 with all-Asian programming.

This turn of events inspired me to write this article. My mind went immediately to thoughts of how long both KFAC and KWKW had been on the air, and the continuing changes on the AM band, that for better or worse, we can't do anything about.

I have deep feelings about preserving the history of radio broadcasting and AM DXing in the United States, and I feel that many IRCA members share that belief. It will certainly be the end of an era when KFAC and its classical music leave 1330 forever, even though the calls and the format will continue on the FM band. I admit I didn't listen to KFAC or its sister FM station much, but the loss of the long-time call letters stirs the same sense of loss I felt when KHJ on 930 kHz. changed calls in 1986 to KRTH. I feel the same way when any set of three-letter calls is lost on the AM band. A similar situation on the AM band made news recently when WNBC was sold by NBC/GE and left the 660 spot on the dial forever in New York.

Since KFAC will disappear from the AM dial soon and KWKW will take its old frequency, I thought it would be interesting to look at the history of these two stations. Actually, it's quite a coincidence that KWKW will shift from 1300 to 1330 kHz. When KFAC went on the air in 1931, it began on 1300 kHz. At that time, two stations had been sharing time on 1300, KTBI and KGEF, both of Los Angeles. Both stations had religious formats and divided the frequency equally, with KTBI on during the daytime and KGEF broadcasting at night.

KTBI went on the air in 1922 as KJS and was owned by The Bible Institute of Los Angeles. The calls were changed to KTBI in 1925 to fit the initials of the owners. KGEF was owned by the controversial Reverend Robert Shuler, known as "Fightin' Bob Shuler." He'd been on the air since 1927 from Trinity Methodist Church and had quite a following among Los Angeles radio listeners. But in 1931, his license was revoked by the Federal Radio Commission for his outrageous attacks on the air. These talks were aimed at people with religious and political beliefs other than his own. Aimee Semple McPherson of KPSG was a well-known enemy of Shuler. Shuler appealed to keep his station license, but the courts upheld the position of the FRC in 1932.

According to "KFAC-A Brief History", sent to me by the station in 1986, Erret Lobban Cord was granted the licenses of both KTBI and KGEF. Cord made his fortune as creator and manufacturer of the Cord and Auburn automobile. He changed the call letters of his station to KFAC in 1931. I don't believe that it's too widely known, but in the station history, they reveal that the F-A-C in the call letters indicated the original owner of their building, Fuller, plus Auburn, plus Cord.

In those early years when network radio began to dominate the industry, KFAC as an independent station, presented many styles of programming. The music was varied but revolved around hillbilly, western and pops, with only a minimum amount of classical. An example of this variety is a February 1943 listing for KFAC showing "Lucky Lager Dance Time" every night from 10 p.m. to midnight. For the KFAC listener of the past 30 years, it's probably hard to imagine anything other than classical music being played. The format gradually became 100% classical music by the late 1940s.

An interesting story about playing classical music at KFAC is told by radio and television veteran Steve Allen in his autobiography, "Mark It and Strike It." Mr. Allen was 23 years old in 1944 when he left KOY Radio in Phoenix for Los Angeles. The first job he obtained in L.A. was at KFAC. He recalled that he played mainly classical music but had little knowledge in that area of music. The record librarian chose the music to be played and his job as staff announcer was simply to introduce the selections and give station IDs. Allen says he probably confused many classical music fans. It didn't occur to him at the time to turn each record over after

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most radios. But it will help those with digital receivers. Mr. Williams says they'll sure find out something happened when they hear Asian programming coming from 1300 when the big change occurs.

As for the future, the birth of a new type of AM radio station for southern California on 1300 kHz., KAZN, can only be good for the area with its expanding Asian population. It will also give DXers a new set of call letters to shoot for.

A combination of circumstances causes many AM and FM radio stations in the United States to change call letters quite often these days. However, I find a positive side to all of this. If you read through a current log of U.S. AM stations, you can still find a good number of them using the same call letters that they've had for 30 to 60 years. So, while another long-time AM broadcaster, KFAC, will be lost, we can at least say that the calls will stay on the FM side, but for some of us it just won't be the same.

playing the first side. Instead, he played a whole stack of records in order, then turned the stack over and played the records in reverse order on the second side of each one. Allen was amazed that he never received any phone calls from listeners complaining of his mangling of the classics. Only the record librarian disapproved, throwing dirty looks in Allen's direction. Allen left KFAC a few months later after an opening for \$10 more a week came his way at KMTR in Hollywood, now KLAC. Also, Jack Lescouille worked at KFAC around 1935. He later was featured on NBC-TV's "Today Show" in the 1950s.

