

Look Back In Awe

Another Glimpse Into The Golden Age Of Radio – Via Picture Postcards

BY ALICE BRANNIGAN

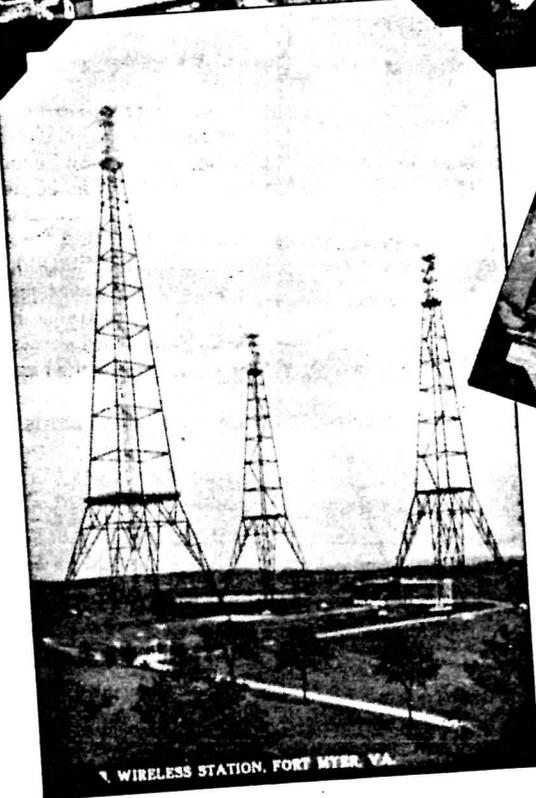
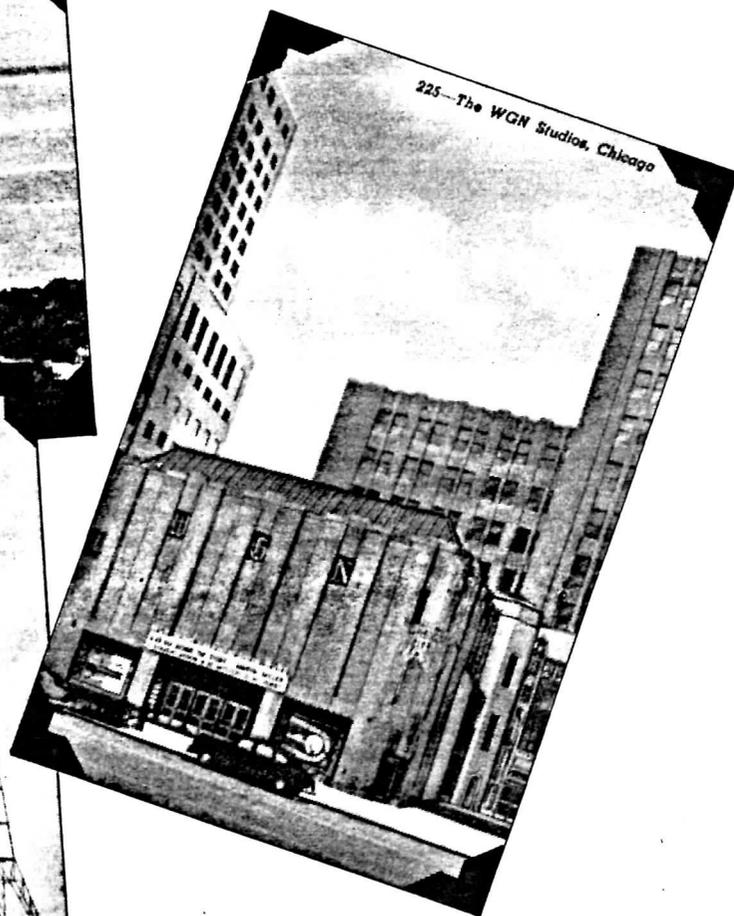
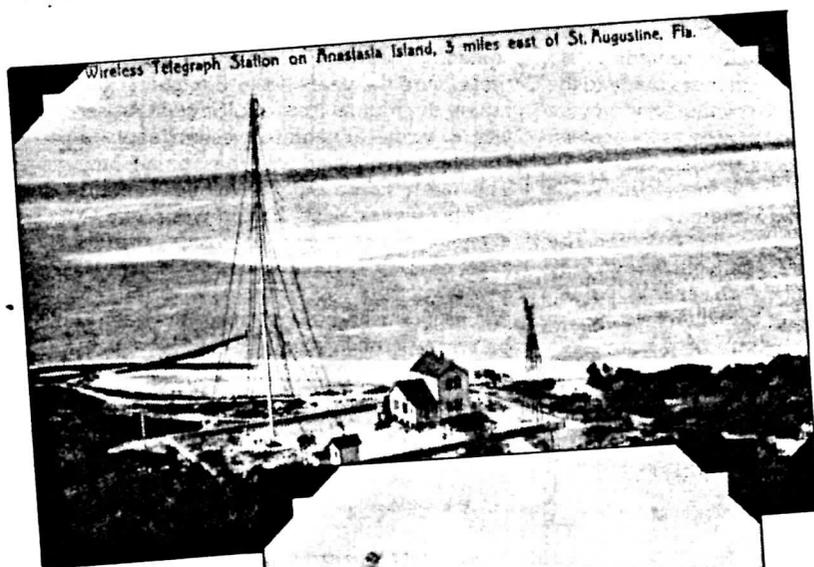
Response to the two previous excursions into ancient broadcasting and utility stations was excellent, so I've dug into my file for additional delights. These photos of old-time radio stations are by means of picture postcards, which is one of the best ways to get a look at the historic transmitting facilities that form the roots of our modern communications and broadcast industries.