During radio's early years in the 1920s, it seemed the whole country tried to see what stations could be heard at night and the DX craze was born. When the networks came along, this changed somewhat, but AM DXing was still quite popular in the '30s. A national all-wave radio magazine appeared from 1924 till early 1942. It was called the Radio Index or RADEX. Its peak in popularity was 1932-37. It featured AM and shortwave DX tips, letters from DXers much like our present forums in DX Monitor, network radio listings, a list of monthly DX tests and programs, and a complete log of AM stations in North America.

KFAC was widely heard during this time. This was before the days of directional antennas. The majority of the stations were off the air by midnight, allowing most frequencies to be clear. All of this helped the DXer to have much better luck than today at hearing low-powered stations in all areas of the United States. Many "oldtimers" also say the use of flat-top wire antennas by most stations then put out a much better skywave signal, not to mention the fact that there was much less man-made noise to put up with in those years.

I read through many letters from DXers that were printed in six issues of RADEX from 1934-35. I was happy to find that KFAC's 1,000 watts put the signal out to DXers in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Connecticut, and Maryland. In addition, RADEX lists in its DX Test column that KFAC ran a special program for distant listeners each night from 12:00 to 6:00 a.m. EST. This interest in distant listeners is further evidenced in the National Radio Club's 50th Anniversary book. In the NRC's DX magazine, Vol. 3, No. 17 dated December 18, 1935, it reads: "KFAC-1300 Los Angeles, Cal. has begun a DX tip program at 12:15 a.m. (EST), conducted by Bill Ellis."

In 1934, both RADEX and White's Radio Log showed that KFAC owner E.L. Cord also owned Los Angeles station KFVD, formerly in Culver City, on 1000 kHz. The transmitter was still in Culver City, but studios were at the KFAC studios. KFVD is now KTNQ-1020. Cord apparently didn't own KFVD too long, as there was a new owner by 1938. In 1938, KFAC was still at 645 South Mariposa, with transmitter at the Adohr Milk Farm at 18th and La Cienega. The station operated on a 24 hour schedule. In 1944 when Steve Allen worked at KFAC, the studios were on Wilshire Blvd.

In March of 1941, KFAC shifted from 1300 to 1330 kHz. when the North American Regional Broadcasting Agreement was implemented. By the late-'40s, power was increased from 1,000 to 5,000 watts. Today, KFAC remains on 1330 kHz. with 5,000 watts day and night, using a directional pattern at night. KFAC-FM is on 92.3 MHz. with 59,000 watts. KFAC's AM transmitter site with two towers is located at 4567 Santa Barbara Avenue in the Crenshaw/La Brea area of the city, with studios at 6735 Yucca Street in Hollywood.

Other history notes on KFAC: The AM and FM were sold in 1963 to the Cleveland Broadcasting Company, owned by Raymond Miller. He was one of the original "Seven Blocks of Granite" of Notre Dame football fame, and was also a former mayor of Cleveland.

KFAC and KFAC-FM were known in 1969 as "The Music Stations" when they were acquired by ASI Communications, Inc. They bought new equipment, plus a new FM transmitter and acquired larger, remodeled office space. It was also their decision to program the AM and FM stations separately. The AM had the lighter, more familiar classics and the FM the more sophisticated selections. In 1986, KFAC, Inc., owned by ASI Communications, sold the stations for 33.5 million dollars to Classic Communications, Inc. The deal was completed by December that year.

The shocker to long-time KFAC listeners was made public in the Los Angeles Times on January 7, 1987. The new owners fired five long-time KFAC personalities, two of whom had been with the station for 41 and 39 years respectively! The new management declared "no more Broadway show tunes, no film scores, no jazz, just 100% classical music." The amount of commercial times was also cut back from the usual 12 minutes per hour and Mutual network news was dropped for in-house news. Some listeners agreed with the ex-announcer's belief that the firings were ruthless. The past year, the station has changed. Being simulcast, they don't mention the AM at all anymore, except as casually as possible during the legal ID. And who could blame them? To the new owners, the AM wasn't worth keeping or promoting, since not many people who enjoy serious music would listen to it on AM. And so, KFAC on 1330 AM was sold.

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KWKW came on the scene during World War II in 1942, operating from Pasadena as a 1,000 watt daytimer on 1430 kHz. The 1430 spot had been open since 1939, when KECA moved to 780 and absorbed KEHE. KEHE was owned by Hearst Radio, Inc. and was affiliated with the Los Angeles Evening Herald Express newspaper.

KEHE had specialized in sports and spot news broadcasts. It was in mid-1935 that KEHE absorbed KELW-Burbank and KTM-Los Angeles. Those two stations shared time on 780 and had done so since the FRC frequency assignment was made in the late-'20s. KTM was already owned by the Evening Herald Express in '35, so that appears to be a call change to fit the owner's initials. KELW went on the air in the late-'20s, and before 1929, KTM was KNRC, first from Los Angeles and later Santa Monica. KNRC went on the air in 1925.

KECA-780 had taken over 1430 from KPLA-Los Angeles around 1929 and was owned by Earle C. Anthony, a Los Angeles Packard auto dealer who got KFI-640 on the air in 1922 with 50 watts. KFI was affiliated with NBC's Red chain or network, as it later became known. KECA was part of the NBC Blue network. In 1941, as part of the NARBA treaty, the AM band was expanded from 1500 to 1600 kHz., and many stations were assigned new frequencies. KECA moved from 780 to 790. The National Broadcasting Company was forced to sell the Blue Network in 1943 after an anti-trust hearing which ruled that a broadcasting company could not own two networks. The new owner of the Blue Network was Edward J. Noble, the owner of Lifesavers candy. In 1945, Noble changed the name of his network to the American Broadcasting Company or ABC. NBC Red simply became NBC. In 1959, KECA changed calls to KABC.

Now, back to KWKW! Forty-six years is a long time to go back and recall exactly what the broadcasting scene was like in southern California. That's why I sent along a copy of an article from Radio Life magazine, dated February 21, 1943. It's an interesting piece on KWKW, telling how the original owner got the station on the air. It also gives one a fairly good look into a time when AM radio was still the only game in town, and how an independent station without network affiliation had to come up with programming each day and serve its city of license. I might add that Radio Life was a weekly magazine costing just 5¢ per issue. It was aimed at Los Angeles and southern California listeners, with radio listings, plus related articles about the big network stars and the local radio personalities.

There was some use of directional antennas for AM stations in the '30s, but these antennas really came into their own after World War II. The directional antennas became much more reliable for reducing co-channel and adjacent channel interference. Because of that, the number of AM stations grew at an enormous rate. Many small towns that never had a radio station before suddenly applied for one. At the end of the war, there were 950 AM stations on the air. By the end of 1948, 1,900 AM stations were on the air.

From 1945 to 1950, several new AM stations came on the air in the towns around Los Angeles, such as Burbank, Santa Monica, Ontario, Corona, and Pomona. One of these new station applications came about between 1946-48. This was a CP for 1300 kHz. to broadcast from Pasadena with the call letters KAGH. KAGH was a 1,000 watt daytimer and was on the air by 1949. I don't have any other information about KAGH-1300, but there was also a KAGH in Pasadena on 98.3 FM in 1948, which changed calls to KARS in 1949. It was silent in 1955, but was KWKW-FM in 1959. Today, it is KBOB, West Covina.

By 1950, KWKW-1430 had been on the air for eight years. It was about this time that KAGH-1300 changed calls to KALI. Details regarding this move are sketchy, but I was able to find out a bit more from KALI engineer, Rick Hunt.

There was more than just a call change to KALI for the Pasadena station on 1300 kHz. Mr. Hunt was able to confirm that in 1950, a frequency swap was made with KWKW-1430. This allowed KWKW to go full-time on 1300 with 1,000 watts. KALI-1430 changed its city of license to nearby San Gabriel, but remained a 1,000 watt daytimer. Power was increased to 5,000 watts by 1954. They probably went fulltime shortly after this, though I couldn't nail down an exact date. Mr. Hunt says KALI celebrated 35 years on 1430 in 1985, which makes them 38 years old now. As for KALI's programming history, Mr. Hunt believes they were the first all-Spanish language station in the U.S. and have been Spanish since first going on the air. Can anyone confirm this?