One card I've always liked especially well

shows broadcasting station WOC in Davenport, Iowa. WOC first went on the air in 1922 with 500 watts on 620 kHz. It was operated at that time by the Palmer School of Chiropractic. License records for 1930 indicate that the station was running 5 kW on 1000 kHz and was owned by the Central Broadcasting Company at 1002 Brady Street. As time went on, there were still further changes. By 1946 the station was on

1420 kHz with 5 kW and was owned by the Tri City Broadcasting Company of 1002 Brady Street, with the transmitter located on RFD #1. Current records show the station still on 1420 kHz with 5 kW, but owned by Palmer Communications Inc. of 805 Brady Street.

The postcard view is undated and shows the two large transmitting towers atop an L-shaped building. A smaller inset at the



bottom of the card shows another view of the station. In the larger scene, the words "Slipping and Checking" and "What's Wrong With Me" are written in large letters along the upper part of the structure. A longer message appears on the wall to the left of the card. It's very difficult to read, but under high magnification it seems to say, "Familiar as the voice of the land is to each, the highest here we ascribe to Moses, Plato and Milton is that they set at naught books and tradition and spoke not what they knew, but what they thought." The antenna arrangement shown gives the impression that we are looking at WOC as it appeared in the late 1920's or early 1930's, but that's just a guess.

Another early broadcaster is WJAX of Jacksonville, Florida. This station went on the air in 1925 and was assigned the callsign which had been previously used by an earlier station in Cleveland, Ohio (Union Trust Co., 500 watts, 770 kHz). Jacksonville's WJAX, licensed to the City of Jacksonville, came on the air on 900 kHz with 1 kW. Rec-

ords of 1946 show that the station was at 1 Broadcast Plaza, with transmitter at Hyde Park Country Club, but it had changed frequency to 930 kHz with a power of 5 kW days, 1 kW nights. Present records list the station on 930 kHz, 5 kW, at 225 Coastline Drive West, and still operated by the City of Jacksonville.

Our view of the station shows it as it appeared in 1930 and described as being located at "Water Works Park." Indeed, the station is shown at the left of the photo and nearby there does seem to be a facility which looks to be a municipal water works. WJAX is shown with two large broadcast towers having antenna wires strung between them. Trolley car tracks are faintly visible in the street to the far right.