Today, KALI remains on 1430 kHz., 5,000 watts day and night, with separate day and night patterns. Their 4-tower array is in San Gabriel on Vista Street. Their studios were also in San Gabriel, until they moved to Melrose and Vine in Hollywood in 1987. Listeners in San Gabriel can still call the station using the same local number as before. KALI's night pat-

tern is beamed southwest, and Mr. Hunt says they could probably get away with running 50,000 watts, since it's so directional. The day pattern has a null to the east, concentrating on the northwest and south. Over the past year, KALI received only three DX reports, and all of them were from New Zealand.

For the rest of the KWKK story, I'd like to thank their corporate engineer, Mr. Lindy Williams, whom I spoke with at length over the phone. KWKK is still on 1300 kHz. as I write this. The power is 5,000 watts day and 1,000 watts night, using separate directional antenna patterns day and night, DA-2. A few years ago, a construction permit for 2,500 watts at night was denied by the FCC. Their transmitter and three-tower array are located in northeast Pasadena, up against the hills on Sierra Madre Villa. The studios have also been at that location for many years, but will be moving to Hollywood after the switch to 1330 is made in early 1989.

KWKK went to a Spanish language format in the late-'50s, when at least a part of their broadcast day was in Spanish. Mr. Williams believes that the station went full-time with Spanish sometime in the early 1960s. KWKK was purchased by Lotus Communications Corporation in 1962. This was long before the existence of a computer company with the same name. Lotus owns 15 stations today, six of which are Spanish language. These include KOXR-910 in Oxnard, CA, KGST-1600 in Fresno, CA, KXET-1250 in San Antonio, TX, WTAQ-1300 near Chicago, and WMDO-1540 in Wheaton, MD. They also own KTKT-990 in AZ, KENO-1460 in Las Vegas, NV and KONE-1450 in Reno. The remainder of stations owned by Lotus are on FM.

Mr. Williams feels that the purchase of KFAC's AM frequency and transmitter for 8.75 million dollars is a very good move for KWKK for several reasons. First was the need to improve the signal for the station's listeners. The 1330 transmitter site will do this, since it's more centrally located and has a non-directional day pattern. Also, the groundwave signal for 1330's tower location is much better than the 1300 site in Pasadena, due to better soil conductivity. Again, it adds up to a broadened coverage area. The night pattern for 1330 will also be an improvement over the 1300 site. The old 1 kw pattern in Pasadena was directed to the southwest and got out toward East Los Angeles. But the 1330 site at night will give much broader coverage of the area to also reach Hispanics in the San Fernando Valley. This pattern will also give KWKK greater nighttime protection from other stations on 1330 and adjacent channels.

Mr. Williams estimates that the nighttime coverage for KWKK-1330 will be five times greater than the 1300 night pattern was. He explained that KWKK would have to use 50,000 watts on 1300 to get coverage equal to that of 1330's 5 kw two-tower night pattern. For you technical types, Mr. Williams says the interference-free contour for 1330 will be a "very listenable" 2.5 mV/m, while 1300's interference-free nighttime contour is worse at 9.8 mV/m. The NRC Night Pattern Book shows that 1330 covers most of southern California while 1300's signal heads out over the ocean, only covering the coastal area around L.A., with another small lobe pointed east.

As for how KFAC and KWKK reach DXers outside their coverage areas, I wasn't able to get any statistics on that. KFAC is widely heard at night. At my location near Monterey, their signal is strong, though KUPL in Portland, OR causes a bit of interference at times. KWKK fades in and out with KYNO in Fresno and KPMS in Seattle. Mr. Williams says KWKK has received DX reports over the years, but couldn't provide specifics since the reports were at the studio in Pasadena and I wasn't able to talk with the engineer there. I suppose it's safe to say that both stations have been heard by DXers in Japan, New Zealand, Australia and Scandinavia during the winter months with Beverage antennas.

The FCC gave its approval for KWKK to move to 1330 about a week before Thanksgiving (1988). Mr. Williams now has set a tentative date for this to take place, so if all goes according to schedule, it will happen on the weekend of January 13, 1989. As Steve Mittman stated in DX Monitor, there may be a period of time when 1300 and 1330 belong to nobody. DXers will have to wait and see what happens. The Los Angeles DXers will definitely notice a change after the frequency swap happens. KFAC was tough to null with a loop antenna, except during sunrise and sunset skip, when it was slightly easier. However, they didn't have the amount of sideband splatter from the higher modulation KWKK used on 1300. Mr. Williams says to expect KWKK on 1330 to have much more processing and louder music than KFAC had. In that respect, DXers will have a tougher time listening to adjacent frequencies.