Utility enthusiasts will like the view described on an old (undated) postcard as "Wireless Telegraph Station on Anastasia Island, 3 miles east of St. Augustine, Fla." My research has determined this is a U.S. Navy radio station which, in 1919 records, had

the callsign NAP. In early records the station was listed as operating on 142, 315, and 500 kHz, although records of 1930 indicate that it was operational on 128 and 500 kHz. The antenna shown in this photo view is a heavily-guyed vertical adjacent to the operating building. At one corner of the fenced-in compound, by a calm-looking sea, is a windmill and tower which was probably used for generating the electric power to operate the facility.

Next we have two views of the WGN studios in Chicago, obviously taken at different time periods. WGN came on the air in 1924, operating on 720 kHz with 25 kW and owned by The Tribune Co. The station, at that time, had its studios at 435 North Michigan Ave., with the transmitter in Elgin, Illinois. Records of 1946 list the station at 441 North Michigan Ave., with transmitter in Roselle, Illinois—still on 720 kHz but running a full 50 kW. The licensee was shown as WGN, Inc. Current records list this well-known station as operated by The WGN

Continental Broadcasting Co., 2501 West Bradley Place, but still on 720 kHz with 50 kW. WGN, of course, has a signal which is familiar to all who have ever attempted to DX on the AM broadcast band.

The horizontally oriented postcard shows a rather ornate structure with the letters "WGN" imbedded in the facade of the building. The studio entrance is below these letters and it appears that two large picture windows flank the triple set of brass doors. This card is undated.

In the other (vertically oriented) photo there have been some changes made to the WGN studios. The two picture windows are now revealed to be display cases for posters. Above the studio doors there appears a marquee topped off with the message, "WGN Mutual Broadcasting System WGNB." The marquee itself reads "6:45 PM Behind The Story - Marvin Miller, 7 Straight Arrow, 9:30 Mystery Is My Hobby." The call WGNB belonged to WGN's FM outlet (I presume).

This second photo must have been taken

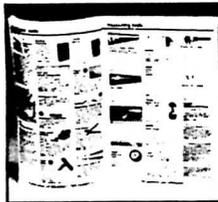
sometime between 1949 and 1951 since those were the years when *Straight Arrow* ran on the Mutual Network. *Straight Arrow* was a kiddie adventure western about a "paleface" who lived with the Comanches. The hero, Steve Adams (along with his ever-present sidekick, Packy) was prone to avenging all manner of evil deeds, according to information on this program. I was unable to locate any information on the other two programs in order to verify the dating, or narrow it down more closely. Those programs were possibly for local broadcast only and not on the network.

Also note that in the second photo, a large building has been constructed to the rear of the WGN studios, and seems to have replaced (or was built atop) a smaller building seen in the earlier view.

As a postscript to the photos we presented in December of Naval Radio NAA in Virginia, reader Paul Lecocq of Quebec wrote to say that he had come across an old card showing yet another view of the three large towers supporting the antenna array. This station cost \$250,000 to build; today the one 600 foot tower alone would cost more than that. The transmitter was rated at 100 kW. Paul's card shows NAA in a close-up view, including the two-story brick transmitter building near the base of the tower at the far right. The card is undated and would seem to show the station at some period around the time of WWI. Thanks, Paul, for sharing this with POP'COMM readers! **PC**

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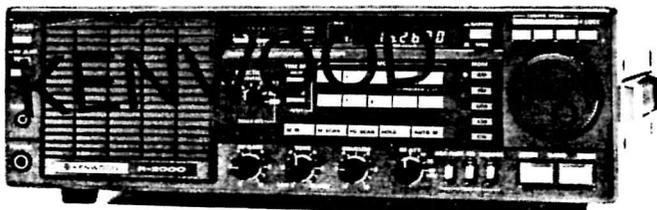
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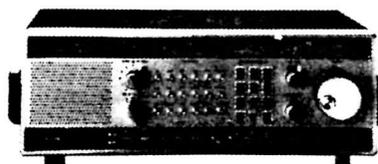
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