The new station taking over 1300, KAZN (K-Asian) will have an Asian language format 24 hours a day. The ability to DX that frequency and adjacent channels will depend on whether talk shows or music is programmed-

the majority of the time. KAZN will be licensed to Pasadena using the 1300 tower site, while KWKK will be licensed to Los Angeles. KAZN's studios are expected to be in Arcadia.

It seems that the handwriting was on the wall for quite some time for KFAC to end its days on the AM band. Ratings for the station have been virtually non-existent for several years. The classical music fan, along with listeners of other music formats on radio, prefer the higher fidelity of the FM band. But KFAC-1330 was there first for classical fans, before the numbers of FM receivers skyrocketed and FM in cars became popular. The station still served a purpose for those without FM in their cars or who had a specific reason for listening to the AM side. One such example is Steve Mittman's father, a man who will miss KFAC-AM and doesn't want Spanish when he punches up 1330 in his car. Steve says the hills around San Pedro make it impossible to hear KFAC-FM and the other FM stations from Mount Wilson. San Diego FM stations come in fine, though. So, while driving in his car, Steve's dad appreciated the qualities of a strong AM signal from KFAC and was able to enjoy his favorite classical music. That will all end soon.

The problems associated with the AM band today have been widely publicized. It's just too bad that the FCC hasn't acted more quickly to solve the problems. There are those doomsday-types who say AM's days are numbered and AM radios will become museum pieces. I don't feel that way. Those of us who've heard good AM stereo stations know the technology is there to make better sounding AM radios for the general public at an affordable price. I hope it happens. Whether it will catch on remains to be seen. KFAC never used AM stereo on 1330. KWKK has on 1300 for some time now and I suspect they will keep it on 1330, as well. KALI-1430 has never used AM stereo.

With half of all AM stations in the U.S. losing money, KFAC-AM in the eyes of the current owners became useless for their programming purposes. They made a business decision to sell the license and transmitter site and did what was right for them. Overall, I'm glad KWKK will move to 1330 and use the facilities KFAC used for so many years. History is repeating itself, and it will be a wonderful way to remember Los Angeles radio history. The roots of 1300 and 1330 kHz. will be remembered by this writer, even if the broadcasting business at large doesn't care. I don't think the owners of KFAC have a sense of what it means to drop the call letters from 1330. They probably also won't have any special programming on the AM's final day marking the historic occasion, though I could be wrong. It will be interesting to see if they make any special announcement when the KFAC ID will be heard on 1330 for the last time.

An interesting sidenote to this is that there was a short-lived station in radio's infancy that used the KFAC call letters! This was from about July, 1922 till February, 1923 in Glendale, California, not far from the KFAC of today. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, Radio Division issued call letters to radio broadcasting stations in alphabetical order at that time. This KFAC was owned by the Glendale Daily Press on South Brand Blvd. Crystal set owners of the day heard KFAC on 360 meters or 833 kHz., though it had to divide time on that wavelength with 20 or so other Los Angeles area stations. A special thanks goes to IRCA member Thomas H. White for the Dept. of Commerce files on this.

With the continuing evolution of the AM band in the United States, it's hard to tell what will happen next. Spanish radio though is a healthy format in Los Angeles, with 6 stations listed in the latest Arbitron ratings. KWKK was 18th overall, but 13th for listeners 35-64 years old and 14th in the 25-49 category. Highest rated of these Spanish stations is 50,000 watt KTNQ-1020, which also has their morning show in the top-10 in L.A. KFAC-FM was 23rd overall, but 19th in the 35-64 slot. KWKK on 1330 will continue to be one of the media leaders in the southern California Hispanic community. They've been the Spanish voice of the L.A. Dodgers for years and are also broadcasting L.A. Raiders football in Spanish. The station plans to add more sports such as soccer in the future.

KWKK will not forget the past either. When the move is made to their new studios at 6777 Hollywood Blvd., an antique radio museum will be prominently displayed on the third floor of their corporate headquarters. This should be ready in early to mid-1989. The station's sales manager found quite a few of the classic AM radios from the '20s and '30s while traveling around the country and purchased them for the station. Mr. Williams says IRCA members and others who are interested in this are invited to stop by when in Los Angeles, but make sure to call for an appointment first. The museum will give you a firsthand look at some of the old battery and early AC radios that DXers of the past probably used to hear distant stations.

KWKK is going to promote on the air the fact that they will be moving up the dial 30 kHz., even though it's such a small space to tune for

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